# 2 Trauma and Nostalgia in the Israeli Televised Memory of the First Gulf War

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**Abstract**
Israeli television has constructed the memory of war as a paradoxical experience of trauma and nostalgia, reflecting the cultural landscape shaped by television. This medium blurs the lines between these phenomena. Television aims to portray reality as intense and conflict-ridden, evoking both personal and collective trauma while also attempting to facilitate the processing of trauma. This chapter employs cultural and psychoanalytical approaches to analyze this connection within televised representations. Using the Israeli memory of the First Gulf War (1991) as a case study, it explores how this war, marked by missile attacks on the Israeli home front, brought forth the trauma of the Holocaust. The memory of this war remains a mixture of traumatic recollections, repression, horror, nostalgia, and entertainment.

**Keywords:** television; war; Israel; home; Holocaust

## Introduction

In January 1991, Israeli society experienced one of the strangest moments in its history: a chain of events that began with the invasion of Iraqi military forces into Kuwait, which led to an American attack on Iraq and later to the launching of thirty-nine Iraqi missiles on Israel. After three weeks, the Israeli chapter in the war ended. The memory of that war experience remains paradoxical and strange: nostalgia, repression, horror, and entertainment are used interchangeably.

For the Israelis, the Gulf War was a new kind of war, almost different from anything they had known in the past. This was the first war in which the

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battlefield was the home front, the sealed room. As historian and journalist Tom Segev has stated, "Never before had so many Israelis shared so Jewish an experience" (Segev 2000, 507).[1] A central component of the war experience was the television medium. Television had become the main source of information and guidance; an anxiety-relieving device and a unifying factor. And yet it appears that the power of television during this war was not only evident in the massive presence of the medium in the arena and in its key role in mediation. The role of television in the Gulf War could also be seen in the radical influence of the medium on the perception of war in real time and on the construction of the experience of war in the common consciousness of Israelis: a complete mix between inside and outside, intimate and global, trauma and entertainment.

Television relies on a dual mode of operation. On the one hand, its logic is premised on the constant promise of development and renewal: "the next thing" is presented as new, unusual, and therefore worthy of the viewer's attention. On the other hand—as a medium entrenched deep within popular culture, and subject to regulated conventions of form, content, and genre—the unusual, the subversive and the deviant, or the very notion of "the next thing" in its deeper sense are entirely foreign to it. In practice, the medium is irrevocably rooted in cyclicality and repetition: return to the familiar and the safe, back to what we have already seen: the regular, "The Obvious."

It seems that this tension, between the one-time and the mundane,[2] the dramatic and the routine, the unusual and the stormy, and the conformist and the stable, is often embodied in the connection between the traumatic and the nostalgic. Trauma and nostalgia, which usually seem like distant phenomena, become, under the auspices of the television experience,

1 "Like all previous wars, this one too brought the Holocaust to the forefront of public consciousness," writes Segev, adding that "[t]he anxiety that pervaded Israel at the outbreak of the war was real, and for the first time since the country was founded, it was an anxiety provoked by a sense of threat not to collective existence but to individual citizens, their families, and their property.... even though everyone was facing the same external danger and was gripped by the same fear at the very same moments, those air-raid sirens, rising and falling in a blood-freezing wail, split society into its components, each person for himself and his family, in his sealed room, isolated within his gas mask. Thousands of Tel Avivers abandoned their homes, seeking refuge in more secure areas of the country.... Those who remained at home huddled together, helplessly expecting the worst" (2000, 505–7).

2 In his discussion of television, media, and culture, researcher Roger Silverstone points to the centrality of media in shaping the everyday. He writes, "We move between the familiar and the strange. We move from the secure to the threatening and from the shared to the solitary. We are at home or away. We cross thresholds and glimpse horizons. We all do all these things constantly, and in none of them, not one of them, are we ever without our media, as physical or symbolic objects" (1999, 30).

adjacent forms that correspond frequently.[3] In fact, one can see how, under the auspices of the medium, a radical process of conversion takes place to the point of presenting the trauma in nostalgic attire.

