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Zionist and Palestinian Honor and Universal Dignity in Israeli Cinema

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Abstract

This article offers a film analysis of Israeli films which, it claims, embrace or critique Israel's Zionist and Palestinian perceptions of honor, as compared with universal human dignity. The article groups together and examines six acclaimed Israeli feature films that, it argues, present and comment on Zionist and Palestinian perceptions of honor, as well as human dignity. The Israeli-Zionist *Kazablan* (1973) and the Israeli-Palestinian *Wedding in Galilee* (1987) each construct an ideal version of Zionist and Palestinian honor codes and mentalities, respectively. More critical and recent films, *James' Journey to Jerusalem* (2003), *Attash* (2004) and *Ajami* (2009), suggest that these happy ideals conceal monstrous shadow images that undermine the reverence and promotion of human dignity. Finally, *Bethlehem* (2013) is read as portraying both Zionist and Palestinian mentalities concerning honor as macho, adolescent, insensitive and hurtful. According to this reading, *Bethlehem* demonstrates how both honor codes preclude the adherence to and cherishing of universal human dignity, locking the two nations in an eternal blood feud.

Keywords

human dignity – Zionist honor – Palestinian honor – Israeli film/cinema

1 Introduction: Argument Layout, Film Analysis

This article analyzes the impact of Zionist and Palestinian honor cultures on these societies' embrace of human dignity, as this theme is shown to be presented in Jewish and Palestinian Israeli cinema.

1.1 *Argument Outline*

The article's grouping together of six Israeli films that have never been grouped together, and its interpretation of all six as a complex, valuable social manifesto on Zionist and Palestinian honor and human dignity, demonstrate how critical social film interpretation may open up unique perspectives and suggest original insights.

Introducing *Kazablan* in some detail (1973), this article argues that the popular musical film presents Israel's 'official story' of its Zionist honor culture, as well as this culture's contemporary iconic man of honor. This 'official story' highlights and celebrates the all-Jewish solidarity achieved through Zionist honor, stressing how Israeli Jews of European and non-European descent unite in a Zionist perception of honor with a Mediterranean flavor. *James' Journey to Jerusalem* (2003), which focuses on African work migrants in Israel, is read here as exposing the segregationalistic, excluding consequences of the *Kazablan* all-Jewish version of Israeli honor, and its dire consequences in terms of universal human dignity.

Wedding in Galilee (1987), an Israeli-Palestinian film, is interpreted here as examining Israeli-Palestinians' honor-based grief and dilemmas under the oppressive military rule, while romantically celebrating and hailing the vision of Palestinian honor revived.¹ The more nuanced Israeli-Palestinian *Attash* (2004) and *Ajami* (2009) are presented as critically exploring the tragic consequences of Palestinian honor customs and mentality on the Israeli-Palestinian community itself. Finally, in the framework proposed, *Bethlehem* (2013) is said here to compare and equate Zionist and Palestinian honor mentalities, pointing to the blood feud that both parties are locked in.² This movie illustrates how the mutual honor-based Israeli-Palestinian blood feud prevents both parties from cherishing human dignity.

1.2 *Methodology: Film Analysis*

Analyzing societies through their cinematic texts has recently been embraced by 'visual sociology'. Yet, as in the case of many film analysts, I have long been tracing social phenomena, currents and trends – including ones that are based

1 Until 1967 Palestinian Israeli citizens were under military rule.

2 Of the six films discussed in this article, only *Bethlehem* refers to non-Israeli Palestinians: West-Bank Palestinians under the rule of the Palestinian Authority and Israeli occupation. This article cannot address the complex relationship between Israeli-Palestinian and non-Israeli Palestinians, or the subtle differences between these two groups' honor mentalities.

on honor and dignity – using critical reading of cinematic texts.³ Referring to the fundamental elements of film (such as plot, characters, editing choices, casting, genre and camera work) such an interpretation is intended to *convince* that a suggested framework is plausible, rather than *prove* that it is exclusively binding. Based in the humanities (as distinct from social sciences), this type of analysis relies on a host of hermeneutical methods and tools, suggesting likely meaningful insights.

Thus, for example, the use of a ‘reader response’ perspective seeks to persuade that a film (like any textual narrative) invites its viewer to take on a certain type of persona – the film’s ‘implied reader’ – while coding the film’s socio-cultural messages to best reach and impact this assumed persona (Iser 1978). A proposed deciphering of a film’s implied reader offers an exposure of the film’s coded socio-cultural messages. As recently summarized by Janina Wildfeuer (2014, p. 1): ‘Film interpretation is an active process of relational meaning-making and inferring its propositional content in terms of assumptions and hypotheses, which the recipient makes according to concrete cues within the text’.

Rather than reviewing a single cinematic text in great detail, this article briefly reviews the six feature films made in Israel (by Jews and Palestinians), suggesting that, when read together, they reveal the rise of critical consciousness regarding Israeli and Palestinian honor cultures and their detrimental effect on the advancement of universalistic human dignity and rights in Israel and Palestine.

2 Part 1: Honor and Human Dignity, and Specifically in Israeli Context

2.1 *Human Dignity and Honor*

Since the English value terms ‘honor’ and ‘dignity’ have recently been interpreted and used in many different ways,⁴ I begin with a short description of

3 Thus, for example, I analyzed the social phenomenon of stalking via reading horror and thriller movies (Kamir 2001) and the subjection of women to honor-based social criticism by means of reading films presenting women in legal proceedings (Kamir 2006).

4 In a recent monograph on honor, Robert L. Oprisko claims that ‘Honor has lost its way. The primary methodological difficulty within the study of honor is that the word means many different things and that, because it means many things, its value as a word becomes relatively meaningless. We use multiple concepts interchangeably when speaking about honor, disregarding conceptual differences’ (Oprisko 2012, p. 4). Similarly, many writers on dignity

the precise meanings they carry in my work at large⁵ and in this article specifically.

Julian Pitt-Rivers, a central figure among the originators of the anthropological research of honor-and-shame cultures and societies, defines honor as 'the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his *claim* to pride, but it is also the acknowledgment of that claim, his excellence recognized by society, his *right* to pride' (Pitt-Rivers 1966, p. 21). Indeed, in honor-and-shame societies, as portrayed and analyzed in vast anthropological literature,⁶ honor is the relative value, worth, attributed to and experienced by a member of society *vis-à-vis* his peers. It implies comparative social status, prestige, rank and standing in the hierarchical structure of a specific group. It is admired and sought after, because its accumulation promises both self esteem and superiority over others, hence psychological well-being as well as social recognition and improved prospects of survival and prosperity.

In honor-based societies, shame is dishonor: the absence of honor due to an inherent lack or circumstantial loss. 'Shame depends on the failure to measure up to the external standard imposed by the honor group. Like honor, it depends on the judgment of others, although it can be felt without the actual presence of the judging group' (Miller 1993, p. 118).

In most honor-and-shame societies, honor is partially bequeathed and mostly gained through careful and disciplined adherence to the norms defined by the relevant honor code. A meticulous observance of the appropriate honor norms entitles a person to honor; failure bestows shame. Honor is ceaselessly

complain that '[h]uman dignity often seems to be used on both sides of many of the most controversial political debates... [D]oes this demonstrate that the concept is hopelessly vague and excessively prone to manipulation?' (McCrudden 2014, p. 1).

5 This article is a part of a larger project of conceptualizing and researching honor and dignity. I have been developing this project since 1999, and have published several books and dozens of articles on this subject. Some of the publications are strictly conceptual; some offer analysis of Israeli honor and dignity; and some analyze cultural texts, such as movies. A book manuscript titled *Escape from Dignity* is under review.

