Television Drama in Israel

Identities in Post-TV Culture

Itay Harlap

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Preface

I felt I was on the edge of a slippery slope. Managing to control myself. Everything within me cried out. "Colonizers!" it cried. "Lies!" it cried. Khirbet Khizeh is not ours. The Spandau [a German machine gun] never conferred any right. "Oh! Oh!" The voice cried within me.

S. Yizhar, "The Story of Khirbet Khizeh," [1949] 2008

Amir [Kais Nashif] You don't think it's a little fucked up, that we conceived a child while lying in the ruins of a village that was massacred [during the Nakba]? It's like if you were to conceive while visiting Auschwitz.

Shaul Nawi [Menashe Noy] Are you kidding me? We—all of our children—were conceived in Auschwitz.

Amir What? Iraqi ones too?

Shaul Nawi Iraqis too. Auschwitz, Dachau, Birkenau, all of it.

—*Parashat HaShavua*, season 3, HOT3, 2009

Figure 0.1 Mother holding a baby in her arms (*Khirbet Khizeh*).

Figure 0.2 Palestinians peering through the cracks in the side of a truck (*Khirbet Khizeh*).

Three decades separate the publication of "The Story of Khirbet Khizeh," a short story by S. Yizhar (1949) describing the expulsion of Palestinian villagers by Israeli soldiers (what is known as the "Nakba" in Arabic, literally: "Catastrophe"), and the television adaptation of the story, *Khirbet Khizeh*, directed by Ram Loevy and broadcast on Israel Television,[1] Israel's public television channel, in 1978. Three decades more separate this program and the airing of *Parashat HaShavua* (Weekly Torah Portion, 2006–2009: Rani Blair and Anat Assouline, HOT3) on the Israeli cable channel HOT3. All three texts—though created in differing time periods and media—have at least one element in common: in all three, the protagonists draw a parallel between the expulsion and murder of Jews during the Holocaust, and the expulsion and massacre of Palestinians in 1948. Thus, in the mind of the protagonist of "The Story of Khirbet Khizeh," the expelled Palestinians become Jewish refugees, the Israeli soldiers become Nazi soldiers armed with Spandaus, and the trucks carrying the Palestinians become train cars. This analogy is maintained in the television adaptation of *Khirbet Khizeh*, which depicts the expulsion of the Palestinians using visual imagery reminiscent—certainly for Israeli viewers—of images of the Holocaust: a mother holding a baby in her arms (Figure 0.1), Palestinians peering through the cracks in the side of a truck (Figure 0.2), and so on. Lastly, the protagonists of *Parashat*

HaShavua compare the remains of an abandoned Palestinian village with the remains of Auschwitz and other concentration camps.

Despite these points of similarity, two significant differences among the texts must be taken into account. The first is to do with the medium of presentation. The differences between the written medium of literature and the audio-visual media of film and television have been thoroughly discussed elsewhere (Chatman 1980), and will not be elaborated upon here. Suffice it to say that a work of literature differs vastly from a work of film or television, due to each medium's defining characteristics and its language of representation. Additionally, television in particular is considered a highly influential medium, due to both the visual nature of its messages and its widespread "infiltration" of the domestic space.

More important, however—particularly in the context of this book's exploration of the medium of television—is the fact that, though both *Khirbet Khizeh* and *Parashat HaShavua* are works of television, they were each aired and viewed on a very different kind of television. This does not refer simply to the device on which each was viewed, as television screens have grown larger over the past few decades, and have higher qualities of image and sound; rather, it refers to a broad and comprehensive array of transformations in practices of regulation, production, distribution, and reception of television texts. These transformations have led contemporary Israeli television to inhabit a cultural space far removed from that of the 1970s, so much so that it might in fact be considered another medium altogether—no longer Israeli *television* but rather Israeli *post-television*, as it shall be referred to in this book.

The second important distinction between "The Story of Khirbet Khizeh," *Khirbet Khizeh*, and *Parashat HaShavua* has to do with the historical period, in the larger Israeli context, in which each was created and received, and with the collective self-image that characterized each period. Thus, as "The Story of Khirbet Khizeh" was written during a time of collective conviction—within Israel and throughout the West—in the validity and righteousness of the Zionist project and in the binary "good" vs. "evil" narrative it established (particularly after the Holocaust), the story was not perceived as a threat to the stability of the Israeli nation, subversive though it was in casting the Israeli as the perpetrator (Shapira 2000).

Conversely, when *Khirbet Khizeh* aired in the late 1970s (on the only Israeli television channel at the time), Israel, by now a formidable military and economic power, was over a decade into the Occupation, its public perception as a David

battling a Goliath steadily deteriorating. And so for a significant portion of the Israeli public, and for several political figures as well, the program was seen as serving Zionism's opponents and foes—hence the numerous attempts to cancel its initial broadcast, and subsequently to bury it, out of sight, deep in Israeli Television's archives. *Parashat HaShavua*, in contrast, aired at a time when critical attitudes, broadly known as post-Zionism, were gaining increased prominence in Israeli cultural discourse in general, and on Israeli television, or post-television, in particular.

Addressing these transformations in Israeli society and in Israeli television, *Television Drama in Israel: Identities in Post-TV Culture* offers both textual readings and discursive analyses of contemporary Israeli television dramas, while adopting a case-study approach. The premise of the book is that the convergence of social trends in Israeli society (primarily the rise of various challenges, against the hegemony of Zionist-Jewish-masculine-Ashkenazi ideologies) and of major transformations in the medium of television in Israel (comparable to similar global transformations that have been termed "post-television") has led to the creation of television dramas characterized by controversial themes and complex narratives, which present identities in ways never before seen on Israeli media.

One of the presuppositions of this book is that Israeli television is deeply rooted within Israeli society, culture, and history. Of the central and complex dimensions of Israeli reality, the traumatic dimension (which is intimately connected to questions of identity) has massively infiltrated Israeli television during the first decades of the twenty-first century, and will be situated at the core of this study. While themes of trauma and victimhood have accompanied Israeli society from its very beginning, they have acquired a more salient position in Israeli culture over the past decades—in the context of both collective and personal trauma; of both the trauma of the victim and the trauma of the perpetrator. Consequently, these themes have also begun to populate many and highly diverse television texts, of both factual and fictional genres; of both what is called "quality television" (such as dramatic series or documentary productions) and genres perceived as pure entertainment (primarily reality television).[2]

Out of the broad and eclectic range of television genres and texts, this research focuses on the genre of television drama, a genre is perceived in public discourse, and above all by mainstream television criticism, as the most highbrow genre and the one that reflects Israeli society in the most profound and courageous ways. The drama series to be discussed here are all examples of what is known in

the conventional—and, as I will show, complex—terminology of television studies as "quality television" (Thompson 1997) or "serious drama" (Caughie 2000: 2). Yet the modifiers "quality" and "serious" should be viewed not as stemming naturally from the texts, but rather as discourse dependent. In fact, an important aspect of this research will be to challenge some of the basic presuppositions of television criticism with respect to the "quality" and "seriousness" of various television texts.

Of the broad range of television dramas produced in Israel in recent years, this book centers on five television drama series, gathered here under the title "Israeli post-television": *BeTipul* (In Treatment, 2004–2007, Hagai Levi, HOT3); *Parashat HaShavua*; *Nevelot* (Bastards, 2010, Dror Sabo and Dafna Levin, HOT3); *Ima VeAbbaz* (Mom and Dads, 2012, Avner Bernheimer and Tmira Yardeni, HOT3); and *Zaguri Imperia* (Zaguri Empire, 2014–, Maor Zaguri, HOT3).

By focusing on only five dramas, I believe I will be able not only to offer a deep and thorough reading of each, but also demonstrate a number of ways of analyzing a television text, thereby contributing to the textual research of Israeli television, a field which is quite lacking. Moreover, all five series have occupied a central cultural position (as attested to by the awards, critical acclaim, and widespread public attention that they have garnered); and they all feature distinct narrative structures, each of them unmistakably televisual, while at the same time offering divergent strategies for coping with trauma on the one hand, and with their respective positions as post-television texts on the other. Finally—and most importantly, some might argue—my personal preferences have greatly influenced my choice of case studies: texts that attracted my attention as a viewer later became the focus of my research, though my opinions of them may have changed over the course of my writing.

The purpose of this study is threefold. Firstly, it explores the historical and cultural contexts that have enabled the emergence of the series to be discussed here. Secondly, it presents the textual strategies these dramas employ to address central cultural processes in Israeli society (primarily those having to do with questions of old and new Israeli identities). Thirdly, it asks what distinguishes these dramas (both as television texts and as post-television texts) from other cultural products in Israeli society dealing with similar themes.

The first, introductory chapter offers a historiography of the genre of drama on Israeli television. Combining research on the media in Israel with research on global television, it will trace the unique evolution of Israeli television on

the one hand, and how this evolution parallels global shifts on the other. This chapter identifies the regulatory, technological, and cultural reasons for the transformations that Israeli drama has undergone; examines the shifts in viewing patterns; and above all describes the textual characteristics of Israeli television drama in each period.

The series *BeTipul* garnered international acclaim when its format was sold first to HBO, and later on to 17 other networks worldwide. However, Chapters 2 and 3 emphasize its local, national meanings, and examine how *BeTipul* touched on themes and conflicts unique to Israeli culture. Chapter 2—focusing on the character of IDF combat pilot Yadin Yerushalmi—examines how contemporary Israeli society constructs and deconstructs the character of the Israeli male soldier. Through an analysis of Yadin's character, this chapter also examines how Israeli society handles its complex position as both victim and perpetrator.

Chapter 3 studies the reception of *BeTipul* by Israeli hegemonic discourse and the reasons it was frequently defined in Israel as a work of art, or as "quality television." In order to study the series' status as "quality television," this chapter argues that it is necessary to look beyond the characteristics of the text and to study its context, including various intertexts, and above all paratexts and metatexts such as promos, opening credits, reviews, articles and interviews. In addition, various connections between the series and certain aspects of Israeli society render it "quality television." The chapter thus looks not only at some of *BeTipul*'s central elements, but also at Israeli society, in which the series was made and where it was met with such success.

Chapter 4 centers on *Nevelot*, a miniseries about two elderly men, who in their youth had fought in a Jewish Zionist underground movement in Mandatory Palestine, and who, in the present day, embark on an all-out killing spree across Tel Aviv, exclusively targeting the young. While *Nevelot* does not explicitly address television per se, key scenes and paratexts do convey that it is by no means "regular television," and that watching it constitutes a viewing experience that differs altogether from "regular television viewing," a practice often associated with passivity, femininity, aging, and victimhood. Employing terms from Zionist, gender, aging, and other fields of cultural discourse, I argue that *Nevelot* offers a fascinating commentary on contemporary Israeli society and on the television content it produces.

Chapter 5 compares two texts—the feature film *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008) and the television series *Parashat HaShavua*, both of which deal with the traumatic effects of the 1982 First Lebanon War. *Parashat HaShavua*'s

preoccupation with that war is enacted through the character of Shaul Nawi, who is plagued by nightmares, hallucinations, and memories from that war. Similarly, *Waltz with Bashir*'s protagonist suffers from post-traumatic memories of an event from the war. However, in this chapter, I argue that *Parashat HaShavua*'s narrative structure as a television series enables the representation of the post-traumatic experience to be more complex than does the narrative structure of most feature films.

In 2014, the daily television melodrama *Zaguri Empire* took Israel by storm, and Chapter 6 examines both the text itself and the cultural environment in which it was received so enthusiastically. The series focuses on a family of Moroccan descent residing in Beer Sheva, a southern Israeli city. The focus on a Moroccan family, or what is called in Israel a "Mizrahì[3] family," isn't in itself new, as Israeli cinema and television have been exploring issues of ethnic identity for over 50 years now. However, *Zaguri* fascinatingly manages to weave together both popular themes and humor, which have enabled it to be embraced by a broad cross-section of Israeli viewers, while at the same time allowing space for difficult, nearly taboo thoughts and opinions to be articulated. In other words, *Zaguri* has maximized the polysemic potential inherent in the television melodrama, and, while heavily influenced by the new ethnic discourse in Israel (a distinctly post-colonial discourse), it has managed to be both popular and critical at the same time. This chapter will examine how *Zaguri Empire* has accomplished this, while reflecting—and at the same time also participating in—major transformations that Israeli culture as a whole, and Israeli television in particular, have undergone over the past few decades.

Over the past decade, representations of LGBTs, both real and fictional, have become increasingly visible on Israeli television, in various channels and genres (though gay men are undoubtedly much more visible than members of any other sexual minority). In recent years, however, the representation of gays on Israeli television has undergone an interesting shift, whereby many television texts feature gay fathers. These texts, mostly news items and documentaries, usually depict gay parenthood as a positive phenomenon, and sometimes even as more successful than heteronormative parenthood. In Chapter 7, I set forth the various strategies via which gay fatherhood is recast as positive on Israeli television, and present the potential personal and ideological costs of this positive (and normative) representation. I then focus on one of the most interesting case studies of the past few years, the television drama series *Ima VeAbbaz* (Mom and Dads), whose protagonists are two gay men who have a

child with a straight woman. I argue that the series manages to deviate from the usual representation of the gay father, thereby offering an interesting ideological alternative to the conventional and conservative (though accepting) representation.

1

Half a Century of Israeli Identities through Television

In his book on the emergence of television in Israel, Zvi Gil notes that even though the title promises a *History of Israeli Television*, he provides a silhouette rather than a full portrait. Indeed, Gil's book hardly addresses "the most important elements in television—what is seen on the screen, the content"—which "deserves separate, in-depth, critical treatment" (Gil 1986: 2). While Gil wrote his book in the mid-1980s, his plea for a historical study on the programs themselves has yet to be answered. Thus, despite extensive writing on the history of communications in Israel, including the evolution of Israeli television, with emphasis on regulation and institutionalization (Caspi and Limor 1992; Schejter 1996; Liebes 1999; Tokatly 2000; Oren 2004), and despite the scant academic literature on specific programs, there is still no detailed historiography on programs broadcast on Israeli television. Given the importance of the television medium in Israeli culture, this state of affairs calls for correction.

This chapter cannot fill this void nor can this book, for that matter. Rather, my aim is to provide another "side" of the story of Israeli television: the stories of texts, especially from the genre of drama. There are several key reasons behind this choice. Firstly, drama is perceived as a genre that addresses "serious" issues, and often exhibits attributes such as experimentalism and controversy (Feuer et al. 1987; Thompson 1997: 15; Creeber 2005: 12). Secondly, drama, due to its proximity to "high art" such as theater and cinema, is perceived as the genre that most profoundly reflects social processes in the society to which it is broadcast and in which it is produced, and thus it plays a role in shaping its viewers' cultural identities (Paterson 1995: 62). Thirdly, as a result of its aforementioned two features, drama has become a genre central to many television channels or, as Yeud Levanon referred to it, "the upper crust of every lineup of any channel that respects itself" (1979: 3). However, although the historiography presented here focuses on the story of the televised Israeli drama, it can serve as the basis for a broad historiography of Israeli television's institutions, viewers, technological developments, and, of course, its texts.

The attempt to trace the history of Israeli television drama encounters several crucial difficulties (or challenges) that require attention and will affect the nature of this study. The first pertains to any historical narrative that proceeds from event to event or from cause to effect. Indeed, the history of television, too, has been affected by postmodernist practices, which view historical narrative as structuring rather than as representing reality (White 1984). That is, contemporary television research presents a historiography of television that, like the proposed study, assumes its point of view will always be partial, tentative, and author dependent (Hilmes 2003; Wheatley 2007).

The second difficulty stems from the specific issues inherent in writing a history of television: just as television studies span various disciplines (Corner 2003), thus yielding various types of studies, the history of television, too, usually subsumes the histories of television, each of which focuses on a single, main angle. For example, Michele Hilmes (2003), editor of *The Television History Book*, divides the history of television into four discrete categories—"Technologies," "Institutions," "Programming," and "Audiences"—each containing a historical narrative that stresses differing elements of television. In contrast, recent historical research, including this study, offers a more holistic approach that connects and combines television's various dimensions (Jacobs 2006; Fickers 2013).

The third challenge encountered when aiming to provide a historiography of television drama, stems from the discrete nature of each genre category, and of drama in particular. Although television genres have never been closed categories (Feuer 1987), and hybrid genres have become characteristic of television in recent years (Edgerton and Rose 2005), drama, more than other genres, presents quite complex challenges, especially when one attempts to distinguish it from other genres of fiction and define a corpus for this category (Thornham and Purvis 2005). And yet, though genre classifications will always remain tentative, and television genres contain not only textual but also discursive characteristics (Mittell 2004), this study assumes that we can examine drama not only as a genre distinct from other television genres of fiction, but also as a genre that, despite its hybridity and variety, contains within it various sub-genres.

The historiography of Israeli drama on television is presented here as divided into eras. Despite the inherent problems with this choice (Corner 2003: 277), it rests on two key research corpora. The *first* is Israeli research, which tends to link the history of Israeli television to that of other media outlets in Israel. However, Israeli research has not sufficiently considered the latest developments in television globally, nor has it related sufficiently to television's textual aspects. Of

the various historiographical divisions in Israeli research, I have chosen to rely on Arnon Zuckerman's division of Israeli television into four main eras: "The first era is from the establishment of the State [of Israel] until the enactment of the Broadcasting Act in 1965. The second is the era of the Broadcasting Authority's monopoly until the end of the 1980s. In the third era—the 1990s—there was a communication revolution; and the fourth era leads us into the twenty-first century" (1999: 124).

The *second* research corpus that influenced this chapter is the global historiography of television, and focuses on two historiographical divisions that have become canonical in the study of television. The first is a division by John Ellis (2000) into three eras of British television: the "era of scarcity," defined by the dominance of the public channels; the "era of availability," characterized by commercial broadcasting and competition; and the "era of plenty," defined by the penetration of various technologies into television culture. The second division is that defined by Rogers et al. (2002), who divide American television into three stages: TVI, or "The Broadcast Era"; TVII, or "The Cable Era"; and TVIII, or "The Digital Era."

Similar to these divisions, I identify three central periods in the development of Israeli television (as well as an earlier "pre-historic" era): "television Aleph" (A) or the era of single-channel consensus; "television Beit" (B) or the era of the dominance of Channel 2; and "television Gimel" (C), or "Israeli post-television".

Before Television

It is customary to begin the historiography of global television with what is known as the "pre-historic era" or the "experimental era." This period began with the invention of the first technologies that enabled the transmission of images and sounds (circa 1870) and ended with the transformation of television into a mass-media platform at the end of World War II (Jacobs 2006). In Israel, the experimental phase was completely absent (Oren 2004: 6), and the period prior to the first television broadcasts in Israel is not known for addressing technological issues, but rather political and ideological questions—primarily the question of the state's cultural-social identity (Winkler 2006).

Most Scholars who have studied the Israeli period prior to television broadcasts, i.e., "before television," have focused on the political and ideological

debates that took place between television's proponents and its opponents. Most of the arguments concerned the nature of the state as the political leaders saw it, and the fear of foreign influences on the newly emerging culture. In her fascinating study, Winkler suggested that one of the main objections to introducing television to Israel was the paternalistic fear on the part of the hegemonic *Ashkenazim* (Jews of Western European descent) that Jewish immigrants from Arab countries, known as *Mizrahim*, would begin watching "inferior" Arabic-speaking programs instead of "superior" European-Zionist cultural content.

Whatever the reasons, the years prior to the first Israeli television broadcasts teach us something important: Israeli television was perceived, before it had actually begun broadcasting, as an important political tool by which Israeli identity would be shaped. Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that the Broadcasting Authority's first three goals, under the law enacted in 1965, address Israeli cultural identity, with an emphasis on Jewish and Zionist values, or as the law states:

> The Authority shall maintain the broadcasts for the purpose of performing the functions of: A. Broadcasting educational, entertainment, and informational programs [. . .] with the goal of: 1. Reflecting the life, struggle, creativity, and achievements of the state; 2. Nurturing good citizenship; 3. Strengthening the bond with Jewish heritage and values and enhancing the knowledge thereof.
>
> Broadcasting Authority Act, clause 1.3

Hence, the identity discourse that took place "before television," as well as the regulations prescribed by the law, resonated in the content aired on television, including television drama, and continue to reverberate to this day. However, despite its importance, as this era did not produce television texts, its place in this chapter is minor.

"Television Aleph" (A), or the Period of Single-Channel Consensus

Israeli television broadcasts began in 1965 with the establishment of the Israeli Educational Television (IETV). Yet the first phase of the development of Israeli television programming occurred between 1968 and 1969: with the broadcast of the military parade on Israel's 20th Independence Day; the regulation of television broadcasting; and the airing of the first drama, *Sìach Lochamìm* (The

Seventh Day, Nola Chilton, Israel Television, 1969).[1] From that year until the end of the 1980s, Israel had only one (public) television channel, which led scholars to name this period "the monopoly of the Israel Broadcasting Authority" (Caspi and Limor 1992: 115; Zuckerman 1999: 124).

This era in Israel is somewhat analogous to the "era of scarcity" in British television, wherein the single public channel, the BBC, tried to foster social integration and erase the differences between segments of the population in British society. It did so by uniting the nation (or so it claimed) under one common culture and social agenda (Ellis 2000: 39–60). The fact that Israeli viewers (many of whom watched channels from surrounding Arab countries, which had a significant Israeli viewership) had a limited selection of channels from which to choose during this era, produced a situation wherein various Israeli publics would view the same content, as night after night television would provide them with a common culture of stories and opinions. Like the BBC, while presuming to unite the nation, the single channel actually served to broaden the cultural gaps between various ethnic groups, as I expend upon later in Chapter 6.

In addition to the inspiration that Israeli Television drew from the BBC model, it also shared features of TVI in the U.S., which was nearly completely controlled by three major commercial networks. This situation created competition between the networks and a dependency upon advertisers and ratings, which resulted in the attempt to maintain a consensus on what was considered appropriate content in order to retain viewers. Thus, "television aleph" bears similarities to both the "era of scarcity" and TVI, as they share in common consensus, or at least the appearance thereof (Liebes 1999: 88), namely, in the case of "television aleph," an attempt to promote the values perceived as shared by the Jewish-Israeli collective, and above all, Zionist values.

This agenda is reflected in the Israeli television dramas aired during those years, which avoided controversy. In the documentary series *Atèm Sham BaBáyit* (Our Viewers at Home, Ami Amir, Hila Alon, and Rogel Alpher, Channel 8, 2012), Rogel Alpher argues that these dramas assiduously avoided "dealing with what was happening in Israel"; and director Ram Loevy adds that "there was a big concern with avoiding subtle and complex issues. Therefore, any movie made in this framework could have just as well been made in Africa, or Canada."

Alpher and Loevy are exaggerating to some extent: although a great many of the dramas aired in those days presented "universal" narratives unrelated to Israel's contemporary political reality—for example *Fernheim* (Yossi Israeli, Israel Television, 1971), an adaptation of Shay Agnon's novel that takes place in

Germany; or *Stella* (Ram Loevi, Israel Television, 1975), about the complex relationship between a voice coach and his student—alongside these, several dramas dealing with Israel's political situation were also broadcast. Thus, among the first dramas to air were *Siach Lochamìm*; and *Bitchilát Káyitz 1970* (Early in the Summer of 1970, Edward Atler, Israel Television, 1972), an adaptation of an A.B. Yehoshua novel about a father whose only son was killed while serving reserve duty in the Jordan Valley. Ruthy Ablin Raveh (2011) claims that these two dramas were critical, and contributed to undermining the heroic ethos. However, despite the preoccupation with the Israeli occupation and questions arising regarding the Zionist ethos, these dramas also presented a positive image of Israel, with *Siach Lochamìm* engendering the image of Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers as "shooting and crying," "which focuses on the humanization or sensitivity of the Israeli soldier in the service of legitimizing Israel's moral superiority" (Hochberg 2013: 48).

Moreover, even though Israeli control of the occupied territories was being questioned, and the land trembled with ethnic uprising—of which the emergence of the Black Panthers (an Israeli protest movement of second-generation *Mizrahim*) was emblematic—these social phenomena were ignored by Israeli television drama well into the 1980s, as Alpher attests:

> Watching movies and series produced by [Israeli television] in the 1980s reveals "satisfying" facts: The IDF did not invade Lebanon, the stock market did not crash, and Prime Minister Menachem Begin did not fall into a depression. These were the years of [Prime Minister] Yitzhak Shamir's administration, and the Israeli repression mechanism was hard at work.
>
> *Atem Sham BaBayit*, Episode 4

Yet despite the desire to maintain a consensus, the first era of Israeli television was also defined by the struggle for "Independent Broadcasting" (Zuckerman 1999: 128–132). Among other factors, this struggle was motivated by those active in creating Israeli television, who viewed it as a platform that should be critical and represent the complex Israeli reality (Ablin Raveh 2011). This notion was reflected in the Drama Department, especially when Arnon Zuckerman was appointed Director of Israel Television in 1973. It was during this time, according to the conventional historiography, that the "Golden Age" of Israeli television drama began (Schwartz and Rotem 1986). The Golden Age was the product, among others, of the political viewpoint of Zuckerman, who aimed to "expand the boundaries as much as possible [. . .] and push the consensus beyond its limits" (ibid.: 11, 15).

Exemplary of this approach was the drama *Khirbet Khizeh*, a single drama depicting the expulsion of the inhabitants of a fictional Palestinian village of Khirbet Khizeh by IDF soldiers during Israel's 1948 War of Independence. *Khirbet Khizeh*'s airing led to one of the most pitched battles in the history of Israeli television (Zuckerman 1999: 42–44; Shapira 2000; Oren 2004: 156–191). The events surrounding *Khirbet Khizeh* reveal not only a great deal about the structure of Israeli television at this point in its evolution, but also about its central role in the ongoing dispute that arose between the hegemonic Zionist narrative, which, like the Broadcasting Authority, still monopolized Israeli discourse, and competing narratives that had begun arising among the Israeli public.

Indeed, the attacks on *Khirbet Khizeh* would resemble the attacks on the Israeli New Historians and on post-Zionist thinkers that arose in public discourse more than a decade later. As Anita Shapira claims, "[the] basic argument was that the film distorted [. . .] the War of Independence [1948], presenting a partial, slanted view" (2000: 36). One of the harshest attacks on *Khirbet Khizeh* was by Yosef Lapid, who claimed that it functioned like Nazi propaganda: "Even if the Fatah's public relations bureau was headed by a genius, he couldn't have come up with anything better than this. Even if Goebbels were directing Arab propaganda efforts, they couldn't have achieved greater success" (quoted in Shapira 2000: 38).

In 1979, Lapid was appointed Chair of the IBA (Israel Broadcasting Authority), and his tenure is viewed as the period when the "consensus" once again guided broadcast principles. Moshe Zimerman, in contrast, views it as a time wherein "clear signs of a steady decline in freedom of speech attainable via television were visible," while "provocative issues disappeared from the screen, and if a potentially controversial matter appeared, it was quickly diffused [by various means]" (Zimerman 2003: 98).[2] One such issue was, of course, the Israeli–Palestinians conflict. Accordingly, as Ram Loevy claims, "The Drama Department was very much dead. It certainly avoided Jewish–Arab subjects" (*Atem Sham BaBayit*, Episode 4).

We can therefore term the airing of *Khirbet Khizeh* a traumatic event that led to the long-standing repression of many issues from the dramatic television text; a suppression that only came to an end with the rise of Israeli post-television, some 30 years later. However, it cannot be argued that Israeli television dramas were not political. Despite the suppression of politics from television drama, the "forbidden" topics surfaced over and over, whether intentionally or not. Gertz and Hermoni (2011) suggested that the television drama *Mischakìm BaHóref* (Winter Games, Ram Loevi, Israel Television, 1987), which openly addresses the

British Mandate over Palestine in 1946, is in fact a displacement of events from 1948, particularly the expulsion of the Palestinians from their villages in the newly declared state of Israel. A similar displacement can be found in *Indiáni BaShèmesh* (Indian in the Sun, Ram Loevi, Israel Television, 1981), which depicts the relationship between an Ashkenazi IDF soldier and a soldier of Indian origin, but can be interpreted as an allegory for the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and a call for Palestinian autonomy (Harlap). Ablin Raveh (2011) claims that while the First Intifada[3] does not directly appear in *LeChaverìm Bilvád* (For Friends Only, Ido Bahat, Israel Television, 1991), it lurks in the background of the question addressed in the series, regarding the legitimacy of the use of weapons.

Despite the politics surrounding Israeli television drama, its dire state during that period cannot be attributed to politics alone. The Drama Department also suffered from serious budgeting problems. However, even when resources were allocated and a relatively high-budget production of a dramatic series was commissioned, such as the mini-series *Hedva Shlomik* (Hedva and Shlomik, Shmuel Imberman and Irena Spector, Israel Television, 1971), negative reactions led to a slowdown in television dramas' development, with a nearly complete halt in drama series production for many years, which "caused irreversible damage [. . .] to the development of Israeli television dramas" (Zuckerman 1999: 141). It appears that it was only later on, with the establishment of Israel Channel 2, that dramas began to be produced and broadcast on a larger scale, and Israeli television drama transitioned (or rather grew) to a new stage of development.

"Television Beit" (B), or the Period of Channel 2's Dominance

At what exact moment did the first phase of Israeli television end and the new phase—defined by Zuckerman as "the communications revolution" (1999: 141); by Liebes as "the era of multi-channels-television" (1999: 95); and in this book as "Channel 2's dominance"—begin? One can point to several events that eroded Israel Television's monopoly and led to this phase: the introduction of videocassette recorders (VCRs), which in the mid–1980s were used in 40 percent of Israeli homes (Cohen and Cohen 1989); the rise of pirated cable television, which was very popular in the second half of the 1980s (Caspi and Limor 1992: 127); the commencement of Channel 2's experimental broadcasts in 1986 (Tokatly 2000: 89); and the penetration of cable TV into viewing culture in Israel from the early 1990s, which was "nearly unprecedented" (Zuckerman 1999: 133).

Yet it appears that the main event marking the beginning of the second period ("television Beit") was the rise of the first Israeli commercial channel, or Channel 2. As Zuckerman writes, "The real revolution, from the perspective of the Israeli viewer, started with the airing of the commercial Channel 2 [. . .] Israel Television, which became known as Channel 1, began losing its captive audience in favor of a new, more modern channel, with a brand new face, professional commercials, and upbeat broadcasting that aimed at creating a wide common denominator" (2004: 30).

Zuckerman appears cautious as he argues that Channel 2 aimed at a "wide common denominator": He does not add the word "lowest," as does education scholar Nimrod Aloni, who wrote that "[ratings] do not avoid lowering or reducing *the lowest common denominator*" (2004: 42: emphasis mine). Various communications scholars have expressed similar ideas (Katz et al. 1997; Liebes 1999: 88), and Gabi Weimann has even called Channel 2 "The Bonfire of Nonsense," adding that "every evening, most Israelis tune in to the cultural junk food tube, and are happily led to the anaesthetizing and pleasurable Refuge of Forgetfulness" (1999: 99).

A key expression used to describe Channel 2's "low standards" was the phrase "Masuda from Sderót,"[4] coined by one of the most influential CEOs in the Israeli televison industry, Alex Giladi. This phrase has since denoted the "fictional character representing the target audience of commercial television, typified by an uneducated Mizrahi audience residing in Israel's periphery" (Rosenthal 2009: 573). According to Noam Yuran, the very image of Masuda from Sderót, born of the Orientalist worldview that characterizes Israeli discourse, exposes the ideological tactics used by Channel 2. "She" is in fact yet another way in which Channel 2 disguises the work of ideology and its viewer manipulations, by creating the impression that we are "all Masuda"—the viewer who believes what she sees on television while at the same time projecting that belief onto some other, innocent figure, who is "someone utterly other: she is always someone else. She is someone else for any media consumer" (Yuran 2001: 72).

The perception of Channel 2 as a channel that has abandoned political issues, and one whose profit-seeking goals lead towards airing at the lowest common denominator, is not only elitist, culminating in "Masuda from Sderot"; it also ignores important nuances of the commercial channel, as well as the tremendous power that the medium of television has as the "ideological state apparatus" (Althusser 1971). As Noam Yuran claims, Channel 2 has become the "New Statehood," serving the state's ideology better than Channel 1, and it does

so "in a manner appropriate to the present, that succeeds in serving both the state and capital equally" (Yuran 2001: 12).

While these statements are not meant to invalidate the argument that Channel 2 emphasizes ratings and entertainment, as per Noam Yuran's reading of Channel 2 as the "New Statehood," it could be argued that we cannot simply lump all of television programming under one umbrella term and define it as "playing to the lowest common denominator." Rather, a thorough textual analysis is required to examine the diverse meanings of these programs. Moreover, the "ratings-and-entertainment" position ignores a very significant development: with the rise of Channel 2, "original television dramas began to flowish" (Talmon and Liebes 2000: 41), or as Alpher describes it: "Since 1995, Channel 2's burst of creativity has grown and is starting to satiate the Israeli public's thirst for series [. . .] Suddenly, the screen was filled with series that were creative, upbeat, well performed, and broadcast during prime time [. . .] Channel 2 has begun to tell the story of Israeli society in quantities and qualities never before seen" (*Atem Sham BaBayit*, Episode 4). In other words, it appears that the of drama genre, which was supposed to be the flagship of the public channel, flourished and grew in the second era of Israeli television broadcasting, or "television Beit"—even if it's only "a fig leaf" (Weimann 1999: 102) or the result of regulation (Lavie 2015). And indeed, an examination of the amount of air time the television drama and drama series especially have received, reveals a startling rise in the broadcasting of drama series concurrent with the establishment of Channel 2.

While during the era of "television Aleph," more than 150 single-episode dramas and five series and mini-series were produced,[5] during the era of "television Beit," about 75 single-episode dramas, 18 mini-series (most on Channel 1 and Channel 2) and 34 series (mostly on Channel 2), were produced—some of which even ran for multiple seasons, for the first time in the history of Israeli television drama.

Just as no methodical survey of the dramas aired on Channel 1 has been conducted, the Channel 2 dramas, and in fact all of the dramas produced in Israel in the age of multiple channels, have likewise not been thoroughly researched. However, several recurring elements therein can be noted: the first and most prominent characteristic is what might be called "multiculturalism," or, as Ayelet Cohen claims, "At the turn of the twenty-first century, the diverse faces of Israeli society in the media in general, and in television broadcasting in particular, are represented in all the media's genres" (Cohen 2001: 42).[6] In this context, Talmon and Liebes note that the series *Bat Yam-New York* (David Ofek

and Yossi Madmony, Channel 2: 1995–1997) illustrates the irrelevance of the term "melting pot," and depicts its Protagonists as an "allegory of the story of individuals and communities in multicultural migration countries" (2000: 47).

Based on the ideas of Israeli film studies, we could argue that the drama series on Channel 2 adopted many features of the Israeli films of the 1990s, specifically what Yael Munk calls "borderline cinema," which reflected two parallel cultural processes: "The deconstruction of the hegemonic Sabra [a term that refers to Jews born in Israel], and the exposure of the histories of those who suffered from the Israeli veterans' colonialist attitude" (2012: 24). Thus, we could, for example, examine a key scene from the mini-series *Bnót Braun* (The Braun Girls, Irit Linur, Channel 2: 2002) in the following fashion. In the first episode, the father, Hezi Braun, played by Assi Dayan, is driving around his moshav (cooperative farming community) in a tractor as the pastoral song "Shir HaKerem" (Vineyard Song) plays in the background. The song creates a palpable, direct intertextuality link to the text with which Assi Dayan is most identified: *Hu Halách BaSadót* (He Walked Through the Fields, Yossef Milo, 1967), in which the protagonist, Uri (Dayan), rides a horse while this same song plays in the background. But unlike Uri, who has a firm grip on both his horse and the workers in his field, Hezi Braun is characterized as weak: his tractor gets stuck and he needs his Arab workers in order to extricate it. Thus, the very figure that has symbolized the Sabra in Israeli cinematic culture is now exposed as helpless, illustrating the "process of the Sabra's disintegration, to the point where he becomes a stranger in his own home" (Munk 2012: 24).

However, *Bnót Braun* does not stop with the deconstruction of the Sabra; it also demonstrates the rise of a new kind of hero in Eli Menashè (played by Golan Azulay), whose appearance and accent cannot be misread: he is of Mizrahi origin. In the subsequent scene, right after the scene in which Hezi got stuck in the field, Eli enters the Braun home. His entrance thereto can be seen as a metaphor for the Mizrahi penetrating Ashkenazi hegemony, a process which might affect him, but more importantly will engender the "moshav residents' adaptation [. . .] to the new bourgeois Mizrahi and his culture" (Urian 2004: 207). Thus in only two consecutive scenes, *Bnót Braun* manages to sum up two of the most significant portrayals in Israeli film and television during the 1990s: the decline of the Sabra, and the rise of a new hero, in this case the Mizrahi man.

Another aspect of "television Beit" drama is the emergence of what Luis Roniger calls "self-oriented individualism." Roniger explains that early on in Zionism, the individual was characterized as one who "unselfishly [and as often

as not through hardship] participates in generalized exchange, contributing on a voluntary basis to the collective wellbeing without a clear notion of recompense or compensation" (1994: 44). However, over time, especially since the 1990s, this image was replaced by the image of an individual focused on his own personal needs, independent of the Israeli collective; an individual who "perceives her/himself as living in a society that operates within an ethos of self-value and self-reliance, and s/he her/himself strongly upholds these values. S/he sees her/himself as being in a situation of relative congruence with the rest of society, and as a part of a collectivity of autonomous individuals" (ibid.: 46).

In some ways, the phenomenon in which Zionist values are replaced, or at least lose their centrality in favor of the individual, is evident as early as the law regulating Channel 2 broadcasts. Unlike the IBA, which promoted Zionist values, The Second Authority for Television and Radio (Channel 2) sees its main role as promoting "Hebrew Israeli creation," to cultivate "good citizenship" and strengthen "democracy and humanism," and only then does it mention "expression of Jewish heritage and [. . .] the values of Zionism" (The Second Authority for Television and Radio Act, 1990).

A series that clearly depicts the above-mentioned process is *Florentin* (Udi Zamberg and Eytan Fox, Channel 2: 1997–2001), which tried to break away from the collective in favor of the personal (Talmon and Liebes 2000: 42), a notion illustrated by the course of events in season 1, episode 4, wherein two parallel plotlines reflect the desire to break from the collective and to withdraw into one's private world: the first plot shows Tomer (Avshalom Pollak), who decides to come out as gay before his family as they are watching Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's funeral on television. Tomer's father seems more amazed by the timing of the disclosure than by its content, and refuses to discuss it during the funeral. In the second plot, Shira (Ayelet Zurer) apologizes to the mother of her ex-boyfriend, who was killed during his military service, for not having attended the military ceremonies in honor of her son. The mother replies that she too never wanted to be part of the "bereaved Israeli family," and adds that "grief is entirely a private matter."

Another series of that era that emphasizes individualism is *Hafúch* (Cappuccino, Shmuel Haimovich, Channel 2: 1996–1998). *Hafuch* tried to depict a reality that was not necessarily Israeli and was sometimes even delusional, including one episode that hinted at the existence of aliens. Even when the Israeli reality penetrated the protagonists' world, it did so in ways that either distanced it from the collective or, alternatively, ridiculed Israeli reality. For example, in one

episode, one of the characters tries to get out of his IDF reserve duty, and goes to see a mental health officer, while another character who is serving reserve duty comes to the realization that he doesn't know what he is protecting and why. It is no coincidence that at the end of this episode, as the former is released from reserve duty after posing as insane, the song "Amsterdam" plays in the background—a song representing the desire of all residents of the "Tel Aviv bubble" (in reality and in cinema) to imagine that there is nothing "beyond it but its sister cities, Amsterdam and New York" (Ben Tzvi 2007: 252).

Yet despite multiculturalism and intentional individualism, Channel 2 ultimately remains within the "permitted consensus" of the "New Statehood." Therefore, it comes as no surprise that one of "television beit's" most successful dramas, *Tironút* (Boot Camp, Uri Barbash and Benny Barbash, Channel 2: 1998–2001), centered on soldiers, with whom most of the Jew–Israeli viewers easily identify. In fact, *Tironút* engendered such strong identification that it encouraged many young men to enlist in the Givati Brigade (an infantry brigade), inspiring the brigade commander (in reality) to award the creators of the series a Medal of Honor.

However, ratings are not the only measure by which to gauge the ability of a series to endure on Channel 2. For example, the series *HaBurganim* (The Bourgeoisie, Asaf Tzipori and Eitan Tzur, Channel 2: 2000–2004), while a critical success, compelled its audience to tune off Channel 2 in favor of one of the satellite channels, as it was perceived as "too depressing," according to Alpher, and "represented a critical turning point in the history of Israeli television drama." Since *HaBurganim*, there has been no prime-time series that confronted its viewers as powerfully, as expressed in *Atem Sham BaBayit*, Episode 4: "The language of the Channel 2 drama had changed beyond recognition."

HaBurganim's "migration" to satellite television in 2004 represented a broader, more significant transition that would occur a year later: the cable and satellite channels' new role as major players in the evolution of Israeli drama in terms of quantity, content and discourse. Even more so, it constituted a transition from television to something that is "not-television," or "post-television."

"Television Gimel" (C) or Israeli Post-Television

Television Gimel closely aligns with the global development of television and the period called the "era of plenty" and TVIII. It was then that Israeli television

began to bridge the gap with global television, particularly with regard to personalized viewing. The introduction of video on demand (VOD), digital video recording (DVR), and start-over services provided to cable and satellite customers, alongside the availability of drama series on digital video disc (DVD) and diverse viewing options and platforms led to extreme transformations in Israeli viewership modes.

During "television gimel," instead of "linear viewing," entailing viewers' dependence on the broadcasting schedule determined by the television provider, viewers can build their own, non-linear schedules, and choose when, where, and on what platform they view their television content. This has reduced the dependence on ratings, and increased dependence on branding, which decisively influence the nature of television content and the attempt to create differentiation through unique texts (Ellis 2000: 165–169; Rogers et al. 2002: 47; Johnson 2007).

The transformations in television culture were so great that there were those who wondered if this was the end of television (Katz 2009). However, most television researchers and scholars regard of these changes as another stage in television's evolution, a stage referred to as "Television after TV" (Spigel 2004), the "post-broadcast era" (Turner and Tay 2009), "the post-network era," (Lotz 2010), or "the post-television era" (Leverette et al. 2009). While certainly affected by these transformations in the global media environment, Israeli television in general, and Israeli drama in particular, are nevertheless unique in several important aspectes. Therefore, in this book I have chosen to call this era "television gimel" or "Israeli post-television," the prefix "post" having several meanings, one of which is "after" (television).

Exactly when did Israeli post-television begin? Just as the transition from "television aleph" to "television beit" was characterized by an anomalous period of several years in which Israel Television (Channel 1) gradually lost its monopoly, so the transition from "television beit" to "television gimel" did not happen overnight. Moreover, compared with Channel 1, which lost its central role with the rise of Channel 2 during "television beit," Channel 2—which largely symbolizes "television beit"—still plays a major role in Israeli television, even while under the heavy influence of the processes that "television Gimel" engenders. Nevertheless, 2005 can be pointed to as the year when Israeli post-television really began. Why?

