AJS Review 38:1 (April 2014), 143–160
© Association for Jewish Studies 2014
doi:10.1017/S0364009414000075

Review Essay
Cinema Studies/Jewish Studies, 2011–2013

Naomi Sokoloff

In an era of massive university budget cuts and pervasive malaise regarding the future of the humanities, cinema and media studies continue to be a growth industry. Many academic fields have been paying increasing attention to film, in terms of both curriculum development and research. Jewish studies is no exception. Since 2011, a boom in publications has included a range of new books that deal with Jews on screen, Jewish themes in cinema, and the construction of Jewish identity through film. To assess what these recent titles contribute to Jewish cinema studies, though, requires assessing the parameters of the field—and that is no easy task. The definition of what belongs is as elastic as the boundaries of Jewish identity and as perplexing as the perennial question, who is a Jew? Consequently, the field is wildly expansive, potentially encompassing the many geographical locales where films on Jewish topics have been produced as well as the multiple languages and cinematic traditions within which such films have emerged. At issue are not just numerous national cinemas, but also transnational productions and international histories. Yiddish film, for instance, was produced in Poland, the Soviet Union, the US, Argentina, and other places as well.[1] Compounding the challenge of assessing the field of Jewish film is the fact that Jewish studies overlaps with Holocaust studies, itself a vast enterprise that has grown dramatically over the past two decades. A simple WorldCat search, restricted to scholarly books from respectable academic presses, turns up dozens of titles on cinema and the Holocaust published since the year 2000.[2] Not surprisingly, the long-standing debates on "what is Jewish literature?" have morphed into controversy over "what is Jewish cinema"?[3]

Even so, as the study of Jews and cinema has gained momentum, the field has been asserting itself as a distinctive area of inquiry. The National Center for Jewish Film was founded at Brandeis University in 1976; Jewish film festivals

1. For overviews of Yiddish film history, see among others Judith N. Goldberg, *Laughter through Tears: The Yiddish Cinema* (East Brunswick, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983); J. Hoberman, *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film between Two Worlds*, updated and expanded ed. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2010); Eric Goldman, *Visions, Images and Dreams: Yiddish Film, Past and present*, rev. ed. (Teaneck, NJ: Holmes and Meier, 2010).

2. Lawrence Baron includes a detailed bibliography in his book, *Projecting the Holocaust into the Present: the Changing Focus of Contemporary Holocaust Cinema* (Lanham, MD : Rowman & Littlefield, 2005). Since 2005 many more films on Holocaust topics have been released, and many new scholarly publications have come along. The recent books deserve a review essay of their own.

3. To get a sense of the debates on literature, see Hana Wirth-Nesher, ed., *What is Jewish Literature?* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994); Ruth Wisse, *The Modern Jewish Canon* (New York: Free Press, 2000); and Justin Cammy et al., eds., *Arguing the Modern Jewish Canon* (Cambridge, MA: Center for Jewish Studies at Harvard University, 2008).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009414000075 Published online by Cambridge University Press

started in the 1980s and then spread widely; with the advent of VHS tapes and DVDs, university courses began to proliferate. Scholarly work—often diffusely published in journals of history, literature, cultural studies, or other disciplines—was accumulating all the while and attracting attention as an academic specialty. Indeed, responding to growing scholarly activity related to film, the literary journal *Prooftexts* published a special issue in 2002 called "The Cinema of Jewish Experience." This volume consists of essays on American, Israeli, French, and German topics, and comments on Palestinian filmmaking in Israel as well.[4] Further consolidating the field, Lawrence Baron's *The Modern Jewish Experience in World Cinema* appeared in 2011.[5] This collection of essays includes discussion of productions from the US, Israel, and a wide range of other countries (Mexico, Argentina, Italy, England, the Soviet Union, France, Germany, and more). As a further sign that Jewish cinema studies were coming into their own, a journal called *Jewish Film and New Media* published its first issue in the spring of 2013.[6] The introduction, by editors Nathan Abrams and Nir Cohen, provides a concise, astute report on the state of the field. Recognizing the predominance of Holocaust-related topics, Abrams and Cohen remark, too, on the preponderance of studies that deal with images of Jews. They call for more global focus and for new attention to a variety of topics that till now have received too little critical assessment – among them: Judaism (as opposed to Jewish ethnicity); Jewish sensibilities as well as overtly Jewish characters; women; video games and other new media. The extensive footnotes in their introduction effectively guide readers toward relevant scholarship in a field that is at once big and baggy, exhilarating and exasperating.[7]

How then to assess recent books in this domain? One way to start is with the considerable number of English-language books that focus significantly on the US or on Israel. America and Israel merit particular attention as the two biggest centers of Jewish population today and as the two biggest producers of films on Jewish topics. Furthermore, the emergence of American Jewish and Israeli identities coincided with the development of cinema itself. The era of the motion picture began at the same time as mass Jewish immigration to North America, as well

4. *Prooftexts* 22, nos. 1 & 2 (Winter & Spring 2002). The introduction by the editors, Joel Rosenberg and Stephen J. Whitfield, 1–10, heavily emphasizes the Holocaust as a central preoccupation, but the editors include a long list of desiderata to expand the field beyond Holocaust studies. The topics they urge scholars to consider include Yiddish cinema; Jewish video archives; the role of independent filmmaking in Jewish cinema; films on Jewish experience in postwar Europe, Latin America, Africa, and other lands; films on black Jewish life in America, Israel, and Africa; films about homosexual Jews; and films exploring Jewish music, Jewish spirituality, Jewish orthodoxy and Hasidism, Jewish humor, and the Jewish underworld. Ten years later many, though not all, of the topics they suggested had indeed come under scrutiny in scholarly discussion.

5. Lawrence Baron, *The Modern Jewish Experience in World Cinema* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2011).

6. The journal is published by Wayne State University Press.

7. Nathan Abrams and Nir Cohen, "Introduction," *Jewish Film & New Media* 1 no. 1 (Spring 2013). Available at: http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/jewishfilm/vol1/iss1/1. Among the editors' helpful suggested readings is the bibliography on television studies.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009414000075 Published online by Cambridge University Press

as the rise of Zionism. Consequently, film has played an integral part in shaping collective self-definition in both Israeli and American Jewish culture. This does not mean that the two communities talk to each other about film studies. They are often worlds apart. And yet, more and more Israeli films make it to American audiences these days—through film festivals, on-line resources such as the collection at the Israel Film Center based in New York (www.israelfilmcenter.org), and still occasional but increasingly common commercial successes such as *Ushpizin* (2004) and *Waltz with Bashir* (2008). New publications in English, including some in translation from Hebrew, are making the world of Israeli cinema more accessible to audiences in the US.

