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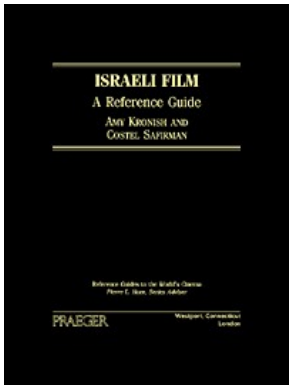
ISRAELI FILM
A Reference Guide
Amy Kronish and
Costel Safirman
PRAEGER

ISRAELI FILM

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ISRAELI FILM

A Reference Guide

AMY KRONISH AND COSTEL SAFIRMAN

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Pierre L.Horn, Series Adviser

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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SERIES FOREWORD

For the first time, on December 28, 1895, at the Grand Café in Paris, France, the inventors of the *Cinématographe,* Auguste and Louis Lumière, showed a series of 11 two-minute silent shorts to a public of 35 people, each paying the high entry fee of one gold franc. From that moment, a new era had begun, for the Lumière brothers not only were successful in their commercial venture but also unknowingly created a new visual medium quickly to become, throughout the world, the half-popular entertainment, half-sophisticated art of the cinema. Eventually, the contribution of each member of the profession, especially that of the director and performers, took on enormous importance. A century later, the situation remains very much the same.

The purpose of Greenwood's *Reference Guides to the World's Cinema* is to give a representative idea of what each country or region has to offer to the evolution, development, and richness of film. At the same time, because each volume seeks to present a balance between the interests of the general public and those of students and scholars of the medium, the choices are by necessity selective (although as comprehensive as possible) and often reflect the author's own idiosyncracies.

André Malraux, the French novelist and essayist, wrote about the cinema and filmmakers: "The desire to build up a world apart and self-contained, existing in its own right…represents humanization in the deepest, certainly the most enigmatic, sense of the word." On the other hand, then, every *Guide* explores this observation by offering discussions, written in a jargon-free style, of the motion-picture art and its practitioners and, on the other, provides much-needed information, seldom available in English, including filmographies, awards and honors, and ad hoc bibliographies.

Pierre L.Horn
Wright State University

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PREFACE

The country of Israel is young, and Israeli film is still a developing industry. As can be seen from an analysis of the quality films produced during the last 10–15 years, the industry has undergone considerable growth and is maturing rapidly. In fact, Israeli films have received critical attention and have been seen in film festivals all over the world, have been broadcast on television internationally, and have gained status and prestige as the cultural and social voice of a nation. In writing this book, we have tried to provide insight into that voice. What are the themes that have been seen on the Israeli screens? How have these themes changed over the years? Who are the people behind the films—and what are they trying to convey?

In "A National Cinema in the Making: An Overview," we have tried to provide a historical and social view of the films. There is no doubt that Israeli cinema reflects the existential dilemmas and the social achievements of both Arabs and Jews within Israeli society. It also reflects political crises and critical voices. Only a careful analysis of trends can provide a greater understanding of the country and the people of Israel. In order for readers to be able to assess these trends for themselves, we have tried to provide detailed information on a large number of Israeli films and filmmakers. The emphasis is on "information"—our intention was to provide as much raw material as possible, including synopsis, credits, biographical material, and so on—in order to supplement the material that already exists in English and in order to provide readers with a valuable resource in assessing the cinematic culture of Israel. It should be noted that a "guide" is not an "encyclopedia"—it does not claim to be all-inclusive. Rather, we have chosen to discuss a diverse selection of Israeli films (information on more than half of the features produced since the establishment of the state in 1948 is included herein) and to offer background on a large number

of key film directors, producers, actors and actresses, cinematographers, and composers.

One of the most difficult tasks was to choose which films should be included. Films were chosen based on a number of criteria: cinematic quality, thematic content, success at the box office, reviews of the Israeli critics, and awards, both national and international. The films chosen here reflect historical trends and social issues. They also offer a look at the development of filmmaking in Israel—both as an industry and as an art form. Since documentary filmmaking is also an important part of the film expression of a nation, we have included a representative choice of documentary films made for the cinema (since the 1930s) based on similar criteria. The documentary films appear together with the feature films, listed alphabetically, in the major part of this guide, which is devoted to individual film entries. Each entry includes English title, original Hebrew title (in transliteration), year of production, credits, awards, analysis of the importance of the film, the major issues that it portrays, and a synopsis of the film's narrative. In order to assist readers in searching for additional information, an asterisk (*) signifies a cross-reference to a film entry or to biographical information.

A fair amount of this guide has been dedicated to the people who have produced Israeli films—those who have devoted their lifework to the art of cinema. Some of them were pioneers in the field. Others have taken up the reins where the pioneers left off. All of them, however, have made an important mark on the film industry in Israel. Their brief biographies are presented, together with a filmography of their Israeli films.

