

# The Israeli Defence Forces' Representation in Israeli Cinema



# The Israeli Defence Forces' Representation in Israeli Cinema:

*Did David Betray His Soldiers?*

By

Fiammetta Martegani

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



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This book first published 2017

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-9118-5

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-9118-9

*To Ugo Fabietti,*

*My supervisor and mentor, a key figure in the development  
of Anthropology in Italy. You will be missed.*



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## PREFACE

# HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE IDF

In short, anthropological writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot ... They are, thus, fictions; fictions, in the sense that they are “something made,” “something fashioned”—the original meaning of *fictiô*—not that they are false, unfactual, or merely “as if” thought experiments. To construct actor-oriented descriptions of the involvements of a Berber chieftain, a Jewish merchant, and a French soldier with one another in 1912 Morocco is clearly an imaginative act ...

(Geertz 1973, 15)

“I could tell you, but then I’d have to kill you!” This is how Tzachi, my Israeli flatmate, responded when I asked him about his real “job” in the IDF on January 9, 2009, the day I arrived in Israel in order to start my fieldwork. At that time, the IDF was bombing the Gaza Strip during Operation Cast Lead, and I didn’t yet know that my flatmate’s answer was a quote from one of the most popular Israeli movies, *Mivtza Savta*, a cult film mocking the stereotypes of Israeli culture, including life in the kibbutz and the IDF.

By the end of the Gaza War, when Israel first declared a unilateral ceasefire on January 18, followed by Hamas announcing a one-week ceasefire 12 hours later, most of my limited Hebrew vocabulary comprised Israeli military slang. Most of the words I had learned were actually from other Israeli cult movies dealing with the IDF, something else that I was still not aware of.

“If you want to understand what’s going on in the IDF, you must see *Givat Halfon!*” *Givat Halfon Eina Ona*, literally “Halfon Hill Doesn’t Answer,” is a cult Israeli satirical movie about the IDF that tells the story of a reserve company watching the Egyptian border from a remote army base in the Sinai desert. The name of the film is a parody of the Israeli patriotic film *Giva 24 Eina Ona* [*Hill 24 Doesn’t Answer*], the first Israeli nationalist-heroic film, directed by Thorold Dickinson in 1954. The satirical version produced in 1976 was, ironically, directed by Assi Dayan,

the son of Moshe Dayan, the fourth Chief of Staff of the IDF, who became a fighting symbol to the world of what was, at the time, the nascent State of Israel, founded only in 1948. From 1948 to date, the Israeli cinema industry has grown up, developed, and changed a lot, as has the state itself along with the Israeli national identity. In a country with universal conscription, in a declared state of war since its inception, it should be of little surprise that the military has figured prominently in Israeli cinema. What might be somewhat surprising is that the image and perception of the IDF have undergone profound changes in the cultural and social arenas. These changes have manifested themselves on the Israeli screen as well.

In the early years of the state, the IDF was regarded as the epitome and fulfilment of the Israeli dream, the people's army that manifested the strength and resolve of the young nation and its inhabitants, the New Jews. Over the years, however, the army has come to be seen increasingly as a necessity rather than an ideal. Service in the IDF was no longer viewed as participation in a grand national undertaking but as just another phase, a rite of passage that follows high school and precedes university, in the *cursus honorum* of Israeli Jews. As the Israeli Studies scholar Eran Kaplan observed, in the early decades following Israeli independence the IDF was a venerable institution that stood high above the fray—an Israeli “holy cow” of sorts (2011, 59). But with time the army became a source of constant criticism and questioning, if not outright derision, as in the case of *Givat Halfon*.

Not surprisingly, when Tzachi finally convinced his IDF commander to let me follow his unit during their army reserve duty, after more than two years of negotiations, I realized what the commander meant when he concluded a speech to the entire battalion by saying: “And don't forget, here is not *Givat Halfon*.” I finally learned to stop worrying about the IDF, which is not only an army but also a huge part of Israeli culture. The IDF is, in fact, also known as *Tzava ha'am*, “the people's army,” and it forms part of Israeli everyday life from childhood, starting from popular children's books such as *Kofiko*.<sup>1</sup> The communal grip of the soldier is evident in all Israeli literature, poetry, art, cinema, and any cultural domain in which the soldier is represented.

