TRAUMA AND KITSCH:
THE PRESENTATION OF ISRAEL'S ARMY
ENTERTAINMENT TROUPES ON TELEVISION

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This chapter examines how Israel's army entertainment troupes are presented on television, using this presentation as a test case for how the media handle war and trauma. The use of the moving picture to depict the army entertainment troupes combines a nurturing of militarism and national feelings with nostalgic, forgiving and sometimes even ironic recollections. Hence, Israeli television serves as a hegemonic mechanism that seems to be normalising trauma by presenting it in an innocent aesthetic wrapping. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this process can be seen as an ongoing refusal to process the trauma, instead recycling it as a demonstrative act in the form of acting out. Thus, television prevents any possibilities for critical viewing or for developing a new political standard.

From 1968, when Israel Television was inaugurated as Israel's official television station, to today's era of burgeoning commercial, thematic and public-service channels, television in Israel has been a major player in creating and disseminating the national story and in defining the collective identity. In its forty years of existence, television has been at Israel's side during all of its many wars. It has reflected the transition of Israeli society from a collectivist-socialist society to one marked by multiculturalism, globalism and commercialism. Hence, a major characteristic has emerged that reflects television's attitude towards Israel's national imaginary. This characteristic, "softened militarism", tends to wrap the trauma of war in Israel in the guise of entertainment that is almost ironic.

Television, then, serves as a double agent: on the one hand it presents a parodic, ironic and self-conscious view of war and trauma, while on the other it "naturalises" the militaristic mentality while purposefully overlooking its roots.

This chapter deals with several major and popular texts presented and re-presented on Israeli television in the last four decades. One can see these texts as a major contribution in the shaping of Israeli national

consciousness. A deep analysis of these texts might reveal some of the hidden ideological currents in this culture. In this paper we will read closely several canonical texts, leaning on a psychoanalytic analysis of trauma' and kitsch.

Army Entertainment Troupes and Television— A Symbiotic History

The first army entertainment troupe *(Me'ein Zeh)* was established in the mid-1940s. Its declared purpose was to entertain the Jewish forces fighting on the front as part of the Jewish Brigade, a military formation of the British Army that served in Europe—and primarily Italy—during the Second World War. During the War of Independence, in 1948, the *Chizbatron* Band, the Palmach's musical and entertainment troupe, was established.[2] Its founder, Haim Hefer, said he was inspired by Edgar Snow's book, *Red Star Over China,* in which Snow questioned Mao Zedong about his action techniques and learned, among other things, about the idea of singing troupes in uniform. Snow quoted Mao:

> There was no more powerful weapon of propaganda in the Communist movement than the Reds' dramatic troupes, and none more subtly manipulated. By constant shifts of program, by almost daily changes of the 'Living Newspaper' scenes, new military, political, economic, and social problems became the material of drama, and doubts and questionings were answered in a humorous, understandable way for the skeptical peasantry.

Hefer took this as an action plan. Shortly thereafter, other troupes were also established. In the 1950s as well, entertainment troupes were an important element of the Israeli military scene.

Based on Socialist, or Collectivistic ideas, militaristic entertainment was seen as an ideological supporting tool; an integral part of the ideological state apparatus (Althusser 1971). Their golden age began in June 1967 in the wake of the Six Day War. That same war led to the foundation of Israel Television.[3] Both tools became a natural part of the euphoria that overwhelmed Israeli society after that major victory.

Hence, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) set up scores of new troupes and entertainment teams to provide entertainment in the occupied territories. These troupes glorified the army's stamina and determination and yearned for peace to come. In those years of intoxication with power, the songs made strong inroads into civilian life as well. The showing of army entertainment troupes on television began at the same time. Early video clips were produced for Israel Television in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The large number of such clips produced at the time positioned the image of the army entertainment troupes at the heart of popular culture.[4] This medium, which had just made its appearance, was identified with a new degree of importance and success. More than ever, these singing stars were guests in everyone's living room.

Television entertainment can be seen as one of the major Israeli cultural structures in which the national ideology germinates. It is precisely within the province of entertainment where ideology clearly reigns. The dominant ideology seems to prefer to present "the situation" not as an historical mistake, a decree of fate or an inevitable evil that must be ended, no matter what. Instead, the situation is presented as a given, as a normal and natural situation, one inherent to the everyday life of Israeli society. The entertainment industry accepts this ideology and does a good job of disseminating it. Along the way, irony, ridicule and fun are sometimes harnessed to the task of spreading this ideology.