Awards presented to films and filmmakers can be an important measure of achievement. They also measure the growth and development of the industry. This guide provides an appendix of international prizes that have been awarded to Israeli feature films—a reflection of the recognition received over the decades. Also mentioned herein are the prestigious national prizes that have been awarded—the prizes of the Israel Film Center of the Ministry of Industry and Trade that were awarded during the 1970s and 1980s; the Israeli Academy Awards, which have become the major prizes of the industry since 1990; and the prizes of the important international film festivals of Jerusalem and Haifa.

In researching the biographical section and in analyzing literally hundreds of films, we took advantage of the insight and experience of many people in the field. We wish to thank the following persons for their input, advice, and patience while being interviewed as part of our research: Gila Almagor, Muhammed Bakri, Uri Barbash, Michal Bat-Adam, Rafi Bukaee, Eli Cohen, Ilan Eldad, Larry Frisch, Amit Goren, Moshe Ivgi, Tsipi Reibenbach, Dan Wolman, and the following, who are no longer with us: Baruch Dienar and Maryana Gross.

The resources amassed at the Jerusalem Cinematheque were invaluable to our ongoing work, and we thank Lia van Leer for making them available to us. We viewed films—both on 35mm editing tables and on video equipment—and we partook of many public screenings of Israeli films. We made use of the library's

new database of Israeli cinema and wish to express our appreciation to the staff—Nirit Eidelman, Ilil Barak, Keren Ben-Or, Michal Mendelboym, and Avi Green—for their efforts in organizing and adding to the enormous collection of newspaper clippings and the creation of this database. In researching the production credits that appear for each film entry, we tried to take the information from the films themselves—a method that truly provides the most reliable material. When this was not possible, however, the information was taken from materials at the library of the Jerusalem Cinematheque.

We are indebted to a previous book on Israeli film entitled *World Cinema: Israel,* by Amy Kronish (published in 1996), from which we adapted some of the research and material and built around it a new structure. We also made use of the reference work by Meir Schnitzer, *Israeli Cinema: Facts/Plots/Directors/ Opinions* (published in Hebrew in 1994), which provided us with details that were otherwise difficult to find.

Our thanks to our editors, Eric Levy of Greenwood Publishing Group and John Donohue of Westchester Book Services, for their dedication to this important series. This is one of the paths for different cultural voices to become known internationally and for readers to become acquainted with a variety of cinematic expressions that are so important in helping to spread greater international dialogue and understanding.

We are especially thankful to our families for their advice, assistance, and support during every phase of this project. We would never have been able to complete this guide without their invaluable insight and understanding.

Amy Kronish
Costel Safirman

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A NATIONAL CINEMA IN THE MAKING: AN OVERVIEW

Since its inception, Israeli cinema has been preoccupied with issues of a society under siege—the hardships of a situation of ongoing war, problems of JewishArab relations, and the major survival issues of the state. Despite this focus, Israeli filmmaking is in fact much more complex and varied. Indeed, Israeli cinema covers a wide spectrum of issues that have developed during the more than 70 years since the first local production of a feature film in 1932.

Filmmaking in Israel, as in other countries, is a contemporary cultural form of expression and also a political and social expression, reflecting more than the personal point of view of each filmmaker and producer and providing a commentary on social trends, historical challenges, and societal issues. Although films can be considered as individual pieces of work, the thrust of this overview is to show how an understanding of Israeli society can be garnered through a careful analysis of the subject matter, issues, and styles of expression of this unique medium. This analysis provides the reader with a better understanding of Israeli cinema as a national cinema in the making—one that has been developing since its infancy during the early British Mandatory period and flourishing in recent years.

THE BRITISH MANDATORY PERIOD

Filmmaking began in British Mandatory Palestine following World War I with an emphasis on documentary production. This period was characterized by ideological and informational films that were produced to convince foreign audiences of the success of the Jewish pioneering enterprise in Palestine at that time. The films of the period reflected the great enthusiasm for the idealism and

dedication to egalitarianism, socialism, and self-defense, all of which characterized the efforts of the early pioneers during the 1920s and 1930s.

A number of the major documentaries of that period were commissioned by the institutions of the embryonic state, such as *Land of Promise* (Judah Leman, 1934), a look at the development of the Jewish settlement in Palestine. Although very different in style, *Avodah* (Helmar Lerski, 1935) also emphasized images of the archetypal pioneers, drilling for water, working in the fields, and making the desert bloom. Lerski's monumental images of people and machinery, however, were offered in contrast to the Palestine that the Jews were trying to change and improve—the barren hillsides, premodern Arabs plowing with old-fashioned methods, and camels slowly lumbering across the screen.

The embryonic film industry in Palestine was struggling and developing during this period. In addition to documentary filmmaking, a number of filmmakers tried their hand at the production of newsreels. The major contribution in this field was made by Nathan Axelrod, who used homemade equipment and worked out of his own laboratory, tirelessly producing Carmel Newsreels, which were screened in the cinemas without interruption for more than 30 years (except during the war years from 1940 to 1945, when the cinemas were closed). Axelrod's newsreels have documented every significant aspect of the growth of the Jewish state in the making, including the establishment of the kibbutzim, the draining of the swamps, the development of the city of Tel Aviv, and the declaration of the state of Israel by David Ben-Gurion in 1948. Together with Haim Halachmi, who came to cinema from the world of theater, Axelrod produced the first dramatic, feature-length film, *Oded the Wanderer* (directed by Halachmi, 1932).