Firstly, it was in 2005 that cable provider HOT launched its VOD services, enabling Israeli viewers, for the first time, to watch television programming according to their schedules and preferences, without having to pre-record programs. However, viewers were unable at this point to choose which the

content would be available in this video directory, only when to watch it. Yet over the years, the quantities of content grew dramatically and covered nearly all the major Israeli texts aired on both broadcast and cable channels. Eventually, the Israeli viewer could control her own viewing schedule, or as HOT advertised on its website: viewing on VOD makes "your viewing experience better, more sophisticated, and much more fun."

That same year, satellite provider YES launched its DVR service, "Yes Max," which allows viewers to build their very own "video libraries" according to their own preferences. While in some ways similar to VCR or DVD recoders, these devices' ease of use; the ability to pre-set a of an entire series and to record two programs simultaneously; the large storage capacity offered; and the option to delete content that has already been viewed without compromising broadcast quality, have all contributed to Yes Max's popularity. In the years since, both cable and satellite television providers have added services that have become so popular that their use in Israel greatly exceeds their average global use (Keinan 2010).[7]

These changes in the viewing culture could potentially have struck a fatal blow to Israeli television drama. While various means of content recording cannot replace certain live viewing experiences—such as offered by news and sports broadcasts, and some reality programs—there appears to be no added value to watching dramas at a given time. Television critic Yuval Nathan put it this way: "Why should I watch an episode [of drama] on television with commercial breaks and at a time that isn't very convenient for me? I can record it on DVR or download it on iTunes or view it on MAKO [Channel 2's website]" (quoted in Keinan 2010). And since drama is "such an expensive genre to produce," adds Nathan, "it is the most vulnerable [genre] under these circumstances," concluding that "today, creating drama series isn't worth it, financially" (ibid.).

On the one hand, it might seem as though Nathan was right, as since the start of the 2010s the number of dramas that have aired on Israeli commercial channels has decreased; on the other hand, however, there has also been a significant increase in the number of drama series that have aired on cable and satellite channels. Thus, by my own count, in December 2015, 12 single-episode dramas, 20 mini-series and 75 series were produced in Israel between 2005 and 2015. Compared to "television Beit," a period lasting 12 years, while there has indeed been a decline in single-episode dramas, there has been a rise in the numbers of mini-series and series produced.

The third event marking the beginning of Israeli post-television: the broadcasting of *BeTipúl*, the series to which "the unprecedented number of original drama series" on Israeli television and the "flourishing of the Israeli drama" have been attributed (Kupfer 2007). It is no coincidence that in the same year that HOT launched its VOD service, it also broadcast *BeTipul*, whose narrative structure fits the new viewing possibilities offered by VOD perfectly (see Chapter 3). Moreover, *BeTipul* was the first Israeli drama series available on DVD after its broadcast on television, and enjoyed impressive sales, which led to further attempts at distributing dramatic Israeli content in a similar fashion.

However, *BeTipul* is not only a product of technological and structural changes on Israeli television: like any other drama (and in fact like any other cultural text), it is also a product of broader social and cultural processes. While one can argue about the cultural changes that have occurred in Israeli society and whether and how television content is their cause or their result, this study adopts Tamar Liebes's claims (1999) to the effect that we cannot understand the content of Israeli television dramas without understanding the deconstruction of the consensus and the fundamental change that occurred over the years in Israeli society's self-image.

One of the central and most complex changes in Israeli society's self-image concerns trauma and victimization. After decades during which the image of "new Jew" (see Chapter 2), which did not allow acknowledgement of the Israeli subject's weakness—as neither victim nor traumatized subject—was the underlying ethos of Israeli identity, Israeli culture began to acknowledge the traumatic and victimizing dimensions of its collective identity and of the individuals of who comprise it. Thus, in "television gimel" many televisual texts, most notably dramatic texts, have dealt with themes of trauma and victimhood that have haunted Israeli society from the establishment of the state, but have only gained a legitimate place in Israeli culture in recent decades.

Israeli *post*-television, then, refers not only to post-television, but also to "post-trauma." For example, the mini-series *Nevelot* tells the story of two elderly men who are still traumatized by the 1948 War of Independence, especially by an event in which they had lain together on a battlefield filled with corpses as enemy snipers tried to kill them (see Chapter 4); *BeTipul* portrays a combat pilot shell-shocked after having dropped a one-ton bomb on innocent civilians (see Chapter 2), as well as a man who was traumatized in the Yom Kippur War; and the protagonist in the of *Parashat HaShavua* suffers from nightmares and hallucinations following the First Lebanon War (see Chapter 5). Most of the

protagonists in *Euphoria* (Ron Leshem and Dafna Levin, HOT3, 2012) suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following the murder of one of their friends; the series *Ptzuìm BaRósh* (Head Wounds, Hanan Savion and Guy Meir, HOT3 2013–) contains the theme of trauma explicitly in its title, and features post-traumatic subjects; and it appears that the series *Hatufîm* (Prisoners of War, Gideon Raff and Liat Benasuly, Channel 2, 2010–2013), created when IDF soldier Gilad Shalit was still in captivity, was nourished by the collective Israeli trauma.[8]

Another subject of the dramas of "television gimel" (and toward the end of "television beit") is the Torah-observant community, dramas about which were produced by Orthodox or formerly Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox writers and directors.[9] This phenomenon has several explanations, two of which are relevant to our discussion. The first explanation relates to Israeli television's post-traumatic aspect. Miri Talmon claims that one reason for the abundance of religious representations on television is Orthodox society's attempt to deal with the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (an incident which caused many fingers to be pointed at it), as well as the social rifts between religious and secular sectors of society (Talmon 2013: 66) that were bubbling under the surface up to Rabin's assassination, and which boiled over thereupon. In other words, even though the traumatic event itself does not appear in these texts, they can be read as the product of an attempt to confront it.

The second reason for the trend toward increased representation of Orthodox Jews on television stems from the deconstruction of the image of the "new Jew," who was the antithesis of the image the religious "feminine" Jews of the Diaspora. In this sense, despite the irony thereof, these series' popularity—even among secular viewers—might be attributed to the introduction of post-Zionist concepts into the Israeli identity discourse that took place in the 1990s, and more specifically in the early 2000s (Ram 2006a). Although post-Zionism is often viewed as constituting "a critical analysis of various cultural phenomena that reflect Zionist ideology" (Ophir 2001: 259), often coming close to certain anti-Zionist notions, it presents another option: deconstructing the masculine "new Jew"; or as Marsha Friedman writes:

> We would have been better off had we started, and I think we started, to give up on this New Jew and raise a generation of young people who are more confident and are willing to recognize the feminine element in their midst. It would be good for us women, and good for the country as a whole. And if this is the possible face of the post-Zionist era, let it show itself.
>
> Friedman 1998: 19

Hence, "Israeli post-television" is in many ways post-Zionist television, or television that is affected by post-Zionist stances that strike a chord with a small yet identifiable sector of Israeli society. Yet post-Zionism does not only address the deconstruction of Israeli masculinity: one of the main goals of the post-Zionists is to rid Israeli Jews of their self-image of victimhood and to confront them with their part in victimizing others (Ophir 2001). Thus many series showcase protagonists who represent the hegemonic masculinity who are exposed as victimizers, and sometimes even as murderers. Take, for example, the combat pilot Yadin Yerushalmi in *BeTipul*, who learns in his debriefing that he has killed 13 innocent Palestinians; the elderly Palmachniks (pre-state resistance fighters) in *Nevelot*, who go on violent killing sprees targeting young people; Shaul Nawi, protagonist of *Parashat HaShavua*, who discovers that he is directly responsible for the establishment of the settlement Maalè Shaúl, which he refers to as "the Nazi settlement"; the protagonists of *Ptzuim BaRosh* who murder criminals that the police cannot apprehend; and one protagonist in the series *Kavanót Tovót* (Good Intentions, Adi Zivlin and Dudi Berman, Channel 2: 2008) who is caught brutally beating a Palestinian without clear justification during his military service in the occupied territories.

The entry of post-Zionist positions into Israeli society in general, and into Israeli television in particular, is also expressed in the growing use of the term "Nakba" in Israeli discourse. Years after the expulsion of Palestinians from their villages in 1948, referred to by Palestinians as the Nakba ("the catastrophe")—which was erased from the collective Israeli memory or rationalized as a direct outcome of the Palestinians' own behavior and choices—the term began to be heard in mainstream Israeli discourse (Azoulay 2013), including on television. And so, in the third season of *Parashat HaShavua*, one of the Palestenian protagonists travels around Israel carrying "Nakba maps" and tries to restore the Palestinian past (Harlap 2016a). Another example of the Nakba entering the Israeli discourse can be seen in the episode titled "Memory" from the series *Avodá Aravìt* (Arab Labor, Sayed Kashua, Channel 2, 2007–2013), about an Arab Israeli family. Maya (Fatimah Yahya), the daughter of the protagonist, Amjad (Norman Issa), who attends a Jewish school, wants to sing "Shir HaReút" ("Song of comradeship" a Hebrew song heavily associated with fallen Israeli soldiers) at a Memorial Day ceremony. Amjad's parents are shocked, and his mother decides to teach her granddaughter about the Nakba by showing her an album of photographs taken before 1948. In the episode's final scene, Maya is seen singing "Shir HaReút," but edited into the scene are images from

her grandmother's album. As she sings "We shall remember them all," the image that appears on the screen is of Palestinians before their expulsion from their village. Thus, both intentionally and playfully, *Avodá Aravìt* blurs the lines between memories and victims.

Another theoretical term with the prefix "post" has found its way into the world of Israeli television drama: "post-colonialism," especially in reference to Mizrahim. In her research, Ella Shohat argues that Jews of European descent (Ashkenazim) have projected orientalist notions onto both Palestinians and Mizrahi Jews, as per Zionist ideology. Shohat states: "First World attitudes toward the Third World are reproduced in their Ashkenazi/Sephardi[10] variants, at times quite explicitly in comparisons of Oriental Jews to Arabs and Blacks" (2010: 105).

The integration of local post-Zionist and global post-colonial notions has led to what has been termed the "new Mizrahi narrative" (Kizel 2014), which exposes the actual and symbolic violence that Ashkenazi hegemony has inflicted on Mizrahi Jews. As aforementioned, this narrative has infiltrated popular culture, television included, and led to the creation of texts that question cultural assumptions regarding nationality and ethnicity. A highlight of this process is the television series *Zaguri Imperia*, which I discuss extensively in Chapter 6.

And finally, in this context, we cannot ignore the term for which the prefix "post" has become an almost obvious shorthand: "postmodernism." "Israeli post-television" is undoubtedly also post-modern television; at the very least, it possesses many elements associated with postmodernism. For example, many series that present "alternative families," or what Fogiel-Bijaoui (2002) calls "Postmodern families," are shown on Israeli television such as the series *Ima'leh* (Mommy, Muli Segev and Tamar Marom, Channel 2, 2005–2008), about a single mother; as well as the series *Ima VeAbbaz*, about a family consisting of two gay fathers and a mother (see Chapter 7). However, it is worth remembering that even in a distinctly postmodern medium such as television, modernist and even reactionary texts still appear.

In summary, despite complaints made about Israeli television culture, and despite commonly heard claims that "Reality TV has taken over Israeli television" (Tucker 2013), and perhaps even Israeli reality itself (Panievsky 2009), Israeli television drama continues to thrive. In fact, it is still evolving and growing ever more complex and interesting. It appears that the new television culture, or "post-television," which allows viewers to choose when, where, and how often they watch television programs, encourages a fair number of creators and

producers to take risks and produce content that offers "the refined rage of Israeli society" as Rogel Alpher put it (*Atem Sham BaBayit*, Episode 4). Yet it is important to remember that this rage does not depend solely on the skills of the creators, but also on the significant changes that Israeli television has undergone—institutionally, technologically, and in the modes of viewership.

2

Bringing Back the Nation: *BeTipul*'s Male Warrior

BeTipul is one of Israeli television's greatest success stories, at least discursively, and was sold to the prestigious HBO cable network, and subsequently to 17 additional broadcasters worldwide.[1] This exporting of the original Israeli format to other countries, mainly in the form of adaptations to local cultural needs and tastes (Waisbord 2004), along with the dominance in the script of the psychologistic discourse—itself in many ways a product of American cultural influence on Israeli society (Almog 2004: 633)—seemingly attests to the text's global appeal.

However, an examination of the original version of *BeTipul* reveals it to be deeply rooted in Israeli culture, a product of broader cultural processes that Israeli society has undergone since its founding. Focusing on the character of IDF combat pilot Yadin Yerushalmi (Lior Ashkenazi; see Figure 2.1), I argue that *BeTipul* is a product of post-Zionist cultural sensibilities that undermine the conceptualization of the Israeli Jew as eternal victim, and make evident the high price paid in the construction of the "new Jew" and its destructive effects on the Israeli male subject.

BeTipul was originally broadcast on Israeli cable Channel 3, airing five days a week for two seasons.[2] Each episode from Sunday (the first day of the Israeli work week) through Wednesday portrayed a single therapy session conducted in the clinic of psychodynamic psychologist Reuven Dagan (Assi Dayan; see Figure 2.2) with a different patient each day, while Thursday's episode presented Reuven's own session with his therapist/mentor Gila (Gila Almagor), held in her clinic. Thus, over the first season's nine-week run and the second's seven-week run, viewers could follow the stories of several patients, who not only meet with Reuven on a specific day of the week, but also appear onscreen that same day, on a weekly basis.

In addition to Yadin, the first season's patients include a young female physician who falls in love with Reuven, a young athlete with suicidal tendencies,

Figure 2.1 Yadin Yerushalmi (Lior Ashkenazi) in *BeTipul*.

and a couple dealing with marital issues. Though the series takes place almost entirely within the confines of the clinic room, season 1 also provides opportunities for viewers to become acquainted with Reuven's own declining marriage, as well as his relationship with his teenage daughter and his complicated rapport with one of his patients.

The second season takes place two years later (both within the narrative and in terms of the series' broadcast), and introduces new patients: a single female attorney who wants to raise a child, a factory manager suffering from shell shock, and a young cancer patient. Alongside these, the season picks up narrative threads from the previous season, such as Reuven's evolving relationship with his daughter, the continuing therapy of the struggling married couple, and the effect on Reuven's personal life of his failure to have adequately treat Yadin, the combat pilot. These lingering effects of the (failed) treatment of Yadin, recurring throughout the second season, indicate how important this plot line is to the series as a whole.

Figure 2.2 Reuven Dagan (Assi Dayan) in *BeTipul*.

Yadin Yerushalmi, Reuven's Monday patient during season 1, is a 40-year-old IDF combat pilot, married and father of two, and son of a Holocaust survivor. During an air raid on Ramallah, by dropping a one-ton bomb on a building where a suspected terrorist was believed to be, Yadin killed 12 Palestinian civilians. Ten days later, Yadin experiences a state of clinical death induced by a near-fatal heart attack suffered while playing strenuous and prolonged tennis match. Following these incidents, Yadin was instructed by his superiors to go see a military psychologist; instead, he chooses to see Reuven, explaining that he's seeking a "routine consultation" before visiting Ramallah with Doctors Without Borders, in order to see the site he has bombed; he simply wants Reuven to "sign him off" as fit for the visit, or "sane." The following week, Yadin returns to Reuven "only" to ask whether he should leave his wife, and later returns again "only" to ask whether he should pursue a romantic relationship with another patient of Reuven's.

In other words, as Yadin sees it, he is not undergoing therapy, but merely coming in for weekly consults on specific dilemmas. After a few weeks, when Yadin feels that the sessions have become too difficult for him (as he puts it), he quits therapy, goes back to being a pilot, and for the first time since the bombing, goes on a training flight during which he dies in what is officially termed an accident, but is implied to possibly have been suicide.

While Yadin is "killed off" toward the end of the first season, his character continues to haunt Reuven, and the series, long afterwards. Yadin's father, Menachem (Yisrael Poliakov), comes to talk to Reuven immediately following Yadin's demise (during the weekly time slot previously reserved for Yadin), holding Reuven—and psychotherapy as a profession—accountable for his son's death. Menachem also returns in the first episode of season 2, demanding that Reuven quit his profession, and threatening to sue him for malpractice if he does not. This lawsuit hovers over the entire season, and is only resolved in the final episode, when Reuven—and perhaps psychodynamic therapy as a whole—is wholly acquitted.

As Chapter 3 illustrates, *BeTipul* was read by Israeli critics as an allegory of Israeli society, with Yadin's character in particular singled out as the embodiment of ambivalent Israeli masculinity in the early twenty-first century.[3] On the one hand, Yadin is a combat pilot, and as such the very embodiment of the fantasy of the "new Jew," or "Sabra" (as his father puts it: "a smart, strong pilot, not some shmendrick.[4] A man!"). On the other hand, Yadin's character also incorporates elements of the individualistic—and even hedonistic—ethos that has come to characterize Israeli society over the past few decades, an ethos that emphasizes individual desires over the collective experience, and in that sense contradicts the traditional conception of the Sabra as a figure of total and willing self-sacrifice in the service of national, collective interests. This aspect of Yadin's character is expressed, for example, in his epicurean taste in coffee, and in his gourmet espresso machine, which he won in an online auction that was being held right after a terror attack had taken place, while everyone was "glued to the television like morons," as he puts it.

It is thus no coincidence that Yadin, rather than participate in this act of national, collective television viewing, elects instead to turn to the internet, thereby exercising his individuality (and exploiting the terror attack) through the act of purchasing a fancy appliance while no one else was bidding.[5] Much like Yadin, *BeTipul* itself is emblematic of the move from collective television viewing to individual choice. Yadin's choice to shop online while "everyone's glued to the

television like morons" in many ways echoes the choice made by many viewers to consume *BeTipul* using VOD services or DVD box sets that were subsequently made available for purchase.[6]

This combination of conflicting models of Israeli masculinity in Yadin's character is also evident in his attitude toward psychotherapy. On the one hand, being faithful to the national collective and serving its interests, Yadin adopts the basic assumptions of Zionist ideology, which rejects on many levels the very notion of psychotherapy. Yadin expresses objection to his treatment in his insistence that he is not "really" coming in for therapy, manifested in his visible expressions of contempt toward Reuven and toward the questions Reuven asks him, as well as in his manner of payment for his sessions—leaving cash on Reuven's table—reminiscent of the stereotypical manner in which a client would pay a prostitute for her services.

On the other hand, as a member of the secular, individualistic culture, and belonging to the upper middle class—a class that has adopted "psychologistic language" as "one of its core 'minerals'," (Almog 2004: 823) and as an essential component in its worldview (ibid.: 720)—Yadin is familiar with psychotherapeutic discourse and is eventually willing to cooperate with it. Toward the end of his therapy, Yadin becomes an "exemplary" patient, revealing his dreams and even reflecting on his sexual orientation.

BeTipul thus depicts the tension between one's need to acknowledge and work through trauma and the refusal to do so, or the inner struggle between Yadin's "masculine" and "feminine" sides, as a battle between Yadin's ego and his super-ego or his ego ideal, which according to Freud is at the same time the ideal of the nation (Freud 1914a: 101) and the product of identification with the father (Freud 1923: 31). In Yadin's case, the ideal of the nation is the one faced by all Israeli male subjects—the ideal of the new Jew—while the identification with the father involves Yadin's personal biography. Indeed, Menachem, Yadin's father, is discovered to have been a dominant presence in Yadin's life, a presence he has internalized as a critical and particularly violent super-ego. One of the most powerful messages conveyed by this father figure is that "real" men, and certainly combat pilots, should not speak about their emotions—let alone work through traumas—and moreover, that doing so might even be dangerous.

However, Menachem is not the only father figure relevant in this context. Two other symbolic father figures strongly influence Yadin's personality: the first is Dan Halutz, who served as Commander of the Israeli Air Force a few years before *BeTipul* aired, and as IDF Chief of Staff during the airing of *BeTipul*'s first

season; the other is Reuven himself, or more accurately, another character Assi Dayan played in the past—that of Uri Kahana, protagonist of the film *He Walked Through the Fields* (Yosef Milo, 1967). Our discussion of Yadin as a traumatic subject will thus be presented through his three "fathers"—Dan Halutz, Menachem Yerushalmi, and Uri Kahana—but first, I will briefly examine the relationships between trauma, Zionism, and masculinity.

Trauma, Zionism, and Masculinity

> *We were and are still damaged; our post-trauma flourishes from two thousand years of exile and beatings and persecution and eradication [. . .] Want to understand us? Start with trauma.*
>
> Yair 2011: 11, 17

The term "trauma" originally referred to "any injury where the skin is broken as a consequence of external violence, and the effects of such an injury upon the organism as a whole" (Laplanche and Pontalis 1988: 465). When psychoanalysis adopted the term metaphorically, it applied three principal characteristics of the physical injury to the psychic injury: "the idea of a violent shock, the idea of a wound, and the idea of consequences affecting the whole organization" (ibid.: 466). Various definitions of trauma in the psychoanalytic context address an individual who suffers a powerful event—singular or recurring, caused by nature or by a human(s)—that threatens his/her physical or mental wellbeing.

However, just as psychoanalysis employs the term "injury" as a metaphor, nearly severing it from its original, physical context, so the term "trauma" has drifted away from its psychoanalytic definition strictly as mental injury and acquired additional meanings, until its use today in much broader, mostly sociocultural, contexts. The notion that collectives and nations can also suffer trauma and even repress or work through it, along with the increase in post-traumatic discourse in the early 1980s, has led to a widespread penetration of the term "trauma" into discourses of identity; many social groups, first in the West and later in the rest of the world, began defining themselves through traumatic discourse, in particular through the lens of "cultural trauma," as articulated by Jeffrey Alexander:

> Cultural Trauma occurs when members of collectivity *feel* they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group

> consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.
>
> 2004: 1

Unlike other definitions of individual and collective trauma that consider the traumatic event itself to be the generator of post-traumatic experience, Alexander's definition of "cultural trauma" rejects the notion that trauma is the spontaneous product of a painful event, instead presenting it as a process that is socially and culturally constructed. Alexander rejects viewing cultural trauma as an inherent element of its inciting incident, and he reiterates that trauma is generated only through social mediation. In this sense, the characterization of a society as suffering from cultural trauma is a matter of representation rather than essential substance; or, to paraphrase Benedict Anderson, cultural trauma can be considered "an imagined trauma" (ibid.: 9).

Israeli society—like many others—defines itself (among other ways) through cultural traumas, at times engaging in "a competition of victims" (Chaumont 1997) against other societies, primarily Palestinian society, as a means of reaffirming its moral superiority. However, despite the constitutive traumatic events of Israeli identity, and despite the advantages afforded by the position of victimhood, Israeli culture displays an ambivalent stance regarding its own collective traumas.

One of the main reasons therefore has to do with its preferred self-image, in particular its preferred image of masculinity. Among the primary goals of Zionist ideology was the rehabilitation and transformation of the Jewish male body from a weak, flawed, feminine, and homosexual body (as perceived by both anti-Semitic and Zionist discourses) into an anti-Diasporic, strong, and masculine one (Gluzman 2007: 13). The "new Jew," as this rehabilitated Jew was named, "was identical to the stereotype of masculinity that accompanied the rise of modern industrial society as the outward expression of true manliness" (Mosse 1985: 570).

A principal aspect of the "rehabilitation of the Jewish body" involved a focus on the cultivation of the body, moving away from diasporic Judaism's near-exclusive emphasis on the cultivation of the mind (Gluzman 2007: 23); in other words, as famously put by Max Nordau, replacing "Coffee-House Judaism" (Mosse 1985: 574) with "Muscle Judaism"—a notion that was meant to promote not only physical robustness, but mental health as well (ibid.: 578). Thus, values that had been cherished by Jewish culture for centuries, such as "skeptical philosophical contention, non-partisan criticism, and self-reflection," came to be

"seen as undermining change, group cohesion, and construction" (Rolnik 2012: 137); and the motto "more deeds, less words" (ibid.: 136) became one of Zionist ideology's central tenets. Against this backdrop, it is no surprise that the principles of psychoanalysis were also perceived as fundamentally contradictory to the Jewish self-image prescribed by early Zionism (Gluzman 2007: 20), and that psychological philosophizing, as Oz Almog has argued, contradicted the earthy, corporeal, and productive nature of the anti-Diasporic ethos (2004: 616).

This negative view of psychology obviously had a crucial influence on Israeli society's willingness and capacity to deal with traumatic experiences, on both the individual and collective levels. Not only did the image of the new Jew reject any position of victimhood—which was associated with passivity, weakness, and femininity—but moreover, the very act of self-examination or any self-analytical process, and therefore the working through of trauma as well, were viewed as unnecessary and even dangerous. This view was manifested in how Israeli society, and subsequently the state, dealt with the trauma of the Holocaust; as Dominick LaCapra puts it, "Israel didn't want to listen to survivors, basically because Israelis were trying, for understandable reasons, to construct a different kind of state with a different kind of political agent" (LaCapra 2014: 158). LaCapra adds, "The aim was to go from victim to agent, without passing through survival and the process of working through the past" (ibid.).

The events of the Holocaust are not the only traumas that have gone without being worked through, either collectively or individually; so have many other painful experiences wherein the Israeli subject supposedly displayed weakness and victimhood. Thus, for example, until the 1970s, shell-shocked soldiers were silenced by the Israeli military, thereby denying them the possibility of properly working through their traumas. This unofficial policy resulted from long-held conceptions that shell shock "did not exist" in the IDF, that is, was not officially recognized as a condition that requires treatment (Stein 2003: 68), and accordingly that introducing psychoanalysis into the military establishment would threaten to start a wave of "unnecessary" requests for therapy; and so the message that should be conveyed to soldiers is that they have nothing to gain from it (ibid.: 73).

The "new Jew," who was first and foremost the "new Jewish man," began being constructed as the central ideal to which the immigrant, and later the Sabra, should aspire, becoming a sort of rigid super-ego whose demands must be met. The Zionist subject, however, was not always able to meet these demands, and was repeatedly confronted by gaps between the national ideal and his actual

lived experience. It is therefore clear, as we saw in Chapter 1, why post-Zionism attempted to undermine the figure of the "new Jew," to point out the arbitrariness of "his" construction, and to expose the high costs it extracted of both the "new Jews" and their (gendered, national, and ethnic) "others." In other words, one of post-Zionism's aims was first to point out the artificiality of the masculine image, and then to offer an alternative, less rigid model of masculinity.

"Israeli post-television," as a period of Israeli television characterized by post-Zionist elements, has often adopted this critical viewpoint, presenting male characters who, in an effort to live up to the standards of the "new Jew," inflict damage upon themselves or their surroundings. These men who have experienced on their very flesh the contradictions between their actual selves and their ego ideal; and their attempts at living up to the Israeli norms of masculinity are ultimately discovered to be traumatic and to extract a heavy mental toll that may lead them to collapse or to the loss of their humanity. Moreover, the television texts that portray these men subscribe to the views of post-Zionism, and therefore, unlike Zionist literature or cinema, highlight the construction of the male body and its costs. I shall now illustrate how these notions are expressed in *BeTipul*, by examining Yadin's relationships and connections with his various father figures.

Dan Halutz and the Trauma of the Victimizer

Though his name is never mentioned on the series, the figure of Dan Halutz, who was appointed IDF Chief of Staff shortly before *BeTipul* aired, hangs over the character of Yadin, while Halutz's views and statements are echoed in Yadin's character. The primary incident that connects the two is the "targeted assassination" of Salah Shahade, commander of the military wing of Hamas, by IDF pilots who dropped a one-ton bomb on Shahade's house in 2002. Besides Shahade and another Hamas operative, 14 civilians were killed in the bombing, 11 of whom were children. Following this action and its consequences, ads protesting the bombing were published in Israeli newspapers, one of which asked: "To the pilot who dropped the bomb: How do you sleep at night?" Halutz, Commander of the Air Force at the time, decided to answer this question, and while meeting with Air Force squadron members, including the pilot who had dropped the bomb, made the following statement:

> Guys [. . .], you can sleep well at night. I also sleep well, by the way. You aren't the ones who choose the targets, and you weren't the ones who chose the target in

> this particular case. You are not responsible for the contents of the target. Your execution was perfect. Superb. And I repeat: There's no problem here that concerns you. You did exactly what you were instructed to do. You did not deviate from that by so much as a millimeter to the right or to the left. And anyone who has a problem with that is invited to see me.
>
> Quoted in Levy-Barzilai 2002

Yadin's storyline, concerning his killing of innocent civilians by dropping a one-ton bomb in an attempt to take out a known terrorist, is an obvious nod to the Shahade assassination. Moreover, when asked by Reuven how he feels about his actions, Yadin's response repeats Halutz's words like a mantra, elucidating and making explicit the connection between the two. At first Yadin says he has no moral qualms or feelings of guilt over what he did, and then adds:

> **Yadin** I sleep very well. With the assumption that I did what I had to in the best possible way [. . .] [Hitting] the right building. If you don't hit the right building you've got troubles with yourself, with your conscience, and with the system. But if you hit the target, like me, but the wrong people were there, then there's no problem. I sleep like a baby. Don't get me wrong, of course there's discomfort when you hear about what happened. But it doesn't really bother my conscience.

Yadin's and Halutz's ability to sleep soundly after a bombing indicates that the actions in which they take part have no effect on them, since insofar as they, and the system in which they operate, are concerned, these incidents are not problematic. Similarly, according to Stein, even when shell shock was recognized as a legitimate psychological condition by the IDF, the notion that it could be experienced by the perpetrators as well was yet not recognized, and therefore questions regarding feelings of guilt over killings and other combat actions perpetrated by soldiers were not asked in the IDF (Stein 2003: 72).

The connection between Halutz and Yadin, however, goes further: following Halutz's speech, when asked by *Haaretz* reporter Vered Levy-Barzilai, "Is it not legitimate to ask a pilot what he feels after he releases a bomb?" Halutz responded unequivocally:

> No. That is not a legitimate question, and it is not asked. But if you nevertheless want to know what I feel when I release a bomb, I will tell you: I feel a light bump to the plane as a result of the bomb's release. A second later it's gone, and that's all. That is what I feel.
>
> Quoted in Levy-Barzilai 2002

This statement by Halutz, which has become engraved in Israeli memory, appears closely paraphrased in Yadin's dialogue with Reuven. In their fifth session together, Yadin makes harsh allegations against Reuven, and reveals his knowledge of intimate details of Reuven's family life, including his wife's affair. Yadin's words noticeably sting Reuven, and when Yadin calls Naama, a patient with whom Reuven has a complicated relationship, a "psychotic slut," Reuven loses control and chokes Yadin for several moments. Reuven then comes to his senses and lets go of Yadin; we see Yadin sprawled on the couch, visibly distraught, Reuven standing over him (see Figure 2.3). In the following session/episode, one week later, Reuven asks Yadin: "What did you feel during that moment, when I attacked you?" to which Yadin answers, with a wry half-smile: "What did I feel? A light bump to the wing of the plane, that's what I felt."

Yadin's paraphrasing of Halutz's words in this context is an interesting choice, and one that signifies a role reversal: Halutz reported feeling "a light bump to the plane" when assuming the position of the pilot who drops the bomb, and in so doing repudiates the possibility of the attacker suffering mental anguish, thus

Figure 2.3 Reuven standing over Yadin (*BeTipul*).

rejecting the very notion of perpetrator trauma. Yadin, conversely, says he felt "a light bump to the wing of the plane" when he was on the receiving end, figuratively assuming the position of "the bombed" rather than "the bomber," a notion reinforced by the high-angle shot that was used to frame the attack scene, particularly toward its end, placing Yadin, if only briefly, in the position of a Palestinian being bombed by an IDF plane. Through this displacement of the words of the attacker (who purportedly feels nothing) into the mouth of the victim (who experiences trauma), Yadin acknowledges the very thing he refuses to recognize in his therapy sessions: that killing innocents, even when unintentional, can be traumatizing.

The text indeed constructs Yadin as a character suffering from shell shock, as he displays the two primary symptoms thereof, according to Stein: numbness and restlessness (2003: 61). On the one hand, Yadin experiences emotional detachment—regarding both the bombing incident and his own near-death experience—from a distance, as someone else's story, at times even recounted in the third person. On the other hand, Yadin's death during flight training, after refusing to stop attacking an "enemy" plane that he was targeting, thus causing his own plane to crash into the side of a mountain, indicates a state of excessive vitality, or what Stein terms a hyperkinetic state, wherein a combatant might lose orientation, and even run maniacally toward enemy lines (ibid.: 61).

And so, rebutting Dan Halutz's claims, *BeTipul* argues that the Israeli occupation, regarding which the series casts Israel in the role of perpetrator, takes a heavy mental toll on IDF soldiers as represented by Yadin, who outwardly adopts Halutz's doctrine, thus elucidating the price Israelis might pay for participating in the occupation.[7] Furthermore, LaCapra's notion of "perpetrator trauma," which *BeTipul* adopts, carries political and moral implications. According to LaCapra, perpetrator trauma "must itself be acknowledged and in some sense worked through if perpetrators are to distance themselves from an earlier implication in deadly ideologies and practices" (2014: 79). In this sense, *BeTipul* raises a two-pronged critique of Zionist ideology, or at the very least, of the Zionist ideal of masculinity: not only does it "demand" that Yadin, as the embodiment of the "new Jew," undergo therapy and work through his trauma; but it also depicts him as an aggressor. One of the main messages, then, of *BeTipul*, is that unless Israeli society allows itself to work through its own perpetrator trauma, it might find itself repeatedly involved in "deadly ideologies and practices."

Menachem Yerushalmi and the Working Through of Trauma

If Yadin inherited from his symbolic father, Dan Halutz, the belief that the perpetrator shouldn't experience trauma, he inherited from his biological father his method of coping with trauma. We learn from Menachem's session with Reuven that at age 16, while Menachem hid from the Nazis, he would physically muffle his father's chronic cough in order that the sound not give away their hiding place. This proved too much for Menachem's sickly and feeble father, leading to his dying at Menachem's hands. According to Yadin, Menachem feels no remorse or guilt over his actions; as Menachem tells Reuven, the night he killed his father, he got drunk. When asked by Reuven about his drinking Menachem replies:

> **Menachem** To this day. I get home at five, pour myself a glass of cognac, and down it. A big glass, like a cup of tea. And all the bad thoughts go away.
>
> **Reuven** So the alcohol helps? It's a method that you recommend for coping with life?
>
> **Menachem** It's a very good method [. . .] A man drinks. He has problems, he drinks, they go away. You can't stop and think about every little ache or pain: Maybe it's because of Father? Maybe it's because of Mother? Maybe because of bloody Hitler? [. . .] Will talking do me any good? Will it bring my father back?

The "coping method" that Menachem adopts and endorses—drinking, rather than talking—is in fact a daily repetition of his actions following his patricidal act, and thus functions as a sort of compulsive repetition, repeatedly reenacting the traumatic event. Menachem, it could be argued, is exhibiting a sort of "fidelity to trauma," resisting the process of working through out of a sense that by reengaging in life, he would be "betraying those who were overwhelmed and consumed by that traumatic past" (LaCapra 2014: 22). But this "coping method" is employed by Menachem not only in response to his act of patricide, but also in response to any other traumatic event in his life. When his wife passed away, he immediately occupied himself with various logistical tasks, and then, according to Yadin, "He immediately met another woman and married her as if nothing had happened. You get it? He went through it without grieving at all." Menachem likewise resists grieving his son's death as well, even refusing to sit *shiva* [Hebrew for "seven"], the traditional seven-day Jewish mourning period during which the mourners put aside their daily affairs in order to work through the loss of a loved one.

Menachem, then, refuses to work through trauma or even acknowledge it, choosing instead to deal with traumatic events through acting out. Understanding this requires knowledge of Freud's distinction, expanded on by LaCapra, between "acting out" and "working through." According to Freud, acting out is a process wherein "the patient repeats instead of remembering" (1914b, 151). In acting out, LaCapra adds, "the past is performatively regenerated or relived as if it were fully present rather than represented in memory and inscription, and it hauntingly returns as the repressed" (2014: 70). An alternative and, as per Freud, healthier mechanism for dealing with trauma is working through, wherein the past is talked about and remembered, enabling the subject to grieve and engage his trauma, thus "achieving a reinvestment in [. . .] life that allows one to begin again [. . .] in ways that allow for a measure of critical distance, change, resumption of social life, ethical responsibility, and renewal" (ibid.: 66).

Examined through this analytical lens, Yadin's conduct is revealed to be governed by the characteristics of acting out behavior, revealing its post-traumatic aspects: as aforementioned, Yadin's stated reason for coming to see Reuven in the first place was not the desire for therapy or working through, but rather for a simple consult and signing off on his plan to return to Ramallah to revisit the site he had bombed. Yadin's desire to return to the place where "it all started," as he puts it, and on the other hand his conviction that nothing worth talking about actually occurred there,[8] indicate both his unwillingness to acknowledge the traumatic event and his inability to break free of it. Moreover, Yadin's compulsion to return to the site of his trauma-inducing act is also evident in his two "deaths": the first, his clinical death experience, was the result of his insistence on playing two straight rounds of tennis, despite the warnings of his tennis partner, a physician; while his second, actual death was the result of his insistence on repeatedly firing on an "enemy plane" during simulated combat.

Note that LaCapra does not dismiss acting out, arguing that it too can be productive for coping with trauma, and that at times, "acting out may well be a necessary condition of working through" (ibid.: 70). However, the refusal to grieve has severe repercussions, both psychologically and ethically. While working through enables the subject to distinguish between the traumatic past and the present, potentially leading him/her to reinvest in life and even to a degree of critical control over the trauma, acting out, as per Freud, might lead to melancholia, a state characterized by "profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings" (Freud 1917: 244).

When Yadin's commander (Halutz) refuses to recognize that killing innocents might cause emotional distress, and therefore dismisses the possibility of "emotional working through"; when his father refuses to speak of his own traumatic history, believing that talking about it has no value, and when his only reaction to the outcomes of the bombing executed by his own son is a supportive pat; when the system he operates in denies the very notion of experiencing guilt or shell shock following a violent and destructive action directed at an enemy, it is clear why Yadin is not able to work through his psychological issues following the air raid on Ramallah, and remains trapped in a state of compulsive repetition that ultimately leads to his death. As the series depicts it, however, this death is not the result of a singular traumatic event, but rather is explicitly linked to the construction of Yadin's masculine identity, or more specifically, his heterosexual identity.

Uri Kahana and the Trauma of Heterosexual Masculinity

During the Second Lebanon War in 2006, as a sense of failure was increasingly dominating Israeli discourse, journalist Ari Shavit published a column in *Haaretz* titled "What Happened to Us" (with no question mark, and without clarifying who was meant by "us"), in which he asked how "we" had become so weak that "the Israeli War Machine was no longer what it used to be." Shavit's answer to this question was clear:

> A simple thing happened: We were drugged by political correctness. The political correctness that has come to dominate Israeli discourse and Israeli awareness in the past generation is totally divorced from the Israeli situation [. . .] Since the IDF has been identified as an army of occupation—rather than as an army that also protects *feminists, homo-lesbians, and any other minority group* that can only exist in a free society—they had reservations about it, they shook it off and became alienated from it. After all, in the world of political correctness, "power" and "army" have become dirty words [. . .] Power is identified with fascism. *The old Israeli masculinity* is publicly condemned [. . .] The academic world has promoted political correctness ad absurdum, and established a somewhat suicidal spirit of criticism.
>
> Shavit 2006, 3; emphasis mine

A few months before Shavit's column was published, an episode of *BeTipul* aired in which Menachem Yerushalmi arrives at Reuven Dagan's office. According to

Menachem, his reason for coming was to find out whether the rumors he'd heard, claiming that his deceased son Yadin had been gay, were true, and whether it was possible that this had played a part in Yadin having possibly intentionally caused his own death. Reuven does not answer Menachem's first question, and explains only that their therapy sessions had aimed to examine Yadin's life in depth, so that certain issues were uncovered that took a lot of courage to confront. Regarding the cause of Yadin's death, Reuven claims that it will never be known for certain, and that it was most probably the result of human error. At this point Menachem delivers a stinging monologue:

> **Menachem** Human error doesn't apply to pilots. That's how they're trained [. . .] they're like machines. Automatic. Later on at home they can think: I was wrong, I wasn't wrong [. . .] I'm a fag, I'm not a fag. But not at Mach 5 and 80 Gs! [. . .] I'm not saying a psychological process is no good, but [it's] for ordinary people. But a [pilot], whose entire life depends on him *not* thinking, on him operating like a machine, then you have to be careful. Very careful.

The juxtaposition of these two monologues—Menachem's taken from a work of fiction, and Shavit's observations on Israeli reality—points to the similarities of their arguments regarding the "proper" way in which the IDF, and the individuals that comprise it, should function. Both Menachem Yerushalmi and Ari Shavit advocate an "automatic war machine," one that doesn't stray from its purpose or become distracted by self-reflection or self-doubt. As they see it, the unique circumstances of their reality dictate that Israeli soldiers (and by extension, the Israeli nation) should not—must not—pause to ask themselves the type of questions other, "ordinary" people (and nations) do. Just as Yadin paid the ultimate price for questioning himself by going to therapy, so the state of Israel is now paying the price of self-reflection, indulging in unwarranted—and dangerous—"political correctness."

Menachem Yerushalmi and Ari Shavit also share a view of Israeli masculinity and of various elements that they perceive as threatening it: Shavit expresses nostalgia for the "old Israeli masculinity" that according to him "was publicly condemned," and views the national concern for the wellbeing of "feminists, homo-lesbians, and any other minority group" as a threat to this masculinity. Similarly, Menachem rants against anyone who does not live up to the standards of hegemonic Israeli masculinity—the Orthodox, Arabs, Mizrahim, and homosexuals—and accuses psychotherapy, which he sees as being only for homosexuals and for women, of compromising his son's masculinity and

impairing his ability to perform, resulting in his death. When Reuven implies the possibility that as Yadin's father, Menachem also played a part in his son's tragedy, Menachem replies:

> **Menachem** Me? Why me? [. . .] What do you mean? That I should feel guilty? About what? About raising my son to be a man? Okay. So you came along, and you opened up a whole new wonderful world for him; you told my son he needs to look inside himself, examine, feel. So he felt. And where is he now? Bits and pieces in the sea that the fish are now eating.

An interesting perspective on Shavit's and Menachem's views is offered by Gideon Levy, an Israeli journalist identified with the radical left, in his review of *BeTipul*. Like Menachem, Levy also sees a connection between Yadin's therapy and his plane crash; and like Shavit, he points to the "dangers" that self-reflection poses for Israeli masculinity. However, unlike Menachem and Shavit, Levy sees this symbolic collapse of the Israeli "overachieving, macho image" as a "valuable contribution to society." Thus, while both Menachem and Shavit see Israeli masculinity as an existing, natural, and necessary entity that has been shattered by certain "undesirable" ideas penetrating Israeli consciousness, Levy sees Israeli masculinity as a problematic and fragile subjectivity to begin with. In other words, it was neither therapy nor "feminists and homo-lesbians" and the "culture of political correctness" they promote that shattered Israeli masculinity; it is Israeli masculinity itself that has collapsed under the weight of its own internal conflicts and inconsistencies, as any rigid gender construct eventually does, while "therapy," "feminists and homo-lesbians," and the academia have merely uncovered this preexisting process.