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<sup>1</sup> *Kofiko* is a series of children's books by Tamar Bornstein-Lazar that tells the tales of the eponymous Israeli monkey. The first book dates from 1954, and still holds the record as the most popular children's series of all time in Hebrew. Kofiko experiences many adventures, travelling around the world. In the different editions, Kofiko joins the IDF (1963), joins the special Paratroopers (1964), carries out reserve duty (1974), and joins the army band (1975).

In the pioneering book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, published in 1980, the French Jesuit and scholar Michel de Certeau examines for the first time the ways in which people individualize mass culture, altering things from utilitarian objects to street plans to rituals, laws, and language in order to make them their own. *The Practice of Everyday Life* began pointing out that while social science possesses the ability to study the traditions, language, symbols, art, and articles of exchange that make up a culture, it lacks a formal means by which to examine the ways in which people reappropriate them in everyday situations. With no clear understanding of such activity, social science is bound to create nothing other than a picture of people who are non-artists (meaning non-creators and non-producers), passive and heavily subject to received culture. Indeed, such a misinterpretation is borne out in the term “consumer,” and therefore in de Certeau’s work the word “user” is offered instead, and the concept of “consumption” is expanded in the phrase “procedures of consumption,” which is further transformed to the term “tactics of consumption.”

In recent years, several scholars from different disciplines started to analyse films in terms of “procedures of consumption”: an excellent tool with which to introduce the culture of a society to its own conflicts, dynamics, frustrations, and hopes. Like other cultural art forms, Israeli cinema portrays the basic longings that are the existential dilemmas of a people. Indeed, Israeli cinema has the unique quality of having grown and developed within a newly formed state. Israeli cinema has in fact been created within a national cultural context that has reflexively produced itself since its very beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, and is still very much engaged in the formation of an evolving national-collective identity in the second millennium. Israeli culture is the product of a utopian enterprise. Zionism, which started in the late 1890s, was conceived in the context of nationalism in Europe and realized in the land of Israel-Palestine as a pioneering endeavour, regarded by some contemporary historians and sociologists as a colonial enterprise. As the scholars of Israeli cinema and culture Miri Talmon and Yaron Peleg argue, this newly created cultural identity used the new medium of film to convey the creative momentum of the new nation (2011, x–xi).

In the case of Israeli culture, Israeli films are certainly a paradigmatic medium through which we can follow the changes that took place in Israeli society since its birth. If the early years of the film industry in Israel were characterized by Zionist, heroic, propaganda movies, over the years the movies have become more and more critical of Israeli society, showing both its strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, in my work I aim to explore

the specificity of cinema as a tool to follow the changes that have taken place in Israeli society since its beginnings, with the goal of following changes in the portrayal of the Israeli soldier on film. Through the prism of these changes, one can follow the more general changes that have taken place in Israeli society and culture.

Israeli culture has changed from pure Zionism to the culture of a country that allows itself to have doubts, to ask questions, and to criticize itself like David, the biblical and mythological hero of Israel. As Raymond-Jean Frontain and Jan Wojcik, both scholars of the Bible as literature, highlighted in their transdisciplinary work *The David Myth in Western Literature*, of all the Biblical heroes, the character of David is perhaps the richest in paradox and also the most difficult to grasp. David's life is crowded with more experiences than all the patriarchs together, and in that mass of experiences there are so many contradictions that no easy statement can be made about him. David is the Biblical Man for all seasons. He is a warrior, a lover, a poet, a killer, and a restorer: "his character is a paradox: he's the Lord's anointed and the supposed author of the holy Psalms, as well as an adulterer and a murderer ... This is the story of a living, breathing, passionate, fallible man, the mistakes he made and the consequences of those mistakes" (Frontain and Wojcik 1980, 1–2).

This elaborate and fascinating archetypal hero and his countless representations influenced and inspired me a lot on my journey through the representation of the Israeli soldier in Israeli cinema. The exposition of my journey in the following chapters is going to be divided into three different levels of "representation," a word which, as the Israeli scholar of cultural studies Ella Shohat argues, has aesthetic as well as political connotations (1987, 3). Here, I will provide a brief organizational map of my work. Following a methodological introduction exploring a scholarly background in postcolonial, gender, and film studies, I will analyse the representation of the Israeli soldier and their continuous metamorphosis, according to the most significant conflicts in the history of the Israeli state.