THE HEROIC PERIOD

Following the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, dramatic filmmaking began to develop, especially with an emphasis on creating the mythical images typical of a young society. Almost all of the dramas of this period provide heroic images of both men and women—pioneers, fighters, and Holocaust survivors—as can be seen in feature-length dramas such as *They Were Ten* (Baruch Dienar, 1960), which looked back on the early pioneers of the nineteenth century, and *Hill 24 Doesn't Answer* (Thorold Dickinson, 1954), about the War of Independence. *They Were Ten* is a sensitive story of heroism and bravery based on the diaries of early Zionist settlers in the 1880s. Shot on location on a hilltop in the western Galilee, the film is significant due to its artistic quality, in-depth characterizations, and striking images. Filmmaker Baruch Dienar is credited with the first Hebrew-speaking feature film to be given recognition internationally—Twentieth Century Fox distributed the subtitled version in 24 countries. *Hill 24 Doesn't Answer,* a film of three episodes, recounts the tales of a group of young soldiers during the last remaining hours of

the War of Independence of 1948. The film combines elements of romance and melodrama with authentically evoked incidents based on historical detail.

Following the uplifting victories of the 1967 Six Day War, a second wave of heroic dramas was seen on the screen. Different from the first wave, these films show both cinematic development and societal change. The loneliness of a war widow is sensitively portrayed in *Siege* (Gilberto Tofano, 1969); the motivations that drive men to commit heroic deeds are seen in *Every Bastard a King* (Uri Zohar, 1968); and a dangerous commando mission is portrayed in *Scouting Patrol* (Micha Shagrir, 1967). Although these films reflect a society in which the perils of war are a basic part of life, there are now a growing maturity, a sense of loss, and an understanding of the dangers involved in wartime. This trend toward a more realistic approach to the inevitability of war continued until the image of the invincible heroic Israeli faded entirely from the screen following the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the war that caught Israel unaware, thereby bringing tremendous losses in battle and resulting in a newfound feeling of vulnerability.

THE CENTRALITY OF JERUSALEM

Following the Six Day War, the reunited city of Jerusalem became the focus of a number of films of the period. In addition, there have been a small number of filmmakers over the years for whom Jerusalem is central to their work. The films of Dan Wolman—*Hide and Seek* (1980), *My Michael* (1975), and his short ode to the city, *To Touch a City* (1978)—reflect a filmmaker's obsession with the city—its light and colors, its stones, its history, and its people. *Hide and Seek* deals with the problems and tensions of living in a society under siege. It is a film about maturity—the demands of a society coming of age, the politics of a state in formation, and the maturity of an adolescent boy who gains understanding and learns about the complexities of the world. Wolman's earlier film, *My Michael,* is an award-winning film about solitude. Set in the divided city of Jerusalem during the 1950s, the film's achievement lies in its beauty and gentleness. A reflection of the divided city in which she lives, the heroine becomes melancholic, isolated, and full of loneliness and tension; she gradually abandons herself to a world of fantasies and dreams.

One of the earliest filmmakers to seriously look at the city, documentary filmmaker David Perlov produced the short film *In Jerusalem* (1963). A few decades later, Ron Havilio combined two styles, documentary and personal diary, for his film *Fragments—Jerusalem* (1994), an epic film that was more than 12 years in the making and that interweaves his personal and family connection to the contemporary city with the historical Jerusalem. Other filmmakers who have portrayed the symbolism of Jerusalem as a major element in their films are Moshe Mizrahi (*I Love You, Rosa,* 1972, and *Women,* 1996), Michal BatAdam *(Moments,* 1979, and *A Thousand and One Wives,* 1989), and, more

recently, Hagai Levi (*August Snow,* 1993), Ye'ud Levanon (*Black Box,* 1993), and Joseph Cedar (*Time of Favor,* 2000).

Jewish thinkers and religious leaders throughout the centuries have spoken of a vision of heavenly Jerusalem, something difficult to fathom and even harder to concretize. With the advent of photography and cinema, everything became more real and concrete, with less being left to the imagination. Thus, Jerusalem, once a heavenly city, became a city of everyday reality, a city of real-life clashes, a city of people and problems instead of vision and future.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDIGENOUS CULTURAL VOICE

Even before the Six Day War, during the early 1960s, Israeli cinema began to develop a uniquely Israeli film expression. Menahem Golan contributed to the growth of the industry through the large number of ethnic and action films that he produced, thereby providing jobs, experience, and a film culture for an entire generation of film technicians and filmgoers. Filmmakers such as Uri Zohar and Ephraim Kishon contributed through their new themes and unique styles.