The artificial and arbitrary nature of Israeli masculinity, and the toll it exacts on Israeli society, have been the subject of previous cultural texts. For example, Israeli cinema since the late 1970s has repeatedly dealt with the disintegration of Israeli masculinity, particularly in a body of films that Raz Yosef has termed "military films" (Yosef 2004: 48–83).[9] These films "exposed and challenged the masochism embodied in the [Zionist] heroic-nationalistic genre" (ibid.: 52), primarily by obsessively focusing on "the construction of the muscular, fighting body, and by removing the 'feminine' elements that threaten its integrity" (Yosef 2010a: 65–66). In other words, these films examined the image of the "new Jew" and depicted heterosexual masculinity, which was presented unquestioned by early Israeli cinema, as a product of social and psychological processes for which we all pay a high mental cost.

Furthermore, as Michael Gluzman has shown, despite early Israeli literature's attempts at reshaping conceptions of Jewish masculinity and constructing a monolithic, masculine identity, some early Israeli literary works—including canonical texts—actually subvert the ideology of the new Jew and his hegemonic body image. One such text, relevant to this discussion, is Moshe Shamir's *He Walked through the Fields* (1947). Published shortly before the Israeli War of Independence, the novel was viewed by both critics and readers as "a sort of generational biography of the Sabra" (Almog 1998: 24), with Uri, the novel's protagonist, depicted as a new kind of protagonist that symbolized the heroic values of the time (Gluzman 2007: 185). Writing decades after its release, Nurith Gertz claims that the novel is principally optimistic in outlook, suggesting that "the yearned-for harmony between collective and individual values is possible despite the difficulties it may face" (Gertz 1993: 67).

Gluzman, however, rejects these readings of the novel, arguing that it is an ambivalent text that deconstructs the hegemonic image of masculinity: though Uri is depicted as a fearless warrior and a product of innovative human engineering, Gluzman argues, "the novel also surprisingly reveals the dark side of this human engineering, the collapse of the Sabra against the demands of the hegemonic gaze, the troublesome gap between the body image and the actual body, between the national ideal of masculinity and a fragile and uncertain masculine identity" (2007: 188).

In other words, Uri's strong, masculine body, that "product of innovative human engineering," as Gluzman critically describes it, or a type of "Israeli war machine," to borrow from Shavit's admiring words, ultimately finds itself deconstructed and shattered not by a feminist or queer gaze—which did not yet exist in Israeli discourse—but because it can no longer endure the contradictions between the ideal body image constructed by Zionist ideology and its actual existence as fragile, uncertain, and "feminine." As Gluzman puts it, Uri's suspicious death during training is not necessarily understood as heroic, but rather as the result of a personality crisis with psychological, gendered, and erotic underpinnings (ibid.: 187).

Despite Uri's layered complexity, the collective memory of this literary character was determined by Zionist discourse, and therefore emphasized Uri's heroic traits and suppressed his character's more ambivalent or "feminine" aspects. This memory is reflected two decades later in the film adaptation of the novel, in which the literary protagonist, imagined by selective hegemonic interpretation as a fearless "national hero," was transformed into a cinematic

hero who sacrifices himself for his country, establishing Uri Kahana as an iconic figure of the post-Six-Day War period.

Though Uri's cinematic incarnation might be less complicated as a character than its literary counterpart, the film's hegemonic reading as an ideal example of masculine heroism again proves incomprehensive: If the literary Uri is unable to reconcile the demands of the hegemonic gaze and his own body, so does the film ultimately fail to reconcile, as Gertz suggests, "the protagonist's private world and his willingness to give his life for his homeland" (1993: 64). Furthermore, though in the film, Uri's death takes place during a vital military operation rather than during training, it nonetheless remains somewhat peculiar: like Yadin's death, it is difficult to clearly declare it either accidental or suicidal.

An intertextual link is discovered between *He Walked through the Fields* and *BeTipul*, beyond Assi Dayan's portrayal of the protagonists of both texts. Assi Dayan and Lior Ashkenazi's scripted therapy sessions, it would seem, are more than just a convergence of two exemplary representatives of "the Sabra who is rough on the outside and sensitive on the inside, the tough Israeli man, the ultimate Sabra," as *BeTipul*'s creators claim on an audio commentary track available in the series DVD box set, but also a convergence of two "warriors" whose deaths remain mysterious, alternately understood as either accident or suicide. The literary Uri meets his end in a grenade explosion, very similar to the manner in which he fantasizes his own death just days earlier, so that his "actual death is an exact realization of [his] death fantasy" (Gluzman 2007: 205). Likewise, Yadin's death in a plane crash while pursuing another plane during combat training is discovered to be a distorted realization of a dream he had dreamt, which comes up during his sixth session with Reuven. In this dream, Yadin sees himself first as a pilot, and then as an outside witness observing the following scene, as he describes it:

> **Yadin** Above my head I see an enemy plane, a Czech MiG, I think, I'm not sure. I've never seen that model. The MiG is being pursued by one of our planes [. . .] All the drivers stop their cars and watch. I say to myself: "Why isn't he firing? Why doesn't he take it down? [. . .]" The enemy is getting away, and it's driving me crazy [. . .] The crowd on the ground is waiting for him to bring it down. They're all bloodthirsty. And it doesn't happen. And they both fly away. That's it.

A brief analysis of his dream leads Yadin to conclude that he is the pilot who "doesn't fire," and that the reason he isn't firing is that the enemy plane "is not really a threat." When Reuven asks who the person flying "this enemy plane that

you refuse to take down" is, Yadin comes to realize that the enemy plane is a projection of himself, and the following conversation ensues:

> **Reuven** Maybe the enemy is a part of you that on the one hand you want to erase from existence, but you can't; something's preventing you [from doing it]. What is this part of you that you think you want to erase? Who is this enemy?
>
> **Yadin** It's not. It's not clear that he's an enemy [. . .] I told you, it's a model [of plane] I'm not familiar with.
>
> **Reuven** What do you feel for him? For this fleeing pilot? What do you think of him?
>
> **Yadin** I think he's a coward [. . .] That he's nothing. That he's not a man. That he's running away like a girl instead of turning back around and fighting [. . .] that I'm dying to fuck him up the ass, that pitiful nobody, shove an air-to-air missile up his rear burner. (*long pause*) Do you . . . do you think . . . Do you think I'm gay? It would fit my father's theories. He thinks that only girls and fags go to see a shrink. Maybe I'm gay. So what? [. . .] That's what you want to say, that it's a homosexual dream. I'm tailing him, see the fire coming out of his back burner, I'm dying . . . to shove it to him . . .

In many ways, Yadin's question—"Do you think I'm gay?"—is not surprising, as it merely brings to the surface what has already been implied in Yadin's first session, that he is a repressed homosexual. But the text leaves this question unanswered, and furthermore rejects Yadin's interpretation of the dream; according to Reuven, the association that Yadin makes between weakness and homosexuality is one he has inherited from his father, and can choose to reject, so that it is possible to associate "weakness" and "femininity" with heterosexual masculinity as well. Hearing these statements, Reuven, and consequently the text as a whole, appear to reject not only Yadin's conclusion regarding his own sexuality, but also the viewpoint articulated by Menachem and by Ari Shavit, according to which femininity and homosexuality weaken Israeli masculinity from the outside, existing external to Israeli male subjectivity. In place of the dichotomies suggested by Zionist ideology—masculinity vs. femininity, heterosexuality vs. homosexuality—the series argues that feminine and homosexual elements exist within any masculine identity, and that the attempt to get rid of these elements could be dangerous for the—essentially queer—male subjectivity.

Indeed, what Yadin's dream mostly reveals is a conflicted identity, in which one part of Yadin attacks another, antagonistic but not quite an enemy. Though Yadin himself admits that he is also the aggressor in this scenario, this

interpretation is incomplete. Yadin's dream is reminiscent of Freud's description of persecutory dreams, in which the patient "managed to escape with great fear" from "a powerful bull or some other male symbol which even in the dream itself he sometimes recognized as representing his father" (Freud, 1922: 229). Freud's reading seems a fitting description of Yadin's dream, which explicitly constructs the fleeing plane as feminine and the pursuing plane as masculine; it is particularly fitting given Yadin's own account of his father, whom he describes as being "tough as iron," and who reprimanded Yadin for any display of "femininity," even slapping him once for "crying like a girl." Is it really Yadin, then, who is pursuing himself, or is it his father? Freud might be helpful again, as he argues that one can easily "recognize in these punishment dreams fulfillments of the wishes of the super-ego" (Freud 1900: 476). And the dreamer's super-ego, in turn, is nothing but "his identification with the father in his own personal prehistory" (Freud 1923: 31).

Rather than being interpreted as an erotic dream, in which Yadin desires to, in his words, "shove it up" another man, his dream is one wherein he himself, or his super-ego, expresses aggression toward himself, in other words, it is a melancholic dream, depicting "the ego divided, fallen apart into two pieces, one of which rages against the second" (Freud 1921: 109). From this perspective, Yadin's insistence on taking self-destructive actions—such as the double tennis match that led to his near-death experience, the trip to Ramallah, and the dangerous combat training that eventually led to his death—appear to be the result of a powerful death wish, provoked by repeated attacks by his super-ego.

Note that, though employing the imagery of fighter planes as a displacement of—or a metonymy for—his divided self, Yadin's dream is not a result of the perpetrator trauma he underwent during the raid on Ramallah, but rather has much deeper, more distant origins: his ego ideal pursuing him in his dream is not a product of a recent period, but rather of his early childhood. Moreover, this ideal originates in Menachem's insistence that Yadin become "a man," as Yadin describes at various points throughout his therapy sessions. In other words, Yadin's becoming a man was a traumatic process, one whose consequences rose to the surface decades later.

In order to understand how the construction of masculinity in general, and of Israeli masculinity in particular, can be read as traumatic, we must turn to one of modern Western civilization's defining myths regarding the formation of masculinity—that of the Oedipal complex suggested by Freud. According to Freud, when the child overcomes its Oedipal complex, the ego ideal is formed

"through the introjection into the ego of [. . .] the two parents," so that the super-ego retains "essential features of the introjected persons [the parents]—their strength, their severity, their inclination to supervise and to punish" (Freud 1924: 167). This is a critical stage in the child's development, and the process of identifying with what was previously the object of desire "has a great share in determining the form taken by the ego" and "makes an essential contribution toward building up what is called its 'character'" (Freud 1923: 28).

Though, according to Freud, abandoning the mother (and the father, as will soon be discussed) as an object of desire is essential to a child's normal development, this process can also be read as a traumatic experience, or a "structural trauma," i.e., a trauma that "is related to (even correlated with) transhistorical absence (absence of/at the origin) and appears in different ways in all societies and all lives" (LaCapra 2014: 77). Unlike historical trauma, wherein the traumatizing events can be determined, "structural trauma (like [transhistorical] absence) is not an event but rather an anxiety-producing condition of possibility related to the potential for historical traumatization" (ibid.: 82). A principal example given by LaCapra for this type of trauma is the Oedipal trajectory (ibid.: 77).

An aspect of overcoming the Oedipal complex that is not emphasized by Freud, and is foregrounded by Judith Butler, is its significant role not only in the formation of character, but also of gender identity, closely linked with sexual identity (Butler 1990: 58). Like the construction of character, the construction of gender and sexual identity inherently entails structural trauma. Crucially, and contrary to popular belief, by which the most common Oedipal trajectory is the boy's abandonment of the mother as an object of desire and the intensification of his identification with the father, Freud explicitly states that the more common form is the *complete Oedipal complex*, in which the child is inherently bisexual. As Freud put it, "A boy has not merely an ambivalent attitude toward his father and an affectionate object-choice toward his mother, but at the same time he also behaves like a girl and displays an affectionate feminine attitude to his father and a corresponding jealousy and hostility toward his mother" (1923: 33).

Though this description is apparently "neutral," it is clear that there is a fundamental difference between the son's desire for the mother and his desire for the father. As Butler has shown, since the ego is always also "a gendered ego" (Butler 1995: 166), and since "normative" femininity and masculinity are associated with heterosexual desire and therefore with the suppression of the homosexual desire that threatens it (ibid.: 168), overcoming one's Oedipal

complex and developing one's ego entail losses that cannot be recognized by the subject. In other words, in order to ensure the development of "normative masculinity," one must first abandon the object of desire—the mother, in the boy's case—but hold on to (heterosexual) desire itself; in contrast, regarding the father, the boy must reject—and even deny—both the object of desire (the father) and (homosexual) desire itself. And since neither this desire nor its loss are allowed to be recognized, heterosexual masculinity "will be haunted by the love it cannot grieve" (ibid.: 170). Therefore, as per Freud, heterosexual masculinity would be defined as melancholic.

As understood by Butler, the son's identification with his father demands that he deny "feminine" elements in his personality and desires, while not recognizing the loss of these elements or mourning them. Furthermore, as Freud has argued, "The more powerful the Oedipus complex was and the more rapidly it succumbed to repression [. . .] the stricter will be the domination of the super-ego over the ego later on—in the form of conscience or perhaps of an unconscious sense of guilt" (1923: 34–35). Accordingly, the domination of Yadin's super-ego over his ego is extremely strict, as are the demands that he reject his "feminine" side. Yet since he is unable to do so, both in reality and in his dream, he is ultimately compelled to eliminate his masculine side—constituted and maintained by his super-ego—as well, an elimination that means his death.

In his dream, Yadin describes a "masculine plane" pursuing a "feminine plane," eventually letting go of it; in reality, however, as evidenced in his training flight, the pursuing, "masculine" plane does not let go of the "feminine" plane, and in a caricaturistic exaggeration of military heroism, crashes into the side of a mountain. Though Yadin's death is very much real, it can also be read as a "symbolic suicide" as defined by Slavoj Žižek, "an act of 'losing all', of withdrawing from symbolic reality, that enables us to begin anew from the 'zero point,' or from the point of absolute freedom" (2013: 49).

Yet is it indeed the "zero point"? This might be an exaggeration in the case of *BeTipul*, which was warmly and nearly unanimously embraced by the Israeli establishment, and in particular by the Israeli hegemony. There are many reasons for this positive reception, but one appears to be the series' belief that behind any soldier, even one who has killed innocent children, hides a "good soul" that proper psychotherapy can not only reveal but also, perhaps, redeem. The enthusiastic reception of *BeTipul* in Israel, and the battle over the Israeli soldier's soul, will be the focus of my next chapter.

3

It's Not TV, It's *BeTipul*: Rethinking "Israeliness"

"[T]o discover something to one's taste is to discover oneself, to discover what one wants ('Just what I wanted'), what one had to say and didn't know how to say and, consequently, didn't know," argues Bourdieu in his discussion of "taste" (1993: 109), thus undermining the notion of the quality predicate ascribed to works of art and cultural texts as being "natural" and innate. Bourdieu's immense influence on the field of cultural studies has led to the view that "[g]reat art works are not simply assumed to be out there, awaiting recognition and analysis. Rather, they are actively validated as great, and the values imputed to them [. . .] are seen to have implications for the legitimation of power structures throughout society" (Edgar and Sedgwick 2005: 3). Thus, rather than examining inherent properties of a work that supposedly render it tasteful or tasteless, what should be examined are the social and economic forces behind such designations of taste, and how they can function to naturalize socioeconomic power relations and class inequality.

From this theoretical stance, and influenced by other schools of thought—such as semiotics, postmodernism, and feminism (Geraghty 2003)—the field of television studies has largely refrained from discussing matters of evaluation, regarding "quality" as a "bad word" (Brunsdon 1997: 124). The massive impact of audience research on television studies (Hall 1980; Morley 1992) was another contributing factor to this trend; if meaning is produced by the audience at the moment of reception, then discussing quality on a textual level is rendered effectively moot, as no meaning exists prior to the text's interpretation by the viewers (Schrøder 1992: 207).

However, over the past two decades, many scholars have begun examining what is known as "quality television,"[1] referring mostly to serial drama. Though assertions of inherent textual quality are sometimes raised (Cardwell 2007; Mittell 2010), the majority of research tends to be more cautious regarding proclamations of value, and "quality" is often used as a descriptive rather than an

evaluative term (Feuer 2007: 148). This is achieved, among others, by examining "quality television" as a generic rather than evaluative category. It should be stressed that the term "genre" does not necessarily entail a purely textual reading, as the social context within which a genre operates is an integral part of its formation and classification (Tolson 1996: 83–119; Edgerton and Rose 2005: 4–7); if genres are cultural categories that are formed and understood by practices of discourse, as Jason Mittell argues, and evaluation by critics and audiences is an integral part of these practices (Mittell 2004: 7–8), then "quality television" can be examined as a genre, which is characterized by discursive as well as textual properties.

An initial list of traits of "quality television" was proposed by Robert Thompson (1997: 13–15), who opened the list with a rather loosely defined trait, itself underscoring the importance of discourse in defining quality: "[Q]uality TV is best defined by what it is not. It is not 'regular' TV" (ibid.: 13). Thompson then suggests 11 other traits of "quality television," some textual (such as a large ensemble cast, a sense of realism, and a cumulative narrative structure) and others contextual, or discursive (such as the garnering of awards and critical acclaim, and viewing by well-educated young audiences).

Though his list has been widely cited when discussing "quality television," Thompson has maintained that he does not presume for it to be used to ascertain "good" television. He has claimed, moreover, that "[b]y 1992, you could recognize a 'quality show' long before you could tell if it was any good" (ibid.: 16), adding a decade later: "Now I can find a lot of shows on the air that exhibit all 12 characteristics but at the end, aren't really all that good" (Thompson 2007: xx).

What do television studies have to gain from the term "quality television," if it no longer functions as an evaluative predicate? Bourdieu's statement, quoted at the beginning of this introduction, will be of use here: when a society establishes its canon of masterpieces, it is also establishing its preferred way of conceiving of itself; it discovers what it wants. Consistent therewith, my purpose in this chapter is to examine what it was that hegemonic Israeli society "discovered" in *BeTipul*, prompting its unprecedented critical acclaim. This chapter does not attempt to argue that *BeTipul* is not "quality television" or even "good" television; rather, to paraphrase Foucault, it seeks to keep its praises in suspense, to disturb "the tranquility with which they are accepted," and to "show that they do not come about of themselves, but are always the result of a construction the rules of which must be known, and the justifications of which must be scrutinized" (Foucault

1972: 28). Thus, "[w]e must recognize that they may not [. . .] be what they seem at first sight" (ibid.: 29).

BeTipul: Text and Context

Though *BeTipul* exhibits several textual properties of "quality television" as prescribed by Thompson, first and foremost its controversial statements about Israeli society, one of the main elements that bolstered its "quality" status were the many superlative-laden reviews it received: "one of the bolder efforts made on local television" (Shaked 2005a), "the best Israeli drama broadcast [. . .] certainly this year" (Shaked 2005b), "a stroke of genius" (Tan-Brink 2005), "an exciting orchestration of fine nuances and suppressed energies" (Ben-Noon 2005), "an exceptional phenomenon on the local screen as we know it" (Kutz 2009), "setting a new bar for writing and creativity in Israeli television drama" (Tzach 2005), "one of the best and most thought-out drama series ever produced here" (Two Fat Men[2] 2005).

Apart from the praise by television critics, *BeTipul* also received endorsement from mental health professionals when *Hebrew Psychology*, a website by and for Israeli mental health practitioners, dedicated an entry to a discussion of the series, stating that it constituted "the most significant convergence of the realms of drama and therapy to date" (*BeTipul 2* 2008). The quality of the series was also evidenced by its nomination in eight categories at the annual Israeli Academy of Film and Television Awards for its first season, and in nine categories for its second season, winning five categories for each season, including one award for Best Dramatic Series.

The extensive list of superlatives, awards, and achievements garnered by *BeTipul* solidified its status as "quality television"—as per Thompson's contextual criteria. This sweeping and (nearly) undisputed consensus, however, invites further examination. This chapter thus analyzes several main characteristics cited in reviews as giving the series its quality status. Though some of these characteristics are interrelated and cannot be seen as wholly distinct, for the purposes of analysis I suggest five claims made regarding *BeTipul*: 1) the series has *symbolic meanings* regarding Israeli culture; 2) the series dares to make challenging and *controversial* statements regarding Israeli society; 3) the series differs significantly from other television programs, and is effectively "*not really television*"; 4) *talented creators* are behind it; 5) it offers *psychological and emotional depth*.

"*BeTipul* Is Symbolic of Israeli Society"

One of the main traits of "quality television" has to do with its presumably "serious" subject matter (Caughie 2000), as "quality" programming is "likely to suggest that the viewer will be rewarded for seeking out greater symbolic or emotional resonance within the details of the programme" (Cardwell 2007: 27). *BeTipul* conveyed this notion even before its pilot episode aired, through the promotional trailer that accompanied its first season, functioning as a paratext that presents a primary text, enabling it "to become a [work of art] and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public" (Genette 1997: 3). The title of the promo, "Israel is going into therapy," had a double meaning: on the one hand, it was implied that Israeli viewers would be "going into" the series, becoming immersed in its fictional world, a promise that turned out to be true, at least according to the critical reviews, though not quite so much as far as ratings were concerned (Kupfer 2007). On the other hand, the series would purportedly be placing Israeli society itself on the psychologist's couch, as it were, a part of the broader trend of Israeli culture's adoption of psychological language (Almog 2004: 633), thus realizing the metaphor of "a society on the couch," which Almog has elsewhere suggested (ibid.: 806).

This invitation to viewers to read the series symbolically, searching for deeper meaning, is reiterated in its opening title sequence: accompanied by a minimalist-impressionist musical theme,[3] the sequence portrays vague human forms that merge with dark ink blots, evoking the Rorschach test, an association that becomes concrete at the end of the sequence, when the title of the series appears (Figure 3.1). The title sequence of a television series can be read as a "peritext," a paratext tangibly linked to a work of art (Genette 1997: 1), in this case to its beginning, thus serving as a threshold or "undefined zone between the inside and the outside" (ibid.: 2). This liminality potentially renders the title sequence of valuable hermeneutic significance when interpreting the primary text, that is, the episode that follows it (Stanitzek 2005: 32).

And what do the Rorschach blots symbolize? Beyond the initial, explicit statement—that the series has to do with psychotherapy—it appears that the choice of incorporating Rorschach blots conveys another meaning: In their original context (the therapy session), Rorschach blots demand that the therapist momentarily discard the blots' literal meaning in favor of another, more abstract or imagined one: The blots invite the subject to find and create meanings within them, and thus "to enter the intermediate space between reality and fantasy" (Tibon 2009: 461). *BeTipul*'s opening sequence, then, similarly asks the viewers

Figure 3.1 *BeTipul*'s opening sequence.

to look beyond the blots' surface, to seek meaning beyond the fictional characters, at a metaphoric-symbolic level.

Apart from the promo and the title sequence, one of the most important textual choices for the series' symbolic reading was the casting of Assi Dayan in the leading role of the therapist. Assi Dayan, as Israeli film critic Uri Klein has argued, "has long since become more than just an actor. He is a myth incarnate"(Klein 1991: 27). This assertion has chiefly to do with two facts: first, that Dayan was the son of Moshe Dayan, considered one of Israel's most distinguished military leaders; and second, as stated in Chapter 2, immediately following the Six-Day War in 1967, Assi Dayan portrayed a heroic soldier in one of the most important films in the history of Israeli cinema, *He Walked Through the Fields*. While Dayan's public image diminished over the years, following his drug addiction and other incidents, his tarnished reputation added another layer of meaning to his casting as a therapist, as his downfall symbolized the downfall of the authoritative father figure in Israeli society (Duvdevani 2008).

Put another way, the juxtaposition of this aging, broken myth with other characters, many of them young and most of them in various stages of

disintegration, conveys a state of collective, perhaps national, dysfunction. Yael Munk (2006) offers an interpretation along these lines, reading Reuven's office as a space where "an analysis of all of Israeliness" is being conducted, and Assi Dayan as one "who has taken it upon himself to serve as a mirror-image of an Israel that is losing the graces of its youth, while one by one its constitutive myths come crumbling down."

In contrast to these claims of *BeTipul* being a quintessentially Israeli series, one might consider the format's purchase by American cable network HBO, and later by 17 other networks in various countries, as evidence that its appeal is actually universal. However, beyond the fact that the series is embedded in Israeli culture, as presented in the previous chapter, three main arguments can be offered to explain the format's immense success abroad, chiefly in the US. Not only do these elements not undermine the series' "Israeliness," but they even reinforce it. Firstly, note that it was not the series itself that was purchased abroad, but rather its format; as Silvio Waisbord argues, "[t]he DNA of formats is rooted in cultural values that transcend the national" (Waisbord 2004, 368), enabling the adaptation of content to the local culture, thereby "domesticating" the format. The intention behind purchasing formats, as Waisbord notes, is "to maximize profits while 'the national' continues to articulate cultural identities" (ibid.).

Secondly, Israeli discourse has deemed the HBO deal an Israeli success story, with various local newspapers declaring it "a local pride" (Bageno 2008), "a national pride" (Alterman 2009), and "the most memorable Israeli-international accomplishment of the year" (Rom and Bashan 2008). One critic added that it was "the highest accolade garnered by the series" (Shargal 2006). In other words, *BeTipul*'s export bolstered Israel's national morale, rendering it not only a symbol of Israeli society, but also its honorary ambassador abroad and a source of national pride. Lastly, discourse is contradictory in its nature, as it is not a tautological product of reality, but rather originates in various sources and serves various needs. The question isn't whether or not there exist contradictions in discourse, nor how this is possible, but rather when and why certain aspects of the series are discursively emphasized while others are downplayed or suppressed.

"*BeTipul* Is a Controversial Series"

Yael Munk's argument that *BeTipul* dispels cultural myths leads us to a second characteristic of the series that was discursively cited: it appears that

BeTipul not only provided a window into Israeli realities, but also dared to articulate opinions that were not frequently heard in Israeli society; more than merely a symbol of Israeli society, *BeTipul* is "a somber metaphor for the state of the nation" (Tan-Brink 2005). In his review of an episode of the series, Raanan Shaked provided the following description: "Enormous barrels of explosives, all lined up in a row, all genuine, Israeli-made products—among them the Holocaust and the Second Generation, machismo, sexual identity, ethnic identity, father–son relationships, violence, and repression—were detonated onscreen one by one within a short half hour, in a spectacular and powerful display" (Shaked 2005b). *BeTipul*, in other words, presents controversial opinions, and as such exhibits one of the main traits of "quality television" (Thompson 1997: 15).

One dissenting opinion regarding *BeTipul*'s near-unanimous critical acclaim might serve to further illustrate its controversial aspects: Rabbi Mordechai Vardi, head of the screenwriting track at the Ma'aleh School of Television, Film and the Arts in Jerusalem, criticized the series in an article published in *Nekudá*, a right-wing Orthodox publication. Vardi claims that the series was "extremely obscene in both language and content" and went so far as to suggest that "youth should be kept away from such material" (Vardi 2006: 66). Besides criticizing it for its explicit sexuality and leftist sentiments, one of Vardi's main criticisms of the series concerns its portrayal of marriage: "There are hardly any couples featured or mentioned on the series that have not experienced betrayal [. . .] according to the conventions conceived by the series, betrayal itself is not the problem [. . .] the series is lenient toward extramarital relations" (ibid.: 68). Vardi's condemnation was a blessing in disguise for *BeTipul*, since this kind of attack on behalf of right-wing and religious sentiments only serves to further emphasize, at least as far as critics writing for the secular public are concerned, the courageous and controversial nature of the series, and hence its "quality" status.

On the other hand, Vardi's criticism accentuates the extent to which the above-mentioned characteristics—controversiality and Israeliness—are discursive, rather than textual products. Thus, while the reviewers' claims that the series deals with Israeliness might appear to be textually based, regarding it as representing "all of Israeliness" is quite a problematic notion, not only because the characters are all Ashkenazim[4] and upper-middle class, but also because the attitude the series expresses toward Israeliness is deeply rooted in a specific socioeconomic sector.

Vardi provides another interpretation of the series' "Israeliness," claiming that it reflects how the Tel Aviv-based media milieu perceives Israeli reality, and adding that the series can be beneficial in examining "the prevalent mindset among the influential members of Israeli culture, and their perspective on Israeli society's conflicts, values, and core ideas [. . .] nearly [all the series' creators] reside in Tel Aviv, within a two-kilometer radius of *Heichal Hatarbut* [a concert hall that typically offers European classical music performances] situated in the heart of Tel Aviv" (Vardi 2006: 68). And not only are the creators members of the "Tel Aviv cultural milieu," so are the series' admiring critics, most of whom are "cut from the same cloth," in the words of television critic Yaron Tan-Brink: "male, Tel Avivian, and Ashkenazi [. . .] a homogeneity that doesn't represent the viewers and their social makeup" (quoted in Glazer 2008).

These last remarks by Tan-Brink, linking socioeconomic status with cultural preferences, are strongly related to Bourdieu's notion of taste. Taste, or "good taste," according to Bourdieu, is no simple matter, but rather is laden with social and ideological contexts, sustained by the existence of "goods that are classified as being in 'good' or 'bad' taste, 'distinguished' or 'vulgar,' classified and thereby classifying, hierarchised and hierarchizing—and people endowed with principles of classification, tastes, that enable them to identify, among those goods that suit them, those that are 'to their taste'" (Bourdieu 1993: 108). "Taste" thus reflects on the individual attributing taste as much as on the object to which it is attributed. And so, to paraphrase Bourdieu, when the critics "discover" *BeTipul*'s quality status, they are also discovering themselves, discovering what they want. What is it, then, that the critics want?

"*BeTipul* Is Not Regular Television"

An answer to "What do critics want?" can be found in a list set forth by Raanan Shaked in an article titled "My Little Racism." Though this list is unrelated to *BeTipul*, and was written when Shaked was no longer a television critic, it nevertheless provides some insights into his cultural preferences:

> We [Ashkenazim] want our country back. For ourselves. And since we know that's not going to happen, we'll thank you—yes, all of you: all you precious and esteemed ethnic groups and holy ascents to The Holy Land and [Operation] Flying Carpets and Operation Solomons and Falash Mura brooms, and jachnun knights and Mimouna men,[5] all of you—to just let us, here and there, in the

> places that are truly important—say, in our kids' schools—have our space. Let us have places where we can be only with ourselves.
>
> Shaked 2008

Whether Shaked is expressing his personal opinions or satirizing those of others, it would seem that *BeTipul* provides the perfect answer to the fantasy he describes—having his own "space." This possibility stems not only from the decidedly Ashkenazi sheen of the series, nor from the characters' more or less homogeneous demographic profile, but also from its perception—whether valid or not—as being "difficult to watch," a perception that renders the act of viewing it rather more like "gazing" as opposed to merely "glancing" (Ellis 1982: 37), that is, a cultural activity, requiring complex thought; as Shaked himself describes:

> *BeTipul* is a sort of shock therapy. Two days after watching its opening five episodes, I can't stop thinking about it. I'm not used to not getting over television. *BeTipul* has been inside my head for two days. I'll have to go back to it [. . .] *BeTipul* demands from its viewers an immense commitment. It's broadcast daily, there's not an ounce of fun in it, and following it every day is a slow, demanding business.
>
> Shaked 2005a

Shaked's enjoyment of suffering seems to be the enjoyment of being distinct and therefore having high quality and taste, defining his taste—as do others—by way of negation (Bourdieu 1993: 111). Indeed, this sense of distinctness is evident in many of *BeTipul*'s reviews, which repeatedly cite its contrast with "regular television," particularly reality television. Gideon Levy, for example, wrote of *BeTipul*, alluding to *Hisardút* (literally: "survival," the Israeli version of *Survivor* [Channel 10: 2007–2012]): "This is the real survival: returning after a successful season with a second one, just as successful, while the march of folly vehemently presses onward in the background" (Levy 2008). Ilan Reisinger adds, "It was indeed excellent television, because beyond the viewing experience, it provided us with an experience of taking part, and by that I don't mean voting for your favorite contestant" (Reisinger 2008), again alluding to the popular reality genre. And in *Hebrew Psychology*, Professor Hanoch Yerushalmi, one of the clinical psychologists that analyzed *BeTipul*, wrote: "The series fascinated me even though watching television usually isn't fascinating for me, as I'd rather spend my time in other ways" (*BeTipul 2* 2008).

In other words, the above quotes seem to lead to the conclusion that although television is normally perceived as a waste of time or a frivolous pursuit, as an

inferior medium directed at popular rather than "legitimate" tastes (Levine 2008), *BeTipul* surpasses the regular television fare and may therefore be enjoyed without qualms. The discourse surrounding *BeTipul*—as is the case with other "quality" programs (Fricker 2007: 14)—presents it as "not television," or rather, as something else: superior, and possessing artistic quality. Put another way, while the discourse still presents television as an inferior medium, it also makes sure to draw within it distinguishing between "regular" programming and "quality" programming that manages to transcend the medium (Levine 2008: 394). It is no surprise, then, that *BeTipul*'s purchase by HBO—a channel that has successfully distinguished itself from other, "regular" television channels with the slogan: "It's not TV. It's HBO" (Jaramillo 2002; McCabe and Akass 2007: 83; Leverette et al. 2009)—served to bolster the perception of *BeTipul* as "not regular television."

Despite HBO's claims of differentiation, however, note that it is indeed a television network, in both production practices and content. Structurally, the same company promoting itself as "Not TV" is in fact a subsidiary of one of the world's largest media conglomerates, Time Warner, Inc., along with numerous "regular television" channels; and so HBO's quality branding is used—cynically, some might argue—for economic ends (Jaramillo 2002: 73). While HOT, the company that produced *BeTipul*, is not HBO, nor are its parent companies anywhere near Time Warner in scope, it is still hard to ignore the fact that the Israeli media landscape is characterized, alongside its growing number of channels, by media consolidation and "the reduction in the number of owners dominating and controlling [media] channels" (Limor 2003: 1030). The same companies that have controlling interests in HOT not only hold a significant share of Israeli capital, but also control other media outlets, among them "regular television" channels. It appears, then, that *BeTipul*'s "aesthetic innovation and experimentation" are in fact "integrated into commodity production generally," that is, participating in the system of late capitalism and serving its economic needs (Jameson 1991: 4).

An example thereof is the series' unique narrative format, which perfectly correlated with concurrent technological developments in television in general, and in Israeli television in particular. It is no coincidence, I would argue, that the very same year—2005—in which HOT first launched its video-on-demand service, which according to the company's website makes for "a higher quality, more sophisticated, and far more enjoyable viewing experience,"[6] also saw the airing of *BeTipul*, which offered viewers a novel, more complex narrative structure.

Jason Mittell's (2015) notion of "narrative complexity" will be useful in clarifying this argument. According to Mittell, contemporary American television provides increasing numbers of series that offer a new vocabulary for television narrative: novel and unconventional narrative structures which, while not ensuring quality in and of themselves, certainly provide creative opportunities and a complex viewing experience, which are perceived to be markers of aesthetic quality, or what Mittell calls "the qualities of complexity" (ibid.: 210–226). Mittell emphasizes that this development in television narratives is the product neither of creative genius nor artistic talent, but rather stems from various historical, institutional, and technological transformations in American television, among them the viewers' ability to control the nature of their viewing (ibid.: 31). Similarly, it appears that *BeTipul*, like other "quality" or "complex" series, targets viewers who are busy and who want to choose their own viewing schedule, or "[boutique] viewers who typically avoid television" (ibid.: 34), or simply viewers who view themselves as distinct from the "ordinary" masses (Nelson 2007: 44).

In this sense, it could be argued that VOD viewing, like DVD viewing, enables the viewer to enjoy both worlds; that is, they may be watching television, but they are not the typical, passive viewer who accepts being told what and when to watch, but rather actively choosing their own viewing times, just as they would choose when to read their books. VOD also renders their choice of content, as they perceive it, more complex and exclusive—and therefore of higher quality. Moreover, *BeTipul*'s unique narrative structure generates connections between episodes, not necessarily in a linear fashion, so that active viewing on VOD (or DVDs) enables the viewer to choose not only when to watch episodes but also in what order (by the original airing order, each episode featuring a different patient; or following a specific patient's therapy over several episodes). Thus, *BeTipul's* narrative is complex, demanding viewer focus and a committed following, in turn increasing the importance of the VOD service and of DVD box sets, which tend to attract, by virtue of their "quality" status, the socioeconomic demographic that can afford to pay more for television viewing (Feuer 2007: 147).

And so, rather than being "not TV," *BeTipul* might be classified as "para-television," a term proffered by Avi Santo referring to HBO's programming, which conducts dialogue, as Santo argues, "with existing television forms and practices in order to call attention to the variations HBO introduces into otherwise familiar television experiences" (Santo 2008: 24). *BeTipul*, however,

exists alongside existing television forms in terms of content as well as industry practices. *BeTipul*'s distinction from regular television, as constructed by various critics, ignores the fact that it expressly relies on the nature of television, as it has featured two of the medium's main characteristics since its inception: intimacy, and seriality (Newcomb 1974: 245). Moreover, when Raanan Shaked praised Assi Dayan's performance for consisting mostly of reactions (Shaked 2005a), he is in fact articulating, though he may not realize it, the essence of another key property of television, as presented by Horace Newcomb: television is at its best when focused not on actions, but rather on reactions, written on the faces of the characters (Newcomb 1974: 245–246).

However, reviews of *BeTipul* not only tended to ignore its basis in—and reliance on—the nature of television as a medium, but also its reliance upon two "inferior" television genres: the talk show, and the telenovela. Regarding the former, *BeTipul*'s structure resembles that of a conversation between host and guest, characteristic of the "one-on-one" talk show subgenre in particular, a conversation during which the viewers are introduced to past occurrences and even offered a "therapeutic" discourse of sorts.[7] *BeTipul* also adopts several properties of the telenovela, such as the daily airing in a prime-time slot, an ensemble cast, interior shoots, and in a certain sense also the typical narrative outline of the telenovela, in which a couple introduced in the opening episode attempts to unite throughout the series, ultimately succeeding in the last episode (LaPastina 2007). While *BeTipul*'s "couple," Reuven and Naama (Sunday's patient, season 1), don't ultimately enter into a relationship (though they almost do in the season 1 finale), their relationship does exhibit many characteristic elements of the telenovela: It begins in the first episode, later developing into a romantic triangle and culminating in the last episode; it is forbidden by a "parent" figure (Gila, Reuven's own therapist), and is encumbered by class differences.

There are of course many differences between *BeTipul* and the telenovela, such as the use of a single-camera rather than multiple-camera setup, and more carefully crafted—or at the very least more costly—script and performances than those of the typical telenovela. Furthermore, like many other works, *BeTipul* can certainly feature textual characteristics of marginal cultures forms while still remaining canonical. Nevertheless, the discursive detachment of *BeTipul* from other television genres is arguable, and in that sense is comparable to other instances where an effort was made to set particular programs or genres apart from television content as a whole by emphasizing some of their properties while ignoring others (Feuer 1995: 111–113; Levine 2008: 395).

The discourse surrounding *BeTipul* can thus be seen as part of an effort to imbue a popular cultural form with artistic value and legitimacy, rendering it a part of the "appropriate" cultural capital. This effort takes on an explicitly social and political cast when new social categories define themselves by their "unique" aesthetic tastes, struggling to legitimize the cultural tastes and lifestyles that accord with their own preferences. As Jane Feuer has argued, when a program is labeled and branded "quality" or "complex," its audience can be reassured of its own "quality" status (Feuer 1984: 56). This assurance allows them to enjoy television content that they regard as more sophisticated, more stylized, and more psychologically profound than the usual fare, and thus distinguish themselves from "the viewing masses," easing their own sense of guilt in watching.

And so it appears that *BeTipul*'s uniqueness has less to do with inherent textual properties, and more with the tendency to discursively emphasize certain elements of the text while downplaying others, in this case emphasizing the series' uniqueness while downplaying the fact that it is after all television, which is still considered an inferior medium, particularly by artistic standards. Moreover, one of the main ways of emphasizing its uniqueness is by highlighting the names of its creators, or its *auteur*.

"*BeTipul* Is Headed by Talented Creators"

One of *BeTipul*'s main characteristics, as discursively emphasized, is its creator-based "persona"; "The series created by Hagai Levi," states the very first line in the series' *Wikipedia* entry ("BeTipul" 2014); "Hagai Levi and Uri Sivan's daily drama," hails television critic Ruta Kupfer (2007). The series' quality and value are often attributed to the creators' talents and creative abilities; and so Raanan Shaked (2005a) has argued that "the series' format [. . .] elicits from its creators (headed by Hagai Levi) immense creativity in dialogue and in editing"; and even Mordechai Vardi, who criticized the content of the series, allowed that "through professional dramatic writing, the series has managed [. . .] to bring about a breakthrough in television" (Vardi 2006: 67).

Discursively, then, another main characteristic of "quality television" is cited—its "pedigree," or its attribution to creators with artistic reputation and standing, from either television or other artistic fields, mainly cinema (Thompson 1997: 14). Indeed, *BeTipul* was created by talented creators of impressive pedigree, or as put—somewhat critically—by Mordechai Vardi: "Those involved hail from

the top ten percentile of public opinion shapers" (Vardi 2006: 66). Furthermore, relying on the familiar concept of the cinematic "auteur," which was adopted by television discourse, it could be argued that *BeTipul* was created by an auteur.

However, when I suggest that *BeTipul* was led by an auteur, or perhaps several auteurs, I do not mean this in the romantic sense of the term, referring to an actual individual with a forceful personality, who incorporates this personality into his or her work. Rather, the emphasis here is on auteurism being a product of discourse, or, to use Foucault's influential terminology, an "author function," creating the impression that there exists a unified subject behind the text, and that the text itself is therefore a product of "[T]he individual, a 'deep' motive, a 'creative' power, or a 'design,' the milieu in which writing originates" (Foucault 1984: 110). But this unity behind the text, writes Foucault, is a product of discourse and of interpretation—and moreover, of an interpretative act that is deeply rooted in the viewer's cultural capital, as Bourdieu argues (Bourdieu 1984: 24).

Thus the auteur's name stems from discursive and interpretative practices, rather than from the text itself. Furthermore, in an era of multiple channels and multiple available platforms for consuming television content, there appears to be an essential need to differentiate among content, rendering some of it "sacred goods" (Bourdieu 1993: 138), so that the creator's name functions as a significant auteurist brand (Pearson 2005: 243) used to address a younger, more sophisticated, and more educated audience segment (Cook 1998).

Another way of emphasizing the creators' standing and the impact of their artistic vision is by citing the creative freedom they are given (Feuer 1984: 32; Santo 2002: 40). This is at times accomplished by presenting the narrative of a noble struggle of the creators, desiring artistic freedom, against the producers or networks, interested in profits and unappreciative of the creators' artistic vision (Thompson 1997: 14). An example of this type of narrative can be found in Hagai Levi's own account of the succession of ordeals he endured while attempting to get *BeTipul* produced, an account that contrasts various networks' narrow-mindedness and myopia with the courage and vision displayed by HOT:

> I was searching for an option with a daily time slot [. . .] the first place I went to was Channel 8 but they couldn't deviate from their documentary niche. I also offered [the idea] to Channel 10, but they wouldn't commit to a long-term investment. [. . .] I also approached [public] Channel 1, supposedly the most obvious choice for this type of project, [. . .] and never got an answer. [. . .]