The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek sees the "passion for the Real" as the primary characteristic of the latter half of the twentieth century but points at the fundamental paradox of it: "It culminates in its apparent opposite.… The passion for the Real ends up in the pure semblance of the Spectacular *effect of the Real*" (Žižek 2002, 9–10). Žižek emphasizes the process of virtualizing reality, a cultural process that causes us to experience the "real reality" itself as a virtual entity.[4] He writes, "The Real which returns (to our lives) has a status of a(nother) semblance: *precisely because it is real, that is, on account of its traumatic / excessive character, we are unable to integrate it into* (*what we experience as*) *our reality, and are therefore compelled to experience it as a nightmarish apparition*" (Žižek 2002, 19). For him, television, as the best representative of the cultural undercurrents of society, can only understand reality twice: first as a trauma and a second time as a description of the same trauma (of the collapse of order), using familiar and worn-out terms.

Against the background of Žižek's conception, it is possible to point out how nostalgia is used as a sophisticated means of normalizing horror. It confirms the existing and makes it routine. Thus, through the mechanisms of ritual repetition over a limited collection of images, television accelerates and fixes the (same) nostalgic memory. This becomes possible through a double action: on the one hand, strengthening the memory while fixing several images within it; on the other hand, sterilizing the image out of its context. Television seems to erase or sterilize memory while turning it into another "meat" ground in the grinder of images operating in a competitive environment.

It is common to claim that the self-perception of Israeli society—as it is expressed daily in the systems of politics, education, and the media in Israel—is that of a post-traumatic society (Alberstein, Davidovitch, and Zalashik 2016). Recognizing the centrality of nostalgic sentiment in Israeli culture and everyday discourse is also not new. In Israeli television, which can be seen as a central arena of social debate, this connection between trauma and nostalgia is realized in a variety of ways and forms.

3 See Arav (2017).

4 For example, in his opinion, most of the public experiences the World Trade Center disaster as a "TV" event. Repeatedly watching images of horror has served as a reminder of the spectacular films of Hollywood creators (Žižek 2002, 11). It should be noted, however, that there are quite a few studies that claim that watching the WTC disaster through television was traumatic (Eth 2002; Putnam 2002).

## Television: Trauma and Nostalgia

The extensive blending of the private and the public, repetition and reconstruction, and eyewitness reports and the commercialization of testimony penetrates and influences the content and form of collective memory (see Arav 2016, 39–49).

Currently the place occupied by trauma seems to have been taken over by nostalgic sentiment. The pattern of acting out, as described above, that is derived from the inability to provide a representation of the object (in this case, the traumatic experience) and is based on the element of repetition is found in the sense of nostalgia located in the repetition of what is known, a fitting framework for its operation. If acting out aims at an excess sense of vitality that denies the wound and the unprocessed pain, nostalgia transforms the reality of the past into something alive in the present. Like acting out, nostalgia also refuses to work through the past to transform it into a meaningful memory. The mechanism of nostalgia is focused on excess activity, an ever-repeating and virtual activity that takes place in the present and that replaces the ability to remember an event. The nostalgic image produces a sentimental substitute whose entire mission is to deny the fact that this is a matter belonging to the past. Addiction to nostalgia creates a sense of "excess vitality" and, with respect to reality, thus withholds from the individual any thoughts of denial or criticism.

The notion that television speeds up the transformation of traumatic memory into a type of melancholic nostalgia certainly has major psycho-political significance. The repeated and nostalgic representation of war through the ritual of fixed media images can be seen as a process of denial that operates continually and efficiently to blur the factor generating the collective trauma, i.e., the state of ongoing war. It may be that the disturbing association between traumatic experience and an exhibitionist, nostalgic television culture instills within us dangerous illusions because of the idea that the discourse of trauma will lead us to redemption and serenity. It is precisely the popularization of using the concept of trauma that obscures the condition of political helplessness and despair.