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[1] Trauma is a basic human emotional state. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is defined by the American Psychiatric Association as the response to "a psychologically distressing event that is outside the range of usual human experience". The response to this event is usually postponed. It finds expression in compulsive repetition of the traumatic event, in dreams and nightmares, in sleep disturbances and hallucinations.

[2] The Palmach—an acronym for Plugot Mahatz (Strike Companies)—was the regular fighting force in the official army of the Jewish community during the British Mandate in Palestine. The first entertainment troupe (Chizbatron) was founded in the Palmach.

[3] The Israeli government's decision to introduce television in Israel was made near the end of the Six Day War. At that time, there were around 30,000 television sets in Israel, most belonging to Arab citizens, receiving broadcasts from Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon. These television stations were thought to be propaganda stations, and their potential influence on the Arab sector was considered by some to be the catalyst for the government's decision. Symbolically, Israel Television's first broadcast covered the IDF Independence Day Parade on 2 May 1968.

[4] A set of three DVDs produced by the Israel Broadcasting Authority in 2006 included 68 clips, 32 of them from the golden age of the troupes (and of Israel Television), 1968-1973. Of the rest, some hail back to the period before the State of Israel was established and through 1968, while others are from the time the troupes were rejuvenated between the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s.

Kitsch, Trauma and Repeated Repression

Trauma has been an integral part of Israeli history since the establishment of the State of Israel. For the past forty years, the Arab-Israeli conflict has generated extreme situations, many of which are associated with trauma: the Yom Kippur War, the First Lebanon War, the First Intifada, the missiles fired at the Israeli home front during the First Gulf War and the Second Lebanon War, suicide bombers in city centres, and other evidence of "less intense wars" such as the Qasam rockets and shells fired on the Sderoth and western Negev regions for the past several years. Clearly, television in Israel has not ignored this reality. Indeed, extreme situations are often the lifeblood of this medium. Copious news items, documentaries and historical series as well as dramas and other forms of television entertainment have all referred to and attempted to explain the collective trauma. Nevertheless—and this is our primary claim —the way in which television has handled this trauma has actually helped to conceal and obliterate the wounds, while at the same time attempting to demonstrate an exaggerated sense of unity, healing and recovery. In psychological terms, this represents a continuous refusal to present the pain in its helpless reality, and an attempt to translate the refusal into a pattern of action.

In "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through", Freud examines trauma and methods of coping with it (Freud 2002 [1914]). He differentiates between the dimension of memory and remembering and that of repeating and working through. Remembering a trauma involves the ability to "process" what hurts, to represent it through verbal or visual means, to cope with the need to repress it, and perhaps even to imbue it with meaning in life. The positive result of this process is the ability to remember. Freud calls this process "working through".

The repetition mechanism, in contrast, works outwardly, generating a compulsive repetition of the traumatic event. Repression of memories of past events causes these repressed memories to assume the form of actions. Disregarding these memories is experienced by acting out, an act directed to the outside. According to Lacan, acting out is a form of evading discomfort by translating it into demonstrative action about which the subject knows nothing, that is, action within the unconscious (Lacan 1977).

> The object acts without knowing what it is evading, and therefore it solves the dead end by acting out [...] the suffix 'out' lends the act a nuance of being outside, outside of what is being said, outside of the process being discussed in analysis. (Rakiz 1995: 22)

The subject, then, is not conscious of this act. Because the act is actively turned outward towards the object, it becomes an alternative exposure of the cause, of the repressed memory. In practice, this is a process of virtual normalisation which ensures preservation of the existing condition and precludes any movement towards change.

We contend that television in Israel is an unconscious mechanism of acting out towards this type of normalisation. It is a process that persistently and effectively acts to deny the collective trauma of an ongoing state of war in Israeli society. This denial and disregard are likely to be expressed in a number of forms, among them repetition, kitsch and nostalgia.

The kitschy pattern is related to the demonstrative pattern, both involving an inability to provide a representation of the object, which in this case is the traumatic experience. Kitsch always stands for a dead object. It is an exaggerated representation of artistic styles that have gone out of fashion. Kitsch generates a surplus of pseudo-romantic excitement, thus giving the subject a feeling of apparent completeness. A surplus of kitschy style is thus parallel to surplus action; the kitschy pattern is based on repetition of the known. Kitsch does not recognise what is other, different or new. It is always identical to itself and satisfied with the "normality" it has established.