> Meanwhile HOT was beginning to show interest [. . .] In retrospect I can say it was a very courageous decision on HOT's part: No one could have imagined that it would work out.
>
> Hagai Levi, quoted in Shargal 2006

This narrative by Hagai Levi describes a visionary creator's struggle against the television industry, and is in this sense consistent with similar narratives that accompany many series branded "quality television." I cite this not to argue against the narrative's truth, but merely to illustrate how critical discourse tends to emphasize elements that reveal the text's personal, creative aspects while downplaying other elements.

Perhaps most illustrative of the critics' treatment of *BeTipul* and its creator is this description by Dvorit Shargal of the moment of *BeTipul*'s inception, as she describes it: "*BeTipul* was born in a gym, of all places [. . .] Hagai Levi is on a treadmill, when all of a sudden an idea pops into his head" (ibid.). Though the darkened bedchamber or disorderly studio might have been substituted for by the gym, the romantic notion, or the humanist axiom (Belsey 1980: 13)—by which the text is seen as a direct product of the creator's thoughts, ideas, psychological makeup, and social background—is very much at play in this description. Shargal is ignoring the economic, industrial, and technological circumstances leading to *BeTipul*'s creation, or, to borrow from Bourdieu, she is ignoring Hagai Levi's position as a "producer" objectifying the tastes (Bourdieu 1993: 109) of Shargal herself and of the other critics. In short, the creators, or more precisely the creators' names and narratives, played a highly significant role in discursively transforming *BeTipul* from an "industrial television product" (targeting mass audiences) into a "work of art" directed by one individual (the creator) at another (the viewer).

"*BeTipul* Is Psychologically Profound"

BeTipul's individualistic aspect lent by the author's name itself reflects the series' focus on the individual, or rather on the psychology of the individual. As such, we encounter one of the main reasons why *BeTipul* became "the talk of the day, and perhaps the talk of the era as well" (Kanti 2006): its focus on psychology in general, and on dynamic psychotherapy in particular. This focus contributes to the series' aura of quality in two ways: it lends an impression of depth—as after all, at the heart of psychodynamic therapy lie the fathomless depths of the human

soul—and it targets an educated, affluent audience, for which, as Jane Feuer has stated, "psychotherapy is [a] religion" (Feuer 2005: 34). Though Feuer is discussing American culture, "dribs and drabs of the American culture of psychologism" have infiltrated Israeli culture since the 1970s (Almog 2004: 681), psychotherapy having become "one of the 'essential minerals' of Israeli secular culture" by the 1990s (ibid.: 82). And although the concepts and vocabulary of psychologism have permeated all echelons of Israeli culture, it has become a "new religion" for one class in particular: the bourgeoisie, or upper-middle class (ibid.: 720).

One of the main reasons for psychologistic discourse's popularity among the Israeli upper-middle class has to do with the economic capital required for enjoying the benefits of psychodynamic therapy, which is "still considered a luxury of the upper class" (ibid.: 835). For this reason, Eran Hayut, a cognitive therapist opposed to the principles of psychodynamic therapy, distinguishes between the popularity of *BeTipul*, a series centered around this kind of therapy, and the socioeconomic status of its fans: "In a prosperous, healthy environment, wherein people choose to attend to their quality of life—therapy as an endless 'journey,' as an ongoing way of life, is certainly considered legitimate, even if there's no genuine reason for it to last for years" ("The Series *BeTipul*" 2006). In this sense, Hayut is not far removed from Freud's own views regarding psychoanalysis, claiming that "[T]he necessities of our existence limit our work to the well-to-do classes [. . .] we care nothing for the wider social strata, who suffer extremely seriously from neuroses" (quoted in Illouz 2007: 40). And since, as Freud himself pointed out, there exists an "affinity between psychic disease, recovery, and one's socioeconomic position," and therefore "psychic misery can be capitalized on" (ibid.: 41), psychotherapeutic treatment is neither egalitarian nor democratic.

However, while economic capital is a significant factor in psychotherapy's popularity, and is also required to some extent in order to enjoy *BeTipul*, it seems that another kind of capital is the main factor preventing access to the series by all: cultural capital, as conceptualized by Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1986, 1990). Of the three types of cultural capital cited by Bourdieu, the one most relevant here is the one manifested in its "embodied state," which "is linked to the body and presupposes embodiment" (Bourdieu 1986: 244), and which enables the appreciation of works of art considered to be of high taste.

The problematic issue to which Bourdieu points is that this type of capital is perceived to be a natural capacity of the body, while in reality it is deeply entwined with other types of capital: economic, institutional, and educational. The idea that enjoying a highly regarded cultural product is an inborn ability

naturalizes the sense of social superiority and belonging shared by members of highly regarded social classes (Bourdieu 1990: 207). And so, rather than seeing the cultural preferences of a hegemonic group as indicating that group's character and wishes, those preferences are perceived as inherently validating the value of a work of art and the quality of its consumers.

In *BeTipul*'s case, not only cultural and embodied capital are required in order to render the series more accessible, but also the capacity to comprehend and express emotions in a certain way, or what Eva Illouz calls "emotional capital" or "emotional competence." Following Bourdieu, Illouz argues that "[i]n the same way that cultural fields are structured by cultural competence [. . .] emotional fields are regulated by emotional competence, or the capacity to display an emotional style defined and promoted by psychologists. [. . .] emotional capital seems to mobilize the least reflexive aspects of habitus" (Illouz 2008: 63–64).

And what is the proper emotion to display in Western culture—which the Israeli elite longs to emulate—in order to be considered of high emotional capital? According to Illouz, it is the emotion delineated and marketed by psychologists, who since psychology's inception have held a monopoly over the definitions and functions of emotional life in both the public and private spheres (ibid.: 210). In other words, it is the same kind of emotional capital required of individuals who undergo psychotherapy, and who watch *BeTipul*.

And so it appears that *BeTipul*'s impressive popularity among the Israeli elite has to do with the particular kinds of capital it demanded of its viewers—culturally embodied capital, and emotional capital—as these kinds of capital are perceived as a subject's natural qualities, despite their being closely entwined with economic capital, and they tend to conceal the socioeconomic context of (and class dynamics behind) *BeTipul*'s quality status. Contrary to the claim that "In Treatment represents an ideal case for cultural analysis [. . .] of the therapeutic and emotional style of *our time* [when] its nature as cultural product [. . .] reflects the relevance of emotions *in contemporary societies*" (García-Martínez and García-Martínez 2012: 119; emphasis mine), I propose that *BeTipul*, or the other versions of it around the globe, represents mainly the hegemonic ideal way of expressing emotions and feeling.

In other words, this is apparently not a situation in which the elite discovered the series to be of high quality due to its cultural and emotional complexity; rather, the elite discovered itself to be of high quality, mobilizing both the series and psychological discourse to naturalize its cultural status and preferences, thereby legitimizing its social privilege by presenting its own tastes and emotional abilities as "a gift of nature" (Bourdieu 1990: 211).

Conclusion; or the Text Also Speaks

Up to this point, this chapter has focused on the discourse surrounding *BeTipul*; however, *BeTipul* is not only its discourse, it is also the text itself. While the text cannot be read apart from its context, it might be of benefit to examine the part the text plays in constructing the properties and qualities discursively ascribed to it, as well as how it contradicts them. In this final section of the chapter, I wish to go back to Yadin and Menachem Yerushalmi, and point out how the series managed, through its own psychologistic discourse, to be controversial and at the same time remain quintessentially Israeli and widely acclaimed.

Building on the final discursive characteristic discussed above, it seems that *BeTipul* not only focused on psychodynamic therapy, but also opted to remain true to its principles, or as Ehud Asheri put it, "to adopt the rules of psychodynamic therapy, as dictated by the professional consultants" (Asheri 2008). Asheri's argument is validated at the end of the second season, when Reuven quits his practice after suffering a crisis of faith in his profession. Significantly, though, Reuven's chair does not remain empty; it is now occupied by a new psychologist (Shira Geffen), who expresses to Reuven her unwavering faith in therapy's efficacy. In other words, while the doubts riddling Reuven over two seasons may have led him to leave his profession, the text itself nonetheless remains firm in its belief in the merits of psychodynamic therapy.

One of *BeTipul*'s strongest arguments in support of the principles of psychodynamic therapy, however, lies in the form of a character that voices the strongest of criticisms against Reuven and the psychodynamic method: Menachem. As noted in the previous chapter, while Menachem is personally attacking Reuven, he is also countering the basic assumptions of psychodynamic therapy, as well as the emotional capital on which it is based, when he claims that delving into the subconscious is dangerous.

Despite the polysemic nature typically characterizing the television text (Fiske 1986), the preferred reading of the text (Hall 1980) is unambiguous: Menachem is wrong, and his error a dangerous one. This reading is achieved primarily through his characterization as a rigid, violent, patriarchal figure who suppressed any creativity his son might have expressed. "It is no wonder," Eran Hayut argues, "that the most legitimate criticism of therapy was placed by the creators of the series in the mouth of a crude, violent character, whose past even includes patricide. Thusly, the creators turned this criticism (the lack of

willingness to engage in soul-searching) into a part of the character's pathology" ("The Series *BeTipul*" 2006: 35).

However, it is the text's form, more than its content, which seems to give away its attitude toward psychodynamic therapy. Throughout its run, *BeTipul* is characterized by a realistic style of representation, abiding by the rules of classical editing and maintaining temporal linearity and a lack of self-reflexivity. The only scene in its two seasons that deviates from this style comes immediately following Menachem's verbal attack on Reuven, which leads to a fantasy sequence that breaks from the realistic style, subjectively depicting Reuven's reaction to the attack. In this fantasy sequence, which is accompanied by a song (breaking with the series' typical soundtrack, which features an exclusively instrumental score), Menachem is shown as a broken man, leading Reuven to get up from his seat, gently caress Menachem's head (Figure 3.2), and tuck him in to sleep on his couch. Reuven then gazes out the window, seeing the character of Yadin in a kind of flashback (to a previous episode), and turns back to look at his couch, now seeing himself as an old man lying on it instead of Menachem (Figure 3.3). The

Figure 3.2 Menchem Yerushalmi (Yisrael Poliakov) in *BeTipul*.

Figure 3.3 Reuven's fantasy (*BeTipul*).

fantasy concludes as the song ends abruptly, and we see Reuven sitting once more in his chair, in his usual position as therapist.

Why did the series deviate so suddenly and so notably from its standard style? As many scholars have pointed out, cinematic and televisual texts that depict trauma tend—and are perhaps compelled—to break from realism in favor of a style that can be termed modernist or postmodernist, characterized by the disruption and fragmentation of both narrative and aesthetics (Walker 2005: 19); by the incorporation of repetitions, intrusive hallucinations, and dreams (Caruth 1996: 4); and by the collapse of linear time, rendering it fragile and uncontrollable (Hirsch 2004: 105). This is not to suggest that any depiction of trauma must necessarily adopt the elements of fantasy, nor that any depiction of fantasy must necessarily be motivated by trauma; but when an otherwise entirely realistic text deviates so sharply from realism in just one specific instance, it begs the question of why, and why in this particular instance.

If the real protagonist of *BeTipul* is "psychology itself" (Asheri 2008), then it could be argued that our protagonist has "suffered a trauma," and that this is why for the first and only time, the series abandons realism in favor of fantasy,

which often characterizes the traumatic subject. *BeTipul*, in other words, reacts traumatically when the fundamental assumptions of the text itself are challenged, as they are in Menachem's accusation of Reuven—or more accurately, of the assumptions of psychotherapy itself—as being implicated in Yadin's death.

At this point, one of the ethical and political problems inherent in the series' aesthetic choices rises to the surface. It seems that as long as individual or collective traumas arise within the confines of therapy, the text "knows" how to deal with them and provides a sense of control, shared by the viewers from their "omniscient" viewing position. The one-time deviation from these principles—the very moment in which psychodynamic therapy comes under attack—provides us with two important insights into the text. Firstly, as I argue above, the text not only depicts psychotherapy, but also adheres to its assumptions and views, even rendering therapy its "protagonist," which might account for *BeTipul*'s massive popularity among critics and psychotherapists alike. Secondly, and more relevant to the matter, as long as the text believes in the principles of therapy, it also believes that there is a chance for a "cure," a chance to make things right. What do I mean by that?

One of the principal ideological operations of Israeli society, according to Slavoj Žižek's reading, is maintaining and accommodating the inherent duality of the soldier: on the one hand, he is "ragged, even vulgar" on the outside, yet "a warm and considerate human being" on the inside. By this perception, underneath the rigid exterior hides a sensitive man; behind the machine-like efficiency and the ethically and legally questionable actions (the "dirty work") hide profound emotions and even sadness; "beneath the excremental surface [. . .] there is a sensitive core of gold" (Žižek 2003: 151). Indeed, Yadin's therapy proves "successful," as in place of the rigid, emotionless combat pilot who arrived at Reuven's office, he is revealed to be an emotional, almost sentimental man. His therapy proved that Yadin can be saved from himself, that the layers of toughness he had grown accustomed to wearing over the years can be peeled away.

Yet when Yadin is killed, instead of seeing psychotherapy as what had helped him keep his head above water, the very principles behind it are attacked by Menachem, who implies that "good pilots," who manage to continue functioning in spite of their immoral actions, have no "core of gold"; they're "automatons" with nothing hidden beneath the surface. What you see—the killing of innocents—is what you get. The text, however, is apparently unable to cope with this harsh truth, and for the first time, itself reacts traumatically. And so, while the text might raise difficult questions regarding Israeli society, it ultimately

provides answers that are easier to digest: a thorough, extensive course of therapy conducted on Israeli society will necessarily reveal that deep down, we Israelis are moral beings; all it takes is the courage to embark on this journey. And as long as we remain "within the consensus," it is possible to be both controversial and popular at the same time.

4

Bad Television/Good (Post-) Television: Aging and Masculinity in *Nevelot* (Eagles)

In 2010, on Israel's 62nd Independence Day, HOT3, Israel's major cable channel premiered a miniseries titled *Nevelot*—a term that in Hebrew has two meanings; the first is literally "carcasses," and the second is an expletive whose meaning is close to "bastards." That the series premiered on Independence Day is no act of chance, seeing as it was a part of the post-Zionist/post-television culture, which sets out to reexamine, if not deconstruct, some of Israel's and Zionism's most consecrated values, those being primarily heroism and masculinity. However, as I argue in this chapter, *Nevelot* additionally makes a statement about the television medium within which it operates.

Nevelot's two protagonists are Ephraim and Moshke (Yehoram Gaon and Yossi Pollack); a pair of elderly men residing in Tel Aviv (Figure 4.1). It is through Ephraim's memories that we learn of the duo's past as two young pre-state

Figure 4.1 Moshke and Ephraim as old men (Yehoram Gaon and Yossi Pollack) in *Nevelot*.

Figure 4.2 Moshke and Ephraim as youths in *Nevelot* (Michael Moshonov and Oz Zahavi).

resistance fighters (Figure 4.2). As part of their work in the resistance, Ephraim and Moshke help smuggle in illegal immigrants, and it is during one particular mission that the two pull out of the Mediterranean a woman named Tamara. In what appears to be a love triangle, both Ephraim and Moshke fall in love with Tamara and attempt to spend as much time as they can in her company. At a certain point, Ephraim and Moshke are sent to battle, at the end of which they both find themselves lying in a blood-soaked field, surrounded by dead bodies (or *nevelot*, i.e., "carcasses") as vultures literally circle over their heads. There and then, lying side by side, Ephraim and Moshke promise each other that if they make it out alive, they shall both break up with Tamara and never see her again—a promise which they both keep, except for one incident a few years later when Ephraim has sex with Tamara and gets her pregnant.

Returning to present-day, "grumpy old men" Ephraim and Moshke spend the majority of their time lolling about at their local café where they had met as young fighters. Their routine, however, is shaken up one day by a car accident that occurs just outside the café, in which Tamara is run over and killed. This event, along with several others, sends Ephraim, and later Moshke too, on a killing rampage across Tel Aviv, targeting the young—a bloodbath that ends only when Moshke kills the daughter of Ephraim and Tamara. The present-day plotline wraps up only when Ephraim and Moshke return to their café, and while they

may not have been caught, they have nonetheless apparently ended their killing spree.

Despite its heavily violent content, *Nevelot* was met with acclaim from critics (Begano 2010) and viewers alike, and soon went on to become one of cable's most VOD-viewed programs of 2010 (Yagil 2010; Shechnick 2011). Not surprisingly, the main discourse surrounding the show revolves around Israeli society's treatment of its elderly and, of course, the opportunity to serve up a healthy dose of revenge on the "rotting" young generation.

However, as I seek to illustrate in the first part of this chapter, the main impetus behind the elderly duo's vicious killing spree is not necessarily revenge per se, but rather an attempt to cope with and contain the traumatic experiences evoked and brought about by old age. I propose reading their violent acts toward the young through Melanie Klein's terminologies, specifically the "paranoid-schizoid position," which leads Ephraim and Moshke to view Tel Aviv's young as a "bad object": a schizoid, multiple object that needs to be torn to pieces (as a vulture would do to its carrion) and ultimately annihilated.

That said, this chapter's main concern is not these fictional characters' actions nor their psychological state of mind, but rather the work of the series itself. Therefore, in the second part of this chapter, I argue that the miniseries *Nevelot* itself operates out of the paranoid-schizoid position,' and that it is out of this very position that—via both textual and meta-textual elements—it turns "regular television" into a "bad object" while at the same time labelling itself "quality TV" (Thompson 1997) or "boutique television" (Caldwell 1995), and, thus, subsequently rendered a "good object."

Old Age and the Bad Object

"The Zionist Revolution," as indicated earlier in this book, was, among others, a revolution that set out to "fix" the Jewish body or "to engineer a new Jew whose body and character would be the exact opposite of the Diasporic Jew" (Gluzman 2002: 43–45). Looking at Ephraim and Moshke in their youth, one can argue that they met this challenge successfully, and that their bodies did in fact adhere to the demands of the hegemonic gaze.

However, a close reading of the relationship between Ephraim, Moshke, and Tamara reveals that the latter, much like many other women in wartime literature, does not stand in the way of the brotherhood of fighters, and is merely there as

someone whose role is "to make male friendship respectable" (Mosse 1985: 128). A homoerotic relationship—which has no room for expression in Israeli-machismo culture—therefore ensues between Ephraim and Moshke. Moreover, their "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 2000: 487) positioning on the battlefield, where they are literally susceptible to penetration (by bullets) effeminizes the two and places them in opposition to the masculine ideal (Silverman, 1992: 74; Morag 2009: 121–122).

Moreover, and in a much more pronounced way, the two's present-day old age as symbolic representation of the new jew, completely and utterly obliterates any transformations achieved, mainly seeing as how Zionism championed not only masculinity, but also youth (Hazan 2001: 7), and it is against this very youthful archetype that "[the] old, frail Orthodox Jews in the Diaspora" (Biale 1997: 179), those who had suffered, according to Max Nordau, from degeneration and exhaustion of the nerves (Mosse 1985: 35), were positioned, measured, and judged. The seemingly aimless presence of Ephraim and Moshke at the café renders tangible Nordau's metaphor of "coffeehouse Jews" (ibid.: 42)—a metaphor whose goal was to illustrate the contrast between the image of the Diaspora Jew and the "muscle Jew."

An additional reason why present-day Ephraim and Moshke are driven further away from the Zionist ideal is that old age is viewed as a victimized position. See the following conversation between the two in the aftermath of Tamara's fatal accident, when Ephraim says to Moshke, "We're going to die. If it's not the heart [. . .] it's some punk with a BMW who'll flatten you like a pancake." Later, the two watch a segment on the news revealing how "Dozens of senior citizens were brutally attacked over the past year by criminals looking for easy targets." The victimized position, despite several ideological advantages one might draw from it (Ophir, 2000: 174–200), is deeply tied to those same weak, effeminate elements from which the "new Jew" so desperately tried to break free, thus excluding Ephraim and Moshke from the Zionist ideal.

At this point, one of the most problematic aspects of old age for Ephraim and Moshke is raised: the compromising of their masculinity. This, for instance, is how Ephraim goes about describing his and Moshke's own daily routine, moments before the car accident takes place: "No one is the same as they used to be. We drink coffee, juice, tea, a little beer [. . .] and we talk, most of the time. We're always talking. *All that's left of the huge hulks we were are talking lips*."

Reducing Ephraim and Moshe into a pair of "talking lips" is a distinct metaphorical and metonymical transition from masculinity to femininity, for this very expression is rather blatantly indicative of the effeminate aspect of their

being—both physiologically (lips being very connotative of the female genitalia) and culturally (speaking, or rather gabbing, considered a trivial feminine pastime). This feminization to which Ephraim and Moshke are subject is also manifested in Moshke's inability to urinate throughout most of the series, a problem Ephraim explains in these words: "How can you take a piss like a man if you're not a man?" Thus Moshke's old-age-related problems are framed as an acute blow to his ability to function and perform as a man, not only as a compromising of the symbolical phallus, but also of the actual, physical organ itself.

The notion that the body of the elderly man has lost its masculine traits and capabilities is by no means limited to Ephraim or Moshke, or even to the Israeli man, as it emerges in many texts on old age: "Elderly men," argues Spector-Mersel, "do not adhere to the dominant construct of masculinity which places an emphasis on strength, control, and primarily youth, and for that, they are not perceived as men at all" (2008: 15). Elderly men, in other words, suffer a crippling loss of dominance and control—an experience that one might even go so far as to frame as traumatic (Krystal 1995; Kaplan 1999).

Therefore, while on the face of it *Nevelot* frames Ephraim and Moshke's killing spree as a type of vendetta, it can also be viewed as a post-traumatic act whose primary impetus is old age. Essentially, Ephraim and Moshke are both in a debilitatingly painful place: not only have they experienced a loss of masculinity as their aged bodies place them in an effeminate, victimized position, but they are also forced to recall and revisit the origins of their trauma as victims threatened by femininity and mortality, much like a pair of carcasses ("*nevelot*") lying on the battlefield. They attempt to grapple with this predicament through murder, or as Ephraim explicitly says at the height of a murder-saturated night, "You're strong when you kill, and you're weak when you're being killed."

Ephraim's words call attention to the *performative* aspect of the killing spree: It is not so much that the "real man" is the killer, but it is the killing that turns the man—or the weak, feminine man—into a "real man"; therefore, these murders ought to be seen as an act that begets first strength and only then masculinity, as opposed to an act whose roots lie in masculinity. Angela P. Harris takes this argument even further, claiming that "Men disempowered by racial or class status develop alternative rebellious ways of proving their manhood [. . .] The instability of masculine identity [. . .] makes violence in defense of self-identity a constant possibility" (2000: 780). As per Harris's words, their violent actions are effectively construed as a performance of masculinity that attempts to reinstate Ephraim and Moshke with their hegemonic masculinity that has been stripped from them.

Giving further merit to this idea is the event that triggers the pair's killing spree: not Tamara's death in the car accident, but rather an event that is seemingly far more trivial—a single word uttered by Moshke right after Ephraim takes to describing Tel Aviv's young as they are seen through the café window (Figure 4.3):

Ephraim And all this time, those sons of bitches are walking past our window. They're stabbing us through the heart, the way they look [. . .] it started right here, at the café. And it is said that the world was created out of words. It was the same thing here: It all started with one word.

Moshke *Nevelot*!

When Moshke refers to the youths as "*nevelot*," he most likely means it derogatively (i.e., bastards). However, as mentioned before, the term *nevelot* literally means "carcasses," a word that sends Ephraim and Moshke right back to that traumatic moment when they were both lying like carcasses on the battlefield. Seen in this light, the utterance "*Nevelot*!" is not only a constitutive one used to describe reality, but rather a speech act or a performative utterance (Austin 1975) that engenders a new reality; the expletive "*nevelot*" is a performative act that frames the random young people passing by "their" café as carcasses, projecting onto them the sum of all the effeminate, victim-like traits that had been projected onto Ephraim and Moshke both on the battlefield and in

Figure 4.3 The young as they are seen through the café window (*Nevelot*).

their present elderly reality. Killing these youths is Ephraim and Moshke's way of attempting to expunge these very traits.

Ephraim and Moshke's mental shift, which has them projecting their own effeminate traits onto others only to then go and attack them, can be explained via Freud's paranoid mechanism (Freud 1911) and Melanie Klein's development of it in her own writings (Klein 1946). In the story behind the Schreber incident, recounted by Freud after reading the former's diaries, the psychoanalyst develops the paranoid mechanism wherein "An internal perception is suppressed, and, instead, its content, after undergoing a certain kind of distortion, enters consciousness in the form of an external perception" (1911: 66). At a later stage, Freud argues that violence is directed at the outside object onto which all sentiments and emotions had been projected. While in his writings, Freud stresses that most of these instances are usually related in one way or another to homoerotic desire (ibid.: 43), Robin Wood has added that a man need only feel threatened by traits that are *perceived* as effeminate for him to activate a similar mechanism (Wood 2002: 341).

In her writings, Melanie Klein revisits the Schreber incident as well as Freud's paranoid mechanism, and proposes a far more intricate defense mechanism that she dubs the paranoid-schizoid position. This position, which according to Klein characterizes the baby in its preliminary stages, leads it to split itself up, as it were, at times of anxiety, and project onto the mother the same terrifying characteristics that it wishes to be rid of. Thus the mother not only rids the child's ego of danger, badness, and any potentially painful scenarios (Klein 1946: 101–102), but also enables it to get rid of an unwanted or dangerous part of itself (Feldman 1992: 72).

One of Klein's central and most innovative points is that the projection is not directed at one single object, but is rather a multiple act of projection, that is, the negative traits that the baby ascribes to one object (the "bad object," which initially is also the "bad breast"), with the positive traits attributed to another object (i.e., "the good object"/"the good breast"); "the frustrating breast," claims Klein, "attacked in oral-sadistic phantasies—is felt to be in bits; while the gratifying breast [. . .], is felt to be complete" (1946: 101). This split leads to two key processes: "The omnipotent conjuring up of the ideal object and situation, and the equally omnipotent annihilation of the bad persecutory object and the painful situation" (ibid.: 102). While Klein's focus may lie with the infant, according to her various readers, the position she has developed is one that "we maintain, at least episodically, throughout life" (Black and Mitchell 1995: 90),

particularly at times of anxiety and emotional overload. Moreover, this position is often related to traumatic experiences (Cohen 1985: 174).

A rereading of the murderous acts committed by Ephraim and Moshke leads to the conclusion that what is at play here is a grappling with traumatic experiences and a post-traumatic mode of being that leads one, in turn, to fulfill the paranoid-schizoid fantasy of eliminating the "bad objects": Ephraim and Moshke project outward at the young their own "bad" traits, whether those be their effeminate, victim-like ones (*nevelot* in the carcass sense) or their inner violent aggressions (*nevelot* in the bastards sense). This act of projection transforms the young into the "bad object," which is why they are fragmentary and numerous, and also why they "demand" to be bitten into and chewed up, the same way scavenging vultures bite into carcasses.

Having said that, Ephraim and Moshke are at the same time also constructing the good object, embodied in the image of the deceased Tamara, who is idealized to the point of near idolization in both Ephraim's and Moshke's recollections. Beyond her extraordinary beauty, Tamara is characterized as almost beyond human, an "enigma" of many contradictions. It is only after Tamara's death that Ephraim begins to redirect this idealization onto another character: Tamara's daughter, Dina. However, when the latter is also murdered, the killing spree comes to an abrupt and complete halt in a way that remains not entirely resolved nor explained by the series as, in effect, nothing has really changed.[1]

To recap thus far, one might say that *Nevelot* is trying to make a statement about Israeli society and the violence with which it has become so identified. Could one not argue that Israeli society, too, is now trapped in the paranoid-schizoid position wherein it splits the world up into the "good guys" and the "bad guys"; those who are "for us" and those who are "against us," and out of that mindset, commits disproportionate and irrational acts of violence? Will Israeli society, too, wake up one day when it is far too late and realize the extent of the damage it has inflicted on both its surroundings and itself, and that the chance to repair the damage has long since been lost?

Yet, while the series may critique the paranoid-schizoid position wherein Israeli society is allegedly stuck, and even goes as far as to indicate the steep price we pay for adopting a dichotomous good vs. evil worldview, the series, too, is guilty of the same dichotomous worldview of sin. That said, this argument is not so much concerned with Israel's political reality, which the series addresses explicitly, as it is with the medium within which the series operates, that is, television, which *Nevelot* addresses far less overtly and directly.

Television as Bad Object

Nevelot opens with a scene that seemingly has nothing whatsoever to do with the series' main arc: at the start of the scene, an eye behind an eyeglass lens appears in extreme close-up (Figure 4.4) and is soon revealed to be that of Ephraim, who is slouched on the sofa, watching/staring at the television in front of him (Figure 4.5), as it is reflected in his eyeglasses, while various commercials play. At

Figure 4.4 Ephraim's eyeglass lens (*Nevelot*).

Figure 4.5 Ephraim watching television (*Nevelot*).

a certain point, Ephraim's voiceover narration begins as his following internal monologue is heard:

> **Ephraim** They advertise diapers as if the babies'll get laid the minute they put a diaper on; showing them on the screen with their tiny little asses. It's horrible seeing a porn movie being made, using little Jewish asses. They're getting out of the water, all wet, with their swimsuits stuck to their bodies. You can see exactly where the end of the cunt starts, and where the thigh ends, and that's how they advertise a mortgage bank, and they're all over the moon.

A further examination of this monologue reveals that while it directly discusses what Ephraim is watching on his television screen, it in fact foreshadows several central themes that will be featured prominently later on in the series: the babies (a word which, in Ephraim's monologue is gendered as male) are in danger of being penetrated and thus feminized, much like Ephraim and Moshke found themselves on the battlefield; the water from which the young models are emerging is like the sea from which Tamara is rescued; and Ephraim's description of the young people featured in the ad will later be echoed in his description of the youths who walk by their café.

However, the content he watches is by no means the only relevant aspect of the unfolding of the series, but also Ephraim's mode of viewing. This opening scene clearly and distinctly corresponds to the series' key scene in which Ephraim and Moshke are sitting in the café looking out into the street at the passersby; from passively sitting before the sight that is unfolding before them to the parallel emotionless gazing at the youths, who are the object of the gaze; the framing of the television screen that is replaced by the café doors; and lastly, the slow-motion cinematography of the youths in both the ad and on the streets of Tel Aviv. Thus, the act of watching television with which the series opens offers a metonymy, or a displacement, of Ephraim and Moshke's act of viewing from inside the café, thereby cementing the two's passive, effeminate positioning. One might even go as far as to argue that it further adds to the traumatic aspect of passive and effeminate old age.

In order to establish and validate this argument, it is essential that one look at how the male television viewer is perceived in culture and, even prior to that, how the consumer of pop culture is perceived. When Adorno and Horkheimer set out to study pop culture, they indicated how it is used as a means of sedating its consumers' mental faculties and thought processes (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 99), adding to viewers' state of powerlessness (ibid.: 116) to the extent that

"the idea itself [. . .] is massacred and mutilated" (ibid.: 109). Furthermore, they added that television, as a prime representative of the culture industry, "merely goads the unsublimated anticipation of pleasure, which through the habit of denial has long since been mutilated as *masochism*" (ibid.: 111; emphasis mine).

It is not without merit that Adorno and Horkheimer view the consumption of pop culture or "the culture industry" as a mode of masochistic pleasure, seeing as how masochism is culturally associated primarily with a feminine positioning. As indicated by Lynne Joyrich (1996: 24–26), criticism has portrayed pop culture as inferior not only aesthetically but also morally, to the point of its undermining the foundations of society and posing a threat to society's intactness. Amongst the acute dangers posed by pop culture and television was primarily the compromising of the culture consumer's rational and analytical capabilities, to the point of fearing that the (male) viewer would become not only feminine, passive, and dependent, but actually emasculated (ibid.: 26). Following this, Patrice Petro further adds, "[T]heoretical discussions of art and mass culture are almost always accompanied by gendered metaphors that link 'masculine' values of production, activity, and attention with art, and 'feminine' values of consumption, passivity, and distraction with mass culture" (Petro 1986: 6).

Although postmodernist writing has challenged the "highbrow" vs. "lowbrow" cultural divide, various scholars maintain that both scholarly research and mainstream discourse continue to regard television in feminine terms. Therefore, while cinematic viewing is perceived as "voyeuristic, linear, and contemplative" (Rose and Friedman 1994: 23), television viewing is seen as an act that requires very little attention, one that promotes a distracted and scattered mode of reception, with the flow typifying it very much akin to that of a housewife's experience of housework (Petro 1986: 5–6), and whose nature "is inextricably linked [. . .] with excessive emotion, domesticity, needy women, being trapped" (Brunsdon 2008: 128).

It is evident how the very cultural notions that have rendered the woman a figure for whom the home is the natural workplace are also the ones that have gone on to render the domestic, television-watching male both feminine and passive (Spigel 2013: 96). Moreover, the male television viewer is often even seen as the victim of certain moves that "[F]eminize his world [. . .] emasculate brutally his very identity" (Joyrich 1996: 31), while television itself is viewed as a "medium capable of emasculating viewers posed as helpless before its onslaught" (ibid.: 69). Petro further adds that the television viewer is perceived as though he was passively being "penetrated" by television (Petro 1986: 16), contrary to the

position of the classic film viewer, who occupies the masculine, dominant position.

My aim here is not to replicate Laura Mulvey's all-too-familiar "active/male vs. passive/female" dichotomy (2000: 487), but rather to defer to one of Mulvey's most influential critics, Carol J. Clover. In her book on horror films, Clover proposes two types of gaze associated with the genre. The first type she dubs "The Assaultive Gaze." This gaze is ascribed not only to the killer who is gazing at his or her victim, but also to the camera (or its stand-in)—and is an inherently masculine gaze. This is also the same gaze with which the viewer often identifies, at least formalistically speaking, through camera tricks (Clover 1992: 204), and is essentially very similar to the masculine gaze that Mulvey describes in her article.

The second type of gaze, which is also the one most pertinent to our discussion, is "The Reactive Gaze," that is, the victim's gaze as s/he stares in terror at her his victimizer; the gaze of the object of another's gaze (ibid.: 181). This gaze, in contrast to the assaultive one, is essentially feminine, and "when the reactive gaze is male, he is either too young to count [. . .] or literally regendered by the experience" (ibid.: 205). In many respects, this is actually the gaze that can be found at the thematic center of horror films, and it is for this reason that so many of them showcase eye imagery in trailers, posters or opening credits: eyes often revealed as belonging to the terrified victim (ibid.: 166–168).

In horror films, therefore, the viewer does not identify only with the assaultive gaze, but also with the assaulted eye or reactive gaze, through which one does the viewing. This notion often gains merit through reflexive scenes wherein a character is seen watching a film or a television program that suddenly turns on them and attacks them (ibid.: 199), just as horror films "assault" their own viewers using strong imagery and light tricks (ibid.: 202).

However, when discussing television, there is virtually no need to attack the male viewer using frightening imagery or formal manipulations; television, as it is perceived culturally, need not rely on its content in order to feminize the male viewer: it does so by being an essentially feminine medium. With that in mind, the eye that we see in the opening shot, much like the eyes in the backdrop of most horror films, can be read as the eye of Ephraim's reactive gaze; it is the gaze of the male television viewer as he is being assaulted by television, that is re-gendering him as female.

Thus, when Ephraim disparages the "penetrated babies," he is essentially referring to himself, as a television viewer among other things, while the childlike-

feminine-victimesque description of what is unfolding on the television screen in fact reflects Ephraim's own position. This notion gains even more ground when we recall that in our culture, the elderly are often akin to small children, with old age often being viewed as a "second childhood" (Mangum 1999: 62).

That said, a reactive gaze is only characteristic of men under two sets of conditions: when they are either too young to be considered men, or when their body has been re-gendered by a situation at hand (Clover 1992: 205). Ephraim, as an elderly male, is far too old to be considered a man and appears to have been re-gendered, not only as a consequence of his age or of his victimized past, but also due to being a television viewer.

However, if television is in fact that harmful, then is there not a chance that the considered male viewer of *Nevelot* is himself is subject to trauma or feminization? The answer to that question would have been affirmative had the show considered itself a "regular" television series; however, similarly to many of its television cohorts, *Nevelot* uses various means to declare itself as being far removed from "regular television," thus labeling itself "quality television" (Thompson 1997: 12). In this way, *Nevelot* can simultaneously view "regular television" as "the bad object," while also framing itself as "the good object," a position that will be further elaborated on in this chapter's final section.

Nevelot as the Good Object

In order to frame itself as a "good object," *Nevelot* must first distinguish itself from "bad television" or, in other words, "regular television." One of the main ways the series goes about setting itself apart from "regular television" is the style of its camera work, allowing one to argue that the series is a good fit for John Caldwell's coined term "boutique television." Boutique television is essentially one of American television's counter-reactions to the 1980s television network crisis. This crisis led the networks to effect a change in the nature of the medium: from being heavily reliant on rhetoric and talk-based broadcasting, the networks all went to great lengths to turn television into a medium of striking visual presence that would grab viewers' attention. One of the products of this move was the inception of boutique television. This type of television is very reminiscent of cinema it is shot on film, using high production value and "cinematic" camera work. Thus, boutique television "constructs for itself an air of selectivity, refinement, uniqueness, and privilege" (Caldwell 1995: 105).

Likewise, with all its exterior shots, period reconstructions, highlighted shooting angles, and formidable cast, *Nevelot* is very closely linked in its aesthetic to Israeli cinema; this is particularly discernible during the combat scenes, for war, adds Caldwell, "makes good television. Especially if by *good* one means spectacular, visual, and all-encompassing" (ibid.: 110). Moreover, *Nevelot*'s opting to expose the byproducts of violence, that is, the bruised and battered corpses, is part of an overall move very much identified with American television (Smit 2010).

In this context, it is particularly noteworthy that despite television having been under attack over the years for the abundance of violence it depicts (McQueen 1998: 179–196), in recent years programs that feature violent and explicit content have been earning scores of accolades and countless awards, or in the words of McCabe and Akass "[P]ushing the limits of respectability, of daring to say/do what cannot be said/done elsewhere on the networks, is entwined with being esoteric, groundbreaking, and risk-taking" (2007: 67).[2] We therefore witness here quite the interesting turnabout, that is, non-violent, conservative, and family-centric television is considered "bad," while violent, profane, and sexually explicit television is considered "good": the latter becomes art and practically, cinema.

However, it appears that *Nevelot*'s most instrumental strategy in its bid to set itself apart from "regular television" is the explicit—and negative—portrayal of "regular television" itself. Throughout the entire series, we come across multiple characters watching television, primarily Ephraim and Moshke; however, what they watch on television, as well as *how* they watch it are explicitly set apart from *Nevelot* itself. Thus, characters watch commercials (which are not featured on cable channels) that feature mainly the young (unlike *Nevelot*'s elderly), news broadcasts that portray a reality that is the stark opposite of the one the series constructs (e.g., representing the elderly as easy target of violence), and the interruption of regular programming for a live news broadcast on the night of the killing spree (a broadcast which itself distorts reality, as the blame is pinned on Arabs.) In other words, if television as it is represented in *Nevelot* is in fact indicative of what constitutes "regular television," then it becomes abundantly clear that *Nevelot* explicitly bills itself as "not-television."

However, beyond the dissimilarities between the television content featured *Nevelot* and *Nevelot* itself as television text, the differences between the two lie in their respective mode of viewing: unlike the viewer of the digital era, who has apparently actively chosen to watch *Nevelot*, having seen it mentioned online or ordered it via VOD, the characters on *Nevelot* watch their television the

old-fashioned way; that is, they stare at whatever is being broadcast at that given moment, choosing neither airtime nor content. This feature gains considerable merit when we realize that this passive viewing activity does not only take place while Ephraim and Moshke are actually watching television, but also as they are watching, elderly and aimlessly, the young people on the street.

The idea that *Nevelot* in fact differs from "regular television," and that it is less harmful than the latter, is brought up not only in the text that is *Nevelot* but also in an interview with its director, Dror Sabo. The interview is headlined "I Would Not Want My Daughter to Watch *Big Brother*," with the subheading offering the following explanation: "Dror Sabo was one of the first to have brought Reality television to Israel, but also the first to rise against it. In his newest series, *Nevelot*, the director rolls up his sleeves yet again and attacks the violence that has overcome the nation." The link made here between the violence in Israel and the reality genre (both of which Sabo attacks) steadily tightens as the interview, by Avner Shavit, unfolds, with Sabo stating:

> We genuinely did mean well [. . .] and it was only at a much later stage that I realized just how harmful Reality TV is, for viewers and contestants alike [. . .] *Nevelot*, for me, is a kind of response to all the ailments of the local, ratings-driven culture [. . .] I wouldn't want my daughter to watch *Big Brother*, and I simply will not create things that I do not want my daughter to watch.

It appears that Sabo's—and *Nevelot*'s—claim is that it is not violent television that is liable to harm its viewers but, rather, commercial, "regular" television. It is interesting that Sabo would rather his daughter watched extremely violent content, including graphic violence and murder, than to a prime-time show that may or may not feature the odd use of profanity or sexual innuendo. However, beyond Sabo's words, turning the spotlight onto the interviewer himself is rather illuminating: despite *Nevelot* being a television series, the one chosen to conduct the interview with its director was Avner Shavit, who is an established film critic. Moreover, in attempting to explain the premise of *Nevelot* to his readers, Shavit references one television program, *Dexter* (Showtime, 2006–2013); however, the vast majority of his imagery is reliant upon cinema. For that reason, he dubs *Nevelot* the elderly's answer to *Dirty Harry* (Donald Siegel, 1971) or a non-Christian version of *Gran Torino* (Clint Eastwood, 2008) and, later, compares the violence in it to that of *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1971).

Therefore, the bid to render *Nevelot* into a work of art is not only made by distancing it from television, but also by associating it more closely with cinema,

that is, by reinscribing it as a cinematic work that simply happens to be aired on television. Even more interesting is the fact that television creative scribes are not the only ones who are trying to distance their works from the medium within which they operate and bring it closer to cinema: cinematic scholarly writing also reveals a trend of labelling cinema as art and television as pop culture. This trend, however, seems to overlook one paramount fact, which is, as Patrice Petro argues, that cinema's own status as art is by no means guaranteed (Petro 1986: 6).

When Petro attempts to explain this shift, wherein filmmakers/critics/scholars view television as inferior, she describes how a certain scholar has created a dichotomy between film and television so as to label television the "bad object" (ibid.: 16). Similarly, Brunsdon cites a variety of films wherein television is presented as the "bad object," that is, a medium characterized by commercialism, consumption, inauthenticity, and the destruction of family life and traditional community values (2008: 128). And while both Petro and Brunsdon neither develop nor delve any deeper into their use of the term "bad object," the fact that they have chosen to use Melanie Klein's term in the first place enables us to suggest the following hypothesis: In order to brand cinema a "good object," one must project any and all negative traits that may have been associated with it in the past onto an outside object that is not-cinema, in this case television: an object that resembles the "good object," yet that is nevertheless defined as differing from it, and that can therefore contain the sum of all its negative traits without it being construed as testimony in any way to the nature of cinema.