As to American Jewish film, groundbreaking studies charting its evolution began to appear in the 1980s. Often cited are two surveys: Patricia Erens's *The Jew in American Cinema* (1984) and Lester D. Friedman's *The Jewish Image in American Film* (1987).[8] These books indicate some of the central preoccupations of films on American Jewish life: immigration, forces of alienation and assimilation, antisemitism, postwar acceptance, and economic success. Early on, too, critics were aware of the role of Jews in film production, direction, and acting. Neal Gabler's *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (1988) highlights the influence of Jewish movie moguls, the ways they shaped showbiz, and their attitudes toward the representation of Jews.[9] In a detailed essay from 1996,[10] Joel Rosenberg reviews previous work in the field (what he called the "consensus view of the Jewish presence in American film"), refines the periodization that Erens and Friedman laid out, updates the received wisdom with mention of post-1980s films, and adds commentary on how Jewish cinema fits in with American ethnic film studies as a whole. Rosenberg anticipates future growth in Jewish cinema studies and calls for more in-depth analysis of individual films, more attention to Jewish history and folklore, and more attention to critical theory. Since 1996 a number of studies across a broad range have indeed appeared, dealing, among other things, with ethnicity, nostalgia, individual entertainers, and relationships of film to radio, TV, popular music, vaudeville, and theater. Other work has focused on auteur studies (singling out, for instance, Woody Allen and David Mamet) and on individual films (*Schindler's List*, especially, led to critical discussion in numerous articles and several books).[11]

8. Patricia Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Lester D. Friedman, *The Jewish Image in American Film: 70 Years of Hollywood's Vision of Jewish Characters and Themes* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel, 1987).

9. Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Crown, 1988).

10. Joel Rosenberg, "Jewish Experience on Film – An American Overview," *American Jewish Yearbook* 96 (1996): 3–50.

11. A path breaking book on Jews and the performing arts, broadly conceived, was Sarah Blacher Cohen's *From Hester Street to Hollywood: The Jewish-American Stage and Screen* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983); for more recent treatments of the entertainment industry, see J. Hoberman and Jeffrey Shandler, *Entertaining America: Jews, Movies and Broadcasting* (New York: Jewish Museum, JTSA, and Princeton University Press, 2003). See also David Desser and Lester D. Friedman, *American Jewish Filmmakers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009414000075 Published online by Cambridge University Press

On the topic of American Jewish film, scholars and general readers alike will find much of value in Lawrence Baron's edited volume, *The Modern Jewish Experience in World Cinema*.[12] While deliberately global in scope, this book elucidates many US-made movies. As an added benefit, by pulling together disparate voices, Baron puts films and film critics from one part of the world in dialogue with others from elsewhere. Common interests, as well as contrasts, become evident through the thematic grouping of essays under such rubrics as "The Shtetl on the Precipice: Eastern Europe, 1881–1921," "The Holocaust and its Repercussions," and "Contemporary American Jewish Identities." Baron's introduction outlines major historical developments in Jewish life throughout the ages, with special emphasis on the modern period, and each of the essays is designed to ground discussion of a particular film or two in the circumstances of a specific era. The authors provide context for understanding both the content of the film and the times in which the film was produced. So, for instance, Hasia Diner's commentary on *Hester Street* explains how this 1975 film reconstructs turn-of-the-century New York and also how it was motivated by and reflected dominant concerns of the 1970s. The search for roots prevalent in that decade sparked a revival of interest in the Lower East Side, even as feminist activism inspired filmmaker Joan Micklin to tell the tale of a beleaguered immigrant wife who makes good in America. Diner's piece is called "The Right Film at the Right Time," but that title could aptly apply to any number of other essays in this volume. Take Ellis Cashmore's discussion of *Chariots of Fire*. Cashmore notes that this 1981 movie from the UK "displayed motifs perfectly suited to the time of its release" (53). While his remarks center on British attitudes toward sports and on Jewish status within British society, he also shows how the film's treatment of amateur and professional competition in the 1920s resonated profoundly with American audiences experiencing the burgeoning individualism, unbridled ambition, and win-at-any-cost attitudes of the 1980s. Sharply insightful and informative, the essays in Baron's collection also aim for accessibility. Many are reprints, but appear in abridged form; all are highly readable. In addition, each entry includes a bibliography for background and further exploration of the topic at hand. In this way, *The Modern Jewish Experience in World Cinema* combines the best of a reference work with substantive original analysis. For instructors designing courses on Jews and film, this collection is indispensable. Its broad scope and admirable inclusiveness make this book eminently suitable as an introduction to Jewish cinema studies as a whole.

In a recent book review ("On Bernardi et al.'s *Hollywood's Chosen People*," *Jewish Film & New Media* 1 no.1 [Spring 2013]), Lawrence Baron provides an updated list of recommended reading on American Jewish cinema. He mentions Jon Stratton, *Coming Out Jewish* (2000), Steven Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism* (2001), Henry Bial, *Acting Jewish* (2005), Donald Eber, *Haunted in the New World* (2005), and several titles that deal with censorship in Hollywood.

12. Lawrence Baron, *The Modern Jewish Experience in World Cinema* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2011).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009414000075 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Several other recent books also offer points of entry to American Jewish film studies. One is the essay collection, *Hollywood's Chosen People* (2012), edited by Daniel Bernardi, Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, and Murray Pomerance.[13] The editors posit two fundamental questions: "What is the historic presence of Jews in America?" and "What involvement has the Jewish presence brought to Hollywood specifically and American popular culture broadly?" (1). The introduction to the volume addresses those questions directly, from an overarching perspective, while the individual essays offer multidisciplinary approaches to a variety of topics. By and large they return to issues that have been central to American Jewish cinema studies. The contributors elaborate on or synthesize ideas about such matters as Hollywood moguls, immigrant directors and actors, Holocaust films, films with serious social agendas, and institutionalized antisemitism in Hollywood. They also highlight forgotten films (Edward Sloman's silent *His People*), Hollywood marriages, responses to 9/11, and the provocative question, why do so many people hate Barbra Streisand? More scattershot a collection than Baron's, this is nonetheless a lively, energetic volume that offers high-quality commentary and adds to the momentum of scholarly exchange in the field.