Nostalgia is a mechanism which involves painful and sentimental repetition of the past; it transforms past reality into something alive in the present. It refuses to work through the past into a meaningful memory. Like the mechanism of acting out, that of nostalgia focuses on surplus action in the present as a substitute for the inability to remember. In effect, nostalgia is the desire not to see, not to recognise the rift with the past, in order not to despair.

Therefore, we propose viewing both trauma and nostalgia as experiences of remembrance. They are primarily involuntary responses to ruptures or to an unusual event or chain of events. They share feelings of an unstable, melancholy and pessimistic reality deriving from extreme discomfort about the present, and feelings of confusion and of being lost on an individual and national level.

The Military Entertainment Troupes in Prime Time

Is television an effective mechanism for working out trauma, and if so, how? Is television a mechanism of denial? What is the televised response to trauma? We propose viewing the medium of television as a platform that generates and markets repetition, kitsch and nostalgia, which in turn

serve as mechanisms for normalising reality, thus preventing trauma from being worked out through memory. This is a sophisticated, unintentional process of denying trauma by presenting it in the form of entertainment.

Entertainment is customarily perceived as a source of distraction and a way to spend one's free time. In this sense, entertainment is considered an innocent genre, without the ideological obligations demanded by other more serious genres, such as the news, investigative reports, discussion programmes and the like. Nevertheless, television entertainment, which is usually broadcast during prime viewing hours, reaches the masses and shapes their ideological world while they remain unsuspicious of its messages and do not object to them (Gitlin 1995 [1982]). Under the cover of entertainment, these masses are turned into passive consumers who tend to accept the hegemonic ideology identified with the military mythology, among other things. The following discussion focuses on different entertainment genres in television and film that facilitate the mental process described above.

That is, we propose to examine the televised representation of the army entertainment troupes as a form of acting out within Israeli culture, as a test case for the entertaining and nostalgic treatment of war and trauma. This treatment is evident in a variety of television texts: we examine a number of early video clips that perpetuate the golden age (1968-1973) of the army entertainment troupes, as well as their later parodies and representations in telenovelas (soap operas) and historical series. The songs sung by the troupes are presented as content that transcends genres. These materials range from "serious" consideration to parody, irony and pseudo self-consciousness. Different texts are often understood in different ways by different audiences. Nevertheless, one can argue that the constant presence of the army songs in the hit parade, as a part of the national hegemonic sound track, might naturalise this phenomenon and make it a common experience. It seems that, except in some marginal cases, no critical perspective was developed. Thus, television acts to make the militaristic mentality a natural part of daily life, while continuing to keep the war experience in the public imagination.

All I Wanted Was to Arrive Home Safely

The story of showing army entertainment troupes on television begins with the early video clips produced for Israel Television in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The large number of such clips produced at the time positioned the image of the army entertainment troupes at the heart of

popular culture.[5] As time passed, these video clips became the only televised documentation of the army entertainment troupes of that time. They were even commonly used for historical programmes and series. They were broadcast countless times on nostalgic programming and ongoing reruns of archived material produced by Israel Television. The image of the army entertainment troupes created by these clips served as a never-disappointing source for imitations and parodies, tributes and reconstructions, both on television and elsewhere. The first to produce these pioneering video clips was the director Shmuel Imberman. His artistic vision involved going out of the television studio and into a space that would serve as an illustration of the song. Imberman usually avoided the military landscape, instead choosing to position the singers in a civilian-urban context.

The song *Ammunition Hill (Giv'at Ha'Takhmoshetf* was performed not long after the end of the Six Day War. The song used a technique that combined personal monologues based on the testimony of combat soldiers (acted by the members of the troupe) with singing by the troupe's singers. When the song appeared, it became extremely popular, and it was not long before it was made into a television video clip.

Ammunition Hill is a lyrical clip. It is marked by exaggerated use of atypical camera angles and by an extraordinarily slow pace. The clip primarily comprises images of the battle for the hill. These are interspersed with wide angle shots of a child wandering alone on the hill while his mother watches him. Another element is the monologues, performed by the members of the troupe, who for the most part appear tired and contemplative. Imberman's approach was to aestheticise and sterilise the war experience. While he did not avoid presenting the war, his war is faraway, hidden and dreamlike. Imberman, relying among other things on IDF films reconstructing the battles of the Six Day War, excluded the enemy from the screen. The war, hence, appeared to be a private matter, the exclusive story of the determined and handsome Israeli soldier. The clip consistently strives to glorify the act of war and to promote fond and contemplative memories by relying mainly on a slow-paced choreography of death.

