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## **“Peace on the Silver Screen”: Can the Film Industry Promote Dialogue in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?**

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# “Peace on the Silver Screen”: Can the Film Industry Promote Dialogue in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?

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### **Conflict of Interests**

I declare no conflict of interests.

## ABSTRACT

This study examined how the film industry, Israeli and Palestinian in particular, can be used to promote intergroup dialogue and foster peace in the context of the long-lasting intractable conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. I focused on content analysis of two films, one produced by Israeli and the other by Palestinian filmmakers. The reason for choosing these films is that both films were released after the Oslo Accords during a dynamic period. The analysis is based on the way each group represented each other, whether they encourage intergroup dialogue within the films, and what their view was on the ongoing peace negotiations. These questions paved the way for answering the question of whether the film industry can promote peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The analysis was grounded on Gordon Allport's concept of Contact Hypothesis – further advanced by Ilfaz Maoz – which designates that intergroup contact can be effective in reducing negative stereotypes between groups in conflict and mutual prejudices. My findings reveal that the Israeli film contributed to creating one of the necessary conditions to reach peace. Although, the Palestinian focus is still on forming a national identity and longing for the past. This investigation adds to our understanding that film industries can serve as a platform that can provoke dialogue and contact among conflicting groups. Nevertheless, Israeli and Palestinian films released within the Oslo Process failed in choosing for this opportunity. Based on these examples, it is possible to conclude that changing conflict-driven narratives and stereotypes of the Other is a major challenge that societies face if they are willing to work towards peacemaking.

**Keywords:** Israeli-Palestinian film industry, representation, Oslo Accords, contact hypothesis, peace

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## Introduction

Societies involved in intractable conflicts construct unilateral conflict-driven narratives in which they describe the conflict with their own experience and verity. These narratives include a description of the conflict that contributes to and sustains the conflict. According to Adwan, Bar-Tal, and Wexler, conflict-driven narratives essentially function as a justification for and an explanation of the continuation of the events and origin of the conflict.<sup>1</sup> These narratives are based on actual events but contain a biased selection of the veracity. The fact is that, in general, they delegitimize the Other's existence and present themselves in praising terms and as the sole victim of the conflict. Besides that, they put the other side in charge of the outbreak of the conflict and focus on the violence of the other. Studies have shown that both sides are oblivious to the other's history and culture and leave out their misdeeds.<sup>2</sup> These societies need vehicles and venues through which they have the means for conveying their national narratives.

Films and cinema have been one of the main tools societies convey their national narratives. After the discovery of cinema's power by ruling authorities, cinema had become a night school where films were the most reliable means of national propaganda. Especially from the 1920s onwards, many states utilized cinema as a communicating tool and gathering public support for governmental policies. The mechanical ability of the camera is also applied to control and manipulate the truth.<sup>3</sup> Cinema, which is generally a prominent aspect of cultural production, expresses the beliefs, values, and norms of a society. Besides reflecting the widely shared assumptions, they can also grant the public with innovative ideas.<sup>4</sup> In line with this premise, cinema can serve both as a platform that validates and maintains the stereotypes and a cultural product that can serve as a source of innovation that can circulate new images (stereotypes). That is also the premise of this research and will be used as a fundamental basis to build on further.

The intractable conflict between Israelis and Palestinians has persisted for over a century and either de-escalated or intensified depending on the political developments.

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<sup>1</sup> Sami Adwan, Daniel Bar-Tal, and Bruce E. Wexler, "Portrayal of the Other in Palestinian and Israeli Schoolbooks: A Comparative Study," *Political Psychology* 37, no. 2 (2016), 201.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 202.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Allen, "Representation, Illusion, and the Cinema," *Cinema Journal* 32, no. 2, 1993, 23.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Bar-Tal and Yona Teichman, *Stereotypes and Prejudice in Conflict: Representations of Arabs in Israeli Jewish Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 177.

One of the crucial development is the Oslo Accords in 1993 after which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict de-escalated. Of interest for the present study is the fact that each party in this conflict has developed its own unilateral narrative. With this investigation, I want to carry out research that will provide us a glimpse into the nature of the correlation between Israeli Jews and Palestinians amid the Oslo Process. This research will enlighten us with the knowledge of whether the narratives conveyed through cinema in the 1990s served either to maintain and fuel the conflict or to move toward mutual acceptance and peace-making. Based on the outcome we can say whether it is worthwhile to alter the national conflict-driven narrative.

So, to gain a better insight into both cultures, I focused on their cultural production and films specifically. The first survey consisted of determining one film from the Israeli and Palestinian filmmakers, respectively. There were several criteria in selecting these films. The first one is the timeframe, which was the most prominent aspect since the research looks specifically at the Oslo process period between 1993 and 2000, a timeline in which several peace accords were signed. Why this timeframe? The study of this period is critical for demonstrating the relationship of peace and representation, at least because this decade coincides with the signing of the Oslo Accords – supposed to pave the way to peace – and ends with the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000, which indicates the failure of the Oslo Accords.

Additionally, I looked at prominent filmmakers whose films represented the other in a certain way and inserted references to the peace negotiations. Besides that, I considered whether these films reached out to the international audience and were nominated for awards. These aspects indicate how many audiences these films reached out to, and hence, how much they might have succeeded in conveying their message. I aimed to investigate whether it was possible back in the 1990s that the Israeli and Palestinian film industry would have been a tool to convey a peaceful dialogue between the parties, and consequently, educate the people on the other side about the other group. So, the film industry serving as an informal education platform to teach the Palestinians about the Jews and the Jews about the Palestinians.

By conducting this research, I aimed at answering whether the film industry can promote dialogue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The research is based on the discourse of the Contact Hypothesis, which emphasizes that intergroup contact can be effective in

reducing negative stereotypes between groups and mutual prejudices when the intergroup contact meets certain conditions. As a case study, I selected two films, one from both parties, and conducted a content analysis. Then, I examined whether the films contribute to the formation of these conditions. In analyzing these films, I conducted a content, thematic, and discourse analysis in which I categorized and discussed the meanings of words, phrases, and sentences. Then, I closely examined the data to identify broad themes and patterns, and finally, I studied communication and meaning about their social context. This involved coding all the data and identifying key themes concerning the following guiding questions: is there indeed a shift in the "Other's" representation? Are they encouraging intergroup dialogue? How was their view on the Oslo peace negotiations? Each theme was examined to gain an understanding of the films' message and the filmmakers' perception. In line with this paradigm, I conducted a horizontal reading of the films.

The aim of this study was to investigate two cases using more or less identical methods and compare the findings. The comparative design is realized in the context of qualitative research (Qualitative Comparative Analysis). In this context, this paradigm entails studying the understanding of social and political phenomena better. I examined these two particular issues with the explicit intention of comparing their manifestations in different socio-cultural settings, using the same research methods to conduct new empirical work. The aim was to gain a greater awareness and a deeper understanding of social reality in a different national context.

This subject is important for both sociologists in order to gain insight into the dominance filmmakers have in the construction and alteration of perceptions from the broader community. The scope of my research will be limited to the Israeli and Palestinian film industries.



## Methodology

This section outlines the research methodology used to answer the research question of whether the film industry could promote dialogue and peace in the 1990s. It comprises the research approach, a description of primary and secondary data collection process, data analysis techniques used, and limitations of the adopted research method. Despite some limitations, the applied research method is considered an opportunity to benefit the most compared to earlier scholars' research methods.

This research entailed qualitative data within the framework of a comparative research design. In order to carry out this research, I used the qualitative ethnography research method and looked for both primary and secondary sources. Data from secondary sources were needed to base on and compare the new findings acquired from the primary sources. I aimed to produce contextual knowledge about filmmaking behaviors from both sides, social structures within the society, and shared beliefs. As this methodology is less controlled and more interpretive, I tried to substantiate every premise extensively with samples from the primary sources, considering that my personal perception and participation have not had influenced the results.

The aim of this study was to investigate two cases using more or less identical methods and compare the findings. The comparative design is realized in the context of qualitative research (Qualitative Comparative Analysis). In this context, this paradigm entails studying the understanding of social and political phenomena better.<sup>5</sup> I examined these two particular issues with the explicit intention of comparing their manifestations in different socio-cultural settings, using the same research methods to conduct new empirical work. The aim was to gain a greater awareness and a deeper understanding of social reality in a different national context.

As explained in the literature review in the pages to come, many research types with different methods have been applied within this area of the subject. As a result, many solutions have been presented to resolve and explain this intractable conflict or end the occupation. Since we, as millennials, have different resources that can usher in peace and equality, this study aims to answer to what extent the film industry can be regarded as a tool within this struggle. As this study will examine how films are used to promote

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<sup>5</sup> Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 72.

intergroup dialogue and reconciliation in the context of the protracted and ethno-political conflict between Jews and Palestinians, it is for granted to single out the Qualitative Comparative analysis. This approach contributes to new knowledge and understanding of the role and significance of cultural productions within conflicts. Despite the fact that many scholars who focus on the Israeli and Palestinian cultural productions use vertical readings of the films, this thesis, justifiably, draws upon a horizontal reading of the primary sources in conjunction with a comparative study. I am convinced that this is the most suitable approach to answering the research question expecting it to contribute new knowledge and understanding.

Despite the importance of my findings to the understanding of the vital position film industries fill as a dialogue facilitating platform that enables both parties to convey peacebuilding actions, it has certain limitations as well. First, the research is based on one film respectively from a more extended period. Further research should be carried out with more film samples to qualify broader generalizations about the dynamics of promoting peace through films. Broadening the scope of the research by comparing films that are released before and after the Oslo Accords would result in more explicit outcomes to identify a shift in focus and the operation of the notion.

Furthermore, we should keep in mind that storing films during that period was probably not that easy as it is today, which might be the cause of the loss of many useful films. Besides the Israeli and Palestinian film industry, it might be an innovative idea to inquire into Hollywood films, since they had a more prestigious status across the world which raises the odds for more concrete influences. It is thus essential to investigate further and deeper researches on this topic.

## Literature Review

The subject of the Israeli-Palestinian issue is, not surprisingly, a very well-studied field. Despite the fact that it is a loaded topic that is appealing much attention and interest, the cinema industries from both sides are in themselves huge fields capable of shedding light on this narrative and our understanding of this “intractable conflict”. We have an abundance of knowledge about both the Israeli and Palestinian part of the story and their film industry respectively, allowing us to lift many corners of the veil of anonymity. In view of this broad knowledge, the present study increases our understanding of the struggle over both narratives which is proceeding instead of trying to move towards mutual acceptance. Using two films – which have not been assessed before in this context – will help us to draw a better path leading to peace and mutual understanding.

There are plenty of revolutionary and groundbreaking works originating from both sides, such as Ella Shohat, Hamid Dabashi, Nurith Gertz, and Michel Khleifi. The former is reminiscent of her pioneering book on Israeli cinema that concerns the political uses of representation: *Israeli cinema; East/West and the politics of Representation* (1989). Shohat provides us with a different insight into the history of Israeli and Palestinian cinema.<sup>6</sup> Her work is a valuable collection that offers the reader an alternative perspective on Israeli cinema by discussing the more significant thematic issue of the political and cultural encounter of the ‘East’ and ‘West.’ This binary opposition not only refers to Israelis and Palestinians but Mizrahim and Ashkenazim as well.<sup>7</sup> By putting this on the table, she was the first initiator who has been trying to demonstrate the interconnectivity of the Palestinian question and Mizrahim – the Arab Jews. Ella Shohat's critical study has been continued by scholars such as Yosefa Loshitsky, Nurith Gertz, Raz Yosef, and Dorit Naaman, but they still could not surpass Shohat's groundbreaking work.