A more systematic survey can be found in Eric Goldman's *The American Jewish Story through Cinema* (2012).[14] Goldman lays out in brief the evolving cinematic treatment of Jews and Jewishness in the US, starting with the advent of the talkies. Each chapter focuses on one or two films that Goldman considers emblematic of an entire era. Among the virtues of this approach are its capacious temporal scope, its chronological progression, and the fact that it avoids overwhelming the reader with encyclopedic detail. The emphasis is very much on assimilation, as the survey starts with the immigrant experience in *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and moves from there to films that tackle antisemitism in the postwar period (*Gentleman's Agreement* and *Crossfire*, 1947), to times of greater acceptance and unabashedly Jewish characters (*The Young Lions*, 1958), and also to times of growing Jewish integration into American society (*The Way We Were*, 1973; *Prince of Tides*, 1991). The final two essays deal with nostalgia (*Avalon*, 1991; *Liberty Heights*, 1999) and with post-Holocaust recovery of the past (*Everything is Illuminated*, 2005). The author is thoroughly familiar with all of the periods he covers, and his book helps bring them alive for today's audiences. Most captivating is the history of *The Jazz Singer*. Goldman traces the trajectory of its development, from its origins in a short story by Samson Raphaelson (1925) to its transformation into a stage play, to its adaptation as the Al Jolson film, and to the various remakes it underwent—with Danny Thomas (1952), Jerry Lewis (1959), and Neil Diamond (1980), and even (on *The Simpsons*) one that featured Krusty the Clown (1991). In this chapter Goldman also discusses several Yiddish films that did not rework *The Jazz Singer* so much as reimagine it, rejecting its

13. Daniel Bernardi, Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, and Murray Pomerance, eds., *Hollywood's Chosen People* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012).

14. Eric Goldman, *The American Jewish Story through Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009414000075 Published online by Cambridge University Press

assimilatory messages. Goldman's discussions in subsequent chapters are solid and informative, though they do not always move far enough beyond précis and rather predictable interpretations of mainstream films. (It would have been useful, for example, to include more commentary on differences between the original novel and the film version of *Everything is Illuminated*.). Even so, the clear writing and many photographs and illustrations that Goldman includes make *The American Jewish Story through Cinema* an instructive and enjoyable read.

For readers seeking assessments of recent American feature films, two books with similar titles offer analyses of stereotypes and Jewish identity. David L. Reznik's *New Jews?: Race and American Jewish Identity in 21st-Century Film* (2012) considers fifty-three films produced by US companies during the years 2000–2009.[15] Nathan Abrams's *The New Jew in Film: Exploring Jewishness and Judaism in Contemporary Cinema* (2012) examines three hundred films – some American-made and others from around the world—released since 1990.[16] Each of these books includes a list of the films examined. Compiling such information is in itself a useful contribution to the field—it indicates the extent to which movies with Jewish content or connection have flourished during this period. Keep in mind, though, that Reznik and Abrams have very different takes on how these films represent Jewish characters, and their decisions about what to include and what to exclude inevitably raise questions about canon formation.

As indicated by the question mark in his title, Reznik holds a skeptical view of the purportedly "new" Jew—a phenomenon that has been widely touted by cultural commentators in the past decade or so. This Jew has been said to assert Jewishness unapologetically—with unprecedented confidence, or with understated naturalness, or even by means of a self-consciously comic irony that deflates taboos and undercuts traditional stereotypes. In short, the so-called "new" Jew accepts being Jewish and is accepted as such by others. All of these qualities are considered manifestations of a healthy "normalization." Reznik's argument, in a nutshell, is that this is a lot of hooey. In actuality, he says, not so much has changed; Jews in film do not present much novelty, even in a supposedly post-racial, post-assimilatory America which aspires to colorblind equality. In his view, Jews are still racially stereotyped, and the proof is that they continue to appear in familiar, demeaning roles that he dubs "meddling matriarchs," "neurotic nebbishes," "pampered princesses," and "scheming scumbags." Here, he says, are the same old traits long associated with Jews on screen. What's new now is just that fathers and sons as well as mothers can be meddling, nebbishes can be homosexual and not just heterosexual, boys as well as girls can exhibit qualities of the JAP caricature, and working-class characters along with many others can be

15. David L.Reznik, *New Jews?: Race and American Jewish Identity in 21st-Century Film* (Boulder and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2012).

16. Nathan Abrams, *The New Jew in Film: Exploring Jewishness and Judaism in Contemporary Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009414000075 Published online by Cambridge University Press

scumbags. Reznik acknowledges that contemporary screenplays do reflect changing demographics, and treat such societal phenomena as dual-income households, aging baby boomers, and single moms. Yet, he emphasizes, because the old, disparaging images persist, no genuine reversal, subversion, or transcendence of stereotypes has taken place. Therefore, rather than "normalizing" Jews or creating a Jew comfortable with Jewishness, this new diversity cements the impression that Jews, regardless of gender, age, sexuality, or class, have an "innate proclivity" to lie, cheat, and steal, or to suffer from neurosis, social ineptitude, and dysfunctional family relationships (156).

Reznik's methodology stems primarily from a sociological concern with race, and he repeatedly refers to the representation of Jews in film as "racialized." This term, which at first may perplex, is clarified in an appendix that sets out the study's theoretical assumptions. By separating this material from the main text, Reznik runs the risk of divorcing important conceptual frameworks from his analysis of the films; at the same time, this approach has the advantage of keeping the preceding chapters jargon free and encouraging two different uses for this book. One version of *New Jew?*, directed at students, is concise and to the point, a slim volume written with discussion questions provided at the end of each chapter. The other version is for readers who wish to delve more deeply into scholarly debate about race and ethnicity. For them, the appendix rehearses contemporary academic arguments, starting from the basic tenet that "race, as traditionally understood, has little to no biological evidence" (161), because there are more differences among individuals within any group than there are among groups. Recent research therefore views race less as something physical than as a social construct, often a product of the popular imagination. Some theorists eschew the concept of race and instead focus on racism—for example, by emphasizing how social institutions implement discriminatory policies against groups that those in power perceive as a "race." Other theorists resolve the conundrum of defining "race" by simply equating race with ethnicity—i.e. a set of cultural practices but not a biological phenomenon. Reznik himself aims to synthesize elements from these various schools of thought. To begin with, he takes care not to essentialize racial identity, but he also rejects the equation of race with ethnicity. What he prefers to emphasize is the idea of "racialization" as "the sociohistorical process[es] by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed" (163). Color terms, he maintains, remain vital for discussing relations of political domination and subordination. Among other goals, he wants to challenge those who view Jews dismissively (and despite their many internal diversities) as white and privileged. He insists that Jews continue to endure hostility as members of a group and that they are still subjected to negative, damaging stereotypes on a widespread basis.

