

# **Interaction between the Self and the Other – Identity Formation as Motif in Eytan Fox's films**

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### III

Note: This text was originally written in German and had been translated into English, including the quotes, if they were not written in English already. Furthermore Dan Bar-Ons **THE OTHERS WITHIN US. CONSTRUCTING JEWISH-ISRAELI IDENTITY**, dating from 2008, was consulted supplementary to the German edition called **DIE 'ANDEREN' IN UNS. DIALOG ALS MODELL DER INTERKULTURELLEN KONFLIKTBEWÄLTIGUNG; SOZIALPSYCHOLOGISCHE ANALYSEN ZUR KOLLEKTIVEN ISRAELISCHEN IDENTITÄT.**, published in 2001.



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## VII

„Over time, we learned that understanding the similarities across groups opened up new ways of thinking: experiences could be accumulated toward a big picture, rather than suffered in relative isolation; people could be different but still have the same experience; people who never had the experience might still have ways to understand.“

Rosenblum, K. E.; Travis, T.-M. (2008): Section IV - The Meaning of Difference. Framework Essay. In: Rosenblum, K. E.; Travis, T.-M. (Ed.): The meaning of difference. American constructions of race, sex and gender, social class, sexual orientation, and disability. 5th ed. New York NY: McGraw-Hill, pp 468–475, p. 468)





# 1 Introduction

This analysis deals with Eytan Fox's feature films *TIME OFF* (1990), *SONG OF THE SIREN* (1994), *YOSSI & JAGGER* (2002), *WALK ON WATER* (2004) and *THE BUBBLE* (2006). All these films focus on contemporary Israel and portray young people searching for their sexual, social and cultural identity as well as their status within society.<sup>1</sup> Thus important topics for Jewish-Israeli identity such as the army, the Holocaust and religion recur within the main plots and the subplots of the films.

The main assumption of this analysis is that Fox's films, upon which his life partner, producer and screenwriter Gal Uchovsky exerts profound influence, are devoted to the communication between the self and the Other.<sup>2</sup> It has to be shown that this communication takes place on different levels and can be related to social psychology or more precisely to late Israeli social psychologist Dan Bar-On's approach to identity:

“The sociopsychological approach to identity construction distinguishes between two different processes (if we momentarily ignore intermediate possibilities): Either identity takes shape in opposition to an 'Other' or it is formed through an internal dialogue among various components of the identity that do not fit together[.]”<sup>3</sup>

Each concept makes its own demands:

“The first process requires minimal energy, as the perceived characteristics of the other supply the necessary contrast for defining one's own superior monolithic 'self'. [...] [I]t is easier at first to unite under a collective construction of identity, faced by an enemy. Nonetheless, in the long run, considerable energy may be needed to preserve a monolithic construction when, inevitably, conflicting components of identity cannot be held together anymore. A dialogue process is then necessary to bring together various components of the identity that become incompatible over time. At such a stage, the quality of the dialogue rather than one of the components determines how the collective identity is reconstructed.”<sup>4</sup>

Already in 2001 Bar-On and social psychologist Ifat Maoz, who teaches at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, emphasise that this kind of dialogue in most cases is initiated by trial and error, but once a revision of the monolithic constructions is started no additional energy is needed to protect identity by means of the Other.<sup>5</sup> Regarding Bar-On's considerations in 2008, it seems more precise to say: If a revision of the monolithic constructions is started the Other can become less important for the definition and protection of the self.<sup>6</sup>

Both concepts of identity mentioned become evident in Fox's films. Moreover the initiated communication between the self and the Other takes place on three levels that shall be examined in

1 The present analysis is – except for the film *SONG OF A SIREN* – based on subtitled original versions. Since dubbing means to make the new dialogues fit to the actors' lips it is more than translation. Hence dubbing may differ even more from the original dialogue than subtitles.

2 As far as I know Eytan Fox's second short film *GOTTA HAVE HEART* (1997) was never screened in Germany and thus is not taken into account just like the TV series *FLORENTINE* which dates from 1997 as well. The latter is Fox's first cooperation with Gal Uchovsky. As Uchovsky told me he and Fox had already cooperated on the scripts of *FLORENTINE*, *GOTTA HAVE HEART* and *WALK ON WATER* although it is not until *THE BUBBLE* that the credits mention both of them for the screenplay.

3 Bar-On (2008), p. 4

4 Bar-On (2008), pp. 4-5

5 Bar-On/ Maoz (2001), p. 17. Following Bar-On I will write “Other” with a capital O.

6 Cf. chapter 2.2.1 of this analysis.

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the following: Level 1: The plots of Fox' films discuss various attempts of communication. Level 2: Through the films Fox and Uchovsky interact with domestic and foreign audiences. Within Israel they discuss the consequences of a disintegrating monolithic phase for identity formation. Regarding foreign audiences they open new vistas beyond the constant presence of the Middle-East conflict in the news. Level 3: The films initiate a discussion within the audience.

This means the communication between the self and the Other initiated in Fox' films takes place 1. within the films, 2. between the filmmaker and the audiences and 3. within the audience. Since the films' dominant aspect is the relation between the self and others it is worthwhile to examine the films' milieus more closely. Relevant topics are homosexuality and enemy.

## 2 Communication between the Self and the Other

### 2.1 *Film-immanent Attempts of Communication*

TIME OFF (1990), SONG OF THE SIREN (1994), YOSSI & JAGGER (2002), WALK ON WATER (2004) and THE BUBBLE (2006) portray different attempts of communication. For this purpose the stories are set in different milieus: either the military or the civil society. It depends on the plot which aspect is highlighted. Interestingly enough the two milieus kind of melt in WALK ON WATER due to the secret service agent Eyal.

#### 2.1.1 TIME OFF

The main characters of Fox's first short film are the young soldier Yonatan and his strict superior Erez. As members of an army unit, which is about to go on a mission, they get a day off. Despite having different ranks they both belong to the same social group: they are soldiers of the Israeli army. Yet they are looking for their identity since their sexuality differentiates them from their comrades. But it happens by chance that they come to know that they are both homosexual. Yonatan seems to succeed well in hiding that part of himself, while Erez needs a lot of energy to mask his sexual orientation: On the one hand he uses advances of the female soldier as an alibi and with regard to Yonatan pretends to be either strict or indifferent. Erez hopes that no one will realise that he is keeping an eye on Yonatan during a meditation exercise, that he is watching out for Yonatan after the latter took a shower or that Erez is only pretending to be indifferent to Yonatan playing the guitar. On the other hand Erez uses the stay in Jerusalem to meet with a stranger in an Independence Park's lavatory. He expresses his sexuality with a man to whom the fact that Erez is a soldier is irrelevant. There is no social relation between the two. However Yonatan followed his superior without Erez noticing it and gets aroused by the sounds, which Erez and the stranger make. Later when Yonatan returns to the unit, he hands Erez Erez's identity card without anyone else noticing. Thus Yonatan reveals to Erez that both had been to this Independence Park lavatory at the same time. It does not take long for Erez to react. His reaction militates in favour of incipient communication on apparently incompatible components of identity: In the final scene of the drama TIME OFF, Erez no longer calls Yonatan rudely by his last name but addresses him gently by his first name, when he calls Yonatan's attention to a song on the radio. It is the same song Yonatan played on the trip to Jerusalem when Erez ordered him to play the guitar to calm the unit's firebrands. These changes in Erez's demeanour may be rooted in an attempt to persuade Yonatan to remain discreet. Yonatan could easily use his knowledge of Erez's sexual orientation against him in order to undermine Erez' authority on the eve of a mission. But such a reaction seems to be

implausible since Jonatan would unmask himself, too. Instead their discreet way of handling their common secret indicates that they are relieved to no longer be “lone warriors” within their army unit.

### **2.1.2 SONG OF THE SIREN**

The main character of the romantic comedy *SONG OF THE SIREN*, Talila Katz, is an independent and strong-minded woman. Nevertheless she seems to have internalised the traditional role of women in Israeli society. During the Second Gulf War she is confronted with the question of marriage. There are three more or less suitable aspirants: Talila's boss Ronen, her long-time boyfriend Ofer and her new boyfriend Noah. Talila's boss is interested in her, but he flees to a conference in Europe in order to escape war. Noah has not yet gotten over his ex-girlfriend Dana, who is studying in the US, but returned home because of war. Eventually Ofer proposes to Talila after his new girlfriend has enrolled at a university in the US and therefore is no longer an aspirant for marriage.

Talila starts wondering about her lifestyle. She needs to decide whether she can and should meet social expectations. Firstly these expectations do not correspond to her temper. But she fails to discuss the situation with her soul mate, because her homosexual colleague is busy. Secondly Talila's family does not set a good example: Her sister Alona is currently having problems with her husband and so did their parents. This however does not keep Talila's father from proposing to his girlfriend. Should Talila nevertheless “marry just for the sake of marriage”? Should she marry her long-time boyfriend Ofer, who will above all guarantee an easy living? Should she accept his proposal to prevent herself from being disappointed if the one she would like to marry – Noah – should not want to propose to her, should tell Talila that she is not the right woman to marry or in the worst case should not want to marry at all? Should she live with the shy food chemist Noah in some backwater near Tel Aviv? Living in sin with Noah – that is cohabiting – would not necessarily mean defying social conventions forever. In contrast to Yonatan and Erez as well as the main characters of *THE BUBBLE* Talila and Noah could marry in Israel anytime, if they should decide to do so. For some time Talila nevertheless prefers an immediate marriage with Ofer to her love for Noah. It is not until a panic attack, when she does have the nerve to reject Ofer's proposal. In order to be able to speak she tears off the gas mask she is wearing while hiding from an air raid. Through speaking her mind she restores her independent and strong-minded self. The conflict caused by the decision for either marriage or love, for personal happiness or social conventions becomes less important.

Although almost every character in the film *SONG OF THE SIREN* tries to control his/ her fear with either black humour or by escaping to (alleged) safe spots – like shelters, gas proof rooms, remote places in and outside the country – they all feel emotionally drained by the circumstances. It is to be shown that in this regard the characters of this comedy not only have something in common with the characters of the previous, but also with those of the following films.

### 2.1.3 YOSSI & JAGGER

While the short film *TIME OFF* ends where meaningful conversation between two homosexual soldiers starts, the two main characters of the short film *YOSSI & JAGGER*, which was filmed twelve years later, are in a relationship. Army officer Lior Amichai called Jagger and his superior Yossi are not getting ready for a mission like Yonatan and Erez, but are already on a military base in the north of Israel. When Yossi wants to be on his own with his boyfriend they pretend to do rounds in the outside area of the base. In the snow-covered nature Yossi seems to be a different person: the fear of being outed, the burden of being responsible for his unit and the tension caused by the general situation disappear from his face. In such moments Yossi adopts Lior's easy-going lust for life. They fool around and Yossi, who is the only one calling Lior by his real name, laughs at Lior's idea to turn the song *BO* – which means “come” in English – into an obvious statement for their sexual orientation. But although Yossi enjoys Lior's presence and his jokes, he even now evades Lior's requests. First he rejects the original text of the song, sung by Israeli singer Rita, which seems to reflect Lior's emotional state with the reproof: “When it comes to music you become so campy.”<sup>7</sup> Then Yossi ignores Lior's invitation: “Come with me, let's go to the Far East. What do you want from the army? You already have your officer.” When Lior returns to this subject during an official private meeting they are having a grim quarrel. The vehemence with which Lior asks for a proof of love because of the upcoming mission – “What if I die? I don't know if you love me.” – is very confusing to Yossi. The same applies to Lior's request that they should share a double room on trips to Eliat and his wish to introduce Yossi to his parents. Hence Yossi's reaction is ultimate rejection. He fears that the comrades will hear Lior's puns and that this will weaken his position as superior. But even living their relationship openly in a private environment is out of question for Yossi. In contrast to Lior, who thinks to have carried out his duties in the army when he has served his time, Yossi's identity is very much influenced by his profession. Therefore it is not surprising that Yossi keeps a low profile when private Yaeli wants him to tell her more about “Jagger”. Although Yaeli reveals to Yossi that she has fallen in love with his boyfriend Yossi neither tells her that “Jagger” is in a relationship nor that he is the one who is having the relationship with “Jagger”. At the same time Lior realises that his comrades would not understand his sexual orientation. They sneer at homosexual waiters on Tel Aviv's Shenkin Street – the setting of the drama *THE BUBBLE* – and they ridicule physical love between guys. Therefore Lior quickly pretends that his question what they would do to him if he was gay, was a joke. Moreover Lior answers a furious accusation of his roommate Ofir with a smile. Right before going on a mission Ofir accuses Lior of having something with Yossi and still making use of Yaeli's feelings for him, although he – unlike Ofir – does not love her. Lior laughs at the statement and denies to be in a relationship with Yaeli, but he does not comment on Ofir's statement concerning Yossi. This again shows that Lior is determined to suppress but not to deny his identity, despite all possible consequences. Yossi reveals his true self only once:

<sup>7</sup> The English translations of the lyrics can be found at Lipski <http://www.hebrewsongs.com/?song=bo>. At IvriLider.com the song's Hebrew lyrics and the video of the cover version for the film can be found <http://www.ivrilider.com/index.aspx> (01.12.09).

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When the fear for Lior's life is bigger than the fear of being discriminated against because of a same sex relationship. At this point Yossi suddenly not only hints at, but declares his love to Lior: Yossi promises that they will go on trips together and that they will live together in the Far East and he kisses Lior in spite of Ofir's presence. But when Lior's life is lost Yossi goes back to the routine and professionally asks for medical help for his severely injured deputy – Lior – and other injured soldiers.

During his stay at the military base Lior had two different identities: On the one hand he was the kind, funny and helpful officer, whom his subordinates called “Jagger” and whom the girls of his unit adored like a rock star. This especially applies to Yaeli. On the other hand Lior was Yossi's lover. His parents demeanour during Shiva<sup>8</sup> indicates that they know nothing about Lior's behaviour in the unit. That is why “Jagger” is a complete stranger to them. It seems unnecessary and sometimes it is even not advisable to talk about missions since every Israeli generation can speak from its own experience. But Lior in particular seems to have kept silent out of loyalty to Yossi. Therefore Lior's parents cannot even guess that Yossi's praise to the soldier killed in action relate to Yossi's deepest feelings. But not only “Jagger” is a stranger to Lior's parents. This becomes clear when Lior's mother admits to Yaeli that her son is a mystery to her and her husband. Lior's roommate Ofir signifies that the parents are **unable** to unscramble a significant part of their son's personality. On this occasion Ofir is the only person – apart from Yossi – who knows the truth. But when Yossi does not object to Yaeli's statement of a beginning relationship Ofir feels obliged to maintain silence. He – regardless of his feelings for Yaeli – is loyal to Yossi, does not show him up and keeps his secret. At the same time Ofir's demeanour indicates that he wants to apologise to Lior whom he had accused of taking advantage of Yaeli right before going on the fatal mission. The willingness of Lior's mother to accept Yaeli's wishful thinking as unquestionable truth proves her **reluctance** to get to know her son's deepest secrets. In addition Lior's mother is not amazed at the fact that his superior – and not Lior's alleged girlfriend – knows Lior's favourite song. Lior's mother does not question what Yossi is telling her about Lior's habit to change the song's lyrics. But Yossi keeps an important detail secret. He does not tell her that Lior used to change the lyrics into an explicit statement about their sexuality. Hence the conversation which Lior wanted to accelerate while still alive is cut short. Yossi's and Ofir's decision to keep silent enables Lior's mother and Yaeli to hold to an idea of Lior that corresponds to social conventions. But Yossi does not only wish to keep harm from Lior's family. He also wants to protect himself in this moment of innermost grief. Therefore Lior's long-term solutions for their identity conflict – being openly gay in a private environment and living a life outside the army/ Israel in the future – seem to have ended in talk. Yet Yossi's decision to keep silent does not mean that the death of his boyfriend has left no mark on him. He will not return to his daily routine or his old habits. What leads to this conclusion is the version of Lior's favourite song, which is heard in the final scene of YOSSSI & JAGGER. Instead of the original version sung by Rita, that can be known to the characters, Yossi is hearing a cover

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8 Shiva is the seven-day Jewish mourning ritual.

version by Israeli singer Ivri Lider. Since Lider sings the unmodified lyrics it becomes clear to the viewer, who is able to understand Hebrew, that a male addresses another male person. That way the lyrics can be considered a message from Lior. They read:

Let's disperse the screen of fog.  
let's stand in the light and not in the shade  
How long will we continue running away,  
To the games of strength  
You are allowed to cry sometimes,  
When something breaks inside of you.