6 My reference to honor relies on a wide range of professional literature, which includes, among others, Peristiany 1966, Campbell 1976, Piers and Singer 1971, Pitt-Rivers 1977, Herzfeld 1980, Wyatt-Brown 1983, Bohem 1984, Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers 1992, Miller 1993, Stewart 1994, Ginat 1997, Johnson and Lipsett-Rivera 1998, Spierenburg 1998, Afsaruddin 1999. For more contemporary adoption of this classic anthropological conceptualization in historical and philosophical literature see Goldberg 2010, Appiah 2011, Oprisko 2012. My short summary of honor here does not diverge in any point from the standard anthropological conceptualization of honor.

achieved, enhanced, accrued and inevitably lost, while shame is dreaded and avoided at all cost.

In an honor-revering society, peers are in perpetual competition for honor, constantly measuring themselves each against all others. The logic of honor competition is, as Bill Miller (1993, p. 116) aptly put it, that of a 'zero-sum or less-than-zero-sum-game'. Since social hierarchy is a pyramid and honor corresponds to a position in the pyramid, one member's promotion must entail another's demotion. Each player's every move, therefore, affects all others' honor and relative standing.

In most traditional honor-and-shame societies, honor is closely linked with the prevailing ideal of manhood. The more honorable a man is, the manlier he is, and *vice versa* (in a classic binary opposition, women and femininity are linked with lack of honor, namely shame).⁷ A man's honor bestows social duties ('*noblesse oblige*'): he is expected to demonstrate virility, leadership, manly self-restraint, courage. It also awards rights: other members of society are required to honor him according to the honor that he has gained and thus deserves.

Although anthropological literature usually refers to *traditional* honor-and-shame societies, honor mentality is very much alive in contemporary social groups all over the world.⁸ Criticizing contemporary scholarly dismissal and neglect of honor, Appiah states that the honor instinct, cultivated by honor-and-shame norms, continues to be fundamental to many Americans' make up. 'We may think that we have finished with honor, but honor is not finished with us' (Appiah 2011, p. ix).

The described logic of an honor-and-shame value system differs dramatically from that of one that is universalistic, humanistic, and based on human dignity. *Human dignity* is the inherent, absolute value we ascribe the category 'human' and identically to every single one of its members worldwide. We can

7 'In Mediterranean cultures, according to the traditional ethnographic account, shame was the female condition, and the moral condition of a man's female relatives' (Miller 1993, p. 118). Women's standing in such societies typically depends on their modest sexual conduct. This gives rise to distinct gendered-based norms of conduct. A man's honor 'obliges a man to defend his honor and that of his family', while obliging 'a woman to conserve her purity. . . . The honor of a man is involved . . . in the sexual purity of his mother, wife and daughters, and sisters, not in his own' (Pitt-Rivers 1966, pp. 42-45).

8 In her analysis of German honor, Ann Goldberg claims that 'Honor codes were flexible, multipurpose, and far from anachronistic, being incorporated into the modern state, industrial capitalism, and mass politics in the age of democracy' (Goldberg 2010, p. 9).

think of it as the hallmark of 'human quality' that is similarly imprinted in each of us.⁹

In line with Kant's moral philosophy (his *categorical imperative*), we define human beings as subjects (Kant 1959). We think of objects as things that may be regarded and used as mere means to a subject's ends; in contrast, we define subjects as *not-objects*: as entities that must never be treated merely as means to other's ends. In line with the Kantian heritage, human dignity means that we are all and completely equally the type of creatures that must always be viewed as ends in their own right. That it is absolutely prohibited to forgo human dignity, i.e., the worth of humanity, and treat any member of the human category disregarding his/her intrinsic and absolute human value; that it is prohibited to treat any human as an object, as a mere means to an end indifferent to his/her own good.¹⁰

In the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, this human dignity is the source of fundamental human rights. A fundamental human right may thus be defined as a right that may compromise human dignity when breached; it is a right that safeguards the status of humans as subjects and not objects; ends and not just means (Kamir 2015). Dignity-based fundamental human rights are vastly different from honor-based rights/ privileges. The latter merely entitle a member of an honor society to the benefits that are considered inseparable from his specific honor, i.e., his status in his group's hierarchy. Honor-based rights/privileges are never absolute or universalistic, and are never applied equally to all humans, as are dignity-based fundamental rights.

This fundamental contrast between honor- and dignity-based cultures has long been presented and stressed by anthropologists, sociologists and philosophers. A researcher of North African honor, Pierre Bourdieu (1979, p. 129) stated in no uncertain terms that

[T]he ethos of honor is fundamentally opposed to a universal and formal morality which affirms the equality in dignity of all men and consequently the equality of their rights and duties. Not only do the [honor] rules imposed upon men differ from those imposed upon women, and

9 In recent years, a flood of academic literature on dignity has created great confusion regarding the meaning of the term. In this article I need not refer to the many diverse formulations of dignity, as I use the term to refer to its basic meaning, as adopted and established by the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

10 Since Kant is considered a primary and vital philosopher of dignity, many scholars refer to his work. For a thorough recent Kantian analysis see Rosen 2012, pp. 19-30, 80-89, 142-155. For a large compilation of articles on human dignity see McCrudden 2014.

the duties towards men differ from those towards women, but also the dictates of honor, directly applied to the individual case and varying according to the situation, are in no way capable of being made universal.

Sociologist Peter Berger (1983, p. 177) has contrasted dignity with honor in a similar manner:

Both honor and dignity are concepts that bridge self and society. [...] The concept of honor implies that identity is essentially, or at least importantly, linked to institutional roles. The modern concept of dignity, by contrast, implies that identity is essentially independent of institutional roles. [...] In a world of honor, identity is firmly linked to the past through the reiterated performance of prototypical acts. In a world of dignity, history is the succession of mystification from which the individual must free himself to attain "authenticity".

Philosopher Charles Taylor (1994, p. 37) has also made a similar comment to the effect that 'With the move from honor to dignity has come a politics of universalism, emphasizing the equal dignity of all citizens and the content of this politics has been the equalization of rights and entitlements'.

2.2 *Israeli-Zionist Honor and Dignity*

The State of Israel was established in May of 1948 and defines itself as the homeland of the Jewish people, a Jewish-and-democratic state (David 2003). 'Jewish' refers to an ethno-national-cultural identity, which is not necessarily religious. 'Zionism' is the Jewish national ideology that brought about the foundation of Israel as a Jewish nation-state and continues to be Israel's hegemonic ideology.

Most Israeli citizens (about 75%) consider themselves Jewish and Zionist. About half of them are of European origin, and half of non-European, mostly Arab-world, origin. Most of Israel's non-Jewish population is Palestinian (mostly Muslim and partly Christian).¹¹ These Palestinians are Israeli citizens, unlike Palestinians who live in the West Bank, who are *not* citizens, and have been under one form of Israeli occupation or another since the 1967 (Six Day) war.

In 1992, almost half a century after its ratification of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the Israeli Parliament enacted Israel's *Basic Law: Human*

11 For accurate, updated statistical data in English see the US Central Intelligence Agency publication: Israel (n.d.) In *The World Factbook*. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/is.html>.

Dignity and Liberty, arguably the Israeli bill of rights. Almost overnight, human dignity became the core of Israel's legally upheld and enforced value system. Aligning with the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the German Basic Law from 1949, Israel's judiciary applied the human dignity discourse to all walks of life. In its attempt to strengthen human dignity and rights, the judiciary repeatedly proclaimed that dignity has always been a key concept in Israel's unwritten constitution (Kamir 2004, p. 106).