These points are all very interesting, and they lend Reznik's project a trenchant point of departure. At times, though, his theoretical model takes priority over readings of individual films, with the result that this book tries to squeeze its interpretations into a one-size-fits-all paradigm. His reading of *Sex and the City*, for instance, insists that main character Carrie Bradshaw is a JAP—spoiled, materialistic, and childish, a woman who wants to be pampered by a wealthy father

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009414000075 Published online by Cambridge University Press

figure (Mr. Big). So far, so good. Yet the label "JAP" doesn't entirely fit. Unlike the classic Jewish princess, Carrie is emphatically *not* averse to sex and not interested only in getting ahead. True, she's materialistic, but she's also very romantic, and in addition she's lived independently for many years pursuing her own career. Not to acknowledge the importance of these modifications to the JAP formula is to underestimate the creativity and originality that contributed to the huge popularity of *Sex and the City*, both as a TV series and as a feature film.

Nathan Abrams's opinion of the "new" Jew is 180 degrees away from Reznik's. Tellingly, he sees *Sex and the City* as drawing on the JAP cliché, but also as turning it into a "form of reversal and empowerment" (52–53). This film, he claims, embraces and revitalizes the stereotype. "New" Jews, in his view, are not afraid to self-identify as Jewish, nor are they afraid to take Jewishness for granted (as would be the case with Carrie, who never overtly identifies or is identified as Jewish). Abrams welcomes films that feature diverse Jewish characters, and he also applauds the representation of ordinary or quotidian Jewishness that needn't explain itself, but nonetheless allows Jews uninhibited enjoyment of insider jokes and cultural references. Either way, the "new" Jew undermines assimilationist paradigms in a post-melting pot America. In addition, he argues, Jewish screenwriters and actors successfully flaunt stereotypes in a playful way, mocking the dominant, majority values and the negative attributes that that majority has used to describe Jews. Accordingly, for Abrams the Jewish parents in *Meet the Fockers* (2004) are cool non-conformists, while for Reznik they are embarrassing boors, overinvolved in their children's lives. Note, too, that self-acceptance, in Abrams's assessment, can mean accepting satiric or ironic depictions of Jews; even Jewish self-hatred may characterize the "new" Jew, serving as an authentic expression of Jewish experience (think, for example, of the tormented, Jewish neo-Nazi portrayed in *The Believer*, 2001). The point is that the new cinematic trends de-universalize and re-particularize Jewish experience, good or bad as that experience may be.

Abrams organizes his book around the following themes: the Jew, the Jewess, sex, passivity, agency, religion, food, bathrooms. The last two topics are the ones he deems to have been least studied and so most in need of scholarly attention. He notes that in cinema certain foods often serve as code for Jewish identity, and that table behavior, too, may be coded Jewish (meaning, full of interruptions, vulgarity, and family decisions). Bathrooms he sees as a site of potential anxiety and unmasking—a place, somewhere between uncivilized and genteel, that can foster a critique of mainstream values or reveal what people are usually unwilling to reveal. Existing outside of public space, bathrooms are where outsiders may act out whatever their issues are with having outsider status. Under each of his thematic headings Abrams discusses a number of films, with some resulting overlap and repetition from one chapter to the next. Because so many films are considered together, it's a bit dizzying to try and keep straight who wrote, directed, and acted in each. However, prominent among the names mentioned repeatedly are Adam Sandler, Ben Stiller, the Coen Brothers, and the Jew Tang Clan (Seth Rogen, Jason Segel, Paul Rudd, inter alia, working with director Judd Appatow). Abrams has taken on the important job of providing an updated

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009414000075 Published online by Cambridge University Press

survey of American Jewish themes in film, and his book will serve for some time as a leading source of information on post-1990 trends.

When extending his analysis beyond North America, Abrams is on less secure footing. He sees a global renaissance of Jewish filmmaking and finds evidence of the "new" Jew in contemporary films from Russia, Argentina, Holland, Germany, Spain, and Israel. "Clearly," he writes, "Jews began to feel accepted in the post-1990 period" (12), and so cinematic representations of Jews have undergone a shift worldwide. The causes he cites as leading to this shift include a more multicultural Europe, reduced antisemitism, greater freedom of expression in the former Soviet republics, more independent filmmaking everywhere, and a greater diversity of Jewish life in Israel. It's to be applauded that he reaches beyond the US, and the discussion here of European films may well be eye opening for many American readers. Nonetheless, Abrams's overall argument loses power as it flattens international contexts. After a decade of notable anti-Jewish incidents in France and Belgium, the rise of ultranationalist movements in Hungary and Greece, and vicious press coverage and political cartoons regarding Jews in Germany and Norway, the Anti-Defamation League concluded that resurgent antisemitism in Europe was one of the top ten issues affecting Jews in 2012. Evidently, the "new" Jew who feels unprecedented acceptance and self-confidence is only part of the story of contemporary Jewish life.

Abrams's notion of "normalization" is problematic, too. Abrams uses the term to mean that recent cinema resists essentialism by undoing outdated binary thinking; for instance, many new films undermine the idea that Jews are passive victims, fundamentally unlike tough and proactive non-Jews. Recent films not only reverse the traditional paradigm by creating tough Jewish characters, they create a wide gamut of tough Jews, thus indicating that thinking in terms of polarities is itself passé. This argument is persuasive up to a point, but it needs to be contextualized more, especially in the international arena. Moreover, the term "normalize" sometimes grates. For example, Abrams refers to *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, a tale of the Holocaust in which a German boy, the son of a concentration camp officer, naively trades places with a Jewish boy.[17] True, this plot shifts the identity of victim from the Jew onto the non-Jew, but Abrams sidesteps the issue of why a blurring of boundaries between victims and perpetrators has recently come into vogue. This film is part of a broad literary and cinematic trend that inverts the roles of Jews and Nazis, attaching blame to no one. Why is this happening now, and what exactly is "normal" about it?