Tell me a little about the moments of fear.  
As it is much easier to fear together.

And when cold winds storm outside,  
I will send to you a warm fire.  
One day maybe you will stop running,  
Among the shadows in the soul.<sup>9</sup>

The lyrics become words of comfort for Yossi. They can be seen as Lior's promise to stay at Yossi's side and to share his sorrow with him, if needed.<sup>10</sup> The second verse, which is not subtitled in the film because at that point the film crossfades to the credits, substantiates this interpretation. It reads:

„Let's disperse the screen of fog.  
Let's stand in the light and not in the shade  
How long will we continue running away,  
To the games of strength  
You are allowed to shiver sometimes,  
When something wonderful happens inside

Tell me a bit about the moments of bliss  
Until the morning sunrise is upon us.<sup>11</sup>

The request to leave the soul's shadows behind might mean that Yossi should not give in to grief, that he should have more confidence in himself and his identity and live openly gay with a future boyfriend. At the same time the song for Yossi becomes a symbol of the moments spent with Lior and a song for the dead army officer Amichai. The song BO stands for both: the beautiful moments that come to Yossi's mind when he looks at a picture showing Lior dressed up as a rabbit for Purim and for the quarrel they could not really arrange despite Yossi's courageous affirmation in the moment of Lior's death. The custom to dedicate a song to a killed soldier is described in the novel **BEAUFORT** by the journalist Ron Leshem – who is also a member of the program board of Israeli TV-station Channel 2. As part of a game called “He will never again“– a game which might seem

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9 Lipski <http://www.hebrewsongs.com/?song=bo>

10 This interpretation may be substantiated by the meaning of Lior's name: “I have a light”. He was the gleam of hope in Yossi's life and still serves as shelter or hideaway.

11 Lipski <http://www.hebrewsongs.com/?song=bo>

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morbid to those unfamiliar – the survivors list all things the killed soldier, who in this case is called Yonatan, will miss out on in the future: Yonatan [...] won't know what song they played at his grave when he died: Shir Hamaalot, a psalm done Middle Eastern-style. It became his song. Everyone killed has a song played at his funeral, that stays with his friends for ever. For months you listen and never get sick of it."<sup>12</sup>

The double function of the song BO proves once more that Lior's identity included both: He was Yossi's lover and a soldier. Likewise Yossi was Lior's lover and a soldier. Differences occurred only with regard to what each of them considered more important or how they wanted to deal with their relationship. During their relationship Yossi was more strongly defined by his role as a soldier and Lior was above all defined by his feelings for Yossi.

### 2.1.4 WALK ON WATER

Yossi and “Jagger” - just like Yonatan and Erez – looked for a way to deal with the fact that for their comrades and families homosexuality does not correspond to the image of a masculine soldier. In contrast Eyal – the main character of the drama WALK ON WATER – relates to the traditional image of a masculine soldier. Furthermore, as a secret service agent he has not only internalised this concept of masculinity but brought it to perfection. But his current mission forces him to question the validity of this concept. The director of the film comments: “Israel is a very masculine society and I wanted to tell a story that portrays a man who undergoes a radical change. He faces up the past by dealing with a terrible event and finds out more about his utmost feelings.”<sup>13</sup>

Eyal has to find out about the health condition and whereabouts of the Nazi perpetrator Alfred Himmelman. Therefore he is – disguised as a tourist guide – set on Himmelman's granddaughter Pia, who lives in an Israeli kibbutz, and on her brother Axel, who comes to Israel to see Pia. Eyal scorns the German brother and sister on a professional basis as descendants of the absolute evil, but he also scorns them on a personal basis. They are the descendants of the man who – during World War II – killed almost all the Jews from a certain region in Germany. Only a few survived. Among the survivors are Eyal's present superior Menachem and his mother. Now Eyal has to gain Axel's and Pia's trust. This poses a huge challenge on a man who has up to now avoided to touch on sore spots of his own life story and also rejected counselling after the suicide of his wife Iris. Eyal's self-concept is based on not showing weakness. He keeps his feelings to himself. So the only action left

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12 Cf. Leshem (2007), p. 2. Ron Leshem's novel and screenplay are the basis for the film BEAUFORT for which Joseph Cedar was awarded the silver bear in the category best director at the International Film Festival Berlin in 2007. [http://www.berlinale.de/de/archiv/jahresarchive/2007/03\\_preistraeger\\_2007/03\\_Preistraeger\\_2007.html](http://www.berlinale.de/de/archiv/jahresarchive/2007/03_preistraeger_2007/03_Preistraeger_2007.html) (27.01.08). The actor who played Yossi in the film YOSSI & JAGGER features in BEAUFORT, too.

13 Arsenal Filmverleih <http://www.arsenalfilm.de/walkonwater/download/WalkonWater-ph.pdf> (08.12.05). This quote is another example that “shows a connection between the crack in the monolithic construction of Israeli identity and an inability to recognize aspects of the masculine self that incooperate weakness and vulnerability”, like Bar-On observes them. Bar-On (2008), S. 56. He speaks of “the hold of masculine heroism on the *sabra* monolithic construction to this day”. Bar-On (2008), S. 57. For more information regarding social psychological aspects cf. chapter 2.1.1 of this analysis.



is rejection: He considers the way of life in a kibbutz outdated and he cannot imagine having children or setting foot on today's Germany. However, the longer he has to deal with Axel and Pia the more his self-concept gets challenged: Suddenly the macho in him gets confronted with Axel's homosexuality. The agent who has to go on a trip to Germany must realise that Berlin has beautiful sights, too, and that Menachem's order to kill Axel's and Pia's grandfather has not been officially approved. Instead Menachem wants Eyal to help him anticipate God. The private citizen Eyal happens to tell Axel – the Nazi's grandson – about the taboo of his childhood: Eyal's parents had prevented their son from keeping in touch with the country of their origin. They banned the German language and German goods as long as Eyal was around.<sup>14</sup> By banning all German influences from their son's life Eyal's parents wanted to protect him from the loss of identity that was forced upon them. They intended to save him from their distress. Furthermore Eyal confides in Axel when he tells him of his wife's recent suicide. He had not told anyone but his superior Menachem about this incident before. In the end the civilian Eyal marries Pia and they raise their child in a kibbutz. Eyal's decision to move to a kibbutz may be directed at the Israeli audience who could otherwise consider Eyal's change of attitude a turning-away from Israel.<sup>15</sup> For Pia living in a kibbutz is a way of dealing with her family's past. Unlike her brother Pia has known for a long time that their grandfather is still alive and that their parents have been helping Alfred Himmelman to hide from judiciary. In order to distance herself from her parents Pia has – even before the beginning of the film plot – made Israel the centre of her life and has refused to have any ties with her parents: She does not call her parents, does not want to cash her father's cheques and refuses to accompany her brother to her father's birthday party in Germany. Axel who has just found out about his family's past still sees the centre of his life in Germany. After having returned to Germany he calls for a change of attitude. When confronted with his parents' unwillingness to think things over Axel balances accounts with his grandfather as well as his parents' inveterate narrow-mindedness. He does so in an even more

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14 Interestingly the (meanwhile former) wife of actor Lior Ashkenazi who starred Eyal, touches upon this taboo in a report for Israeli television at the occasion of the world preview of WALK ON WATER at the International Film Festival Berlin in 2004. While they are having a currywurst – pork [!] – she tells her husband and the film crew, that surrounds them and talks to the woman who sells the sausages in broken English, that she will not say “thank you” in German, because her mother would not want her to. Still she used the German expression “Dankeschön” when she talked to her husband. But the same report also sheds light on a deeply rooted German taboo. While Israeli crew members obviously try to gun each other by telling sarcastic jokes about the Holocaust German crew members seem to feel uneasy while listening to these jokes. This hints at the diametric roles: What seems to make it easier for descendants of victims to deal with the Holocaust brings the descendants of the perpetrators closer to the latter who ridiculed their victims with jokes, too. Inevitably Axel's putting his parents' villa at the Wannsee [!] at the same level as a kibbutz which is meant to be funny must seem inappropriate to Eyal. In my opinion this scene reveals the influence of German actors Knut Berger (Axel) and Caroline Peters (Pia) who according to Fox “spent some time with us [with him and Uchovsky, P.A.] in Israel and cooperated on the script. They made sure that their German roles were as 'precise' as possible.” Arsenal Filmverleih <http://www.arsenalfilm.de/walkonwater/download/WalkonWater-ph.pdf> (08.12.05) However it is not only Germans who deny themselves telling jokes about the Holocaust. Yousef Sweid who is an Arab living in Israel and who features in the films WALK ON WATER and THE BUBBLE thinks that only someone who is part of the Jewish society may afford to clearly criticise it: “It's like the fact that only Jews are allowed to tell Holocaust jokes.” Kuperboim (2006) <http://www.ynetnews.com/Ext/Comp/ArticleLayout/CdaArticlePrintPreview/1,2506,L-3272023,00.html> (14.08.06)

15 With regard to the audience in Israel cf. chapter 2.2.1. In contrast in the film TIME OFF an inhabitant of Tel Aviv uses the word “kibbutznik” in an insulting way to refer to a young man who lives in a backwater near Tel Aviv.

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radical way than Pia. While Axel is losing his naiveté over the course of the film, his optimism has a big impact on Eyal. This conclusion can be backed by Eyal's dream of them walking on the Sea of Galilee. The dream resumes Axel's symbol for inner harmony and peace of mind. It serves as the film's title. During the actual visit to the Sea of Galilee Eyal commented on Axel's idea that with a pure heart one could walk on water by saying: "Hey Jesus, they lied to you, it's impossible to walk on water."

While Alfred Himmelman for Eyal's parents represents the hell of losing family and friends, the fear of death, the need to flee and the struggle to survive, Pia enables Eyal to reintegrate his family's German background that had been cut off in Nazi Germany, because Eyal gains positive experiences here and now. At the same time Israel becomes a true home for Pia at the moment when she starts a family with Eyal. Since Pia saw the centre of her life in Israel even before marrying Eyal it can be assumed that they got married in Israel even if this is not illustrated in the film. Thus Pia has not only assumed Eyal's surname but converted to Judaism, too. That way she manages to integrate the severances in her family's story into her identity. Their encounter, caused by Axel's visit in Israel, enables all three of them to work up the past. This change of attitude may be found in the English tag line of the film, which reads: "Only the past is impossible to change". In spite of the decreasing intensity Eyal keeps to a certain image of enemy: While in the introductory scene of WALK ON WATER he had killed a member of Hamas by order of the secret service he later vents his verbal aggression on the Arab Rafik who lives in Beit Jala. For Axel the helpful waiter is a desirable man. For Eyal Rafik is a symbol of the current Other with whom a meaningful communication is impossible. That is why Rafik – figuratively speaking – serves as punching ball for everything that Eyal has to cope with right now: the suicide note of his first wife Iris, which confronts Eyal with her despair and his sense of guilt, because Iris explained her decision with the fact that Eyal is killing all people around him as well as the growing love for Pia, which confronts him with his parents' story and the taboos related to it. Thus the fact that Axel is having a one night stand with Rafik is too much for Eyal. This can be concluded from his harsh reaction towards Rafik and his uncle as well as from the sally he makes. He is furious about the Germans, who feel sympathy for the poor Arabic shop owners in Jerusalem. The director tries to describe the challenge, that Eyal is trying to avoid, by saying:

"I'm convinced that Israelis are so obsessed with the Holocaust and their victim status that they have become blind in regard to the fact that they themselves have become aggressors by inflicting pain and distress on Palestinians. I think if Israelis start to reconcile with their past they will make the first step towards getting aware of how cruel they have become."<sup>16</sup>

Consistently in the drama THE BUBBLE, Fox and Uchovsky turn their attention to the consequences of the Middle-East conflict for an Israeli-Palestinian couple.

### 2.1.5 THE BUBBLE

The Israeli Noam and the Palestinian Ashraf, the main characters of the film *THE BUBBLE* meet for the first time at a turbulent control at the checkpoint where Noam serves his reserve duty. What brings them together is Noam's identification card, which he lost without noticing it. Having found Noam's identification card enables Ashraf to find out where the young soldier, whose eye Ashraf caught several times, lives and call on him in Tel Aviv. Like in the short film *TIME OFF*, shot 16 years earlier, the identification card becomes a part of or a symbol for a secret and has a deep impact on the relationship between the owner of the identification card and the person returning it. Instead of a singular encounter during which Noam and Ashraf try to save a baby's life they have a chance to meet again. This second encounter can thus become the beginning of their time shared.<sup>17</sup> In this respect Noam's identification card serves as a ticket to a world no longer accessible to Ashraf.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, the identification card – shortened ID – identifies Noam as Israeli, who is able and allowed to move around in Tel Aviv without restrictions, while Ashraf, without the necessary residence permit, remains an outsider (if not an outlaw) in Tel Aviv. Instead of sexual attraction or love between two soldiers of the Israeli army – Yonatan and Erez or Yossi and “Jagger” – or sexual attraction or love between a German and an Arab or between a German woman and an Israeli – Axel and Rafik or Pia and Eyal – the latest film portrays a meaningful relationship between a Jewish guy and a Palestinian guy. Without permission to stay in Israel Ashraf is forced to pretend to be Jewish when moving around in the public of Tel Aviv. That is why Ashraf's identity is going to be even more split than the identity of the Israeli commanders Erez and Yossi or the Israeli army officer Lior Amichai. In order to be able to be with the one to whom Ashraf is attracted first sexually and then emotionally, he needs to wear Noam's clothes and take on the Hebrew name “Shimi”, when in public. In contrast to the introductory scene of *THE BUBBLE*, in which Ashraf raises the suspicion of all people around and is caught in the “crossfire” because of speaking Hebrew, it turns out to be very useful for “Shimi's” identity that Ashraf speaks Hebrew without

17 Cf. also the interview in the English press kit of *THE BUBBLE*. Pro Fun Filmverleih: *THE BUBBLE*. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino-filmverleih.html> (26.07.07)

18 As inhabitants of Jerusalem Ashraf's family had Israeli citizenship. But his father abandoned that right for the whole family in order to protest the demolition of their house which Ashraf's father had built without having been granted a building permit. So they moved to Nablus. Cf. the conversation between Ashraf and Noam after their visit to the theatre. At this point Ashraf's situation differs from Rafik's. The character from *WALK ON WATER* seems to be able to move around more freely than Ashraf. The former might be an Arab with Israeli citizenship, an “Israeli Arab”. This assumption can be backed by the fact that Rafik's uncle owns a shop in Jerusalem, just as Ashraf's family once did. But it is not absolutely certain because Axel asks Eyal to take Rafik to Beit Jala. Cf. the scene in which Eyal picks Axel, Pia and – reluctantly – Rafik up and drives to Jerusalem. Regarding the town Beit Jala cf. Bar-On (2008), p 122. With regard to the term “Israeli Arab” Uchovsky explains: “Palestinians who live in Israel [are] the people we used to call 'Israeli Arabs'.” Pro Fun Filmverleih: *THE BUBBLE*. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino-filmverleih.html> (26.07.07) . The actor Sweid who plays both Rafik and Ashraf belongs to this group himself. As described in the documentary that is part of the Israeli DVD of *THE BUBBLE* Sweid is from Haifa. In an interview for the French-German TV channel Arte on the occasion of the International Film Festival Berlin in 2007 Sweid calls himself an “Arab living in Israel”. Arte <http://www.arte.tv/de/film/Berlinale-2007/Interviews--Trailer---/1464122.html> (10.08.07). If in the following text this interview, the Arte interview that Fox gave on the occasion of the International Film Festival or an Euronews report dating from 04.07.2007 is quoted these quotes are based on notes I took myself.