A set of three DVDs produced by the Israel Broadcasting Authority in 2006 included 68 clips, 32 of them from the golden age of the troupes (and of Israel Television), 1968-1973. Of the rest, some hail back to the period before the State of Israel was established and through 1968, while others are from the time the troupes were rejuvenated between the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s.
[6] Lyrics: Yoram Taher-Lev; melody: Yair Rosenblum; performance: Central Command Troupe.

One line from the song has practically become an idiom: "I don't know why I received a citation; all I wanted was to arrive home safely". This line arouses discomfort, for it comes after a long and detailed summary of the heroic acts of one of the soldiers, presented in a manner that is automatic, almost sterile. The true cost of the war remains hidden from the eye: the killing dissipates, to be replaced by turning the war into a poem, thus firmly denying the experience of death. In our opinion the video clip of *Ammunition Hill* is a cynical example of how battles became a performance of kitsch. The transition from battle to song to video clip is only one example of how popular culture appropriates war in order to penetrate society. At the same time, popular culture provides widespread representation of war while refraining from presenting it as a realistic experience reeking of trauma or battle shock. Again and again the camera moves along the communication trenches in the empty outpost. War is thus turned into the personal story of the Israeli soldier and the earth beneath him. This acting out response is directly related to the desire to repress the trauma, presented in the guise of vaguely nostalgic kitsch.

Here is another scene. A company of soldiers equipped with large musical instruments infiltrates what appears to be the old Tel Aviv Zoo. Standing among the paths and in the presence of the cages, the Nahal Entertainment Troupe bursts into song with one of its greatest hits: *Carnival Banahal (Carnival at the River)?* There, in the heart of the Israeli metropolis, the soldiers call attention to the following:

> The river has flooded its banks
> It gushes; its waters are good,
> Its strong stream and tributaries
> Flood the entire land.
> Its paths are many and not easy.
> It marks the borders,
> Waters the fields and the plains
> And sings beneath the bridges.
>
> A carnival at the river, a carnival
> If you don't come, too bad
> If you don't come, too bad

From our perspective more than thirty-five years later, this appears somewhat bewildering. Is this some form of disguise? Are these real soldiers? What is the connection between the army and the zoo, and what does a carnival have to do with all this? Originally, carnivals were

associated with connotations of criticism. They served as showcases for protesting against those in authority, using an abundance of costumes and performances to show off their purposelessness. And indeed, this performance seems to point to the politicisation and infantilism of institutions of power such as the army (Bakhtin 1978: 110-140).

Yet the clip is devoid of all political criticism. The song is heartwarming and naive. It is difficult not to embrace these childlike young men who take their circus performance so seriously. Their song does not seem to be military. One can imagine this clip as part of a performance for children or a recording of children's songs. The purpose is to mesmerise us and to create a fixed, rhythmic and optimistic impression. An army that presents itself in such a way is not threatening. Indeed, anyone can love such an army. Undoubtedly this is how we would all prefer to see the army and ourselves in it. *Carnival Banahal* is a masterpiece of befuddlement, adornment and disregard, particularly of the political purpose of the settlements established by the Nahal, the IDF's pioneer combatant youth brigade. These settlements played no small role in the early years of the occupation, when the clip was produced.

Flowers in the Gun Barrel: Real and Fictitious Subversion

In the next scene, we have already moved to the mid-1990s. The five members of the Cameri Quintet comedy troupe appear dressed in civilian clothes against a completely blank backdrop, singing *Prachim Bakaneh (Flowers in the Barrel)?* They sing with precision, in what appears to be a serious attempt to convey the spirit of the song. But in the final moments, while the female singer at the centre of the scene continues to sing with a sweet smile glued to her face, the males in the troupe get angry. They go on singing the words, maintaining their comic stance, but their facial expressions have become anxious and restless, and the atmosphere is coloured with anger and impatience.

Literary and cultural critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1968; 1981) distinguishes between two types of parody: non-ironic parody that strives for release and relief, and ironic parody that is engaged in imitating and quoting earlier styles. According to Bakhtin, parody—no matter what the type—plays a subversive social role in the spirit of the carnival. This is because parody has a hidden attitude of appreciation and respect for the object it ridicules and imitates. In this sense, every parody refers to texts from the past,

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⁷ Lyrics: Leah Naor; melody: Yair Rosenblum; performance: Nahal Troupe.