Menahem Golan, the most prolific and successful of Israeli producer/directors, is perhaps the figure most responsible for the growth of Israeli cinema during the 1960s and 1970s. Golan directed his first film, *Eldorado* (1963), which starred the then-unknown Haim Topol and was a huge box office success. Golan's low-budget ethnic films are the forerunners of the popular "bourekas" films, which were generally made for audiences of Jews from Arab lands, known as Sephardi Jews. In 1973 Golan created the first Israeli musical film spectacular, based on a popular Israeli stage musical (by Yigal Mossinson), entitled *Kazablan*. The story is about a petty criminal (played by Yehoram Gaon) who is seen as a victim of social prejudice. The film combines elements of the ambitious American musical with a tale of ethnic tension and romance in Old Jaffa. The lyrics and songs became well known; the album was a best-seller; and the film was acquired by MGM for international distribution.

In addition to comedies and musicals, the prolific and diverse Golan has produced and directed Hollywood-style, fast-paced thrillers of international intrigue, terrorism, and underworld crime. Golan, who has been personally responsible for the production and/or direction of over 50 Israeli features, has been heavily condemned by Israeli critics for his popularized style of filmmaking and crass imitation of Hollywood. Golan did not believe in producing pretentious films for a limited audience of art lovers. Instead, he built his entire career on the belief that films must reach out and meet their public. He produced many of the biggest box office successes in Israel, which were not necessarily also the critics' choice. Even though most of his films poke fun at ethnic types, and his adventure films play on the Israeli macho heroic image, it is important to

note that Golan has also produced and directed a small number of elaborate and prizewinning films that received praise from the critics.

Uri Zohar's individualistic filmmaking can be characterized as unique, witty, irreverent, and often decadent. As a member of the Palmach generation, Zohar expresses a rebelliousness and a dissatisfaction with the normative, local lifestyle. His early expressions, such as *Hole in the Moon* (1963) and *Take Off* (1970), although fragmented, are brilliant parodies on many aspects of Israeli society. Moreover, his dramas *Three Days and a Child* (1967) and *Every Bastard a King* (1968) proved him to be a capable, serious director, concerned with societal issues both collective and individual. In a completely different style, he is perhaps best known for his trilogy of beach comedies—*Peeping Toms* (1972), *Big Eyes* (1974), and *Save the Lifeguard* (1977). These self-indulgent comedies portray the adolescent fantasy life of grown men. *Peeping Toms* has become a cult film in Israel due to its slang and its portrayal of the hedonistic and secular lifestyle personified by Zohar and other literary figures of that period. Although Uri Zohar abruptly ended his film career by making a complete about-face and becoming an ultrareligious Jew, his contribution to Israeli cinema is remembered for its spontaneity, creativity, and an authentically Israeli irreverence.

Very different in style and background from Uri Zohar, Hungarian-born Ephraim Kishon was also creating a particularly Israeli style of filmmaking during the 1960s. Although both filmmakers used humor, Kishon's sophisticated satire is very different from Zohar's spontaneity, slang, and vulgarity. Zohar's characters lived on the periphery of Israeli society in contrast to Kishon's satires of the little guy, the victim of society. Kishon's films—*The Big Dig* (1969), about a man who breaks out of a lunatic asylum and creates bedlam in Tel Aviv, and *The Policeman* (1971), which portrays a bumbling cop of Moroccan descent, not very effective but well intentioned—contain inimitable insight and satirical social comment. His most important contribution to Israeli cinema is the musical *Sallah* (1964), a parody of the life of the new immigrant family, Israeli bureaucracy, and the political system. Due to its warmth, understanding, and capacity for poking fun at every aspect of Israeli life, *Sallah* was extremely popular with Israeli audiences and became the most successful Israeli film of that period. The first Israeli film to be nominated for an American Academy Award*, it tells the story of a Moroccan Jew (Haim Topol) who has recently brought his large family to Israel and is living in the humiliating conditions of a transit camp. This exaggerated and stereotypical tragicomic look at the life of the new immigrants is the forerunner of many Israeli ethnic films that addressed the needs and moods of the large immigrant population.

*Seven Israeli films have been nominated for Academy Awards. Six features were nominated for Best Foreign Film: *Sallah* (Ephraim Kishon, 1964), *The Policeman* (Ephraim Kishon, 1971), *I Love You, Rosa* (Moshe Mizrahi, 1972), *The House on Chelouche St.* (Moshe Mizrahi, 1973), *Operation Thunderbolt* (Menahem Golan, 1977), and *Beyond the Walls* (Uri Barbash, 1984). One documentary was nominated for Best Documentary: *The Eight-First Blow* (Jacques Ehrlich, David Bergman, and Haim Gouri, 1974).

THE "BOUREKAS" PERIOD

Immediately after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, a large wave of immigration brought Jews from Arab lands, such as Morocco, Iraq, Libya, and Tunisia. These so-called Sephardi Jews are often referred to as the "second Israel" due to the fact that they were looked down upon by the "bettereducated" Ashkenazi Jews of European descent. By the late 1960s, the Sephardi Jews had learned Hebrew, moved out of the temporary transit camps, and become a viable audience for Israeli films.