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accent because of his childhood in Jerusalem. Like Lior in *YOSSI & JAGGER* Ashraf has two different names for different areas of life. But unlike Lior who is convinced that after having served his time he will be able to leave the identity behind that is linked to the name “Jagger”, there is no conceivable time limit for the Palestinian Ashraf. The latter nevertheless decides to hide in Noam's flat-sharing community and to work as waiter in Noam's favourite pub, the famous “Orna veElla”. From that moment on Ashraf is living in constant discord: In Tel Aviv, where his boyfriend lives, he cannot be an Arab and in Nablus, where his family lives, he cannot be openly gay. One evening at a concert, when Noam's clique gets confronted with aggressive points of view Noam avers that he and “Shimi” hate Arabs. Conversely Ashraf's sister Rana could imagine her brother being married to a divorced Christian or even a French woman of Jewish faith, but she reacts with blatant hostility when Ashraf tells her that he loves Noam, an Israeli from Tel Aviv. From Ashraf's point of view the main question is: To what extent am I capable of abandoning my identity in order to be with my boyfriend and his friends?<sup>19</sup> Is it possible to change sides out of love? Despite all obstacles Ashraf manages to alternate between Nablus and Tel Aviv several times during the film. Furthermore the double role Ashraf/ Shimi in Israel and the facade of a straight person at home call for a constant emotional change of sides. The resulting burden becomes evident in an antagonism: On the one hand there is loving Ashraf, who strives for reconciliation and understanding, and on the other hand there is Ashraf who is acting radically out of despair. Actor Youssef Sweid, who is starring Ashraf, explains:

“In his mind's eye Ashraf sees the checkpoints where – like in the introductory scene – sometimes babies die. Like every Palestinian he breathes occupation. At the end of the film Israeli soldiers kill his sister by mistake, but what makes him a suicide bomber is the conclusion that he can live his sexual identity only in Tel Aviv, not in Nablus. When he talks to his sister about this he can see her deep disappointment and he loves her more than anyone in the world. Therefore he feels guilty for falling in love with the enemy. For him the man, whom he sleeps with, is jointly responsible for his sister's death.”<sup>20</sup>

Ashraf is torn apart. In the same way he previously strived for reconciliation and understanding not only in regard to Noam, Ashraf now has more than one reason for becoming a suicide bomber.<sup>21</sup> Likewise Noam is not only capable of loving Ashraf, he can also forgive him for taking their lives.<sup>22</sup> Therefore the lost identification card – lost ID – which initiated the relationship with Ashraf could also be associated with “lost identity”. Did Noam lose his head out of love? Is he denying his identity, because he has started a relationship with Ashraf? From the point of view of Noam's flat mate Yali the answer is “yes”. Yali is more than doubtful about Ashraf's honesty. This becomes

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19 For Sweid Noam's friends are also Ashraf's friends even though Noam's flatmate Yali likes to tease Ashraf. Arte <http://www.arte.tv/de/film/Berlinale-2007/Interviews--Trailer---/1464122.html> (10.08.07)

20 Avidan <http://www.dradio.de/dkulturr/sendungen/fazit/594373/> (01.03.07). What Sweid describes resembles the phase that Bar-On calls neo-monolithic. Cf. Bar-On (2008). Regarding Bar-On's concept cf. Chapter 2.2.1 of this analysis, regarding Sweid's statement cf. also to his interviews for Arte and Euronews. <http://www.arte.tv/de/film/Berlinale-2007/Interviews--Trailer---/1464122.html> (10.08.07) and Euronews <http://www.euronews.net/index.php?lng=1&page=cinema> (09.07.07).

21 At this point Ashraf's attempt to reveal his sexual orientation to his beloved sister – mentioned in previous quote – is significant.

22 This interpretation is preferred by both Fox and Sweid. Cf. Arte <http://www.arte.tv/de/film/Berlinale-2007/Interviews--Trailer---/1464122.html> (10.08.07)

evident when Noam and Yali are having a night-time conversation about Ashraf's and Noam's visit to a theatre. But Yali's reasoning is loaded with jealousy, too. The play that causes Yali's and Noam's quarrel is Ashraf's first Hebrew play. In addition to this it deals with the trauma of Holocaust, which has a big impact on Jewish identity. The scene shown in the film *THE BUBBLE* discusses persecution, which is familiar to Ashraf, too. Moreover the play's scene shown offers unexpected potential for identification for Ashraf: Both prisoners of the concentration camp – one stigmatised by a yellow star as a Jew, the other by pink triangle as a homosexual – succeed in maintaining their sexual identity even in the inhumane and hostile environment of the concentration camp. Thus they manage to affirm live while the Nazis seek for their lives.<sup>23</sup> If this is possible could there possibly also be a different reaction than a death threat, if Ashraf decided to reveal his homosexuality to his family in Nablus? Is there a chance for him here and now to live with Noam in Tel Aviv?<sup>24</sup> The sign for “I love you” that originated in the concentration camp is also tremendously up to date for Ashraf, so he transfers it to the present. But instead of using it with like-minded people in Nablus Ashraf keeps using the code, which was invented by homosexual prisoners in concentration camps, in Israel, because he loves an Israeli man. The sign represents what Ashraf wants to say from the bottom of his heart, but cannot utter. On both occasions in which he makes use of the sign it is above all directed to the viewer.<sup>25</sup>

For Christa Tilmann it is surprising how openly they – the Israeli and the Palestinian – talk about the Holocaust and persecution after having been to Martin Sherman's classic *BENT*.<sup>26</sup> Boundaries between the two different points of view are moreover resolved by the editing. It does without shot-reverse-shot. The observant viewer will notice that Noam and Ashraf do not only interact with each other through words but also by body talk. In a relatively long scene Noam and Ashraf walk side by side and still keep some distance. Ashraf calls Noam's attention to the fact that regarding his sexual identity Noam as an inhabitant of Tel Aviv has privileges that Ashraf – the Palestinian from the occupied territories – cannot ask for neither at home nor in Israel. While Ashraf is keeping his distance because he is not used to guys showing their affection to each other in public, it dawns on Noam that his lover lives in a completely different world. But the main reason for keeping some distance is the play, they have just been to: For one of them – Noam – it represents an identity-generating past and an important part of collective identity.<sup>27</sup> For Ashraf it means being confronted with the affliction of the Jewish people, and yet offers surprisingly up-to-date reference to his own present life. When Noam and Ashraf finally sit down on a bench and Noam tells Ashraf about his childhood their facial expressions, gestures and postures indicate respectful distance. They turn to,

23 A conversation between Uchovsky and Caroline Peters, who plays Pia in *WALK ON WATER*, is an impressive evidence that the scene, in which the gay concentration camp prisoners Max and Horst live out their sexuality, deliberately becomes an important part of the film *THE BUBBLE*, shot two years later. With regard to Uchovsky's conversation with C. Peters cf. bonus material of the *WALK ON WATER*-DVD.

24 Someone who is familiar with Martin Sherman's play will know that there will be only a few moments of happiness. Cf. Sherman (2001).

25 One time Ashraf turns in Noam's direction. Noam – if at all – can see the sign only for a split second. On the other occasion Noam cannot see it at all.

26 Tilmann (2007) <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/:art772,2018281> (14.08.07)

27 Regarding the varied consequences of the Holocaust for Jewish-Israeli identity cf. Bar-On (2001) and Bar-On (2008).

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but refrain from touching each other. Later on in the party scene of the film, when Noam tells Ashraf the story of his mother, their interpersonal dialogue has become profound enough to enable Ashraf to put his arm around Noam.<sup>28</sup> This meaningful communication has started the morning after their alleged one-night-stand: In the beginning of that scene they stick to their points of view – for Ashraf the Israeli checkpoints are a symbol of harassment which caused the death of a family member; and for Noam the checkpoints mean protection – but little by little they start to talk about the wounds inflicted on them by the Middle-East conflict. At that point Fox shows Noam and Ashraf standing on the roof of Noam's flat-sharing community. At first Noam stands in the front and Ashraf can only be seen in the background. In the course of their conversation Ashraf gets closer and closer to Noam until they look at the silhouette of Tel Aviv. From now on they are on a par with each other.

If the steps from common accusations to a serious attempt of a meaningful communication that acknowledges the sore spots and differences, are connoted through editing as different stages of communication between Noam and Ashraf, then the title song of the film *THE BUBBLE – SONG TO THE SIREN* – marks the most emotional moment between the main characters. The scene begins with Noam playing the guitar and blends into Lider's cover version of the 1968 classic by Tim Buckley.<sup>29</sup> Ashraf's question about the name of Noam's mother and the tenderness with which Noam wipes off Ashraf's tears show that at this very moment they are physically closer than ever and furthermore despite all obstacles emotionally connected. This is the moment of greatest understanding and accordance.<sup>30</sup> Noam and Ashraf will never again be this close. They know that their love will not withstand reality. They feel attracted to each other like the sailor to the siren that is sung about in the song *SONG TO THE SIREN* and cannot part from each other.<sup>31</sup> Like the films *TIME OFF* and *YOSSI & JAGGER* the drama *THE BUBBLE* finishes with the song which is the most important one for the main characters. But since the character of Noam talks until the final fade-out the song *SONG TO THE SIREN* cannot be heard until the credits. In addition to this the cover of the song *THE MAN I LOVE* is highlighted by a guest appearance of Lider. While the title song *BO* in the drama *YOSSI & JAGGER* had the function of being a key to the main characters'

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28 In this scene Noam tells Ashraf how his mother tried in vain to keep a children's playground in Jerusalem open for Arab children as well. He also reveals to Ashraf that he thinks that the illness from which his mother died resulted from this unsuccessful attempt to reconcile. Referring to the scene on the playground Fox states: "The story with the playground really happened. Only that the 'bad guy' was not my father but the chairman of residents. One day he announced that from that day on Arab children were no longer allowed to enter the playground in the Jewish neighbourhood because they had been beating Jewish children. With the support of the city administration he consequently put up warning signs in the Palestinian village. My mother protested against this because usually the children liked to play together. Therefore she threw a reconciliation party, baked cakes and sent invitations. But the only people who came were me, my mother and her best friend with her son. No one else came and the children stopped playing together. Avidan <http://www.dradio.de/dkultur/sendungen/fazit/594373/> (01.03.07).

29 Playing the guitar marks tender and intimate moments between the main characters in the film *YOSSI & JAGGER*. In the film *TIME OFF* it symbolises the wish for a personal area which is isolated from the outside world.

30 This is also evident in the fact that Noam chooses his mother's favourite song for this moment. She was in his opinion shattered by the Middle-East conflict. Cf. the conversation in the party scene. If you follow Noam's explanation for the death of his mother there is a parallel between her fate and Ashraf's fate. However, unlike Noam's mother Ashraf takes the decision to die.

31 Cf. The Tim Buckley Archives <http://www.timbuckley.net/lyrics/starlyr.htm#song%20to%20the%20siren> (22.09.07).

souls and furthermore serves as a message from a male to another male person, here the two cover songs by Ivri Lider resume this function. By being incorporated into the plot of the film *THE BUBBLE* like Sherman's play *BENT*, the classic *THE MAN I LOVE*, which was written by the Gerschwain brothers – sons of Jewish-Russian immigrants – in 1924 for the Broadway musical *LADY BE GOOD*, bears high contemporary relevance. For Noam and Ashraf Lider's performance of the song at a concert becomes a symbol of their hope to be able to live one day the way they want: with the man they love, regardless of his name, cultural background or passport. Leaving out the first verse of the original song is another hint that they most likely will not be able to live together.<sup>32</sup>

### 2.1.6 Interim Conclusion

All the attempts of communication portrayed in the films *TIME OFF* (1990), *SONG OF THE SIREN* (1994), *YOSSI & JAGGER* (2002), *WALK ON WATER* (2004) and *THE BUBBLE* (2006) aim at finding one's identity. Taking all films into account, it can be said that identity needs to be continuously defined within a milieu as well as in different environments. This is a dynamic process. The characters Erez and Yonatan are separated by their ranks, what unites them is their sexual orientation. Their homosexuality however separates them from most of their comrades, who – as shown in the film *YOSSI & JAGGER* and indicated by the conversation during the concert in the film *THE BUBBLE* – often have little understanding, because their idea of homosexuality is incompatible to the prevailing image of a masculine soldier.<sup>33</sup> In the film *WALK ON WATER* Eyal and Pia as well as Eyal and Axel are separated by the diametric experience of the elder generations during the Holocaust. What unifies them is the fact that this part of history calls for a frank discussion between all three of them. That way the love between Eyal and Pia and the friendship between Eyal and Axel can stand a chance. The main characters of *THE BUBBLE* are united by their sexual orientation and separated by different historical experiences as well as different cultural or religious backgrounds as Jew and Arab. But first and foremost they are separated by the current political situation. A relationship between an Jewish-Israeli guy and an Arab guy from the occupied territories – as portrayed in the film *THE BUBBLE* – most likely marks the most significant contrast there is in the Middle East. However, a small scene in *YOSSI & JAGGER* shows that no

32 It reads „When the mellow moon begins to beam, / Ev'ry night I dream a little dream; / And of course Prince Charming is the theme: / The he/ For me./ Although I realize as well as **you** [emphasis added, P.A.] / It is seldom that a dream comes true, / To me it's clear/ That he'll appear.” ST Lyrics <http://www.stlyrics.com/lyrics/newyorknewyork/themanilove.htm> (18.08.07). References to reality outside Tel Aviv's bubble include inter alia the lyrics of many other songs used in the film – e.g. the one used when Noam and Lulu drive to Nablus –, the flatmates' discussion about the origin of the name Shimi in which they debate whether Shemi comes from Shimon or Samson. Yali states: “Let my soul die with the Philistines.' History's first suicide bomber.” Other references are the joke about homosexual suicide bombers, the night-time talk between Noam and Yali, the TV news and the direct reference to François Truffaut's drama *JULES & JIM* (1962).