But in the reality of Israeli social, it is the particularistic Zionist honor, rather than universal dignity, that has consistently served as a fundamental organizing principle (for the Jewish majority), determining individuals' value, status, precedence and excellence (Kamir 2004, pp. 43-105). Originally, when first constructed in central and eastern Europe at the turn of the twentieth century, Zionist honor was modeled on central European (mostly German) honor codes of the day (*ibid.*). Zionism criticized pre-Zionist European Jewish men for their lack of honor. In response, it attempted to construct the 'new Jew', the Zionist, as a real man of honor (*ibid.*). The arrival of Zionists in Palestine/Israel, their encounter with the local Palestinian and Bedouin population, Jewish migration to Israel from Arab countries in the 1950s, the Holocaust and wars with the neighboring Arab countries – all these and many other events had significant impact on the evolving formation of Israel's particularistic Zionist honor culture (*ibid.*).¹²

This particularistic Zionist honor is the principle used to bridge gaps among Israeli Jews of various backgrounds (such as European and non-European). Simultaneously, it bars Palestinian citizens of Israel, as well as work migrants, from full partnership in the Israeli community. It also fuels an honor-based antagonism towards the Palestinian national entity, the Palestinian Authority, and Palestinians at large. This honor is not officially acknowledged in legislation

¹² Anthropologists and political scientists have long described how honor cultures change. See, for example, DuBoulay 1974, Bowman 2006. Since Israel is not examined as an honor society and Zionism is not studied as an honor culture, no attention has, so far, been dedicated to the change of Israel's Zionist honor code, except in my reference to the issue. The specifics of these changes are beyond the scope of this article. One such change, the exchange of Zionism's original iconic man of honor, the *sabra* of European descent, with a Mediterranean Moroccan Jew, is presented below in the analysis of *Kazablan*. 'Sabra' is a positive moniker referring to Israeli-Jews born in Israel to Zionist pilgrims and their descendents, typically of European origin. The term originally referred to the first generation of Zionist-Jews born in Israel, in the 1930s, but later came to refer to all native-born decedents of these native-born Israelis, and finally was expanded to include all Jewish Israelis born in Israel (including those of non-European descent). It is currently used inconsistently to refer to any one of these three groups.

(or elsewhere), but is taken for granted in social reality. It is prevalent in the Israeli Hebrew public discourse, its media and popular culture (Kamir 2004, pp. 79-105).

Ironically, the Hebrew term used by the Basic Law and the judiciary to denote 'dignity', *kavod*, is the same word in the contemporary Hebrew spoken in Israel that also means 'honor'. *Kavod* is the single term that denotes both honor and dignity (as defined above), thus fusing the two concepts together without distinction. *Kavod* thus completely, and unconsciously, enmeshes universalistic human dignity and rights with the particularistic, tribal Zionist honor (Kamir 2005, p. 11).¹³ The universalistic value system gets locked in this particularistic, national honor, signaling to Hebrew speakers (mostly Israeli Jews) that dignity is inseparable from Zionist honor.

I have developed the line of argument presented in the last four paragraphs in great detail in many publications (mostly in Hebrew) since 1999.¹⁴ This article relies on these previous publications, offering a review of Zionist honor and its relationship with dignity as featured in three remarkable, influential and highly acclaimed Israeli films (*Kazablan*, *James' Journey to Jerusalem* and *Bethlehem*). The article further comments on the representation of Palestinian honor and dignity in three Israeli-Palestinian films (*Wedding in Galilee*, *Attash* and *Ajami*).¹⁵

The films analyzed in this article, even those that enjoyed great popularity (*Kazablan*, *James' Journey*) or acclaim (*James' Journey*, *Bethlehem*, *Attash*, *Ajami*), received very little or no scholarly notice, and have never before been systematically associated with one another or with the theme of honor and

13 Apparently in an unconscious attempt to distinguish the two meanings, reference dignity is often referred to through the hyphenated expression *kvod ha-hadam*, literally 'Adam's honor/dignity', commonly understood as 'human dignity'. The stand-alone expression *kavod* is more typically understood as 'honor'. But this distinction is unofficial and not used consistently.

14 For the first published formulation of this argument, see Kamir 2002. For more detailed explications, in Hebrew, see, for example, Kamir 2004 and 2005.

15 By 'Israeli-Palestinian films' I refer to films created by (i.e., written, directed, produced and acted by) Palestinian citizens of Israel, that comment on Israel's Palestinian community. I do not refer to Palestinian films made by non-Israeli citizens outside of Israel's borders, including the occupied territories in the West Bank, Gaza and the Palestinian Authority. For reference to two such films see footnote 30. Lacking expertise with respect to Palestinian honor, I refrain from making a full analysis of Israeli-Palestinian films and offer merely outlines for their honor-focused interpretations. The observations offered here regarding these films contextualize the representation of Zionist honor and dignity in the other Israeli (Jewish) films.

dignity. The novelty of this article lies in its choices with respect to acknowledging these films as social-meaning-bearing popular visual texts, and reading them intertextually as a corpus that contains a meaningful reflection on Zionist and Palestinian honor and universal dignity.

3 Part II: A 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde' Portrayal of Contemporary Zionist Honor in Two Israeli Films

3.1 *The 'Official', Positive Story of Israeli Honor: Kazablan*

3.1.1 *Kazablan: Synopsis*

Kazablan is Israel's first, enormously popular musical film, and is, to this day, a household name among Hebrew-speaking Israelis.¹⁶ Released (by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) in May 1973, it presents a simplistic, folkloric version of an earlier play (1954) and a theatrical musical (1966), both with the same title.¹⁷ Despite its immense popularity, cinematic scholarship all but ignored it.

Somewhat like the American musical *West Side Story* (1961), *Kazablan* features a socially forbidden Romeo-and-Juliet melodrama, with the unlikely twist of a happy ending. Its three main characters are Feldman, Kazablan, or Kaza for short, and Yanush, referred to as Goulash. The three men are neighbors in a rundown Jaffa neighborhood, about to be demolished by the municipality. The neighborhood is populated by low-class Jewish immigrants from diverse European and Arab countries. Mietek Feldman (Yehuda Efroni), an immigrant from Poland, is respected, trusted and treated by the entire community as its unofficial leader. His only daughter, smart, strong, beautiful and sophisticated Rachel (Efrat Lavie) is the love object of both Yanush and Kaza.

Goulash, the derogative nickname attached to Yanush (Yossi Graber), alludes to his Hungarian origin. Always wearing a suit and tie, he is the bourgeois owner of a small shoe store in the decaying neighborhood. Bald, with bulging eyes, he is somewhat sleazy and unattractive. Recommending himself to Mr. Feldman as a suitable prospective suitor for Rachel, Yanush presents a list of advantages: he is intelligent, educated and comfortably well-off; he speaks languages and studied the piano; he is a man of culture and, most importantly, a European.

16 When the film was released, a million tickets were sold to a population of three million Hebrew-speaking Israelis.

17 As this article was being written, in 2016, the play *Kazablan* was once again being performed by the Israeli theater *Ha-Kameri*, and enjoying great popularity.

But Yanush is a one-dimensional, negative character: a standoffish, unpopular loner; an egotistical opportunist; a dishonest, cunning coward. When the opportunity arises, he steals his neighbors' hard earned money, undermining their collective endeavor, compromising the integrity of both Feldman (who was the one entrusted with the money) and Kaza (who is suspected of committing the theft). When Rachel does not reciprocate his interest, he tries to grab her forcefully and is stopped only by Kaza's chivalrous intervention.

Yanush is constructed as the villainous antagonist to the pure hearted 'anti-hero' protagonist: Kaza (Yehoram Gaon). This Moroccan Jew leads a gang of unruly hooligans, who spend their nights drinking, their days harassing and terrorizing the community, and the rest of the time extorting protection money from local businesspeople. Nevertheless, Kaza is portrayed as a charming, sensitive rascal. He is a reliable, loyal man among men; a gallant, if (appropriately) persistent, suitor. The film's credible on-screen narrator and 'reasonable person', Moshiko, a street-wise, folkloric, non-European fisherman (Arieh Elias), repeatedly reassures us that despite his apparent roughness, Kaza's heart is pure gold.¹⁸

Kaza's heart of gold is enhanced by a hearty smile, a full head of black curls, and a casually-chic Greek-style hat. Further still: together with the Feldmans (Rachel and her parents), we (the viewers) learn that, in the 1967 (Six Day) war, Kaza received a medal for risking his life to save his commander, who was trapped wounded in a mine field.¹⁹ This noble savage, the tender-hearted brute, is constructed as unavoidably loveable. The casting of Yehoram Gaon, a household name and cherished Israeli singer, then as now, cements this point. Rachel succumbs to these charms, as do we.

