## **Prologue**

This book constitutes the first broad historic study of the enactment of sex in Israeli film, providing a variety of analyses of sex scenes from their first appearance in the 1960s into the late 1970s. Its main goal is to present an alternative historiography of Israeli film to that which prevails in the research community today.

The focus on the enactment of sex, rather than sexual symbolism, puts an emphasis on the viewer's cinematic experience, rather than the critic's interpretation. Following the work of Michel Foucault and Linda Williams, the sex scene is defined here as a cinematic entity that constitutes an arena in which individual subjectivity and communal identity materialise. It provides a platform for us to reconsider popular perceptions of these attributes in Israeli film studies.

By reviewing existing research into Israeli film, we can identify the development of a paradigm which became dominant in the late 1970s, which is antithetic in structure. It describes two historic rifts in communal Israeli identity. The first of these is Zionism's departure from Diasporic Jewish identity at the end of the nineteenth century, and the second is a post-ideological turn within Israeli society in the last third of the twentieth century. In addition, this paradigm dictates that questions of identity and agency are primarily reflected through the prism of Otherness where the Zionist norm is defined as heroic masculinity.

I argue against this view of Israeli film history on two theoretical levels. Firstly, alongside Foucault and Anthony Wilden, I advocate a history of continuity, acknowledging that values and perceptions are never obliterated, but instead undergo transformation from one era to the next. Secondly, I examine the concept of Otherness developed by Sander L. Gilman and Judith Butler, demonstrating the limits of its binary divisions.

I present an alternative historiography, one based on four central motifs. The first of these is the enactment of intrusion, which resides in the sense of space. The remaining three embody a sense of being through cinematic prototypes: the comic figure, the victim, and the child. The enactment of intrusion by and upon the individual reflects an ambiguity within the Zionist movement regarding the ideal relations between individual and society, which may also be understood as the central predicament of modernity. This describes an imbalance between the public and private spheres. On the other hand, the three cinematic prototypes – the comic figure, the victim, and the child – all become comprehensible within the moral notion that the human subject must always be subordinate and secondary. The comic type figure, inherited from the Jewish Diaspora, is incongruous within its environment – revealing that it is both subjugated to that environment and fundamentally independent of it. The victim type figure embodies not just

grief, but also an affirmation of the individual that is otherwise morally unacceptable. The child and adolescent type figures were prevalent as symbols in the early days of the Israeli society. Both are associated with innocence, fragility, instability, juvenility, and liminality. They enhance the sense of victimhood, insignificance, and volatility. With these motifs at hand I can now pursue a history of subjectivity as manifested in the viewer's physical sensations, which are affected by the incarnation of cinematic figures and the space that surrounds them. The 1960s and 1970s were a period of crucial change in Israeli society. Through my examination of sex scenes from these decades, I demonstrate how Israel renegotiated its identity in cinematic terms.

Sex scenes from the 1960s reflect the volatility of the boundaries between private and public spheres. They demonstrate the bond between subjectivity and eroticism, the way in which these are diminished in the comic figure and enhanced in the victim, and the destructive role sexuality plays in the presence of children. All of these motifs are presented within a wider cultural-historical framework. I take into account both the impact of historical events, like the Six-Day War, and cultural trends. Cinematic phenomena – the representation of promiscuity, the subjectification of the female and the objectification of the male in depictions of sex, the use of male bodies to bring about spectacle or lethargy, ambivalent representations of rape – are all placed in historical context.

My discussion of sex scenes from the 1970s is structured around three phenomena associated with that decade. Two melodramas correspond to the Yom Kippur War and the political crisis which followed it. The depiction of Oriental Jewish identity is associated with protest movements. Finally, the genre of youth films prominent towards the end of the decade reflects a new sense of reality following the Israel-Egypt peace agreement of 1979. I demonstrate that each of the analysed films operates within the patterns outlined above. The enactment of intrusion by and upon the individual persists and increases. So too does the use of incongruous comic figures and fragile, unstable, sometimes volatile adolescents. I contextualise the decline of the victim type figure and the ambivalent depiction of alternative sources of eroticism.

Through detailed analysis that associates the sensual with the political, this book provides a comprehensive exploration of the nature of sex scenes and their role in the Israeli cultural sphere during a defining period in the nation's history. The perspective offered by these scenes allows for a re-examination of Israel's cinematic history. As well as offering a new narrative of Israeli cinematic history, I offer insight into the ways in which this history is and has been narrated.