33 At this point the campfire scene with Eyal and Axel in *WALK ON WATER* is significant. On the one hand Eyal insists on closing ranks with Axel to warm each other, just as Eyal has learned it in the army. On the other hand he surely would not proudly insist on doing so had he already known about Axel's homosexuality.

politically difficult situation is needed to turn faith into a dividing characteristic: Jagger's comrades treat a buddhist member of their army unit in a nasty and sneering way.<sup>34</sup> Despite its humorous element, in the film *THE BUBBLE* the conversation between Noam's flat mate Lulu and her “combatant” for a “Rave Against Occupation” Shaul, in which Shaul proposes to her, reveals that even young Israelis in Tel Aviv have different opinions about religion, which they have to debate. The film *WALK ON WATER* portrays opposing opinions on the Israeli secret service. There are Eyal's colleagues who celebrate him after he has returned from a mission and there is Eyal's wife, who is at the same time committing suicide. For her it has become unbearable that her husband is killing people, regardless of the reason he might have. There is the Hamas activist and there is the activist's son, whose sad eyes haunt Eyal and become a reason why in the end he cannot kill anymore. Finally with Eyal in *WALK ON WATER* and Ashraf's brother-in-law – Jihad – two different types of hunters are portrayed: The former uses the logistics of his service, the latter provides logistics to people who want to turn themselves into a living bomb. Only one of them is portrayed as being capable of changing himself.

## **2.2 Communication between the Filmmakers and the Audience**

### **2.2.1 Audience in Israel**

In order to illustrate the challenges Fox's films pose to the domestic audience an excursus to the conception of the Other in Jewish-Israeli society from the psychological point of view needs to be done. Bar-On and Maoz consider the construction and transformation of identity a life-long process.<sup>35</sup> With regard to a timeline specific analysis of the collective Israeli identity the two social psychologists distinguish three phases: 1. monolithic identity construction, 2. disintegration of the monolithic construction, 3. perception of disintegrating aspects of identity and a beginning dialogue.<sup>36</sup> In 2008 Bar-On distinguishes four phases: 1. monolithic identity construction (past), 2. disintegration of the monolithic construction (present I), 3. neo-monolithic construction (present II), 4. dialogue between disintegrated aspects of identity (future).<sup>37</sup> This extension of the conceptional construct can be explained as follows:

“During the neo-monolithic phase the *internal* monolithic construction continues to disintegrate. This combination of disintegration and neo-monolithic construction leads to a painful disorientation. The disharmonious bits and pieces of the collective try to gain ascendancy over one another. The impulse is to replace the old hegemony with new ones, not through dialogue but through power struggle. The individual is

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34 In the context of Israeli-German relation the statement Eyal made at the Sea of Galilee – “Hey Jesus they lied to you. It's impossible to walk on water.” – is a teasing based on history. Its explosiveness is to be allocated between the two statements mentioned above.

35 Bar-On/ Maoz (2001), p. 19 and Bar-On (2008), p. 1

36 Bar-On/ Maoz (2001), p. 19

37 Bar-On (2008)



caught in a whirlwind as the dynamic of disintegration pulls in one direction, while the neo-monolithic dynamic pulls away. Thus, this phase is characterized by confusion and despair. Lost in various power struggles, people struggle to define themselves as part of the collective.”<sup>38</sup>

This becomes especially obvious when the original idea of the nature of this process is taken into account:

“The monolithic Zionists had an idealized scenario for how collective Israeli-Jewish identity would develop: When no external threat remained, the monolithic construction of identity would disintegrate as part of its own maturation process, as a snake sheds its skin. Then a new identity construction would be established with new physical, social and psychological meanings. This change would enable the gradual relinquishing of the repressive process that involved rejecting aspects of the self, projecting them onto the Other.”<sup>39</sup>

Upon examination of the validity of this idea, Bar-On concludes:

“However, optimal processes such as this are unusual. Outside of fairy tales the disintegration begins before existential and psychological security is established. Thus the dissonance that can develop between a reliable representation of reality (the collective self's multicultural voices) and the monolithic, traditional representation with further dissonance about the 'right' timing for the process.”<sup>40</sup>

The monolithic phase “was supposed to break with the traditional Jewish identities and point out the differences to the emerging collective Israeli 'self'.”<sup>41</sup> To that extent it turned against the inner Jewish Other, on the one hand the Diaspora Jew and on the other hand “the ethnic Jewish Other who emigrated from Afro-Asian (usually from Arab countries) to reach Israel”<sup>42</sup>. “On the other hand collective Israeli identity had also been mobilised against the threat of the external Other”.<sup>43</sup> According to Bar-On and Maoz both the German Nazi who stood for the annihilation of Jews in Europe during World War II and the Arab who opposed the establishment of the Jewish State in the Middle East were perceived as an existential threat to the individual and the collective self.<sup>44</sup> The remaining relics of the monolithic phase reveal

“all inner contradictions that may have existed in Israeli identity from the very beginning. [...] Meanwhile we have identified an 'Other' in some aspects of our self which are no less threatening than the external 'Other'. Israeli identity, seemingly 'better' than former Jewish identities because it established a monolithic 'Other', did not seem so different anymore.”<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore

“the disintegration of the monolithic concept of the 'Other' threatens the monolithic concept of the 'self' and accordingly causes defence mechanisms, confusion and even existential fear. Who am I if I do not have an 'enemy' or the 'Other' who clearly differs from me and by whom I can define myself as 'absolute good?’”<sup>46</sup>

For Maoz the fact that people escape to a new monolithic construction of the self is based on wishful thinking: “Even if processes of disintegration are acknowledged, the illusion prevails that

38 Bar-On (2008), p. 11

39 Bar-On (2008), p. 55

40 Bar-On (2008), p. 55

41 Bar-On/ Maoz (2001), p. 20

42 Bar-On (2008), p. 51. In 2001 Bar-On and Maoz did not yet mention the the “ethnic Jewish Other”. Cf. (2001), p. 20.

43 Bar-On/ Maoz (2001), p. 20

44 Bar-On/ Maoz (2001), p. 20

45 Bar-On/ Maoz (2001), p. 20

46 Bar-On/ Maoz (2001), p. 20

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another monolithic image of the 'Other' and the 'self' would replace the one that vanished as soon as the fight over identity is over."<sup>47</sup> In contrast Bar-On is convinced that a dialogue started during the disintegration of the monolithic phase and may lead to post-Zionist multiculturalism as well as to a new monolithic phase.<sup>48</sup> The latter happens prior to a future dialogue.<sup>49</sup> But Bar-On and Maoz both agree on the complexity of a world view beyond a clearly differentiated and a clearly defined Other and self – “total evil” versus the “absolute good”<sup>50</sup> – which confronts people with

“conflicting aspects of identity [...] (both in the 'Other' and in the collective 'self') which cannot easily be reconciled in the present or in reflection of the past. But instead of continuing to squeeze one into the other by ignoring the contradictions between these aspects of identity, it is also possible to acknowledge their existence and develop a dialogue between them.”<sup>51</sup>

In an obituary for Bar-On the writer and publicist Alexandra Senfft calls this process “soliloquy with different fragments of one's identity”<sup>52</sup>. It has to precede the dialogue with the external Other.<sup>53</sup> In the social psychological concept of 2001 this process represents the third phase, in 2008 it represents the fourth phase of Israeli identity. In both cases it marks a future phase thereof. Due to the integration of inner contradictions this world view is perceived as “weaker” or “softer”.<sup>54</sup>

Accordingly “in a social system that values strength and rigid definition”<sup>55</sup> people who are able to integrate conflicts and contradictions into their identity are considered weak: “Their ability to contain conflict is perceived as 'feminine quality' – as disadvantage in dealing with 'absolute evil' when the adversary decides to return to the ring.”<sup>56</sup> Their ability to “maintain a dialogue which enables a new definition of identity in the light of internal and external changes” is condemned.<sup>57</sup> That is why the dialogue

“is a process that may be seen as unstructured and even chaotic, and the outcomes are neither predictable nor guaranteed. Therefore, there will always be a tension between the option of developing dialogue with all its complexity, and a kind of atrophy and atavistic desire to re-embrace a simpler and seemingly 'tougher' worldview”.<sup>58</sup>

Bar-On and Maoz describe where this leads to:

“Isolation and obligation to the image of an unambiguous 'Other', above all in the form of religious-nationalist fundamentalism, are characteristic of this progressive phenomenon. This fundamentalism is known to western civilisation and is especially striking in Israel and some Islamic countries of the Middle East, especially in those that had close relations to western civilisation. In the course of this isolation usually a more defined definition of the 'Other' is given compared to the previous monolithic definition. Now Israelis are at least in the eyes of some extreme Islamic movements the 'total evil', not only as conquerers but as Jews. Accordingly for

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47 Bar-On/ Maoz (2001), p. 21

48 Cf. Bar-On: Resümee (2001), p. 199

49 Cf. Bar-On (2008)

50 Bar-On/ Maoz (2001), p. 22 and Bar-On (2008), p. 9

51 Bar-On/ Maoz (2001), p. 21

52 Senfft (2008), p. 13

53 Senfft (2008), p. 13

54 Bar-On (2008), p. 133

55 Bar-On (2008), p. 133

56 Bar-On/ Maoz (2001), p. 142 and Bar-On (2008), p. 133

57 Bar-On: Schritte... (2001), p. 142

58 Bar-On (2008), p. 11. Cf. Bar-On (2008), p. 102.

members of (the extremely right wing and religious) the Kach party the Palestinians are the 'total evil' not due to some specific action, but because of being Palestinians.”<sup>59</sup>

Bar-On and Maoz call this reaction “monolithic aggression”<sup>60</sup>. Paradoxically, it contributes “to the disintegration of the older, less extreme monolithic phase”<sup>61</sup>. But at the same time “it represents an even more extreme alternative which addresses especially those who are afraid and cannot endure ambiguity in the disintegration of the collective identity”<sup>62</sup>. “But the disintegration of the monolithic phase is not only influenced by national political issues. Topics such as gender or sexual identity other than heterosexual are some other examples that have caused changes in collective identities, above all in western civilisation.”<sup>63</sup>

While Bar-On and Maoz argue from a social psychological point of view, the filmmakers Fox and Uchovsky debate the interpersonal emotional process accompanying the inclusion of the Other into individual and collective identities through artistic means. The short film *TIME OFF* discusses the fact that there are gays in the Israeli army. This fact poses a huge challenge on monolithically structured aspects of (Israeli) identity since homosexuality is not compatible to the image of a masculine soldier. Yet the role model which is based on monolithic constructions has already been questioned by Talila Katz, the main character of the comedy *SONG OF THE SIREN*. Forced to choose between the pursuit of happiness or social conventions, between marriage or love, this young woman finally regains trust in her independent and strong-minded personality. She stands up for this decision. Contrary, Lior in the drama *YOSSI & JAGGER* decides to keep his sexual orientation secret for now in order to protect his relationship with Yossi. Being in a relationship already – and therefore having gone a step ahead of the main characters of *TIME OFF* – Lior nevertheless calls for change: He asks Yossi for proof of love and he would like to persuade his comrades to reconsider their homophobic points of view. His long term idea of a relationship with Yossi – being openly gay in a private environment including the parents and living a life without the army – aim at challenging monolithic constructions. In contrast Yossi's way of coping with incompatible components of identity aim at maintaining the monolithic phase: “It is characteristic of this phase to suppress the contradictions in identity, usually by blocking those voices that are perceived as 'weaker' or 'troublesome', regardless of whether they are aiming at the collective or the individual.”<sup>64</sup> Referring to Bar-On it can be said that Yossi cannot afford to be characterised as “weak” or even “feminine”, especially while on a mission. The surrounding framework “military”, of which he as a commander is an important part, is not capable of absorbing a “setting that will moderate the complexity of [a dialogue between contradictory parts of one's own identity, P.A.] and support awareness and differing components of a disintegrating monolithic identity.”<sup>65</sup> Keeping this in mind neither Yossi's harsh rejection at the briefing with Lior nor Yossi's demeanour while expressing his condolences to Lior's parents is surprising. But at the moment of Lior's death Yossi

59 Bar-On/ Maoz (2001), p. 23

60 Bar-On/ Maoz (2001), p. 24

61 Bar-On/ Maoz (2001), p. 24

62 Bar-On/ Maoz (2001), p. 24. In 2008 this alternative represents the neo-monolithic construction. Bar-On (2008)

63 Bar-On/ Maoz (2001), p. 22

64 Bar-On: *Die Gegenwart...* (2001), p. 74

65 Bar-On: *Schritte...* (2001), p. 142

had taken a diametrically opposed strategy in spite of another soldier's presence. Yossi's vehement commitment to Lior – and thereby to his own sexual orientation – hints at the antagonisms hidden behind the monolithic facade of Yossi's identity. In this very moment Yossi clearly exceeds what Lior had asked for. Through the main characters of the film *YOSSI & JAGGER* diametric strategies of handling monolithic constructions in regard to homosexuality and being a soldier are discussed. With his cover the musician Lider turned Rita's song *BO* into a key for Yossi's and Lior's relationship as well as a proof of love from one male to another male person. Consequently Lider decided to take this opportunity to be openly gay.<sup>66</sup>

The main character of the thriller *WALK ON WATER* refrains from the monolithic idea of the “absolute evil” with regard to the German Nazi and his descendants. Even though he has a chance to Eyal does not kill the old man, who as a Nazi commander was once responsible for the killing of relatives and friends of Eyal's parents. At the same time the job-related contact to Axel and Pia which was enforced by Menachem leads to friendship and love. For Eyal this means abandoning his resistance against the inner-Jewish Other of the monolithic phase. While his parents tried to strengthen his Jewish-Israeli identity by protecting him from the loss they had suffered during World War II and the Holocaust, Eyal by facing up to the taboos from the past and by building trust through communication with Axel and Pia tries to come to terms with his German background. Thus Eyal manages to reintegrate his German background into his personality instead of holding that part of his identity off intuitively.<sup>67</sup> The following remark by Bar-On illustrates how much energy is needed for the latter: “The psychological price for it [for de-identification] is very high compared to the process of disintegration which is capable of alternating between the old and the new, until the decision in favour of the new is consolidated on a deeper level.”<sup>68</sup> Considering this, the fact that Eyal finds his new home in a kibbutz, is less puzzling than it seems to be at first glance. Due to his relationships with Pia and Axel two important aspects that form Eyal's “strong” viz. highly monolithically connoted identity have vanished. Referring to Bar-On and Maoz it can be argued that by committing himself to the lifestyle of kibbutzim Eyal avoids to react with monolithic aggression to the radical changes he had undergone. By adding a positive aspect to these monolithic aspects of his identity Eyal reassures himself of his Jewish-Israeli biography. Thus he may succeed in accepting the recent past although having a family with Pia differs a lot from Eyal's previous life. In the course of the film Eyal makes a deliberate decision to live with Pia and thus takes up a position that he would previously have rejected as “weak” and “feminine”. Conversely Eyal's rejection of the second form of the “external gentile Other”<sup>69</sup> persists. He refuses to enter any form of dialogue with Rafik, the Arab from Beit Jala. Eyal's behaviour corresponds to Bar-On's conclusion:

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66 IvriLider.com: Bio. <http://www.ivrilider.com/english/> (01.08.07)

67 Entering a dialogue with Eyal also means that his German vis-à-vis starts to remove taboos and work up the past, one of the most important steps of reconciliation works as intended by Bar-On's concept of storytelling [= biografisches Erzählen]. Cf. Herzig (2005) <http://www.hagalil.com/archiv/2005/04/bar-on.htm> (15.12.09).