Kaza and Yanush compete for Rachel, the film's female *sabra* of European descent and the trophy sought by both contenders. I suggest that the film leaves little doubt regarding the symbolic meaning of Rachel's status as the fairytale princess: the man who wins her is crowned as the story's iconic man of honor, and the honor code he represents is whole heartedly embraced by

18 Systematically portrayed as a wise, reliable, balanced interpreter and commentator, Moshiko plays the role of a chorus in a Greek tragedy, indicating to the viewers of the film what a reasonable member of the community (both on and off screen) might feel at any moment.

19 In a charged onscreen meeting with the military commander whose life he had saved (now a senior police officer), we learn that, when the war ended, Kaza felt abandoned by his higher class, *sabra* war buddies. Their betrayal triggered his drifting and deterioration to crime. For meaning of *sabra* see footnote 12.

the entire (Jewish Zionist Israeli) community. This embrace of the honor code and its iconic embodiment contributes to the solidification of the community.

3.1.2 *Kol HaKavod: Kazablan's Honor Theme*

I claim that honor is *Kazablan's* main theme, and that the film is a blunt popular manifesto of Israel's Zionist honor. Reflecting and refracting common Israeli perceptions of this notion, it performs an important social function of manifestation and articulation. I further claim that the film's formulation of Zionist honor is so accurate and powerful, that it has been internalized and embraced by Israel's Zionist society to the point of being taken for granted and almost indisputable (Kamir 2004, p. 96).

Presenting himself to Mr. Feldman as a sophisticated, cultured, middle-class man of European descent, Yanush claims his superiority in keeping with one possible set of values.²⁰ In *Kazablan*, this set of values is portrayed as inseparable from cowardice and dishonesty, and despised as what Zionism defined 'exilic': representing the hated 'old European world' that Zionism rebelled against. This set of values is portrayed, through Yanush's character, as elitist, segregationist and presumptuous; deceitful, back-stabbing and treacherous. It comes with Yanush's unattractive bald head, packaged in dark, old-fashioned suit and tie, and enclosed in a small, shabby shoe store. Like its slimy protagonist, this set of values lacks vitality, sensual energy, heroism, integrity, and communitarianism.

Kaza stands for an entirely different and contrary set of values: the Zionist honor code. At the very end of the film, exonerated from the false accusation of stealing the community's savings, and acknowledged as a war hero, he is invited to serve as the Godfather of Moshiko's first *sabra* grandson. In Kaza's honor, the newborn, whose mother (Moshiko's daughter) is of non-European descent and father is of European descent, receives Kaza's full name as well as his nickname. The decision of the film's community to embrace of Kaza's qualities and the honor code they imply, signal Kaza's metamorphosis from the film's anti-hero to its official hero and true man of honor.

Kaza's Zionist honor code is presented in great detail in a song, '*kol hakavod*', which is the film's most enduring contribution to Israeli popular culture. The Hebrew phrase *kol hakavod* means 'bravo', 'kudos', 'well done', 'way to go'. Its literal meaning is 'all honor'. I suggest that the beloved '*Kol hakavod*' (words by Dan Almagor and music by Dov Setzer), ever dominant in Israeli popular

20 This set of values may be viewed as a particular, Jewish European code of honor, but discussion of this is beyond the scope of this article.

culture, captures and constructs Israel's 'official' Zionist honor code. It, therefore, calls for a close review in the context of interpreting *Kazablan*.

3.1.2.1 *Verse I: The Peacock Bravado Performance*

In the song's first verse, Kaza reminisces how he would stroll aimlessly with his chest puffed up, 'like a cannon', in Casablanca's city center. Acknowledging his imposing manly posture, everyone would wave from their windows, calling 'bravo'/'kudos to you' (*kol hakavod*). His gang joins in for the refrain, stressing that everyone would know all too well whose honor is greatest.

This verse presents an element of traditional honor that could be labeled 'the peacock bravado gesture': a man manifests, and gains acknowledgment of, his honor by showing himself off publically and featuring his most shining manly attributes. At the turn of the twentieth century, Zionist men of European origin in Palestine/Israel 'puffed their manly chests' in manners they learned and adopted from the neighboring Bedouins (Kamir 2004, pp. 80-82). The song's association of this honor element with Casablanca's city center acknowledges Kaza's Moroccan origin, suggesting that unlike European Jewish men this 'Eastern'/'Oriental'²¹ Israeli Jew, endowed with genuine, authentic Mediterranean honor, does not need to mimic honorable Bedouins as honorless European Jews did. In his hometown, the song leads us to believe, Jewish men had authentic bravado and were publically appreciated accordingly. They were 'players' (in the honor game), as is Kaza. This is in striking contrast with Zionism's stereotypical 'exilic', unmanly, honorless European Jew, represented in *Kazablan* by Yanush, with all his excellent heritage and education.

Despite the explicit reference to Casablanca, the musical is careful not to connect the city or the protagonist in any way with anything Arab. Jaffa's sea front, Kaza's signature Greek hat, and the enchanting Greek music that excites him and his gang in their favorite hang-out, Rosa's Bar, all seem to portray Kaza as a Mediterranean rather than an Arab Jew. Kaza's honor is, thus, the proud, native honor of the lively, sunny Mediterranean (not 'Middle-East'); it is, as the film seems to signal, the honor that best and most naturally suits the Mediterranean port city, Jaffa, and Israel at large.

3.1.2.2 *Verse II: War Heroism*

The second verse describes a war situation, which we later understand refers to the 1967 (Six Day) war. The battle is blazing, the platoon is dumbstruck,

21 Jews of non-European origin were once called *Spharadim*, referring to their Jewish-religious customs. They later claimed the name *Mizrahim*, meaning 'Eastern' or 'Oriental', and finally 'Arab-Jews'.

and the commander orders 'Kaza – lead the attack!'. Everyone knows that Kaza is always the first to storm in, and from behind they cheer him, calling 'bravo'/'kudos to you' (*kol hakavod*).

The second commandment in Kaza's honor code is spelled out in the second verse: 'show courage, leadership and altruism facing the enemy in the battle field'. This he does with flying colors and distinction in what Israelis consider their most heroic moment: the 1967 (Six Day) war. Of all the brave soldiers in his unit, it is Kaza that the commander picks to storm into battle, knowing that he would never hesitate to sacrifice his life and do what a man's got to do. The other soldiers follow in his footsteps, saluting his bravery.

'The Six Day War' inspired many popular Hebrew songs depicting heroic, altruistic leadership in battle.²² Typically, the war heroes of these songs are *sabras* of European descent, viewed as Israel's salt of the earth. In contrast, in *Kazablan's* '*kol hakavod*' it is the Moroccan Kaza – and not the soldiers of European descent – who best portrays this cherished type of heroic honorable conduct.²³

3.1.2.3 *Verse III: noblesse oblige*

In verse three, Kaza encounters a young man escorting his girl on the streets of Jaffa. If Kaza only wished, the girl would be in his arms. But he would never disturb the young man, causing him to tremble. For him, Kaza proudly declares, it is a matter of principle: he is a man of honor! This is why everyone would know all too well who has the most honor.

The third commandment of Kaza's honor code seems to be 'never take advantage of your superiority; pick only on guys your own size'. Fairness, self-restraint, discipline and performance of *noblesse oblige*.

3.1.2.4 *Verse IV: Communal Responsibility*

In the song's fourth and last verse, Kaza describes how, if a drunkard arrives at a bar, he pacifies him, then kicks him from Jaffa's center to the end of the

22 The song *Givat Hatachmoshet* (words by Yoram Teharlev, music by Yair Rosenblum) is a very famous case in point, describing soldiers rising to lead and storm in, and finding their death.