A unique genre of locally produced Israeli films, "bourekas" films—named for the Middle Eastern puff pastry—used clearly identifiable ethnic characters in order to appeal to this segment of the population. The films, produced mostly during the late 1960s and 1970s, included both ethnic comedies and heavily laden melodramas based on ethnic stereotypes. Although not terribly serious or artistic in content, these films show great respect for the family and for Jewish values and were very popular with Israeli audiences.

Some of the most memorable images were seen in Ephraim Kishon's *Sallah* (1964), Menahem Golan's *Lupo* (1970), and Alfred Steinhardt's *Salomonico* (1972). In addition, melodramas by George Ovadiah such as *Arianna* (1971) and *Nurit* (1972) and tragicomedies by Ze'ev Revach such as *Only Today* (1976), *Sweet and Sour* (1979), and *A Bit of Luck* (1992) are some of the classic bourekas films. Revach's Sephardi character Sasson, who appears in many of his films, is a man of warmth, wisdom, and insight. During the same period, filmmakers such as Yoel Zilberg and Ilan Eldad were making ethnic films for Ashkenazi audiences.

Some of the *bourekas* films became pop culture classics in Israel. In addition, although not strictly belonging to the bourekas category, the teen teaser films directed by Boaz Davidson (including *Lemon Popsicle,* 1978, and its sequel, *Going Steady,* 1979) also appealed to the mass Israeli audience. The success of these teenage romances can be attributed to their imitation of international filmmaking techniques, especially the use of fast-paced editing and popular rock music.

POST-SIX DAY WAR BRAVADO

The Six Day War of June 1967 gave the country of Israel a sense of military security that it had never had before. The Israelis transformed their prewar vulnerability into a postwar heroism and optimism, which led them to believe that their new strength would bring them long-lasting peace with their Arab neighbors.

Many films, both documentaries and dramas, were produced that reflected the newfound bravado and euphoria. Films portrayed dangerous commando missions in the Sinai desert, and striking images from the documentary films showed

the shoes of fleeing Egyptian soldiers and many Egyptian tanks left behind in the desert.

Produced immediately following the war, full-length feature films offered a new psychological portrayal of the Israeli soldier. These dramas, produced in the wake of the war, include *Every Bastard a King* (Uri Zohar, 1968), portraying a swashbuckling Israeli hero; *Siege* (Gilberto Tofano, 1969), a psychological study of the loneliness of a war widow; *He Walked through the Fields* (Yoseph Millo, 1967), originally a stage play that examines the pioneering generation of the War of Independence; and *Is Tel Aviv Burning?* (Kobi Jaeger, 1967), the first Six Day War drama. Although dissimilar in their narratives, all reflect the postwar obsession with military and security issues and the societal need to come to terms with the new feelings of both euphoria and ambivalence that were a result of the war.

"KAYITZ"—YOUNG ISRAELI CINEMA

During the 1960s and 1970s—at the same time that bourekas films were popular—a new understanding of film as an art form was sweeping through an entire generation of young filmmakers in Israel. These filmmakers, heavily influenced by the French nouvelle vague, established a new style of Israeli cinema, entitled "Kayitz," a Hebrew acronym for "Young Israeli Cinema." Often criticized for not taking the commercial viability of their films into consideration, the Kayitz filmmakers covered a variety of subjects—romance, juvenile delinquency, rootlessness, and alienation—but their films appealed only to an intellectual elite in Israeli life. Different from the escapism of bourekas films, their style could be characterized as personal, psychological, sensitive, artistic, and even avant-garde, and they showed a self-conscious awareness of artistic cinematic techniques.

One of the major filmmakers of the Kayitz movement, Moshe Mizrahi, has directed films both in France and in Israel. His Israeli films include *The Traveler* (French co-production, 1970), about a former Gestapo officer who tries to rebuild his life in Eilat, and three Sephardi cultural films, the best known of which is *I Love You, Rosa* (1962), which was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign-Language Film. Mizrahi's films reflect folkloristic influences, an obsession with both Jewish and Nazi survivors of World War II, a sensitivity to the problems of forbidden love, and an authentic grappling with issues of faith and cultural conflict. His work can be seen as an antithesis to the bourekas films of other Sephardi filmmakers since his portrayal of ethnic characters is idealistic rather than stereotypical.

Another of the auteur filmmakers of the Kayitz movement, Dan Wolman, has become Israel's major filmmaker dealing with humanistic and existential themes, such as aging, alienation, and human relationships. Wolman's humanism is apparent in all of his films—*My Michael* (1975), based on the novel by Amos Oz; *Hide and Seek* (1980), dealing with the problems and tensions of living in a

society under siege; *The Distance* (1994), depicting the responsibilities of a son toward his aging parents; and *Foreign Sister* (2000), making a plea for human understanding of the plight of foreign workers within Israel.

In addition to the films of Dan Wolman and Moshe Mizrahi, the leading films of the Kayitz movement include Avram Heffner's *But Where Is Daniel Wax?* (1972) and *Cover Story* (1979), which show a preoccupation with the past; the portrayals of alienation by Nissim Dayan in *Light Out of Nowhere* (1973); and Michal Bat-Adam's *Moments* (1979) and *A Thin Line* (1981), which focus on relationships between women.