68 Bar-On: *Die Vergangenheit...* (2001), p. 29

69 Bar-On (2008), p. 9

“Even when the monolithic construction with regard to the inner “Other” [...] cracks open and disintegrates, there remains a powerful tendency to preserve parts of the monolithic construction with regard to the external 'Other' [in large parts of Israeli society], especially if this 'Other' is perceived as a threat to physical and psychological existence.”<sup>70</sup>

The film WALK ON WATER takes up this thought: It confronts the Jewish-Israeli audience with a successful process of reconciliation between a descendant of a Holocaust survivor and a descendant of the “absolute evil” of the past. When it comes to the main character of the film the foundations for starting a process of reconciliation with a representative of the “alien Other facing us today”<sup>71</sup> who, according to the monolithic concept, is perceived as an existential threat that is equal to the threat posed by the German Nazi, have not (yet) been laid<sup>72</sup>. Noam, the Israeli main character of the drama THE BUBBLE has to deal with this process. The same applies to his Palestinian vis-à-vis Ashraf. With their decision to get involved with each other, both challenge fundamental components of their diametrically structured identity. What begins as (sexual) affair, gradually turns into storytelling in conflict [= biographisches Erzählen]: “This approach developed by Bar-On enables people to discover common grounds, even with the enemy, because individual experiences of life are often similar, regardless of historical, political or ethnic boundaries.”<sup>73</sup> By entering a dialogue Noam and Ashraf – like Eyal and the German siblings Axel and Pia – learn to trust each other. They both touch on taboos as they face up to incisive experiences to the Middle-East conflict. At this point the film THE BUBBLE focuses even more on the actual **process** of conversation between the characters than WALK ON WATER.<sup>74</sup> In accordance with Bar-On's concept unsolicited honesty is a keystone of Noam's and Ashraf's reconciliation work.<sup>75</sup> Simply due to differing cultural, religious and historical conditions their dialogue has a different drive than the dialogue between Eyal and Himmelman's grandchildren.<sup>76</sup> Accordingly Noam and Ashraf are confronted with limits: Since Ashraf as Palestinian lacks the permission to legally stay in Israel, he – in spite of his willingness to adjust to Tel Aviv and to his boyfriend's lifestyle – has to wear borrowed clothes and pretend to belong to a cultural/ religious tradition that is not his. That's why he cannot reveal in public that Hebrew is not his mother tongue. Following Bar-On's argumentation Noam's flatmates – strictly speaking – are lacking an important pre-condition of meaningful dialogue with Ashraf, despite their willingness to tolerate Ashraf as Noam's boyfriend and member of their flat-sharing community. They want to keep out of politics. Therefore the dialogue remains

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70 Bar-On: Die Gegenwart... (2001), p. 78

71 Bar-On (2008), p. 59

72 Bar-On gives a psychological explanation: “It is more difficult to give up the monolithic construction when there are still indications of internal and external threat that ostensibly justify its continuation.” Bar-On (2008), p. 133

73 Senfft (2008), S. 13

74 The epilogue of WALK ON WATER hints at a process of reconciliation that has lasted several years. It has started with Axel's visit to Israel. So far the film had focused on conversations between Eyal and Axel.

75 Regarding the principles of Bar-On's concept of storytelling [= biografischen Erzählens] Cf. Herzig (2005) <http://www.hagalil.com/archiv/2005/04/bar-on.htm> (15.12.09). In addition to the film-immanent conceptional design (editing) this is another proof of how serious the main characters are about their communication or their attempt to give each other an understanding of their differing reality. This seriousness surprises Tilmann. Cf. her statement in the previous chapter.

76 Regarding the principles of Bar-On's concept of storytelling [= biografischen Erzählens] Cf. Herzig (2005) <http://www.hagalil.com/archiv/2005/04/bar-on.htm> (15.12.09).

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unique to Ashraf and Noam. But Noam's honest effort to understand Ashraf's reality of life in Nablus is also limited, because living conditions in Nablus are beyond Noam's imagination. The fact that Noam wants to kiss Ashraf when they meet at Ashraf's parental home illustrates that Noam seems to be no longer aware that for Ashraf it is even more difficult to live his sexual identity in Nablus than it is outside of Tel Aviv in Israel. Noam is so happy to see Ashraf that the fact that he could only make it to Ashraf's home because he and Lulu disguise themselves as French journalists becomes less important. That way Noam and Lulu mask in front of Ashraf's family, who would surely treat them differently if they knew that they were not French but Israeli. At the same time Lulu and Noam are hiding their identity from their own authorities by using forged press cards since they must obey their government's ruling according to which Israeli citizens are not allowed to travel occupied territories.<sup>77</sup> Actor Sweid who is starring Ashraf points out that although being an Arab himself life in the occupied territories is as unfamiliar to him as it is to the character of Noam. He says he had to base his interpretation of Ashraf's living conditions on descriptions by friends.<sup>78</sup> At a screening of the film at the International Film Festival Berlin in 2007 Fox and Uchovsky said, that the scenes set in Nablus are shot in a village in Israel. The pan-shot of the silhouette of Nablus that can be seen in the film was moreover shot by friends in Nablus who are filmmakers. Referring to this Fox says: "In recent years many young Israelis do their army service or their reserve duty (like Noam in THE BUBBLE) at checkpoints on the West Bank. For most Israelis these checkpoints are the only places they will actually encounter Palestinians."<sup>79</sup>

The checkpoint scenes of the film most obviously illustrate the limits and the dependency of the dialogue on external conditions. These are the places where monolithic aggression and backlashes surface. During the control at the checkpoint in the opening scene of THE BUBBLE private Noam acts less aggressively than his comrades. Nevertheless when Ashraf suddenly draws near Noam points his gun at the man who is yet unfamiliar to him. To prevent Ashraf from getting closer Noam volleys. With his hands up in the air Ashraf needs to ask Noam for help in Hebrew in order to persuade Noam to try to help a Palestinian advanced in pregnancy, who due to the fierce situation at the checkpoint suddenly happens to be in labour. When the newborn baby is not breathing, despite the help of a doctor who had been called, Ashraf's future brother-in-law accuses Noam and his comrades that they have killed the baby.

During the whole scene everyone – the Israeli soldiers as well as the Palestinians waiting to enter Israel – eye Ashraf above all. From the social psychological point of view his willingness to speak Hebrew even in the moment of major monolithic aggression characterises him as a profoundly

77 Cf. Heck (2006), S. 99. Lulu and Noam crossing the same checkpoint where Noam had served his reserve duty may be a plot device to increase suspense. But it could also be a means of organisational efficiency while shooting the film because the checkpoint scene needed to be re-enacted. Or maybe it is mere coincidence that Noam was on duty at the checkpoint which needs to be crossed to get to Nablus. The fact that Israelis – unlike citizens of the EU – cannot travel the occupied territories also explains the deeper meaning of a short scene in WALK ON WATER. It is not just Eyal's general aversion to Arabs that causes Eyal's stroopy reaction to Axel's request to visit the occupied territories, too. Eyal is also annoyed with Axel's ignorance that he – the private person Eyal – as an Israeli citizen is not allowed to go there. As a secret service agent he could probably get the permission but would thereby put his disguise as tourist guide at risk.

78 Arte <http://www.arte.tv/de/film/Berlinale-2007/Interviews--Trailer---/1464122.html> (10.08.07)

79 Pro Fun Filmverleih: THE BUBBLE. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino-filmverleih.html> (26.07.07)

integrative character. Consequently both sides which at this point retreat to their diametric monolithic constructions of identity consider him an extremely “weak” person. Therefore everyone doubts that Ashraf’s mediative demeanour is exclusively motivated by his wish to help the young woman and her baby. In a similar checkpoint scene later in the film Ashraf’s sister Rana is being checked. A soldier cuts open a little bag, which according to Rana contains henna for the ornamental painting at her wedding. He orders a female soldier to make sure that Rana’s information is true. Then the soldier orders Rana to put everything back into her suitcase. The female soldier apparently felt abashed when Rana’s dress fell to the floor during the control. Still chances have increased that henna will now rub off on Rana’s white wedding dress. On a different occasion Ashraf tries to explain to soldiers in Hebrew that the people waiting to be checked are going to be guests at his sister’s wedding. He hopes that this will help reduce the routine of examination so that the guests will be in Nablus on time. At the same time he tries to conciliate the guests in Arabic. But the soldiers harshly warn Ashraf not to interfere. Still the checkpoint scenes do not only help disclosing psychological mechanisms. They also reflect the filmmaker’s opinions on checkpoints. Fox says: “These are terrible places where the results of war and occupation are evident.”<sup>80</sup> Uchovsky adds:

“Checkpoints in some way have become the symbol of occupation. On the one hand these are the places where Palestinians are humiliated on a very personal level. These are the places that make their lives most miserable in a very visible way. But the Israeli army insists that they are necessary to stop suicide bombers, etc.”<sup>81</sup>

Within the Israeli society the evaluation of checkpoints differs a lot. Uchovsky distinctly points out the range of evaluations that exists and once again takes a firm stand: “There are the wonderful women of Machshom-Watch (Checkpoint Watch) who go to all the big checkpoints on a daily basis to see that soldiers are kind to the Palestinians and there are all the settlers who come and scream at these women.”<sup>82</sup> In the film Lulu talks about her mother, who seems to be involved with Machshom-Watch. An argument that can be brought forward against Uchovsky’s point of view is already mentioned during a heated debate between young soldiers in Fox’s film TIME OFF. Basically it says that only inhabitants of Tel Aviv can afford having moderate opinions on Arabs since they are not as subjected to attacks as the rest of the country. The current film of Fox and Uchovsky touches on exactly this matter. The ringleader of the recruits who are critical about Tel Aviv would probably agree with Fox when he says:

„People who use the term ‚bubble’ critically are judgemental of the lifestyle and choices made by many Tel Avivians. It’s true that many people in Tel Aviv have consciously disconnected themselves from regional realities they feel are unbearable. These people are sometimes regarded by other Israelis as superficial and/or irresponsible.”<sup>83</sup>

80 Pro Fun Filmverleih: THE BUBBLE. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino-filmverleih.html> (26.07.07)

81 Pro Fun Filmverleih: THE BUBBLE. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino-filmverleih.html> (26.07.07)

82 Pro Fun Filmverleih: THE BUBBLE. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino-filmverleih.html> (26.07.07)

83 Pro Fun Filmverleih: THE BUBBLE. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino-filmverleih.html> (26.07.07)

## 32 Communication between the Self and the Other

Being aware of the foregoing considerations, increasing challenges of monolithic identity constructions can be found in Fox's films. This applies to both, the topic of the enemy and the topic of homosexuality. The change in the concept of the enemy may be outlined as follows: While the recruits in *TIME OFF* only guess that their operation area is going to be in Lebanon, the enemy in *SONG OF THE SIREN* is as clearly defined as the friend or the ally – on the one hand Iraq and on the other hand above all the USA. Like in the drama *THE BUBBLE* the plot of *SONG OF A SIREN* focuses on the civil society and its way of coping with danger. Accordingly Noah's reserve duty on the eve of the Gulf War is only mentioned briefly. The drama *YOSSI & JAGGER* which chronologically follows the comedy *SONG OF A SIREN*, returns to the setting “military” which had been the central theme of *TIME OFF* twelve years earlier. But although soldiers – unlike civilians – (have to) accept to clash directly with the enemy, the enemy who instantaneously strikes the soldiers of an Israeli outpost on the Golan Heights may be determinable but nonetheless remains elusive. The film *WALK ON WATER* chooses a point of view that is located between a soldier and the civil society. It sheds light on the events from the point of view of a secret service agent, who gradually departs from his double role in favour of the role of a private citizen. Current risks due to suicide bombers are part of the film since Eyal can only pretend to be a tourist guide because of Pia's fear that something might happen to her brother without being accompanied by someone familiar with Israel. However, these risks become less important since the viewer sees only beautiful sights.<sup>84</sup> Eyal's hard-bitten comments contribute to marginalise the risk of suicide bombers, too.<sup>85</sup> With *THE BUBBLE* in mind it needs to be emphasised that Pia has already internalised the habit to call family and friends after an attack has happened in order to know if they are all well. Since the main character of the film has to spy out the German siblings the attention is not drawn to the current enemy but focuses on the threat caused by the Holocaust. From Eyal's point of view this threat is related to the previous generation. The consequences – as has been shown – reach up to the present. Since *WALK ON WATER* sheds light on this topic from an Israeli point of view it opens up unusual vistas to the German audience.<sup>86</sup> In *THE BUBBLE* the current enemy finally becomes a person with an individual life story. *THE BUBBLE* poses the question whether a human being, if he/ she is not any particular person, or if no one knows who he/ she really is can be everyone. Maybe even the current enemy? With regard to the previous considerations of psychological mechanisms and the assassination at the end of the film this question has to be negated. Through his last action Ashraf rather declares – like Max in Sherman's play *BENT* which Ashraf watched together with Noam – “Look at me, I'm not a Jew.”<sup>87</sup> “The highly dramatic ending”<sup>88</sup> of *THE BUBBLE* therefore is not as Louise Oechler believes, “almost

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84 Accordingly the actor who plays Eyal says about the shooting: “For this reason we travelled our small and beautiful country, from the Golan Heights down the Jordan Valley to the Dead Sea in the south. Cf. *WALK ON WATER*-DVD.

85 On Axel's arrival Eyal insults him by telling him that in case of an attack there would usually be one a day, but for Axel to witness an attack there might be an exception and for once a second attack might happen on the same day. In a subsequent scene Eyal calls the assassins animals in front of Axel.

86 In chapter 2.2.2 more links for the audience outside Israel will be pointed out.

87 Cf. Sherman (2001), p. 80. Cf. Vorwerk (2007) [http://www.satt.org/film/07\\_02\\_bubble-beach.html](http://www.satt.org/film/07_02_bubble-beach.html) (14.08.07).

88 Oechler (2007) <http://www.zdf.de/ZDFde/inhalt/31/0,1872,4342719,00.html> (01.03.07)



incomprehensible”<sup>89</sup>, but rather convincingly consequent. The crucial reason, however, for Ashraf to slip off to neo-monolithic phase that is even more strictly monolithic than the one he was in before meeting Noam is Rana's death after the day of her wedding.<sup>90</sup> Bar-On sums up the pitfalls along Ashraf's way:

“It seems that human beings find it very difficult to separate from [the] constructions that formed their identity. Defining the Other as totally evil solves many problems in an economical, most effortless way. It also leaves the monolithic self flawless. Under certain conditions, this process engenders a lot of energy. A formally calm person roused to anger against an Other is suddenly filled with hitherto unrecognised energy. Hatred and jealousy can activate and manufacture forces of which one is unaware. It is much harder and more complicated to start an internal and external dialogue between parts that are challenging to reconcile. It obviously requires a great deal of effort and intermediate gain is neither clear nor promised in advance. Perhaps this is why we find movement in a neo-monolithic direction during the process of the monolithic construction's disintegration”<sup>91</sup>

Noam's capability of not only loving Ashraf but also of forgiving him for taking Noam's life<sup>92</sup> illustrates that Noam in regard to the dialogue with the external Other of the collective monolithic construction of identity has reached a stage that Bar-On (and Maoz) refer to as future phase. At the same time Noam's voiceover indicates that he realises that Ashraf and he did not stand a chance. Noam is moreover aware of the fact that the environment – no matter on which side – is not yet prepared to go this far: “Maybe people [...] understand how stupid these wars are. No, they probably never will.” Nevertheless he wants his surviving friends to remember them by handing a picture to the newspapers that shows him and Ashraf “high and happy” at the “Rave Against Occupation” which he and Lulu helped to organise. It obviously means very much to Noam that the happy moments of the short time he spent with Ashraf are those remembered, not the deadly explosion. Viz. for Noam even the event that led to his death does not result in a more drastic reconstruction of the current external Other. In this spirit the future phase of Bar-On's concept – affection and interpersonal communication with Ashraf – is in spite of his sky-high price more important to Noam. But although Ashraf and Noam die the communication will not end like in the film *YOSSI & JAGGER* after Lior's death. Due to the media coverage the event will turn from an interpersonal-private dialogue to a matter of public concern.