23 Nurit Gertz claims that in 'ethnic' (non-European Jewish) Israeli films, the 'eastern' (usually Moroccan) protagonist is granted the merit that is typically associated with the *sabra*. He wins the trophy woman of European origin and integrates into the European Jewish society that the film criticizes. Gertz claims that such films were the precursors of later social developments (Gertz 1993, p. 30).

territory. Returning, the guy humbly raises his glass and says 'bravo'/'kudos to you' (*kol hakavod*). Everyone would then know all too well who has the most honor.

A variation on *noblesse oblige* also lies at the root of the fourth commandment of Kazablan's honor code: 'harness your strength and status to maintain public peace and order in your community'. Kaza both calms the drunkard at the bar and sends him flying. Even the drunkard himself pays homage and tribute to the man who so forcefully fulfills his honor-duty.

I suggest that *Kazablan's* theme song, '*kol hakavod*' offers the viewer a detailed textbook of the film's specific ideal of honor. Simultaneously, the film constructs its protagonist, Kaza, as the embodiment of this ideal: the true man of honor. The movie invites the viewer to embrace the film's specific honor formulation, as well as its manifestation in Kaza's character. I claim that *Kazablan* has been overwhelmingly successful in constructing Israeli Jews as its 'implied readers'. The honor code defined in the film's theme song managed to perfectly voice the unarticulated Zionist honor sentiments that were brewing in Israel's Jewish community of the day (1973). In turn, this community embraced the song's formulation of its honor code, together with the cinematic manifestation – Kaza's character – as a cherished ideal. This has had far reaching socio-political implications, which are explored in the following section.

3.1.3 From the Silver Screen to Socio-Political Reality

Kazablan was released in the summer (July) of 1973, two years after the break of the 'Oriental Revolt' and the establishment of the Israeli Black Panthers movement.²⁴ Three months after the film's release, the *Yom Kippur* war was launched on Israel by Egypt and Syria in October 1973. Despite its eventual victory on both fronts, Israel was initially taken by surprise and invaded. Its entire defensive concept collapsed. This was experienced as a deep collective trauma, and translated into a major blow to Israel's 'old elites': the *sabras* of European origin, formerly perceived as almost mythologically omnipotent, were exposed as presumptuous and vain. Their 'elitist', European, secular Zionism was rejected for a more traditional Jewish version of Zionism (Liebman 1993).

24 In 1971, young Israeli Jews whose parents had immigrated to Israel from Arab countries founded the 'Israeli Black Panthers' and led an uprising against the mostly European hegemony and the establishment. Although the uprising did not achieve much in practical terms, it did receive much public attention and is considered a turning point in the self-perception of non-European Israeli Jews.

The broad loss of faith in the country's hegemonic leadership brought about the first change of power in Israeli history. In 1977, the socialist labor party that had ruled Israel since its establishment and was associated with the European and *sabra* Israelis (which are now labeled 'old elites') lost the elections to Menahem Begin, the leader of the right wing *Herut* (today *Likud*) party. Begin, the eternal oppositionary, viewed by the socialist hegemony as a despicable, radical right winger, was associated with the 'underdog' non-European Jews, who were for the most part Moroccan.²⁵ Through their vote he seized political power and rose to political hegemony. His dramatic victory is considered a turning point that marked the beginning of a deep cultural process that is still going strong. Since 1977, Israel has consistently become less European, secular and socialist and more right wing, nationalistic, religious and middle-eastern/Mediterranean, i.e., 'Eastern'/'Oriental' (Ram 1995; Sheffer 1999).

I claim that, when read against this historical background, *Kazablan* can be said to have vividly anticipated – as well as inspired, sketched and assisted – the socio-cultural transformation that began to materialize soon after its release. I claim that the film did so, above all else, through its nuanced cinematic construction of Israel's Zionist honor (*kavod*).

Kazablan's honor code does not necessarily differ *in substance* from earlier, implicit explications of Israel's Zionist honor code. As in the case of previous expositions, it contrasts Zionist honor with what Zionism viewed as 'exilic' unmanly cowardice and dishonesty. Yet, distinctly, in *Kazablan*, the iconic man of Zionist honor is the film's protagonist, the underprivileged, warm-hearted Mediterranean Moroccan Jew. Embraced by the on- and off-screen Jewish Israeli community, he is hailed as the rightful successor of the honorable Zionist *sabra* of European descent and heritage. His *sabra* children, like his godson, will combine their mother's Jewish European heritage: subtlety, sophistication and commitment to education, with their father's Mediterranean warmth, manliness and honor.

The film might be seen as a cultural manifesto, insisting that Zionist honor be spelled out, acknowledged, celebrated – while also adjusted, through embodiment in the iconic image of the underprivileged Jewish Moroccan/

25 Begin, who is himself of European, Polish origin, was popularly perceived – much like *Kazablan's* fictional Mr. Feldman – as a warm Jewish leader, who loved Israel's Mediterranean Jews and preferred them over the elitist, snobbish Europeans and their *sabra* descendents. Although he was himself a polished gentleman in a suit and tie, Begin, like Feldman, was constructed as defying the pedigree-honor that cherished refined, European breeding, replacing it with Kaza's vital Mediterranean honor code. Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's current prime minister, attempts to maintain this image.

Mediterranean Israeli man. Historical circumstances helped materialize this agenda, and make *Kazablan* a cinematic 'declaration of independence' of sorts: a text that pronounces both the consistent elements of Zionist honor as well as its new hues.²⁶

I suggest that *Kazablan's* vision was a self-fulfilling prophecy that had overwhelming impact on Israeli politics and society. *Kazablan's* explicit reverence of Zionist honor as embodied in Kaza's image was broadly embraced by the new Israel that has been developing since 1977 under *Herut/Likud* leadership. The film's veneration of Zionist honor echoes the honorary, militaristic vision of *Herut's* ideologist, Ze'ev Jabotinski (Shavit 1988; Halkin 2014, p. 69; Ram 1995, pp. 88-90), while Kaza's character reflects and refracts the self-perception of Israel's 'new ruling elites'. *Kazablan's* honor-ethos, portrayed as an all-Israeli-Jewish common denominator, establishes the now hegemonic 'official' Israeli perception of its national honor and identity.

The transformation that Israeli Zionist society has been undergoing since 1977 is commonly acknowledged, interpreted and analyzed (celebrated by some and lamented by others). The framework developed here conceptualizes this fundamental socio-cultural transformation in terms of a shift in the narrative adopted by Israeli society concerning the ideal of the Zionist man of honor. In this analysis, *Kazablan* is a popular cultural visual narrative text that, in 1973, mirrored burgeoning popular sentiments, defining and framing the transformative shift in the societal perception of Israel's honor and identity.

3.2 *The Dark Shadow of Israel's Zionist Honor: James' Journey to Jerusalem*

Written and directed by Ra'anana Alexandrowicz and produced by Renan Schorr, the 2003 *James' Journey to Jerusalem* is a variation on Voltaire's *Candide*. The film received two Ophir prizes (Israeli Academy Award) and five international prizes, and was hailed by Israeli critics as the best Israeli feature film of its year (Duvdevany 2003). The movie's protagonist, James (Siyabonga

26 This analysis of *Kazablan* challenges Ella Shohat's 'Orientalist' criticism of Israeli society and cinema. Shohat claims that in 1970s films such as *Kazablan* (derogatively labeled 'Bourekas' films) 'escapism derives from the almost utopian desire to bridge the gaps of Israeli society and thus promote an image of ethnic/class equality, pluralistic tolerance, and solidarity' (Shohat, 2010, 119). Tellingly, Shohat, like most scholars, ignores *Kazablan* almost completely, mentioning it in passing only. Her critical analysis draws a broad portrait, avoiding close reading of specific themes in particular films, such as the *kavod* theme in *Kazablan*. For a parallel argument to the one I make here, regarding an earlier, paradigmatic 'ethnic' film, *Salah Shabati* (1964) see Gertz and Munk 2015, pp. 41-50.