The Kayitz period was a period of personal filmmaking that emphasized existential themes of relationships, alienation from society, aging, and the universal search for the meaning of life. It is seen as a reaction against a number of issues: the ongoing state of siege, the rootlessness of a society made up largely of immigrants, the psychological complexities of living in the shadow of the Holocaust, and the disillusionment with the contemporary fulfillment of the Zionist dream. Many of these same filmmakers went on to become the leading politically conscious Israeli filmmakers of the 1980s.

A CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE: FILMS ABOUT HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

The Kayitz filmmakers were not the only ones to make serious and soulsearching films in Israeli society. Those who attempted to confront the Holocaust also made substantive and sensitive films. Following the establishment of the state of Israel and the incredible victories in battle against the Arab armies during the War of Independence, Israelis found it difficult to understand those Jews who had survived the Holocaust without having tried to defend themselves against the forces of evil. Those survivors, who were not part of the mythology of armed resistance, were made to feel embarrassed by their "sheep to the slaughter" past and learned not to speak of it. As a result, a great conspiracy of silence and denial was created.

The small number of films produced during the early years of the state concerning Holocaust survivors focused on hints of their exploitation at the hands of the Nazis and their emotional instability. When the children of these survivors grew to maturity during the 1980s and into the 1990s, a change developed in the perception of survivors. There was a new appreciation for their spiritual resistance and for the simple fact of their survival. Dramas such as Daniel Wachsmann's *Transit* (1980), Tsipi Trope's *Tel Aviv-Berlin* (1987), Eli Cohen's *Summer of Aviya* (1988), and its sequel, *Under the Domim Tree* (1995), deal with the difficulties of survivors adjusting to their new lives and living in the haunting shadows of their memories.

Similarly, the documentaries *Due to That War* (Orna Ben-Dor, 1988), *Choice and Destiny* (Tsipi Reibenbach, 1993), and *Don't Touch My Holocaust* (Asher Tlalim, 1994) are controversial films that deal with the problems of survivors

and second-generation survivors and the psychological hardships that they have endured. In her award-winning film *Due to That War,* Orna Ben-Dor (herself the child of survivors) documents the impact of the Holocaust on the lives of second-generation survivors, two popular Israeli rock figures, singer Yehuda Poliker and lyricist Ya'ackov Gilad, and their parents. The fact that Poliker and Gilad's rock album *Ashes and Dust* was so popular and sold so many copies is a clear indication that the younger generation of Israelis was ready to confront an issue mostly hidden by the parents' generation.

During the mid-1980s, Gila Almagor, the "first lady" of Israeli stage and screen, wrote her own personal story of the shame that she had felt as a child, growing up with a mother who was forever tortured by her memories of the Holocaust. Two films were produced based on her autobiographical material: *Summer of Aviya* (1988) and *Under the Domim Tree* (1995), both directed by Eli Cohen. For many years, Almagor had been satisfied with her press image as a Jew of Moroccan descent, a misperception that emerged from the roles that she played on the Israeli screen *(Eldorado, Fortuna, Highway Queen)*. She had been hiding her true family story, that her mother was a Holocaust survivor whose experiences had left her scarred and unbalanced all of her life. As a result of her mother's inadequacies, Almagor grew up in a boarding school with other children, many of whom were survivors themselves. During the 1980s, Almagor, now a mature woman, began to come to terms with her own past. At that time, she wrote and performed her own story—with herself playing the role of her mother—first as a one-woman theatrical performance and later as an awardwinning film, *Summer of Aviya*.

In the sequel, *Under the Domim Tree,* it becomes apparent that the mother did not actually experience the Holocaust. Rather, she went to Palestine before the war. Her feelings of guilt at having left her family behind and selfdeprecation for not having suffered what they suffered bring her to a mental breakdown. She not only imagines that she has suffered the agonies of the Holocaust but tattoos a number on her arm.

In a form of self-censorship, it is interesting to note that there have been no Israeli cinematic portrayals of the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis. This is in part due to the years of silence and also due to a hesitation on the part of Israeli filmmakers about trivializing and commercializing a subject of such sensitivity.

THE SOCIALIST DREAM

Serious filmmaking in Israel also brought Israeli filmmakers into confrontation with some of the foremost ideological issues of the society. The kibbutz, where members lived a communal life, was the revolutionary contribution of the prestate pioneering generation. Based on the Marxist principle "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need," the socialist ideology of the kibbutz called for a lifestyle of equality, commitment to the land, and, by necessity, the communal raising of children. Over the years, this ideology proved

problematic, and issues arose that required flexibility and adaptability rather than strict adherence to ideology.

During the 1950s, kibbutz communities split apart over ideological issues as it became clear that the old principles needed reworking. As Israeli cities developed, early films reflected the growing tension beween kibbutz and city life. During later periods, films dealing with the kibbutz way of life reflected serious internal crises of ideology. Yitzhak (Tzepel) Yeshurun's *Noa at 17* (1981) shows concern with the issues of a collective society in flux. Films by Nadav Levitan, including *Intimate Story* (1981) and *Stalin's Disciples* (1986), portray problems of collective living—lack of privacy, an individual's need to bend to the will of the group, tensions of group decision making—and the need to adapt to the dynamic world outside the kibbutz framework.