To Noam and Ashraf applies – other than in regard to Eyal and the German siblings Pia and Axel in *WALK ON WATER* – what Uchovsky succinctly describes as follows: “The problem is that life is sometimes far more powerful than the wishes of individuals and that the destiny of a country or nation is sometimes more mighty than the destiny of an individual.”<sup>93</sup> The arbitrariness of the

89 Oechler (2007) <http://www.zdf.de/ZDFde/inhalt/31/0,1872,4342719,00.html> (01.03.07) Cf. Goetze (2007) <http://www.zenithonline.de/archives/346-Am-Ende-platzt-sie-doch.html> (14.08.07).

90 Cf. Sweid's statement on page 18 of this analysis.

91 Bar-On (2008), p. 132

92 This hints at the Jewish understanding of forgiveness which can only be granted to the perpetrator by his or her victim. Whether Noam's friends or his father and brother can forgive Ashraf is written in the stars and also a question affected by the Christian understanding of forgiveness. Answering this question would go beyond the scope of this film or its timeframe.

93 Euronews <http://www.euronews.net/index.php?lng=1&page=cinema> (09.07.07) Cf. Uchovskys statement: „If you are young and you want to live like your peers in New York, London and Paris, you have to isolate yourself from the harsh reality of the Middle East. That's what Tel Aviv is about. The problem is that life is stronger than the free will of individuals and you can't run away.” Pro Fun Filmverleih: *THE BUBBLE*. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino->

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person and the superiority of politics in relation to individual destiny – that Uchovsky mentions here – also become evident in the fact that Ashraf carries out the final assassination. However, thus he manages to prevent the worst since he kills no one but himself and Noam. In contrast, Ashraf's brother-in-law had planned to carry out this assassination out himself in order to retaliate upon as many Israeli citizens as possible for his wife's death, because Rana had been killed by Israeli soldiers.

Although the end of the film is fictitious it still illustrates dramatically how quickly the reality in the Middle East can hit “the bubble” or threaten the bubble that gives Tel Aviv its nickname. At the International Film Festival Berlin in 2007 the two filmmakers kept pointing out how difficult it had been to obtain a permission from the real owners of “Orna veElla” and from the city's authorities to enact a bomb explosion in the middle of the Shenkin area, the area around Shenkin Street in Tel Aviv. This scene is tantamount to a visualised primal fear shared by the inhabitants of this neighbourhood among which are Fox and Uchovsky, too. Thus Noam's comment of the first night with Ashraf “We were explosive.” is the key sentence of the film as well as of the scene on the roof of Noam's flat-sharing community. It illustrates Ashraf's surprise and his honest astonishment that someone “here in this crazy Middle East”<sup>94</sup> uses the word “explosive” like a duck takes to the water in order to pay Ashraf a compliment although he is a Palestinian from the occupied territories. “We were explosive.” comprises the beauty as well as the horrible tragedy of their love. This sentence at the same time expresses hope and hopelessness. It – figuratively speaking – juggles the beginning and the end of Noam and Ashraf's time shared. While in the film YOSSIE & JAGGER – as has been illustrated<sup>95</sup> – it is above all Yossi who suffers from an environment that can neither absorb the complexity of a dialogue between disintegrating constructions of identity nor support awareness or revision of different aspects of a disintegrating identity, in THE BUBBLE this applies to both main characters. Ashraf cannot hope for an understanding environment neither in Tel Aviv nor in Nablus. In one case his (secret) reconciliation work cannot be acknowledged; in the other case his homosexual relationship cannot be tolerated. Although Noam and Ashraf in terms of intercultural conflict resolution made a huge step forward the progress they made does not enable them to live together. In other words: Due to the fact the conflict resolution Noam and Ashraf started could happen only without including their environment it remains limited. This is, apart from film-immanent explanations and hints at the set ending, another reason why their “bubble” must burst. With regard to Israeli identity Bar-On names the process that the main characters cannot succeed in by referring to Jürgen Habermas:

“A paradigm shift will not happen until an Israeli identity emerges that can accept its inner contradictions, without shifting the direction of the projection by 180 degrees from collectivism to individualism. If we follow this approach, the next phase in collective identity will develop by acknowledging the incompatible aspects of identity[.] [...] It will have to be accompanied by dialogues between these different elements. Acknowledgement and multicultural dialogue [...] should create chances for '*containment*' [emphasis original, P.A.] of conflicts viz. integrate conflicts into collective identity and give them space within, instead of projecting them onto various

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[filmverleih.html](#) (26.07.07)

94 Uchovsky on Euronews. Euronews <http://www.euronews.net/index.php?lng=1&page=cinema> (09.07.07)

95 Cf. p. 25 of this analysis.

'Others'. [...] The dialogue enables communication between differing voices and containment, at least for an interim phase, until a new 'self' – which differs qualitatively from the voices that compose it – emerges.”<sup>96</sup>

Fox thinks: „Most young Israelis and more specifically, most Tel Avivians are more progressive than most Palestinians as far as social and sexual issues go. Sadly enough this progressiveness does not always affect the way these Israelis understand their relationship with their Palestinian neighbours.”<sup>97</sup> Consequently Fox evaluates the challenge posed on parts of the domestic audience by a dialogue with the Other, who is classified as an enemy, as more serious than the confrontation with homosexuality is for monolithic constructions of identity. Nevertheless the growing visual directness of the latter in regard to Fox's and Uchovsky's work is explosive. In the short film TIME OFF the coitus as well as a relationship between two men is only hinted at. Although the key scene takes place at a lavatory most of what is going on is up to Yonatan's imagination and can be read from his face only. The viewer as well as Yonatan knows very well what is going in the neighbouring cubicle, but Yonatan and the viewer see nothing of the coitus but entwined hands and dropped pants that dangle around boots (= Erez) or shoes (= the stranger). In SONG OF THE SIREN homosexuality is mentioned, too, but it is limited to Talila's colleague who is by his dress style and some of his gestures and his posture but above all by his way of treating Talila and vice versa characterised as homosexual. Since she cannot get hold of him, they cannot ally themselves against social conventions. Instead Talila has to bring herself to stand her ground and stop caring about social conventions. YOSSI & JAGGER focuses on a relationship between two men again. In this film – as has been shown – the attention is turned to the conflict that plagues the commander Yossi. Yossi has found a partner in officer Lior Amichai but Yossi's self-concept is – in contrast to Lior's – very much based on Yossi's status within the army. In regard to their sexual orientation this milieu however is perceived as intolerant by both of them. Unlike the film TIME OFF YOSSI & JAGGER presents tender moments and a kiss between lovers but any other physical contact is only hinted at. In WALK ON WATER Uchovsky and Fox let Pia confirm her brother's homosexuality to Eyal during a visit to the Western Wall. This plot device implicates the question of whether religion – in particular Judaism – and homosexuality are compatible. Previously the viewer saw together with the outraged Eyal, Rafik and Axel touching while flirting. However, Eyal does not allude to the topic of coitus between two men until he and Axel go to a pub during Eyal's visit to Germany. Having a beer Eyal works up the courage to ask Axel about it and gets an explicit answer. What has been described with words in WALK ON WATER is finally visualised in THE BUBBLE. Therefore Israeli Igal Avidan who has been working as a freelancer in Berlin since 1990 inter alia for Israeli and German newspapers, radio stations and newspaper agencies in his review for Deutschlandradio Kultur talks of the “boldest homosexual love scene that has ever been screened in Israel”<sup>98</sup>. It is striking that one part is played by Sweid, the same actor that played Axel's flirt in WALK ON

96 Bar-On: Die Gegenwart... (2001), p. 73

97 Pro Fun Filmverleih: THE BUBBLE. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino-filmverleih.html> (26.07.07)

98 Avidan <http://www.dradio.de/dkultur/sendungen/fazit/594373/> (01.03.07). Cf. Kuperboim (2006) <http://www.ynetnews.com/Ext/Comp/ArticleLayout/CdaArticlePrintPreview/1,2506,L-3272023,00.html> (14.08.06). Regarding Avidans biography cf. Perlentaucher Medien GmbH [http://www.perlentaucher.de/autoren/21866/Igal\\_Avidan.html](http://www.perlentaucher.de/autoren/21866/Igal_Avidan.html) (18.12.09).

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WATER while the other part is played by Ohad Knoller who already played Yossi in YOSSİ & JAGGER. Sweid says about the shooting:

„Both Ohad and I had quite a bit of trepidation before the filming, [...] but I felt that the scenes were justified and that they were important from the point of view of expression, so I put my hesitations aside and I saw it through to the end. The erotic scenes were between an Israeli-Jewish guy and a Palestinian, who get into each other both physically and emotionally. I think that the courage to show this is like the courage to make peace.”<sup>99</sup>

Even the question who is on top in the love scene and who is not is a politically explosive issue „That is really a sens[e]tive point. I’m lucky that we didn’t have to decide that for ourselves. It was written in the script. The answer is that everyone has the opportunity to be on top. That’s important.”<sup>100</sup> Sweid's smiling statement that his family had not watched THE BUBBLE yet and that he hopes his mother will never watch it confirms that homosexuality poses an extreme challenge on monolithic constructions of identity in the Arab community – whether within Israel or in the occupied territories.<sup>101</sup> He explains:

„I’m a bit apprehensive about the Arab reaction, mostly from distant relatives. There are very intimate scenes there, and in our society we’re not yet at the point where we’re fighting for gay rights. I’m not sure that older Arabs will accept such a love story. It’s not a question of good or bad. It’s just a question of a certain culture. And just as Arab culture is too conservative on these issues, in Tel Aviv, in my opinion, there’s excessive sexual openness. I believe that there is something right about preserving values and the sacred place of sex.”<sup>102</sup>

Sweid who was confronted with many severances in his own identity within the scope of this film may be identified as “the true star of the film [‘The Bubble’]”<sup>103</sup>. Having in mind Sweid's statement mentioned above a revision of Katharina Goetze's evaluation of the character of Ashraf is needed. According to her the character seems to have no issue with his sexuality despite his traditional family background.<sup>104</sup> The fact that Ashraf acts on the spur of the moment during the

99 Kuperboim (2006) <http://www.ynetnews.com/Ext/Comp/ArticleLayout/CdaArticlePrintPreview/1,2506,L-3272023,00.html> (14.08.06). Uchovsky confirms: „I think the fact that this movie exists is an optimistic thing. Also the fact that it has been a hit in Israel, very popular with young people, that’s also a reason for optimism.” Pro Fun Filmverleih: THE BUBBLE. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino-filmverleih.html> (26.07.07)

100 Kuperboim (2006) <http://www.ynetnews.com/Ext/Comp/ArticleLayout/CdaArticlePrintPreview/1,2506,L-3272023,00.html> (14.08.06). The cultural explosiveness of this scene can be understood by Vincenzo Patanè's statements about homosexuality in (Islamic) societies of the Middle-East. Cf. Patanè (2007). The character of Noam would probably agree with Robert Aldrich's statement: “Judaism condemned same sex relationships, but in the Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament) there were women who desired women as well as men who were passionately in love with consexuals[.]” Aldrich (2007), p. 7. In contrast TIME OFF illustrates the inner contradiction when Erez satisfies his sexual needs at a public lavatory but at the same time wants to keep his dignity (especially that of a commander) by taking the active role. In WALK ON WATER Alex explains to Eyal that he does not care if he takes the active or passive role. Axel considers himself a man emancipated from cultural (Christian) tradition. Cf. reference to Axel's foreign partners.

101 Cf. bonus material of the Israeli DVD of the film and Arte <http://www.arte.tv/de/film/Berlinale-2007/Interviews--Trailer---/1464122.html> (10.08.07) and Kuperboim (2006) <http://www.ynetnews.com/Ext/Comp/ArticleLayout/CdaArticlePrintPreview/1,2506,L-3272023,00.html> (14.08.06). Elsewhere Sweid says with a smile: “My parents were happy that I as an Arab actor got a job. I asked them not to watch the film. Some day my mother saw a poster and was a bit concerned that people might really think I'm homosexual.” Goetze (2007) <http://www.zenithonline.de/archives/346-Am-Ende-platzt-sie-doch.html> (14.08.07).

102 Kuperboim (2006) <http://www.ynetnews.com/Ext/Comp/ArticleLayout/CdaArticlePrintPreview/1,2506,L-3272023,00.html> (14.08.06)

103 Goetze (2007) <http://www.zenithonline.de/archives/346-Am-Ende-platzt-sie-doch.html> (14.08.07). Cf. Kuperboim (2006) <http://www.ynetnews.com/Ext/Comp/ArticleLayout/CdaArticlePrintPreview/1,2506,L-3272023,00.html> (14.08.06).