## The Gulf War: Holocaust, Media, and the State

The memory of the Holocaust has often been perceived as a constitutive trauma in Israel, and its connection to the consciousness of destruction has been repeated over the years. Naturally, this linkage is growing in the public

discourse in Israel in times of severe distress, especially during wars and terrorist attacks. Hence, it was no surprise that the next threat to Israel—less than nine years after the start of the First Lebanon War (1982) and ten years after the bombing of the Iraqi reactor—would also encounter a rhetoric and system of images drawn from the Holocaust. This time, however, a new, seemingly alternative set of images was created. Responsible for this was television, which more than any other factor reshaped the collective trauma within the memory of the Gulf War. Television not only intensified the link between Holocaust trauma and war but also created a new connection to trauma: entertainment. Macabre humor, cynicism, and escapism found expression in a variety of ways and in different television formats.

It seems that the Gulf War served as a catalyst in the processes of dealing with the Holocaust in Israeli society. For the cultural researcher Moshe Zimmerman, the Gulf War was integrated into the process of "updating" attitudes toward the Holocaust in art and cinema, with confusion and ambiguity taking the place of confessions and justification (Zimmerman 2002, 327). Zimmerman refers mainly to cinema, but his words are also valid in relation to television (in the Gulf War, television preceded cinema, which by nature responds later and more substantially to events). Historian Shlomo Sand sees the Gulf War as a milestone in the process of changing the cultural power relations between classical intellectuals and licensed memory agents and between the moving picture and electronic communications networks. The Gulf War produced "an array of impressive audio-visual representations, which weakened not only the flow and filtering of information, but also the very shaping of the immediate moral attitude towards it" (Sand 1999, 205).

The television coverage of the Gulf War and its place in public memory must be examined against the background of the profound changes in Israeli society at that time. It should be remembered that for the Israeli media, the early 1990s marked a period of transition. If until the 1980s the Israeli media, including state television, functioned as a monolithic body, largely expressing the position of the leadership or elite, then by the 1990s this status had already cracked. The sociopolitical changes that took place with the right-wing Likud's rise to power in 1977 ended, at least explicitly, the Ashkenazi hegemony[5] based on the values of the labor movement and

5 Israeli society has always been shaken by ethnic discourse. It is claimed that the founders of the state, mostly immigrants from Eastern European countries (Ashkenazim), founded the state on Western foundations while ignoring the tradition and worldview of a significant portion of the Jewish people from Middle Eastern and North African countries (Sephardic, Mizrahim). Some see the results of the 1977 elections as the end of Ashkenazi hegemony and the rise of the

accelerated the trend of decentralization, speeding up the entry of cable channels (1989) and the establishment of a second, commercial, television channel (1993). These changes have been integrated into global trends that started to gain a local foothold: the increased Americanization of daily life in Israel intensified, and the brand began to play an important role. Technology was also improving miraculously: color television, VCRs, and then cable systems that broadcast live events from the wider world. New words were heard, like satellite, CNN, and MTV. The wider world was within reach. Globalization was knocking at the door.

During these years, there was also a profound mental change in Israeli society resulting from a growing concern about "the righteousness of the way" and general fatigue from the ongoing state of war. Thus, a decade after the signing of the peace agreement with Egypt—in which, for the first time, in exchange for complete and stable peace, Israel gave up territory—there was a growing recognition that peace is not an abstract concept but a real possibility. The consciousness of the collective siege was cracked. The precedence given in the media to security issues and the constant attempt to present a broad consensus on key questions were loosening. At the same time, the 1982 Lebanon War, which was seen as the first war that was wanted, cracked this consensus. Many war veterans were losing faith in the country's leadership. They turned inward, preferring nihilism and avoidance. Some turned to anarchic humor. The first intifada that broke out in 1987 accelerated these feelings of disintegration and despair.

In January 1991, one state television channel operated in Israel on an educational television station that broadcast current affairs and children's programs at certain hours of the day. An experimental Channel Two was intended to broadcast on the future frequency of the commercial channel and was managed by the Ministry of Communications. This channel, which until then had broadcast only five hours a day, moved with the outbreak of the war to a continuous broadcast of eighteen hours. "Israel's television history is full of wars.... We flourished in the Gulf War," said Uri Shinar, who was the channel's content director in this experimental format.[6] Despite the emergency laws, which perpetuated the media in favor of the state, it seems that in practice during the war, state control and supervision greatly loosened.

Mizrahi voice in politics, media, and culture. However, the ethnic question continues to occupy Israeli society to this day.