As can be seen through the films portraying the kibbutz, this uniquely Israeli form of socialism underwent major crises in its ideology and was constantly facing change in an attempt to keep up with contemporary reality.

SELF-CRITICISM

Just as the kibbutz movement felt the need for adaptation to outside pressures, all aspects of society must remain flexible, dynamic, and open to criticism, which leads to social growth, development, and change. Conscious of this need, artists feel compelled to use their art form as a platform for social criticism. In all parts of the world, they tend to be more politically left-wing and often choose to dedicate their art to raising consciousness and criticizing societal and political issues. Israeli filmmakers have also shown this tendency. In fact, following the new vulnerability and changing societal attitudes that came about as a result of the hardships on the battlefield during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Israeli filmmakers began to delve critically into problematic issues such as the responsibilities of military service, the nature of war, Arab-Jewish relations, and the Middle East conflict.

This period of social consciousness and political criticism was ushered in with the production of two groundbreaking films: Yehuda (Judd) Ne'eman's *The Paratroopers* (1977), the first film to ask difficult questions about the Israeli army and the tough discipline of army training, and Daniel Wachsmann's *Hamsin* (1982), which presents Arab characters in depth and poses questions about the superficial relationship between Jewish employer and Arab worker within the state of Israel. As the 1980s continued, a preoccupation developed with issues of army and defense; there was a new sensitivity toward the tragedies of war; and a plea was made for greater understanding of our Arab neighbors. Moreover, the documentary films of Amos Gitai and the television dramas of Ram Loevy show a sense of social responsibility and a tendency toward political criticism in Israeli filmmaking. Feature films that deal with the traumas of war include *Shellshock* (Yoel Sharon, 1988), set during the Yom Kippur War; *Ricochets* (Eli Cohen, 1986), a film produced by the film unit of the Israeli army

concerning the War in Lebanon; and *One of Us* (Uri Barbash, 1989), about an army cover-up during the period of the first *intifada* (uprising).

Reflecting on his own fears and hesitations before joining the army, filmmaker Renen Schorr made the prizewinning *Late Summer Blues* (1986), which dramatizes the ambivalent feelings of a group of young people on the verge of conscription. Schorr chose to set his film in the period of the War of Attrition, during the summer of 1970; nevertheless, the film transcends any specific period and reflects the issues and dilemmas facing young people about to be inducted into the army during wartime.

TWO PEOPLES—ARABS AND JEWS

Previously portrayed as primitive characters in peripheral roles, Arab screen characters slowly began to extend beyond stereotypes. The earliest Israeli film to portray an Israeli Arab with depth of character is *My Name Is Ahmed* (Avshalom Katz, 1966), a short film written by Ram Loevy. The film concerns the feelings of a recent high school graduate as he leaves his Arab village to find work in Tel Aviv.

Two major literary adaptations explore Arab-Jewish relations. Based on David Grossman's book, *The Smile of the Lamb* (Shimon Dotan, 1986) is the story of a wise old man who embodies Arab folk wisdom and lives on the fine line between reality and fantasy. The second, *Khirbet Hiza'a* (Ram Loevy, 1978), from the story by S.Yizhar, is set during the 1948 War of Independence between Israel and the surrounding Arab states. Produced for Israel Television, the film explores the feelings of ambivalence and guilt on the part of those involved in forcibly deporting the citizens of an Arab village. Due to its controversial nature, the completed film was initially shelved by the producer/broadcaster for many months until a protest organized by the workers' committee forced Israel Television to relent and broadcast the film.

Arabs continued to be portrayed as one-dimensional characters and visual symbols and only in supporting roles until the Israeli political and psychological realities began to change in the 1980s. At that time, a major feature film was produced that grapples with the relations between Jews and Arabs within Israeli society and is set against the background of life in the agricultural area of the Galilee in northern Israel. *Hamsin* (Daniel Wachsmann, 1982) is a landmark production because of its brutal honesty and intensity and because it was the first attempt at tackling the difficult subject of contemporary Arab-Jewish relations in the Galilee.

Two major Israeli films explore the basic bonds of common destiny between Arab and Jew. In Uri Barbash's *Beyond the Walls* (1986) and Eran Riklis' *Cup Final* (1991), outside forces cause the two groups to forge an otherwise unlikely alliance. Bought for international distribution by Warner Brothers, *Beyond the Walls* challenges political and social stereotypes, portrays larger-than-life characters, and offers a harsh, realistic portrayal of the best and the worst within

Israeli society. Most importantly, it presents a clear metaphor of Arab and Jew being locked up together, uniting against a common enemy, and condemned to mutual acceptance and coexistence.

Similar to *Beyond the Walls, Cup Final* leads the viewer toward the possibilities of mutual understanding; the conclusion, however, is less optimistic. On the background of the War in Lebanon, the film explores the themes of male bonding during wartime, the relationship between captor and captive, and the possibility of coexistence in the politically tense atmosphere of the Middle East.