It is virtually impossible to speak of Israeli cinema without Palestinian cinema, just as it is vice versa. When we turn to the other side, we run into more names and groundbreaking works like Hamid Dabashi, Amal Jamal, Teri Ginsberg, Nadia Yaqub, and much more. Hamid Dabashi has produced a valuable archive on Palestinian cinema, unlike any other, by publicizing *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema* (2006), a collection of essays by

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<sup>6</sup> Ella Shohat, *Israeli Cinema: East/West And The Politics of Representation*, I.B.Tauris, 1989.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

scholars and filmmakers such as Michel Khleifi and Nizar Hassan – well-known Palestinian filmmakers. This collection sets out information on Palestinian cinema in which cinema is seen as a crucial expression of Palestinian resistance against dispossession and denial. The overshadowing theme, as Dabashi remarks, is the paradox of how a stateless nation manages to produce a national cinema.<sup>8</sup> Bearing in mind cinema's other capabilities, I want to investigate whether Palestinians and Israelis used this cultural expression in order to spread dialogues among each other.

National cinema has been the key theme in other works as well. This national cinema is deficient in an overall story of typical Palestinian history. Despite this fact, Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi attempted in their book *Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma, and Memory* (2008) to place its history in the Palestinian narrative by making a connection between Palestinian history and Palestinian cinema. They are doing this by analyzing the manner in which cinema has constructed Palestinian memory and space by representing the places that once existed and are now gone.<sup>9</sup> This book focuses on landscape, trauma, and memory by approaching it very broadly and providing extensive context. Within the context of Palestinian cinema and filmmaking, the emphasis has always been on justifying the existence of a national cinema based on testimonies, individual histories, and interviews. All of these studies facilitate us to acknowledge the fact that the authors have been fraught with resources in producing such studies.

There is a different kind of study carried out by Amal Jamal: *The Arab Public Sphere in Israel, Media Space, and Cultural Resistance* (2009). Contrary to the studies mentioned earlier, Jamal undertook to add another perspective to the issue by focusing on the rise of the Arab public sphere and new patterns of communicative behavior among the Arab minority that have not yet been thoroughly examined in the literature. Even though Jamal's focus lies more on (print) media, he makes some overriding claims regarding cinema's role in constructing social identities and shaping ethnic relations in Israel.<sup>10</sup> Another striking outcome of his research, which he conducted by using the quantitative research method, is that despite cinema contains the power to suppress and manipulate identities, it is, though

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<sup>8</sup> Hamid Dabashi (ed.), *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*, New York and London: Verso, 2006, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema Landscape, Trauma and Memory*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Amal Jamal, *The Arab Public Sphere in Israel, Media Space and Cultural Resistance*, Indiana Series in Middle East Studies, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009, 12.

partially, over to the participants whether to choose being affected or not. His research shows that 62.5% of the Palestinian interviewees are not interested in Hebrew films and television series. 17.8% state not to be interested at all, while 11.8% could easily say that they are moderately interested. The remaining 7.9% openly say that they are very interested in Israeli films and series.<sup>11</sup>

Another crucial concept for this research is the concept of the 'other'. In this case, the 'other' refers either to Israelis or Palestinians. All elements relate to each other through binary opposition. Like day needs the night to be perceived, the west needs the east to position itself, and Israelis need Palestinians (and the other way around) to persevere with their existence. Being superior requires an inferior, locating under it to make a place for the position above it. Having said this, I wanted to make understand that Israelis and Palestinians are both making room for each other within their cinema as a necessity to acknowledge their own identity, existence, or suffering. What is important here is how they are doing this since this would allow us to derive different outcomes. Understanding this idea will help us understand Israeli-Palestinian relations and indicate whether the rivals are far apart in socializing the generations of the 1990s more towards the persistence of the conflict or prepare it for a new epoch of peace.

We should bear in mind that analyzing a film is a way of interpretation, and every interpretation is subjective since we all have different backgrounds, knowledge, and values. Regardless of this, many scholars were curious about representation by analyzing dozens of films from both sides. On the Israeli side, we have a very recent essay written by Liat Steir-Livny: *Mizrahi Jews and Holocaust Survivors in 1950s Israeli Cinema: A Revised Outlook* (2019). Livny analyzes the representation of Mizrahi Jews in Israeli films, which Ella Shohat thoroughly examined in 1989. She reckons that Shohat's book does not feel overly convincing and re-examines the movies from the 1950s, which are focusing on encounters between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews.<sup>12</sup>

Then, we have Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi, reminiscent of *Palestinian Cinema* (2008). These two scholars examined films of the 1990s within *Palestinian 'Roadblock Movies'* (2005) in which Palestinian artists encountered difficulties in presenting the 'space'

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 105-6.

<sup>12</sup> Liat Steir-Livny, "Mizrahi Jews and Holocaust Survivors in 1950s Israeli Cinema: A Revised Outlook," *Shofar*, 37, no 2, 2019, 1.

in mapping the Palestinian territory.<sup>13</sup> However, this work is looking at the construction of the Palestinian territory rather than the way it is represented. Within *Space and Gender in the New Israeli and Palestinian Cinema* (2002), Nurith Gertz carried out a comparative study and examined two Israeli and one Palestinian film. Here he chose to zero in on specific aspects as the representation of space and gender within both cinemas.<sup>14</sup>

Gertz went on and studied dozens of films of Rashid Masharawi, who is widely considered one of the best Palestinian filmmakers today, to show how the structure of the film and the camera work emphasizes the awareness of confinement, narrowing horizons, and psychological siege.<sup>15</sup> He is focusing on the thematic and technical aspects of the films.

From all these outcomes of 'representation,' it is all too easy to fall into the temptation of thinking that the concept of representation is completely innocent. Nevertheless, there are some hardened stereotypes of the representation of Palestinians and Jews. For example, in the Arab-Israeli conflict, Palestinian resistance is represented sensitively by Arab cinemas but primarily as terrorism by Western and Hollywood films.<sup>16</sup> By doing so, this idea is being spread and strengthened. Nowadays, when talking about Arabs, it cannot be different from imagining a dressed Bedouin strolling in the desert.

Nonetheless, Ella Shohat's contribution to the concept of 'representation' has been significant. In the early stage of the Israeli cinema, a hierarchy was created to endorse a homogenous view of the new Hebrew identity in which the Hebrew-speaking male took its place at the top.<sup>17</sup> The Palestinians, or Arabs, were not even included on the screen. The Israeli cinema was ignoring their existence which gave the impression of a solely Jewish country. It was also a claim of the very idea that the region was not inhabited before the arrival of the Israelis.<sup>18</sup> Jews are always portrayed as a working society.<sup>19</sup> After the Second World War, there was a representation shift after which the Arabs were included as well but, obviously, as inferior to the learned and educated Jews. Arabs were ignorant, sewage,

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<sup>13</sup> Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi, "Palestinian 'Roadblock Movies'," *Geopolitics* 10, no. 2, 2005, 316-7.

<sup>14</sup> Nurith Gertz, "Space and Gender in the New Israeli and Palestinian Cinema," *Prooftexts* 22, no. 1, 2002, 158.

<sup>15</sup> Nurith Gertz, "The Stone at the Top of the Mountain: The Films of Rashid Masharawi," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 34, no. 1, 2004, 23.

<sup>16</sup> Shohat, *Israeli Cinema*, 257.

<sup>17</sup> Gertz, "Space and Gender," 157.

<sup>18</sup> Shohat, *Israeli Cinema*, 201-2.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

and dehumanized and should need the guidance of the Jews to civilize. The appearance of such an Arab character served as a support of the ideal Jewish character.<sup>20</sup>

On the Palestinian side, we see that Palestinian historians and intellectuals have written about the stresses of the Arab population living in Israel and the occupied territory. Their attitude could be described more as introvert since they solely focused on their traumatic discourse and history. Gertz and Khleifi investigated this approach, and they declared that the focus on the past was because Palestinians still lived in the past, when there was peace in the land and no traces of Jews.<sup>21</sup> According to them, it was not plausible to create history as a narrative with a chronology of events since they are still living in the past. They describe the present as being replaced by the past and the future as a desire to return to the past. Within the Palestinian cinema, there was a shift in representation as well, whereby new filmmakers attempted to create an ongoing historical narrative.<sup>22</sup> The focus of Palestinian cinema was instead to document the harsh lives and sufferings of the Palestinian people.

From the above-delineated picture, we see that there have been many attempts to enlighten the cinema's field produced within the Israeli/Palestinian region. Although, additionally to this state of literature, this paper aims to contribute to the missing part by lifting at least a new corner of this veil of anonymity covering the way Israelis and Palestinians represent each other between the years 1993 and 2001. Why this timeframe? It should be noted that the selection of this time frame has been a conscious one at the outset. The study of this period is critical for demonstrating the relationship of peace and representation, at least because this decade coincides with the signing of the Oslo Accords – supposed to pave the way to peace – and ends with the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2001, which indicates the failure of the Oslo Accords.

In the 1990s, politicians made various attempts on the political stage to resolve the conflict that turned into a failure. Additionally, there were many developments from both sides in terms of seeking contact with the “Other” in which they create an environment without ignoring the "Other" and even live together peacefully. They are working together

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<sup>20</sup> Shohat, *Israeli Cinema*, 34.

<sup>21</sup> Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema*, 3-4.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

in hospitals, schools, and businesses to forge a better future.<sup>23</sup> Since the early 2000s, at least nine peace-oriented projects began to occur by Palestinians and Israelis.<sup>24</sup> However, their goal was mainly to spread mutual understandings and respect the differences between the narratives. Given these efforts, the present study employed whether cinema fostered intergroup dialogue during a period in which peace talks were heard on every corner of the region.

It is known that the majority of the official and societal institutions of both parties, such as the governments, the media, and cultural channels, presented each other negatively and conveyed a pessimistic picture of the current state of the conflict. Still, there are indeed groups within both societies that do try to promote peace. Although, these attempts contribute to the improvement of the image each party has of its rival. While cinema cannot resolve conflicts and end wars, it can, under certain circumstances, create a new perspective on political problems or even reshape the existing ones.

Given these heated public debates, it is important to situate the position of Jews and Palestinians among the society for the sake of a better understanding of this research. Being familiar with the sociological condition within the society will help to position the findings and strengthen the outcome of this research. This is because the living of Arabs under Zionism in Israel is unique and significant in terms of the Palestinian question and the Arab-Israeli struggle.<sup>25</sup>

The bulk of the literature on Arabs living under the Jewish regime concentrates on its political and legislative power.<sup>26</sup> The uniqueness and significance lie in the fact that Israel claims to be a Jewish and western democratic state. Since the defining feature of a democratic state is that the state treats all its citizens equally and makes them members of a common civic nation,<sup>27</sup> the question of whether Israel is indeed democratic has been questioned and discussed thoroughly and extensively by scholars. As Sammy Smooha

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<sup>23</sup> Kate Shuttleworth, "The Israelis and Palestinians Who Work Together in Peace," *The Guardian*, July 11, 2016, accessed April 17, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/11/israel-jews-arabs-palestinians-work-together-peace>.

<sup>24</sup> Rafi Nets-Zehngut, "Palestinians and Israelis Collaborate in Addressing the Historical Narratives of Their Conflict," *Quest: Issues in Contemporary Jewish History* 5, 2013, 232.

<sup>25</sup> Sabri Jiryis, *The Arabs in Israel*, New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1976, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Gila Menahem, "Arab Citizens in an Israeli City: Action and Discourse in Public Programmes," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21, no. 3, 1998, 545.