This shift is featured far more explicitly at the start of Christian Metz's influential book, *The Imaginary Signifier*. While Metz's subject matter may not be television, when he defers to Klein, he indicates just how various elements in the film industry and in film-centric writing have taken to constructing "bad objects" within cinema so as to be able to define a certain type of cinema as the "good object," or in Metz's own words: "It is very often for the purpose of exalting one kind of cinema that another has been violently attacked: the oscillation between 'good' and 'bad,' the immediacy of the restoration mechanism, then appear in all their clarity" (1982: 10).

Like film, television has gone to great lengths in order to produce quality content which, for many years, it had gone about doing by deferring to and comparing itself to film, so that what was deemed "good television" was effectively "not TV" or, simply, film. However, in recent years, with the rise of TVIII and its counterparts across the globe, including "Israeli post-television," television can

now serve up the "good object" vs. "bad object" divide directly from its own midst. For instance, if traditional television viewing is characterized by passiveness and femininity, then "new television," which has turned its viewer active, is that much more identified with masculine traits, or as Brunsdon puts it, "Instead of being associated with housebound women, this new television is young, smart, and on the move, downloaded or purchased to watch at will" (2010: 65).

Therefore, with the advent of (Israeli) post-television, a new divide has formed even as the discourse has begun differentiating between new-television viewing which is seen as predominantly more masculine, and old-school, feminine viewing. This division has in turn allowed for additional divisions, and has also enabled those creating television content to author new material for this medium while simultaneously emphasizing that they are not "really" operating within it, and even going so far as to turn against it, as Sabo himself does in his interview.

I argue that the same shift suggested by Sabo in his words to Shavit is also proposed in *Nevelot* itself, where the director projects all traits perceived by our culture as negative onto "regular television" so as to render *Nevelot* "good television." In other words, *Nevelot* not only features two paranoid-schizoid protagonists, but itself employs a similar defense mechanism triggered by fear of being labeled a work of television; for that reason, it frames television as a "bad object": one that differs starkly from the series itself, which falls under the heading of "new television," that is, the "good object."

Thus, both the text itself and the context surrounding it come together to form a clear divide between the bad object that is "regular television" and the good object that is boutique television, or "not TV": *Nevelot*. However, while *Nevelot* is conscious of the ramifications of its protagonists' paranoid-schizoid position, and does not shy away from showing the high toll it exacts, it appears that ultimately, the series remains unaware of the price of its own paranoid-schizoid position. In the series' and its creators' insistence on reinforcing the divide between "good (masculine) television" and "bad (feminine) television," *Nevelot* not only replicates and reinforces the same dichotomy that only keeps it further away from its coveted "work of art" status, it also continues to reproduce the same gender binaries for which its protagonists go on to pay a hefty price. Perhaps it is high time that television authors, as well as film and television scholars, abandoned their own paranoid-schizoid position vis-à-vis television, and reevaluated their own conceptions of highbrow vs. lowbrow, masculine vs. feminine, film vs. television.

5

Small-Screen Trauma: Seriality and Post-Trauma in *Parashat HaShavua* and *Waltz with Bashir*

Between 2007 and 2009, three films were produced and screened in Israel about Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, known as the First Lebanon War (henceforth "Lebanon War"): *Beaufort* (Joseph Cedar, 2007), *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008), and *Lebanon* (Shmuel Maoz, 2009). A number of scholars have tried to identify the reasons for the production and success of films dealing with a war that had ended a quarter-century prior to their making and distribution. Raz Yosef (2010a) argues, among the various explanations offered, that this phenomenon has to do with a delayed return to traumatic memory, while Nurith Gertz and Gal Hermoni (2011) contend that these films represent an attempt by their creators to take responsibility, by means of post-traumatic language, for the massacres committed under the aegis of Israel (see also Mansfield 2010; Landesman and Bendor 2011; Duvdevani 2013).

To be sure, these were not the first Israeli films to deal with the Lebanon War; a number of films about this war were made as far back as the late 1980s and early 1990s.[1] Nevertheless, there is one major difference between the more recent films and the earlier ones: as Raz Yosef points out, whereas the early Lebanon films dealt primarily with the political and historical controversy surrounding the war and had been ultimately subordinated, moreover to the Israeli perspective, the new film dealt with the impact of the war on the Israeli psyche, highlighting the personal and subjective experiences of the Israeli soldiers and the post-traumatic effects of the war (Yosef 2011b). This shift has led the films to an "atemporal zone marked by symbols and private hallucinations" (ibid.: 68).

This focus on the post-traumatic experience of the Lebanon War, as well as the utilization of a psychic world made up of dreams and hallucinations, is also found in another cultural text created during those same years: namely, the second season of the series *Parashat HaShavua* (hence forth *Parashat*). The

series follows four Israeli families in present-day Israel, whose lives intertwine and intersect throughout its ongoing plot. As is typical of serial drama, numerous characters are featured (Figure 5.1), yet thematically and structurally, one—Shaul Nawi (Menashe Noy)—stands out as the series' main protagonist. Moreover, it is through Shaul's character that *Parashat*'s preoccupation with the Lebanon War is enacted.

Shaul is a Jewish Israeli in his late forties who runs a bar that doubles as a jazz club. He and his wife, Hagar, have two sons: Assaf, a soldier who serves in the Gaza Strip and later in what is known as the Second Lebanon War (2006), and a younger son, Gili. Throughout the entire series, Shaul is characterized as being distressed, exhibits extreme mood swings, and suffers from anxiety attacks and post-traumatic symptoms that are related, as we later discover, to his having fought in the Lebanon War.

Shaul is in many ways a composite alter ego of three real-life people: the series' director, Rani Blair; actor Menashe Noy (whose surname was originally Nawi); and the series' head writer, Ari Folman. The latter is known especially as the creator of the film *Waltz with Bashir* (henceforth *Waltz*), an animated documentary

Figure 5.1 The main characters in *Parashat HaShavua* (from left to right): Yonatan Berger (Danny Geva), Anna (Sara Adler), Shaul Nawi (Menashe Noy) Hagar Nawi (Keren Mor), Assaf Nawi (Michael Moshonov), Amir El-Nashaf (Kais Nashaf), Manar El-Nashaf (Klara Khoury), Elisha Ben-David (Yuval Segel) and Elia Ben-David (Ronit Elkabetz). Photo: Ido Lavie.

film that follows the protagonist, identified in the film as Folman himself, as he tries to decipher a distorted and hallucinatory memory from the Lebanon War.

Unsurprisingly, there are many similarities between how the two texts, *Waltz* and *Parashat*, and their respective characters, Folman and Shaul Nawi, cope with the trauma of the Lebanon War. However, it is not the similarities that will be addressed in the present discussion, but rather the differences. This chapter argues that *Parashat*'s distinct approach to coping with the trauma, when opposed to those of the films that deal with the war (and *Waltz* in particular), derives in large part from the medium whereinwhich it plays out—television—and more importantly, from its narrative structure—that of a serial.[2] Hence the purpose of this discussion is to cite the differences between the cinematic ways of depicting the trauma, especially as it appears in *Waltz*, and its depiction in *Parashat*, its television counterpart.

Shaul the Dreamer

The second season of *Parashat* opens with a surreal scene, which turns out to be Shaul Nawi's dream. In this dream, we see Shaul lying on a sand dune, wearing swim trunks and a swim cap. Next to him lies a soldier in uniform whose national affiliation is unclear. After Shaul looks around him, two physicians enter the scene and examine Shaul and the foreign soldier. The female physician arrives at the conclusion that Shaul is done for, and that nothing can be done for him (Figure 5.2); only the other soldier can be saved. Lying with his eyes open, Shaul appears to understand everything that is going on, but is unable to respond. In the following scene, we find Shaul attending a support group, whose facilitator, Neta (who was the female physician in the dream we have just seen), tries to interpret Shaul's dream. The following conversation takes place:

Neta Shaul, I bet you wanna tell us it has to do with some war you were in, when you were young. Which war was that? Yom Kippur?

Shaul Why insult me, Neta? Do I look that old to you?

Neta No, but still [. . .] a dead man in uniform, in the sand. Did you know him?

Shaul Yes. It was Boris Buskila.

Neta And he died in the war . . .

Shaul No. He died swimming across the Kinneret [Sea of Galilee]. When we were in eighth grade, while swimming across the Kinneret, he had an asthma attack midway and died.

Figure 5.2 Shaul's first dream (*Parashat HaShavua*).

Thus Shaul rejects Neta's interpretation of the dream twice over: first, he rejects her reading of the war in the dream as the Yom Kippur War, and then he rejects her reading of the dream as having to do with death in war. Neta's interpretation that the war in the dream is the 1973 Yom Kippur War is indeed erroneous: Shaul is too young to have fought in that war. Yet it is interesting to examine what makes Neta commit this error: The dream obfuscates its dealing with the Lebanon War by incorporating elements associated with other wars. First, there are the sand dunes, which are associated with the Egyptian front during the Yom Kippur War. Second, the dream opens with a shot of a helicopter and the loud noise made by its rotor, followed immediately by the song "The End" by the Doors. This choice of soundtrack is a precise and deliberate reference to the opening of Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* (1979), an iconic depiction of the Vietnam War.

It seems that Shaul's "choice" of dreaming about war through *Apocalypse Now* actually reveals more than it conceals: the Vietnam War has been assimilated into Israeli discourse largely in connection with the Lebanon War, which is often cited as being "Israel's Vietnam." This comparison has led many cinematic texts to represent the Lebanon War using conventions that have previously appeared in American films dealing with the Vietnam War (Gertz 1999: 165). Hence Shaul's dream-work employs a cultural convention in order to displace the

memory of the Lebanon War onto images associated with the war closest to it in Israeli cultural discourse, the Vietnam War.

Yet Shaul does not correct Neta by explaining that the dream is about the Lebanon War; in fact, he summarily rejects the possibility that this might be a war dream at all. The alternative interpretation offered by Shaul is that the dream has to do with a childhood friend of his, Boris Buskila, who had drowned in the Sea of Galilee. While this interpretation may be possible, it does not cohere with the series' trajectory: in the first season, Shaul tells his son about an event from his childhood, when a child named Gabi had drowned in a swimming pool and died.

The gaps between the story Shaul tells his son and the one he tells Neta are perplexing. How did the drowning of Gabi in a swimming pool morph into the drowning of Boris Buskila in the Sea of Galilee? Since the entire scene is framed within a therapeutic interpretation of a dream, it could be argued that just as the Yom Kippur and the Vietnam Wars, which appear in the manifest content of the dream, represent a third, latent, event—the Lebanon War—so here, too, what at first appears to be two separate childhood "memories" or "screen memories" (Freud, 1899) are discoverd to be covering up a single event, which in turn may be the one underlying the dream. A hint as to the nature of this event will appear in Shaul's second dream, in the second episode of the season.

In this dream, Shaul is lying on the sand dune once again. As the camera pans out, another dune is revealed, from which a soldier emerges who turns out to be Assaf, Shaul's older son. Assaf approaches his father and tries to wake him up. He shakes and slaps him lightly (Figure 5.3), shouting, "Dad! Dad, get up! Get up, Dad. [. . .] You have to help me. Where're the car keys? [. . .] You have to help me. Dad, [. . .] don't you understand? Dad, I need to get out of here! Help me! Dad, don't leave me. Dad, Dad! Dad!"

Shaul does not respond to his son's entreaties, even after opening his eyes. Then Assaf, seeing soldiers approaching, runs away. At this stage, in a swish-pan transition, we see Shaul asleep and his lover, Galia, having difficulty waking him. Shaul wakes up and immediately phones his son Assaf, who in the previous episode was drafted to the Second Lebanon War, and who hasn't made contact for two days. Shaul's reaction makes it clear how he interprets the dream: as a call of distress from his son Assaf, whose life is in danger. But the most interesting point is not the content of the dream but rather the fact that Shaul is unable to wake from the dream.

In this sense, Shaul differs substantially from another father who also dreams about his son trying to wake him and seeking his help: namely, the father who

Figure 5.3 Shaul's second dream (*Parashat HaShavua*).

appears in one of Freud's famous and most-cited dream analyses. The story recounted by Freud is that of a father who fell asleep in the room adjacent to the one in which the body of his recently deceased son was lying, surrounded by candles and watched over by an elderly guard. Freud writes that, after several hours of sleep,

> [T]he father had a dream that his child was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm, and whispered to him reproachfully: "Father, don't you see I'm burning?" He woke up, noticed a bright glare of light from the next room, hurried into it, and found that the old watchman had dropped off to sleep and that the wrappings and one of the arms of his beloved child's dead body had been burned by a lighted candle that had fallen on them (1900: 509).

In his interpretation, Freud argues that this dream, like other dreams he analyzes, "contained the fulfillment of a wish" (ibid.: 510) and that an examination of the dream would reveal at least two possible wishes: first, to prolong "by that one moment the life of the child," and second, to "let the dream go on" so that the dreamer does not need to wake up (ibid.: 607). Cathy Caruth, analyzing this dream mainly by way of Lacan, focuses on the second wish, and argues that "the father's wish to sleep [. . .] comes not only from the body but from consciousness itself, which desires somehow its own suspension" (1996: 96).

According to Caruth, the central question arising from Freud's story is not why the father is asleep despite his son's cries, but why he wakes up at all. If Freud places

the emphasis on the external reality that woke the father up, Lacan claims that the father wakes up due to a demand arising in the dream itself. But when the father wakes up, he discovers that, once again, he is too late to do anything about his son's burning arm in real life. This story of recurring failure may be read as a compulsive return to the traumatic event of the son's death, but also as a broader one: the "story of an impossible responsibility of consciousness in its own originating relation to others, and specifically to the deaths of others" (ibid.: 104)[3]

When comparing Shaul's dream to the one described by Freud, it is clear that the way Shaul awakens from the dream is relevant to its understanding no less than the dream's content: whereas the father whose son is burning wakes up from the events of the dream, and thereby rises to the son's ethical call to see and "speak" the other's death, Shaul is unable to wake up on his own. His refusal to wake up, as well as our prior knowledge from the previous episode that his dream is a displacement of the Lebanon War, suggests that it is a matter not only of the life and death of his son in the present, but also of the life and death of someone else in the past. Shaul, however, is not yet ready to see and "speak" the death of the other, and it is only after the third dream that he is ready to do so.

Shaul's third dream appears at the beginning of the third episode of the season. It opens with an image of a hand protruding from the sand on a beach and wearing a watch (Figure 5.4). Subsequently Shaul is seen walking slowly down the beach, wearing the same swim cap and swim goggles as in the previous

Figure 5.4 Shaul's third dream (*Parashat HaShavua*).

Figure 5.5 Shaul's third dream (*Parashat HaShavua*).

dreams. He approaches the hand, removes the watch, and tries to extract the body from the sand. At some point the physicians from the first dream appear and try to help Shaul extricate the body (Figure 5.5). After several attempts the figure of his son Assaf, in uniform, emerges from the sand. The three try to resuscitate Assaf, and when he starts to breathe, Shaul embraces him hard and caresses him. The dream then cut abruptly, and Shaul is seen jumping up from his bed, bellowing and terrified. After drinking some water and calming down a little, he mutters, "Ofer Navon. Major Ofer Navon. You fucking asshole. I'll show you what an Omega watch is. Asshole." These are words that will be understood only later in the episode, when Shaul tells his Arab friend Amir the following story:

> **Shaul** June 1982. Lebanon. Between outpost 324 and outpost 325, there was a little mound of sand. We called it Yad Vashem[4] Junction. In the beginning of the war, a Syrian soldier was buried there. His hand was left exposed [. . .] There was a watch on this hand. I was a young soldier, and one day I found myself hitching a ride with the commander of the battalion's headquarters, Major Ofer Navon. A real asshole. In short, we arrived at Yad Vashem Junction. He stopped, got out of the car, went to the hand, took the watch, came back to the car, and drove off. Then he gave me this look, shoved the watch in my face, and said: "You, be careful. One word from you, and I will turn your life here into hell." Believe me, I was so scared that I didn't speak for a month.

While it is not difficult to make the connection between this story told by Shaul and his third dream, it seems that the memory of the watch may also provide the interpretation for the two previous dreams. The paralysis that had taken hold of Shaul under Ofer Navon's gaze, and the silence that has accompanied him since, have in fact cropped up in those dreams as well. Yet despite the tidiness of this interpretation, it also appears to raise some questions: although Shaul's reaction would suggest a traumatic experience ("I was so scared that I didn't speak for a month"), the event itself, while certainly unpleasant, does not seem powerful enough to warrant such a reaction, and lacks what Freud has dubbed "traumatic force" (1896: 193–194). It is furthermore reminiscent of familiar war stories; hence it seems that, just as Shaul's dreams "cite" other texts in order to "remember" Shaul's personal trauma, so too does Shaul "remember" through other texts, specifically through texts dealing with the wars intermingled in his first dream: the Yom Kippur War and the Vietnam War.

At least three texts can be mentioned here: the first is the Israeli film *HaAyit* (The Vulture; Yaky Yosha, 1981), which deals with the Yom Kippur War. The film opens with a battle waged on the dunes of the Sinai Peninsula; at the end of this scene, the protagonist approaches the body of an Egyptian soldier, removes his watch, and puts it on his own wrist. The second text is Haim Be'er's book *The Pure Element of Time* (Havalìm, literally "cords" 1998), wherein the protagonist recounts seeing an apparition during a battle in Yom Kippur War: "On a sand dune, among shell casings and some low desert bush, I saw an arm—one arm, torn off, tanned, hairy, with a big steel watch on it, a very virile watch that had stopped" (ibid.: 272). The third text is Tim O'Brien's story "Speaking of Courage," which describes a scene from the Vietnam War in which a soldier is buried in mud, his hand and wristwatch exposed: "Kiowa was almost completely under. There was a knee. There was an arm and a gold wristwatch and part of a boot" (O'Brien 1991: 168). Thus, consciously or unconsciously, *Parshat*'s creators replicate existing stories, or clichéd scenes, presenting them as an authentic memory in Shaul's mind.

In its reflexive or even pastiche-like use of representations of other traumas, *Parshat* seems to be pointing to a difficulty with respect to the very possibility of the representation of trauma. The principal message conveyed by this representational strategy is that not only is it difficult to speak the trauma (as it is an event exceeding the limits of understanding), but it is also impossible to authentically describe a personal trauma, as it always gets "contaminated" by other

traumatic representations; thus personal memory commingles with the other's memory, and the personal commingles with the collective.

However, another way of reading the incorporation of other traumas in the form of pastiche is to see it as a distortion or as a displacement mechanism that distances not only Shaul from the traumatic event, helping him to "disremember" (Walker 2005: 17–19) but also the text itself. In other words, it seems that something else underlies Shaul's dreams, something of which the text itself is not conscious and of which it does not "speak." What is that something? An intertextual reading through the film *Waltz with Bashir* may provide a few answers to this question.

Between *Parashat HaShavua* and *Waltz with Bashir*

The main story in *Waltz* concerns the protagonist's attempts to uncover the meaning of a memory that arises after a meeting with his friend Boaz: "That night, for the first time in 20 years, I had a flashback of the war in Lebanon. Not just Lebanon, West Beirut. Not just West Beirut, but the massacre at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps." In the memory (or flashback, the cinematic term used by Folman), the protagonist sees himself with two other friends coming out of the sea and walking toward the destroyed city of Beirut, while flares light up the sky in the background. The soldiers begin to walk the streets, when suddenly a mass of lamenting women emerges ahead of them. At this point the memory ends. Folman tries to reconstruct the event and starts interviewing people about their war experiences and memories, only to discover that the memory could not possibly be based in reality and is therefore fallacious.

Feeling at a loss, Folman speaks with Uri Sivan, whom he calls "my psychologist," and the latter offers him an interpretation of this "false" or displaced memory: the sea symbolizes fears, and Folman's interest in the massacre has to do both with the fact that he had been in its proximity and with his interest in other camps, namely the Nazi extermination camps. Sivan concludes by claiming that the only way Folman could understand the "memory" is by figuring out what really happened there, and what he had to do with it.

Folman indeed continues to investigate; he finally comes to understand that during the massacre in Sabra and Shatila, he was present on one of the roofs surrounding the camp, but at a distance that did not enable him to see what was going on inside it. After solving the "riddle," the film shows Folman's face in close-up, as it was shown at the end of the distorted memory; and then, as if from his point

of view, we witness a transition from animation to live action footage, in which we see the horrific aftermath of the Sabra and Shatila massacre, including piled-up and dismembered corpses.

There is a strong parallel between the solution proffered by the film *Waltz* to its enigmatic memory, and that proffered by the series *Parashat* to Shaul's dreams. As in *Waltz*, the solution in *Parashat* leads to an event that took place in the Lebanon War, one in which Folman/Shaul each witnessed some immoral act for which they were not responsible, while nevertheless being on the side of the perpetrator. Moreover, in both cases, there is an attempt by the protagonist to divest oneself of responsibility and accountability for the deed, and even to feign innocence. Firstly, in linking the events of the Lebanon War to the memory of the Holocaust,[5] the protagonists—like other Jewish Israelis—hold onto the victim position precisely in situations wherein, they are the victimizers, or at least on the side of the victimizing party (Ophir 2000). Secondly, both protagonists relieve themselves of responsibility by casting themselves as children: Shaul through screen memories from childhood, a type of memory according to Freud is used "for the sake of its innocence" (1899: 317), and Folman through a memory in which he is "reborn" out of the water, with the flares assisting the massacre already in the air.

The upshot of this analysis is that Shaul's memory—just like his dreams and his childhood stories, and just like Ari Folman's hallucination in *Waltz*—is merely a displaced and absolving version of the constitutive event of both texts: the Sabra and Shatila massacre, or perhaps any event in which the Israeli subject functions as a bystander-perpetrator who is simultaneously responsible for an immoral deed and (supposedly) an uninvolved spectator. Yet the argument that *Parashat* is merely another version of the trauma raised by *Waltz* is not the bottom line of this discussion; it merely lays the groundwork for comparing the two texts to advance a more general claim: noting the similarities between *Parashat* and *Waltz* allows us to discuss the significant differences between them—differences related to the media in which they were made.

In his examination of the ending of *Waltz*, Raz Yosef argues that the transition from animation to live action marks a shift of consciousness within the protagonist, who arrives at a belated recognition of the memory of the massacre, leading in turn to a shift of consciousness within the film's viewers as well, who awaken to the "recurring memory of death" that demands that they accept ethical responsibility for a horror they did not see at the time, and then "to talk about the meaning of [their] blindness to the traumatic story of the massacre at Sabra and Shatila" (Yosef 2010a: 322). Yosef's conclusion stems from Caruth's analysis of

Freud's dream of the burning child, and suggests an analogy between, on the one hand, the father who awakens from the dream in order to see and speak the other's death, and on the other hand the protagonist and viewers of *Waltz*, who awaken to a recognition of the wrongdoing committed in Sabra and Shatila and of their failure to see this wrongdoing in time.

Not everyone agrees with Yosef's claim that *Waltz* leads its protagonist and viewers to accept responsibility for the acts perpetrated in the camps. Raya Morag, for example, argues that the ethical position cannot be content with merely seeing; that the film's cathartic, "redemptive" ending raises many ethical problems; and that "the pursuit of resolution as the climax of the journey, as the *telos* of the narrative, becomes a missed opportunity, as both the protagonist and the film get stuck in Folman's 'discovery'" (Morag 2010). Similarly, Shmulik Duvdevani contends that the cathartic ending of the film figures Folman, rather than the Palestinians, as the real tragic hero of the massacre, and at the same time as not being morally responsible for it, as he is akin to an "innocent in Eden" whose eyes were finally opened (Duvdevani 2013: 64–65).

It appears that both Morag and Duvdevani find it difficult to accept not only *Waltz*'s solution but also its ending, which conveys a very strong sense of resolution, of closure. In this sense, despite the fact that *Waltz* is certainly not a mainstream film, and that its narrative is far from the classical paradigm,[6] it does not go beyond the bounds of one of the central characteristics of mainstream cinema, namely the subordination of the various elements in the film to an overarching causal, teleological sequence aiming at closure, or as Morag puts it: "*Waltz* structures a causal narrative" (2012: 99). She continues: "[T]he quest for the missing days entails finding the missing piece of his memory. Although this missing piece is shocking live footage of the Sabra and Shatila massacres, it still functions as the protagonist's revelatory insight and the end of his self-tormenting search for missing memory" (ibid.: 100–101).

Against this backdrop, a significant difference can be pointed out between *Waltz* and *Parashat*, or between the cinematic narrative and its television counterpart. Film scholar Rick Altman, for example, argues that whereas cinematic narrative is "goal-driven," television narrative is "menu-driven"; that is to say, it is marked by synchronic rather than diachronic relations (Altman 1986: 44, 1992: 36). Hence, while it could be argued that every film is oriented towards its ending (even if it diverges from a strictly linear trajectory), in television series the ending does not hover constantly above the text, and many series are written without any certainty about the end nor about when it might occur. Consequently,

the unfolding of events cannot be regarded as "striving for resolution." Thus watching a television series is related more to continuity and cyclicality than to climax and ending (Fiske 1987: 183).

One of the major ramifications of the temporality of the serial has to do with the psychology of the characters. When Jean Archer examines what she calls the "fate of the subject in the narrative without end," she notes that the absence of closure has a crucial impact on the psychology of the character, for even when some understanding has been attained as to a character's identity, it can subsequently be disrupted (Archer 1992: 91). In this sense, the television character in episodic series tends to be more dispersed and less coherent than his or her cinematic counterpart. Yet the serial form is more accommodating not only to the psychology of the character, but also to its therapeutic treatment. According to Jane Feuer (2009), television is the most suitable medium for describing the "reality" of psychoanalysis or psychodynamic treatment; serial narratives, like dynamic psychotherapy, can not only raise problems and offer solutions, but also have the potential to hold their viewers and characters in an infinite process, or a finite one but without closure.[7]

To the extent that a serial fulfills its potential to not bring narratives to closure, that is, not to solve problems, it would appear suitable not only to the portrayal of psychological therapy, but also to the depiction of post-traumatic experience, at the heart of which lies the compulsive and cyclical return to the traumatic event (Freud 1914a). This contrasts with the linearity and closure characteristic of many films. Thus we have seen though it is not linear and certainly not "classical," *Waltz* offers closure and resolution to the dilemma arising at its opening. The moment the "riddle" is solved and the text is brought to an end, one gets the impression that this resolution in and of itself releases the protagonist from the compulsive return characterizing trauma.

Indeed, the circle that was opened during the conversation with Boaz comes to a close at the end of the film, when Folman recalls and recognizes his quasi-responsibility for the massacre. Single narrative line, even though it contains manifold digressions, leads from the opening scene to the closing scene of the film, the latter "closing the circle" opened by the former. In *Parashat*, by contrast, the circle is not brought to a close, and even after Shaul has solved the riddle of his dreams, the event underlying it continues to haunt him. Beyond the personality differences between Shaul and Folman, the fact that each of them operates in a different medium (television and film, respectively) significantly influences how each copes with his trauma. To put the differences into sharper

relief, I will focus on one scene from *Parashat*, which appears in the tenth episode of the second season.

Second Season, Tenth Episode, Last Scene

After discovering the source of his nightmares, Shaul undergoes a crisis, leading him to smoke massive quantities of marijuana, lose connection with those around him and lose touch with reality. Despite having solved the riddle of his dreams, and despite his son being alive and well, Shaul continues to be haunted by hallucinations, to which he responds by returning to the infantile state characterized by lack of responsibility and by dependence on others. In other words, the traumatic experience does not let go of Shaul, and both the protagonist and the series get stuck not in the discovery, but rather, as I will now illustrate, mainly in the compulsive return to the traumatic event.

Shaul keeps trying to change and undergoes a metamorphosis: he starts eating healthfully and begins kayak training with a personal coach named Alex (later revealed to be a Russian oligarch), an act he defines as an attempt to save himself from himself and from how he has "neglected his soul." At some point, Alex poses a challenge to Shaul: kayaking with him down the Yukon River. In preparation for this trip, Shaul and Alex go out to train in the Sea of Galilee—a training session that takes place over three scenes in the tenth episode of the second season.

In the first scene, it turns out that there has been an expectation gap between Alex and Shaul: whereas Alex's goal is to win the Yukon River kayak competition, Shaul declares that he is not the competitive type. Shocked by this answer, Alex asks Shaul whether he is indeed "with him," and Shaul replies, "I'm with you, I'm with you. Sure I'm with you. Whatever you say, *Captain*." This sentence, uttered jokingly, will resonate in more serious tones in the second scene of this plot line. After Shaul complains of being mistreated by Alex, Alex replies, "Here I'm not your coach, Shaul. . . . Here I'm the *captain* and these are high seas. . . . Discipline at sea is sacrosanct, and objections or doubts are an attempt at mutiny."

To be sure, while the army functions as a metaphor in the relationship between Alex and Shaul, metaphors tend to distanciate the text from its literal meaning or, as John Fiske notes, allow the television text to expand its range of possible meanings and to become polysemic (Fiske 1986: 401). The use of the military term "captain" in this case enables the viewer to link the events at the Sea of Galilee to other narratives related to Shaul's military experiences. In the present

episode the literal facet of the metaphor is further supported by two additional plot lines: the time spent by Gili, Shaul's younger son, in a military boarding school; and the military trial of Assaf, Shaul's older son, for desertion.

No link between Shaul's story and those of his sons is offered in the text; the various plot lines in the episode, centering on the stories of the three men of the Nawi family, are associatively rather than causally connected. Based on this associative logic, we are justified in assigning greater significance to the military metaphor accompanying Shaul and Alex, and even in placing it front and center. In this sense, the text takes advantage of the polysemy inherent in the segmented television narrative (as opposed to the linear cinematic narrative). As Fiske puts it: "segmentation, with its associative structure, is more likely to produce an open text that offers more readily a range of semiotic potential than [does] a text like a film that relies more on narrative sequence and cause and effect for its structuring principles, for these are agents of semiotic closure" (ibid.: 402).

Shaul and Alex's training session on the Sea of Galilee becomes associated with the army in general and with both of Israel's wars in Lebanon in particular. And it is through this same association that we can also read the last, somewhat hallucinatory scene of the episode.[8] In this scene, Shaul and Alex row ashore and step onto the beach, when suddenly Alex takes out a sniper rifle. In response to Shaul's inquiry, Alex explains that it is not important, and that he is just going to visit a childhood friend of his named Tolik Chernin. At this point, Shaul begins to object and, his voice mounting gradually to shouts, utters the following:

Shaul You used me, eh? You turned me into the "boss's lackey"[9] for a murderer, and I believed you. I'm such an idiot. Shaul Nawi, the sucker. . . . Tell me the truth: Did you use me now, or didn't you? Huh?

Alex Shaul, it's a long story. You only came in at the end of it . . . . (*Alex begins to walk up the hill towards an unfamiliar house*).

Shaul (*shouting upward*) Tolik Chernin, wake up! [Figure 5.6] Wake up, Tolik Chernin! Alex is here! Tolik Chernin, wake up, you asshole! (*the sound of a gun being loaded is heard; Shaul approaches the kayak and keeps shouting*) Chernin, wake up, you asshole! Alex is here! Wake up, Chernin! (*Shaul rows away on the kayak, his voice becoming increasingly dim*). Chernin! Chernin, wake up! Chernin! (*Fade out. End of episode*)

Judging by the military associations with which we have arrived at this scene, it appears that it functions not just as a direct continuation of the plot line dealing with theYukon River training, but as an indirect continuation of the plot line dealing with Shaul's post-traumatic experiences. Once again Shaul finds himself

Figure 5.6 Shaul shouting, "Tolik Chernin, wake up!" (*Parashat HaShavua*).

positioned as a simple soldier exploited by people stronger than him in order to commit an immoral act, and once again he is told to remain silent. This is another reenactment of the recurring situation in Shaul's own life, as well as the lives of many soldiers in Israeli cinema, who "stand by, helplessly watching the horrors unfolding before [them]—an expulsion, a murder, a lynch . . . [they try] tries to act, but fail" (Gertz and Hermoni 2011: 40). This time, while Shaul chooses to shout out rather than stand by silently, it remains unclear whether his shouting is of any use, or whether it comes too late.

From a narrative perspective, what is interesting about this scene is that, while appearing to be completely detached from Shaul's past and from his traumatic experiences, at the same time it lapses back into them, compulsively replicating and displacing them. Moreover, it is precisely the ostensible disconnect between the previous plot lines following Shaul and the present plot line that enables the more complex representation of the post-traumatic experience. What is discernible here is not just a compulsive return to the traumatic situation, but also an event detached from a clear narrative trajectory leading from cause (the traumatic event) to effect (the compulsive return); and this detachment is created thanks to the unique narrative structure of the serial form, and specifically its associative structure.

This last scene, in other words, strengthens the traumatic potential built into the serial, in which, as in the post-traumatic experience, "the future is no longer

continuous with the past, but is united with it through a profound discontinuity" (Caruth 1996: 14). Moreover, beyond return and recurrence, *Parashat* a serial also offers connections among various disconnected time lines, enabling them to coexist in such a way that, as in the post-traumatic experience, "the very distinction between psychic time and chronological time seems suspended" (Elsaesser 2001: 197). In *Parashat*, the compulsive return is detached from the event itself, or from the narrative sequence launched by the event, and only an interpretive act can draw the connections between them.

Yet *Parashat* does not end there; in the following season, Shaul continues to move between different worlds, between different realities, and his feelings of guilt continue to haunt him. This time the main reason for this guilt is related to an affair Shaul had had several years earlier, with a lover to whom he had given a large sum of money. At the end of the season, Shaul finds his lover living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, in a Jewish settlement called Ma'ale Shaul, which was built with the aid of the money he had provided (Harlap 2016a). Will Shaul, who is vigorously opposed to the settlements, be able to relieve himself of responsibility? Is he indeed not involved or responsible this time as well, even though the settlement was constructed using his own money and in his own name? It appears that *Parashat*, in contrast to *Waltz*, does not absolve Shaul of responsibility; nor does it bring any circles to a close. Instead, it leaves its protagonist in infinite pursuit. As far as Shaul is concerned, this pursuit will never end, for, although the last episode of the third season ended with the words "To be continued," the follow-up will never come, as the series was taken off the air.

To conclude, there is on the one hand a clear link between the series *Parashat HaShavua* and the Lebanon War films made during the same period—a link consisting not merely of their engagement with the same war, but also their shared focus on the trauma inflicted on Israeli society by this war, as well as their ingress into the characters' psychic lives. On the other hand, however, it is evident that the medium that offers a more intriguing choice for dealing with trauma is not film, but television—precisely the medium so often derided for its superficiality and inability to deal with reality in complex ways. This alternative emerges not from some new content or visual language, but rather from the distinctive narrative structure characterizing the medium.

6

"Black Box": Memory, Television, and Ethnicity in *Zaguri Imperia*

Aviel Zaguri [Oz Zehavi] What are you? Deaf? It's the siren![1] Stand up!

Beber Zaguri [Moshe Ivgy] It's not my family that died. I'm not standing.

Aviel It's your people. Stand up.

Beber It's not my people. My people came to this country from riches, palaces, and luxury. And they ruined our lives [. . .] When we came here, the Ashkenazim took all their anger about what the Germans did to them out on us [. . .] Do you ever hear of a memorial ceremony for the *ma'abarot*?[2] No. Only [for] the Holocaust [. . .]

Aviel Don't you understand you're only perpetuating the discrimination this way?

Beber It should be perpetuated. Why should they memorialize[3] only themselves? [. . .] Why do I need to know the names of all *their* places? The entire history of *their* writers and poets?

Aviel Because it's the history of the Jewish people!

Beber And I'm not the history of the Jewish people? Why? Do they know anything about what happened to me? Do they know anything? Do they teach them in school about my "shtetl" in Africa?[4] [. . .] Every year I'd stand during the siren, but after I realized they weren't interested in what I went through, I stopped. When they make television shows and memorials about me, when the director of the dinosaurs [Spielberg] makes a movie about the *Egoz*,[5] then, and only then, I'll stand.

This dialogue, which takes place between Beber Zaguri and his son Aviel, during the sounding of the siren on the morning of Israeli Holocaust Remembrance Day, appeared in the first episode of the second season of the daily television drama *Zaguri Imperia* (hereinafter: *Zaguri*). Not surprisingly, the scene raised heated media and audience reaction, which contributed to the widespread cultural debate sparked by the series during its first season, when it became, according to Israeli cable company HOT, the strongest series launch in the company's history, as well as the strongest in terms of online following, "with

tens of thousands of followers on Facebook and Instagram" (Averbuch 2014). Further evidence of the prominence of *Zaguri* in Israeli popular discourse is the fact that the phrase "Zaguri Imperia" topped the list of most common Google searches in Israel in 2014 (Arad 2014).

Zaguri is a daily serial drama that tells the story of the Zaguris [Figure 6.1], a family of Moroccan origin (that bears the series' creator's surname) residing in Be'er Sheva (a peripheral city in southern Israel). The series' precipitating incident is the return of Aviel, the family's prodigal son who had left home years before and has not returned since, following the recent death of his grandfather. Aviel, now an up-and-coming IDF officer, had not only physically left home, but also become estranged from it, by "passing as Ashkenazi," the analogous term in Israeli society for "passing as white" (Sasson-Levy and Shoshana 2013). Aviel has Hebraized his surname from "Zaguri" to "Gur,"[6] he consumes mostly Western culture (a fact that he emphasizes by reading Russian literature), has an Ashkenazi girlfriend, and generally expresses contempt for his culture of origin, primarily for the superstitious beliefs and excessive emotional displays that characterize his family. Aviel's physical appearance (in part a product of the casting of Oz

Figure 6.1 The Zaguris (*Zaguri Imperia*). Photo: Ohad Romano.

Zehavi, an Ashkenazi actor) also enables him to "pass" as Ashkenazi, in contrast to the other members of his family, whose "Mizrahiness" is evident in both appearance and behavior (including characters portrayed by Ashkenazi actresses, such as Aviel's mother and grandmother).

The narrative compels Aviel to remain in his family home, despite continuous attempts to leave, and by the end of two seasons it appears he is not able to find his place in any cultural arena. Though this storyline gradually recedes from the narrative focus, while various other storylines move to the foreground, its fundamental conflict—that of acceptance versus rejection of home and of Moroccan/Mizrahi culture—hovers over the series as a whole, relevant to both characters and viewers.

It is therefore not surprising that the public discourse surrounding *Zaguri* was primarily focused on the ethnic issue, and in particular on debating whether the series offered a stereotypical, negative, and narrow representation of Mizrahim, or rather a subversive, oppositional challenge to the hegemonic Ashkenazi elite, deconstructing dominant ideological categories such as Arab/Jew and Ashkenazi/Mizrahi.

Thus, on the one hand, some, like Hani Zubida (2014), have argued that the series ridicules Mizrahim, by leaning on—and accentuating—prevailing pejorative stereotypes of representation; Zubida concludes his criticism by asking: "Will Mizrahim forever be presented as ignorants, delinquents, thieves, or, in short, the bottom of the Israeli barrel?" On the other hand, others defended the series against such criticisms; as Merav Alush Levron (2015b) argues: "[such displays of] anger and opposition would be justified if *Zaguri Imperia* were devoid of subversiveness toward the hegemony, [if it were] bigoted and orientalist toward its characters and lacking in political awareness of outside reality. But it is in fact abundant with subversiveness."

As Alush-Levron points out, this intense debate surrounding an audiovisual text dealing with "Mizrahiness" is not a new phenomenon in Israeli culture, and in many ways reproduces a similar debate that took place two decades earlier, sparked by the film *Sh'chur* (Black Magic, Hanna Azoulay Hasfari and Shmuel Hasfari, 1994), which also focused on a Moroccan family living in southern Israel, and which also, as Alush-Levron puts it, "raised a cultural and public uproar among many intellectuals, filmmakers, and viewers" (2015b). This turmoil surrounding *Sh'chur* was explained by Yosefa Loshitzky (1996: 87) as having been triggered by a text that "arrives on the cultural landscape and touches an open nerve [. . .] develop[ing] debates on significant issues of history,

representation, and national Identity." This last description, as I will argue in this chapter, applies verbatim to *Zaguri* as well.

Though its first two parts explore parallels between *Sh'chur* and *Zaguri*, the primary purpose of this chapter is to examine the rise and success of *Zaguri* in contemporary Israeli culture. I will argue that the series articulates two major cultural processes in Israeli society: the first is the introduction of what is known as the "new Mizrahi discourse" (an essentially post-colonialist discourse) into mainstream Israeli popular culture, and the second is Israeli television's—or rather Israeli post-television's (as presented in Chapter 1)—becoming one of the most important and complex sites of cultural life in Israel. In other words, I will show how *Zaguri* makes use of the unique attributes of the televisual text, as well as those of the medium of television in its contemporary incarnation, in order to join the introduction of the new Mizrahi discourse into the Israeli mainstream, becoming one of the most prominent manifestations of this cultural process.

The chapter's first part will examine textual and contextual parallels between *Sh'chur* and *Zaguri*, which will not only enable a more comprehensive view of *Zaguri*, but also provide insights into major cultural processes in Israeli society. The second part will focus on the position ascribed to the medium of television in both these texts, and by extension in Israeli culture, situating *Zaguri* firmly within the rise of Israeli post-television. The final parts will examine three key scenes from the series that not only hold broader implications for the series as a whole, but will also offer a self-reflexive commentary on the medium of television, as well as piercing criticisms of Israeli culture and society.

Twenty Years On: *Sh'chur* and *Zaguri*

Taking place in the 1990s (the time of its release), *Sh'chur* tells the story of Cheli (short for Rachel), portrayed by Hanna Azoulay Hasfari, who also wrote the film's script and was seen as the main creative force behind it (which added an autobiographical dimension to the film, much like in *Zaguri*'s case). Cheli is a successful television presenter for Channel 2 (Israel's primary—and at that time only—commercial broadcast channel) who is compelled, following the death of her estranged father, to reconnect with her past as the adolescent Rachel (Orly Ben-Garti), the daughter of Moroccan immigrants, growing up in a development town[7] in southern Israel. *Sh'chur*'s narrative alternates between its protagonist's

present life as Cheli, and her recollections of her past as Rachel, a spirited child who is ashamed of her large family; of the culture of "sh'chur" (a form of sorcery practiced in Morocco and other North African countries) and the superstition it perpetuates (Figure 6.2); and above all of her cognitively challenged sister, Pnina (Ronit Elkabetz), who is referred to as "crazy Pnina." Rachel is ostensibly "rescued" from this "inferior" culture when she gets sent to a boarding school for gifted children in Jerusalem (the first point in the plot where the viewers meet an Ashkenazi character), where she changes her name to Cheli, and begins her journey toward the heart of the Israeli hegemony, ending up in Channel 2's prime-time slot.