At times, too, Abrams's comments on Israeli films don't quite ring true, because they don't fill in enough information about historical context. Abrams observes, accurately, that Israeli film since the 1990s has increasingly represented diverse groups and paid special attention to *mizraḥim*, Holocaust survivors, women, Arabs, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender characters. Inaccurately, he remarks that the increasing presence of diverse Jewish characters—and of Jewish characters in world film who speak Yiddish, Aramaic, and other languages—constitutes a cinematic fulfillment of David Ben-Gurion's vision of

17. UK (2008). Released in the US as *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009414000075 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Jewish normalization: the dream that Jews would become a people like other peoples. In fact, Ben-Gurion was making the opposite point. *His* notion of normalization was one that would take place not in a multilingual world that welcomed diversity, but in a Jewish national context made cohesive through the Hebrew language. Indeed, the diversification of Jewish character in contemporary Israeli cinema came about just at the time when "normalized" notion of identity, the Hebrew-speaking sabra (itself known in earlier eras as the "new" Jew) started to lose luster and fade as a cultural ideal.

For the past twenty-five years, much debate in Israel has focused on just this phenomenon—that is, on the transition from an ideal of Israeli society as a Zionist melting pot to more of a multicultural model. While American Jewish film studies overwhelmingly define assimilation as a central issue and reveal an ongoing preoccupation with minority status, Israeli cinema studies cling to Zionism and its discontents as a central concern, revealing ongoing tumult over the adjustment to majority status. Prior to World War I, and then with growing intensity in the 1920s and 1930s, film helped document and shape the rise of the Zionist movement and Jewish settlement in Palestine. Subsequently, well into the early years of statehood, nation-building values—the creation of modern Hebrew culture and the pioneering exploits of a proud, strong, self-reliant sabra—were extolled in film. All of this underwent a sea change, though, over the following decades. The Zionist dream of a uniform Israeli identity emerging within Israel's variegated Jewish population was challenged as early as the late 1960s and the 1970s. The critique took on increased momentum in Israeli films in the mid-1980s, a moment that coincided with the upsurge in studies of Israeli cinema. Consequently, critical debate has gravitated toward the issue of Israeli identity. Expressions of disillusionment and the deconstruction of Zionist discourse have come to dominate, both in Hebrew- and English-language studies. In English, groundbreaking work along these lines includes Ella Shohat's *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation*[18]—an influential study that adopts a postcolonial stance. Nurith Gertz, one of the prominent film scholars who drew attention to Holocaust survivors and the second generation after the Holocaust, as well as representations of women and the Arab minority in Israel, published a number of articles in English related to her extensive research in Hebrew.[19] Yosefa Loshitzky's *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen*[20] followed in 2001, revisiting related topics and offering new analyses of particular films as sites of struggle over meaning.[21]

18. Ella Shohat, *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989; London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

19. See, for example, several chapters on cinema in Nurith Gertz, *Myths in Israeli Culture, Captives of a Dream* (Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2000) and her article "Space and Gender in the New Israeli and Palestinian Cinema," *Prooftexts* 22, nos.1 & 2 (Winter & Spring 2002): 157–185.

20. Yosefa Loshitzky, *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).

21. It bears noting that a documentary called *A History of Israeli Cinema* (2010) is available now on DVD, with English subtitles. The great advantage of this source is that it provides not just discussion and a survey of the topic, but also extensive clips from the films it discusses.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009414000075 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Continuing the debates, a collection of essays appeared in 2011, *Israeli Cinema: Identities in Motion*, edited by Miri Talmon and Yaron Peleg.[22] This volume includes commentary on a variety of topics, starting with pre-state Zionist film and staple emblems of Israeli culture in cinema from the years following independence (soldiers and kibbutzniks). The collection moves on from there to more recent preoccupations: *mizraḥi* identity, the mass immigration of "Russians," gender and LGBT themes, religion, Palestinians, and the Israeli occupation.[23] The introduction by the editors skillfully presents an overview of the field. The book presents some fine essays, but may also serve as a sampler of things to come. It includes contributions by Yaron Shemer, Raz Yosef, Ariel L. Feldestein, and Anat Y. Zanger, all of whom have expanded on the material presented in this collection, incorporating it into book-length studies of their own.

One of these monographs is Yaron Shemer's *Identity, Place, and Subversion in Contemporary Mizrahi Cinema in Israel* (2013).[24] Covering documentaries and shorts, as well as fiction films, Shemer's research focuses primarily on work produced since the 1990s. The author's approach is informed by postcolonial theory, and he examines what stereotypes reveal about the people who promulgate them. Shemer is careful not to foist stereotypes onto *mizraḥim* and he eschews any simple or essentialist definition of *mizraḥim*. Acutely aware that the term refers to people of many different backgrounds, he defines *mizraḥim* not as a homogeneous group, but as a set of people who have developed a collective identity based on experiential commonalities. That is, he explains *mizraḥi*-ness as an awareness of group cohesion that has emerged out of a series of ethnic confrontations and struggles within Israel. In short, it is an adopted self-identification, and one that Shemer champions. The chapters of his volume cover the history of *mizraḥi* circumstances in Israel, the way filmmakers have constructed *mizraḥi* identity, *mizraḥi* space (in particular, who in Israel is on the margins and who is in the center, culturally and geographically), *mizraḥi* protest cinema, and intra- and intergroup relations (meaning, the convergence and intersections of gender and ethnicity, plus the relation of *mizraḥi* issues to Palestinian issues and to class conflicts).

Among the many strengths of this book are its impressively sophisticated and sensitive readings of cinematic texts. Shemer also identifies fascinating trends, including a widespread yearning among young Israelis to reconnect with their grandparents' generation, to unearth the family's past, and to better understand the traumas of aliyah and adaptation to Israeli culture. Shemer describes a

22. Miri Talmon and Yaron Peleg, eds., *Israeli Cinema: Identities in Motion* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).

23. LGBT topics have had particular visibility in English, with the publication of two monographs—Raz Yosef, *Beyond Flesh: Queer Masculinities and Nationalism in Israeli Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004) and Nir Cohen, *Soldiers, Rebels and Drifters: Gay Representation in Israeli Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011)—as well as discussion of film within cultural studies publications by Lee Walzer, Rebecca Stein, and others.