Melongisi Shibe), a young Christian pilgrim from a remote African village, is the living image of naiveté. Training to become a priest, young James is sent by his remote African community to bathe in the piety and purity of the holy city, Jerusalem. It is through his external, unsuspecting point of view that the movie has us take a critical view of what I suggest it paints as the ugly face of Israeli honor.

Assumed to be an illegal work immigrant, James is arrested upon arriving in Israel. He is released on bail by Shimi (Salim Daw) – a modern version of a slave holder – who confiscates James' passport and puts him to work. Shimi treats James, as his other workers, as chattel, paying him much less than minimum wage and profiting from his hard manual labor.

Shimi is married to Rachel (Sandra Schonwald). They live in an apartment building in Jaffa, by the sea, exactly where *Kazablan's* crumbling neighborhood once stood. Of the old buildings only one remains: Shimi's father's. The father, Salah, an aging non-European Jew, is portrayed by Arie Elias; an actor still familiar to many Israeli viewers as *Kazablan's* Moshiko, the reliable fisherman narrator whose street wisdom represents communal common sense. In *Kazablan*, Arie Elias as Moshiko offers much loved and well remembered popular folk-wisdom regarding honor. In *James' Journey to Jerusalem* Arie Elias as Salah urges his son Shimi – and later James – to maintain honor by avoiding shame at all cost. It is as though the 2003 film presents itself as a sequel: '*Kazablan – Thirty Years Later, The True, Ugly Story*'. I read this as a sharp critical commentary on *Kazablan's* 'official story' of Israeli honor, exposing its hideous 'Mr. Hyde'.

Shimi does his very best to live up to the ideal preached by his father: do not be a *frier*. '*Frier*' is the term used by Israelis for a sucker, honor-less person, someone who fails to live up to the prevailing honor code, allowing himself to be trampled on and shamed.²⁷ As the characters in *James' Journey to Jerusalem* repeatedly explain to the naive African priest, a *frier* is someone who allows others to take advantage of him; who does not make the most of any given opportunity for himself; who does not stand on his honor extravagantly. I claim that *James' Journey to Jerusalem* suggests that, in 2003, the prevailing Israeli honor mentality is, in reality, a crude, ruthless offshoot of the *Kazablan* model code. It wastes no time on chivalry, nobility, altruism, fairness or service to the community. It focuses on peacock bravado and aggressive competition for precedence at all cost.

²⁷ Originally, this common 'Hebrew' term derives from Polish and Yiddish. For an analysis of the *frier* social phenomenon see Kamir 2004, pp. 98-105.

Shimi is a non-European Israeli Jew, most likely of Moroccan origin, who was apparently born and raised in Jaffa. His greatest motivation is to avoid being a *frier*. The fear of being considered a *frier* controls him and silences all other considerations. He never tires of stating that he is no one's *frier*, and is always acutely intent on doing whatever it takes to prove it. Dodging *frierhood*, he tries to take advantage of others better and faster than they might take advantage of him. He attempts to maximize his profits at everyone else's expense, turning a blind eye to any other moral or humane concern. Assuming that everyone lives by the same philosophy, he suspects everyone of everything all the time, never trusting or sharing.

Indeed, Shimi has good reason to be suspicious of his surroundings: his entire community conducts itself by the very same *frier*-driven honor/shame logic. They each want to pay the least, gain the most and feel that they have outsmarted the system and everyone else. In their constant competition, they have no regard for rules or, indeed, for other humans and their intrinsic value. James and his fellow migrant workers are tools in this game; mere objects, never considered as goals in their own right. Shimi and his colleagues, men and women alike, use and exploit them without any scruples. They look through them, seeing none of their humanity, vulnerability or pain. In their ruthless chase of what they consider non-*frier* Israeli honor, they completely disown the human dignity of these non-Jewish outsiders, betraying the Kantian command. Blinded by an egotistical greed for precedence, they show no mercy or compassion for their own old and weak either.

As Shimi repeatedly reminds him, Salah (Shimi's father) raised his son in keeping with a single commandment: to never be a *frier*. Yet, in his old age, Salah is on the receiving end of Shimi's compulsive *frier*-avoidance, and he gets a taste of his own medicine. Shimi tries to force Salah out of his house, hoping to receive a million dollars for the precious land: only a *frier* would miss out on such a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Focused entirely on maximizing his profit, power and status, Shimi is blind to his father's needs, pains and fears.

James' Journey to Jerusalem throws Salah and James together. The guileless African priest is brought by Shimi to clean up Salah's house. Salah takes a liking to the sincere young man and seeks his company. James revives Salah's ruined garden, spends time with him and lends him a caring ear. In return, Salah teaches James how not to be a *frier*. You must find a way to profit from other people's work, he explains. James pays heed to the old man's wisdom, and quickly learns to run a discrete business of his own, much like Shimi's, behind Shimi's back. Under Salah's supervision, James transforms into a driven, suspicious, impatient Shimi, exploiting his colleagues and making money at their expense.

Finally, horrified at the monster he has created, Salah dismisses James. Having turned the ultimate *frier* into a ruthless seeker of crude Israeli honor, Salah is appalled by the Mr. Hyde image staring back at him from the mirror.

In an act of resignation, as though acknowledging responsibility for the damage of his *frier*-preaching, Salah signs his house over to the buyer. Learning of Salah's concession, James is filled with pity and realizes his own deterioration. He throws the 'blood money' he made by exploiting his comrades in Shimi's face. Shimi realizes that James made a *frier* of him, and in revenge has James deported back to Africa. Upon their separation, Salah and James bond, forgiving and redeeming one another. Shimi and his friends will continue their ruthless *frier*-avoidance honor game.

I claim that *James' Journey to Jerusalem* sketches the shadow image of *Kazablan* honor gone awry. Devoid of its *noblesse oblige*, haunted by *frier*-anxiety, this honor code breeds unrestrained, brutal, paranoid egotism. Binding Jews of all backgrounds as an honor-community, it unleashes uninhibited competition, while denying non-Jews not only honor, but also human dignity.

In *Kazablan*, Kaza's honor and dignity are so perfectly compatible and so completely fused together, that honor in no way threatens human dignity. *James' Journey* reveals that this is so because the Zionist musical features and celebrates Israeli Jews and their manly Zionist honor, conveniently overlooking the potential of this particularistic honor to threaten and clash with the human dignity of non-Jews. *James' Journey* focuses on this clash and illustrates it, claiming that once unleashed, the threat posed by national honor to human dignity cannot be kept at bay; it effects and injures all.

Kazablan and *James' Journey* seem to depict two faces of, or two takes on, the honor mentality of Israel's Jewish community. Interestingly, although both films are set in Jaffa, a Palestinian city, neither one of them acknowledges the existence of Palestinians in Israel.²⁸ Neither the optimistic nor the pessimistic portrayal of Israel's honor associates it with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The 2013 *Bethlehem* does.

28 It is interesting to note that, while none of the characters in the films is Palestinian, Salim Daw, who plays Shimi, presenting the ugly face of Israeli honor, is a Palestinian-Israeli. Omri Yavin claims that this reflects the postmodern erasure of ethnic identities, 'baptizing' everyone into capitalism – the only game in town (Yavin 2016, 11).

4 Part III: A Comment on Israeli-Palestinian Cinematic Representations of Palestinian Honor

4.1 *Romantic Celebration of Palestinian Honor: Wedding in Galilee*

Wedding in Galilee (1987, directed by Israeli-Palestinian Michel Khleifi), is considered the first full-scale Palestinian feature film (Khleifi 2001, 184). It was awarded several Israeli and international prizes, including the International Critics Prize at Cannes in 1987, and received some scholarly attention (Gertz 2001). It is set in a Palestinian village in Galilee (in northern Israel) echoing the days (before 1967) when Israel's Palestinian citizens lived under a tight, restrictive Military Rule.