⁸ From the "Quintet in Green" DVD containing a number of army sketches performed by the Cameri Quintet.

transferring and diverting them to new contexts. Parody's general tendency is satiric, and hence corrective. The ensuing laughter is a means of release, a way to connect to the past and at the same time to be relieved of it.

The manner in which the songs of the army entertainment troupes were handled on the Cameri Quintet programme makes it conceivable that this scene should be taken as parody as well. Nevertheless, a different interpretation can more fully clarify this issue. Contrary to parody, pastiche ridiculously imitates dead forms, remaining within these forms and at the same time maintaining an ironic distance from them. By reiterating past texts from a critical distance, pastiche is able to view its object ironically while still maintaining complete respect (Hutcheon 1986, 1987). This perspective enables the artist to converse with the other's inner voice, but without becoming assimilated within it.

Hidden within this interpretation is the pastiche hodgepodge of death, which views the world as a symbol that can be interpreted by referring to other symbols or texts. Hence, the text is likely to claim that the army entertainment troupes are not something from the past. Indeed, the opposite is true. Lines such as "The sun will shine red between Gaza and Rafah", and even more the fond memories provided by this song and others like it thirty years after the Six Day War, are a matter of contemporary interest, something unfathomable, depressing. This is not the smashing of some debilitated and forgotten sacred cow but rather a comment on an Israeli identity that has not taken the trouble to embrace reality. The critical dimension of pastiche is found in its insertion of the past, what appears to be dead, into the present, which cannot cast it aside and therefore must come to terms with it. This intertextualism can be seen as "a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect and as the operator of a new connotation of 'pastness' and pseudo-historical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces 'real' history" (Jameson 1990: 107). The joke, then, is not on the troupes of the past, but rather on contemporary Israeli society. Perhaps it is not a joke at all.

In a show marking Israel's fiftieth anniversary on Israel Television's Channel One (1998), the *Bnot Pessia (Pessia's Daughters)*[9] troupe performed a medley of songs from the army entertainment troupes, including, for example, *Yesh Li Ahuv Besayeret Charuv (I Have a Beloved in the Charuv Unit).* On the surface, this appears to be a matter of gender subversion, with the group poking fun at straight, male and national

[9] *Bnot Pessia* was a group of male drag queens that performed in the 1990s, addition to comedy sketches, the group produced parodical and exaggerated cov of Israeli songs.

values. Yet at the same time, this parody was warmly embraced by the powers that be. *Bnot Pessia,* who should be representing the anti-culture, chose a song from the army entertainment troupes so as to clearly mark the object of their criticism and ridicule. But is this actually a parody?

On the one hand, the performance can be viewed as a certification and corroboration of the centrality of the army entertainment troupes in Israeli culture, as part of the national 'male' canon. Nevertheless, this view has been adopted by a group that should be representing the anti-culture through criticism and ridicule. Has a myth been shattered here? Or perhaps the self-conscious kitsch here has a dual function. With respect to gender, there is certainly an element of subversion. *Yesh Li Ahuv Besayeret Charuv* is sung by a group of men dressed as women, a far cry from the military experience. Yet in the context of working out the national trauma, this does not seem to be a radical step or subversion, but rather an update. By joining into the spirit of the times, the drag stars become partners in the national enterprise. They also fondly remember the beloved from the Charuv Unit. And why not?

In 2006, Israel's Yes satellite television provider broadcast the third season of the series *Hashir Shelanu (Our Song)*[11]—a daily musical telenovela. After the 218 episodes of the first two seasons had been broadcast, an announcement was made that the first two seasons had in essence been "a movie within a movie" and that in the coming season the "actors" of the previous seasons would abandon their roles in order to serve in the army. The third season follows their adventures in the army as part of the Chief of Staffs campaign to reinstate the army entertainment troupes and restore them to their former glory. A total of 73 episodes were broadcast during the third season.

Ostensibly, the point of departure for *Hashir Shelanu* is realistic: an announcement that the prestige of the army entertainment troupes has declined and an attempt to restore them to their former glory in a contemporary format. This attempt is expressed in the seemingly reflective nature of the series, which revolves around a group of young people recruited for the entertainment troupes and their varied and sundry romantic relationships. The series is conscious of its genre and thus makes explicit use of quotes, gestures and earlier representations from the army entertainment troupes, thus ostensibly indicating a critical awareness of the genre. Nevertheless, deeper examination shows that all these efforts are devoted to historical legitimisation of the army entertainment troupes in an

[11] The series' producers included Yoav Tsapir, Uri Gross, Tamira Yardeni, Zvika Hadar, Maia Hepner and Asaf Tsipor, and was produced by Teddy Productions.

attempt to overcome the trauma. Nostalgia is working overtime here. From the opening theme song, it is possible to recognise how well the series simultaneously adopts two seemingly contrary points of view. It is marked by a total aestheticism, a fluent and polished television kitsch that conceals and even obliterates meaning, while at the same time it is an ironic self-parody. As Jameson contended, in parody the object itself has value, even an object that is belittled and disparaged. Ultimately the parody here expresses the profound and relevant admiration for the troupes even today. Even when simply a humorous interlude, the presentation is not one of criticism, for the purpose is to prepare the next generation.