6 In an interview on the occasion of the nineteenth anniversary of the first broadcast day of Channel Two in its experimental format (Shiloni 2005).

The Gulf War seemed to be tailored to the dimensions of the television medium: virtual in nature, distant and non-threatening. This was completely different from any war in which Israel had been involved until then. For the Israeli public, the war took place mostly around the small home screen. Paradoxically, this was not an “ordinary” war, since it was not perceived as a war for the existence of Israel itself, but on the other hand, it was seen as a real risk to the normal course of life at the home front. This was also not an ordinary war in terms of national solidarity. In the past, criticism was often silenced in the face of an external threat, but this time one could discern a certain level of skepticism and uncertainty regarding the conduct of leadership. In broad circles, the lack of response to the Iraqi attacks on the Israeli home front was perceived as an expression of intelligence failure, and especially as a sign of the weakness of the Israeli leadership in the face of the United States and its allies. The change in the experience of war was also evident in television: when the home front becomes the front, so does television. The family home—the destination of the message of television—has now become the scene of drama. This drama took place in a sealed room, in an intimate and private space. The home video cameras that were common technology by then allowed for documentation from inside this sealed room, usually of the alarm and the subsequent practice of wearing a mask. Such images have been tirelessly broadcast on various television channels in Israel and around the world. They have made active spectators out of Israelis, watching themselves. The fusion/confusion of home front and front line aligned with the technological innovations that similarly merged the local and the global. Connected to CNN and other satellite channels, to the telephone, and even to the internet, which was taking its first steps at the time, Israelis watched in their living rooms another war live, the one taking place on Iraqi soil, the war that was the reason for being locked up in this sealed room.

With the outbreak of the war, the Israeli public encountered a wealth of questions and dilemmas. The main one was: Whose war is this anyway? If this is “our” war, how can we not respond to these missile attacks? If it is not “ours,” then why do missiles fall on our territory? But other questions came also to the fore: What should be done in case of a missile attack? Is the sealed room a safe shelter or, as has been argued, is the sealed room a death trap? Will the Iraqis use gas against us? It soon became clear that these doubts were also shared by government members and that the leaders were also influenced by media sources such as CNN. As a result, a profound feeling arose among the public that there was no one in the leadership who really knew. The choice of whom to listen to ranged from the prime minister, who

did not speak, to publicists warning of the danger of Hitler and politicians accusing Germany of helping Iraq, to psychologists, to military commentators repeatedly making mistakes, to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) spokesman, who constantly recommended calming down and drinking water.

Anthropologist and sociologist Haim Hazan argues that this situation, in which "psychologists took the place of politicians, and instead of generals on the battlefield, a well-publicized military spokesman accompanied by bewildered broadcasters appeared … posed a threat to the imaginary community and the validity and issuance of collective memory" (Hazan 1997, 163). Like Hazan, Nurith Gertz argues that although Israel played a passive role in the war, the political language of the leadership sought to glorify the war and Israel's role in it. The problem for the country was trying to recreate, without correction or adjustment, the narrative and elements of previous wars, while in reality there was a large gap between this war and its predecessors.[7] Gertz argues that the establishment itself expressed two conflicting perceptions: "One was to intensify the crisis, to highlight national drama and thus to express the right-wing ideological narrative and the other was to swallow the crisis, minimize the drama to reassure the public" (Gertz 1995, 150). According to her, the result was that the right-wing narrative, based on national and heroic images, faced criticism that weakened it at the expense of reinforcing other narratives, including the personal, uninvolved narrative.

It is possible that the tension between the two perceptions to which Gertz points is one of the sources for the construction of the Gulf War in the collective memory as a surrealist vision. It seems that the abundance of hallucinatory moments summoned by the war (for example, Israelis who spoke with their relatives abroad were updated on the phone in real time about a missile falling in their city and the extent of the damage done) and the satirical and dramatic potential, inherent in the inability to reconcile the conflicting narratives, formed the material from which the most televised moments of the war were created. The presentation of these paradoxes, sometimes in full ridicule, intensified them and later instilled them as the important memory of the war.