<sup>27</sup> Sammy Smooha, "The Model of an Ethnic Democracy: Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State," *Nations and Nationalism* 8, no. 4, 2002, 475.



elaborates extensively in his article *Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State*, Zionism is the state ideology of Israel, and its main objective is to create a Jewish identity, demography, culture, one single language, institution, and to protect Jewish lives and interests all over the world entirely.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, Israel is ethnically divided between a Jewish majority and an Arab minority to whom it extends various kinds of rights. Hence Hillel Cohen's reasoning that Israel's claim of being a democratic and Jewish state creates a dilemma in terms of principles of democracy and equality before the law.<sup>29</sup> Scholars have primarily researched this obscure position of the Arabs within the Jewish democratic state. Moshe Berent, for example, states that Israel's national identity does not acknowledge the existence of a civic nation. Moreover, Israel makes no effort for the integration or assimilation of non-Jews into the Hebrew culture.<sup>30</sup>

Until the 1980s, the literature about the Israeli Arabs living within Israel covers this relationship mainly through the prism of security. Nevertheless, research conducted by prominent scholars such as Sammy Smooha, Ian Lustick, and others makes a shift in focus whereby Arab society has been studied as a particular subject. The topics of their studies deal with various aspects of Israeli Arab life. Ian Lustick emphasizes in his book that the Arab minority has been placed under a system of control that severely restricts their political rights. However, Lustick perceives a change in which this system is being dismantled as a result of the electoral power of Israeli Arabs.<sup>31</sup> Robert Freedman attributes this change to the crisis traditional Zionism was undergoing at the end of the 2000s. During this time, Arab parties and Jewish dissidents challenged the dominant assumptions of the Palestinian "Other," which resulted in the vanishing of the mutual negative stereotypes among the society.<sup>32</sup>

This thesis concerns, in a sense, the political uses of representation within historical, cultural, and sociopolitical contexts. And while all representations embody either positive or

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 475.

<sup>29</sup> Hillel Cohen, *Israel and Its Palestinian Citizens: Ethnic Privileges in the Jewish State*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, 73.

<sup>30</sup> Moshe Berent, "The Ethnic Democracy Debate: How Unique is Israel?" *Nations and Nationalism* 16 no. 4, 2010, 657.

<sup>31</sup> Ian S. Lustick, *Arabs in the Jewish State: Israel's Control of a National Minority*, University of Texas Press, 1980, 45.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Owen Friedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process: The Impact of the Oslo Accords*, University Press of Florida, 1998, 11.

negative intentions, cinematic representations are even more well suited to achieving larger social tasks. This is due to its organized, technological, collaborative way of production and its viral mode of spreading. By conducting this study, I claim that much more complex representations will emerge when we visit films of the late 1990s, a very vibrant period. I will analyze two films – *Haifa* and *Circus Palestina* – and examine how they both represent the integration of 'the Other' and endorse an intergroup dialogue. In the Israeli case, the other implies the Palestinians and the other way around.

In closing, this study will also probe into the peaceful interactions between Israelis and Palestinians and the impact of peace negotiations on filmmaking. The films I discuss do not ascribe superiority to both sides; instead, these films create a clear distinction between the representation of each other and the traces of the peace negotiations. The next chapter of this thesis analyzes the selected films to show and explain why and how Palestinians and Israelis were represented in a certain way and whether the Peace Negotiations have impacted the practice of narrating about and defining each other. These films will be assessed regarding the concept of contact hypothesis and intergroup dialogue. I wish to examine this subject by focusing on one Israeli film, Eyal Halfon's *Circus Palestina* (1998), and another film by a Palestinian filmmaker, Rashid Mashharawi's *Haifa* (1996). These findings will provide us an insight into the nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and relations. Moreover, it will indicate to what extent the rivals enable the audience to socialize more towards peace talks rather than the continuation of the conflict.

### Theoretical framework – Contact Hypothesis

This thesis draws from frameworks associated with Contact Theories and is inspired by the discourse of the Contact Hypothesis, which emphasizes that intergroup contact can be effective in reducing negative stereotypes between groups and mutual prejudices.<sup>33</sup> The first discourse on the Contact Hypothesis was presented by the American social psychologist Gordon Allport.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, Allport is one of the most influential and often cited scholars in the field of intergroup relations.<sup>35</sup> This theory was further developed in 1969 by Yehuda

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<sup>33</sup> Ifat Maoz, "Does Contact Work in Protracted Asymmetrical Conflict? Appraising 20 Years of Reconciliation-aimed Encounters Between Israeli Jews and Palestinians," *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 1, 2011, 117.

<sup>34</sup> Irwin Katz, "Gordon Allport's 'The Nature of Prejudice'," *Political Psychology* 12, no. 1, 1991, 152.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 125.

Amir and applied in the Israeli-Arab context. Ifat Maoz advanced this idea further by identifying the following four conditions that should be met for an effective intergroup contact: (1) equal status for both groups during their contact situations; (2) ongoing personal interaction between individuals from both sides; (3) cooperation in a situation of mutual dependence, in which both parties work together toward a common goal; and (4) institutional and social support about norms that endorse equality.<sup>36</sup>

Abu-Nimer makes the list longer by identifying favorable and unfavorable conditions that can promote or prevent change in attitudes and prejudices, such as a positive perception or representation of the other group as a result of interaction and voluntary participation in seeking contact.<sup>37</sup>

The majority of the existing literature focuses its attention on ordinary conditions. Little attention has been given to the effectiveness of intergroup dialogue interventions in settings of acute asymmetrical violent conflict in which both sides try to assist the shift to peaceful reconciliation.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, studies that have examined the effect of intergroup contact have noted the success of contact under the specified conditions, even in cases where not all conditions are fully met.<sup>39</sup>

Given the limitations of the contact hypothesis, Maoz developed alternative approaches to intergroup contact and devised four contact models: the Coexistence Model seeks to promote mutual understanding between Arabs and Jews by emphasizing the similarities and what is shared. Its main goal is to reduce stereotypes and foster intergroup contacts. The Joint Project Model builds further on the former model and assumes that a shared task directed toward achieving a common goal will bring both parties closer to each other and create a shared identity. Unlike the aforementioned method, the Confrontation Model emphasizes the conflict and power relations between two sides. The goal is to encourage awareness among Jews with regards to the asymmetrical relations between Jews and Palestinians, and especially of their role as a dominant oppressive group. And finally, the Narrative Model uses an approach based on storytelling, sharing their individual and

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<sup>36</sup> Maoz, "Does Contact Work in Protracted Asymmetrical Conflict?" 117.

<sup>37</sup> Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Dialogue, Conflict Resolution, and Change*, SUNY Series in Israeli Studies, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999, 4.

<sup>38</sup> Maoz, "Does Contact Work in Protracted Asymmetrical Conflict?" 117.

<sup>39</sup> Yifat Mor, Yiftach Ron and Ifat Maoz, "'Likes' for Peace: Can Facebook Promote Dialogue in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?" *Media and Communication (Lisbon)* 4, no. 1, 2016, 16.

collective experiences and sufferings in the conflict.<sup>40</sup> These concepts will guide us in assessing the findings of the films and analyze whether the films contribute to reaching these certain circumstances needed for intergroup dialogue.

Although intergroup contact and its role in reducing prejudices are commonly studied, relatively few studies have been conducted on the ways in which the film industry can be used to promote reconciliation and dialogue between groups in conflict. The problem definition of this research is that there is no understanding between Jews and Palestinians, while above, I delineated the importance of it. My main objective is to look at the plausibility of the film industry to foster intergroup dialogue. Hence, the purpose of the present study is to examine the ways in which the film industry may be used to promote dialogue aimed at reconciliation in general, and the Joint Project Model together with the Confrontation Model of intergroup dialogue in particular, in the context of the prolonged conflict between Jews and Palestinians.

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<sup>40</sup> Maoz, "Does Contact Work in Protracted Asymmetrical Conflict?" 118-20.

# 1. Case Study One: An Analysis of Eyal Halfon's CIRCUS PALESTINA (1998)

## 1.1. Introduction

Within this chapter, I will delineate *Circus Palestina*'s findings by answering the questions for the sake of this research. As shown in the pages to come, we might consider a shift in representation and perception of Palestinians by Jews. This hesitation comes from the fact that *Circus Palestina* is a dark comedy, which is why Halfon represented the Palestinians within his film with the general stereotypes devoted to Palestinians, e.g., in media and schoolbooks. I will expound on these stereotypes in the upcoming pages. Moreover, I will use the terms Palestinian and Arab to indicate those Palestinians within the region. On the other side, I will use Jew and Israeli interchangeably to refer to Jews living within Israel's borders.

Like Daniel Bar-Tal, Sami Adwan, and Bruce E. Wexler's findings, *Circus Palestina* presents the situation from a one-sided perspective that negatively puts the "Other." The "Other" within this chapter refers to Arabs and particularly Palestinians living within the Israeli borders. Although, the film refers both to Arabs living within and out of the borders when talking about the "Arab". In addition to that, Halfon intervenes little with the other's life and culture in his film. The Jews, on the other side, are portrayed both as superiors and victims of Palestinians who need to defend themselves against the savage Arabs. Besides that, there is a lack of explanation or information about the legitimate presence of the Palestinians. Many scholars have regarded this lack of presence as a central obstacle to respect and tolerance necessary for peace.<sup>41</sup> As a matter of fact, in the following section, I will prove this statement true and demonstrate that, indeed, the acknowledgment of the Other will lift at least one obstacle to achieve peace.

Even though all of Eyal Halfon's films are shot within Israel's borders, not all are dealing with the Israeli Palestinian issue. The one that does is *Circus Palestina*. *Circus Palestina* has emerged from the collaboration of the Israeli Film Fund, Paralite, and Transfax Film Productions. The Israeli Film Fund was founded in 1979 in order to answer the need to create a public fund that will support Israeli filmmakers to realize their vision and promote

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<sup>41</sup> Sami Adwan, Daniel Bar-Tal, and Bruce E. Wexler, "Portrayal of the Other in Palestinian and Israeli Schoolbooks: A Comparative Study," *Political Psychology* 37, no. 2 (2016), 213.

Israeli film worldwide.<sup>42</sup> This Fund mainly financed *Circus Palestina*, which enabled the film to be nearly uncensored. Not entirely uncensored, because Pat and Samir Twair say in their report that Eyal Halfon, the director of *Circus Palestina*, was not allowed to use the word *Intifada* in the film.<sup>43</sup> This statement appears to be correct since there is no use and reference to the story and event except a news radio about the conflict we hear twice during the movie.

Eyal Halfon (1956–present) is a former journalist serving in the West Bank during the Intifada and an Israeli filmmaker who wrote and directed this screenplay. The eighty-three-minute film is an Israeli political satire. The director uses dark comedy that confronts the Israeli-Arab conflict by incorporating a style that highlights sensitive subjects that both sides consider severe or painful to discuss openly. Halfon’s inspiration for this story came from his belief that there was once brought a circus to the West Bank. He says that he even found remnants of the actual circus in a suburb in Tel Aviv.<sup>44</sup> Especially when he read about mysterious lion paw prints in Jerusalem's surrounding area, the idea of a circus with a lion as its main attraction dominated his thoughts.

Halfon’s first feature film took a hard look at Israel. That is the reason Israelis did not regard it as a success. Then, he decided to examine the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a softer look by including more comedy to it. *Circus Palestina* was the product of this approach. Another reason for adjusting such an approach to this subject was due to its short of funds.<sup>45</sup> So, we can say that the Israeli film industry was mainly unable to encourage those who intended to produce films with a critical approach or an opposing view of the situation at the end of the 1990s. This comes definitely from the ongoing political upheavals at the time. The Oslo Process was a potential game-changer that affected the Israeli-Palestinian relationship, but how it would affect was not clear for anybody. This explains one of the reasons why the Israeli film industry was reluctant to endorse critical films. Nevertheless, Halfon did not renounce his faith and had still made his point by applying dark comedy to his work.