Any possibility of achieving understanding and coexistence in Israeli society is complicated by the fact that Israel has been in a continuous state of war with some of her Arab neighbors since its existence. For the first 19 years, the Arabs in the region constituted the major power bloc, both militarily and politically. Following the war in 1967, the tables were turned, and suddenly they found themselves as the losers in battle. At that time the Jews, who had been the underdog for thousands of years, found themselves in a position of strength. Rafi Bukaee's *Avanti Popolo* (1986) explores this reversal of roles and makes a plea for understanding the humanity of the Arab enemy. Two Egyptian soldiers are crossing the Sinai Peninsula when they come across an Israeli patrol. Using the only language that they have in common—the language of the theater—one of the Egyptian soldiers, a professional actor, recites a Shylock monologue from *The Merchant of Venice*. Using all his acting ability and considerable charm, he is begging for water and understanding at the same time: "I am a Jew. Has not a Jew eyes, emotions, senses? Do we not bleed?" With this reference to Shylock, director/scriptwriter Rafi Bukaee is saying to his Israeli filmgoing public, You were an oppressed minority in the diaspora; now it is time for you to understand and empathize with the oppressed minority within your midst.

Avanti Popolo is about perceiving the human being behind the face of the enemy. Although it refers to wartime, it is a metaphor for the greater understanding of Arab neighbors in general. The need for developing a better understanding and relationship between Jews and Arabs in Israel is the theme of three other films produced in the 1980s—*Marriage of Convenience* (Haim Bouzaglo, 1988), a comedy told from the middle-class Israeli point of view; *Nadia* (Amnon Rubinstein, 1986), from the perspective of an Israeli-Palestinian teenage girl; and *Night Movie* (Gur Heller, short, 1985), from the point of view of an Israeli soldier who has a fleeting encounter with a Palestinian teenage boy. All three films are about relationships under difficult circumstances.

One of the fears of improved coexistence is that it can lead to romantic entanglements. Three feature films have been produced on the subject of ArabJewish forbidden love—*On a Narrow Bridge* (Nissim Dayan, 1985), *Torn Apart* (Jack Fisher, 1989), and *Crossfire* (Gideon Ganani, 1989). *On a Narrow Bridge* and *Torn Apart* importantly reflect the intolerance of both the Jewish and Arab communities, which cannot condone a serious relationship between an Arab woman and a Jewish man. *Crossfire* is different from these two films in that it is set during the period of the British Mandate and is based on a true incident,

a tragic love story between a Jewish girl from Tel Aviv and her Arab lover from Jaffa.

A number of the films that deal with the problems of Arab-Jewish relations focus on friendship and betrayal. Yehuda (Judd) Ne'eman has directed several films that reflect growing dissent in Israeli society. His first feature, *The Paratroopers* (1977), portrays the stresses of army service. His next two films, *Fellow Travelers* (1983) and *Streets of Yesterday* (1989), depict the ambivalent feelings of Israelis whose left-wing politics bring them to actively support underground Palestinian organizations. Both are complex narrative films about Israelis who become unwittingly involved in the armed struggle of their Arab friends and, having stretched out their hands to assist them, become caught in a complex and dangerous web of betrayal.

During the 1990s, as the peace process developed, fewer films dealt with Arab-Jewish issues on the Israeli screen. Following Eran Riklis' *Cup Final* in 1991, only two feature films, both allegories, were produced dealing with relations between Arabs and Jews: *The Flying Camel* (Rami Na'aman, 1994) and *Circus Palestine* (Eyal Halfon, 1998). *The Flying Camel* explores a mutual relationship between two men, an Arab and a Jew. In this film, in contrast to others produced before, the two men have parallel desires and dreams. It is a political statement about Jews and Palestinians rebuilding elements of the past and working together for the future. *Circus Palestine,* a complex film of romance and intrigue, tells the story of a Palestinian entrepreneur who brings a circus to a Palestinian town under Israeli army occupation.

Previously obsessed with security problems and issues of how to support masses of new immigrants, Israeli society developed into a proud and selfconfident nation, and attention started to be focused on the Arab minority within its midst. During the 1980s and early 1990s, films of depth about Arabs and Arab-Jewish relations began to fill Israeli cinema screens, films that were extremely varied in nature. Quite different from those produced during earlier periods, these films offered a radically new image of the Arab. Arab characters were no longer faceless stereotypes of the enemy; rather, they began to be seen as individuals with political consciousness, human needs, and a sense of humor. Some of the films of this era are deeply pessimistic and end in violence and tragedy. Others offer a vision of coexistence and mutual support, even amid brutality and war, or make a plea for better understanding between the two groups. Yet all reflect a growing consciousness among filmmakers of the new importance of Arab-Jewish relations. This can be seen in a new recognition of each other's histories and current dilemmas and a basic acceptance by Jew and Arab that the other is here to stay.

THE RISE OF PALESTINIAN FILMMAKING

Only recently have films produced and directed by Arab filmmakers from Israel and from the Palestinian Autonomy begun to appear. Born and raised in