This self-awareness seems to focus on the aesthetics of the troupes. The aesthetics have been updated, now emphasising the role of the troupes as a hegemonic mechanism. The use of the telenovela format is a major strategy that serves to normalise the trauma. The imaginary Chief of Staff, the entrenched female settler who eventually becomes the star of the troupe, and other characters as well do nothing to shatter the myth. On the contrary, this self-conscious text serves to perpetuate the myth. We are all actors in a telenovela. This seemingly cynical use of political material does not offer a new perspective resulting from ironic observation, but rather the opposite. Emphasis is placed on the existing, the familiar, the unifying ("Our Song"), and on the role of the army entertainment troupes within this.

The documentary series *Yorim v'Sharim (Shooting and Singing* or *IDF-The Musical)*[11] was produced in 2004. This series sought to provide a complete and sober picture of the troupes. It attempted to present a confrontation between the enormous popularity of the troupes' songs and what appeared to be a developing alternative discourse in Israel after the dismantling of the national ethos, which comprised, among other things, the Yom Kippur War, the Lebanon War, the Oslo process, and the rise of capitalism, privatisation and the politics of identities in Israel. The series attempted to acknowledge this unique cultural phenomenon, while at the same time examining it in a cultural and political context. The series made use of archive materials and interviews with former troupe members. These interviews showed that spending their formative years in the army entertainment troupes left a deep impression on troupe members. Even after more than thirty years, most of the interviewees considered their army service in the troupes as an innocent, simple and apolitical experience. Attempts to elicit a different, more retrospective and sober

point of view were not very successful. *Yorim v'Sharim* was part of Channel Two's commercial programming, broadcast in prime time, and was thought by some of the critics to be a nostalgic series rather than a critical text. This type of reception can perhaps be considered another example of the ongoing rejection of trauma by means of presenting it in a nostalgic light, that is, by normalising trauma and seeing it as an "experience".

Different Voices: Song of Peace and Children of Winter '73

Before drawing any conclusions, it is worth considering whether the process described above is, in fact, a systematic technique. Are there no exceptions to the kitschy ritual presented here? Is there no escape from the trap of acting out?

The history of the army entertainment troupes contains a number of incidents in which certain songs were criticised by the military authorities or by the political establishment. Some saw these as protest songs. Do protest songs represent an attempt to work out the trauma differently, to escape the troublesome cycle of acting out? A deeper look at these songs and how they have been presented in the cinema and on television reveals that they, too, are a form of sophisticated repetition, another type of acting out that confirms the trauma and constitutes part of the mechanism that defines and operates it.

In 1969, the Nahal Troupe performed *Shir LaShalom (Song of Peace)*[12] as part of its programme *Beheachzut HaNahal BaSinai (In the Nahal Settlement in Sinai).* At the time, the song was received with mixed feelings. Some saw it as an expression of weakness and a lack of respect for the victims. The final line of the verse was particularly grating to some: "Allow the sun to penetrate through the flowers / don't look back, let go of those departed". The line "let go of those departed" spurred a commotion.[13] Others viewed this song, written in the spirit of Woodstock and the anti-culture, as a sign of maturity and readiness for peace. Unfortunately, no televisual record of the song's original rendition has been preserved. Nevertheless, the song continued to be a part of Israeli

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[11] The series was produced by Eden Productions. Among its producers were Elin°' and Edna Kowarsky, Erez Laufer and Dan Arav. It was broadcast by Telad on Channel Two in late 2004.

^ Lyrics: Yaakov Rotblit; Melody: Yair Rosenblum.