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<sup>42</sup> “About,” Israel Film Fund, accessed March 9, 2021, <http://intl.filmfund.org.il/index.asp?id=1&About>.

<sup>43</sup> Pat and Samir Twair, "Circus Palestina" Wows L.A. Moviegoers," Washington Report On Middle East Affairs, March 1999, accessed March 9, 2021, <https://www.wrmea.org/1999-march/circus-palestina-wows-la-moviegoers.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

The first preeminent research question in this research was regarding the representation of the “Other” and whether there might be a shift in this manner due to political upheavals. The second question considers possible traces of or references to the peace negotiations held roughly in the same period. Last but not least, I will look at whether the way of filmmaking in this period might encourage intergroup dialogue and promote peace.

## 1.2. Representation of the “Other”

One of the film's primary purposes was to show the daily life of those living under siege in the West Bank. Halfon made efforts to reveal this as genuine as he could. Though, his actions were not that simple. Halfon wanted to challenge the colonialist perception of the Other by representing both sides with their stereotypes in a satirical way. Since the film is a dark comedy (also known as black humor) and touches upon sensitive subjects, Halfon wanted to create a colonialist view combined with humor to highlight the situation's absurdity. In the film, Palestinians are represented as lazy, primitive, and savage, and the Jews as sensible, superior, but violent as well in order to defend the land from dangerous Arabs. Although Halfon did not mention the *Intifada* during the film, in the opening scene, we hear in the background a piece of radio news in Hebrew and English, which summarizes this intractable conflict and the situation in which they are stuck. The film illustrates the difficulties experienced by both sides in this very stormy decade.

The first impression after watching *Circus Palestina* is mixed. As the primary genre of the Israeli film industry, as Shohat suggests, covered the Zionist ideology and the colonialist approach to Arabs, Halfon does the same.<sup>46</sup> In *Circus Palestina*, the Palestinians are represented as Bedouins who have never before seen and attended a circus while Israelis have. A dialogue between the Israeli colonel and the Palestinian entrepreneur clarifies that, right now, during the Intifada turmoil and with an Israeli officer's permission, Palestinians deserve to amuse themselves with a circus. Though, after the lion of the circus escapes right before his first performance, the Israeli soldiers renounce this idea and claim that Palestinians were not ready to reach the amusement stage.

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<sup>46</sup> Shohat, *Israeli Cinema*, 34.

The preeminent reason for the mixed feelings is due to Halfon's distinctive approach, his use of dark comedy. One clear example of this genre is, as abovementioned, the arrival of a circus to amuse when the region is in the grip of a crisis. Another example is that they make a mountain out of a molehill, such as the Palestinian flag, as a big matter. When Marianne continuously asks what the problem is with this flag, Bleiberg answers as follows: "It is just too high, simply too high," followed by "and too white," and finally "and too many colors, just too much of a flag." In another laughable scene, they underline this molehill again. This time it is about the exaggerated reactions to issues, such as the escape of a lion. The Israeli army reacts to this as a great war by making use of all the available weaponry while at the same time taking great delight in the shooting sounds.

On the other hand, the Israeli army's presence within the West Bank borders is depicted as needy since it is for the sake and defense of Jews and the Israeli state from the savage Arabs. In one scene, the Jewish officer, colonel Oz, and the Arab entrepreneur talk to each other on the flags. The problem is that Palestinians are hanging flags in every corner, and Jewish soldiers are snatching them away to burn them, which seems like a cat and mouse game. The Jewish soldier expresses his anger about this issue, upon which the Arab entrepreneur replies, "That is how Arabs are and always were. Only understand force." Then, another Jew says, "They know no limits. Give them an inch, and they take a mile." We see that Halfon did indeed apply the main Israeli perception to his film but in a thoughtful way. It is also striking that a Palestinian also agrees with this statement. However, the point here is that this comparison has nothing to do with the subject. This is one of the reasons this film is appointed as a dark comedy. Halfon applied it right here to highlight how useless the arguments and the conclusions drawn from them are.

Despite the fact that Arabs are not that much at the forefront, in the course of the film, we mainly see Arabs appearing passively on screen, sitting in the street café, smoking shisha and cigarettes, playing cards, and not performing any job. However, the Jewish culture in the film regards performing a job and proving yourself as a key to prosperity. In a scene, colonel Oz asks an Israeli soldier – Shimshon Bleiberg, who seems happy and not much expecting from life: "Don't you want to do something right once? Cut the crap, prove yourself? Get promoted like everyone else? Pass the officer's course? Do something people will admire? Isn't that important to you?" Shimshon replies, "I'm fine, just the way I am." This dialogue points the finger at the longing for perfection in Israeli society. Bleiberg's



character seems rebellious and shows that you do not need to prove yourself and impress others with your abilities in order to be happy.

Nevertheless, the setting with hanging Arabs occurs twice during the film. An ironic perspective on this setting is introduced when the only hard-working Palestinian is Ibrahim Sus, the Arab entrepreneur who financed the circus. It is essential to mention here that he also participates in an illegal car trade (chop shop) in cooperation with the Jews. Ibrahim brings the circus to town because he believes that entertainment is precisely what his people need. When the circus truck arrives at the village, Ibrahim expresses his enthusiasm by speaking out to the Arabs sitting on street cafés and smoking shisha while not giving attention to the circus.

The camera embraces the whole setting by focusing on Ibrahim, the circus behind him, and the sitting Arabs while we hear him saying: "This land needs a circus! We need a circus! Our own circus right here! Not in Beirut, not in Tripoli! Here, in the land of milk and honey! The land of olives and figs! In Arabic! in Palestine!" While Ibrahim is talking, the camera captures him from a distance, and in the background, we see the circus truck, the acrobats, clowns, and contortionists. After Ibrahim finishes his speech, we hear applause but do not see those clapping their hands. In the meantime, the camera turns towards one of the acrobats and zooms in on his face. He seems captivated by the speech and the reaction of the Arabs, which is not very enthusiastic. The acrobat looks at them with a grin on his face and mockingly raises his eyebrows as he says, "sure, whatever." Ibrahim's very nationalistic and patriot statements seem amusing and unrealistic to a foreigner precisely as it is framed to the outer world in the real world.

The second setting in which the Arabs appear is after the lion escapes, and riots are about to start. After losing the lion and all the misery that followed, the circus owners decided to sell the circus to the entrepreneur, and they meet at the same street café to bargain for it. Still, the entrepreneur is not interested in the circus and wants them to find the lion and go away. When the talk continues, an Israeli with whom the entrepreneur does business comes along to the café and yells at him in Hebrew since the lion is still a danger for everyone. He says, "I am fed up with this chop shop," and continues, "go back to hard labor for sixty cents an hour!". Then gradually, the voices of invisible Arabs began to get louder: "This circus is the devil's work!", "they would better not touch the chop shop!",

“why would you bring that dangerous animal here?”, “it’s all a Zionist conspiracy!”, “let the circus get the hell out of here!”

From here on, the riots in the village begin. Arabs start to throw potatoes at the Russian circus owners, and an Israeli soldier intervenes by setting fire to the air out of anger. The issue escalates, and the soldier shoots at the residents to disperse the crowd, but the Arabs reply by throwing firebombs. The shooting sounds spread across the village, and Israeli army troops got mobilized to join the soldier. This scene reinforces the differences between Israelis, whose actions reflect colonial values, and the Palestinians, who cause damage and bring harm.

However, until now, we have seen that the Arabs are not that much at the forefront of the story. The Arabs who actively participate in the story are Ibrahim, the entrepreneur, and his son Fatchi. Fatchi calls himself *Moshe Dayan*, an Israeli military leader and statesman who played an essential role in leading Israel to victories over its Arab neighbors and became a symbol of security in his country.<sup>47</sup> Fatchi is a huge fan of him and wears, like Moshe Dayan, also an eyepatch. His name, love, and aspiration for an Israeli hero are chosen deliberately. The idea of portraying Bedouin children as astonished and impressed by Jewish stories is one that we see occur more often in Israeli cinema, as in *Oded the Wanderer* (1933). The Arabs are impressed by the clothing and technologies developed in the Western world.<sup>48</sup> In this case, an Arab kid introduces himself by comparing his name and look with an Israeli hero. However, even within this setting, Shimshon underscores that this kid is not with him because he is an Arab kid. To Mariana’s astonishment, Shimshon reacts as follows: “What do I look like to you? I am Bleiberg, he is Fatchi.” A Jew and an Arab could never be regarded together.

### 1.3. Traces of Peace

In the film's opening scene, we watch from behind the fence and a far angle the setting in which the lion’s truck is being lifted by a crane and placed on the Holy Land. The film begins with salient signifiers of the 1990s, the era it describes, whereby even the lion is locked both on-screen and cage. In the background of this scene/setting, we hear news on the radio

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<sup>47</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, "Moshe Dayan," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, October 12, 2020, accessed March 24, 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Moshe-Dayan>.

<sup>48</sup> Shohat, *Israeli Cinema*, 34.

both in Hebrew and English: "Israelis and Palestinians both define themselves as victims, as peoples who have had a bad history and can count on nobody but themselves, and victims do not compromise. Both people claim their absolute claim on the land at least, in part," followed by "with a forty-year war, reduced to its essence, Muslims and Jews locked in a battle for the land they call home." The film clearly states that "too many promises have been given to too many people on only one land," which is also affirmed in the film by an Israeli sergeant Shimshon Bleiberg during his dialogue with the Russian lion tamer, Marianna.

While driving the circus to a Palestinian village (not specified in the film) located in the West Bank, the cars and the truck are shot from a far distance in order to focus on the empty and uninhabited region. The trucks are rumbling down the roads of West Bank shows the country's empty landscape. The camera embraces a broad perspective by zooming out entirely. In the background, we can barely see houses, but the overall impression is that the entire region is empty, and the landscape is green with grazing sheep, which is also recurrent during the rest of the film. Israeli filmmakers commonly used this setting to ignore the presence of Arabs before the arrival of Jews to the Holy land and emphasize its emptiness. It is a subliminal message that conveys to the viewers that the country has solely remained Jewish and Israelis did not displace anyone. The region was empty until Jews came, and with their effort, the land revived and turned into a source of life and work. It is also reminiscent of the portrayal of Palestine in the early period of Israeli cinema. This trend of emptiness is also found in Halfon's other feature film, *Oded the Wanderer* (1933).<sup>49</sup>

Despite the fact that sensitive issues are not openly touched in the film, there are some references to political developments which show us the liberal Israeli perspective. Halfon made this film in the interim of the Oslo Accords, which assigns the start of the Oslo Process. But "nowadays nobody is happy," says the Russian from the circus staff. This peace treaty aimed to achieve a peace treaty and fulfill the "right of the Palestinian people to self-determination." *Circus Palestina* exposes the fact that there was not a slight change in daily life concerning achieving peace. The film's moral lesson is that love and common interests could serve as a means to reach the end, peace. As in the film, Mariana is the only one who believes that the lion is still alive after the big attack and starts to look after him together

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid 18.

with Shimshon Bleiberg, who is in love with Mariana. But they need the help of the little Fatchi, the Arab kid, to find the lion. From here on, the Israeli-Arab-Russian cooperation has started. Mariana, little Fatchi, and Shimshon set out in search of the lost lion, and they finally find him. Collaboration is the only way out towards peace and to solve this intractable crisis.

As mentioned in the earlier pages, there are two radio voiceovers – almost the same – during the film about the impossibility of peace negotiations. That is because both sides regard themselves as victims, “and victims do not compromise.” It is striking that people in power, such as colonel Oz and Ibrahim, are unwilling to achieve peace. Dialogue among these two after the flags were removed and burned by Israelis makes their perception more clear. Colonel Oz sees the flags as to where the danger begins. “How much longer can this last [referring to the flags]? A year? Two? Soon they will have their peace here, and that is the worst that can happen,” he says. “That would be very bad for business,” replies Ibrahim, upon which Oz responds, “So why bother with the petty flags and symbols? We co-exist just fine, right?”