As Yosefa Loshitzky (1996) described it, *Sh'chur* raised public debate, with some, much like in *Zaguri*'s case, criticizing its stereotypical ethnic representations. Sammy Smooha, for example, argues that *Sh'chur* imparts to its audience that "cultural underdevelopment is a burden that Oriental Jews carry with them from their countries of origin, and which they can get rid of only in modern Israel" (quoted in Loshitzky, 1996: 96). Orly Levi suggests, moreover, that *Sh'chur*'s script is ridiculous, implausible, and borderline absurd, and that it "presents a certain

Figure 6.2 Rachel (Orly Ben-Garti) watching her mother (Gila Almagor) and sisters (Ronit Elkabetz and Esti Yerushalmi) performing a sh'chur (*Sh'chur*).

population in an ignorant and primitive light" (Levi 1995: 68). On the other hand, Mizrahi recording artist Kobi Oz has argued that the film is "an authentic document, executed flawlessly and merrily" and that it "reminded me of many images from my own childhood" (1995: 67). Conversely, it has also been argued that *Sh'chur*, "one of the most important Israeli films ever made, destroys all the sacred values of the first generation of Orientals and invites the sons' generation to dance on the grave" (Dov Alfon, quoted in Loshitzky 1996: 90). At the crux of the debate lies primarily the character of Pnina, the cognitively challenged sister, interpreted by many as a metaphor for either the "natural disability" of Moroccan Jews as a whole, or how they are perceived by the Israeli hegemony (Niv 1999: 134).

Many similarities can be found between *Sh'chur* and *Zaguri*: Both texts center on a large family of Moroccan origin, residing in Israel's periphery; in both narratives, an estranged son/daughter returns home after having found success in the outside world (in the media or in the military), following the demise of the family patriarch (father or grandfather); and in both cases the estranged offspring, who is effectively "passing as Ashkenazi," has not only adopted Ashkenazi culture, being ashamed of their own ethnic culture, but also adopted a new name, thus distancing themselves from their origins. Thus, Cheli and Aviel are both characters wrestling with split identities, torn between the worlds of home and hegemony, and both discover the steep costs of their detachment, a detachment that initially might have been imposed upon them, but one that they have both reinforced and cultivated. Furthermore, both texts present a family in which the forces of *sh'chur*, or superstition reign, and in which one child is disabled (cognitively challenged/insane Pnina in *Sh'chur*, and Avishai (Daniel Sabag), who suffered a childhood head trauma, in *Zaguri*). Another point of resemblance, which will be elaborated on later in this book, is the self-reflexive discussion of television initiated by both texts. Lastly, as was previously detailed, both *Sh'chur* and *Zaguri* led to a lively—at times turbulent—public debate.

Note, however, that public discourse surrounding *Sh'chur* mostly focused on whether the film was "authentic" or distorted, and on whether it offered a demeaning portrayal of the Mizrahi/Moroccan family or a positive one, largely sidestepping questions of cultural subversiveness. In other words, the popular discourse of the mid–1990s—unlike that surrounding *Zaguri*—only examined such a text as potentially critical of Moroccan culture, and had not yet begun examining it as potentially critical of the Ashkenazi hegemony as well.

Another significant difference, in terms of both texts' reception, is their levels of success. While *Zaguri* has managed to gain widespread popularity with

audiences as well as critical recognition among prominent scholars from the Israeli cultural elite, it seems that *Sh'chur* only managed to find success (in terms of ticket sales as well as discursively) among the cultural hegemony, and not among the general public, including periphery-based Mizrahi audiences, with whom the film was presumably concerned (Loshitzky 1996: 95; Niv 1999: 140).

These differences in reception between *Sh'chur* and *Zaguri* can be attributed to several factors, three of which shall be mentioned here. Firstly, it is important to acknowledge the wider cultural transformation that took place in Israel during the two decades that separate *Sh'chur* and *Zaguri*. As was mentioned in the first chapter, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, post-Zionism has been deeply embedded "within the Israeli discourse of identity and the Israeli way of life" (Ram 2006b, 173), no longer "the discourse of a handful of marginal intellectuals" (ibid.: 170), but a "post-Zionist condition" that is "abundantly expressed in both highbrow culture [. . .] and in everyday, material, popular, and commercial culture" (ibid.: 169).

An integral component of post-Zionist criticism stems from post-colonialist discourse (ibid.: 37), which criticized the Ashkenazi hegemony's attitude toward "Mizrahim," or Jewish immigrants from Arab countries. And just as post-Zionism infiltrated mainstream Israeli culture, so have post-colonial identities and sensibilities, at times dubbed "New Mizrahim," "New Mizrahi discourse" (Chetrit 2000), or "the New Mizrahi Narrative" (Kizel 2014). And so, what was once relegated to intellectual elites—including filmmakers (Yosef 2011a: 63–81)—and to members of the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow Coalition, has made its way into popular culture and discourse.[8]

Just as some eulogized post-Zionism during the first decade of the twenty-first century (Livne 2001), there were those who similarly decreed the death of the new Mizrahi narrative, lamenting the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow Coalition's lack of influence, having failed to make its ideas and worldview resonate with wider audiences (Yonah et al. 2007: 32). However, it seems these proclamations of the demise or failure of the new Mizrahi narrative were exaggerated, and that this narrative, as Arie Kizel (2014) wrote while *Zaguri* was airing, is very much alive (289), having been appropriated by—and becoming a "second language" of—the young generation, a generation that lives in "an era of coming out of the closet, both in terms of its freedom to express its Mizrahiness and the legitimacy it is afforded on various platforms (academic, media, and cultural), and in terms of its ability to dissolve to some extent the boundaries of narrative discourse in the public domain" (ibid.: 287–288).

For example, "the Arab Jew," one of the central concepts of the new Mizrahi narrative (Shenhav 2006), which was initially "the marker of a cultural and political avant-garde" (Shenhav and Hever 2012: 114), features in the headline of Maor Zaguri's first column in *Yediot Achronot* (one of Israel's highest-circulation dailies), titled "I Am an Arab Jew" (Zaguri 2015). Elsewhere, Zaguri, along with Mizrahi poet Roi Hasan, was co-listed as number six on the list of "most influential people in Israeli media in 2014," a decision explained in a sidebar also titled—this time in Arabic—"I am an Arab Jew," the author going on to explain that "the Israeli-Mizrahi, Jewish-Arab identity has stopped apologizing and hiding from shame behind the walls of academia, and is finding its place at the heart of media and cultural prime time [. . .] over the past year or two, the Mizrahi struggle, which includes the insertion of Arab motifs into the very heart of Israeli cultural life, has become one of the [most] popular issues not only in academic and literary circles, but among *mainstream* ones as well" (Avivi 2016: 28: 30; emphasis mine). While this does not suggest that the Israeli mainstream has adopted the perspective of the new Mizrahi narrative—as indeed it did not adopt post-Zionism—expressions of this narrative can nevertheless be found in more and more cultural sites—not only in elitist films, but also in popular television and online series.

Which leads to another point of differentiation between *Sh'chur* and *Zaguri*, at the level of reception: while *Sh'chur* was perceived as "the first experimental 'art film' associated with Israeli Oriental ethnicity" (Loshitzky 1996: 88), *Zaguri*, a television series, inhabits a medium largely considered to be artistically inferior, and furthermore operates within generic boundaries generally perceived as particularly lowbrow, that is, the daily drama serial, a term that was for many years used in Israeli culture as a euphemism for series that displayed distinctive generic traits of the telenovela. In many textual aspects, *Zaguri* considerably distanced itself from the telenovela—in terms of cinematography, narrative structure, acting styles, and themes—and yet in terms of its large ensemble cast and multiple plot threads, as well as in discourse—an integral element in generic definition (Mittell 2004)—it seems to oscillate between the ("lowbrow") "daily drama" and the ("highbrow") "serious drama." Thus, for example, at the 2014 Israeli Television Awards ceremony, *Zaguri* competed (and won) in the category of Best Daily Drama, and not Best Dramatic Series (unlike *BeTipul*, which had avoided a similar fate despite also being a daily drama); while on the other hand, *Zaguri* has been attributed with "serious" and even subversive, anti-hegemonic statements. Its second season, despite raising intense public debate and garnering

critical acclaim among opinion leaders, was not nominated in any category at the 2015 Israeli Television Awards (Harlap 2016b).

This tension in generic delineation and reception is related also to the polysemic nature of *Zaguri*, whose semantic wealth—generated by its large ensemble cast and multiple plot threads—enables many divergent readings, so that like many television narratives, it is characterized more by continuity and cyclicality than by climax and ending (Fiske 1987: 183). Thus, unlike most works of cinema—among them *Sh'chur*—that offer a "goal-driven" narrative, *Zaguri* offers a "menu-driven" narrative (Altman 1986: 44), a feature that enables it to "explore a multiplicity of relevant perspectives" so that "[t]here are no objective truths, no answers, no permanent securities, no uncompromised actions, no absolutes" (Livingstone 2013: 52). Thus, rather than being a medium which, out of an inherent need for popularity, can serve solely hegemonic worldviews, as certain critical positions regard popular television to be, it seems this medium rather has the potential to infiltrate—both literally and figuratively—Israeli homes and influence public discourse, moreso than any other "artistic" or "highbrow" medium. Yet as we saw in the first chapter, television drama has changed over the years, and the comparison between *Zaguri* and *Sh'chur* can teach us new things about Israeli (post)television.

From "Dancers Dancing in the Snow" to "Habibi Diali"

A key theme in *Sh'chur* is the role of television in the life of its protagonist, and particularly in the forming of her identity. In the film's opening scene (or the *syuzhet*), we see Cheli as a famous television personality, hosting her own nighttime talk show bearing her name, "Current Events with Cheli Shushan"; in the following scene, which is the first scene in terms of the chronological order of events (or *fabula*), we see the family's first television set brought home by their eldest son in the early 1970s. Television appears again in various scenes throughout the film, including some integral scenes—such as the one in which Rachel renounces her identity as "Cheli," or the one in which she reconnects with her sister and her daughter, who can both control television through magic, or *sh'chur*. It seems that television is, as Orly Lubin (1999: 423) argues, "the film's master-signifier"; in other words, *Sh'chur* depicts television as an ideological outlet of the Ashkenazi hegemony, and the Moroccan culture of *sh'chur* as an oppositional alternative, which subverts and eventually replaces it.

In order to understand *Sh'chur*'s anti-television critique, it is important to examine the nature of television as it is depicted in the film. As was discussed in the first chapter, the first period of Israeli television, "television aleph," or the "Period of Single-Channel Consensus," was mostly characterized by the attempt to maintain the appearance of consensus—one that obviously suppressed the expression of identities that did not conform to Israel's—or rather, to its cultural hegemony's—desired self-image.

This kind of television is the one that appears at the beginning of *Sh'chur*, when Rachel's brother first brings home a television set. While most of the family is either indifferent to or apprehensive about television, Rachel is enchanted by it, zealously staring at it, even when the screen displays nothing but "white noise" or "snow," as it is called in Hebrew. When her brother asks her to stop watching television because "there's nothing on," Rachel, who at the time is watching a classical European ballet performance partially visible through the "snow," answers: "You're wrong. There're all sorts of dancers dancing in the snow." No other metaphor than "dancers dancing in the (white, European) snow" can more fittingly point, on the one hand, to the extent to which this television was detached from and irrelevant to the culture in which Rachel was growing up, and, on the other hand, to the place to which she wished she could run away. It is no coincidence that later on in the film, Rachel imagines herself as a ballerina.

Twenty years later, Rachel, now going by Cheli, has succeeded in entering that magic box, becoming a successful television show host (Figure 6.3). It is now a different kind of television, however, as Cheli's success coincides with the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Israeli television, "television beit" or the "Period of Channel 2 Dominance."

Two main criticisms that were directed at Channel 2—for acting as a "bonfire of nonsense" (Weimann 1999) and for providing only a semblance of multiculturalism (Cohen 2001)—are illustrated in *Sh'chur*, as evidenced in Cheli's opening monologue of her broadcast: "Our program tonight will be about the betrayal of the main Histadrut institutions[9] and the national health services; about the failure of astrologists to predict their own future; and about Yosef Zikerman, who decided to convert to Islam and move to the Palestinian Authority so as to live with his long-time lover." These lines are clearly offered as a parody of the talk shows that characterized Channel 2 in its early years, programs that were criticized by both critics and scholars for "quickly devolving into sensations, scandals, celebritism, and provocation" (Liebes 1999: 95). In other words, *Sh'chur*'s

Figure 6.3 Chely (Hanna Azoulay Hasfari) as television show host (*Sh'chur*).

critique of television is indicative of the wider (and mostly elitist) criticism aimed at television in general, and Channel 2 in particular, as peddling "garbage" disguised as serious and honest debate, rather than actually offering a meaningful and challenging discussion of cultural identity.[10]

From this reading of *Sh'chur*, it is clear that neither of these models of television—the public television of the 1970s, which attempted to erase the Arab/Mizrahi identity by showing "dancers dancing in the snow," and the commercial television of the 1990s, which foregrounded a liberal capitalist ethos and created but a semblance of multiculturalism—is relevant to Rachel/Cheli's identity, each model in its own way erasing her identity. But *Sh'chur* also offers an alternative subject position from which to address television, embodied in the characters of Cheli's cognitively challenged sister and daughter.

Pnina, Cheli's cognitively challenged sister, possesses telekinetic abilities and is able to manipulate the images broadcast on television; in the early 1970s she watches her sister's program from the 1990s, and even turns off the television set that Cheli's daughter is watching, two decades into the future. Pnina passes her supernatural powers, and particularly this ability to control television, on to Cheli's daughter, as they are both seen, toward the film's end, messing with

television viewers and switching channels telepathically. Unlike Cheli, who has found success working in commercial television yet in the process has lost her identity, these disabled yet supernaturally gifted characters retain their identities and their powers of *sh'chur*, manipulating television at will. Or, as Munk (2008) and Lubin (1999) point out, *Sh'chur* posits television as the principal signifier of Ashkenazi hegemony, and the (Moroccan, but also feminine) culture of *sh'chur* as an alternative position that ultimately prevails.

But the Israeli television landscape has changed considerably since *Sh'chur*'s release, and *Zaguri* is airing during "television gimel," or "Israeli post-television." In this period, as was discussed previously, out of a need for branding, Israeli cable and satellite drama series (which are not dependent on ratings) often tend to adopt controversial views on Israeli realities, among them post-Zionist and post-colonialist views. And what better way to attract public attention, raise cultural debates, and generate online buzz than a scene in which a Jewish Israeli man refuses to stand during the sounding of the siren, claiming that Israel does not recognize the injustice to which it has subjected him as a Moroccan?

Zaguri is a representative product of "Israeli post-television" in terms of chronology (it aired about a decade after the beginning of that period of Israeli television), modes of reception, practices of consumption (most of its audience watched it through VOD services, and it generated much social media chatter), and ideology (it adopted, in part, post-Zionist and post-colonialist views, as will soon be illustrated). Additionally, the series self-reflexively examines its own position as a television text in this new era, and its ability, from this position, to perform the same type of "magical" subversion suggested by the women of *Sh'chur*—though this time not directed against television, but rather from within the medium itself. In order to establish this argument, I will examine three key scenes from the series' second season, beginning with the concluding scene of the season (and of the series as a whole, as of this writing).

Initially presented as the main protagonist of the series, Aviel Zaguri fails to come full circle by the end of the series, when the seemingly "obvious" solution—finding his identity and a place at home with his family, and ending up with the beloved Lizzie (Ninette Tayeb)—does not come to pass. But Aviel loses more than his sense of identity and his beloved—he also loses his narrative position as protagonist, having been replaced by Avishag Zaguri (Chen Amsalem), who is seen by some as the primary character to undergo a significant transformation over the series' course, moreso than Aviel, and has also been singled out as carrying symbolic meaning. It has been argued, for example, that Avishag is "a

character that represents the injustice suffered by youth from the periphery" (Mehager 2015), and that the series' creator "also reflects himself" through her (Getz-Salomon 2015).

Avishag, who throughout the two seasons unsuccessfully attempts in various ways to escape her home, finds herself in the last episode arriving in Tel Aviv with her boyfriend; there, in Habima Square, home to Habima National Theater, one of the main symbols of hegemonic culture (and the place where Maor Zaguri began his own journey into the heart of the cultural hegemony, as a theater director), she comes across a group of people wearing headphones and dancing, each to their own rhythm. Avishag does likewise (Figure 6.4): First she listens to a song by Dudu Tassa, an Israeli artist identified with multiculturalism, who combines Western and Iraqi musical styles; at a certain point, however, this song is replaced by a modern version of the song "Habibi Diali," one of the most popular and beloved songs in both Jewish and Muslim Moroccan culture. At first the song is played quietly, as though only Avishag can hear it, but it then grows louder, dominating the scene's soundtrack, and continuing to play over the closing titles.

This concluding scene is in many ways indicative of its time, both in a broader cultural context and in the context of the contemporary television landscape. In the cultural context, the scene indicates that multiculturalism does not have to mean eliminating all individual identities within one homogeneous melting pot;

Figure 6.4 Avishag Zaguri (Chen Amsalem) dancing in Habima Square (*Zaguri Imperia*).

each individual in the group can dance to their own rhythm and music, and they can all still dance together in the same plaza.[11]

In the context of contemporary television, the headphone dance can be interpreted as a metaphor for the viewing experience on Israeli post-television: No longer is this a collective, simultaneous viewing experience, of a large audience not only being told what to watch and when, but also delimited by a unifying (and negating) culture imposed upon it; it is rather a personal viewing experience, each viewer choosing what to watch, how often, when, and where, viewing programs that do not presume to target an imaginary, fabricated "everyone," but rather address "individuals and communities that ask or demand that their voices be heard" (Cohen 2001: 44).[12]

In this kind of television culture, a text like *Zaguri* also has its place—much like "Habibi Diali"—at the heart of the hegemony. And so, *Zaguri* does more than simply announce that "Habibi Diali" has the right to be played in Habima Square; it also offers the option for television to provide its own "Habibi Diali"—a text that allows Mizrahi/Moroccan culture to be expressed, at full volume, in the heart of the city, that is, in the mainstream of Israeli television.

"All But the White Foam": Television and Memory

During the episode in which Beber Zaguri refuses to stand during the sounding of the siren, another little rebellion takes place in the Zaguri household, one which did not make any waves, nor did it spark heated debates in either the Zaguri home or Israeli public discourse, but which nevertheless suggests its own poignant critique of the Israeli modes of cultural memory, and particularly of the role of television in shaping Israeli collective memory. This act of "rebellion" is carried out by Alegria (Hava Ortman), the grandmother of the Zaguri family, while "watching" memorial songs being played on television, while a title card displayed on the screen reads: "Our regular programming will resume after Holocaust Remembrance Day" (Figure 6.5). Behind Alegria, the mother, Vivienne (Sarah von Schwarze), and two of her younger children, Abir (Eyal Shikartsi) and Avigail, or "Guli" (Hila Harush), are performing a traditional ritual against the evil eye (Figure 6.6). Also present in the living room are sons Avishai and Aviel.

At a certain point the song "The Sand Will Remember" begins to play, performed by Chava Alberstein (a prominent Ashkenazi recording artist, who also sings in Yiddish), whose lyrics are by Natan Yonatan (a prominent Ashkenazi

Figure 6.5 Watching television on Israeli Holocaust Remembrance Day: "Our regular programming will resume after Holocaust Remembrance Day" (*Zaguri Imperia*).

Figure 6.6 Alegria (Hava Ortman) and Avishai (Daniel Sabag) watching television, and Vivienne (Sarah von Schwarze) and two of her younger children performing a traditional ritual against the evil eye (*Zaguri Imperia*).

poet). Alegria expresses noticeable disdain for the song, and the following conversation takes place:

Alegria Ashkenazis, they've got songs. What? Like they enjoy being sad.
Avigail (*angrily*) Grandma!
Alegria Abir, where is that suave singer's disc?
Avishai *loads a disc into the stereo system; while the television is still going, the song "The Gambler" by Ofer Levi—a Mizrahi recording artist—begins to play in the background.*
Avigail Turn those songs off already. It's Holocaust Day!
Vivienne At least turn it down.
Alegria (*after singing along with the song for a while*): If you want to be really sad, *these* are depression songs.
Aviel Forget it, Guli. Nobody in this house has any respect for anything.

In order to understand the meaning of Alegria's defiant act, it is necessary to understand that Israeli memorial days—chief among them Yom HaZikaron, or the "Day of Remembrance for the Fallen Soldiers of Israel and Victims of Terror," and "Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day"—do not just function as a means of remembering and commemorating the past, but are primarily used to shape and define the Israeli collective's self-image and reaffirm its societal system of values in the present (Neiger et al. 2011); and so memorial days do not only "memorialize," but also omit events that do not fit hegemonic society's self-image from the national narrative, simply disregarding various forms of "un-honored griefs," or losses that do not extend the griever commensurate recognition, esteem, and social stature (Lebel 2013) with the hegemonic losses. In other words, as Beber Zaguri himself implies later that episode, in the dialogue quoted at the introduction to this chapter, whether an event should be remembered or forgotten is a matter of choice, dependent upon the hegemony's selection of what is to be cherished and memorialized and what is not: a performative act of memory, rather than a purely descriptive one.

One of the notable scholars to have placed emphasis on the performative aspect of history is Pierre Nora (1989), who points to the contrasting natures of human memory as opposed to the national mechanisms of memorialization (which he names "les Lieux de Mémoire," or "The Realms of Memory"). Put another way, Nora differentiates between "living memory," which "remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting," and history, which is "the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer" (ibid.: 8). Nora elaborates on this notion using the fascinating

metaphor of the relationship between the sea and the shore: "if history did not besiege memory, deforming and transforming it, penetrating and petrifying it, there would be no *lieux de mémoire*. Indeed, it is this very push and pull that produce *lieux de mémoire*—moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned [. . .] like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded" (ibid.: 12). A similar metaphor is employed by anthropologist Marc Augé, who writes: "Memory is framed by forgetting in the same way as the contours of the shoreline are framed by the sea" (1998: 3).

A semantically related image, likening historical memory to a seashore, where certain events leave traces as often as others are wiped away, is featured in "The Sand Will Remember" (playing on the Zaguris' television set), which begins with the following lyrics: "The sand will remember the waves / But the foam—will not be remembered / Besides by those who passed / with the late night wind / From their memory it will never be erased / All will return to the depths of the sea / All but *the white foam*." Originally written about the loss of youth, it has become one of the songs most identified with bereavement in Israeli culture, and for a time was the most played song on Israeli radio on Yom HaZikaron (Doron 2009). Despite being embraced by the hegemony, however, the association of this song with national memorial days also contains an implicit criticism of the selectiveness of the Israeli realms of memory, of the act of erasing history that leaves in its wake, instead of shells on the shore, only "the white foam."

Incorporated within an episode in which Beber Zaguri complains that the state chooses to forget his own history—as was the case with the sinking of the *Egoz*—while demanding that he remember only Ashkenazi history, the song acquires a new meaning. In the context of the episode, it seems that most historical events (much like the *Egoz*) "return to the depths of the sea," and all that is left is "the white foam"—or the "white" memory. Against this "white foam," while the television set is still on, all the while displaying the "Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day" title card, Alegria expresses her dissatisfaction, and moreover offers a clear alternative: a Mizrahi—or "black"—song, thus proposing an alternative form of mourning, as well as an alternative form of memory.

This resistance to the "white foam" is reiterated and emphasized several episodes later, when Mizrahi poet Roy Hasan appears on that same television set (Figure 6.7), reading from his groundbreaking poem, "Medinat Ashkenaz" ("Ashkenaz Nation"), which explicitly links "whiteness" and Ashkenaziness: "In the State of Ashkenaz I am mufleṭa /[13] I am ḥaflah /[14] I am honor/ I am lazy/ I am everything that was never here before/ When everything was *white* [. . .] I am an

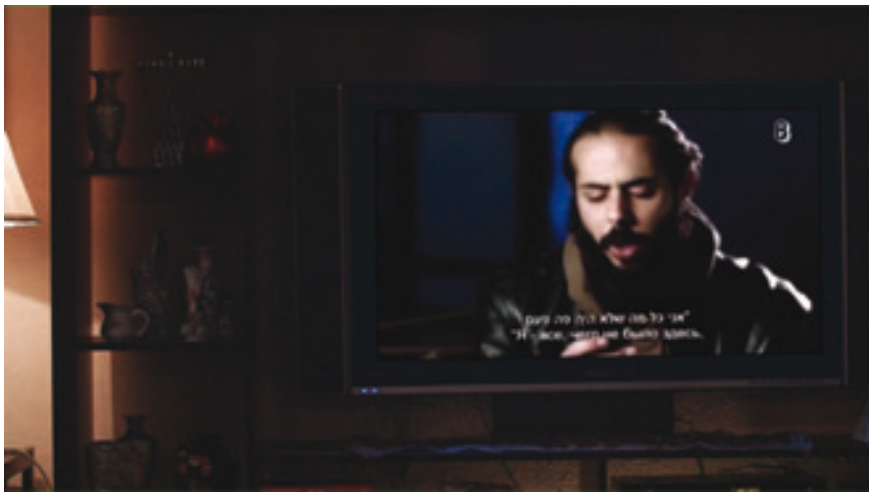

Figure 6.7 Roy Hasan reading from his poem "The State of Ashkenaz" (*Zaguri Imperia*).

"Ars" /[15] I am yalla / kapáyim [clap your hands] / And cheap music / Sub-culture / Sub-standard [. . .]" (Hasan 2013; my emphasis).

Hasan's lyrics touch on another important aspect of Israeli culture and memory: unlike the "sub-standard" "sub-culture" mentioned in the poem, and epitomized by "*yalla kapáyim*!"—an exhortation to "clap your hands!" signifying low culture and noise—, "The Sand Will Remember" in many ways represents the unofficially preferred type of song for remembrance days in Israel, characterized by quiet, minor tones and Western musical conventions (Neiger et al. 2011: 269; Hermoni and Lebel 2013). This notion is strongly entwined with the Israeli "hegemonic bereavement model," which neutralizes anger and external emotional expression, in a way that emphasizes acceptance rather than grievance or protestation (Hermoni and Lebel 2012: 470), as well as with the valued type of "emotional capital" in Israel, which—influenced by Western psychological discourse—calls for restraint and sublimation. This emotional capital, and the cultural capital it entails (as has been elaborated in Chapter 3), dictate that individuals be differentiated, judged, and rewarded (both economically and socially) for their ability to "appropriately" display emotion (Illouz 2008: 93; Illouz 2003).

This hegemonic insistence on certain modes of emotional expression and mourning in Israel has distinct cultural and ethnic aspects: while restrained mourning is associated with Israel's self-perception as a Western culture,

mourning customs characterized by louder, less inhibited, outward expressions of grief, as Ori Schwartz (2013) argus, are often branded "oriental" and "traditional," associated above all with Mizrahiness. This notion is related to the common perception held by many Israelis that associates loudness with Mizrahim (as also implied in Hasan's poem), Arabs, and those of low socioeconomic class (ibid.: 160). Since death during wartime (or during the Holocaust) is for many Israelis one of the most powerful signifiers of national unity, the refusal to take part in the culturally mandated, "proper" type of mourning, and the deliberate rejection of the proper "emotional capital" are statements defying the hegemonic/Ashkenazi attempt to enforce its chosen modes of emotional expression. Alegria and Beber, each in his/her own way, refuse to mourn in the manner decreed appropriate by the Ashkenazi hegemony—quietly and solemnly—and call attention to the arbitrary, and at the same time violent, nature of this compulsory solemnity.

In this sense, not only does *Zaguri* take part in one of the principal cultural processes initiated by the new Mizrahi narrative—the struggle against the Ashkenazi Zionist attempt to wipe out the collective Mizrahi memory, by seeking "to form a Mizrahi collective memory from which a Mizrahi consciousness and alternative vision for the State of Israel will emerge" (Chetrit 2000: 60)—but it also examines the hegemonic modes of memory and mourning. In other words, *Zaguri* undermines not only the content of the Israeli culture of memory and mourning, but also the "white" protocol with which they are handled and performed.

Another aspect of the scene in which Alegria is "watching" memorial songs is worth pointing out: rather than taking place in front of a television set, this scene could instead have featured—and was perhaps more likely to have featured—a radio, as radio is the main medium associated with Remembrance Day songs in Israel. However, *Zaguri*, as a television text, chooses—not coincidentally—to carry out its "rebellion" through the medium of television, and not in detachment from it. Unlike *Sh'chur*, which finds an alternative outside the realm of television, *Zaguri* does not abandon the medium (as further evidenced when, a few episodes later, Roy Hasan appears on that very same television set). This notion is further underscored by the fact that it is the Zaguri women, Vivienne and Avigail, who, while performing a traditional ritual against the evil eye, try to abide by the model of memory stipulated by the television—asking Alegria to be quiet—while the latter, despite being an avid television viewer herself (and in particular a fan of Erez Tal, host of the Israeli version of *Big Brother*, a staple of Channel 2's lineup), is

the one who finds an alternative—not by turning off the television set, but by "changing the channel," or in this case, by listening to a Mizrahi disc while the television is still on. In other words, Alegria, like the women of *Sh'chur*, controls television, but unlike them, she does not give up on the medium, but rather finds a way to challenge from within—much like *Zaguri* itself does.

In this context, it is important to point out that as communication media evolve, and in particular with the rise of new media and multimedia interactivity, the archive—which for Nora was a principal realm of memory, in opposition to spontaneous memory (Nora 1989: 12)—has become a collective, social practice, a real, living memory, and not merely a mechanism that solidifies and calcifies collective memory and the cultural texts that constitute it (Pinchevski 2011: 255). Furthermore, as the archive is now conjointly compiled by a collective of people (or "prosumers"), it is no longer the exclusive property of formal institutions (ibid.: 256), and therefore enables us to conceive of a collective memory that is in fact constructed by the collective—and not only by the hegemony. Or, as put by Avishag Zaguri, "Why would you need an encyclopedia when you've got Wikipedia?"

Contemporary Israeli television, to summarize up to this point, has drastically transformed since its early days, when it was used in an attempt to create a uniform collective with a unified memory; and also since the days of Channel 2, when it was used in an attempt to erase alternative models of identity by creating the illusion of multiculturalism and of "television for everyone," without actually letting "everyone" have a say in the matter (Cohen 2001). In our current stage of the medium's history, *Zaguri* asserts that it is possible to struggle over culture and memory from within the medium, neither abandoning it nor succumbing to the cultural suppression at times imposed by the hegemony—but rather managing to voice protest and to provide an alternative narrative from within.

Conclusion; or What's the Moral of the Story?

> *I keep forgetting things, and I speak gibberish, and everybody keeps ignoring me [. . .] but I'm not speaking nonsense. I just sometimes don't say it right.*
>
> Avishai Zaguri

At this point I would like to return to one of the most interesting similarities between *Sh'chur* and *Zaguri*: the incorporation of cognitively challenged

characters. Against Cheli's cognitively challenged sister and daughter in *Sh'chur*, *Zaguri* presents Avishai, who at a certain point in the series is also called Avichai Peter Zaguri, who suffered a childhood head injury. Unlike Pnina and Cheli's daughter, whose cognitive disability was a given state, without any particular preceding causes (though several possibilities, natural and supernatural, are implied throughout the film), *Zaguri* suggests that Avishai's brain damage was a result of the actions of his brother and sister. This historical event was "forgotten" (or more precisely, silenced), however, and is not spoken of in the Zaguri home. Only Avishai's stubborn insistence on investigating the past, against the express wishes of his family, enables him to uncover the story, which had been suppressed and buried for years.

After recognizing the wrongs to which he has been subjected—beginning with the accident, and continuing with the conscious efforts to cover it up—Avishai decides to reenact the traumatic event in front of his entire family, while gathered in the living room, with most family members seated on the couches that are normally used for watching television (Figure 6.8). Rather than watch television, however, the Zaguri family now watches a play for two performers—Avishai and his girlfriend, Shimrit (Ronit Starshnov)—reenacting the event in which Aviel and Avishag, the eldest siblings, dropped their younger brother Avishai on his head while playing a game (Figure 6.9). This incident is presented

Figure 6.8 The Zaguris watching the play, seated on their TV couch (*Zaguri Imperia*).

Figure 6.9 Avishai Zaguri (Daniel Sabag) and Shimrit (Ronit Starshnov) founding a new religion (*Zaguri Imperia*).

as only the inciting event of the play, which fills Avishai's mind with a "great big light" and allows him to become the founder of "the most newest religion, a religion for everyone, the Chrismuslews [an amalgamation of Christians, Muslims, and Jews]." The play ends with the following exchange between the performers and their audience:

Avishai What's the moral of the story?
Abir That you're idiots.
Avishai No. Get over past traumas and become spiritual leaders. One day they'll make plays about you too.

The scene functions as a *mise en abyme*—a work within a work, particularly referring to a work of art presented within the fictional world (a story within a story, or a play within a television series), various aspects of which—such as its sources of inspiration, its textual characteristics, and the audience response it generates—allow the author to reflect on the work as a whole, commenting on the text itself, on its production, and on its reception (Weir 2002: xx). In other words, it is a way for the text to say "read me this way," an intersection and interlude wherein "reader, author, and character test various readings in isolation from the remainder of the text, but with significant implications" for the text as a whole (ibid.: xxii).

And so, as is the case with works featuring a *mise en abyme*, multiple connections can be found between the "larger" work—*Zaguri*—and the "smaller" one—Avishai's play. Both are autobiographical texts, presented in the family living room and viewed from the television-watching couch. Avishag Zaguri later defines the play as a "Habima play"—referring to the theater that Maor Zaguri—the series' creator—has been working with for several years, and that, as was previously mentioned, is located in the plaza in which the final scenes of the series take place.[16]

Furthermore, while *Zaguri* attempts to depict a world of complex identities—not premised on the dichotomous distinctions between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi, Jewish and Arab—Avishai Zaguri invents a "new religion" that attempts to construct a hybrid identity combining all three Abrahamic faiths. The audience's response to the play is also meaningful, as some of the Zaguri family members, who in this reading serve as surrogates for the viewers of *Zaguri*, realize how painful and difficult the play's statement is, and understand its attempts to uncover repressed family secrets, while others see it as nothing more than light entertainment, perhaps even "retarded entertainment."

And here we arrive at the conclusion, or "the moral of the story," one that is presented implicitly in *Zaguri*'s case, left for audiences to infer, but stated explicitly in Avishai's play: "Get over past traumas and become spiritual leaders. One day they'll make plays about you too." What is meant by this, in the broader context of *Zaguri*? On the one hand, it is clear that the cultural "retardation" supposedly ascribed to Mizrahim or Moroccans is neither natural nor inherent, but—like Avishai's disability—the product of social choices and of silencing and intentional forgetting. The mere act of performing the play is a statement of the necessity of recognizing and speaking aloud about the events that have led to the present situation. However, as Avishai puts it, we should not wallow in feelings of misery and victimization; we should find a way to move on. This is not, it should be emphasized, an indictment of Mizrahim as "whiny" or "bitter" over their disenfranchisement, over a "fabricated" state of ethnic injustice (sometimes called "the ethnic demon" in Israel)—but a clear statement of the existence of injustice, the importance of acknowledging it, and the necessity to refrain from dwelling on it.

In other words, to paraphrase from Hannan Hever's description of the writing of Iraqi-born writer Shimon Ballas, both works, the "smaller" one (Avishai's) and the "larger" one (*Zaguri*), attempt to extricate "the narrative of the protest [. . .] against the oppression of Mizrahim in Israel from the main danger that awaits it,

which is that of presenting [. . .] the Mizrahi as an inferior victim who is not active and does not fight for his views and his social status" (Hever 2007a: 269). Both of these texts, that is, present their protagonists as "active characters, that do not accept the state of oppression they find themselves in as a given" (ibid.).

In conclusion, *Zaguri* should not be read as an attempt to represent all of Mizrahi culture, or even Moroccan culture; nor is it a realistic depiction of the real-life Zaguri family. It is rather a work of television that offers an alternative to *Sh'chur*'s "dancers dancing in the snow" or "Current Events with Cheli Shushan," which symbolize, each in its own way, the early stages of Israeli television, which acted to suppress or subdue non-hegemonic cultures and identities, and Mizrahi-Arab cultures and identities in particular. In complex and fascinating ways, *Zaguri* recognizes this cultural suppression and offers an alternative from within the medium itself, in its contemporary form—an alternative that manages to call out Israeli realities and Ashkenazi hegemony, and at the same time gain popularity and wide public acceptance: truly a work of magic.

7

The New Normative: Gay Fatherhood on Israeli Television

The theme for the 2014 Tel Aviv Gay Pride parade was LGBT parenting, as was publicized with posters and graffitis of gay and lesbian couples with their children (Figure 7.1). Gearing up for this parade, the City of Tel Aviv-Jaffa financed a video clip featuring Dana International (Israel's most famous transgender person) performing the well-known song "Yeladìm Ze Simchá" ("Children Bring Joy"). While the song's title appeared to chime with the desirable message (children bring joy to LGBTs as well), the images featured in the video, like the bleeding Bar Mitzvah boy (Figure 7.2); the singer's previous statements that she would never have children, and that "any nitwit can have a child" (quoted in Lendsman 2014); and moreover, the choice of a tongue-in-cheek song criticizing the Israeli "fertility cult" (mostly referring to Mizrahim)[1] —undermined the positive message sent by those who commissioned the clip.

Figure 7.1 Graffiti on the route of the 2014 Tel Aviv Gay Pride parade: "Tel Aviv is marching for equality!"

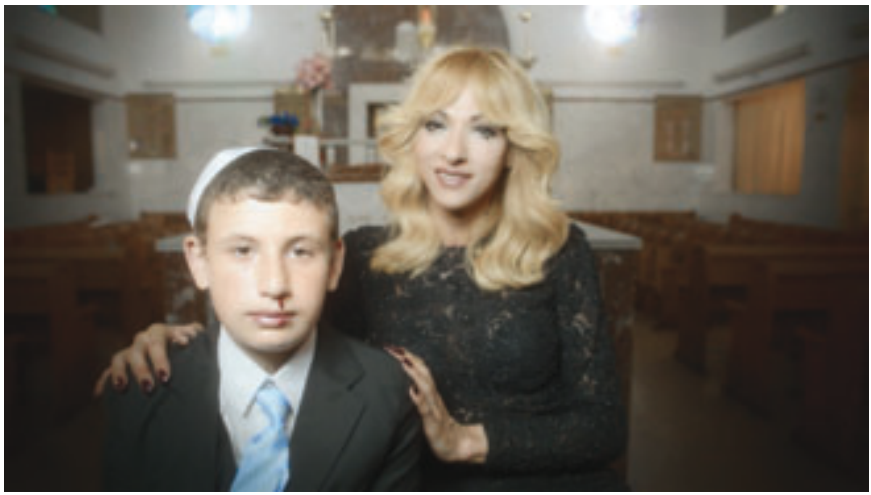

Figure 7.2 Dana International in the video of "Children Bring Joy."

Negative reactions soon poured in from members of the LGBT community and their supporters. The web site *GoGay* issued, among others, the statement that "this clip doesn't deliver the desired product, [that is,] the message that members of the community are also entitled to raise a family with children. [The message] doesn't come across well" (Naór 2014). A famous television anchor even stated that "Dana isn't the one who should be conveying the message of LGBT childbearing" (quoted in Lendsman 2014).[2]

As a cultural scholar, gay father, and fan of Dana International, I have contemplated this clip at length. I posted a *Facebook* status wondering what the clip was trying to achieve, whether it served to reinforce the City of Tel Aviv's message of support of LGBT families, or protest the community's focus on having children. The widely ranging reactions it received didn't surprise me: some of my friends claimed that the clip reflects "boring heteronormativity," that the creators were pushing to increase the birthrate in the community, that "people don't pay attention to words and don't understand that this song criticizes the encouragement of childbearing." Some even accused the clip's creators of having blundered out of "ignorance and stupidity," and another claimed that "those who concocted the whole thing missed the song's critical message and meant to say that having children is fun, even in the case of LGBTs." Others, however, saw the clip as deliberately subversive of Tel Aviv's message, as a sneer at "homosexuals eager to find a woman

who will serve as a surrogate mother for their children." They argued that it suggests, instead, a "cynical reading" of the child as "the sacrificial lamb at the altar of heteronormativity," preserving "the [original] song's irony and criticism."[3]

These conflicting readings stem no doubt from the clip's polysemic nature, but they are also affected by internal community tugs between the desire, on the one hand, to integrate into Israeli society, and thus, perhaps unwittingly, to be a part of the "national project" in which childbearing has a national role (Kadish 2005: 234), and, on the other hand, to preserve a uniqueness, or queerness, that defies heteronormativity: as Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman emphasize in their writings, children (and even fetuses) and reproduction have a major role within symbolic reality (Edelman 2004: 18), or "the machinery of national life" (Berlant 1997: 28), in such a way that queerness should not "fight for [having] children," but rather take "the side outside the consensus" and fight against what Edelman coins "reproductive futurism" (2004: 3).

But is LGBT parenting (in reality and as representation) fated to be part of the homonormativity that characterizes the LGBT community in Israel (Gross 2014), or can it be an alternative to the hegemonic discourse? Or, as Darren Langdridge asks in his discussion on gay fathers, "Is negativity the only option in the face of the onslaught of reproductive futurism, or might there be a *dialectical solution* that is at once radically queer but also reflective of the variety of claims for sexual citizenship?" (2013: 728; emphasis mine).

In what follows, I also embrace a dialectical position and explore the tensions between mainstream and radical, or homonormativity and queer politics in the specific Israeli Jewish context, through a textual and discursive reading selection of television programs that revolve around gay parenting in Israel.[4] The first part of this chapter addresses the cultural and social context that has generated these representations, dealing with three key Israeli areas within Israeli culture: the fertility cult, the evolution of the LGBT community, and the evolution of local television. In the second part, I offer a queer reading of these "positive" representations (mainly in news reports and programs labeled "documentaries" by broadcasters) and highlight the possible price of the "bear hug" given by Israeli media to gay parents. The third section focuses on the television serial drama *Ima VeAbbaz*, and suggests that this drama exposes the performative aspect of parenting and the connection between ethnicity and fertility, and offers an alternative to normative representations of gay parenting.

From Criminals and "Sick People" to Gay Fathers

If you've recently encountered more and more male couples pushing a baby carriage, it's not by accident. The dream of parenthood certainly hasn't skipped the gay community in Israel.

Oshrat Kotler, anchor of *Saturday News*, Channel 10: 2009

A male couple pushing a baby carriage is no longer a rare sight in Israel. Gay couples don't want to forgo fathering children and do so with a surrogate mother, despite the steep price.

Ayala Hason, anchor of *HaYomán*, Channel 1 News, 2012

The rise of parenting among gay Israeli men is not limited to reality, as the above news anchors have declared, but can also be observed across numerous genres on Israeli television, including drama,[5] reality TV,[6] news, and documentaries. Moreover, these gay fathers are often not only represented positively, but as a laudable phenomenon, even boasting advantages over normative heterosexual parenthood. In this section, I argue that this "positive" representation stems from cultural processes in three key areas: the relatively successful struggle for Israeli LGBT rights and "positive" media representation; the rise of the postmodern family in Israel; and Israeli post-television.