The prime objector to the song at the time was then commander of the Central Command, Major General Rehavam Ze'evi (Ghandi), who tried to ban the song and stopped it from being played in the area under his command. Then Chief of Staff Haim Bar-Lev annulled Ghandi's decree.

society for many years. In 1995, the song again gained hair-raising popularity, to a large extent mediated by television.[14] Towards the end of the peace rally held on 4 November 1995, the rally's participants all returned to the stage to sing the closing song. The televised photo of Prime Minister Rabin and Foreign Minister Peres flanking the song's original soloist Miri Aloni is in effect the last televisual record of Rabin, minutes before his assassination. A piece of paper with the song's words that Rabin had put in his pocket was later shown on television, stained with his blood. The distance from this point to seeing the *Song of Peace* as Rabin's spiritual last will and testament is short indeed.

The *Song of Peace* is a fitting example of how a protest song becomes part of the acting out ritual that reiterates and perpetuates the trauma. In 1978 the song was used in the final segment of the film *The Troupe*. The film presents the entertainment troupe as a group of youngsters operating in a political vacuum. The outside world does not penetrate inwards; the war in the film is merely a distant rumour. To say that the choice of this song, which is devoid of any reference to the conflict, was quite strange would be an understatement. The film includes no problems that are related to this song, and singing it in chorus at the end places it within the consensus. It is a testament to acceptance and to the solution of conflicts— not external conflicts but rather the personal internal conflicts of the troupe members. Thus, the message of protest is neutralised, if in fact it was ever there to begin with, as the song is presented as a harmonious and agreeable background. This harmony is depressing, for it silences the alternative voices, which never appeared in the movie in any case. The words lose their meaning. In the musical version of *The Troupe* staged by the Habima National Theatre, the song and the controversy surrounding it are more central. Hence, the song's creators were asked to add the following lines: "They sing of peace, and fill the cemeteries / on their way to nowhere / with unseeing eyes..."[15] Anat Gov, who adapted the film script for the stage, explained, "We had the feeling that today no one listens to the words of *Shir Hashalom*. The idea behind the extra verse was to make people listen" (Shohat 2006).

Involvement with the performance elements of the song has replaced concerns for its content. The seeming recycling of the controversy, or of the quasi-dilemma presented by the decision to play the song, has replaced

any concerns for its meanings. For that distinct population group calling itself the peace camp, the song became a form of national anthem, even before the murder of Prime Minister Rabin and more so afterwards.[16] These people see the song as a status symbol of sorts, the badge of their civilian unit. For the majority of the general public, hearing this song played does not add or detract anything. It is simply a backdrop for unessential dilemmas. As far as most people are concerned, it has no subversive and painful base. Furthermore, the song's forgotten subversive aroma may even contribute to its acceptability. Hence, the song's transformation into the soundtrack of the consensus blurs the fact that the true controversy is not whether and where to sing the song, but rather the state of war that produces death. Making this song into an abstraction is testimony to the concealed preference to continue to wallow in images of death. Under such circumstances, the song is seen more as a song of identification with the dead and less as a text pointing to the causes of their death. We accept these causes as something obvious. That is to say, the public has embraced this song because it has been transformed from a seeming song of protest to a song of commemoration (for the dead, for Rabin). Such a song of commemoration will always remind us that our trauma is far from healed. Such nostalgia ensures that the kitsch will unconsciously be recycled.

On Independence Day 1993, the Special Education Troupe performed the song *Children of Winter '73*[17] at the central holiday performance attended by the Chief of Staff and other high-ranking army officers. The song claims to represent the voices of soldiers bora after the Yom Kippur War. These soldiers, who were inundated with promises of striving for peace, confront their leaders and beg them not to forget their promises:

> You promised a dove and an olive branch,
> You promised us peace at home.
> You promised us spring and blossoming
> You promised to keep promises!
> You promised a dove

Despite their disappointment, the soldiers declare they will continue to bear the burden:

[14] Minutes before his assassination during a peace rally the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin stood and sang this song. After his death the song was considered by the media to be Rabin's heritage or will.

[15] The additional lines were written by the singer Muki, who also sang them in the musical.

During the 1996 election campaign, the song, sung by Dana Berger and Zahava Ben, was included in the Meretz party's campaign clips. The song was translated into many languages, including Arabic, and was performed at numerous memorial ceremonies, demonstrations and other peace events.

Lyrics: Shmuel Hasafri; Melody: Uri Vidslavsky.

This is why we will not pressure you, we will not demand of you,
And we will not threaten you
When we were young you said promises need to be kept
We will give you strength if that is what you need
We will not hold back
We just wanted to whisper
We are the children of that winter in the year 1973

The televised performance of the song drew an immediate response. Chief of Staff Ehud Barak, who was present, rose and declared:

Children of winter '73! I am here not only on behalf of your commanders but also on behalf of your parents' generation. We meant what we promised. We did not promise a dove with an olive branch suspended in mid-air. But if a dove with an olive branch shows up, we will not drive it away, nor will we reject it.