24. Yaron Shemer, *Identity, Place, and Subversion in Contemporary Mizrahi Cinema in Israel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009414000075 Published online by Cambridge University Press

cluster of films, all of which highlight musicians who set out to rekindle interest in the Arab music and Middle Eastern songs that their grandparents once performed. Since many of the films discussed in the book are not widely distributed in the US, Shemer's sweeping analysis brings valuable insights to an American audience. In addition, he includes an appendix of film titles and gives links to various sources where some of these films can be ordered, thus helping to make them more accessible. In another significant contribution, Shemer uncovers patterns of representation that otherwise might go unnoticed. He points out that many Israeli films, ostensibly not about *mizraḥi* issues at all, nonetheless offer evidence of ethnic tensions and sociological suppositions. For instance, he names *Bonjour Monsieur Shlomi* (2003) as but one of many films in which *mizraḥi* characters find success only by leaving their families and neighborhoods and moving to Ashkenazi centers of culture. Finally, Shemer's book provides compelling accounts of *mizraḥi* efforts to reach wider audiences. The author recounts in absorbing detail how the Sderot Cinemateque, an organization in a marginal location, has successfully launched venues to offer films and opportunities unavailable elsewhere. Through its efforts to screen Israeli-made films and films about socioeconomic struggle, its successful launching of a film festival (Festival Darom) that sponsors many events free of charge, and its recruitment of volunteers who take films to other towns and out-of-the-way locales (including bomb shelters during Qassam attacks), the Cinemateque has transformed Sderot into a cultural hub for various satellite communities in the south of Israel.

This book offers very high-caliber work. Shemer articulates a variety of debates with great precision and expertise in enviably well-crafted prose. Be forewarned, though: after explaining all the issues, he takes assertive positions that are sure to polarize readers. For instance, after laying out the various appellations that have been applied to *mizraḥim* (‘*edot ha-mizraḥ*, Sephardim, Oriental Jews, Arab Jews, Jews of the Muslim and Arab world) and after pointing out the historical connotations and shortcomings of each term, he himself deliberately chooses to use the phrase "Arab-Jew"—this, despite the fact that many *mizraḥim* hail not from the Arab world but from Iran or other places. Shemer prefers this designation, because it is "designed to subvert and eschew the tenets of Ashkenazi Zionism" (52). He resents the way that Ashkenazi founders of Israel supposed Jewishness to be distinct from Arabness and so, condescendingly, viewed Jewish immigrants from Arab lands as hybrids. Similarly, Shemer is highly cognizant of varied streams of Zionist discourse, and he acknowledges their distinctive ideologies; yet, after presenting subtly nuanced explications of their differences, he endorses the views of critics who "set out to expose the inveterate racial and colonial underpinnings" of Zionism and who denounce Zionism for promoting a pernicious, deliberate agenda predicated on "labor exploitation, discrimination, and oppression" of North African and Middle Eastern Jews (19).[25]

25. Shemer builds on the work of, among others, Ella Shohat. Of particular pertinence to the discussion of *mizraḥi* space and identity are the comments she includes in the section called "Postscript" in her expanded, revised edition of *Israeli Cinema* (2010).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009414000075 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Politics suffuses Israeli film studies; there's no way around that. Raz Yosef openly acknowledges this aspect of his own work in the title of his 2011 book, *The Politics of Loss and Trauma in Contemporary Israeli Cinema*.[26] Film, he argues, offers a "new political understanding" of Israeli history, precisely because filmmakers have been so invested in exploring trauma (5). While telling stories of personal tragedy or private loss, cinema urges Israelis to confront repressed national pain and to deal with truths that have been downplayed by conventional wisdom or evaded by official accounts of collective events. All Israelis have experienced an abundance of traumas—some related to war, some to the Holocaust, some to immigration and the rigors of adjustment to a new society; some are a result of discrimination against homosexuals, and some of the occupation and injustices committed against Palestinians. Traumatic events are, by definition, "incomprehensible and unrepresentable," that is, these are events so shattering that, at the time, the victim cannot integrate them into memory or assimilate them into previous frameworks of understanding. Such shocks and wounds therefore repeat—for instance, in flashbacks or nightmares—and they can be worked through only belatedly. Accordingly, Yosef writes that he does not deal with naive questions regarding "the true or false representation of reality" (11), but with the ways that specters of the past haunt the Israeli psyche. For example, the film *Kippur* (2000) portrays the Yom Kippur War as a battleground filled with rain and mud. In fact, rain did not fall during that 1973 conflict. Mimetic fidelity, though, is beside the point here; in Yosef's view, at work in the film is a post-traumatic aesthetic that relies on displacement, metaphor, and distancing strategies. These enable the filmmaker "to touch upon past wounds" indirectly (11) and so to foster dialogue between the present and the past. *Kippur* does not portray the October war accurately, but it does dramatically portray battle as a site of masochistic fantasy and so pushes aside any interpretation of the war as possessing national significance. In short, this interpretation posits that the Yom Kippur War is depicted as primarily a bloodbath and an orgy of violence, an unnecessary war that (in Yosef's opinion) might have been avoided had Israel been less militaristic, more willing to trade land for peace, and more willing to reconcile with its enemies.

The same artistic detachment and displacement that effectively express trauma also at times disappoint this author. He laments that a number of Israeli war films lack historical context, an omission that neutralizes the potential for critique of the Israeli army. *Beaufort* (2007) and *Lebanon* (2009), for example, focus closely on the fears and suffering of Israeli soldiers, not on the role of the Israeli military as an invading force in Lebanon. Yosef takes the filmmakers to task for casting the soldiers as victims and failing to show enough empathy for Arab suffering. Indeed, Yosef takes a clearly prescriptive stance throughout his study. He argues that for decades Israeli society has been acting out trauma from the Holocaust, and that because of an inability to work through this issue, the state

26. Raz Yosef, *The Politics of Loss and Trauma in Contemporary Israeli Cinema* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009414000075 Published online by Cambridge University Press

promulgates needless violence and victimization of Palestinians. Yosef's readings of films are sharp, penetrating, and high powered; furthermore, they intelligently combine psychoanalytic frameworks with recent understandings of trauma theory. Ultimately, however, what he delivers is a political message: "The hegemonic Israeli discourse refrains from dealing with the question of responsibility for the injustices that it itself has perpetrated. This is because the Jewish-Israeli is always seen as a passive victim of events and as uninvolved in historical processes" (142). Readers with opposing viewpoints will no doubt object that this argument is unsubstantiated. Yosef presents as self-evident the idea that Zionism is unjust and that all Israeli Jews are born into a guilt that precedes and supersedes their own actions (18). Furthermore, references to Israeli discourse as "hegemonic" go unexamined. Skeptics will find the term virtually oxymoronic; steeped as it is in debate, known for citizens who loudly profess conflicting perspectives, Israeli society has long since relinquished any clear political consensus. More fundamentally, it could be argued that Hebrew culture—especially in the area of literature and film—has been busy working through Holocaust trauma quite openly for more than thirty years; it remains unclear, then, how much an unwillingness to confront Holocaust issues has constituted a significant determinant of national policies.