In the first chapter I will analyse the development of modern Zionism and the consequent establishment of the state of Israel, from the First Zionist Congress that took place in Basel in 1897 to the declaration of the state of Israel in 1948. In the second chapter I will explore the construction of the body of the nation from the 1948 War of Independence to the 1967 Six Day War. In the third chapter I will analyse the dramatic turning point of the 1973 Yom Kippur War and the consequent political overturning of the 1970s. In the fourth chapter I will explore the explosion of violence characterizing the 1980s and 1990s, the time of the First Lebanon War and the beginning of the First Intifada. In the final chapter, which deals with



the last decade of Israel's history, I will conclude by trying to explore the complex period of the Second Intifada and what I define as "the wars of the new millennium."

Each of these chapters is divided into three subchapters dealing with a specific level of "representation." In the first subchapter of each chapter I will analyse the relation between "nation" and "narration," to quote the pioneering work of the Indian contemporary postcolonial studies scholar Homi K. Bhabha. After describing the most significant period of the history of Israel, according to the Israeli narrative, in the second subchapter I will explore the relation between "nation" and national "artistic" representation.

As the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz stated in his fundamental work "Art as a Cultural System," art is notoriously hard to talk about, "even when made of words in the literary arts, all the more so when made of pigment, sound, stone or whatever in the non-literary ones, to exist in a world of its own, beyond the reach of discourse. It not only is hard to talk about it; it seems unnecessary to do so. It speaks, as we say, for itself: a poem must not mean but be; if you have to ask what jazz is you are never going to get to know" (1983, 94). According to Geertz, the talk about art that is not merely technical or a spiritualization of the technical is largely directed by placing it within the context of these other expressions of human purpose and the pattern of experience they collectively sustain. What this implies is that the definition of art in any society is never wholly intra-aesthetic, and giving art objects a cultural significance is always a local matter. Therefore, to study an artform is to explore a sensibility, which is essentially a collective formation, and a theory of art is at the same time a theory of culture (*ibid.*, 96–7). The exploration of different historical periods of the Israeli sensibility to produce and consume Israeli art guided me in the third level of analysis of representation: the relation between a nation and its cinematic representation, which is explored in the third subchapter of each chapter, and which is also the heart of my ethnographic work.

To be more specific, my approach is, first of all, "textual." Rather than considering the films merely as historical reflections or social symptoms, I attempt to deal with them as films, seeing film as text, according to Geertz's definition of culture as, "an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong" (1973, 452). At the same time, my approach is also "intertextual," dealing with the relationship between the film texts and other texts (filmic and non-filmic) that have preceded or influenced them. In the case of Israeli Cinema, this includes the influence

of non-Israeli films and the presence of non-filmic text in the films themselves, in the form of source-plays and novels adapted for the screen. In this sense, I am concerned with “translation” from medium to medium and what Christian Metz calls “semiotic interference between languages” (Metz 1974)

Politics and cinema, text and context, are intimately linked. For this reason, my approach is also “contextual,” analysing homologies and allegory as representing a kind of bridge between text and context. I am concerned, finally, with the “spectator-in-the-text.” According to Shohat's definition, in fact, “the filmic experience is inevitably inflected by the cultural and political awareness of the audience itself, constituted outside the text and traversed by social realities such as nationality, ethnicity, class and gender” (1987, 8–10). My work examines the discursive creation of the Israeli soldier through the prism of representation in Israeli cinema. To gain a panoramic view of how the soldier is represented, the work brings together different analyses of several ethnographic fields. I will be concerned with representations of the soldier as discursive formations. These representations are constructed both in interviews with people who described their felt experience to me and research on Israeli culture, history, and cinema. It is hoped that the diversity of these sources will add to the understanding of the extensive period covered in the study of the complex representation of the Israeli soldier.

As Peter Ian Crawford and David Turton suggested in their landmark work *Film as Ethnography*, film is a rich instrument for communicating ethnographic knowledge. It suggests that images and words in this discipline operate on different logical levels; that they are hierarchically related; that whereas writings may encompass the images produced by film, the inverse of this cannot be true. The author argues for this position further by suggesting that the visual is to the written mode as “thin description” is to “thick description” (Crawford and Turton 1992, x–xii). The term was used for the first time, as a peculiarity of the ethnographic methodology, by Geertz in his fundamental essay “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973). More than 20 years later, the Palestinian-American anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod wrote “The Interpretation of Culture(s) After Television” (1997), which, with other essays collected in the anthology “Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt,” decisively contributes to the anthropological study of media and nationalism. Referring to the British literary critic Raymond Williams’ hypothesis about the consumption of television as the “dramatization of consciousness” (1989), Abu-Lughod analysed how mass media has made