Flags are a matter of honor, especially for those who are in a fight for their own country. So, in reply to Oz, no, you do not coexist just fine. The point Halfon tries to make here is that the issue is big in its essence but for those in power it is all about business and money. Local people are suffering from the repercussions and do not co-exist just fine. They are struggling for their primary rights and freedom.

After the lion’s escape, Oz makes his perception of the peace talks even more explicit: “There are macros and micros. That’s what I always say. The lion is micro, the rabble’s flags, that is micro. Rumors about peace that is micro. But what is important in life are the macros. The grand scheme and what we are doing now is macro. The Mitsubishi’s Lugasi started organizing, which is macro too. The lion’s share of the macro. The idiots above me do not understand that. But one day, they will. Boy, will they understand? And all this for whom? Not for the government, not for the army, not for your fanatics [Arabs] or ours [Jews]. It is for us, the simple people who work hard and need to make a living.” We can interpret this dialogue differently. Oz is touching here on an important issue. Replace “the idiots above me” with the United States or other interfering countries, consider the car traffic as the corruption of people in higher positions, and the village as the whole region. The outcome is that Israelis and Palestinians do not want any interruption from outside

because everyone is acting out of self-interest, and that is, in the long run, what it is all about.

The situation of the lion roaming free and wreaking terror is getting on everyone's nerves, especially on the Israelis. Colonel Oz regarded the escape of the lion finally as an internal crisis and wanted to solve it promptly, without any interference from 'above'. The reason for this is to make sure that their car traffic will not be revealed by the people 'above'. He says: "We have to get that lion before he ruins our entire business, the entire country." To do this, colonel Oz is ready to use all the equipment he has in store, so he does. The civil defense siren – also known as an air-raid siren – goes off to warn the residents of the danger. Everyone starts to shoot like they are hunting the lion. Even women walking on the street pulled their weapons after hearing the siren and the lion's roar.

Nevertheless, colonel Oz seems to be very happy about this: "I love this sound [gun fire] so early in the morning. The lion episode will end. The circus will leave. The blondes will stop driving everyone crazy here, and we will get back to our Mitsubishis! The Macro!". The macro here refers to an earlier scene which will be analyzed in the next section. After all the shooting, everyone assumes the lion is dead and carries on with their happy life.

Dialogue in *Circus Palestina* moves deliberately between Hebrew, Arabic, Russian, and English, with most Hebrew and English conversations since it is an Israeli feature film. *Circus Palestina* appeals to the mainstream English and Hebrew speaking audience, who can access Hebrew dialogue. The reason for the primary language being in Hebrew is because the early filmmakers regarded Israeli cinema as a means to spread Hebrew as a spoken language. Nevertheless, conversations in *Circus Palestina* are conducted in Hebrew, Arabic, English, and Russian.

Hebrew is the dominating and mediating language in the film. In that way, Arabs who at least get by in Hebrew use it to communicate with Jews even though Jews know Arabic as well. Jews speak Hebrew among each other. The Hebrew-speaking Arabs are Fatchi Dayan – the Arab child – and Ibrahim, both operating as mediators between Jews and Arabs. Besides that, they are the only ones in contact with Jews during the film. Russian has only been spoken in few scenes among the circus employees. The use of mostly Hebrew might be the producer's aim to attract particularly the Jewish audience, which leads us to conclude that the film's messages are mainly directed towards the Jews.

The Israeli film industry is still centered on its self amid the peace agreements and displays the other's presence with negative descriptions. By doing this, the film fails to form the setting necessary to foster intergroup dialogue, and, on the contrary, fuels the conflict.

#### 1.4. Hope For The Future

In the earlier scenes, we have seen that Ibrahim seems quite excited about the idea of especially him bringing the circus to Palestine because he believes that his people deserve to amuse and enjoy themselves. Despite his corrupt business and secret collaboration with the Jews, he has patriotic sentiments and, deeply, wants his land and freedom back. As in one scene where a soldier forces Ibrahim to climb a high pole and remove the Palestinian flag. He calls his son Fatchi and lets him do that. Upon this, in anger and despair, he says to his family that one day he will hang a flag on every last corner of the village.

It is vital that the director uses a kid to have an ordinary dialogue with an Israeli soldier. Children were the preferred subjects since the 1940s and 1950s because their young age symbolized an opportunity for change and hope.<sup>50</sup> That clarifies the setting in which the Arab children are the only ones entertaining and looking forward to the circus' arrival. When the circus settles and prepares for their first performance, a Jewish kid asks his mother what would happen if they went to see the lion. His mother answers with: "You know very well why we are not going, and you know the lion is not the problem, right?" at which point the kid nods and says nothing. But what is the real problem, then? This question remained unanswered for both the kid, who symbolizes the thinking with pure common sense.

The film is about an unhappy lion who seeks happiness in the nature, where he belongs and has hormonal longings. Strolling in the forest, amazon, is his primary need to live because he belongs there. When the lion arrived at the land, he was shot from behind the fence, imprisoned. Marianne expresses continuously that he is needy and thus unhappy. In the end, he is liberated and released into the forest. He has given back his freedom and happiness. So, the whole problem with the lion was that he was controlled against his will, which caused the unrest. Giving him what he was longing for solved the problem. The reason for his disappearance is again and again linked to his sorrow. And when we are

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<sup>50</sup> Steir-Livny, "Mizrahi Jews and Holocaust Survivors," 10.

talking about imprisonment, the Palestinians are popping up in our mind, as they are, according to an Amnesty report, effectively living in an open-air prison.<sup>51</sup>

The longing for hope is not openly covered in this film, but some indications indirectly lead the viewer to feel that everything might be better in the future. Nevertheless, before achieving hope, there are other steps needed to take. And the most prominent one is to take heed of the other's narrative. Furthermore, the film sheds light upon a possible way out for the enduring crisis. The cooperation of three enemies – Israel had some issues with Russians as well during that period – leads us at the end of the day to hope and peace.

The film clearly states that "too many promises have been given to too many people on only one land," which is also affirmed in the film by an Israeli sergeant Shimshon Bleiberg during his dialogue with the Russian lion tamer, Marianna. However, wailing about decisions taken in the past by politicians does not help to build a better future for the next generations, which is proved in the last decades. The film closes its scenes with cheer and without leaving any open window for a negative interpretation. While a Jewish mother said in the beginning that Jews cannot attend the circus in Palestinian territory, in the final scene, they come together. All different sections involved in the conflict – Jews, Palestinians, and the Israeli army – enjoy a great evening show of the circus. Even those who opposed the whole idea of a circus within the Israeli borders did entertain the evening.

In 1999, *Circus Palestina* won the Israeli Academy Award for best script and best film. It is also nominated for seven Israeli Film Academy Awards, winning five of them. "Probably more for its liberal intentions than genuine craft."<sup>52</sup> The vast correspondence concerning this film attests to its translations into English and its global distribution to Europe, Canada, Asia, the United States, and South America.<sup>53</sup> The film opened the 15<sup>th</sup> annual Israeli Film Festival in Los Angeles and was repeated to a full house even two weeks later.<sup>54</sup> These accomplishments mean much to the director. Especially the fact that it achieved a much wider audience than intended and anticipated. It remains open to question whether it

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<sup>51</sup> Amnesty International. "Tell Israel to Lift the 11-year Blockade on Gaza." Accessed April 27, 2021. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/take-action/lift-the-blockade-on-gaza/>.

<sup>52</sup> Ted Shen, "Circus Palestina," Chicago Reader, accessed March 24, 2021, <https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/circus-palestina/Film?oid=1066223>.

<sup>53</sup> "Circus Palestina," Israeli Films, accessed March 24, 2021, <https://www.israelifilms.co.il/catalogue/circus-palestina>.

<sup>54</sup> Pat and Samir Twair, "Circus Palestina" Wows L.A. Moviegoers," Washington Report On Middle East Affairs, March 1999, accessed March 9, 2021, <https://www.wrmea.org/1999-march/circus-palestina-wows-la-moviegoers.html>.

achieved the director's goal, which was predominantly to make the Jewish society make think of and criticize the current situation.

Bearing in mind that it is still available today, it tells us the wider audience the film reached. So, the film has had the opportunity to spread its message for decades. Regardless of the main aim of the filmmaker, in light of this research, the film failed to convey the concept of peace and intergroup dialogue among the audience. Additionally, the reviews, which often praised the film, generally did not discuss the representation of the "Other." One film reviewer said that the film is intended to serve as a political parable, but it did not surpass a morass of platitudes.<sup>55</sup> All critics are featuring the uniqueness of the film's genre but are not going further than that. Even though it is a fact that *Circus Cinema*, a movie on Israeli Palestinian relations seen through Israelis' eyes, reached hundreds of thousands of viewers. Notwithstanding the lack of any accounts of its effect on society, the records that it is nominated and awarded for Israeli prizes express that it is appreciated and respected. As it may be unconsciously, it would have left a subliminal message to the viewers.

### 1.5. Conclusion

In the early minutes of the film, Ibrahim drives the circus owners through Israeli checkpoints. We see two Israeli soldiers expressing their discontent with the circus' arrival and being skeptical about it since it is not the right time for entertainment. "Your too soft, too considerate. Who needs a circus here? What's wrong? Are you constipated?" says one soldier to Oz for tolerating a circus. While that is exactly what it is all about, and a circus is exactly what they need. It is a need for entertainment to revive all the positive feelings available in human nature, such as love and joy, because only then can we understand each other and acknowledge the others' legitimate present instead of endeavor to justify ours.

*Circus Palestina* seldom rises above the clichés because of using general stereotypes assigned to both Israelis and Palestinians. For Palestinians, this is the need to be two-tempered to make great achievements. In terms of Jews, it is the exemplary Hebrew character superior to Arabs and eager to use their power to save the land from the savage Arabs. Applying dark comedy to criticize society anyway was necessary for that period when openly criticizing was not taken for granted and not endorsed at all. Hence, Halfon

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<sup>55</sup> Ted Shen, "Circus Palestina," Chicago Reader, accessed March 24, 2021, <https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/circus-palestina/Film?oid=1066223>.



accomplished a special position in pushing through obstacles even his premise is against the general assumptions and out of the box. Winning five Israeli awards is proving his success. Albeit we now know that shooting a critical film openly would not be granted at the end of the 1990s.

Being a dark comedy did not enlighten the first part of this research concerning the representation of the “Other,” but we do know now that everyone is aware of these stereotypes and questions them. *Circus Palestina* tells us that it is not plausible to question these sensitive issues publicly. Although, even this upholds the claim that there is something wrong in the way of representing.

Within the film, they are referring a few times to the peace negotiations in a scoffing way. The film states that negotiations hold among politicians are not the way to peace. There is one thing that can bring us to peace, and that is intergroup dialogue and collaboration. In a surprising way that undermines the Zionist narrative, the film simply illustrates a simple moral lesson: We can live together, and we have to live together. There is no second option. Every step taking to cause damage to the other has its repercussions on both sides, and at the end of the day, there is no winning party. The film promotes a war won by both sides.

Even though the Israeli film industry was not willing to fund projects with a critical approach, *Circus Palestina* succeeded in presenting the conflict in the 1990s in a way that questions the situation from inside. Even though, it still provides many more negative than positive descriptions of the Other and provides little information about the religion, culture, and life of the Other. Even the self-community is characterized in generally negative terms. Thus, the film undermines the Other’s presence by the combination of negative descriptions and lack of information about the Other. Despite the fact that the Jews are described as portrayed undesirably as well, *Circus Palestina* succeeds to construct one of the settings needed to encourage intergroup dialogue and peace. The film emphasizes the conflict itself and the common goal. Maoz calls these two approaches a Joint Project Model and the Confrontation Model. The goal is to encourage awareness among Jews with regards to the asymmetrical relations between Jews and Palestinians, and especially of their role as a dominant oppressive group.