Images of gay men have existed in Israeli media since the state was founded. In the first few decades however, those images were mainly found in news items on crimes, including murder and "indictments of men who committed sodomy with boys or adolescents," as Amit Kama demonstrates (Kama 2000: 137). In the 1980s, the negative context was AIDS related, while gay representations revolved mostly around the disease, which was labeled "the homosexual syndrome" (ibid.: 138). However, this situation began to change in the late 1980s, as the law against homosexual intercourse was officially rescinded. The decades that followed saw favorable shifts in the liberal public discourse that accompanied legal shifts to protect LGBT rights,[7] such as the prohibition of employee dismissal on the grounds of sexual preference or gender identity, and partial recognition of LGBT partnerships (Harel 1999; Gross 2001).

While undoubtedly, the situation has improved for many LGBT people, legal and extra-legal violence and discrimination are still very much a part of Israeli societies and cultures, as the legal shifts have often taken place in the courts and

not in legislation; and some have accused the Israeli right-wing government of exploiting these advances to "pinkwash" its violation of Palestinian rights and mendaciously brand Israel as a liberal democracy for the rest of the world (Gross 2014). However, it appears that it is not only the state of Israel that "uses" LGBT people, it is the LGBT individuals who have integrated (or, rather, wished to integrate) into Israeli society, who have most strongly adopted the underlying assumptions of Zionism, or, as Solomon writes, "the mainstream gay movement has not sought to challenge Zionism, but to be pressed to its bosom" (2004: 158).[8]

However, although the relative acceptance of LGBT people in Israel stems, among other, from the state's ideological and propaganda interests, one cannot ignore the significant change in the lives of LGBT people in Israel and their growing acceptance by Israeli society. This political, legal, and social shift is related (as both result and cause) to the increasing number of gay characters in Israeli films and on television, who are presented as worthy subjects of identification, often even of envy. Thus, what has been unfolding, according to Marguerite Moritz, in the United States over four decades—when "texts and images have moved from deviant loners and losers to normal couples and their kids" (2007: 182)—has begun in Israel too. That is, society has gone from a state of symbolic annihilation, both qualitative and quantitative, to a situation in which, "gay men are now represented in a rich array of images" (2011: 191).

But how diverse is this representation? Probably well within clearly defined mainstream borders, because, as Kama claims elsewhere, "The new gay actors on the public stage are members of mainstream Israeli society: mostly professional, educated citizens" (2000: 149). This holds true of both the actual agents of change and their media representations, primarily on television and in film. In his discussion of Israeli cinema and television, Raz Yosef claims that "the yearning to be 'normal' and 'like everyone else' that has characterized mainstream Israeli homo-lesbian politics has given preference to representations of homosexual identity that *have been acceptable* to most heterosexuals but that have come at the cost of silencing nonconformist members of that very community" (2005: 285–286).

And how can one be accepted? A Jewish Israeli man can emphasize military service, as in the successful television drama *Yossi and Jagger* (Avner Bernheimer and Eytan Fox, HOT3: 2002), which focuses on a romantic relationship between two men, a soldier and an officer, that ends when one of them is killed in a military operation, that is, earns a heroic death. This drama, as Raz Yosef claims, "represents an attempt on the part of its director [Eytan Fox] to join the

national heterosexual collectivity and to attach himself to the myths that constitute it, at the price of depoliticizing and desexualizing gay male identity" (ibid.: 286).

A woman can become a mother. And indeed, in the 1990s, lesbians were the first to acquire social "respectability" thanks to childbearing. The view underpinning this shift is that "by bearing children, women "escape" their sexual identity as lesbians and enter the most desirable and respected role for Israeli women—that of mothers" (Kadish 2005: 236). On the other hand, in contrast to the visibility of gay fathers two decades later, lesbian parenting was nearly absent from television in the 1990s. Even in the comic drama *Ima'leh*, which focuses on a single mother played by the comedian Orna Banai—a lesbian mother (though at that time still in the closet)—whose character was presented as a straight woman.

But since the 2000s, there has been a significant increase in the number of gay men who have chosen to have children, a situation the press has even referred to as a "baby boom": "As Tel Aviv winds down from the work week and heads into Shabbat, this relaxed, baby-friendly gay scene is the new normal, and a clear indication of the baby boom taking place within the gay male community in Israel over the past few years" (Harman 2013).[9] Thus, from signifying death in the 1980s, in contemporary discourse on gay men, homosexuality has come to be associated mainly with life, at first in the sense of "having fun" (the colloquial Hebrew equivalent to "having fun" is "making life") and now in the sense of procreation, or, in the words of Jasbir Puar, "from being figures of death [. . .] to becoming tied to ideas of life and productivity" (Puar 2007: xii).

An important context in which to understand the significance of gay fatherhood is the Israeli obsession with procreation. In its dominant discourse, "the Jewish-Israeli family has been among the material and ideological cornerstones of the Zionist nation-building project" (Bar-On 1997: 222). While perhaps not reproducing the normative heterosexual nuclear family, Jewish LGBT people can join the nation-(re)building project by having children (Bar-On 1997: 222; Fogiel-Bijaoui 2002: 40; Kadish 2005: 234).

Moreover, despite processes of individualization, which remove the individual from national tasks in favor of personal needs, in Israel the environment and the family relentlessly monitor the individual, for whom the possibility of spending a significant part of their time in private spaces impervious to society's eye is meager compared with other Western societies (Roniger 1999: 113). This "intimate public sphere," using Berlant's terminology (1997: 5), is especially obvious in childbearing-related matters, where people take the liberty of

meddling with others' modes of parenting, be they family members or strangers, even chastising them for not producing children, or not producing enough of them. This lack of boundaries almost leaves gays with no choice: they "must" produce children, or remain relegated to an inferior status. And this is doubly true when we consider what Lesley Hazelton calls "The Cult of Fertility":

> Fertility is a national priority in Israel [. . .] In Israel there is constant talk about "the next generation" as if it were a new concept. And for Israelis it is. After 30 years [from 1948] of embattled statehood following close on the destruction of a third of the Jewish people, it represents a minor miracle, not to be taken for granted.
>
> Hazleton 1977: 65

When Hazelton set out in the late 1970s to study the status of women in Israel, she was not surprised to discover that childbearing was a crucial issue in their lives. Using the phrase "The Cult of Fertility," she described a society that still considered childbearing to be a woman's main role, without which she remained an "inadequate woman." Hazelton correctly refers to the Holocaust as a factor in the Israeli cult of fertility, as it emphasizes the perspective that one must "shore up the forces" to compensate for the murdered six million.

Yet, on closer scrutiny, further reasons for the fertility cult emerge, such as "the demographic threat" supposedly posed by the Arabs (i.e., the need to constitute a significant Jewish majority in Israel–Palestine); Jewish tradition, which stresses childbearing, since God promised Abraham that his seed would be "as the sand which is upon the seashore" (Gen. 22:17); and even the need "to produce soldiers" for the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) (Kahn 2000: 3).

Given this cult of fertility and the aspiration to produce Jewish babies, it is hardly surprising that, as Kadish claims, "Israel spends more on fertility treatments than [does] any other Western country, and its birthrate remains highest among postindustrial nations" (2005: 235); and that many Israelis, as Martha Kahn adds, have "enthusiastically embraced new reproductive technologies as reasonable solutions to childlessness and [. . .] as legitimate alternatives to sexual intercourse as pathways to pregnancy" (2000: 1). This eagerness is reflected, for example, in the vast alternatives for raising Israel's birth rate, and in the high number of fertility treatment centers. While these clinics have not yet helped gays interested in procreating via surrogacy, for lesbians and gays who wish to father children with a woman (and certainly for straight people with fertility problems and women who approach sperm banks), the

state generously subsidizes the process and, in any case, encourages women, and recently men as well, to procreate even if they are not in a heterosexual relationship.

Thus, recent years have seen a rising number of middle- and upper-middle-class families that do not conform to the traditional structure of the nuclear family, that is, a heterosexual couple with children and a traditional gendered division of roles, with the woman in charge of raising the children and the man as the main wage earner. Moreover, new arrangements have emerged, which Fogiel-Bijaoui calls "post-modern families," in which "the individual, his/her wants, his/her needs are the center and purpose of the institution" (2002: 55), leading to a situation wherein "the whole project of Jewish reproduction [. . .] becomes open to a diverse range of social actors for whom it was previously closed. By so doing, the project of Jewish reproduction is expanded in new and unexpected ways" (Kahn 2000: 170), and the LGBT family indubitably belongs to this growing group.

Yet the rising use of fertility technologies and the reconfiguration of the traditional family into new, postmodern structures do not indicate that the conception of the family, which is largely consistent with the Jewish view on procreating, has been dethroned. For example, most LGBTs in Israel circumcise and, when it is needed, convert their children to Judaism and send them to institutions and organizations that reproduce the dominant ideology. In other words, in the Israeli context, the desire to beget children, often claimed to be "authentic" or "natural," cannot be disentangled from the symbolic order that urges individuals to produce Jewish children, because "children bring joy." The adoption of the gay parenting model is, therefore, a double-edged sword: On the one hand, it is a "tremendously positive development" that offers "the success of an appeal to liberal sensibilities around equality," on the other hand, it is merely an "effective assimilation of lesbians and gay/bisexual men into a privileged heterosexual matrix of (white, middle class) coupledom, monogamy, and the strictures of particular given family forms" (Langdridge 2013: 730).

However, the vocal critics of heteronormativity also point to the queer potential of the LGBT family, as the latter dismantles traditionally gendered divisions and separates romantic love from fertility, biology, and childrearing (Kadish 2005: 236). Judith Butler, who cautions against normalization of the LGBT community, even argues that LGBT families "constitute a 'breakdown' of traditional kinship that not only displaces the central place of biological and sexual relations from its definition, but gives sexuality a separate domain from

that of kinship [. . .] and [opens] kinship to a set of community ties that are irreducible to family" (2002: 37).

The question is which directions does LGBT parenting take on Israeli television, running the gamut from heteronormativity to queerness, and often incorporating multiple and even contradictory moments. This challenges facile dichotomies between hegemony/counter-hegemonic discourse, queer/heteronormative portrayals, positive/negative representations, individualism/collectivism, and so forth. Moreover, the changes that television in general, and Israeli television in particular, has undergone in recent decades allow us to offer a more nuanced account that also distinguishes between differing modes of broadcasting and viewing.

As mentioned in the first chapter, one of the key features of "television beit," or the "Period of Channel 2 Dominance," was highlighting the desires of the individual, as exemplified by the scene from *Florentin* in which Tomer decides to come out as gay to his family while they watch Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's funeral being broadcast on television. Tomer's father seems more amazed by the timing of this disclosure than by its content, and refuses to discuss the matter during the funeral. But the position of Tomer as a main character and the representation of Tomer's father as a rigid patriarch underscore that the text promotes the belief that this is the right place and the right time to "come out"; that is, sometimes individual needs are more important than the "national needs."

Still, Tomer's "defiance" (and by extension, the network's) seems rather limited to the usual ideological function of Channel 2, or its position as the "New Statehood" (Yuran 2001). In other words, the commercial channel, although (or due to its being), separate from the state, functions as an ideological apparatus, that is, preserves and naturalizes the dominant ideology in Israel, including the need to produce (Jewish) children.

In this sense, the representations of unprecedented quality and quantity of gay fathers in factual and fictional texts alike, on broadcast channels to boot, exist not despite but rather because of mainstream television culture in Israel. This is the result of the blending of the individualism advocated by both the postmodern family and LGBT rights with the cult of fertility and family values, that are part of Israel's dominant ideology. Moreover, their largely middle- and upper-middle-class status, highly appealing to advertisers, has allowed LGBT families, especially those headed by gay parents, to thrive on the commercial channels. Bearing that in mind, let us examine some representations of gay fatherhood on the Israeli airwaves, with an emphasis on the news and documentary genres.

Normative Gay Parenting on Israeli Broadcast Television

> *40 percent of Israeli families do not follow the traditional nuclear model of mother, father and children under one roof. While it may still seem strange or abnormal, every year hundreds of Israelis, gays and straights, decide to link up and establish a slightly different family [. . .] Tonight we ask you to really watch with an open mind, as you may be surprised.*
>
> "Children under Contract," April 16, 2012, *The True Story,* Channel 10

This is how the anchor of the documentary series *The True Story* introduces the documentary episode "Children under Contract," about joint parenting, mostly between a gay man and a straight woman. "Children under Contract" focuses on a family of two gay parents who are raising two children, each one through joint parenting with a different straight woman. This family structure, which undermines so many conventional understandings about family, couplehood and fertility, is presented (accompanied by voiceovers and stereotypical images of loving families) as normal and positive. Moreover, the report ends with the statement: "Perhaps in the future, monogamy will vanish, and the family will resemble much more what we have seen in this program." While to some extent this text undermines the monogamous family and subverts gender divisions, following the broadcast, which also featured Shanì, a woman who had not found a parenting partner, the anchor concluded with, "Good news: Shani has found a male partner, and is now pregnant."

This is one of the many television texts that waver between defiance of traditional family norms, on the one hand, and reproducing the ideology of the heteronormative family and of the Israeli cult of fertility, on the other. For what could be more pleasing than a woman who has gotten pregnant, or gays who have "realized the dream of parenting"? Whether uttered on prime time or day time, on commercial or public television, these texts manage to remain well within the limits of the "New Statehood" and faithfully reproduce many underlying assumptions of Israel's cultural hegemony.

One method of keeping the texts within the dominant ideology is by positioning the viewers in such a way that invites them to observe an "unusual" phenomenon or a "newsworthy" novelty from the outside, and to decide whether or not it is positive. Thus, despite his statement that "40 percent of Israeli families do not follow the traditional model," the announcer/anchor then asks the audience "to be open-minded," hinting that "they may be surprised." This direct interpellation

(Althusser 1971: 170–177) which places the viewers in the judge's seat, allows them to see these families as entirely severed from the normative made rather than as being positioned on an endless and diverse spectrum of family models.[10]

In fact, in most news items or documentaries on this subject, the anchor will pose an equivalent question at the beginning, asking whether LGBT parenting is legitimate or "okay." For example, Oshrat Kotler, *Saturday News*'s anchor, inquires "Can one grow up without a mother? And what are the implications of all-male parenting?" ("Dad and Dad" 2009). In the item that follows, the reporter, Yinnon Miles, who obviously believes gay parenting is not only legitimate but also has many advantages, nevertheless insists that "While one cannot dismiss the mother's role in childrearing, dozens of two-father couples question the axiom that there's nothing like a mother," and asks one interviewee whether there's "a problem with a child growing up without a mother" (ibid.). In another case, the interpellation occurs after the report, when Razi Barkai, one of Israel's esteemed veteran presenters, comments on an item which had portrayed a transgender man giving birth, stating that "the film is hard to watch, to tell the truth. Not all of us have gotten used to this" ("Pregnant Dad" 2014).

This phenomenon, which puts LGBT parenting on trial, is not uniquely Israeli, and, as Clarke and Kitzinger (2004: 202) show in their article on American talk shows, LGBT parenting as such is always challenged, as "the questions posed by the anchor are presented as the ones 'we the people' want answers to." Neither, of course, is this phenomenon unique to television. In daily life, LGBT parents find themselves again and again on the defensive, or at least having to prove the legitimacy of their parenting and the wellbeing of their children against questions ranging from the genuinely curious to the blatantly accusative (Peregrín et al. 2014: 21).

In many ways, Israeli programming is better in this sense than that of the majority of American talk shows, as the former rarely feature people who directly oppose LGBT parenting. But the very questioning, whether direct or indirect, bookended by opening and closing statements referring to a "phenomenon" that the "wider public" must be allowed to digest, render these parents ambassadors who are compelled to defend their parenting by proving that they are "just like everyone else."

The first problem with this approach is its underlying assumption that heterosexual parenting is by definition acceptable, and its singling out of LGBT parenting for discussing whether it is likewise acceptable. Feminist and queer theories question the very institution of the nuclear family, and propose

dismantling rather than emulating it. As Mark Poster writes, "The ideology of romantic love," assumed to be a cornerstone of the heterosexual family, "has become a heavy chain around the neck of marriage partners, weighing them down with expectations that are difficult to fulfill" (1978: 204). The question, then, should be why LGBT parenting (and coupling) should emulate this impossible model.

The second problem lies in the pressures exerted on both LGBTs and the texts' authors (who, as was mentioned, mostly support these families) to prove that LGBT families are "normal" and, therefore, present a family as similar as possible to a normative family; "In the face of the attacks from conservatives," as Peregrín et al. write, "the advocates of lesbian and gay parenting feel compelled to favor normalization strategies and face great difficulty in providing an alternative framework to simple heterocentric assimilation" (2014: 22). Furthermore, it appears that as big as the question mark is, or as vehement as the criticism from opponents is, the more necessary "normalcy" becomes.

How do LGBT parents "prove" their normalcy? Clarke and Kitzinger (2004: 207) present six key strategies used in talk shows, among them: claiming that theirs is "regular," rather than "LGBT parenting"; that it is natural for LGBTs to procreate; that what matters in a family is love; that LGBT parenting has advantages over heterosexual parenting; and that the children themselves are the best "proof," as they "refute fears about the effects on children of growing up in a lesbian and gay family."[11] Watching Israeli LGBT parenting on television, one can find the same strategies. Interestingly, however, while on American talk shows is mostly the parents themselves who reply, in Israeli news reports and documentaries, the text's authors (reporters and anchors) join in the endeavor to "normalize" and vindicate LGBT parenting.

For example, to underscore that this is not "LGBT (i.e., different) parenting" but "normal, guy-next-door regular" parenting, one parent says: "We have two girls who are only ours. Like any other couple." When asked who the biological father is, he replies, "I don't want to make distinctions in life. We're like any other couple" ("Dad and Dad" 2009). Since the news, too, is interested in stressing how normal a situation this is, it focuses mainly on the parents' daily activities, such as feeding, changing diapers and going out. The presenter even sounds slightly disappointed when this parenting reveals nothing "interesting" or "different": "A couple of men with two baby girls getting ready to go out sounds like photogenic chaos, but these parents' efficiency and smoothness ruined our plans. A few minutes later we were already outdoors."

Occasionally, the claim that LGBT parenting is potentially superior also emerges in television texts. Thus, when the parents mentioned in the previous paragraph have managed to organize everything quickly without any help, one of them says, "This is the advantage of two men. It's easier [for us] to schlep their buggies." In another news report, one parent claims that since these are children of parents who had gone to great lengths to produce them, these children "get 110 percent" ("Father and Father" 2012). The idea that gay parents are good parents because they passionately want children is voiced by a teenager who has grown up with two fathers, who tells us, "If you want children very much, you'll probably be good parents, so go ahead."

The frequently raised claim on American talk shows, that "love makes the family," is often heard in the Israeli context as well. Here, too, parents express it directly: "With attention and love, you can raise a child without a mother," says one gay father, and his partner adds, "I think what matters is what you give children [. . .] how much love you give them. How much you invest in their education. How much you nurture them" ("Dad and Dad" 2009). Experts, of course profess similar views: "As long as men can meet most or many of the child's developmental needs—hugs, love, boundaries—the child's needs are met." And the enacted narrative (Corner 1999: 48–9) in these televised segments shows, over and over, children enveloped in their fathers' love.

Other forms of gay parenting defensiveness, especially on the issue of "naturalness," also crop up in television texts. For example, a father asks, "What would I do with a woman? What does that have to do with anything?" His partner adds, both naturalizing his parenthood and using the notion of "natural" to disrupt conventional models, that for him having a child with a woman doesn't fit, because "It's not natural at all" ("Dad and Dad" 2009). In another report, a new father speaks about the "paternal instinct" that had kicked in for him when he first held his child ("Father and Father" 2012). In *Pregnant Dad*, a documentary about a couple, one a cisgender man, the other a transgender man, who has produced two children, the reporter says, "Even if the state did everything to thwart such developments, these families would keep living here. The reason is simple, *even natural*: conservative, political, or bureaucratic forces cannot perpetually stifle a person's right and inclination to build his life according to his desires" (Pregnant Dad). In other words, all these fathers and texts emphasize the idea that paternal feelings are natural, regardless of how the child was conceived.

Despite the similarities between Israeli and American strategies of normalization, three Israel-specific arguments come up in discourse regarding

gay parenthood in Israel. First, as parenthood is a "national issue" and perceived as a vital contribution to society, many associate the right to parent with other contributions to society. For example, as one gay father says, refering to Israeli surrogacy laws: "Me and my partner are IDF reserve officers, tax-paying citizens. Why do we have to pay for what other Israelis can do here [in Israel][12] for free?" ("A New Family," April 29, 2010, *HaYomán*, channel 1). This statement not only indicates fiscal and patriotic contributions to the state, but more subtly pits the speaker against two main populations in Israel that produce many children yet supposedly contribute less to society: Arabs and ultra-Orthodox Jews, most of whom do not serve in the Israeli army, and on average earn lower salaries and therefore pay less taxes.[13]

The second argument proffered by Israelis regarding gay parenthood relates to the family. As mentioned earlier, not only the state but the family, too, brings its support and pressure to bear on the procreation cult. As a key Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser 1971: 143), the family also adds to the pressure, reinforcing arguments as to why gays should procreate: to bring joy to their own parents. Indeed, many news items show happy grandparents who feel fortunate to have biological Jewish grandchildren. One grandmother even states, "It's the most basic thing. Everyone wants continuity. And I very much wanted Ronèn and Arik [both males] to have a baby. There's going to be a child, so they won't be alone, so they won't be childless when they're old" ("Father and Father" 2009). Elsewhere a gay father says, "When I came out of the closet, my mother asked: 'Won't I have any grandchildren from you?' So I told her, 'You will, you will'" ("Dad and Dad" 2009).

The third and most complex argument for gay parenting is never explicit, though it is heavily implied in some of the television texts. While Israel may foster a fertility cult, not all acts of procreation are equal: the pressure to procreate touches only on Jewish, not Arab/Palestinian, women. But even among Jewish women, the pressure is not exerted equally, as a distinction exists between Ashkenazi women and Mizrahi women. Shoham Melamed writes:

> In Israel, alongside the national demographic discourse runs an intra-Jewish, ethno-demographic discourse that stresses the importance of the collective "quality" [. . .] The childbearing capacity of Mizrahi women is morphing into a problem to be bridled by rationalizing and modernizing traditional cultural practices of procreation. [. . .] [the "fertile" Mizrahi body] at times was viewed as a solution and at times as a problem.
>
> Melamed 2004: 71–73

The "solution," according to the hegemonic discourse, lies in Mizrahim bearing Jewish children who will join the fight against the Arabs. The "problem" however, lies in their bearing Mizrahi (and their presumably inferior) children, while the Ashkenazim, the preferred "breed," do not produce enough children.

Ashkenazim bore fewer children precisely because of their socioeconomic edge, which was consistent with their self-perception and rationality. "Paradoxically," Raz Yosef writes, "what turns Ashkenazi men into whites—control over the body and the sexual drive—endangers the continuity and childbearing of the white Jewish race. [. . .] The tenacious, perpetual struggle between body and spirit defines the whiteness of the *Zionist male subject against his gender or racial others, who are all body without spirit*" (2010b: 53). In other words, while the Mizrahim, like the Arabs, are viewed as "bodies without spirit," who merely produce children and therefore threaten the European character that the Zionist state has donned, the Ashkenazim are "a bodiless spirit" and, as a result, have fewer children.

Gay fathers on Israeli television are not always presented as Ashkenazi; some are dark enough in complexion to be perceived as Mizrahi. Yet their efforts to find an egg cell from a white—and not just any white, but a "blonde, blue-eyed" woman, as one father describes his egg donor ("Father and Father" 2012)—underscores their felt need to produce fair-skinned children, even if one parent is swarthier and/or Mizrahi. This conception is made explicit in an "innocent" illustration in the news item "Dad and Dad," that aims to explain to the layperson how surrogacy works in Israel. The clear graphic drawing shows two featureless yet fair-skinned men, who signify the gay parents; the egg donor, also featureless but fair-skinned and fair-haired; and the surrogate, with only her pregnant abdomen and dark complexion visible (Figure 7.3). Though the surrogate's complexion is historically justified, as during that period most surrogates were from India, here the distinction is quite vivid: the fathers and the egg donor, who transmit genetic information, are fair and graced with a face, that is, spirit, while the surrogate mother is dark and faceless: a mere body.

It appears, then, that gays have solved Israel's demographic "threat": not only do they produce Jewish children and thus tip the demographic scales against the Arabs, but many choose to produce fair-skinned/Ashkenazi children, thereby contributing to the demographic battle against the Mizrahim as well. Moreover, these parents act rationally and deliberately, paying hundreds of thousands of dollars to procreate; they are not "merely" carnal or sexually active people who got pregnant unintentionally. And this cardinal property

Figure 7.3 How surrogacy works in Israel, "Dad and Dad" (*Saturday News*).

distinguishes the respectable middle class from the lower, depraved classes, as Mark Poster argues:

> A gospel of thrift was applied to semen as well as to money. The act of sex, with its connotations of lust, rapture, and uncontrolled passion, was the epitome of unbusinesslike behavior. The bourgeoisie defined itself morally against the promiscuous proletariat and the sensual nobility as the class with virtuous self-denial. Bourgeois respectability led to a most unique separation of marriage and love on the one hand, from sexuality on the other.
>
> 1978: 169

To corroborate the positive "businesslike behavior" of the gay father, I would like to expand for a moment on my own dual position as both scholar and object of scholarship. In 2006, I was in the process of becoming a father through joint parenting, and in December 2007 my son was born. During my search for a parenting partner and our subsequent attempts at conception, I was accompanied by the television crew of *Ima Yekará Lee* (Mother Dear, Channel 10, 2007) and the episode I was featured in was broadcast about a month before my son was born. Although the program dealt mainly with infertility among women, this

episode focused on my attempts to father a child. In one scene the television crew accompanied me on the way from the home (where I had "produced" the sperm) to the clinic (where I would deliver it), and the following conversation was shown:

Interviewer There must be a deadline to get to the clinic.
Itay Within an hour from ejaculation.
Interviewer And your partner? What's the procedure with her?
Itay She'll come [later] to be inseminated. A doctor does it. It's very technical.
Interviewer Basically, you get here, do your part of the deal, and leave.

"Procedure," "technical," "deal": all these terms remove the process of getting pregnant from "dirty," "irrational" intercourse. During the filming, more emotional and less mechanical words were uttered, yet there seems to be a reason why the original exchanges didn't make it to the editing room. The interviewer seemed slightly shocked by the technicality of the process, and this is precisely why gay parenthood is presented so positively: Not only does it produce Ashkenazi, or at least mostly fair-skinned, children, but it is also rational and economically calculated (most of the resulting children will not need state support).

But can one avoid this kind of representation? Can one represent LGBT or gay parenting in Israel without falling into the pitfalls of normalization or advocacy? Did I, as any other gay father, have any option, or even desire, to subvert the normalization of gay parenting while appearing on television? In the chapter's last section, I propose a possible post-television alternative to the normalizing representation of gay parenting, which, though it may not resolve all the problems raised here, nonetheless challenges the hegemonic discourse.

Ima VeAbbaz (Mom and Dads)

Ima VeAbbaz (Mom and Dads), a fictional serial, revolves around a parental triangle consisting of a gay couple, Erez (played by Yiftach Klein) and Sammy (Yehuda Levy), and a straight woman, Talia (Maya Dagan), who produce a child (Figure 7.4). The child is the biological offspring of the distinctly Ashkenazi-looking Erez and Talia, while Sammy, Erez's Mizrahi partner, functions as the second father, even though he has no legal relationship to the child. The series' writer and creator, Avner Bernheimer, is a prominent Israeli television

Figure 7.4 Erez (Yiftach Klein), Taliá (Maya Dagan), and Sammy (Yehuda Levy) in *Ima VeAbbaz*. Photo: Ohad Romano.

screenwriter, who also wrote the successful drama *Yossi and Jagger*, which similarly starred Yehuda Levy (as Jagger).

The series triggered disagreement among television critics and the LGBT community. Many praised the series for both its quality content and its message. For example, one critic wrote, "*Mom and Dads* courageously dismantles clichés" (Yitzhaki 2012); another wrote, "One can hardly exaggerate the effectiveness of this comic drama, the complex and multi-layered handling of dramatic situations" (Birnat 2012); and a third suggested that it "makes an important contribution to the acceptance of the idea that LGBT families, in their varied makeups, belong to the norm" (Volach 2012). Even the *New York Times* praised it, comparing it to *The New Normal* (NBC, 2012–2013): "While the American show mines laughs from outrageous characters and snarky one-liners, *Mom and Dads* focuses on the complex dynamics of the parental triangle, layering their insecurities and complicated emotions with wry humor" (Schaefer 2012).

Besides garnering general acclaim, there were also complaints, mostly among gays who had watched the first episode and didn't like the idea that the child's biological father, Erez, bicycled to Independence Park (a gay cruising spot) to get a blow job at the exact moment when Talia, the mother, was about to enter the

Figure 7.5 Erez gets a blow job (*Ima VeAbbaz*).

delivery room (Figure 7.5). Many felt this plot element was a regression to old representations of gays that emphasized promiscuity or, as one viewer posted in an online forum: "I was disappointed by the episode's immediate suggestion that the man always cheats and comes home as though nothing had happened. Too bad they're not showing in such a series that in this community there are also *normal* couples who don't cheat" (emphasis mine). In another forum, another poster commented: "How stupid—the father feels so insecure that while Maya [the actress's name] is giving birth, he can't handle it and goes to get a blow job from some random guy in fucking Independence Park, as though the eighties were still here. So much shallowness backed by prejudices."

I suggest that the poster's referring to the character by the actress's name in the last comment isn't an accident: it indicates that the viewer reads the text not purely as fictional, but as a reference to reality, which spotlights gays in general rather than the particular character, or even the text as a cultural artifice. Perhaps this scene should be read not as a referential (and anachronistic)[14] depiction of gay life in Tel Aviv, but as a performative, even insolent, statement of *Mom and Dads*. Dispatching the protagonist to Independence Park, which for many gays metonymically signifies gay culture in the days before gay pride in Israel, conveys the message that the text doesn't mean to ingratiate itself to the viewers, whether gay or straight, nor does it presume to present a character of an "easily digestible"

gay man so that the audience would "grant him a parenting license." In some ways, one can argue that this scene conjures up the late 1980s and early 1990s films by Israeli director Amos Guttman, who often placed his characters among the trees of Independence Park and was overtly "contemptuous of the demand for 'politically correct' representations of homosexuality" (Yosef 2010b: 186).

Another corpus of audiovisual texts which can be contrasted with *Mom and Dads*, includes American film and television texts (like *My Best Friend's Wedding* and *Will and Grace*) which, as James Allan describes, present relationships between straight pregnant women and gay men, whether as the fetus's/child's father or not (Allan 2007: 57). Often, the gay man would like to be a father, for various reasons, one of which is simply to display normative masculinity (ibid.: 62). In most cases, to be presented as a worthy and normative father, his portrayal relies on the figure of a woman "unfit for motherhood" (ibid.: 66), while he himself must undergo a process of desexualization (ibid.: 67). "At their worst," Allan concludes, "many gay-man-straight-woman texts re-inscribe extremely limited and dehumanizing representations about gay men and straight women: that gay men cannot be sexual and responsible at the same time; that career women cannot be good mothers" (ibid.: 71). Thus, despite the queer potential of friendship, and even of joint parenting between a straight woman and a gay father, many cultural texts actually choose to reproduce predominant views.

Ima VeAbbaz deliberately dismantles this stereotype. Firstly, we have a rational, working mother (in fact, of the three she is the only one with clearly defined employment) who has chosen the arrangement, and even states that she has no interest in parenting within a heterosexual relationship. Secondly, rather than suppress the gay fathers' sexuality, the series highlights it: the biological father goes to Independence Park for a blow job, and both the main and secondary characters use highly sexual language, including conversations on genitalia and anal sex, even if at times using a slang that might be lost on heterosexual (and even some homosexual) ears. Furthermore, the narrative is structured such that Erez, the non-functioning father, that is, the father who is repeatedly shown struggling to care for the child, slowly loses his sexual desire for men and briefly even fantasizes about a "heterosexual gene." In one scene he even refuses to have sex with Sammy, who wants to penetrate him, as he feels this may damage his masculinity and, therefore, his fatherhood (Figure 7.6). Yet the series distinctly conveys that it is actually the sexual gay man, who doesn't suppress but rather celebrates his sexuality, who is the better and more devoted father.[15]

Figure 7.6 Sammy wants to penetrate Erez, who refuses (*Ima VeAbbaz*).

The idea that the non-biological, overtly sexual father functions better as a father not only severs the connection between biology and parental attachment, but raises another subject: parenting as performance. While Erez is hard put to understand his parental role, Sammy assumes it easily. Yet the idea that Sammy functions better than the biological father challenges the "naturalness of the role." Moreover, Erez rebukes Sammy several times for merely "playing dad" (when he reads books on parenting, feeds the child, or is excited to see him) because Sammy is not the biological father. At some point, Erez even tells Sammy, "All your efforts are fake, just fake." Yet it is Erez, the biological father, who presumably doesn't have to fake his role, who fails over and over in the performance of fatherhood.

However, might Sammy's "successful faking" and Erez's failure at parenting not suggest that all parenting is a kind of fakery, or at least a part of gender performance, that is, "acts [and] gestures [that] produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body" (Butler 1990: 136)? Butler's description of the performative character of gender suggests that functioning as a father or mother is a form of performativity, "therefore a doing, a becoming, rather than a being" (Geinger et al. 2014: 3). In other words, if you act like a dad, and play the role persuasively, you can be the dad, regardless of biological or legal status.

The idea of parenting as performance is manifested in yet another scene, in which Erez and Sammy reproduce a widespread image on Israeli television: two

Figure 7.7 Erez and Sammy as two men and a baby carriage (*Ima VeAbbaz*).

men carrying a baby carriage (Figure 7.7). As they walk, Erez suddenly lets go of the carriage, which rolls down the street and tips over. What at first appears to be a disaster that alarms passersby quickly turns out to be a misunderstanding: the carriage was empty. Thus, this common image is, in fact, a performance that challenges not only other television representations of fathers pushing a baby carriage, but also the "naturalness" of the scene which, as has been mentioned, has become "the fashion" in Tel Aviv (Harman 2013). It also suggests that much like fashion, or clothing, parenting can be worn, even without any essence underneath.

Furthermore, *Ima VeAbbaz* offers a complex exploration of the issue of ethnicity. Unlike the Ashkenazi ethnicity of most gay fathers who appear on the news and documentaries, and despite the attempt to obfuscate this issue—which, as we've seen, remains a crucial component of the issue of fertility in Israel—*Ima VeAbbaz* addresses it both explicitly and implicitly. Yet it is not always clear whether the series adopts the colonialist gaze typical of the fertility discourse in Israel, or exposes and defies it.

The issue of ethnicity emerges foremost in the character of Sammy, who is distinctly portrayed as a Mizrahi man surrounded by Mizrahi men,[16] and in the character of his mother (Raymonde Abecassis), an actress particularly associated with Moroccan culture. The mother, who is hard put to accept her son's sexual orientation (note the stereotypical representation of a slightly "primitive" Mizrahi mother), does not consider Sammy's son to be her grandson, and the first sentence she utters when seeing his photograph is: "Ashkenazi, but cute."

In more than one way, Sammy reproduces many Mizrahi stereotypes, as well as those specific to Mizrahi gays. Thus, on the one hand, while Erez gradually loses his sexual passion, Sammy exudes an explosive sexuality, apparently reflecting the hegemonic Ashkenazi view that "signified the Mizrahi body as the sexual and gender other of the ideal Zionist-Ashkenazi body" and "produced ideological fictions [. . .] on the sexual nature of Mizrahi masculinity" (Yosef 2010b: 111). Yet Sammy is not merely hyper-sexual, he is also very effeminate, reproducing yet another common stereotype: the refined, "feminine" Mizrahi youngster (ibid.: 116). Moreover, despite the rather exceptional representation of a gay Mizrahi father, the biological father is Ashkenazi, and, therefore, the cult of fertility appears to be staying its usual course, with the Ashkenazi father chosen to transmit his genes.

Yet the series is not oblivious to this choice, and even seems to portray it as disturbing: in the first episode, Erez is upset that his son doesn't resemble him, but what bothers him most is the child's curly hair, to the point that he decides to pull out a hair from the boy's head and submit it for DNA testing. Furthermore, he inquires as to whether Talia, the mother, once had curly hair and had subsequently straightened it. Erez's obsession with hair can be attributed to his "natural" fear that the biological father may be someone else. Yet one cannot dismiss the fact that in Israeli society curly hair is a key sign, a prominent synecdoche, of Mizrahiness. That is, Erez is worried not only that his son may not be his biological child—causing him to initially refuse to declare his paternity—but most of all that his son is curly-haired, that is, Mizrahi. When he tells Sammy that he suspects he may not be the biological father, Sammy replies, jokingly, that it's true and that he, Sammy, is the biological father. Erez does not find the joke funny, as in many ways it seems to reflect his biggest nightmare.

Moreover, the series presents the relationship between Talia, Erez, and Sammy as a utilitarian one, in which the first two, the biological Ashkenazi parents, "use" the non-biological Mizrahi father, or treat him as "cheap labor." In one episode, Talia tells Sammy that he should carry the child, because "What else are you here for?" This attitude toward Sammy, who throughout the entire series is presented as the most responsible and devoted parent, is repeated throughout the serial, thus perhaps exposing a cardinal Zionist approach, as described by Raz Yosef, in which the motivation "to bring Mizrahi Jews to Israel" was economic and political, exploiting Mizrahi bodies as cheap labor (ibid.: 110).

Does *Ima VeAbbaz* criticize the exploitation of the Mizrahi body? Does it reproduce it? Moreover, does the series join in the cult of fertility (or the cult of

the "right people" procreating), or does it explore it critically from a fresh angle? There are no unequivocal answers to these questions. Yet unlike many texts which, eager to normalize gay parenting, prefer not to tackle weighty questions, let alone provide answers to them, *Ima VeAbbaz* confronts its audience not only with the gay fathers' sexuality and the performative aspect of parenting, but also with the enmeshed connection between procreation, ethnicity, and race, which Israeli society usually tries to obfuscate and even deny.

To conclude, one can explain the differences between the heteronormative representation of gay fatherhood in the news and documentaries, and queer representation—or at least the non-ingratiating kind characteristic of parenthood in *Ima VeAbbaz*—from various angles: generic (news vs. drama), institutional (commercial vs. cable channels), or personal (the creators' various worldviews). One can also place these differences along the spectrum ranging from normative to queer, with most contemporary Israeli television texts in the middle rather than at the far ends. While the debates on representations typical of television scholarship since the 1970s, which to this day influence both academic and popular discourse, have evaluated gay representations in positive or negative terms, this chapter has shown that it is precisely the apparently negative representation that can sometimes offer liberating outlets to a minority group uninterested in normalizing integration. On the other hand, the "positive representation" of gay parenthood as something inherently good, even worthy of striving for, can have an oppressive effect on those who do not wish to or cannot have children. What many openly gay men have been spared for many years—social and family pressure to produce children (or grandchildren)—has now become their lot as well, and we cannot ignore the role of television in this phenomenon.

8

Conclusion and Some Observations on Israeli Reality TV

Big Brother How are you, Amjad? [. . .] Or, should I say, Yossi?

Amjad I don't understand, Big Brother.

Big Brother Your first task is to pass as Jewish [. . .] if you can hide your Arab identity from the other housemates until Sunday, you will receive immunity from eviction [. . .]

Amjad It won't work, Big Brother. The minute I open my mouth, they'll be on to me. Trust me [. . .] I'm here to convey a message. Really. A message of peace.

Big Brother You'll have plenty of time to convey messages after the task is over. Big Brother [. . .] is counting on you, Amjad. Or should I say, Yossi Peretz?

Amjad Peretz, Big Brother? That's . . . a Mizrahi name, isn't it, Big Brother? See, I'm thinking, if I do this task as a Jew, I've got to have an Ashkenazi surname. It's just . . . more suitable for my nature. You know? It would be more believable. Maybe Epstein, Big Brother?

Big Brother Alright. Agreed. Yossi Epstein.

Amjad Danny. Daniel Epstein, Big Brother.

Avodá Aravìt, season 3: episode 1

This dialogue, from an episode of the Israeli comedy-drama series *Avodá Aravìt* (Arab Labor) titled "Fictional Identity," takes place between Amjad (Norman Issa) and "Big Brother"—voiced by Yoram Zak, who also voices "Big Brother" on the Israeli version of the successful reality program *Ha'Ach HaGadól* (Big Brother, Channel 2: 2008–). The episode was filmed on the actual set of the Israeli *Big Brother*, and features appearances by Erez Tal and Assi Azar, at the time the hosts of the program, while Amjad and the other "housemates" are portrayed by actors and actresses. This hybridity—mixing fictional characters and real people, as well as genres of fiction and reality—is not a new phenomenon on television, where reality and fiction, scheduled side by side, often coexist and intermingle (Burdon 2000: 459). In recent years, however, generic hybridity has become increasingly common on television, and hybridity in particular among

Figure 8.1 Amjad (Norman Issa) is talking to Big Brother (*Avodá Aravìt*).

genres of reality and of fiction (Mills 2004; Edgerton and Rose 2005: 7).[1] Some, in fact, consider hybridity to be one of the common characteristics of post-television texts (Williamson 2009).

In the case of *Avodá Aravìt*, this hybridity offers a deconstruction of Israeli identities.[2] This is achieved by depicting identity as performative: while it might not be possible, as in *Big Brother*'s assigned task, to put on an identity and discard it at will, it is certainly possible to "play" with it and to perform it using the appropriate characteristics. Thus, for example, the Palestinian-Israeli Amjad transforms into an Ashkenazi Jew by changing his name and his behavior (refusing to drink Turkish coffee with cardamom, traditionally associated in Israel with Arabs and Mizrahim), and by constructing an alternative personal narrative, in which his father is given a heroic past as an IDF soldier, and he himself is a kibbutz member. Furthermore, Amjad's insistence on impersonating an Ashkenazi rather than Mizrahi Jew, and his initial rivalry with, and consequent identification with, a Mizrahi contestant/housemate, emphasizes the extent to which primary categories of identity in Israel, and the dichotomies they constitute—such as Jew/Arab, Mizrahi/Ashkenazi—are tentative and prone to deconstruction and reconstruction. Though this is a fictional text and a "fictional identity," it would nonetheless seem to reflect on Israeli reality; as LaCapra argues (2014: 185–186), "[a]t times art departs from ordinary reality to produce surrealistic situations or radically playful openings that seem to be sublimely

irrelevant to ordinary reality, but may uncannily provide indirect commentary or insight into that reality."