the melodramatic genre part of everyday life for most Egyptians, developing a certain “melodramatization of consciousness” by offering up models for subjectivity and narratives of the self in the characters whose quotidian lives are emotionalized (2000, 129). Adopting Abu-Lughod’s (or actually Williams’) definition, my hypothesis about the representation of the IDF in Israeli cinema is that it produces a kind of “cinedramatization of the David consciousness” in the Israeli everyday life. And after two years of fieldwork in Israel, although it might seem off for me to admit it, I realized that I was also influenced by this kind of “cinedramatization of the David consciousness,” as we can see from my decision to divide the chapters of my work according to this kind of soldier-centric (and macho-centric) perspective: the directors of the films I examine are all men, and they express to a large extent the masculine, national worlds to which they belong.

Or maybe I was influenced right from the beginning, when I first arrived in Israel in the middle of the Gaza War and the first movie I saw, sitting in Tel Aviv’s Dizengoff Cinema, was *Waltz with Bashir*. As the critical columnist of *Haaretz* Gideon Levy observed, talking about the Golden Globe which Ari Folman, the director of *Waltz with Bashir*, won in 2009: “It deserves an Oscar for the illustrations and animation, but a badge of shame for its message. It was not by accident that when he won the Golden Globe, Folman didn’t even mention the war in Gaza, which was raging as he accepted the prestigious award. The images coming out of Gaza that day looked remarkably like those in Folman’s film. But he was silent. So before we sing Folman’s praises, which will of course be praise for us all, we would do well to remember that this is not an antiwar film, nor even a critical work about Israel as militarist and occupier. It is an act of fraud and deceit, intended to allow us to pat ourselves on the back, to tell us and the world how lovely we are.”

Actually, it was while watching this movie that I started to learn not only how to stop worrying about but even to love the IDF. It’s nevertheless true that, to conclude with Geertz’s words, “‘the sense of beauty,’ or whatever the ability to respond intelligently to face scars, painted ovals, domed pavilions, or rhymed insults should be called, is no less a cultural artifact than the objects and devices concocted to ‘affect’ it. The artist works with his audience’s capacities—capacities to see, or hear, or touch, sometimes even to taste and smell, with understanding. And though elements of these capacities are indeed innate—it usually helps not to be color-blind—they are brought into actual existence by the experience of living in the midst of certain sorts of things to look at, listen to, handle, think about, cope with, and react to; particular varieties of cabbages,

particular sorts of kings. Art and the equipment to grasp it are made in the same shop” (1983, 99). The stories I will examine here are part of a shop which is still open, and of a history still in the making.

Therefore, as I started my work with a question, I will conclude with another question mark, because what I am going to suggest is that the David of our time is also still looking for an answer.

## INTRODUCTION

# BEYOND THE SCREEN: IDENTITY POLITICS AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a “production,” which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.

(Hall 1990, 222)

### **The Contribution of Cultural and Postcolonial Studies to the Study of the Nation**

Hugh Seton-Watson, author of by far the best and most comprehensive English-language text on nationalism, and heir to a vast tradition of liberal historiography and social science, sadly observes: “Thus I am *driven to* the conclusion that no ‘scientific definition’ of the nation can be devised; yet the phenomenon has existed and exists.” ... In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.

(Anderson 1983, 5 [quote from Seton-Watson 1977])

The concept of nation as an “imagined community” is coined by Benedict Anderson, who states that a nation is a socially constructed community, which is to say “imagined” by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group. As Anderson puts it, members of the community will probably never meet one another face to face; however, they may have similar interests or identify as part of the same nation.

The media particularly creates imagined communities by targeting a mass audience or generalizing and addressing citizens as the public.

According to Anderson, the creation of imagined communities became possible because of “print-capitalism.” Capitalist entrepreneurs printed their books and media in order to maximize circulation. As a result, readers speaking various local dialects were able to understand each other, and a common discourse emerged. Anderson argued, therefore, that the first European nation states were thus formed around their “national print-languages.”

Anderson arrived at his theory because he felt that neither Marxist nor liberal theories adequately explained nationalism. His thinking falls into a group of studies around nationalism along with Ernest Gellner (1983) and Eric Hobsbawm (1983). This school stands in opposition to the primordialists, who believe that nations, as ancient and natural phenomena, have existed since early human history.