## 2. Case Study Two: An Analysis of Rashid Masharawi's HAIFA (1996)

### 2.1. Introduction

The second film analysis of this thesis is on Rashid Masharawi's *Haifa* shot in 1996, right after the second Oslo Accords were signed. We encountered different outcomes of this analysis which would not be a surprise. This film provides us information from an entirely unilateral perspective without any explicit reference to the "Other" except a few minor scenes, which will be unpacked in the upcoming section. The "Other" within this chapter refers to Jews in Israel, while the "self" refers to the Palestinians. To highlight this point, I will use solely the term Israeli and Palestinian rather than Arab and Jew in this chapter, unless used in the film.

Since the film is shot in a dynamic period, it has an abundance of allusions to the peace negotiations. Although the film's primary goal is to depict the contrasting perceptions of these negotiations through the eyes of the Palestinian society living within the region, it is worthwhile to include it in this research.

Despite the fact that Masharawi does not adopt the stereotypical characteristics to describe the Israelis, he works with the features ascribed to the Palestinian cinema after Oslo. Nadia Yaqub, who inquired into the cinema during the revolution, remarks that since Oslo, characters in Palestinian film resist Israeli violence and occupation and corruption, incompetence of and injustice from the Palestinian Authority.<sup>56</sup> Besides that, *Haifa* underscores Adwan, Bar-Tal, and Wexler's findings that the self-community represents itself as a victim who wants nothing but peace and justice.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, it undermines the "Other's" presence by lack of information and negative description. It is striking that these aspects recur in the Israeli film analyzed in the earlier chapter as well.

As a Palestinian Jaffa raised in the Shati refugee camp in the Gaza Strip,<sup>58</sup> it is not mind-boggling that Masharawi's experience shaped his cinematic vision was refugees' daily lives living in refugee camps. So is *Haifa*, one of Masharawi's films in which he depicts the

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<sup>56</sup> Nadia Yaqub, *Palestinian Cinema in the Days of Revolution*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018, 10.

<sup>57</sup> Adwan, Bar-Tal, and Wexler, "Portrayal of the Other in Palestinian and Israeli Schoolbooks: A Comparative Study," 202.

<sup>58</sup> "Rashid Masharawi," International Film Festival Rotterdam, accessed April 25, 2021, <https://iffr.com/en/persons/rashid-masharawi>.

everyday struggle for survival of the inhabitants. *Haifa* is an outcome of the cooperation with several international film producers. Besides international producers such as MY Spotlight Independent and FORTISSIMO Films, *Haifa* is supported by another prominent Palestinian director, Hani Abu-Assad, who Masharawi met in the Netherlands, where he lived for three years. Besides producing films, Masharawi established a production company in collaboration with Abu-Assad, called Ailul Films.<sup>59</sup> And in order to shot *Haifa*, Masharawi cooperated with a Dutch production company named Arkus Films. This involvement of many international companies gives us an indication of the wider audience *Haifa* reached. Notwithstanding these companies' emphasis on the importance of independent filmmaking, it remains open to question whether the film is funded uncensored.

After returning from the Netherlands, Masharawi (1962–present) founded the Cinematic Production Center and initiated a mobile film unit. He aimed to support the production of local films and improve the Palestinian technical and production crews to minimize dependency on foreign film crews and foreign funding. As Masharawi explains his reasoning in his own words in an interview: “I felt this can at least help keep those people who can study cinema outside and come back, so they have an address, and don’t just leave and go back to those countries.”<sup>60</sup> His attempts are by several scholars and movie critics regarded as the start of a new era of films produced within the Occupied Territories by exclusively Palestinian production crews.<sup>61</sup>

Rashid Masharawi was an internationally acknowledged filmmaker, and so were his films. He gained this honor because, between films, he earned his livings by building sets for both the Israeli and Palestinian film industries. He got the opportunity to assist at both, which gave him the prospect to gain broad experience. Due to this privilege, he acquired recognition from the Israeli Film Institute as well and opened his potential to the international audience. Nevertheless, the whole time he resided in Tel Aviv, he was illegal and could only leave Gaza with permission and after curfew hours.<sup>62</sup> His personal

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<sup>59</sup> “Hany Abu-Assad,” International Film Festival Rotterdam, accessed April 25, 2021, <https://iffr.com/en/persons/hany-abu-assad>.

<sup>60</sup> Fareed Armaly, “An interview with the Palestinian filmmaker Rashid Masharawi,” Fareed Armaly, April 2002, accessed April 25, 2021, <https://www.fareedarmaly.net/about/bio/biblio/interview-rashid-masharawi/>.

<sup>61</sup> Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema*, 44-5.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

experience is relevant to the narrative of the film and played an important role in the films' themes. He aimed at narrating his experience through his job and make the story heard.

In the next section, I will put forward my discoveries from *Haifa* with regard to the representation (shift) of the "Other" by virtue of political events. In this case, the essential part is the impact of the Peace Accords on filmmaking and its effects on encouraging intergroup dialogue and peace-making. After identifying the traces of Peace Negotiations, I will look at whether the filmmaker points out the availability of hope for the future. Finally, I will answer the question of whether the Palestinian film industry did foster peace amid the peace process by looking at whether *Haifa* meets one of the conditions mentioned earlier that should be met for an effective intergroup contact.

## 2.2. Representation of the "Other"

As a refugee being raised in a refugee camp, Masharawi dedicated his life to screening refugees' daily lives. After discovering the power of the moving image, he decided to talk about the situation by art. In this platform, he could tell his part of the story with the language he wanted to use, without violence and shootings.<sup>63</sup> *Haifa* is one of these stories in which Masharawi portrays his knowledge of living under occupation in refugee camps.

Within his film, Masharawi does not elaborate too much on the characters' stories as he does not on Israelis. He aimed to portray the one-sided experience of the situation, which is why he does not include that many Israeli characters or references to sketch out a clear picture of the "Other." Nevertheless, from the little information given about the Israelis within the film, the image we can draw is not different than we expected. In the film, the Palestinians are the victims of the entire situation. The Israelis have devoted the role of the perpetrator who caused harm to the Palestinians and locked them up in refugee camps. Moreover, the Israelis limit their freedom by putting the whole area under curfew.

The impression the film leaves you is despair and grief. As the genre of the Palestinian film industry focuses on the forming of national identity by reviving the past, Masharawi captures the idea of the future and what it means for people to have hope and perspective by providing a peek at the famous television images from the Middle East. The characters

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<sup>63</sup> Armaly, "An interview with the Palestinian filmmaker Rashid Masharawi," Fareed Armaly, April 2002, accessed April 25, 2021, <https://www.fareedarmaly.net/about/bio/biblio/interview-rashid-masharawi/>.

represent the people in their everyday lives. Haifa, the main character who is considered crazy, is walking through the streets of Gaza in his uniform and laughing out loudly. In the opening scene, Haifa is singing a sad song and sitting in a broken car, gesturing like he is driving.

Before the camera perspective embraces Haifa, we watch from a distance an empty landscape with a mountain and tiny stone houses. A black cloud of smoke comes out between the houses. A barren landscape precedes this scene from a distant high angle in which the refugee camp is seen. An open landscape is reminiscent of the Israeli cinema in which indicates the emptiness of the region. However, this setting is not a characteristic of the Palestinian. The reason for using this scenery might be the longing for and connectedness with the land since the concept of the land is a crucial aspect of Palestinian filmmaking.<sup>64</sup>

Abu Said's family with two sons and one daughter is central in this story, each with its own survival strategy. One of his sons is prisoned, and the other has been chased by the Israeli army. After the film's opening scene, we see a typical scene in which three Israeli soldiers are chasing two Palestinian kids across the village/camp, one of which is Abu Said's son, Siad. The reason has not been mentioned throughout the film, but it is clear that it is not about why such things are happening but that it is happening at all. The boys are running from the Israeli soldiers, and the only reason given is, so they do not get caught.

Moreover, these chasings are regarded as usual among Palestinians. This is evident from the scene in which Siad plunged into a Palestinian family's yard where they have breakfast. When Siad interrupts their breakfast, the father asks him what happened. Siad answers with, "the army caught my friend," upon which the man offers him to sit and have breakfast together. Accordingly, it is quite normal that one jumps into a stranger's yard and joins with breakfast.

Haifa, the crazy of the camp, laughs out loud and constantly speaks of returning to Haifa. He might be considered crazy but speaks sporadic words of wisdom about the Palestinian people's reality because of his long-lasting pain. A common sentence Haifa shouts is Haifa, Yafa, Acka – three coastal cities. In one scene, where Haifa is happy, he sings the following remarkable things: "The Turks came to us, built mosques and went. The British came, built

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<sup>64</sup> Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema*, 3-4.

prisons, and went. The Jews came, swallowed the country without much effort, and increased the number of jails. Well, what about the Palestinians? Will they build us gardens?"

That the Israelis came and took everything that belongs to the Palestinians is another profile frequently sketched throughout the film, as in one scene where a Palestinian refugee speaks with journalists: "I am from Al Majdal. Today they call it Ashkelon. Give me back this Ashkelon, and they can take what they want." In other scenes where they touch upon this aspect is generally about topics surrounding peace: "If they want real peace, they should give us what belongs to us and take what belongs to them. any other way will not work." Palestinians point their finger at Israelis as the sole cause for the conflict. When they go, the problem will be solved, and "we can manage by ourselves," they claim.

A stereotypical image highlighted during the film is the villain Israelis who imprisoned the Palestinians. This is an eminent sketch since those living in Gaza effectively live in one of the world's largest open-air prisons.<sup>65</sup> The prison is depicted with constraints on movement. In the second half of the film, Abu Said got paralyzed because he pushes his cotton cart around town in the sun and heat every day. Upon this, Siad tries to comfort him with the following words: "Be strong, father. It does not matter you cannot walk for a while. Look at us. We can walk but where can we go? The most important thing is attitude. Then, you go fast." Another aspect of being prisoned is the curfew and the shops' closing. A Palestinian makes the situation clear: "One day of working ten days of strike. I do not like it," upon which another man replies: "They say you must close, I close." Besides physical imprisonment, many refugees, especially Haifa, are prisoners of memories and longings for the past.

The Palestinians are fed up with the indistinctness of negotiating politicians for a proper solution from both sides. The camp is roughly divided into two: those who either support or refute the Oslo negotiations. Each of them hopes for their right of return, although, deep down anxious for the outcome, no one dares to speak except for Siad and Haifa. After hearing the news that Israelis will withdraw from the region, Haifa's comparison makes the situation clear: "Withdraw? [laughs out loudly] Once, John wanted his neighbor's house. He

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<sup>65</sup> Roald Høvring, "Gaza: The World's Largest Open-Air Prison," April 26, 2018, accessed May 3, 2021, <https://www.nrc.no/news/2018/april/gaza-the-worlds-largest-open-air-prison/>.

began to frighten him at night. He imitated a hyena, an owl. He hung a slaughtered cat on his door. Finally, he made him leave the house. And now he wants to sell it. The man stuck a nail in the wall and said, 'the house is for sale, but not the nail because it reminds me of my late father.' He came to the house every day. Once to hang his trousers on the nail, once to hang his underwear. In the end, he is using the house more than the owner. Understand?" He wants to make clear that at the end of the day, Israelis will never leave this region with their own will.