104 Goetze (2007) <http://www.zenithonline.de/archives/346-Am-Ende-platzt-sie-doch.html> (14.08.07)

reunion with Noam on the roof of Noam's flat-sharing community is rather justified by a “now or never”-feeling. At this point in time Ashraf and Noam do not know where this is going to take them. Having returned the identification card to Noam, Ashraf is doubtlessly more aware than Noam that there will be no second chance. That is why Ashraf must give an interpersonal reason to stay in touch with Noam. Apart from this too much talking might put the fragile bond of affection between them at risk. Therefore it is easier to get physical, especially up on the roof with no one else around. Because although being outside they are all by themselves high above the nightly city. Ashraf has yet to get used to being touched in public little by little. So the screenwriters on purpose put him in half-light or darkness: at the concert in the audience of the theatre or at the party. Noam and he hold hands only during a walk through an almost deserted city on an early Shabbat morning. Uchovsky says in an interview: „It’s very difficult as Palestinian society is not really open to gays yet. It’s already complicated to be gay there, even more so to sleep with the enemy. For heterosexual couples, it’s not much better with actual Palestinians from the West Bank. It’s more common for Palestinians who live in Israel.”<sup>105</sup> The latter is tolerated although for some people it also is a taboo. The best example is Sweid himself. While promoting the film the Israel-born Arab was still in a relationship with a Jewish woman.<sup>106</sup>

„It’s hard for my mother that I have a Jewish girlfriend. She wants me to go out with a girl who is Christian, like me. It’s true that the people around us are cool, and no one looks funny at us, but I’m sure that there are some people who think that our relationship is not a good example for their children. That it’s something not sane, that it’s assimilation, sleeping with the enemy.”<sup>107</sup>

## 2.2.2 Foreign Audience

With reference to the work of social psychologists Bar-On and Maoz the previous chapter focused on itemising the dimensions of the dialogue which the filmmakers Fox and Uchovsky look for or enter with their domestic audience by means of their work. Now I would like to turn attention to the specifics of their communication with foreign audiences, who have come to the fore increasingly since the short film YOSSSI & JAGGER, shot in 2002, happened to be a commercial success.<sup>108</sup> This can be proved by the main topics of the films WALK ON WATER (2004) and THE BUBBLE (2006). They portray a wide range of possible ways Israelis and Germans or Israelis and Palestinians can deal with each other.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore both the characters' names and the music used are evidence of an international approach. In addition the filmmakers are anxious to describe the

105 Pro Fun Filmverleih : THE BUBBLE. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino-filmverleih.html> (26.07.07)

106 Cf. bonus material of the Israeli DVD of the film and Kuperboim (2006) <http://www.ynetnews.com/Ext/Comp/ArticleLayout/CdaArticlePrintPreview/1,2506,L-3272023,00.html> (14.08.06)

107 Kuperboim (2006) <http://www.ynetnews.com/Ext/Comp/ArticleLayout/CdaArticlePrintPreview/1,2506,L-3272023,00.html> (14.08.06)

108 Fun Filmverleih: YOSSSI & JAGGER. [http://www.yossiundjagger.de/Yossi\\_Jagger\\_Presseheft\\_Monitor.pdf](http://www.yossiundjagger.de/Yossi_Jagger_Presseheft_Monitor.pdf) (03.03.06)

109 The film WALK ON WATER which was subsequent to the film YOSSSI & JAGGER is considered the most successful Israeli film overseas and THE BUBBLE is considered the most successful film in Israel in 2006. Pro Fun Filmverleih : THE BUBBLE. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino-filmverleih.html> (26.07.07)

way of life of the young generation in Israel. Therefore THE BUBBLE is devoted to a clique that is committed to the spirit of its neighbourhood in Tel Aviv. Noam sells music at the “Third Ear” and thus indulges in his passion for music beyond the mainstream. That way he lives at least part of the dream of his youth which was to become a musician. His flatmate Lulu works as a shop assistant in a soap shop and dreams of getting ahead as internationally known designer. In her free time she is involved in a “Rave Against Occupation”. Noam's flatmate Yali works at the trendy pub “Orna veElla”. All three of them are young and have succeeded in finding a flat at Shenkin Street. Thus they consider themselves lucky and want to preserve their lust for life. According to Uchovsky this is “a physical and mental thing”<sup>110</sup> or a “state of mind”<sup>111</sup>:

„The Shenkin area has a mixed population. Religious people, secular, old, young, families, etc. A lot of creative forces of Israel live there, in a very small area, so it has become kind of an artistic green house. It's also an area filled with cafés and shops. So it's very vibrant. And of course many young Israelis dream to move there when the time comes.”<sup>112</sup>

The intention of the two filmmakers according to Fox was to make “neither cheap slapstick [...] nor a highly political film”<sup>113</sup>: “Instead we tried to describe the complexity of life in Tel Aviv. Of course, politics play a part here, but so do family, friends and sexuality.”<sup>114</sup> Uchovsky expressed the same dictum for the film WALK ON WATER. During a reading of the film's script previous to the beginning of the shooting, he hoped “that this will be a pleasant film, easy to watch, fast, up-to-date. But also a film which overwhelms you and has a deep impact on you.”<sup>115</sup> With regard to THE BUBBLE Fox says the following in an interview for the French-German TV channel Arte:

„It is a mainstream movie making style. It is [...] more smooth and slick and colourful and there is all this nice music going on and so on. [I]t [...] also has to do with the fact that we were trying to capture our live in Tel Aviv. And our live in Tel Aviv has all these different sides all these different things going on together simultaneously.”<sup>116</sup>

Fox continues:

„Sometimes we believe our way of life can make a difference, and the love and progressive ways of thinking and behaving that we so enthusiastically have adopted will conquer all. And other times there is a feeling that the situation is hopeless, that we are surrounded by too many people who disagree with us.”<sup>117</sup>

Accordingly, the actor who plays the character of Noam says: “The idea of the film is to describe the conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians the way they are perceived in Tel Aviv. [...] [W]e live a relatively easy life in Tel Aviv. Very grim things happen around us, but we see them through the prism of the easy life in Tel Aviv.”<sup>118</sup> That is why THE BUBBLE according to Uchovsky is both a

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110 Pro Fun Filmverleih: THE BUBBLE. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino-filmverleih.html> (26.07.07)

111 Pro Fun Filmverleih: THE BUBBLE. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino-filmverleih.html> (26.07.07)

112 Pro Fun Filmverleih: THE BUBBLE. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino-filmverleih.html> (26.07.07)

113 Pro Fun Filmverleih: THE BUBBLE. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino-filmverleih.html> (26.07.07)

114 Goetze (2007) <http://www.zenithonline.de/archives/346-Am-Ende-platzt-sie-doch.html> (14.08.07). Cf. Fox's interview for Arte. Arte (Hg.) <http://www.arte.tv/de/film/Berlinale-2007/Interviews--Trailer---/1464122.html> (10.08.07)

115 Bonus material of the WALK ON WATER-DVD.

116 Arte (Hg.) <http://www.arte.tv/de/film/Berlinale-2007/Interviews--Trailer---/1464122.html> (10.08.07)

117 Pro Fun Filmverleih: THE BUBBLE. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino-filmverleih.html> (26.07.07)

118 Hansen <http://www.zdf.de/ZDFde/inhalt/29/0,1872,5557405,00.html> (14.08.07)

declaration of love to Tel Aviv and a “self-critical film about me and the people I know”.<sup>119</sup> For the scriptwriter and producer Tel Aviv is “a very cool place. I think most people around the world who learn about Israel from CNN will be surprised to learn that in the center of all that craziness there is a place that's easygoing, fun, friendly and very much like big cities in Europe and the US.”<sup>120</sup> Fox adds: “We love Tel Aviv, and THE BUBBLE is to some extent a love song to the city. Tel Aviv is a socially and culturally vibrant city, and is the only truly liberal and progressive place to live in Israel.”<sup>121</sup>

While THE BUBBLE portrays young inhabitants of Tel Aviv, the films WALK ON WATER and SONG OF THE SIREN provide insight into a wide range of aspects of Israeli everyday life. In contrast the films TIME OFF and YOSSI & JAGGER give foreign audiences an insight into everyday life of soldiers.

As shown in this analysis not only THE BUBBLE offers links for “the local [German, P.A.] audience”<sup>122</sup>. Having all films in mind the drama shot in 2006, which the director of the 13<sup>th</sup> Jewish Film Festival in Berlin and Potsdam, Nicola Galliner, calls “Eytan Fox's most successful film”<sup>123</sup>, is, above all, the most complex work of Fox and Uchovsky so far.<sup>124</sup> Therefore an interpretation of the film as a fairytale falls as short as the criticism by publicist Sylke Tempel.<sup>125</sup> For her the numerous strands in THE BUBBLE serve as a general proof that: “Everything in Fox's films is somehow too much: too linked, too intertwined, too inextricable.”<sup>126</sup> Tempel's opinion is thus contrary to Oechler's. The latter points out: “The Bubble' is fraught with strands which interdigitate, sometimes thrilling, sometimes witty, sometimes tragic – no strand gets a raw deal, every strand works and is narrated till the end.”<sup>127</sup> Oechler's evaluation can be confirmed by a review given at the Austrian Queer Film Festival “Identities 2007” [!], where Fox's films YOSSI & JAGGER and WALK ON WATER achieved great success in recent years. In this review the plot device that all the tragedy of the Middle-East conflict pictured by the life stories of Noam, his family and flatmates as well as by the life stories of Ashraf and his family is acknowledged: “Once again the topic of fundamental differences and social conflicts is handled in a manageable group of people and thus taken to – striking and dramatic – extremes.”<sup>128</sup> Uchovsky explains:

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119 The t-shirts' label “I love, love Tel Aviv” and the same slogan on the house wall, where Noam and Ashraf set their camp for their first night, go with it.

120 Pro Fun Filmverleih: THE BUBBLE. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino-filmverleih.html> (26.07.07)

121 Pro Fun Filmverleih: THE BUBBLE. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino-filmverleih.html> (26.07.07)

122 Soballa <http://www.dradio.de/dkultur/sendungen/fazit/636646/> (10.08.07) This can also be proved by the prices THE BUBBLE was awarded in Germany. Cf. Pro Fun Filmverleih: THE BUBBLE. 4 LIEBENDE, 2 WELTEN, 1 GRENZE (2007), p 13. [http://www.pro-fun.de/presse/PF0510D\\_kino.pdf](http://www.pro-fun.de/presse/PF0510D_kino.pdf) (09.08.07).

123 Soballa <http://www.dradio.de/dkultur/sendungen/fazit/636646/> (10.08.07)

124 Cf. Vorwerk (2007) [http://www.satt.org/film/07\\_02\\_bubble-beach.html](http://www.satt.org/film/07_02_bubble-beach.html) (14.08.07).

125 The interviewer speaks in favour of the assumption of a fairytale both in the Arte interview with Fox and the Arte interview with Sweid. Arte <http://www.arte.tv/de/film/Berlinale-2007/Interviews--Trailer---/1464122.html> (10.08.07)

126 Tempel (2007), p. 19 [http://www.jffb.de/presse/4\\_presse.pdf](http://www.jffb.de/presse/4_presse.pdf) (11.08.07)

127 Oechler (2007) <http://www.zdf.de/ZDFde/inhalt/31/0,1872,4342719,00.html> (001.03.07)

128 Josefson (2007) <http://derstandard.at/?url=/?id=2904726> (14.08.07)

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„THE BUBBLE is tragic in a Romeo & Juliet kind of way. The tragedy was there from the start. It's foreseeable, but then when you come out of the movie, hopefully you don't just remember how tragic the ending was, but how beautiful and happy they were before and both notions stay with you.”<sup>129</sup>

In conjunction with the relations identified in this analysis in Fox and Uchovsky's hitherto existing films it becomes clear that THE BUBBLE is more than a variation of “the classic tragedy about Romeo and Juliet”<sup>130</sup> from “the point of view of a gay Israeli-Palestinian couple”<sup>131</sup>, which the film is at times labelled in German newspaper articles at the occasion of the International Film Festival Berlin in 2007.<sup>132</sup> This handy label holds to sensational and – as has been shown - intended violations of taboos. Still Fox's films are not geared towards a certain audience. Accordingly Uchovsky negates a question posed in an Q&A following a screening of THE BUBBLE at the International Film Festival Berlin in 2007. He was asked if THE BUBBLE should not have better focused either on the topic Middle East or on homosexuality instead of covering both. Uchovsky points out that both topics are part of the way of life that he and his partner perceive in Tel Aviv. Instead of – casually speaking – a “homosexual” point of view the viewpoint of all these films – including SONG OF THE SIREN – is that of an auteur. Like François Truffaut and his companions Fox intends to amaze and touch the audience by approaching his characters with “tremendous tenderness”<sup>133</sup> and thus gives an understanding of their awkwardness and their search for the “beauty in little things”<sup>134</sup> in an everyday life characterised by threats. Consequently, Fox's films confirm the dictum that “the idiosyncratic personal point of view on the chosen story is as important as the story itself.”<sup>135</sup> An auteur's film is supposed “to create new relations between what strengthens the drama's centre and that which grants space to the less noticed”<sup>136</sup>. A film-immanent hint which proves that both Fox and Uchovsky see themselves in the tradition of the French auteur is the scene in THE BUBBLE in which the main character explicitly refers to Truffaut's film JULES & JIM. On the way to Nablus Noam literally tells Lulu: “You are Jeanne Moreau. And I'm Jules. We gonna find Jim and we gonna die for our love”. On the one hand Noam lives for the reunion with Ashraf – which this time is unexpected for Ashraf – and is full of hope. On the other hand the fact that Noam is identifying Lulu, Ashraf and himself with the main characters of Truffaut's drama illustrates once more that there are little chances for a happy ending. Lulu and Yali will survive like Jules (and Gilberte), and Noam and Ashraf will not be buried at the same cemetery just like Jules is not able to fulfil Catherine's last will “to [scatter] her ashes [...] into the wind from a hill” since this

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129 Pro Fun Filmverleih: THE BUBBLE. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino-filmverleih.html> (26.07.07)

130 Euronews (Hg.) <http://www.euronews.net/index.php?lng=1&page=cinema> (09.07.07)

131 Euronews (Hg.) <http://www.euronews.net/index.php?lng=1&page=cinema> (09.07.07)

132 Oechler (2007) <http://www.zdf.de/ZDFde/inhalt/31/0,1872,4342719,00.html> (001.03.07) and Vorwerk (2007) [http://www.satt.org/film/07\\_02\\_bubble-beach.html](http://www.satt.org/film/07_02_bubble-beach.html) (14.08.07). The idea of ROMEO & JULIET is also mentioned in the interviews for the TV Channel Arte. Arte <http://www.arte.tv/de/film/Berlinale-2007/Interviews--Trailer---/1464122.html> (10.08.07). Cf. Euronews <http://www.euronews.net/index.php?lng=1&page=cinema> (09.07.07). The English version of the Euronews review of THE BUBBLE confirms that the idea of THE BUBBLE as a modern production of ROMEO & JULIET – or even more precisely as ROMEO & JULIO-production – is only one aspect of the story.

133 Grob (2002), p. 49

134 Grob (2002), p. 49

135 Grob (2002), p. 49

136 Grob (2002), pp. 49-50



is forbidden. The fact that Ashraf just like Catherine decides to run away from a hopeless situation by not only killing himself but a beloved person, too, becomes even more shocking since Catherine and Jim are burned to ashes while Noam and Ashraf burn up in the fire of an explosion.

Names of characters with a deeper meaning are characteristic for Fox's films. Thus the strict commander in the film *TIME OFF* who would not lose his poise in front of anyone or anything and who hardly gets insecure is named Erez which means “strong cedar tree”<sup>137</sup>. The one Erez is attracted to is given the telling name Yonatan, which means “God has given” or “God's gift”<sup>138</sup>. The name of the shy food chemist who in *SONG OF THE SIREN* manages to tame Talila means “calm down”<sup>139</sup>. The ray of hope in the life of commander Yossi in the film *YOSSI & JAGGER* is called Lior which – as already mentioned elsewhere in this analysis – means “I have a light”<sup>140</sup>. The name of the main character in *WALK ON WATER* Eyal is the male version of the name “Ayala” – which means “deer” or “hind” and he sometimes behaves like the dominant alpha male, in English often referred to as top dog, in German called a “Platzhirsch”, which is the dominant deer in the herd. With his first wife, Iris, the first Latin non-Hebrew name emerges. She was beautiful and fragile like a flower and serves as messenger because after her suicide she is present in Eyal's memory/dream only. Still it is her who triggers Eyal's fundamental change.<sup>141</sup> With regard to grandfather Himmelman the surname elicits associations of the antipodes heaven and hell, because this by now critically ill, old man once was the one who decided that many people had to die. For Eyal's parents he embodied – as has already been pointed out – the hell of losing family and friends, the fear of death, the need to flee and the struggle to survive, but also the loss of identity since they were most brutally forced to leave their German background behind and consequently decided to protect their son from such an experience by making all German influences vanish from his life. Pia – Latin, equivalent to: “pious, righteous”<sup>142</sup> – is the first member of the Himmelman family to deal with this part of the past. However, the most impressive name is the one chosen for Pia's brother, Axel. On the one hand this name sheds light on the narrow-mindedness of the married couple who put a good face on the matter that Alfred Himmelman was an influential Nazi by helping him hide from judiciary for decades. Moreover, Pia's and Axel's parents seem to still prefer floating with the tide over thinking their opinion over. On the other hand the name Axel hints at the character's function within the film's plot. Axel is a Scandinavian name which therefore might correspond to a national socialist idea of the Nordic. But the name descends from Hebrew. It can be traced back to David's third son Absalom (Avshalom) who was like his five brothers born in Hebron. The name means “father of peace”. Accordingly, Axel's character in *WALK ON WATER* serves as peacemaker, because he is the initiator of the relationship between Eyal and Pia through which they both find out about their true self. At the same time the film makes use of the characterisation of Absalom

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137 King Salomon used cedar to build the Temple.