Another crucial influence on Anderson’s work was the concept of “imagined geographies,” which evolved out of the work of Edward Said, particularly his critique on “orientalism” (1978). In this, “imagined” is used not to mean “false” but “perceived.” It refers to the perception of space created through certain images, texts, or discourses.<sup>1</sup> Said, in fact, was heavily influenced by Michel Foucault (1971).

“Imagined geographies” show the problems created by the use of popular discourse to construct views of other regions or societies. All landscapes are seen as being imagined—there is no “real” geography to which the imagined ones can be compared. Thus, when being analysed, these geographies should not be “measured” for their “accuracy” but deconstructed so that the power invested in them can be revealed.

Scholars have been heavily influenced by the concept of imagined geographies. Gerard Ó Tuathail, for example, has argued that geopolitical knowledge is a form of imagined geography. Ó Tuathail was, together with Simon Dalby and Klaus Dodds, one of the founding figures of “critical geopolitics” as a domain of research within political geography and international relations. Rooted in post-structuralism, critical geopolitics sees the geopolitical as comprising four linked facets: popular geopolitics, formal geopolitics, structural geopolitics, and practical geopolitics (1996). Particularly, “popular geopolitics” is concerned with the ways in which “lay” understandings of geopolitical issues are produced and reproduced through popular culture. Popular geopolitics studies are therefore premised on the idea of a recursive relationship between popular

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault developed a notion of discourse in his early work, especially the *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), where he defines discourse as systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs, and practices that systematically construct the subjects and worlds of which they speak.

culture and popular conscience. The complexity of the relationships that popular culture has with “formal” and “practical” geopolitical cultures has been studied with reference to a range of popular cultural products: specifically, critical studies of newspapers, cinema, comics, music, and any kind of media that participates in the process of building “imagined geographies.”

The relevance of popular culture in the study of the nation and nationalism has its roots in the academic field known as cultural studies. Cultural studies is extremely holistic, combining history, philosophy, politics, feminism, literary theory and media theory to study cultural phenomena in various societies. In this way, cultural studies seeks to understand the ways in which meaning is generated, disseminated, and produced through various practices, beliefs, institutions, and political, economic, or social structures within a given culture. Richard Hoggart coined the term in 1964 when he founded the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), which has since become strongly associated with Stuart Hall, who succeeded Hoggart as director.

Many cultural studies scholars employed Marxist methods of analysis, exploring the relationships between cultural forms (the superstructure) and the political economy (the base). In order to understand the changing political circumstances of class, politics, and culture in the United Kingdom, scholars at the CCCS turned to the work of the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci. In the work written from prison during the Fascist regime in the 1920s and 30s, Gramsci modified classical Marxism through seeing culture as a key instrument of political and social control. In this view, capitalists use brute force (police, prisons, repression, the military) to not only maintain control but also penetrate the everyday culture of working people. The key agenda for Gramsci and cultural studies is that of “cultural hegemony” (Gramsci 1971).

The theory of hegemony was of central importance to the development of cultural studies. As Hall puts it:

I have said enough to indicate that, in my view, the line in Cultural Studies which attempted to think forwards from the best elements in the structuralist and culturalist enterprises, by way of some of the concepts elaborated in Gramsci’s work, comes closest to meeting the requirements of the field of study ... Though neither structuralism nor culturalism will do, as self sufficient paradigms of study, they have a centrality to the field which all the other contenders lack because, between them (in their divergences as well as their convergences), they address what must be the *core problem* of Cultural Studies. (1981, 72)

This facilitated the analysis of the ways in which subordinate groups actively resist and respond to political and economic domination. This line of thinking opened up fruitful work exploring agency, a theoretical outlook that reinserted the active, critical capacities of all people. Researchers have concentrated on how a particular medium or message<sup>2</sup> relates to matters of ideology, social class, nationality, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender. Notions of agency have supplanted much scholarly emphasis on groups of people (e.g. the working class, colonized peoples, women) whose political consciousness and scope of action were generally limited to their position within certain economic and political structures.

In work of this kind, which was popular in the 1990s, many cultural studies scholars discovered in consumers ways of creatively using and subverting commodities and dominant ideologies. Cultural studies concerns itself with the meaning and practices of everyday life.<sup>3</sup> Cultural practices comprise the ways people do particular things (such as watch television, dance, or eat out) in a given culture. In any given practice, people use various objects (such as iPods, fixed-gear bicycles, or crucifixes). This field studies the meanings and uses people attribute to these various objects and practices.