7 Gertz states that the popular narrative by which the American media understood the Gulf War is this: "Evil, monstrous forces driven by the pursuit of evil violate the existing order, and those responsible for this order, after deliberations and hesitations, are forced to come out and defend it" (1995, 135). The narrative managed to unite the American people but did not survive after the war. The reason: the elimination of the tyrant and the restoration of order did not occur.

One of these surreal moments recorded on television cameras took place in a Jerusalem concert hall. Following an alarm, the great violinist Isaac Stern stopped playing and encouraged his audience to wear a mask. Holding a mask in his hand, Stern continued to play. This event was presented as a link in a chain of performances given in Israel at the front and rear during wars since the War of Independence (1948). The fact that the event took place in Jerusalem, which was not under threat at the time, does not diminish the power of the image. It is the apparent contrast between the images of war and the sound of classical music that explains the power of this eternal image and its role in the ideological system, whose purpose it is to prove and point to war—any war—as a war of no choice that is imposed on civilians. The phrases "The people are the front" and "We must continue to play" have become a commonplace over the years in this context. Most of all, in this we can see the essence of an absurd concept that took root in those days in Israel, an "Emergency Routine." This surrealist dimension seems to be closely related to what has been called the virtualization of war. Following Jean Baudrillard and others, the Gulf War has often been presented as a simulation (Baudrillard 1995). The main argument was about building the war in real time as a kind of computer game: a distant, very clean war, based mainly on advanced technology, seen as an advertisement for sophisticated weapons and, above all, a war in which the enemy is not present (Katz 1998). Those images, representing the war as bizarre, greatly encouraged the surrealistic construction of the Gulf War. The surrealist statement, which is reflected in the concept of the "Emergency Routine," has a dual role. First, it functions as an instrument for dealing with and repelling terror. In addition, it functions as a catalyst in the process of dismantling and updating the Israeli ethos which, until the Gulf War, relied on a substantive and traditional view of the war.

## The Gulf War: A Televised Memory

The question of the televised memory of war is greatly strengthened in the Gulf War. For example, the experience of watching TV, as for example in the humor and slapstick shows *Zehu Ze* (This is it!) and the *Ha-Olam ha-Erev* (The world tonight), is a central part of the memory of that war. And in the archive of texts associated with this war, these programs have a central place. *Zehu Ze in the Gulf*, says Hazan, "supposedly tattooed the foundations of the Israeli collective self. Rabbis and 'spiritual leaders' were portrayed as fools and charlatans, the glorious IDF generals as clueless and helpless, leaders

as lost and frustrated and the people seeking to escape wherever possible, the public is plagued by hysteria and panic and the media as someone who has completely lost her mind" (Hazan 1997, 163).

The role of humor as a central component in this memory requires explanation. The common explanation would suggest seeing humor programs as a kind of repression and refuge, a natural need in times of war.[8] Hence, for example, the DVD of *Zehu Ze* became one of the representations of the collective memory of the Gulf War. From this point of view, the status of *Zehu Ze* as a central component in the memory of the war would imply that this need has not yet been satisfied. Another, complementary explanation connects the experience of watching the show with understanding the Gulf War as a media event combining reality and simulation. Thus, the commercial success of the VHS cassette and then of the DVD of this program, Hazan claims, depends on the power of the program to cancel "the validity of the event as it occurred at a time and place of data" (163). For him, the cancellation of the event and its non-event took place on three levels: First, the tape is marketed as part of a routine of consumption of audiovisual products that are not conditioned in any context; they are forever detached from the "thing itself." Second, the event is presented as part of the fatalistic myth of Jewish existence, as an event belonging to the mythical collective memory, and echoing the images of the Megillah[9] and Purim,[10] that is when the war ended. The third level is that "the war is

8 The notion of humor as a defense mechanism is well described by Sigmund Freud and others. Freud claimed that people use humor in situations that provoke their fear and anxiety, through which they gain a new perspective on the situation that helps them to avoid experiencing negative emotions (Freud 1990; originally published 1922). Liat Steir-Livny emphasizes that humor "helps individuals alleviate stress, cope with negative feelings and tough situations, mitigate suffering, dissipate feelings of anxiety—at least for a certain time—and grant them some sense of power and control in situations of helplessness" (2015, 203). Jaqueline Garrick finds that "[t]he crux of a victim's sense of humor is in the nuances of irony and satire that can be healthily exploited for the purpose of survival. Although humor can be used to facilitate therapeutic gains, one's inappropriate use of humor or affect generally indicates that one is trying to avoid one's true feelings. If a client is smiling and joking while reporting a particularly painful childhood memory, it is likely that the client is not sure how close s/he wants to get to the memory and is attempting to obtain distance from the associated emotional pain. This distancing is similar to denial in that it provides for a comfort zone" (2006, 176–77).