138 Kohlheim (2007), pp. 211-212 .

139 Kohlheim (2007), p. 282

140 Cf. footnote 12.

141 Kohlheim (2007), pp. 195-196.

142 Kohlheim (2007), pp. 298-299

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(Avshalom) as “handsome and eloquent” so that he “stole the heart of the men of Israel” (2. Sam. 14,25; 15,2-6).<sup>143</sup>

The Israeli main character of THE BUBBLE is called Noam, which means “delight, joy, cheerfulness”<sup>144</sup>. Although the relationship with Ashraf is a cause for concern as well as a constant reminder of Noam's sore spot, Ashraf is the only one who enables Noam to experience cheerfulness. This is substantiated both by the comment of Noam's employer after Noam had spent his first night with Ashraf and by Noam's question whether Yali begrudges Noam's rare moments of bliss. For Noam's flatmate Lulu it is clear that she has to back Noam because Ashraf's presence brings the best out of Noam and his absence makes Noam suffer. The name Lulu comes from “Luisa” and means “famous female fighter” but also “militant woman”.<sup>145</sup> It corresponds to the character who dreams of becoming famous, but is also an ironic and sarcastic allusion intended by the scriptwriters. Despite Lulu's resolute decision to stand up for Noam and Ashraf the “fight” for peace that she and her friends are fighting is naïve. According to Uchovsky their form of protest is debatable: “To organise a rave party [...] against occupation is nice, naïve and also stupid.”<sup>146</sup> Nevertheless he comes to the character's defence:

“They better dance to protest occupation than e.g. in support of the extermination of Palestinian olive trees. Either is stupid, but in this case I prefer the silly optimists. Of course the idea is absurd. The appropriate action would be to organise long sit-ins at the checkpoints all day – and change the world. But changing the world is hard and you don't always have the strength for it.”<sup>147</sup>

Unlike Yossi, who is left behind by all himself Noam and Ashraf are united in death, probably even kissing while dying.<sup>148</sup> The actor Sweid who plays Ashraf emphasises that Ashraf's actions are motivated by deep despair and the wish to be helped by Noam and his friends. In WALK ON WATER Axel asks Eyal if he ever thought about how desperate a person must be to turn himself/herself into a living bomb, despite his or her family. Eyal's counter-question: “So why do they come here and kill innocent mothers and children here?” illustrates that for Eyal Axel is not in the position to ask such questions.<sup>149</sup> At the same time the Palestinian main character of the film THE BUBBLE is aware that Noam and his friends cannot help him. The contradiction that literally kills him is rooted in himself. The name of his character indicates this, too. In Arabic Ashraf means

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143 Henning (1998), p. 14, Kohlheim (2007), pp. 63 and 32

144 Kohlheim (2007), p. 282

145 OC Projects GbRmbH, Optendrenk & Calinski: Lulu. <http://www.baby-vornamen.de/Maedchen/L/Lu/Lulu/> (16.08.07) and OC Projects GbRmbH, Optendrenk & Calinski: Louise. <http://www.baby-vornamen.de/Maedchen/L/Lo/Louise/> (16.08.07). Regarding the militant female character cf. Vorwerk (2007) [http://www.satt.org/film/07\\_02\\_bubble-beach.html](http://www.satt.org/film/07_02_bubble-beach.html) (14.08.07).

146 Avidan <http://www.dradio.de/dkultur/sendungen/fazit/594373/> (01.03.07)

147 Avidan <http://www.dradio.de/dkultur/sendungen/fazit/594373/> (01.03.07). Cf. Pro Fun Filmverleih: THE BUBBLE. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino-filmverleih.html> (26.07.07) and Sweid's statements in the Interview for Arte. Arte <http://www.arte.tv/de/film/Berlinale-2007/Interviews--Trailer---/1464122.html> (10.08.07).

148 Cf. Fox's interview for Arte. Arte <http://www.arte.tv/de/film/Berlinale-2007/Interviews--Trailer---/1464122.html> (10.08.07).

149 The relation between the films WALK ON WATER and THE BUBBLE once more substantiates the assumption that Fox and Uchovsky approached the scope of THE BUBBLE little by little.

“decent” and is related to “sharafa” which means “decent, belonging to nobility.”<sup>150</sup> His name characterises the character as special, rare and worthy of (Noam's) love. Therefore it high-lights the inner dichotomy that pushes Ashraf to extremes. With the flatmates' discussion in mind in which they discuss whether the name “Shimi” comes from Shimon or Samson it is striking that of all things it is Ashraf's Hebrew name that hints at the final assassination. Yali states: “Let my soul die with Philistines' history's first suicide bomber.”<sup>151</sup>

There are characters in *THE BUBBLE* whose names can easily be deciphered even by people who do not speak Hebrew or who are unfamiliar with onomastics: Jihad and Golan. Both first names denote exchangeable persons. Not the **person** is important, but the fact that they are facing the enemy. If it were not Ashraf's brother-in-law any other Hamas activist might try to win the family for the fight, the Jihad. The same applies to the character of Golan on the other side. Even after years he still does not say anything against his army comrades with whom he served on the Golan Heights. Although Noam's flatmate Lulu in particular reminds him that his comrades would probably not stand up for him like he still does for them if they knew about his homosexuality. The facial expression of the others around shows that they agree with Lulu.<sup>152</sup> This however leaves Golan unimpressed. He – surely against better knowledge – overrules her objection and paints the picture of heroes fighting together. Both of them – Jihad and Golan – represent the points of view of hardliners who defeat both the naïve peace activists as well as the lovers.

The internationalisation of *THE BUBBLE* finally becomes evident on the level of music as well. Lider performs a cover of the song *THE MAN I LOVE* on stage and does not sing off stage only, like four years earlier in *YOSSI & JAGGER*. Thus the stylistic device of a song in which a male addresses another male person becomes readily identifiable for an international audience as well. In *YOSSI & JAGGER* this was done by Lider's version of the Hebrew song *BO*. While the previous films featured Hebrew songs *THE BUBBLE* focuses on songs sung in English, which is another evidence that Fox and Uchovsky are more and more addressing an international non-Jewish audience, too.<sup>153</sup> There is only one song with Hebrew lyrics in this film. As the meaning of the lyrics – like the Hebrew songs in previous films – is linked to the film's plot the song is subtitled for foreign audiences.

### 2.2.3 Interim Conclusion

The film *THE BUBBLE* – unlike *YOSSI & JAGGER* – presents a fictitious story. It gives an idea of why somebody may become a suicide bomber who is neither driven by profound hatred nor

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150 Kohlheim (2007), p. 60

151 Cf. footnote 34.

152 The group's point of view is also substantiated – as has already been shown – by Fox's films *TIME OFF* and *YOSSI & JAGGER*.

153 At least in Israel a soundtrack CD was released together with the film *THE BUBBLE* for the first time. Rita's song *TIFTACH HALON* is missing on the CD.

a deep-rooted desire for revenge.<sup>154</sup> Ashraf at the most hates himself – he is scrunching a photo of himself up – because he is in love with someone who in Ashraf's opinion is in the broadest sense kind of responsible for his sister's death.

For foreign audiences THE BUBBLE builds yet another cinematic bridge to people living in the Middle-East. It provides an insight into a schizophrenic live situation, which according to Uchovsky is even for those facing the situation every day sometimes hard to grasp.<sup>155</sup> It is characterized by two things: menace and overwhelming longing for a normal everyday life. As a matter of fact Fox and Uchovsky tell their stories mainly from the Jewish-Israeli point of view but they do not perceive their cinematic bridge as one way street, but as a chance for mutual exchange. This can be proved by another statement of Uchovsky: "It's nice of you to drop by. We are friendly. We want you as our friends. We make movies. They are good. We want you to see them. It's far away when you are in Israel. So we come to meet you here."<sup>156</sup>

### **2.3 Communication within the Audience**

This analysis already proved that on the level of the film stories as well as on the level of communication between the filmmakers and the audience identity-generating moments and topics are developed further. Presented in new contexts they shall open new vistas. In order to initiate constructive and productive discussions Fox and Uchovsky are not afraid of breaking taboos. This applies last but not least to the third level of initialised communication between the self and the Other: communication in the audience.

In the previous chapters I discussed topics such as e.g. the stages of identity formation, culturally or historically differing experiences or differences between generations which are suitable for an approaching or even acknowledging exchange between the audience and what the viewers have just seen. Concluding I want to point out that regarding all films reviewed in this analysis aggressive boundary crossing out of revenge is agreed to easier than boundary crossing out of love.<sup>157</sup> As to an inter-nationally composed audience the boundary crossings out of love illustrated in Fox's films – homosexual love in the army, love between a descendant of a Holocaust survivor and a descendant of a Nazi perpetrator, sexual attraction between an Arab guy and a German guy as well as homosexual love between an Israeli guy and a Palestinian guy – offer common ground for discussion. At first glance the antagonism between hate and love seems to be as considerable as the antagonism between bonfire and deadly explosion. But Fox's films teach the audience that the step may be small.<sup>158</sup> How small the step can be is illustrated by the main character of TIME OFF and

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154 Cf. Fox's interview for Arte. Arte <http://www.arte.tv/de/film/Berlinale-2007/Interviews--Trailer---/1464122.html> (10.08.07) Uchovsky told me that YOSSI & JAGGER is based on a true story. Cf. Pro Fun Filmverleih: YOSSI & JAGGER. [http://www.yossiundjagger.de/Yossi\\_Jagger\\_Presseheft\\_Monitor.pdf](http://www.yossiundjagger.de/Yossi_Jagger_Presseheft_Monitor.pdf) (03.03.06).

155 Euronews <http://www.euronews.net/index.php?lng=1&page=cinema> (09.07.07)

156 Uchovsky <http://www.myspace.com/galuchovsky> (01.08.07)

157 Kyora (2007), p. 159

158 SONG OF THE SIREN ends with fireworks and YOSSI & JAGGER and THE BUBBLE end with a mine

the main characters of the drama *THE BUBBLE*. At the beginning of the short film *TIME OFF* the young soldier Yonatan says about his superior Erez: “He hates me.” The comrade who at a military camp shares a tent with Yonatan is amused and irritated by Yonatan's remark. Hence he tries to appease Yonatan. Gradually Yonatan – and with him the viewer – discovers that the exact opposite of what he thought is true: Erez is in love with Yonatan. But because of the surrounding milieu Erez refrains from showing his feelings openly. Still Yonatan obviously feels attracted to Erez, too. In *THE BUBBLE* Noam and Ashraf are in a relationship even though their life stories could have just as well turned them into grim enemies. But for them – in contrast to Yonatan and Erez – there is no niche in which they could live together just the way they are.

Uta Schaffers' remark that distress caused by human beings is the hardest to endure, because it has neither been caused by nature nor is it distress conditional upon nature that effects the own body, is revealing in regard to Fox's films.<sup>159</sup> Distress caused by human beings is an expression of “an exfoliation of the varnish of civilization under extreme conditions”<sup>160</sup> and represents “the detonation of an unstable cultural system”<sup>161</sup>. To talk about these extreme situations fulfils two functions: Firstly to create or to re-establish an order “by giving sense and meaning to certain events by arranging and naming them”<sup>162</sup>. Secondly it is “a way of coping and being relieved” since “the mere expression, the labelling of something makes it more manageable, provides space for handling an incident or already is a strategy of coping with a certain incident.”<sup>163</sup> This – as has been shown – is also a characteristic of Fox's films.

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explosion and a bomb explosion respectively

159 Schaffers (2007), p. 22

160 Schaffers (2007), p. 23

161 Schaffers (2007), p. 23. Thus the act of removing taboos always contains explosive quality. Cf. Friedrich (2007), p. 161.

162 Schaffers (2007), p. 26

163 Schaffers (2007), p. 26

### 3 Conclusion

As proven by this analysis director Fox and producer/ scriptwriter Uchovsky with each of their films get closer to the range of topics dealt with in *THE BUBBLE*: from military confrontation of two warring parties through the way of dealing with threatening situations as civil society to an attempt of living together in a civil society.

It is a nightmarish aspect about the films reviewed that they in spite of dealing with the present situation neither lose track of the past nor become outdated. Thus e.g. the films *TIME OFF* or *YOSSI & JAGGER* could have also taken place in 2006. In *TIME OFF* even the location where the soldiers are sent corresponds to the recent reality of 2006. In addition well-known Israeli actor Knoller who plays Yossi in *YOSSI & JAGGER* and the Tel Avivian Noam on reserve duty in *THE BUBBLE* was drafted in 2006 due to the Second Lebanon War.<sup>164</sup> In this respect *THE BUBBLE* provides the opportunity to deal with the Israeli present in an intensive way that has a big impact on the audience. Concerning the audience in Israel Fox and Uchovsky moot traditional aspects of masculinity and femininity. Moreover they challenge strategies used to come to terms with the past and ask for a way to organise the future. All this poses huge challenges on monolithic constructions of identity. From the social psychological point of view these monolithic constructions become very important in particular in threatening and conflict situations because they help create a collective in contrast to the Other, the foreign and the evil. Therefore it is not surprising that the filmmakers on the occasion of the screening of the film at the International Film Festival Berlin in February 2007 explain that it rather had an adverse effect on *THE BUBBLE* that the film was in Israeli cinemas just around the Second Lebanon War. Nevertheless according to Fox and Uchovsky the domestic controversy notably among the younger viewers had a positive impact. The director states:

„The audience up until now has been mainly one of younger people who have been flowing to the theaters, making *THE BUBBLE* the only Israeli film to succeed commercially in Israel last year. Many theater owners describe situations where groups of viewers stay at the entrance to the theater, not wanting or willing to leave, talking and arguing about the film. This success is particularly interesting considering the fact that there is a war going on, and people are frightened to leave their homes. It is important for us that young people in Israel are confronting the issues raised by the film, and embracing its ideas.”<sup>165</sup>

Considering all films together they illustrate that the relation of the self and the Other needs to be negotiated not only between different milieus but within particular milieus as well. This stage marks the last phase of the dynamic process as outlined by Bar-On (and Maoz) for social psychological analysis of collective Israeli identity.

Almost along the way the films *TIME OFF* (1990), *SONG OF THE SIREN* (1990), *YOSSI & JAGGER* (2002), *WALK ON WATER* (2004) and *THE BUBBLE* (2006) give foreign audiences an understanding of points of view that are unconsidered in general news coverage. Fox and Uchovsky turn their attention to characters who question the social system that surrounds them, who question

164 Cf. Fox's interview for Arte. Arte <http://www.arte.tv/de/film/Berlinale-2007/Interviews--Trailer---/1464122.html> (10.08.07).

165 Pro Fun Filmverleih: *THE BUBBLE*. <http://www.pro-fun.de/html/kino-filmverleih.html> (26.07.07)

the prevailing moral and religious concepts in order to pursue their little bit of happiness in everyday life. Therefore the characters do not shy away from the risks of a life beyond established conventions, although they are not always aware of the consequences of their decisions. The results are a film-immanent inductive discussion as well as an inductive discussion referring to the audience which acknowledge shades of grey rather than reinforcing black and white approaches and aim at making aware of contradictions.

48 Thanks

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