### 2.3. Traces of Peace Negotiations

Earlier I mentioned that the "Other" is not openly embodied in *Haifa*. As opposed to that, there are many references to peace negotiations in which divergent attitudes towards the ongoing political developments are illustrated. Shooting this film amid these upheavals definitely aims to illustrate and manifest the impact of these negotiations taking place outside of Palestine on those living inside refugee camps. Even though the negotiations have a direct effect on these refugees, they had no right to speak. With this film, Masharawi intended to acquaint the sufferings of the refugees with the world. Thus, he wanted to show that these refugees are directly dependent on the agreements made kilometers away while they have less to say to influence the course of the negotiations.

Haifa's extravagant actions point to the confusion of the Oslo Accords. Palestinians have waited for almost five decades for their right to return, which they hoped Oslo would deliver, but it did not. There are three perspectives throughout the film among Palestinians of the enduring peace negotiations in the course of the 1990s: supporters, opposers, and those who are in the midst. *Haifa* covers all three views and substantiated them as well. One of the supporters in the film is Abu Said, while his son Siad clearly resists it. Those in the middle act as minor characters in the film, such as the barber, but fulfill a significant role.

The first dialogue on peace is between Abu Said and Siad when Abu Said states that he could not listen to the news that day. "Do not bother, father. What do you expect? Nothing is new under the sun," replies Siad. The father says with all his belief and confidence, "but I think the peace talks are serious this time. Everybody wants to make real peace." Siad's answer demonstrates Masharawi's point of view in making this film: "You know what this peace means for the people in the refugee camps? Refugee camps. This peace they are talking about does not happen here but in Washington and Madrid, and who knows where.

But here? Nothing will change.” Abu Said’s reaction to this is negative, with a shake of the head, but Siad does not let him respond and leaves the house.

This dialogue and a few more during the film are pointing at the attitude of the politicians or those participating in the negotiations. In another scene where Abu Said is having a haircut, the barber expresses his concerns and distrust of the outcome of the negotiations. Abu Said tries to reassure the barber: “Leave politics to the politicians. Every one of them has a brain as big as this barbershop. they know what they are doing.” The barber interrupts him with his doubts and reclaims that he is not against hope or what is best but he concerns whether there is a real solution at all. And Abu Said continues: “I want to be it a real solution. Just wait a couple of months and you will see. I swear it on my mustache. You will come to tell me how right I was. You will sleep in peace at night. No worries about curfews or soldiers or anything.” Abu Said iterates the same words in another scenery where he tries to persuade Siad to change his rebellious attitude towards the situation: “Leave politics to the politicians and God will help. Your brother will be out of jail and people will have no more problems.”

As mentioned in the opening of this section, Masharawi highlights the notion that those who are directly affected by the peace negotiations have not a say in the process. This is evident from the pronoun used in conjunction with peace negotiations: *they*; “If they want real peace, if they finish discussing peace, they say that, they know what they are doing.” Even though, what bothers Siad most is the inconsistency of these politicians/parties and not knowing what they want: “Peace should not be like that. Those people are not for peacemaking. What will the result be? Every day they come with a different peace. One with Jerusalem, one without, one with settlements, one without.”

Moreover, Masharawi underlines that Palestinians have just as little impact on the case as a Westerner. When the news spread through the camp that French journalists came to the refugee camp and wanted to interview Palestinians, Haifa wants to talk to them while he does not speak English anyway. He says, “you know what, if they understand us, and we understand them, they will not understand us and we will not understand them,” and starts laughing loud. In the end, he does not speak to them. So, the journalists’ camera points at a few Palestinians who want to speak. One of them says to the microphone: “We ask for the West Bank and for Jerusalem and all the prisoners.” Another Palestinian interrupts and emphasizes that the prisoners are the most important. Then, a third takes the word and



says, “tell the journalist to look for another job because nothing will happen here.” The last Palestinian makes clear that it does not matter what their demands are because at the end of the day their efforts will not be heard or influence the course of the negotiations. Even not through Western media.

It is outstanding that when they talk about peace in the film, they repeatedly mention *real* peace together with adding what real peace means for the Palestinians. Real peace appears when they got back their dignity, their freedom, and particularly things that belong to them since it is evident that any other way will never work. The method politicians try to fulfill is easily explained in the film when a customer enters a shop to buy a t-shirt. He suddenly puts his ice cream on the table with Arafat’s poster and damages it. Despite his apologies, the shopkeeper wants him to pay for it. Suddenly, another shopkeeper interferes and says that each of them should pay half, and like that they can solve their problem. On the other hand, the customer does not want to pay for someone’s poster whose actions he disapproves of. As in different scenes from the film, this scene sketches out the absurd situation through the eyes of Palestinians. Accordingly, the Israelis are the offenders who caused the damage and now both sides have to pay for its solution. This is immoral.

At the end of the film, the final results of the agreements were well received by many Palestinians. “We deserve to see a good day after the humiliation and suffering we have experienced,” a Palestinian says to Siad. And he continues with his advice: “Listen Siad, whether you like it or not this is what you have got. Take my advice and be happy. Or do you like curfews, running away from Israeli soldiers, arrests, and death?” Siad still does not seem convinced to cheer up, but he chooses to join the celebration together with his father in the wheelchair. They gathered in the square waved banners and chanted slogans: “Yes to our right to return and control our destiny,” and “No peace without releasing all prisoners.”

Despite the positive outcome of the Oslo, and the general cheer among the refugees, the individual characters seem lost and not satisfied. The final result left them bewildered and asking more questions. As An old dame in the street stops a taxi who asks her where she wants to go. Her answer to this question is recapping: “I do not know where I am going, my son. Where should I go?” Perhaps she speaks for many Palestinians. Even though the outcome seems positive on the surface, they all know that it is not the end of the story but the story only begins.

## 2.4. Hope for Tomorrow

The main theme of *Haifa* clearly shouts to the audience that a group of Gaza's townspeople and the town's fool have hope for better days in the future. Masharawi explores the meaning of this hope through those people's eyes. Despite that he does not zoom in on any of the characters, they express their hope in a different way. The characters I found outstanding and necessary to scrutinize are Haifa, his aunt, Abu Said, and his family – his wife, daughter (Sabah), and son (Siad). Since Masharawi examines what it means for war victims to carry/convey hope, I will analyze them respectively. It is striking that they all live together but their lives do not interfere with each other.

Haifa, the laughing stock of the camp, is a symbol of the townspeople's collective disheartenment.<sup>66</sup> He constantly relives and ponders the past, like a prisoner of memories. His greatest longing is for Latifah, his cousin, with whom he was supposed to marry if there was no war. He repeats that she promised to wait for him. Until one day, when he hears that Latifah has happily married, he feels devastated, angry, and lost. Perhaps, Haifa expresses everyone's rage and disappointment after the failure of the Oslo. Particularly Masharawi himself. He displays Haifa's character entirely with his own dilemmas because, after the Oslo process, he felt as he lost Jaffa like someone took the ground out from under his feet and this problem will never be solved because, according to Masharawi, politicians changed the discourse of the problem, which made it impossible to solve. When something does not exist anymore, it cannot be solved.<sup>67</sup>

Abu Said and his family is central in *Haifa's* story. Each of the members is living a different life path with different aspirations and inspirations. The father, chief of the family has hope for the future to have Palestine back and continue where they left off. After the peace negotiations are finished, he plans to retake his position as a former cop: "I will be a policeman again and clear up this whole mess." Besides that, he is informing and trying to convince those he speaks about the prospect of peace he is aspiring to. He says repeatedly, "I want something good to happen for everyone." One day, he suddenly got paralyzed and it

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<sup>66</sup> Sonia Nettnin, "Sonia Nettnin Film Review: Haifa," May 5, 2005, accessed April 27, 2021, <https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL0505/S00074/sonia-nettnin-film-review-haifa.htm>.

<sup>67</sup> Fareed Armaly, "An interview with the Palestinian filmmaker Rashid Masharawi," April 2002, accessed May 2, 2021, <https://www.fareedarmaly.net/about/bio/biblio/interview-rashid-masharawi/>.

seems like he lost his expectation. Then, people around him try to motivate him to recover to retake his position as a cop.

Abu Said's elder son is jailed by the Israeli army for which the reason is not mentioned. When he is visited by his mother he has wounds on his face which indicate that he is tortured and abused. His mother has a positive outlook on the future since she believes her husband's sayings about a better life in the near future, while she repeats: "Please let me find you a bride. And your father says the country will be better." She desires to settle him down and hold him back from problems and rebels after he is out of jail, and she adds: "You do not want to finish school and we do not want you to go abroad. You must have a job, a house, and a wife. Responsibility." She is convinced that everything will be okay after the negotiations and the problem is just about responsibility.

The political view of their second son, Siad, is undoubtedly like his brother's since he runs from the police in the opening scene. He seems rebellious and has a gloomy view of the current situation and discusses openly his view with others. Contradictory to his father's view, he is against the negotiations due to his distrust of the politicians. Despite his criticism, he still has hope and strives for a better opportunity. In one scene where they talk about the Oslo as an achievement, he replies: "Look, nobody likes death but there are people who care about dignity."

Sabah, Abu Said's daughter, is living an entirely different life. Her role in this film is rather focused on her secret meetings with a boy where they talk about their future lives, rather than with her family. When Sabah is at home, she is painting colorful and happy landscapes which she hangs on the wall. During the secret meetings with the boy, taking place in Haifa's house, they are talking about their hope in the future that everything will be better. Sabah intends to finish school and study abroad. Marriage is not a destination of her plans, since it is common in the culture: "I want to complete my studies. If someone asks me to marry him, and I like him, I will and if I do not I will not."

In an interview, Masharawi explains the underlying meaning of this character. Sabah did not exist in real life then. He was trying to indicate a role model for girls to choose their own lives, continue their studies, and marry someone they love and definitely not go with arranged marriages. He wanted the girls to be jealous and as strong as her.<sup>68</sup> This featuring a

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

child in a major role is reminiscent of the neorealist tradition in which the story is set amongst the poor and working-class where survival is the primary objective.

Last but not least there is Haifa's bedridden aunt. Haifa visits her once in a while and brings her food. Their conversations are inspiring especially Haifa's words. The aunt is the greatest example of yearning for the good/best. No matter when Haifa enters her home, she asks whether he is one of his three sons who left the country. Haifa replies, "I have been coming to see you for forty years now and every time you tell me this son and that son. Mostafa is in Jordan and Youssef is in Syria. Let's say they are doing well there. But what made Adnan go to Canada?" upon which the aunt responds: "everybody is going, nobody stays with me."

When Haifa visits his aunt secondly, he sees her busy with wool and asks what she will do with it. She says: "This is some wool I brought from my old country. I will weave a waistcoat for Mostafa. When I have finished he will be back." Upon this, Haifa grins and tells a donkey's story: "Once there was a king. The king wanted his donkey to speak. He announced, "the person who teaches my donkey to speak will receive then kilos of gold, but anyone who fails to do so will be beheaded." Nobody dared to take the challenge but one. He took the gold and the donkey and asked the king for ten years. When he left, everybody said, "he will cut off your head," but he answered, "In ten years, either the donkey will be dead, the king will be dead or I will be dead." This story touches upon the amount of hope the Palestinians have, especially his aunt's. Despite the situation being intractable and long-lasting, they all have hope to the moon.

As every cinema film, *Haifa* was also screened to make a difference or to convey a message by, at least, appealing to a wide audience, and it did indeed. The film is screened in many countries, especially in Europe. *Haifa* succeeded to get screened in the Un Certain Regard section at the 1996 Cannes Film Festival and Festival des Cinémas d'Asie de Vesoul.<sup>69</sup> Besides that, it won awards for Best Artistic creation by Medfilm de Rome in 1995. Mohammad Bakri, Haifa in the film, won the award for Best Performance in Barcelona Festival in 1995. Nowadays, the film is available on YouTube and Amazon Prime Video for a

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<sup>69</sup> Panos Kotzathanasis, "Film Review: Haifa (1996) by Rashid Masharawi," February 8, 2020, accessed May 3, 2021, <https://asianmoviepulse.com/2019/03/film-review-haifa-1996-by-rashid-masharawi/>.

small amount. Although, the problem is that there is an area restriction and it can be watched exclusively in the United States or the United Kingdom.