Recently, as globalization has spread throughout the world, cultural studies has begun to analyse the common ground between local and global forms of resistance. Echoing Marshall McLuhan's pioneering study in media theory *Understanding Media*<sup>4</sup> (1964), in *Understanding Global*

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<sup>2</sup> Marshall McLuhan's work is paradigmatic of the development of the theory and language of all media and cultural studies. *Understanding Media* (1964) represents a pioneering study in media theory in which McLuhan proposed for the first time that media themselves, not the content they carry, should be the focus of study, popularly quoted as "the medium is the message." McLuhan's insight was that a medium affects the society in which it plays a role, not by the content delivered over the medium but by the characteristics of the medium itself. McLuhan pointed to the lightbulb as a clear demonstration of this concept. A lightbulb does not have content in the way that a newspaper has articles or a television has programs, yet it is a medium that has a social effect; that is, a lightbulb enables people to create spaces during the night time that would otherwise be enveloped by darkness. He describes the lightbulb as a medium without any content: "a light bulb creates an environment by its mere presence" (1964, 8).

<sup>3</sup> As I introduced in the preface, one of the key texts in the study of "everyday life" is represented in Michel de Certeau's work *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980), which examines the ways in which people individualize mass culture, altering things, from utilitarian objects to street plans to rituals, laws, and language, in order to make them their own.

<sup>4</sup> McLuhan, *Understanding Media*.



*Media* (2007) the media and communication scholar Terry Flew offers a comprehensive overview of global media production and circulation, drawing insight from a range of perspectives, including politics, political economy, media and cultural studies, audiences, and creative industries.

Postcolonial theory has highlighted the cultural contradiction and syncretism generated by the global circulation of peoples and cultural goods in a mass-mediated and interconnected world, resulting in a kind of commodified or mass-mediated syncretism (Shohat and Stam 2003, 15). The most influential approaches to these questions have been found in the transdisciplinary and transnational work of Arjun Appadurai and Homi Bhabha.

Bhabha is one of the most important figures in contemporary post-colonial studies, and has coined a number of the field's neologisms and key concepts (such as ambivalence, hybridity, third space of negotiation, and space in-between) in order to describe ways in which colonized peoples have resisted the power of the colonizer (1989; 1990; 1994). One of his central ideas is that of "hybridization," which describes the emergence of new cultural forms from multiculturalism. Instead of seeing colonialism as something locked in the past, Bhabha shows how its histories and cultures constantly intrude on the present, demanding that we transform our understanding of cross-cultural relations.

Influenced by Bhabha's concept of hybridization, Appadurai has provided conceptual underpinnings for theories of globalization and global culture that point to "cultural hybridization," rather than cultural domination. He proposed that the "imaginary"<sup>5</sup> is composed of five dimensions of global cultural flow, operated across five planes: ethnoscaples, technoscaples, finanscaples, mediascaples, and indeoscaples. Particularly, mediascaples

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<sup>5</sup> As Appadurai puts it: "The image, the imagined, the imaginary—these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as a social practice. No longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is somewhere else), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people), and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity), the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility. This unleashing of the imagination links the play of pastiche (in some settings) to the terror and coercion of states and their competitors. The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order" (Appadurai 1996, 31).

are set up by the global flows of images, narratives, media content, and so on through print, broadcast, cinema, and, increasingly, internet and digital media (Appadurai 1996).

Cinema, in particular, plays a special role in the complex process of the building of mediascapes. As Andrew Higson puts it:

Individual films will often serve to represent the national to itself, as a nation. Inserted into [a] general framework of the cinematic experience, such films will construct imaginary bonds which work to hold the peoples of a nation together as a community by dramatizing their current fears, anxieties, pleasures and aspirations. A diverse and often antagonistic group of people are thus invited to recognize themselves as a singular body with [a] common culture, and to oppose themselves to other cultures and communities. Of course, this work is never completely achieved.

(Higson 1995, 7)

Higson's analysis of national cinema argues that both national identity and national cinema should be seen from a processual point of view. He suggests that we might define a national cinema by looking at a range of features: its industrial and business aspects, exhibition and consumption and their impact on national culture, the definition used in cultural policymaking and critical circles, and the question of representations. I analyse the specific role of cinema in the complex process of nation building in the following section.