Ariel L. Feldestein's *Cinema and Zionism: The Development of a Nation through Film* (2012)[27] represents the other end of the political spectrum from Yosef's. Celebrating Zionist films from the years 1917–1939, Feldestein explores connections between cinema and national institutions. This book is organized around studies of prominent filmmakers. Feldestein devotes one chapter each to Ya'akov Ben-Dov, Natan Axelrod and Ḥayim Halaḥmi, and Barukh Agadati, all of whom were immigrants working in the Yishuv; then Feldestein turns, with one chapter each, to international filmmakers Alexander Ford, Helmar Leski, Leo Hermann, and Yehudah Leman. Each chapter includes a detailed summary, description, and commentary on individual films, with attention to matters of financial support, production, distribution, legal controversies (such as who had rights to use the "Song of the Valley" in their movies), and who was employed by whom.

One of Feldestein's chief goals is to defend the filmmakers against claims that they were merely propagandists. His central thesis is that they differed significantly from filmmakers recruited to serve the state in Nazi Germany and the USSR. He argues that many of the Zionist filmmakers were self-motivated or volunteered their work. He presents Ben-Dov, for instance, as a creative artist unwilling to sacrifice his professional independence or relinquish control over the content of his work, even when offered support from the Jewish National Fund. At several important junctures Feldestein deals with these issues by conducting a dialogue with Ella Shohat, whose work adopts a stance highly critical of Zionism. For example, what she sees as a failure of early Zionist filmmakers to address tensions between Jewish pioneers and Arab inhabitants in pre-state

27. Ariel L. Feldestein, *Cinema and Zionism: The Development of a Nation through Film* (Middlesex and Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2012).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009414000075 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Palestine, he sees as benign focus on other themes. Explaining away the omission of individualized Arab characters in *Oded the Wanderer*, a feature film from 1933, he finds neither overtly hostile bigotry nor even troubling blind spots, only a tale of youthful Jewish pioneers who bravely explore the wilderness. He states that, to support her case, Shohat "should have found in the documentation of the production that the director explicitly instructed the cinematographer and other crew members to ignore the Arab residents of the land. But she does not present such evidence, nor is there any indication that she has found such proof" (72).

In Feldestein's view, the filmmakers he discusses were not stooges of the establishment, and, by the standards of that time, did not produce blatant propaganda. This argument has merit, but times have changed and sensibilities have changed; today it's hard for viewers not to note the heavy-handed approach of early Zionist films. Feldestein would be more persuasive had he acknowledged this more openly, and had he admitted that their imagery and strategies of representation (which he himself explicates attentively and agilely) are woefully outmoded—even, at times, downright cringe-worthy. Nonetheless, the primary aim and contribution of this book is to present detailed documentation of behind-the-scenes processes that contributed to building up the Yishuv and strengthening the film industry there. That, it accomplishes. Most of the previous scholarship on cinema of this period has been published in Hebrew, so it is a positive development to have Feldestein's research available in English.[28] Regarding stylistic aspects of this study, two small caveats are in order: the translation is at times awkward, and the bibliography lists numerous Hebrew titles in English translation only—neither in Hebrew nor in transliteration. This choice makes it harder for readers to follow up and find the original sources.

Politicized discourse is integral also to Anat Y. Zanger's *Place, Memory and Myth in Contemporary Israeli Cinema* (2012).[29] The book leans left and embraces post-Zionist critique, but that is not its most salient feature. Rather, the originality of Zanger's project stems from the way she applies ideas about space to portrayals of landscape, territory, and identity in Israeli films. Place and space have become a hot topic in literary and cultural studies in recent years, and Zanger draws on a rich array of theoretical frameworks developed by Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, J.W. Mitchell, and others. She starts from the premise that, in cinema, space is never merely scenery, but a record of economic, social, and political systems. Following Zali Gurevitch and Gideon Aran, she finds in Israeli culture a fundamental friction between the idea of the Land—that is, the grand notion of Zion as the idealized locus of Jewish yearning—and the reality of the place that has become the venue for everyday life in the State of Israel. It is intriguing to see

28. One notable book-length study in English is Hillel Tryster's *Israel before Israel: Silent Cinema in the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: Steven Spielberg Jewish Film Archive of the Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Central Zionist Archives, 1995).

29. Anat Y. Zanger, *Place, Memory and Myth in Contemporary Israeli Cinema* (Middlesex and Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2012).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009414000075 Published online by Cambridge University Press

these concepts applied to cinema. They effectively illuminate early comedies such as *Blaumilch Canal* (1969) in which a misfit undertakes subversive activities, challenging officials in Tel Aviv to rearrange their maps (their territorial image of the world), thereby undermining their sense of authority. Zanger's approach to films set in Jerusalem yields particularly thought-provoking insights. That city is a site of constant tension between the sacred and the mundane, and Zanger pulls together diverse recent films that challenge and dismantle the notion of Jerusalem as the *axis mundi*, the place where spiritual and physical worlds meet. Her discussion begins with *The Burdensome Stone* (2008), a documentary that explores the Dome of the Rock/Temple Mount as the site of the foundation stone, the mythical spot where heaven and earth connect. Zanger then compares that film with *Seven Minutes in Heaven* (2007). This experimental fiction film blends two levels of reality, mediating between a celestial and earthly Jerusalem while the main character lies suspended between life and death in the aftermath of a terrorist bombing. The analysis of the axis mundi topos continues in a reading of *Someone to Run With* (2006), a film based on the novel by David Grossman. This tale of teenage runaways revolves around two towers, one utopian and one dystopian, reaching above and below the city. The juxtaposition of these films is startling, refreshing, and stimulating.

Marring this positive impression are arguments that fail to develop fully, creating confusing leaps in logic. For example, Zanger sees one of the towers in *Someone to Run With* as an emblem of Zionist nationalism and its failings, and she then relates the Jerusalem setting to Agnon's 1945 masterpiece *Tmol shilshom* (*Only Yesterday*). The problem is partly that the connections are conveyed in just a few curtailed sentences, and partly that her reading conflates nationalism with religion—a concern much more pertinent to the present than to the period of the Second Aliyah, the setting for Agnon's novel. In *Tmol shilshom* Zionists gravitate toward Jaffa, while Jerusalem is the home of reactionary religious traditionalists opposed to Jewish nationalism. Zanger's presentation seems to have garbled the issues through overly telegraphic exposition, and this kind of weakness impairs the book at several other points as well. Zanger's approach is least successful when it overreaches or overuses a model. Any source of water, it seems—whether the ocean, a ritual bath, or a swimming pool—may function as a cinematic variation on the fairytale, "The Little Mermaid," and hence Zanger reads a number of disparate films primarily as allegorical tales about the suppression of women's voices. Nonetheless, and altogether, it's exciting to see how Zanger engages innovative theories and acute analysis of cinematic visuals to create new, and sometimes dazzling, perspectives on Israeli film.