The drama series discussed in this book have likewise provided a number of surreal situations: an Israeli combat pilot, son of a Holocaust survivor who was forced to kill his own father in the ghetto, kills 15 innocent Palestinians, suffers clinical death after a cardiac incident during a tennis match, miraculously recovers, undergoes psychotherapy, questions his sexual orientation, and meets his death in what might be either an accident or an act of suicide; two aging former resistance fighters who one day begin murdering the youth of Tel Aviv, eventually killing a young woman who turns out to be the daughter of one of them; an Israeli soldier witnesses an incident in which a wristwatch is removed from the body of an enemy soldier, traumatizing him and haunting him decades later, leading him to become an unwitting accomplice to an oligarch's assassination mission at the Sea of Galilee; a Mizrahi Jew who refuses to "properly" grieve with the rest of the Israeli nation on Holocaust Remembrance Day; an Ashkenazi gay man removes a hair from his infant son, suspecting that he is not his biological son, and that he is Mizrahi. These events move from the realistic to the surreal, but they all, in LaCapra's words, "provide indirect commentary or insight" into the realities of twenty-first century Israel.

This book's main purpose has been to demonstrate how Israeli television, or more specifically Israeli post-television drama, has become a major venue via which Israeli culture communicates itself to itself, providing commentary and criticism. Unlike earlier television texts, which largely leaned toward consensus—in an attempt to appease both political and commercial sponsors—the unique characteristics of the post-television era have led to the rise and flourishing of television dramas that dare to address issues previously avoided by the medium, and to present critical opinions of Israeli society and Israeli identities—opinions that have often been termed "post-Zionist."

This post-Zionist tendency is articulated in several ways. Firstly, by depicting mythic archetypes of Israeli culture—such as the Jewish pre-state underground members who "built the country," or the IDF combat pilot—as partaking in unjustified and merciless killings, thereby challenging one of the most fundamental Zionist precepts: that the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is a dichotomous struggle of good against evil. Secondly, by portraying the heavy price these men and others must pay for their own violent actions (or for the violent actions they have witnessed, as with Shaul on *Parashat HaSahvua*), as well as for the national ideal of Israeli masculinity—thus undermining the image of the "new Jew," another

central precept of Zionist ideology. And thirdly, by pointing to the cultural effacement inflicted upon Jews from Arab countries—an effacement mourned by *Zaguri Imperia*, and alluded to (or, rather, replicated by) *Ima VeAbbaz*.

At the same time, this research has not ignored Israeli post-television's continuing need to be popular, and to attract various audiences by presenting diverse ideological positions. Thus, these texts maintain high levels of polysemy, often countering their criticism with humor and occasionally with conservative rhetoric, leaving interpretation to the audience. And so, a series such as *Ima veAbbaz* might alternately be read as either a reactionary text, which replicates hegemonic positions on childbirth, parenthood, and ethnicity; or as a critical text that questions and undermines these very positions. Similarly, *Zaguri Imperia* enables a range of audience reactions (as suggested by Avishai's play, discussed earlier), reading it either as a critical text or as mere lighthearted, even frivolous entertainment.

Aiming to illustrate the complex and nuanced nature of television texts, I have chosen to analyze only five drama series, at the expense of ignoring other texts, whose cultural relevance and importance are no less significant than those of the texts discussed here. However, this choice enables a close reading of specific case studies, utilizing diverse tools provided by television studies, including both textual analysis and discourse analysis. As such, this research does not presume to make any generalizing claims regarding all of Israeli television drama, or provide a comprehensive overview of Israeli television as a whole.

Nonetheless, this research would be remiss without mentioning, even briefly, another significant phenomenon characteristic of Israeli post-television—the dominance of reality television, or what John Corner (2002) has named "post-documentary." Recall that contemporary television drama, though highly prominent in hegemonic discourse, is not the only product of the current phase of Israeli television, nor is it the most significant one, certainly in terms of ratings or of the quantities of content produced today. In Israel, as in the rest of the world, while the era of post-television has indeed led to the proliferation of increasingly diverse dramatic content, it has also led to the rise of reality television.

Though its origins in Israel can be traced back to the early 2000s,[3] it was not until programs like *Kocháv Nolád* (Pop Idol, Channel 2: 2003–2012), *Hisardút* (Survivor, Channel 10: 2007–2012: Channel 2: 2015–), and *Big Brother* gained widespread popularity that the genre claimed a prominent—at times almost exclusive—position on the Israeli prime-time schedule, with various singing and cooking competition programs regularly topping the ratings charts.

For many television critics and scholars, reality TV and television drama stand at opposing ends of the spectrum of television culture. For one thing, the reality genre "promises to provide nonscripted access to 'real' people" (Murray and Ouellette 2009: 3), while the genre of drama is premised on fiction, enacted by actors playing out a script. Secondly, and no less important, while the genre of drama is discursively perceived as having artistic merit, and therefore as being "quality television," or a "good object," the reality genre is largely perceived as pure entertainment, one of the inferior television genres, and therefore a "bad object," an emblem of "bad television" or of "regular" television as a whole.

However, despite the many differences between these two genres, recall that they also have much in common. Firstly, both genres are greatly influenced by the transformations of the medium, with the numerous possibilities offered in the post-television era (such as the multi-platform viewing experience and the convergence of digital technologies) closely entwined not only with the success of narrative innovation in the genre of drama, but also with the success of the reality genre (Murray and Ouellette 2009: 2–3; Gray 2010: 8–84). Secondly, the "quality" of one genre is dependent, among others, on the "inferiority" of other genres; we have seen, for example, how *Nevelot* and *BeTipul* attempt—both textually and discursively—to differentiate themselves from "regular television."

Third, as the example from *Avodá Aravìt* illustrated, the genre of drama cannot ignore the reality genre, at times incorporating it as a central reference point, either as the subject of criticism, or as a legitimate part of the same television landscape. Thus, *Zaguri Imperia* also incorporates various—and not necessarily negative—references to *Big Brother*, by which the series creator, Maor Zaguri, has admitted to having been influenced in his own writing.[4] And lastly, both genres have also been greatly influenced by cultural processes in Israeli society, and while the reality genre largely tends to present more conservative views than those of the genre of drama (particularly when airing on broadcast channels during prime time), it often raises similar themes to those addressed by drama.

Thus, for example, prior to its seventh season, the production of *Big Brother* specifically looked for "Mizrahi activists," among them Roy Hasan (who has appeared, as was previously mentioned, on television in the Zaguris' living room), to appear as housemates on the show, aiming to add a "prominent presence of Mizrahi discourse" to the season (Stern 2015). Eventually, activist Or Sionov joined the cast, and her on-screen protests against various forms of violence—institutionalized and non-institutionalized—perpetrated upon Mizrahim and Arabs became a prominent talking point when discussing the

season, for both critics and supporters of the worldviews to which she gave voice. Nadav Peretz and Hani Zubida (2016), for example, argued that Sionov represented for her opponents

> the field through which [they examined] the major transformations taking place before their eyes. From the immense success of the spoken poetry events held by the poets of "Ars Poetica"[5] to the critical Mizrahi discourse and the new terminology it has introduced into the collective Israeli consciousness, the media, and public discourse [. . .] now, after decades of struggle, these opinions and the striving for equality have become mainstream.

However, as popular shows are often broadcast by commercial networks, reality programs do not adopt post-Zionist assumptions, and are sometimes deeply embedded in mainstream Zionist discourse.[6] A characteristic example of the genre's reactionary ideological position is *HaShagrìr* (The Ambassador, Channel 2 2005–2006), which purported to find a "representative for Israeli hasbara" (Israeli public diplomacy) who would most positively advocate internationally on behalf of Israel. The premise of the show was that Israel's major problem is its image abroad, and not its problematic actions against Palestinians.

While *HaShagrir* is certainly not post-Zionist, it does manifest another central characteristic of Israeli post-television: a post-traumatic experience. Thus, in order to emphasize Israel's just position, in one episode, in which the contestants visit Uganda, the show constructs its contestants as post-traumatic subjects of the hijacking of an Israeli airplane to Uganda in 1976, even though they hadn't even been born at the time. This is done visually, by presenting the hijacking as the private memory of the contestants (particularly by dissolving images of their faces with images from the fictional film *Mivtzá Yonatan* ([Operation Thunderbolt, Menachem Golan, 1977], which tells the story of the hijacking), as well as through the contestants' monologues, in which they describe the visit as "coming full circle" or as "returning to Uganda," despite never having been there.

Contestants in many other reality shows similarly rely on trauma, emphasizing their traumatic life stories in order to win audience sympathy. These traumatic narratives are sometimes highlighted by the production as well, particularly in the subgenre of "makeover," in which traumatic discourse is often utilized to explain crisis and to justify the need for change, whether in the family unit—in programs like *Super-Nanny* (Channel 2: 2007–2013) and *Mishpachá Chorèget* (Stepfamily, Channel 2: 2006–2012)—or in the participants' fashion choices—as happens, for example, on *Trinny and Susannah Do Israel* (Channel 10: 2012)

and *HaYafá VeHachnún* (Beauty and the Geek, Channel 10: 2008–2014). However, unlike drama series, which are influenced by psychoanalytic discourse, reality television tends to "resolve" trauma in a manner more compatible with cognitive behavioral therapy, which is premised on certain presuppositions that are consistent with the genre's premise: the perception of the individual as an agent of change and therefore as having the capacity to change his/her behavior; an emphasis on the individual's current behavior (rather than the traces of his/her past); and the notion that change can be made quickly and externally (Wilson 2005).

Of course, reality programs also reflect, rather than just cause, transformations in the lives of individuals: the genre is in fact viewed by some as a direct response to the transformations in global and local industry structures that are sometimes called post-Fordism (an element which, as was mentioned in the introduction to this book, is also featured—much less prominently—on drama series). Indeed, many scholars have observed the close correlations between the reality genre and the post-Fordist condition, pointing out reality programs' portrayal of the characteristics of the new subject of capitalism (Bourdon 2008), with the experience of the reality contestant—in constant fear of elimination, under scrutiny by the other contestants, pressured to form temporary alliances, etc.—likened to the everyday experience of the contemporary work force (Bratich 2007: 9–11; Hearn 2009: 134).

Life under these economic transformations has been described, not surprisingly, as a difficult and even traumatic experience: "Israeli society in the nineties is undergoing a deep crisis and a radical transformation [. . .] living in Israel in this period might be likened to the trajectory of a scary roller coaster, where frightening monsters lurk behind every corner, threatening the passengers [. . .]" (Ram 1999: 99). In this sense, reality programs can be read as a post-traumatic reaction to the roller-coaster ride nature of the economic and social transformations undergone by Israeli society, to the declining sense of personal security, and to the deepening of social and economic inequality, accompanied by poverty and a sense of injustice (ibid.: 136).

So that rather than dismissing the reality genre as pure escapism or as "the Bonfire of Nonsense," it should be regarded as a direct product not only of the changing television culture, but also of the fears and anxieties of the Israeli public facing the changing realities of life. Though the solutions offered are, for the most part, frivolous and insufficient, tending toward simplicity and populism, the programs themselves are not as far removed from reality as they are often

presented in discourse. This matter, and more in-depth textual analyses of specific reality programs, are outside the scope of this research.

As I have stated throughout, it is not only reality programs that are not analyzed herein, due to time and space constraints, but also many other dramas that are no less important and influential that those that are analyzed. Yet I believe that in the upcoming years, more and more academic articles will be written on Israeli television, just as we're seeing more articles on television worldwide, addressing both the drama and the reality genres. In the Israeli context specifically, it appears that the combination of local Israeli changes, which led to the production of complex and "quality" dramas, and global changes, foremost the transformation of Netflix and other such online viewing services into significant factors in the production of dramas and their viewing—so much so that we can define it as the next stage in the evolution of television, or TVIV (Jenner 2016)—will perhaps provide many around the world exposure to the Israeli drama in its original form. As recently as the writing of this conclusion, select Israeli series can now be found among the offerings of Netflix, Amazon, and Hulu,[7] leading to more viewership around the world and drawing more academic attention. It is my hope that this book will contribute, however modestly, to this process.

Notes

Preface

1 Until Channel 2 began broadcasting in 1993, Israel's public television channel was called simply "Israel Television," while after 1993 it became known as "Channel 1." Throughout this book, I will refer to programs produced up to 1993 as belonging to "Israel Television," and to subsequent works as belonging to "Channel 1."
2 A critique of the dichotomous division between reality entertainment shows and "quality" dramas is presented in Chapter 8.
3 An adjective denoting Jews of Middle Eastern origin, whose culture is and was considered inferior to that of Ashkenazim, or Jews of European descent, who form the hegemonic group in Israeli society.

1 Half a Century of Israeli Identities through Television

1 *Siach Lohamìm* is an adaptation of a startling and widely read collection of kibbutz-raised combatants' reflections on the Six-Day War. The genre taxonomy of *Siach Lohamìm* is complex: It is in many senses a hybrid text that moves between the documentary and the dramatic, and between the theatrical and the televisual. This hybridity stems from the fact that although the monologues are recited by actors who were guided by a theater director, they are in fact reconstructions of the same testimonies given by Israeli soldiers in the book of the same name, without a connecting storyline between them.
2 Rogel Alpher provides us with a slightly different perspective: while he doesn't speak out against the narrative that Lapid's management led to the marginalization of controversial issues, he shows how Lapid's appointment to office was a reaction against the elitism that characterized Israeli television (*Atem Sham BaBayit*, Episode 1).
3 Late 1980s–early 1990s Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation.
4 Masuda being a stereotypical female Mizrahi name; and Sderot being a southern outlying town, thus assumed to be lacking in culture.
5 The data for Channel 1's dramas were collected with the help of Orna Lavie Flint, as part of a study we conducted together.

6 At the same time, Cohen is skeptical towards claims of multiculturalism, as demonstrated in her analysis of the series *Zinzana* (Haim Bouzaglo and Micha Sharfstein, Channel 2, 2000–2005), that it was only a semblance of multiculturalism.
7 This is not to say that the "old" viewership—the linear viewership of television dictated by the channel's broadcast schedule—has disappeared, and, as Ido Keinan (2010) adds, "The majority of viewers still watch traditional linear broadcasts."
8 However, the existence of trauma in televised texts should not be understood as a post-traumatic phenomenon, nor as a representation or simple reflection of processes in Israeli society that exist a priori to their appearance on television. Rather, the emergence of trauma on Israeli television plays a pivotal role in the structuring of drama within Israeli society, and in this sense, it is not only "post-trauma," but also the prior condition for its very existence.
9 Such as *Meorav Yerushalmi* (Jerusalem Mixed Grill, Jackie Levy and Nissim Levy, Channel 2 and Channel 10, 2004–2010) *Merhák Negiyá* (A Touch Away, Ronit Weiss Berkowitz, Channel 2, 2008), *Srugim* (Crocheted [skullcaps], Hava Dibon and Laizy Shapiro, Yes, 2008–2012), *Urim VeTumim* (Divination, Shuki Ben-Naim and Elad Chen, Yes, 2011) and *Shtisel* (Uri Alon and Jonathan Indorsky, Yes, 2013–).
10 Though often used interchangeably with "Mizrahi," "Sephardi" in certain cases refers to a slightly different population.

2 Bringing Back the Nation: *BeTipul*'s Male Warrior

1 As of early 2015, these are the countries where a local adaptation of *BeTipul* has been produced (figures in brackets indicate the number of seasons produced to date): USA (3), Canada (2), Netherlands (2), Italy (2), Russia (2), Poland (1), Romania (2), Czech Republic (2), Serbia (1), Slovenia (1), Croatia (1), Argentina (3), Brazil (3), Chile (1), Japan (1), Luxembourg (1).
2 Later reruns on Israel Channel 2 dispensed with this daily airing format, as the weekly schedule was divided among several media franchisees. The format was also not retained by some foreign adaptations of the series.
3 Even the character's name is heavily symbolic: Yadìn is Hebrew for "he shall judge"; and Yerushalmi ("Jerusalemite") is a classic Hebrew surname.
4 From Yiddish: a skinny, weakly "pipsqueak."
5 It would seem that the coffee maker in many ways makes a similar cultural statement to the one ascribed to youth hanging out in coffee shops in the 1960s, who were even called "the espresso generation," indicating "individuals absorbed in their own personal and hedonistic world, having abandoned the values of pioneering and Zionism in favour of individualism and careerism" (Naor 2014: 444).

6 In this context, it is important to point out that the post-Zionist condition, which was discussed in the opening chapter, has to do not only with television content, but also with its modes of consumption. According to Charles S. Liebman, "The connection between [Post-Zionists and consumerist-hedonistic orientations] is that the consumerist-post-modernist culture focuses upon the individual and denies the authority of the larger collective, thereby providing a foundation upon which post-Zionist arguments appear credible and even appealing. If individuals are all that count, and national identity no longer carries any authority, then the post-Zionist demand that Israel be 'a state for all its citizens' is perfectly just" (1997: 175).
7 It should be emphasized that neither the textual construction of Yadin's experience as traumatic, nor my own reading of his character as a post-traumatic subject, absolve him of the responsibility for the suffering he has caused or present him as another victim of the act he himself has committed. As LaCapra has argues, "not everyone traumatized by events is a victim. There is the possibility of perpetrator trauma [. . .] Such trauma does not, however, entail the equation or identification of the perpetrator and the victim" (2014: 79).
8 As Yadin puts it, it was ultimately nothing more than simply "another day in the long history of Yadin Yerushalmi," further distancing himself from the incident by referring to himself in the third person.
9 Among the films Yosef discusses are *Paratroopers* (Judd Ne'eman, 1977); *Repeat Dive* (Shimon Dotan, 1982), and *Soldier of the Night* (Dan Wolman, 1984).

3 It's Not TV, It's *BeTipul*: Rethinking "Israeliness"

1 On the use of quotation marks when denoting "quality," particularly in television studies, see Cardwell (2007: 25). For recent discussions of "quality television" see, among others Jacobs (2001); Jaramillo (2002); Geraghty (2003); Jancovich and Lyons (2003); Mittell (2004: 94–120); McCabe and Akass (2007).
2 "Two Fat Men" was the pseudonym under which television critics writing for *Tel Aviv Newspaper* wrote.
3 The minimalist musical style (composed by Avi Belleli) contributes to the sense of abstraction that the title sequence evokes; moreover, this musical impressionism can be viewed as an attempt at creating musical "color blots" (Palmer 1973: 28), interacting with the Rorschach ink blots that appear throughout the sequence. I would like to thank Gal Hermoni for these insights.
4 In the second season, one character could be considered Mizrahi, due to the casting of Mizrahi actress Assi Levy, though the ethnic issue is never addressed.
5 Shaked is referring to various expressions that are all associated in Israeli culture

with Mizrahim. Operation Flying Carpet and Operation Solomon were names of operations that brought Yemenite and Ethiopian Jews to Israel, respectively; the Falash Mura are Ethiopian immigrants whose Jewish status is questioned; *jachnun* is a traditional Yemenite Jewish dish; and Mimouna is a traditional Moroccan Jewish celebration.

6 This is how the VOD service was described on HOT's official website in its first years.

7 *BeTipul*'s affinity with the talk-show genre was underscored by the airing of the Israeli talk show *Sihát Nèfesh* (Heart to Heart, HOT and the Educational Television, 2008–), hosted by psychoanalyst Yoram Yovell, a program perceived by critics as the "non-fiction version" of *BeTipul* (Lazovski 2008). For a discussion connecting the talk show genre and psychotherapy, see White (1992); Shattuc (1997); Illouz (2003).

4 Bad Television/Good (Post-) Television: Aging and Masculinity in *Nevelot* (Eagles)

1 However, perhaps one thing may have changed after all; at least concerning Ephraim, as in Melanie Klein's terms, one might argue that Ephraim is now able to break away from the paranoid-schizoid position and take on a far more reality-based one; the "depressive position" (see Klein 1940).

2 This shift also emerged owing to the fact that our mode of television viewing has changed beyond recognition: From passive and non-selective viewing that had been so synonymous with television for years (Gerbner 2002: 342), viewing in the digital era of (post-) television is now touted as an active, selective experience. See Rogers et al. (2002).

5 Small-Screen Trauma: Seriality and Post-Trauma in *Parashat HaShavua* and *Waltz with Bashir*

1 Among the important films that have dealt with the Lebanon War are *Ricochets* (Eli Cohen, 1986); *Fragments* (Yossi Zomer, 1989); *Cup Final* (Eran Riklis, 1991) and *The Cherry Season* (Haim Bouzaglo, 1991). For a discussion of those movies, see Gertz (1999); Shohat (2010: 232–236); Zanger (2012).

2 There is disagreement among scholars over the characteristics of serials and how they differ from other common narrative forms on television, notably the mini-series and the series or episodic series. All of these writers, however, cite the continuous character of this narrative form. See Corner (1999: 57–58); Creeber (2005: 11); Mittell (2010: 230).

3 This dream is cited more explicitly in Udi Aloni's film *Forgiveness* (2006). Despite the differences between the two texts, it appears that both turn to this dream to elucidate the connection between trauma and guilt (Zanger 2012: 138), or, as Sandra Meiri argues in her article on *Forgiveness*, the dream "turns into an ethical demand located in a specific traumatic historical context where all involved suffer, are guilty, and are therefore held accountable" (2012: 343). Moreover, Meiri continues, Freud's dream, in which a son accuses his father of allowing him to burn, links the text to the biblical myth of the *akedá* (the binding and near-sacrifice of Isaac). This myth hovers over the first season of *Parashat HaShavua*, in which it turns out that Shaul prefers (unconsciously) to sacrifice his son's "surrogate," but since it is a human sacrifice, it fills Shaul with guilt and haunts him like a ghost (Harlap 2016a: 141–162).

4 Israel's main Holocaust commemorative museum (literally "memorial and a name"), where all visiting heads of state lay a wreath in memoriam.

5 In *Waltz*, the characters explicitly compare the events, whereas in *Parashat* the link emerges through the name of the place where the body was buried, Yad Vashem Junction.

6 Many critics have noted the unusual narrative structure of *Waltz* and have even argued that it is one of its central characteristics. Natasha Mansfield (2010: 2), for example, mentions that the film offers "fluid movement between subjectivities that jump back and forth from one consciousness to another," which leads, among other things, to a situation in which there is "no sense of chronology to events: A person's story will begin, falter, be interrupted by a different narrative, and then pick up the thread again some time later" (ibid.: 4). Landesman and Bendor (2011: 366) argue that the film "weaves the viewers into its nightmarish mnemic web," and Stewart (2010: 58) adds that "Folman's narrative is especially difficult to remember in the exact order of its realist flashbacks and its delusional cover stories. As a psychic topography, it amounts less to an autobiographical through-line than to the layering of a collective unconscious."

7 I refer here, of course, merely to the potential inherent in the serial's narrative structure, one that usually remains unfulfilled. Many series have their characters undergo a psychological process, in the course of which they make progress and even manage to resolve major problems in their lives. The series *Six Feet Under*, for example, presents an ethos of treatment and self-improvement (Merck 2005).

8 The existence of a scene oscillating between the realistic and the hallucinatory on the shores of the Kinneret/Sea of Galilee of all places is by no means random. As Hanan Hever (2007b, 128) claims, the Sea of Galilee harbors multiple thematic meanings, and its cultural existence, moving back and forth between religion and secularity, creates "in those who observe, visit, and experience it [. . .] a dual reaction of imagination and reality." Given this cultural status of the Kinneret, it is hardly surprising that we find Shaul's objective reality and subjective experience intermingle

at this site, generating a situation that borders on the absurd, and one that can bring Shaul Nawi to ask the same questions raised by the poet Rachel when writing about the Kinneret: "And perhaps these things never happened," and "O, my Kinneret / Were you there, or was I dreaming?" (cited in ibid.: 137).

9 *nahag boss*, a soldier who serves in the IDF as the driver of senior officers.

6 "Black Box": Memory, Television, and Ethnicity in *Zaguri Imperia*

1 One of the principal memorial rituals in Israel is the sounding of a minute or two-minute siren, during which it is customary to cease any activity and stand in place, collectively sharing a national moment of silence. Not standing during the sounding of the siren is largely considered (by Jews) to be a major cultural taboo, or at least a huge social faux pas.

2 The *ma'abarot* were tent camps for temporary housing of incoming refugees and immigrants in 1950s Israel. Though people from all countries passed through the *ma'abarot*—both Ashkenazim (Jews who immigrated from Europe) and Mizrahim ("Oriental" Jews who came from Arab countries, including Morocco, Beber Zaguri's country of origin)—discriminatory policies by the government, as well as assistance by veteran Israeli relatives of Ashkenazi immigrants, resulted in 80 percent of the residents of the *ma'abarot* being Mizrahim. Also note Beber's conflating of "camps" and their occupants: Nazi concentration camps (Ashkenazim) < > tent camps (Mizrahim).

3 The Hebrew word for "perpetuate" is in this context the same as the word for "commemorate."

4 "Shtetl" is the Yiddish word referring to small Jewish towns located in Central and Eastern Europe before the Holocaust.

5 *Egoz* was the name of an undercover ship that carried Jewish immigrants from Morocco to Israel in the early 1960s, when the emigration of Moroccan Jews to Israel was illegal. The *Egoz* sank in 1961, drowning all 44 immigrants on board.

6 As Sasson-Levy and Shoshana explain, "Replacing a Mizrahi last name with a more 'Israeli-sounding' one" is a common practice among Mizrahi Jews "passing" as Ashkenazi, as "surnames are major signifiers of social positioning and can thus provide a path to social mobility" (2013: 461).

7 Referring to "Israel's development town programme, which entailed the establishment of 28 new towns during the 1950s, mainly in the country's peripheral regions" (Yiftachel 2000: 418), a program which, as has been argued, "caused the reproduction of inequality, and the creation of a discernible low-status 'ethno-class' in the towns, comprised mainly of Mizrahi Jews" (ibid.).

8 The Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow Coalition is a non-profit organization established (mostly) by descendants of Jewish immigrants from Arab countries, that aims to transform public discourse and government policies relating to Mizrahim. *Sh'chur* was influenced by the discourse generated by this organization, and the film's creator, Hana Azoulay Hasfari, was an active member in the Coalition's first years (Alush-Levron 2015b: 2).

9 The Histadrút is Israel's largest labor union.

10 In this sense, *Sh'chur* is following a wider, global cultural tendency whereby the medium of cinema differentiates itself from the medium of television by rendering the latter a "bad object"—characterized by commercialism, consumption, a lack of authenticity, and the destruction of family life and traditional community values (Brunsdon 2008, 128)—in order to establish itself as a "good object."

11 However, it should be pointed out that—and this points to a unique characteristic of the serial structure—as of this writing, the future of the series remains unclear. While the chances of there being a third season are quite high, what will happen in this season? Will Avishag find her place in the big city without losing her identity, or will she surrender, as her brother and many others have before her, and assimilate into the hegemonic identity? Is the headphone scene merely a passing moment in which Avishag enjoys the individual privacy and freedom afforded by a city that celebrates individualism, only to find herself feeling alienated and alone later on, longing for the familial, "tribal" environment she has left behind, one that celebrated "togetherness" over individual growth? Only time will tell.

12 Throughout the series, Avishag is shown to admire Bollywood films, even producing, along with a friend, a video clip for an Indian song, in order to compete in a contest that would send the winner to take part in an actual Indian film production. Avishag's affinity with Bollywood films, which she watches on television, underscores her ability to choose her own cultural products, as well as pointing to many Mizrahi Jews being drawn to Indian cinema, seen as "a relatively legitimate replacement for their forbidden Arab culture, thereby forming an alternative to the Eurocentrism of the Ashkenazi cultural hegemony in Israel" (Yosef 2011a, 72). Furthermore, by creating her own video clip, Avishag is a practicing "prosumer" (a consumer who also produces her own content), one of the main characteristic behaviors enabled by the era of "post-television"—as viewers create their own audiovisual content in response to "institutional" content, and upload it to YouTube and other websites, for other viewers to watch and respond to.

13 A mufleta is a North African Jewish pancake, traditionally served at the Mimouna celebration following Passover.

14 "Hafla" is the Arabic word for a party or get-together.

15 "Ars," literally "pimp" in Arabic, is a widely used derogatory Hebrew slang term used to describe male Mizrahim of low socioeconomic status.

16 Incidentally, but perhaps not coincidentally, following *Zaguri*, Maor Zaguri directed an adaptation of *Hamlet* for Habima Theatre, a play whose eponymous protagonist reenacts, as part of a play within the play, the murder of his father in front of his uncle, in order to test the latter's reaction upon realizing that Hamlet is aware of his crime. Unlike Hamlet, however, Avishai's purpose is not to test the members of his family nor to cast blame on them, but rather to declare his knowledge of the incident and his unwillingness to remain silent any longer, even considering the event to be the inspiration for his uniqueness and his creation.

7 The New Normative: Gay Fatherhood on Israeli Television

1 As Edwin Seroussi (2010) writes about the song's lyrics: "The ironic text calls the (Mizrahim/Oriental Jewish) public to bring more and more children; one can get benefits from having more children such as receiving public housing. But children are also needed because the country needs 'nice young people,' a hidden hint for the need by Israel of cannon fodder and a cheap working force." The clip's ethnic/Mizrahi context is underscored both by the casting of Dana International (whose family comes from Yemen) and by the clip's creators, who stage high-profile Middle Eastern-themed gay parties known as *Arica* (for more about Arica, see Atwan 2015).
2 Ultimately, the clip was removed from *YouTube* on the grounds that it has exploited minors, as they were not aware of the song's subject.
3 One of the clip's creators also participated in this and other discussions held at the time. He even explained his intention, writing on his profile page (after the Tel Aviv municipality removed the clip from YouTube): "It turns out that it was too extreme for the City, and did not sufficiently promote the tepid message of encouraging childbearing among the LGBT [. . .] I think the City, which is wasting resources and energy on a giant parade, can at least make a bold effort and face the pressure brought to bear on the values it promotes."
4 This book deliberately addresses only gay and not lesbian parenting. Some examples will refer to trans-male parenting, which also exists within gay couplehood. This focus stems from the view that "It would be theoretically as well as empirically inaccurate to discuss both female and male Israeli homosexuals under one rubric" (Kama 2000: 136); and from the cultural shift in recent years that has allowed representations of gay fathers to thrive on Israeli television.
5 The third season of the comic drama *Ima'leh* (Mommy, Mommy, Muli Segev and Tamar Marom, Channel 2, 2005–2008) features a gay couple who try to procreate through a surrogate mother; in the series *Inyán Shel Zman* (A Matter of Time, Ronit Weiss Berkovich, Channel 2, 2012), a gay couple adopt an older child who was

thrown out of his home; *Rviyat Ran* (The Ran Quartet, Oren Yaakoby and Giyora Yahalom, Yes, 2008–2010) features a man who leaves his wife and two children for another man.

6 In the first episode of the third season of the Israeli version of *Ima Machlifa* (Wife Swap, Channel 2, 2005–2014) one of the families includes two gay men and three adopted children. In the fifth season of the docu-soap *Mechubarìm* (Connected, HOT3, 2009–) one of the participants was a gay co-parent.

7 The LGBT community has evolved within a wider cultural context. Within the discourse that defines Israel as a Jewish state, LGBTs have become a flashpoint in the searing debate on the state's religious vs. secular character. Both right- and left-wing parties tout LGBT rights as a key element in the transformation of Israel into a secular, liberal democracy. As Elissa Solomon writes, "standing against the imposition of fundamentalist religious law, [the tolerance of queerness] has come to stand for democratic liberalism" (Solomon 2004: 153).

8 In this respect there appears to be a difference between the gay and lesbian communities. Among the former, many have sought to join the mainstream, whereas many active members of the latter share a feminist worldview and, therefore, often "[see] themselves as situated outside the mainstream, working against the system" (Kadish 2005: 231). Yet this phenomenon, too, dwindled once lesbians were accepted by Israel's liberal culture, a process facilitated, among other factors, by rising birth rates among the lesbian community (ibid.: 233–234).

9 While the phrase "gayby boom" is probably more appropriate to describe the phenomenon, it is not part of the Israeli lexicon.

10 In addition to the interpellation function, these statements have another function: They represent the "phenomenon" as something special and unique, and therefore newsworthy.

11 Peregrín et al. (2014), in addition, offer three central tenets: "No difference," "A question of rights," and "De-sexualizing."

12 In Israel, as of this writing, only heterosexual couples are allowed to use Israeli surrogates, of course in exchange for payment. Same-sex couples who wish to use surrogates are compelled to find them abroad, at much higher costs, and often in developing countries such as Nepal, India, and Thailand, raising the issue of exploitation. Thus, when the speaker says "for free," not only is he inaccurate; but he also ignores or minimizes the surrogate's role and work.

13 While serving as Treasury Minister and head of the liberal Yesh Atìd Party, Yair Lapid wrote in a similar vein about a gay couple who procreated through surrogacy in the US: "Both served in the army, they work hard for a living, and for the past 15 years have run one of the most stable, beautiful, and healthy homes I've ever seen," hence they too deserve surrogacy in Israel.

14 Anachronistic because not only is this a dated and "negative" representation of gays typical of Israeli culture in the past, but also because by the time the series was filmed, Independence Park was no longer a gay cruising area.
15 On the other hand, Sammy's portrayal as a devoted and loving father reproduces stereotypical ethnic representations, as in Israeli culture the Mizrahi family is persistently portrayed as being "warm" and "familial" in contradistinction to the "cold" Ashkenazi family unit.
16 One of Sammy's friends is played by Uriel Yekutiel, a performer identified mostly with *Arica*, which produces gay parties featuring Mizrahi music (Atwan 2015).

8 Conclusion and Some Observations on Israeli Reality TV

1 In recent years, many television series, dramatic and comedic, have placed this fluidity of reality and fiction in the forefront, often deliberately confusing actors with the characters they portray. To name only a few representative examples from American and British television, we might mention *Episodes* (Showtime and BBC2, 2011–), *Life's Too Short* (BBC2, 2011), *The Comeback* (HBO, 2005, 2014), and others. This trend has been accelerating in Israeli television as well, and among the more successful examples we might mention *Red Band* (Hot, 2008–2011), a "comedy verite" (Mills 2004) that features Israeli musicians and singers portraying themselves; *Ish Hashuv Meod* (VIP, HOT, 2014–), *Tzomet Miller* (Miller Junction, Channel 2, 2016–), in which actors Yehuda Levi and Adir Miller respectively portray exaggerated versions of themselves, and *HaTasritái* (The Screenwriter, Channel 1, 2015–), which depicts the life of Sayed Kashua, creator of *Avodá Aravìt*, who is portrayed by an actor (Yousef Sweid), while other actors appear on the series as themselves.
2 This is not to say that any postmodern text that blurs generic boundaries necessarily provides a deconstruction of identities. Thus, for example, the sketch comedy series *HaYisraelim* (The Israelis, Channel 2, 2007), an unofficial Israeli adaptation of *Little Britain* (BBC3, 2003–2004), presents a reactionary—even racist—view of Israeli identities. This is particularly apparent in the character of Salim, "the only Arab student in the university," a variation on *Little Britain*'s Daffyd Thomas, "the only gay in the village." While Daffyd's character is used to convey a queer worldview, deconstructing sexual identities and orientations, *HaYisraelim* emphasizes Salim's otherness, presenting him as "not really Israeli," and does not highlight his connection to the Mizrahi students, or "Arab Jews." In other words, despite its deconstructive potential as a hybrid text, *HaYisraelim* presents a conservative, isolating worldview.

3 With programs such as *HaChafarpèret* (The Mole, Channel 2, 2001) and *Kchi Ottì, Sharón* (Take Me, Sharon, Channel 2, 2: 2003).

4 Remarks made during a special panel discussing Mizrahi discourse on Israeli television, as part of "Inside and Outside the Box," 6th '*Fiktzia*' Conference on Television Studies, Tel Aviv University, February 23–24, 2016.

5 "Ars Poetica" is a contemporary Israeli spoken poetry group. Its name alludes to Horace's *The Art of Poetry*, as well as to the Israeli slang term *arss*, a derogatory name for Mizrahi men. The group was founded around 2013 by Israeli poet Adi Keissar, and also includes Roy Hasan, Erez Biton, and other members.

6 Sionov, for example, did not make it to the season finale; while her "nemesis," Shai Hai, a nationalistic Mizrahi man who "passes as Ashkenazi," charmed the audience. However, neither did he make it to the finale, following an act of violence directed at Sionov.

7 For example: in February 2017 the next Israeli television dramas could be found among the offerings of Netflix, Amazon, and Hulu: *Fauda* (Lior Raz and Avi Issacharoff, Yes, 2015–), *Bnèi Brubá* (Hostages, Omri Givón and Rotem Shamìr, Channel 10, 2013–), *HaMidrasha* (*Mossad 101*, Uri Levron and Izhar Harlev, Channel 2, 2015–2016), *Hatufìm* (*Prisoners of War*), *Mekimi* (Noa Yaron and Yuval Dayan, HOT, 2013), and *Srugim*.

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"A New Family" (April 29, 2010), *HaYomán*, Channel 1.
Atèm Sham BaBáyit (2012), Ami Amir, Hila Alon, and Rogel Alpher, Channel 8.
Atèm Sham BaBáyit (2012), Rogel Alpher, HOT8.
Avodá Aravìt (2007–2013), Sayed Kashua, Channel 2.
Bat Yam-New York (1995–1997), David Ofek and Yossi Madmony, Channel 2.
BeTipul (2004–2007), Hagai Levi, HOT3.
Big Brother (2008–), Channel 2.
Bitchilát Káyitz 1970 (1972), Edward Atler, Israel Television (Channel 1).
Bnèi Brubá (2013–), Omri Givón and Rotem Shamìr, Channel 10.
Bnót Braun (2002), Irit Linur, Channel 2.

"Dad and Dad" (February 12, 2009), *Saturday News*, Channel 2.
Dexter (2006–2013), Showtime.
Episodes (2011–), David Crane and Jeffrey Klarik, Showtime and BBC2.
Euphoria (2012), Ron Leshem and Dafna Levin, HOT3.
Fauda (2015), Lior Raz and Avi Issacharoff, Yes.
"Father and Father" (December 30, 2012), *HaYoman*, Channel 1.
Fernheim (1971), Yossi Israeli, Israel Television (Channel 1).
Florentin (1997–2001), Udi Zamberg and Eytan Fox, Channel 2.
HaBurganim (2000–2004), Asaf Tzipori and Eitan Tzur, Channel 2.
HaChafarpèret (2001), Channel 2.
Hafúch (1996–1998), Shmuel Haimovich, Channel 2.
HaMidrasha (2015–2016), Uri Levron and Izhar Harlev, Channel 2.
HaShagrìr (2005–2006), Channel 2.
HaTasritái (2015–), Sayed Kashua, Channel 1.
Hatufìm (2010–2013), Gideon Raff and Liat Benasuly, Channel 2.
HaYafá VeHachnún (2008–2014), Channel 10.
HaYisraelìm (2007), Yigal Shapira and Uri Katz, Channel 2.
Hedva veShlomik (1971), Shmuel Imberman and Irena Spector, Israel Television (Channel 1).
Hisardút (2007–2012, 2015–), Channel 10, Channel 2.
Ima Machlifá (2005–2014), Channel 2.
Ima VeAbbaz (2012), Avner Bernheimer and Tmira Yardeni, HOT3.
Ima Yekará Lee, (2007), Channel 10.
Ima'leh (2005–2008), Muli Segev and Tamar Marom, Channel 2.
Indiáni BaShèmesh (1981), Ram Levi, Israel Television (Channel 1).
Inyán Shel Zman (2012), Ronit Weiss Berkovich, Channel 2.
Ish Hashúv Meód (2014–), Shirley Mishiyev, HOT.
Kavanót Tovót (2008), Adi Zivlin and Dudi Berman, Channel 2.
Kchì Ottì Sharón (2003), Channel 2.
Khirbet Khizeh (1978), Ram Loevy, Israel Television (Channel 1).
Kocháv Nolád (2003–2012), Channel 2.
LeChaverìm Bilvád (1991), Ido Bahat, Israel Television (Channel 1).
Life's Too Short (2011), Warwick Davis and Ricky Gervais, BBC2.
Little Britain (2003–2004), David Walliams and Matt Lucas, BBC3.
Meorav Yerushalmi (2004–2010), Jackie Levy and Nissim Levy, Channel 2 and Channel 10.
Mechubarìm (2009–), Ram Landes and Doron Tsabari HOT3.
Mekimi (2013), Noa Yaron and Yuval Dayan, HOT.
Merhák Negiyá (2008), Ronit Weiss Berkowitz, Channel 2.
Mischakèim BaHóref (1987), Ram Levi, Israel Television (Channel 1).
Mishpachá Chorèget (2006–2012), Channel 2.

Nevelot (2010), Dror Sabo and Dafna Levin, HOT3.
Parashat HaShavua (2006–2009), Rani Blair and Anat Assouline, HOT3.
"Pregnant Dad" (March 28, 2014), *Hamakor*, Channel 10.
Ptzuìm BaRósh (2013–), Hanan Savion and Guy Meir, HOT3.
Red Band (2008–2011), Eithan Zor and Keren Chachama, HOT.
Rviyat Ran (2008–2010), Oren Yaakoby and Giyora Yahalom, Yes.
Shtisel (2013–), Uri Alon and Jonathan Indorsky, Yes.
Sìach Lochamìm (1969), Nola Chilton, Israel Television (Channel 1).
Sihát Nèfesh (2008), Hot Bidúr.
Six Feet Under (2001–2005), Alan Ball, HBO.
Srugim (2008v2012), Hawa Divon and Laizy Shapiro, Yes.
Stella (1975), Ram Levi, Israel Television (Channel 1).
Super-Nanny (2007–2013), Channel 2.
The Comeback (2005, 2014), Lisa Kudrow and Michael Patrick King, HBO.
The New Normal (2012–2013), Ryan Murphy and Ali Adler, NBC.
Tironút (1998–2001), Uri Barbash and Benny Barbash, Channel 2.
Trinny and Susannah Do Israel (2012), Channel 10.
Tzomet Miller (2016), Adir Miller, Channel 2.
Urìm VeTumìm (2011), Divination, Shuki Ben-Naim and Elad Chen, Yes.
Will and Grace (1998–2006), David Kohan and Max Mutchnick, NBC.
Yossi and Jagger (2002), Avner Bernheimer and Eytan Fox, HOT3.
Zaguri Empire (2014–), Maor Zaguri, HOT3.
Zinzana (2000–2005), Haim Bouzaglo and Micha Sharfstein, Channel 2.

Film

A Clockwork Orange (1971), Stanley Kubrick, UK.
Apocalypse Now (1979), Frances Ford Coppola, USA.
Beaufort (2007), Joseph Cedar, Israel.
Cherry Season (1991), Haim Buzaglo, Israel.
Cup Final (1991), Eran Riklis, Israel.
Dirty Harry (1971), Donald Siegel, USA.
Forgiveness (2006), Udi Aloni, Israel.
Fragments (1989), Yossi Zomer, Israel.
Gran Torino (2008), Clint Eastwood, USA.
HaAyit (1981), Yaky Yosha, Israel.
Hu Halách BaSadót (1967), Yossef Milo, Israel.
Lebanon (2009), Shmuel Maoz, Israel.
My Best Friend's Wedding (1997), P. J. Hogan, USA.
Paratroopers (1977), Judd Ne'eman, Israel.

Repeat Dive (1982), Shimon Dotan, Israel.
Ricochets (1986), Eli Cohen, Israel.
Sh'chúr (1994), Hanna Azoulay Hasfari and Shmuel Hasfari, Israel.
Soldier of the Night (1984), Dan Wolman, Israel.
Waltz with Bashir (2008), Ari Folman, Israel.

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