In order to get permission to throw an all-out wedding party for his son, the village leader, (the *mukhtar*), reluctantly agrees to host the Israeli military governor and his officers as the wedding guests of honor. By getting permission to conduct the traditional celebration, the *mukhtar* aims to secure not merely his own honor, but that of the Palestinian cultural heritage. Yet the villagers view the military governor's presence in their midst as condescending and shameful to them. They adopt the slogan that 'there is no honor under the military boot, and without honor there is no celebration'. To avenge the stinging humiliation, some young men plot to assassinate the military governor. More pragmatic members of the village community attempt to curtail this expression of honor in order to avoid dire consequences.

Consumed with shame experienced as a result he views as his father's dishonorable conduct, the bridegroom is unable to perform his manly honor-duty of consummating the marriage: the father's shame literally emasculates the son. As the bridegroom contemplates slaying his father to save the family honor, the *mukhtar* bemoans his son's shameful lack of manliness.

Finally, the loving, compassionate bride saves her husband's honor – and perhaps his liberty and life – by 'plucking' her virginity herself and presenting the villagers with the long awaited blood-stained sheet. The only blood shed is that of virginity and, with the proof of the young man's manliness, honor is also salvaged. As the villagers celebrate the consummation of the marriage and the bridegroom's manliness, they redeem their honor by driving the military governor and his officers out of the village.

I suggest that this film idealizes Palestinian honor just as *Kazablan* idealizes Zionist honor. The sentiment of Palestinian honor, triggered by the provocation of Israeli, is portrayed as uniting noble-spirited Palestinian men and women who lead traditional, pastoral lives on their historic land. The repressive exterior intervention (of the Zionist state's military rule) causes tension

among them, as it triggers diverse honor-responses, emasculation and fierce dispute. But, since their honor impulses are all fine and altruistic, harmony is recovered. Through solidarity, loyalty, compassion and love, villagers heroically channel their honor sentiments to secure the survival of the community and the continuation of traditional Palestinian culture.

Unlike *Kazablan*, *Wedding in Galilee* does not explicitly define textbook Palestinian honor; it seems to assume a code that is taken for granted by on- and off-screen communities alike. This film's vision of Palestinian honor implies possession and defense of ancestral land, preservation of traditional customs, manly courage, self assertion and virility, hospitality, and proud self-rule.²⁹ It is portrayed as an underlying, uniting value system, from which individuals and the collective derive their sense of self worth and the strength to survive Israeli oppression.

The 2004 *Attash* and the 2009 *Ajami* paint very different, far more critical pictures of Palestinian honor in communities of Israeli-Palestinians.

4.2 *Attash: Critical Illustration of the Gender Politics of Palestinian Honor*

Attash (2004, written and directed by Israeli-Palestinian Tawfik Abu Wael), winner of various Israeli and international awards, including the International Critics Prize at Cannes in 2004, is a slow, beautifully filmed, poetic art film. It follows the isolated lives of five family members in a nowhere location (in Israel). They slave together, producing charcoal made from stolen wood. The young boy is the only one who, attending school, comes into contact with society. With very little plot, the film follows the characters' expressions of long, lonely suffering and yearning for normalcy.

I suggest that the scant conversation onscreen reveals that the secluded family is imprisoned by the father's overbearing sense of honor/shame. Ten years earlier, the older daughter was sexually abused, namely, according to the prevailing honor mentality, she was defiled and shamed. The father, the patriarch of this little clan, seems to have opted not to kill either his victimized daughter or the offender. He, therefore, lives in perpetual, tormenting shame. The community reinforces this shame by humiliating the boy, calling his sister 'the whore'. The father uses self-enforced exile from society as a means

29 The film also clearly associates manly honor with penetration of female virginity. This traditional feature of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern honor codes distinguishes this film's Palestinian honor code from *Kazablan's* Zionist honor code. So do the emphasis on ancestral land and traditional customs. Discussion of these distinctions is beyond the scope of this article.

for salvaging his honor. Yet this 'cleansing' of honor comes at the expense of family members' dignity. The uninhibited wilderness in which the patriarch's honor has forcefully incarcerated them, deprives them of minimal living conditions, basic facilities (such as running water) and, no less important, human company.

The family's growing resentment towards the tyrannical oppressor merely intensifies his aggression. Finally, when he attempts to illegally provide running water for the family, thus solidifying the permanence of their isolated dwelling arrangement, the prisoners' thirst for life prevails. In keeping with the framework of this article, they overthrow the tyrannical oppression of the patriarchal honor, break free and head back to civilization.

4.3 *Ajami: Palestinian Honor and Murderous Blood Feud*

Ajami (2009, directed by Palestinian-Israeli Scandar Copti and Jewish-Israeli Yaron Shani) won many Israeli and international awards, was the first Arabic-speaking film submitted by Israel for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film (2009), and was nominated for the award. In a raving review, Jack Faber claims that 'we have waited for this film for years' (Faber 2009, 52). It is set in a rundown Jaffa neighborhood called *Ajami*, inhabited by Israeli-Palestinians. The cast includes many authentic residents, who speak Arabic mixed with Hebrew. This lends the feature film a powerful documentary aroma.

Ajami presents a complex compilation of five intertwined story lines. The film's opening scene features a drive-by shooting of a teenage boy working on his car on an *Ajami* street. The alarmed neighbors realize that the assassins were members of a notorious Bedouin clan, avenging the earlier shooting and wounding of their clansman, who had tried to rob a restaurant. The restaurateur who shot that Bedouin was an uncle of Omar and Nasri, the film's young protagonists. Omar, in his late teens, was thus targeted by the avenging Bedouins, but since he sold his car to a friend, it was the friend who was mistakenly killed in his place. The realization that the Bedouin avengers will not rest until they hit Omar or his brother Nasri sets the scene for the film's five intertwined plots.

With the assistance of an honorable neighbor and restaurateur, Omar arranges a three-day cease fire and a hearing in a tribal court. The elders hear both sides' claims, ruling that to end the blood feud, Omar must pay the Bedouin clan tens of thousands of dinars within three weeks. Omar's widowed mother pleads with him to run and hide, but he is adamant that they could run, but never hide from the vengeance. In his attempt to raise the money that would end the blood feud, Omar encounters his society's prejudices, class-snobbery, greed, abuse of the weak, hypocrisy and treachery, all cloaked in the

rhetoric of honor. Finally, as Omar desperately attempts to sell (fake) drugs to undercover policemen disguised as drug dealers, his younger brother, Nasri, is accidentally shot to death. The inescapable blood feud – a deadly social disease, augmented by the Israeli-Palestinian community's many additional flaws – claims the life of a pure-hearted, imaginative, innocent Palestinian boy.

I argue that, whereas *Wedding in Galilee* portrays the Palestinian honor mentality romantically as a noble cultural heritage that unites Palestinians and strengthens them in the face of their Zionist-Israeli oppressors, the more critical *Attash* and *Ajami* depict the 'Mr. Hyde' shadow of Palestinian honor. Hardly mentioning Israel, Zionism or Jews, these films accuse the Palestinian honor mentality of brutal, tyrannical internal oppression that ruins and claims many innocent lives.³⁰

In 2013, *Bethlehem* offers a combined look at both Zionist and Palestinian honor mentalities, at the ethnic blood feud they feed, and their detrimental consequences regarding human dignity.

5 Part IV: An Honor-and-Dignity Reading of *Bethlehem*; The Deadly Israeli-Palestinian Blood-feud

Co-written by Yuval Adler (a Jewish Israeli) and Ali Wakad (a Palestinian Israeli), the 2013 *Bethlehem* received a critics' award in Venice, first prize at the Haifa Film Festival and six Ophir (Israeli Academy) Awards, and was selected as the Israeli entry for the Best Foreign Language Film at the 86th Academy Awards. This dramatic action film portrays Israeli and Palestinian Authority security agencies as mirror-image teams of young men, pumped with testosterone and pomposity, playing deadly honor games and mutually denying human dignity.