This recent spate of English-language publications brings higher visibility to Israeli cinema in the international arena.[30] It is to be hoped that these and future

30. Most American scholars are unlikely to read in Hebrew, whereas Israeli academics are more likely to read English-language scholarship and to be aware of American cinema as well. In recent years a number of publications have appeared in Hebrew that compare Israeli and American film. See, for example, Yuval Rivlin's *Ha-'akhbar she-sha'ag: zehut yehudit be-kolno'a ha-'amerikani ve-ha-yisraeli [The Mouse that Roared: Jewish Identity in Israeli and American Cinema]* (Jerusalem:

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009414000075 Published online by Cambridge University Press

studies will lead readers to a more discerning understanding of Israeli culture. Especially important is work that provides historical background and contextualized commentary, which can enhance appreciation of Israeli film while decreasing egregious misreading of it.

Take, for example, the challenges of teaching *Waltz with Bashir* to university students. This highly successful film has become a political football and has elicited a lot of reaction from audiences and critics, some of it strikingly ill-informed. It is fortunate, then, to find thoughtful, well-informed work such as Ilan Avisar's essay, "Dancing Solo in the Lebanese Mud" (included in Lawrence Baron's *The Modern Jewish Experience in World Cinema*). This piece is a welcome addition to critical debate, precisely because it lays out the complex reception *Waltz* has had and the positions that different constituencies have taken vis-à-vis this film. Avisar points out that the director, Ari Folman, insisted it was an antiwar movie and not political; nonetheless, reviews in the US and Europe (including pieces in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Guardian*) greeted *Waltz* enthusiastically as a protest against the Israeli military's responsibility for the Sabra and Shatila massacres of 1982. At the same time, Israelis to the right of the political spectrum were vexed by the negative depiction of Israeli soldiers as singularly destructive and "heedlessly violent" (362). Furthermore, many viewers objected that the omission of reference to the circumstances of the Lebanon War muddled the representation of that conflict. All the same, the Israeli Left was angered by the film's focus on individualism and Holocaust imagery, which led them to condemn *Waltz with Bashir* for "lacking any substantive criticism of Israel aggression" (363–64). It is to Avisar's credit that he sets out these different perspectives in level-headed fashion even while acknowledging the brilliance of Folman's artistry and explaining how *Waltz* made a major contribution to the language of cinema through its use of documentary animation.[31] Well versed in cinematic genres, conventions, and precedents, Avisar both lauds Folman's innovative imagery and shows how his narrative devices draw on a long line of previous war films, including *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, *Flags of Our Fathers*, *Full Metal Jacket*, and *Apocalypse Now*. With the help of this essay, students can better assess both the film's artistic accomplishments and its political impacts.

More studies in English on other national cinemas, not just Israeli film, will certainly enrich the field of Jewish cinema studies. Moreover, greater critical dialogue across national boundaries is desirable for the simple reason that many recent productions are in fact transnational.[32] *Live and Become* (2005), an engrossing coming-of-age story set in Israeli's Ethiopian community, was a joint Belgian, French, Israeli, and Italian production. *Sunshine* (1999), a family saga about

Toby Press, 2009). For an articulate review of some prominent trends in Israeli film studies, focusing on English-language publications, see Marc S. Bernstein, "Scofflaws, Prophets, and Other Criminals: New Scholarship on Israeli Cinema," *Israel Studies Review* 27, no. 2 (Winter 2012): 213–225.

31. It should be noted that Avisar doesn't withhold his own views; he finds the film painfully biased against the Israeli military and evasive in its treatment of large political issues.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009414000075 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Hungarian Jews, was made possible by Austrian, Canadian, German, and Hungarian cooperation. And of course, many of the early Zionist films were international endeavors as well, made with support from US producers, Polish directors, and others. Excavating the archaeology of their production and distribution helps explain whose influence and whose attitudes came into play in making these films. This is precisely the kind of work Feldestein has done, and similar excavations of contemporary film could usefully foster more sophisticated understanding of the filters and perspectives through which Jewish experience has been represented on the screen in recent times.

One thing is certain: even with the outpouring of new books on the topic of Jews and film, much more remains to be said. Beyond ongoing obsessions with immigration and ethnicity, beyond pervasive attention to the Holocaust, other issues are also worthy of attention. The depiction of religion is one such topic that still deserves more comment than it has received. A number of new films have treated religious themes and religious milieus with insight and sensitivity; consider *God's Neighbors* and *Fill the Void*, two high-quality Israeli films from 2012 that would yield interesting comparison with films from other nations. The Ma'ale Film School in Jerusalem, which produces films by and about Orthodox Jews, is in itself a phenomenon that film students in the United States should know about. This school has made a number of films (among them, *Green Chariot*, 2005) that merit commentary and that can serve pedagogical needs at the university level. The TV series *Merḥak negi'a* [A touch away, 2006] and *Srugim* (first airing in 2008) add to the spectrum of intelligent and tastefully done programming that features religious characters and that appeals far beyond observant audiences.[33] Jewish cinema studies will benefit, too, from further attention to genre and auteur studies and to new theoretical approaches. Stereotypes, for instance, will continue to be a compelling issue, particularly as they invite more theory-based analysis.[34] Above all, there is need for constant updating. The films keep on coming, and new media keep evolving. The present boom in new books is just the beginning for Jewish cinema and media studies.

Naomi Sokoloff
University of Washington
Seattle, Washington

32. Avisar points out that many Israeli films of the 1980s and 1990s were produced with European funding. He sees a correlation between the source of funding and the prevalence of protest films during that period.

33. Some articles on religion have indeed begun to appear; see for instance the pieces by Nava Dushi and by David Volach in Talmon and Peleg's collection. Also of interest: David Jacobson, "The Ma'ale School: Catalyst for the Entrance of Religious Zionists into the World of Media Production," *Israel Studies* 9, no.1 (Spring 2004): 31–60.

34. In a review of Abrams's *The New Jew in Film*, Shai Ginsburg suggests directions in which future studies of stereotype might develop so as to engage more deeply with theory. H-JUDAIC, H-Net Reviews, June 2013, https://ww.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=35887.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009414000075 Published online by Cambridge University Press