## **The Contribution of Film Studies to the Study of Postcolonial Identity**

In 1950, Hortense Powdermaker published *Hollywood, the Dream Factory: an Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-Makers*. It is not only the first substantial anthropological study of the American film industry, but also the first anthropological analysis about media and the relevance of the audiences as fieldwork. Initially, she planned to complete a content analysis of movies, but at the suggestion of Paul Fejos of the Viking Fund, who offered his support, she incorporated fieldwork from Hollywood into the study. The hypothesis underlying the Hollywood study was that the social system in which movies are made significantly influences their content and meaning. In carrying out the study, Powdermaker focused on the process through which a film is made and the social interactions entailed at each step.

Fifty years later, in Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie's work *Cinema and Nation*, Philip Schlesinger highlighted how, consciously or unconsciously,

social communication is considered an expression of the cultural geography of the nation state in a world of sovereign states: “This is the bedrock on which film studies has been based when it invokes a largely derivative sociological argument about nationalism and collectivity. The main task has been to define and depict the relations between nations and film cultures” (Hjort and MacKenzie 2000, 29).

In the last 20 years, several scholars have focused their attention on the relevant relationships between cinema, nation, and identity, and particularly on the specific power of cinema to represent all the richness of the identity as process, as something always “in-between.” Jim Pines and Paul Willemsen’s *Questions of Third Cinema* (1989) is the first contribution concerning the study of cinema as the “Third Place.” In Bhabha’s chapter “The Commitment to Theory,” the author analyses the theoretical, and at the same time political, debate that developed after the first Third Cinema<sup>6</sup> conference, which took place in Edinburgh in 1986. As Bhabha puts it:

We should remember that it is the “inter”—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between, the space of the entre that Derrida has opened up in writing itself—that carries the burden of the meaning of the culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the “people.” It is in this space that we will find those words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others. And by exploring this hybridity, this “Third Space,” we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves.

(Bhabha 1989, 131)

Almost 15 years after this fundamental research was completed, Anthony R. Gunerante and Wimal Dissanayke published *Rethinking Third Cinema* (2003), a significant anthology addressing established notions about Third Cinema theory, and the cinema practice of developing postcolonial nations. This anthology contains two relevant contributions by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam.

In Shohat’s chapter “Post-Third-Worldist Culture: Gender, Nation and Cinema,” the author highlights that cinema has the potential power not only to offer countervailing representation but also to open up parallel spaces for antiracist feminist transformation. As Shohat puts it, “In this historical moment of intense globalization and immense fragmentation, the

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<sup>6</sup> The “Third Cinema” movement called for a politicized filmmaking practice in Africa, Asia, and Latin America which would take on board issues of race, class, religion, and national integrity

alternative spectatorship established by the kind of film and video works I have discussed can mobilize desire, memory and fantasy, where identities are not only the given of where one comes from but also the political identification with where one is trying to go” (Shohat 2003, 75).

In Stam’s chapter “Beyond Third Cinema: the Aesthetics of Hybridity,” the author offers an interesting analysis about the specific “chronotopic multiplicity” of cinema, influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the “chronotope.”<sup>7</sup> According to Stam, cinema in particular, and audio visual media in general, are “multichronotopic.” Although the Russian philosopher and scholar develops his concept of the “chronotope” to suggest the inextricable relation between time and space in the novel, Bakhtin’s description of the novel seems in some ways even more appropriate for film than literature. Cinema, Stam argues, is ideally equipped to express cultural and temporal hybridity. Cinema is temporally hybrid, first of all, in an intertextual sense, in that it inherits all the art forms and millennial traditions associated with its diverse matters of expression. But cinema is also temporally hybrid in another, more technical sense. As a technology of representation, cinema produces a constellation of times and spaces: “film’s conjunction of sound and image means that each track not only presents two kinds of time, but also that they mutually inflect one another in a form of synchresis. Atemporal static shots can be inscribed with temporality through sound ... Superimposition redoubles the time and space, as do montage and multiple frames within image, opening up utopias (and dystopias) of infinite manipulability” (2003, 37).

That same year, these two authors jointly published another fundamental contribution to this field of research: *Muliculturalism, Postcoloniality and Transnational Media* (2003). The volume, reflecting the burgeoning academic interest in issues of nation, race, gender, sexuality, and other axes of identity, brings all of these concerns together under the same umbrella, contending that they must be discussed in relation to each other.