9 The Megillah, or the Book of Esther, narrates the story of a Hebrew woman in Persia who becomes queen of Persia and thwarts a genocide of her people. The story forms the core of the Jewish festival of Purim, during which it is read aloud twice: once in the evening and again the following morning.

10 Purim is a Jewish holiday that commemorates the saving of the Jewish people from Haman, an Achaemenid Persian Empire official who was planning to kill all the Jews in the empire, as recounted in the Book of Esther.

identified with a self-employed media event and is conducted according to the cryptography of its own language. The embarrassment and madness of the systems is communicative and unrealistic" (Hazan 1997, 164). According to Hazan, what survived and was included on the tape was what did not launch into the collective memory, what did not threaten to penetrate the memory and undermine it. For this reason, sketches dealing with Saddam Hussein's Doppelgängers or the integrity of people using gas masks were not included on the tape. Such a sketch, he argued, could have made the imaginary situation real and threatening.

Like *Zehu Ze in the Gulf*, *Ha-Olam ha-Erev* also breathed an alternative spirit of nonsense into television broadcasts. The show, which aired as part of Channel Two's trial broadcasts, did well to outline the contours of the hallucinatory confrontation. Among other things, the actors played the characters of Saddam Hussein and "Bassam Aziz, Iraq's ambassador to Israel." The enemy has often been portrayed as sophisticated and sympathetic. At the same time, what was emphasized was the incompetence of the defense establishment and the Israeli leadership in understanding the conflict, responding to it, and mediating it for the public.

After the war, several documentaries were made. The film *Shaanan Sy*[11] was presented as a sleepwalking trip to Tel Aviv during the war, combining interviews while documenting the atmosphere at various relevant sites such as public shelters during the war. The film excelled as a parody moving between patriotic promises, anxiety, and terror. The film presented the Gulf War as a link in the chain of the Israeli wars. Thus, for example, a monologue was interwoven in the film about the sequence of wars held by the grandmother of one of the directors. The interviews incorporated in the film also excelled in mocking the symbols of the state and drawing a clear line between state rhetoric, as it resonated in the media, and the distrust and cynicism of a growing part of the population. This is how one of the interviewees puts it: "The war is a chain of humiliations … that suddenly you have to trust the IDF. Or listen to the IDF spokesman. Or trust the army, which is an institution I have been skeptical about all my life.… Nachman Shai [IDF spokesman] reassures me very much. That is what humiliates it. It robs us of our freedom."

Another film completed near the end of the war was *The French Initiative*.[12] The film consists of photographs that an Israeli photographer was asked to take for a French production company. The film, says Gertz, organizes

11 *Shaanan Sy* (documentary). Directors: Ari Folman and Ori Sivan, 1991.

12 *The French Initiative* (documentary). Directors: Eitan Dotan and Ron Katzenelson, 1992.

parodies concerning the framework of the struggle between the citizen and the authorities, between the personal and the national. Gertz claims that in both films (*Shaanan Sy* and *The French Initiative*), anxiety and terror are not repressed in a stable and calming structure, nor do they lead to national catharsis. It turns out that the films only contain a recurring motif. "The films do not try to cure the anxiety, nor to present it as a step beyond some redemption but only to describe it from a personal, human angle … they present anxiety without release, fear of disaster without redemption, detached episodes without an organizing story and 'comforting'" (Gertz 1995, 162). Both films rely on "details of events, looks, objects that do not organize in a frame story, rehearsals that do not advance any purpose, footage that does not build a complete picture. They do not tell a cohesive historical story but present life details that break the historical story" (Gertz 1995, 165).