The film was shot in close cooperation with Dutch producers, screened in Italy and France, and won awards in Italy and Spain. This coproduction is probably the reason for *Haifa* being shot in high quality and the wide mobilization. The film is also screened in Israel with Hebrew subtitles but, alas, there is no record of any review or critique from the Israeli side, which would improve the value of this research.<sup>70</sup>

Unlike *Circus Palestina*, there are many reviews of *Haifa* by European critics. They all praise Masharawi's ability to filmmaking and conveying his message. As a very recent film viewer says: "The film did an excellent job of drawing empathy,"<sup>71</sup> or Sonia Nettnin: "The creative energy Bakry infused in his character made it an impressive performance,"<sup>72</sup> and finally Jann Ruyters: "It makes them insecure, suppressed and ambivalent feelings of the camp dwellers all the more empathic."<sup>73</sup> Other reviews available in different languages such as German, Dutch and French show the wider audience the film reached out to.

## 2.5. Conclusion

So, in *Haifa*, there is Haifa and a central family with two sons and a daughter, each with their own survival strategy. Nevertheless, there were sufficient useful elements that serve to answer the research question of whether the film industry can promote dialogue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These are elements concerning the representation of the Israelis, traces of peace negotiations that might encourage intergroup dialogue, and the prospect of hope for a better and worthwhile life for every inhabitant of the region regardless of their religion, ideology, or ethnicity.

I conclude that Masharawi succeeds in his aspiration to draw empathy and be a voice for the unheard in portraying their sufferings, but that is not enough to foster peace and help Israeli Jews to understand Palestinians. Despite Masharawi's exceptional position and

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<sup>70</sup> Joshua Katzman, "Haifa," Chicago Reader, accessed May 3, 2021, <https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/haifa/Film?oid=1063865>.

<sup>71</sup> "Reviews of Haifa," Reviews of Haifa, Letterboxd, January 3, 2020, accessed April 27, 2021, <https://letterboxd.com/film/haifa/reviews/by/added/>.

<sup>72</sup> Sonia Nettnin, "Sonia Nettnin Film Review: Haifa," May 5, 2005, accessed April 27, 2021, <https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL0505/S00074/sonia-nettnin-film-review-haifa.htm>.

<sup>73</sup> Jann Ruyters, "Een Kijkje Achter de Televisiebeelden," November 24, 2010, accessed May 1, 2021, <https://filmkrant.nl/recensies/haifa/>.

ability to form and alter conceptions, he did not use this possibility in encouraging dialogue with the other. Nonetheless, his endeavor to peace and a fair solution is clearly visible within his films. Despite this shortage, we have seen that there is no shift towards a positive portrait of the Israelis in *Haifa*. Although minimal, the Israelis are presented in a negative range as aggressors and suppressors. There is one clear fact we can conclude from *Haifa*: Israelis are the core cause of this conflict because, quoting from *Haifa*, “they took what belongs to us.” Nevertheless, Masharawi does not care about the problem. His film might be an answer to “what now?” Since the film is screened after the Oslo, it asks, “what after Oslo?” And “what means Oslo for refugees?”

Besides the success of conveying empathy, *Haifa* is a drama that sheds light on the fact that, besides all the bombings and negotiations, there are still normal people trying to live a decent life.

I derived a negative outcome for the second question of whether the film encourages peace and intergroup dialogue. Masharawi shows the failure of the Oslo Accords. Despite the open end, Oslo did not help the people in their endeavors. The audience acquires a just insight into Palestinian refugee camp lives. The film does not offer solutions or an exit to the situation. As Said mentioned in the film, some people care about dignity and hence do not see any partition as a probability. The sole solution *Haifa* proposes is “let them go, and we can manage by ourselves”, which repeatedly results in a stalemate.

The self-community is characterized as a victim needing to defend itself against the negative intentions of the Other and as wanting nothing but peace. Like in the Israeli film, Palestinians undermine the Other’s presence at all by the combination of negative portrayal and lack of information about the Other. this lack of information is a central obstacle to respect and tolerance necessary for peace.

## Discussion

Despite the fact that intergroup contact and its vital role in reducing prejudices and intergroup hostility is commonly studied, relatively little research has been conducted to become acquainted with to what extent the film industries can be used to foster dialogue and reconciliation between groups in a predicament situation. This current study investigates the possibility of intergroup dialogue through the film industries from both sides in the context of the prolonged conflict between Jews and Palestinians.

My analysis of specific themes such as the representation of the other and the narrative of peace talks that appeared in both films from the Israeli and Palestinian side revealed that the Israeli film is more conducive to correspond to the conditions likely to reduce stereotypes and promote peace. More specifically, I found that the Israelis are more aware of the common stereotypes used to address the Palestinians. Halfon confronted this idea by applying dark comedy but to claim a shift in representation is not eligible since he still goes for these stereotypes. However, by doing this, he sheds light upon aspects which the Israeli society is not ready to discuss openly. On the other hand, we saw that the Palestinian film industry is still enduring its introverted attitude, and centers on the past narrative and forming of a Palestinian identity. While doing this, Masharawi does not devote much space for Jews, but in cases he does, he uses the common stereotypes as well. Hence, in this case, we cannot talk of a shift in representation for both sides.

Here below I will discuss the findings in light of relevant previous literature dealing with intergroup contact and dialogue, while in the meantime, mostly focusing on the context of the conflict.

### 1. Film Industry as a Platform for Dialogues in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

We live in an era in which the circulation of information takes place in no time. Sending one message reaches the other side of the world takes less than a second. Everyone has access to all kinds of information through the online platform. Nevertheless, the television and film industry in the 1990s differ from other platforms for dialogue in several ways. Unlike other platforms, interest in film and cinema will always stay because of its irreplaceable position comparing to other printing press inventions. Hence, examining the film industry from the

Palestinian and Israeli sides is highly important since the growing potential of mobilizing films and the attention they got from the international public is still very high.

This study explored the likelihood of the role the Israeli and Palestinian film industry in the 1990s may take in serving as a means for circulating peace. By laying the foundation with the contact hypothesis, my findings indicate that the Israeli film did compose partly to endorse intergroup contact and a peaceful dialogue between the parties, and thus, reduce stereotypes. These two films made clear that the Israeli-Palestinian struggle amid the Oslo Process, was still over narratives that were proceeding instead of trying to move towards mutual acceptance.

The Palestinian and Israeli films both included negative portrayals of the Other. Besides that, there was a lack of information about the Other's culture, beliefs, and activities. This lack of information constitutes a lack of recognition of the legitimate presence of the Other. especially in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this lack of recognition is a central obstacle to respect and tolerance which is necessary for peace. It is hard to imagine Israelis and Palestinians living in peace without learning more about the positive aspects of the other. So, the film industry cannot foster peaceful education while the other is represented quite poorly.

It has been demonstrated that societies in prolonged conflict construct reasoned and coherent narratives that justify and explain the conflict and the events. Hence, the findings of this study are consistent with the extensive literature. Both Israeli and Palestinian films in the 1990s establish unilateral and opposing narratives about the same period in the same region. While the Israeli film referred to their pursuit of peacemaking in face of the Arab resistance, the Palestinian film described the colonialist intention of the Jews.

## 2. Dialogue as a Process Toward Peace

In both films, there was an exposure to a moderate and peace-seeking voice. In the Israeli narrative, this facilitated a positive outcome for both parties; hope and acceptance. The discourse on peace among Palestinians in the film differs entirely from the Israelis. Palestinians, too, are longing for goodwill and peace, but see peace as the total withdrawal of the Jews from the region. Otherwise, peace can never occur. The peace-related dialogues in the film are also not auspicious for the future. Here, reconciliation is not considered at all,



because reconciliation takes place between two equal parties but an average Palestinian citizen is not regarded as an equivalent to a Jewish citizen. Hence, living in amity with each other is not considered as an opportunity at all. The only path leading to peace is that Israelis give back what belongs to the Palestinians and remove entirely from the region. As this will never happen, peace will never come. Despite this impossibility, the idea of hope for a better future is strongly covered in the film. Besides that, it does not matter that they sign treaties in Washington and shake hands laughingly to the camera.

Halfon follows a different path that finally leads to peace. He points out that they are experiencing a situation of mutual dependence, whether they like each other or not. Cooperation is simply the exclusive option. Meeting on common interests is the solution Halfon sees a potential to enter into a dialogue for a better life.

### 3. Two Approaches to Intergroup Contact through Films

In the earlier pages of this research, I delineated a few approaches to intergroup dialogue in settings of protracted conflict. I will use the Joint Project Model and Confrontation Model to intergroup contact, interchangeably to assess the precious findings. Using multiple approaches will give me and the two parties more prospects for a better future. The former and second approaches are closely related to each other and are based on the assumption that the emphasis on intergroup similarities, cultural equalities, as well as endorsing notions of cooperation can promote mutual understanding and tolerance between Israelis and Palestinians.<sup>74</sup> Its main goal is to reduce stereotypes and foster positive intergroup contacts.

The Joint Project Model adds to this the idea that working together to achieve a common goal will reduce hostilities and cherish cooperation. Additionally, it will substitute the separate identity of each group and create a shared identity. The latter model puts its emphasis on the conflict and the asymmetric power relations. These conditions altogether lead to the creation of mutual understanding, trust, and compassion through reconstructing another image of each other.

The picture that emerges from my findings whether the Israeli and Palestinian film industries can promote contact is more complex. We have seen mainly the Joint Project Model in Halfon's film. In line with this model, we have seen that cooperation toward a

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<sup>74</sup> Maoz, 118.

common goal in a situation of mutual dependence results in a shift towards a positive perception of the other group. Which, again, results in more voluntary participation in interaction and less warfare and aggression. So, the use of this model evoked positive and sympathetic outcomes.

In Masharawi's film, we observe the Confrontational Model. In contrast to the other models, this model emphasizes the conflict and the asymmetrical power relations between the two sides. Palestinians who suffer from the conflict the most, do not have any saying in the negotiations but they have a strong feeling of hope for returning to their earlier lives. That is the reason Masharawi does not present a path to peace in his film. He underscores the fact that there is no equal status for both sides during their contact situations to encourage greater awareness among the audience.

## Conclusion

The present study provides us a well-enough glimpse into the nature of the relations between Israelis and Palestinians during the Oslo Process in the 1990s. Besides that, it indicates that the two parties were far apart in socializing the audience more towards the continuation of the conflict rather than preparing it for a new era of peace. Moreover, the use of mutual negative portrayal strengthens this observation signifying that the battle over the narratives proceeded instead of moving more towards mutual acceptance. Even in the era during which one of the greatest attempts were made to reach the state of peace.

Additionally, it seems that, at least in their current form, the Palestinian industry lacks the encouragement of intergroup contact, which, as Maoz indicated, creates a necessary condition likely to reduce stereotypes. This has to do with the time things happened. The wavering events taken place in the course of the 1990s were not favorable to Palestinians and did not meet their requests. It might be that if the Oslo Accords turned into a success, it could have changed the trajectory of peace and, thus, the themes of filmmaking. But even this would take a long time.

The process of ending incitement, hatred, and misrepresentation of the Other in prolonged conflicts is difficult and requires deliberate effort. In consistence with the literature, it is possible to say that altering conflict-driven narratives is one of the foremost challenges that societies face if they are willing to engage in peacemaking. Even a minor change towards a more positive view of the Other can be regarded as an indication of an attempt to appease the conflict.

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