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<sup>7</sup> It is through the essays contained within *The Dialogic Imagination* (first published as a whole in Moscow in 1975 and translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist in 1981) that Bakhtin introduces the concept of “chronotope,” making a significant contribution to the realm of literary scholarship. In the essay “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,” Bakhtin applies the concept in order to further demonstrate the distinctive quality of the novel. The word chronotope literally means “time-space” (from the Greek *chromos*, time, and *topos*, place), and is defined by Bakhtin as, “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (1981, 84).

Communities, societies, nations, and even entire continents, the book suggests, exist not autonomously but rather in a densely woven web of connectedness. In order to explore this complexity, the editors forged links between usually compartmentalized fields, especially media studies, literary theory, visual culture, and critical anthropology, and areas of inquiry, particularly postcolonial and diasporic studies and a diverse set of ethnic and area studies. As the authors put it:

In a globalized world, what are the relationalities between Indian and Egyptian cinema, or between Chinese and Japanese cinema? How are issues of race and caste formulated in other national contexts? What discourses are deployed? ... As the products of national industries, produced in national languages, portraying national situations, and recycling national intertexts (literatures, folklores), all films are in a sense national. All films, whether Hindu mythological, Mexican melodramas, or Third Worldist epics, project national imaginaries.

(Shohat and Stam 2003, 4, 10)

An ethnography of cinema also involves an ethnography of different cinematic techniques and modes of production, also called “accented cinema,” following the important contribution of Hamid Naficy with *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2001). This text was an attempt to rewrite the history of contemporary cinema by reinventing the categories we use to think about production, consumption, and spectatorship. If the dominant cinema is considered universal and without accent, the films that diasporic and exilic subjects make are accented. Accented filmmakers are not just textual structures or fictions within their film: they are also empirical subjects, situated in the interstices of cultures and film practices. These films are, as Naficy puts it:

fragmented, multilingual, epistolary, self-reflexive, and critically juxtaposed narrative structures: amphibolic, doubled, crossed and lost characters: subject matter and themes that involve journeying, historicity, identity, and displacement: dysphoric, euphoric, nostalgic, synaesthetic, luminal and politicized structures of feeling: interstitial and collective modes of production, simultaneously local and global ... In the best of the accented films, identity is not a fixed essence but a process of becoming, even a performance identity. Indeed, each accented film may be thought of as a performance of its author’s identity.

(Naficy 2001, 4, 6)

From Naficy’s perspective, Israeli cinema represents a paradigmatic production of an “accented cinema.” Particularly Israeli cinema, together

with Israeli literature, music, and art, takes part in the everyday production of Israeli national—but at the same time personal—identity: an identity always “in-between”: between colonial and postcolonial policy; a masculine and post-masculine gendered representation of the country; a stereotyped and critical representation of the “Other.”

### **The Contribution of Gender and GLBTQ Studies to the Study of the Nation**

In her evocative book *Bananas, Braches and Bases*, Cynthia Enloe observes that “nationalism has typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope” (1990, 45). If, according to Benedict Anderson, nation is an “imagined community,” *who* imagines this kind of community? To answer, with a quote by Anna McClintock: “all nationalisms are gendered, all are invented, and all are dangerous” (1993, 61).

From the 1960s, gender studies, as a field of interdisciplinary study which analyses the phenomenon of gender, began to be related with the study of class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. The field emerged from a number of different areas, such as the theories of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and the work of feminists such as Judith Butler. Each field came to regard gender as a practice, referred to as something that is “performative.” The concept of gender “performativity” is at the core of Butler’s work, notably in *Gender Trouble* (1990). In Butler’s terms, the performance of gender, sex, and sexuality is about power in society. She locates the construction of the “gendered, sexed, desiring subject” in “regulative discourses.” In her account, gender and heterosexuality are constructed as natural because the opposition of the male and female sexes is perceived as natural in the social imaginary.

If, in the past, research in the field of gender has mainly addressed issues relating to women, and has, for the most part, been developed by women, Butler’s contribution is fundamental in extending gender studies from women’s studies to GLBTQ (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and queer) studies. Through this pioneering work, the study of gender has rapidly expanded and there has been a growing interest in masculinity and men’s identities, conduct, and problems. Research on masculinities has become a prominent part of gender studies over the past 20 years. Fuelled in part by popular fears of a “crisis” at the heart of modern masculinity, work on gender relations has focused more carefully on the question of how masculine identities are constructed and (re)produced (Van Hoven and Horschelmann 2005, 6). In his 1990 cross-cultural study *Manhood in*