In contrast to *Shaanan Sy* and *The French Initiative*, which were independent personal productions, shortly after the Gulf War, the Israel Broadcasting Authority also produced a concluding film about the war, called *Viper Snake*.[13] This documentary portrayed the Gulf War as "a series of crises and reversals, each of which contains the threat of destruction and the hope of resurrection. This takes place in the form of a power struggle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness, between an isolated but united nation and a broad hostile front" (Gertz 1995, 144). Gertz sees *Viper Snake* as a drama that serves the ideological narrative of the Israeli leadership: the apocalyptic, rightist-Jewish narrative—the horror and the celebration, the destruction and the redemption are mixed with each other at the opening and end of the film. Sharp and surprising transitions take place in the film. The transitions are usually from photographs of peace and routine (children at home, family, discussions in the Knesset, a choir singing) to the alarms and destructive images that "penetrate" them unexpectedly. The rapid cutting from state to state is also accompanied by a sharp transition from day to night, from darkness to light, or vice versa, and this further enhances the dramatic effect (Gertz 1995, 144).

In David Ofek's mockumentary *Beit*,[14] members of an Israeli family of Iraqi descent watch television that is broadcasting American airstrikes on Baghdad. Under the threat of missiles, hidden in the living room of their home in Ramat Gan, the adults want to locate their forgotten home in the broadcasted footage and in this way convey to the younger generation part of their own childhood. The surrealist scene, which involves nostalgia and

13 *Viper Snake* (Nachash Tzefa) (documentary). Director: Yarin Kimor, 1991.

14 *Beit* [Home] (mockumentary). Director: David Ofek, 1994.

war, exemplifies the overall style of the film disguised as truth. The sense of complete blurring between truth and falsehood, between documentation and fiction, reflects a basic state of uncertainty involved in deciphering the experience of the Gulf War in memory and in real time.

The later representations of the Gulf War are not many. In television these are usually minor and unsystematic references. Thus, in the documentary series *TEKUMA*,[15] the Gulf War is mentioned only as a comment and in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

> When the Gulf War broke out in January 1991, and rocket fire was fired from Iraq, Israeli residents wore protective masks and locked themselves in sealed rooms, and the Palestinians did not hide their joy.... A new Holocaust. The Shamir government did not respond. When the Iraqi army was defeated, there was a calm atmosphere. Not a sense of victory. The miserable end of the mother of all wars in the United States victory and the disintegration of the Soviet Union gave birth to what they then called a new world order. A strong American demand to renew the peace initiative left the Shamir government with no choice but to flex its positions. This is how the Madrid Peace Conference was born.

This narration comes against the backdrop of the archival, familiar image series of that war. In the series *In the Jewish State*,[16] which deals with the history of Hebrew humor, the Gulf War is presented as a "war of nonsense." Its unique characteristics, so it was claimed, encouraged the wave of television nonsense that flourished at the time. In the drama series *Bnot Brown*,[17] the war is a distant episode that is seen from the TV screen of a country home, far from the missile launch sites. The war serves as a background for the protagonists' behavior and is a dramatic pretext for a reunion between family members whose paths have parted, but now, under the shadow of the war, they seek each other's closeness. Here, too, war is presented in a pastoral context. At the end, one of the characters says, "It's a pity the war is over." In the series *Shishim*,[18] the Gulf War receives a single mention. In her memoirs about those days, one of the interviewees shares with the viewer, "[It was]

15 *TEKUMA* [Resurrection] (historical documentary series, 22 episodes). Editor-in-chief: Gideon Drori; episode 21: "The Stone and the Olive Branch," director: Danny Waxman, 1998.

16 *In the Jewish State* (historical documentary series, 11 episodes). Creators: Modi Bar-On and Anat Zeltzer, 2003–4.

17 *Bnot Brown* (drama series). Creator: Irit linur; directors: Rani Carmeli and Irit Linur, 2002.