Since then, the song has been particularly successful and prominent. It is played regularly on the radio and on television. It is often used at school ceremonies, military events, peace rallies and commemorative occasions. The song invariably wins high honours at different competitions.[18] Can the song *Children of Winter '73* indeed be deemed a protest song? Has the standard model of acting out, of ritualistic repetition of kitsch, been breached?

On the contrary, we believe that the opposite is true. The protest, if it exists at all, is weak, hesitant, feeble. The voice of protest here is sentimental, perhaps even whiney. Rather than expressing determination, the song represents a new position, one of tormented masculinity that does not hesitate to express emotions in public. Furthermore, if the song was ever intended to be a protest, this protest was quickly and effectively domesticated by its very objective, with television playing a major role in this domestication. The official establishment context in which the song was played for the public and its assimilation on-screen by Chief of Staff Barak in effect neutered any subversive elements that may have been there in the first place. Instead, the song was energetically embraced by the consensus. Commanders and enlisted men, leaders and citizens—everyone can sing this song aloud and with genuine meaning, for it does not say a thing. The words play on the emotions, they are perhaps different, but the

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[18] For example, on Independence Day 2004 the song was chosen as the best entertainment troupe song of all times on a special television broadcast produce by Keshet.

ritual has not changed. Again our trauma is singing itself into a state of boredom.

Conclusion: Can This Melody Be Stopped?

The above examples represent a wide variety of content areas at different points along the development of television and society in Israel. Diverse entertainment genres, ranging from soap operas *(Our Song)* to video clips of army entertainment troupes performing songs such as *Ammunition Hill* and *Children of Winter '73,* represent an ongoing effort to institutionalise what is abnormal within Israeli hegemony. This hegemony is controlled by a patriotic paradigm that considers military texts as natural sources of material to be shown on television.

The national framework within which Israeli Television functions sees these materials as echoing its own needs, at the juncture between the hegemonic medium and the matching conforming content. The result is a process of corroborating the norms common in Israeli society while seeming to present them as norms that are criticised and even painful. This is a way to integrate the threats of war into civilian life, into the Israeli experience, which seeks normalisation at any price. The army entertainment troupes offer a legible and acceptable text that makes its contribution to the feeling of normality that every Israeli so desires. Thus, the most horrible thing that can be imagined becomes reasonable. From an ideological perspective, this can be seen as concealing the political and emotional price the Israeli public is willing to pay. Entertainment, therefore, exposes the conservative ideological facade marking Israeli society since 1967. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the process described above can be expressed in terms of an unwillingness to recognise trauma and to cope with its pain, along with an ongoing attempt to demonstrate a surplus of activity by means of melodramatic presentations of the trauma.

The essence of trauma lies in repressed memories that people want to forget. Forgetting involves transference from the conscious to the unconscious, that is, from remembrance to repetition. The trauma in the songs of the army entertainment troupes is repeated in the form of acting out. This acting out expresses the thing itself, but the very conversion of word into action precludes the possibility of working out and therefore changing. Hence, the action can be expressed in a number of ways, among them singing songs of bereavement, memorial songs, nostalgic songs and also songs of indecision and protest. Of course, memory converted into action is not something odd. In effect, the attempt to cope with difficult

questions, such as the question of death itself, covers up disregard for death. This barren groping actually helps us forget the price to be paid. Indeed, repeating the same effects of death helps perpetuate and normalise such representations.

We believe that the trauma can be overcome when people are willing to despair. Indeed, despair is the father of change (Alon & Omer 2005: 67-110). Compulsive repetition of what we know in advance, of what we have already seen, does not allow us to overcome the trauma.

Thus, we move on to the next trauma. The need to document this next trauma, the next war, becomes a substitute for the profound understanding that perhaps could have changed the future emotional and political expectations of both sides. The question then becomes, can a post-ideological Israel, which has ostensibly dismantled its unified identity, recognise its post-traumatic situation, and is it prepared to extricate itself from this situation? On the way to such disengagement, the trauma must be recognised. This is likely to reopen the traumatic wound, which over the years has donned a mask of normalised Zionist kitsch. In the meantime, the songs will continue to be played, on television and on the radio, at rallies and at sing-alongs, and at popular karaoke evenings. Will they go on forever?

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