18 *Shishim* [Sixty] (historical documentary series, 6 episodes). Episode no. 5: 1988–1998, director: Anat Zeltzer, 2008.

the funniest period of mourning. *Shiva*[19] with Gaz masks." As demonstrated above, it seems that the Gulf War is accepted as a war that is legitimate to indulge in; one can long for its unique and mostly positive experiences.[20] One can expose the nostalgic passion for war, since the Gulf War is seemingly not a "real war." It is a virtual war, ostensibly with no casualties. This is a war that is easy, pleasant, and comfortable to embrace in memory.

## Conclusion

More than any other war in the past, the visual memory of the Gulf War and the discourse about it clearly express the fascinating connection between trauma and nostalgia. The dual nature of this war—as it was experienced in the Israeli home front but actually took place thousands of miles away, both tangible and virtual—evokes feelings of anxiety, stress, and closure and at the same time opens up to the global, technological space. This dual character is the main designer of this war memory and the reason for blurring the boundaries between trauma and entertainment, which has taken place in the memory of this war. It should be noted that the memory of the Gulf War seems to have had an impact on later representations of earlier wars, such as the First Lebanon War. However, such an intertextual analysis goes beyond the limits of this chapter.

The most significant television texts associated with the war present it as a hallucination, a dream, or a nightmare, but not as a horror. The terrible dimension of war (any war) does not get proper expression. The television memory of the war prefers to reinforce two positions during the war: one is a closed, forced connection with the trauma of the Holocaust, and the second is marked as a "non-existent" war, a virtual war, in which Israelis engage in a series of puzzling actions, where their connection to war in its usual sense is questionable (confinement in an sealed room, wrapping in plastic sheets, drinking water, etc.).

The representation of the war in the hallucinatory, and therefore entertaining, dimension is supported from various directions. On the genre level, television humor and satirical programs seem to be an integral part

19 Shiva is the week-long mourning period in Judaism for first-degree relatives.

20 The positive aspects of the war are clear: the war led to rapprochement and family reunion. Quite a few separated families reunited under missile fire. Some talked about the fact that the war brought their personal problems into proportion. On the other hand, it is possible that the indulgence in this war stems from its vague nature and the fact that there were not many casualties among the public.

of war memory. The sting of these programs, which in real time have been used simultaneously for criticism and stress relief, has not dulled over the years. As a critical, ironic text that mocks Israelis and their leadership, these programs remain relevant. It is important to mention that television entertainment was created during the war mainly on the fringes of the old media establishment. The most notable programs in this regard have been broadcasted on educational television (*Zehu Ze*) and on the experience broadcasts of the Second Authority (*Ha-Olam ha-Erev*). It was, as mentioned, a war that took place in an era of media change, the significance of which was greatly intensified by that war. For the first time, Israelis were able to consume war-related television content through a channel that was not monolithic, state-run, or outdated. This time "the sky opened up": diverse information and content flowed into the Israeli living room through additional TV channels, and official articles, from Israeli sources but also from international sources such as CNN, provided news alongside independent content based mainly on the relatively new availability of home video cameras.

In March 2003, the images of the Gulf War returned to haunt the collective consciousness of Israelis. At the height of a monthslong process, the coalition armies of the United States, Britain, and their allies invaded Iraq to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime. The war, which lasted about three weeks, conjured up images of the first Gulf War.

In January 2006, the fifteenth anniversary of the outbreak of the war, the war did not receive any mention in the media. An explanation for the absence of images of the war on the screen could be its "low media value." It can be argued that, in media terms, the images of the Gulf War are not powerful enough for a country where a tangible threat to the home front has become a breakthrough vision. Since the Gulf War, the country has undergone major waves of terrorism, making the missile threat sink into oblivion. Another explanation could simply be successful repression. The image of the Gulf War is well immersed in the depths of the collective consciousness and will emerge in the event of a threat with similar characteristics, such as a missile threat to Tel Aviv. Perhaps the Gulf War was not a trauma after all, but a kind of media showcase.

Over time, terror would infiltrate the heart of Israeli cities. The war at home would no longer be delimited by a specific time frame or defined by a title. Israeli existence would become overwhelmed with chaos, confusion, and above all the blurring of boundaries. Out of this condition, a new, more sober perception of Israeli identity would emerge, a perception whose televisual antecedents can be traced back to the Gulf War of 1991.

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