The film revolves around the complex relationship between its two protagonists: the Israeli Razi (Tsahi Halevi) and the Palestinian³¹ Sanfur (Shadi Mar'i).

30 Among the most interesting (non-Israeli) Palestinian films that tackle the issue of the Palestinian honor mentality are *Paradise Now* (2005) and *Laila's Birthday* (2008). The first explains a suicide bomber's motivation in the need to cleanse the family honor, stained by his father's collaboration with the Israeli authorities. The second reveals the daily nuisance of crude, harmful Palestinian honor. It echoes the critical point of view of *James' Journey to Jerusalem*.

31 Unlike the previous films, presented in Part II, in this film 'Palestinian' does not refer to 'Palestinian citizen of Israel', but to residents of the West Bank, which is currently under the rule of the Palestinian Authority. Residents of Bethlehem are not Israeli citizens.

Razi is a *Shin Bet*³² intelligence officer who recruits and handles Palestinian informers. Sanfur is one of his informers. He is the young brother of Ibrahim, the head of a militia/terrorist group that Razi is after. Razi contacted Sanfur when he was only fifteen and, over the course of four years, has developed a close, even intimate relationship with him. In their frequent meetings, Razi's job is to use, manipulate and exploit Sanpur for intelligence purposes. The intelligence officer attempts to get information from the young man that would reveal his brother's hiding place and lead to his accomplices.

At the same time, Razi is also attentive to the young Palestinian man, preps him, warns him, encourages and reproaches him as a tough yet loving older brother would. Sanfur's own brother, Ibrahim, is too busy fighting for the Palestinian cause to pay attention to his younger brother. It is Razi, not Ibrahim, who buys Sanfur jeans and stands by his hospital bedside when the young man's wounds are treated. In fact, Razi is Sanfur's best and only friend. And for Razi, Sanfur is closer than his own son. Their bonding is mutual and deep. Yet, *à la* West Side Story, they belong to two rivaling gangs. Each gang adheres to a stern honor code that requires complete dehumanization of the members of the other gang. In terms of this article, in order to maintain their honor within their respective groups, Razi and Sanfur are each required to use, exploit and kill the other.

The film opens with a scene in which Sanfur is badgered by other young Palestinian men to prove his manhood. 'Younger brother' that he is, living in the shadow of his older brother, he is taunted and mocked as coward and a 'female'. The young men goad him to put on an old, torn flak jacket and let them shoot at him. Feeling hard pressed to prove his manly honor, Sanfur consents. This motif of feeling obliged to prove manly honor in response to group goading runs throughout the film. Thus, when, towards the end of the film, Sanfur's older brother, Ibrahim, is killed by the Israeli forces (led by Razi), the grieving father says that his dead, eldest son was his only source of honor. In response, Sanfur feels obliged to volunteer to avenge his brother's death.

Hearing of Sanfur's flak jacket incident, Razi tells him that honor is not gained through empty bravado, but by hard work, study, and self-restraint. Man-to-man, he tries to curb Sanfur's unrestrained peacock-pose honor and insert discipline and self-realization into the young man's honor code.

Yet, Razi too is a member of a group that abides by macho honor rules. His commanders mock him for not getting enough information out of Sanfur, taunting that he is soft, letting the young man toy with him. Not merely his professionalism, but Razi's honor and manliness are also challenged by his

32 The Israeli equivalent of the US CIA.

superiors. This honor-badgering drives each of the protagonists (as well as many other characters) to take high risks and act dangerously (just as verse III in the *Kazablan* honor code commands). It is hardly surprising that the two honor groups are portrayed as locked in an eternal blood feud.

I suggest that the film makes a powerful point, focusing on mirror-image similarities between the two honor mentalities of the two sides. Yet it does not stop there, and goes a step further, claiming that each group's commitment to its honor mentality precludes a universalistic, humanistic, dignity-base perception of the other.

When, at the turning point in the film, a bomb goes off in the center of Jerusalem, resulting in many casualties, Razi's commander orders Razi to use Sanfur as bait to summon Ibrahim, his brother. The plan is to hit them both from the air, avoiding Israeli boots on the ground and potential casualties. The commander tries to incite the reluctant Razi, saying that Sanfur deserves to die for withholding information that could have led to the capture of Ibrahim much sooner. But Razi understands Sanfur's loyalty to his elder brother, and cannot stand the thought of bringing about the young man's death. He concocts a plan to get Sanfur away, and goes after Ibrahim with a unit of combat soldiers. This choice spares Sanfur, while claiming the life of a fellow Israeli officer. Razi's commander detects that Razi is allowing himself to be motivated by personal emotions towards Sanfur. He confronts Razi, accuses him of acting unprofessionally, calls him unreliable and untrustworthy and doubts his credibility.

The commander's strong stand makes it clear that Razi's professional honor as an intelligence officer requires him to treat Sanfur *solely as a means to an end and never as an end in its own right*. Razi's professional honor as a member of the Israeli security agency precludes the possibility of him treating a Palestinian informer as a human subject, namely one that is always to be treated as an end in its own right. To preserve his honor and status within his group, Razi must deny Sanfur's human dignity.

Indeed, Razi's refusal to deny Sanfur's well-being and safety eventually leads to his own death. The film proves the commander to be right: acknowledging the enemy's human dignity is suicidal. As in ancient Greek tragedies, overriding the social blood-feud rules, Razi's commitment to human dignity claims his life.

On the other side of the divide, when Sanfur is found out by his brother's comrades and exposed as a traitor, he is shamed and humiliated in front of his grieving father. The only option presented to him for cleansing his honor, as well as his family's, is to kill Razi and die as a martyr. Comrades of his brother

promise that if he does not consent, Bethlehem will be covered with his posters titled 'traitor'; this is an ultimate humiliation. His father would die heart-broken and shamed.

As he shoots Razi and then smashes his head with a rock, Sanfur accepts that his and his father's honor within their Palestinian group precludes any possibility of acknowledging the human dignity of the Israeli Other. Standing on his honor, he kills his best friend, Razi. The film ends before Sanfur points his gun at himself. But it leaves little doubt that his commitment to his group's honor code is stronger than to anyone's human dignity, even his own.

6 Conclusion

Both scholarly analysis and popular publicist writing ignore Zionist honor and the central role it plays in determining the Israeli mentality, Israel's commitment to human dignity and rights, and the perpetuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. An honor-sensitive critical film interpretation reveals that predominant Israeli films tackle this theme openly and boldly, offering useful insight. Analysis of such films is crucial and revealing.

This article examines six prominent, very highly acclaimed Israeli feature films that I argue can be read as tackling the themes of honor and dignity openly and insightfully. The Israeli-Zionist *Kazablan* (1973) and the Israeli-Palestinian *Wedding in Galilee* (1987) each construct an ideal version of Zionist and Palestinian honor codes and mentalities respectively. *Kazablan's* Zionist honor code is heroic, noble and dressed in Mediterranean garb, uniting Israeli Jews of all origins. *Wedding in Galilee's* Palestinian honor is manly virility and pride, deeply rooted in the timeless, pastoral Palestinian soil and traditional village life.

When viewed through the lens of honor, more critical and recent Israeli films suggest that these happy ideals conceal monstrous shadow images. *James' Journey to Jerusalem* (2003) shows how the dark side the honor mentality of Zionist Israel – dread of being shamed – drives Israelis to crude competition for precedence at all cost. It shows how the overwhelming fear of dishonor blinds Israelis to the human dignity of others, allowing them to exploit and abuse African work migrants ruthlessly. In a similar manner, the Israeli-Palestinian *Attash* (2004) and *Ajami* (2009) demonstrate how the Palestinian honor mentality and the fear of shame that it breeds can be internally oppressive, ruthless and murderous, not merely towards women but to all people at large (honor killings of both women and men are portrayed as a plague).

Bethlehem (2013) critically examines both Zionist and Palestinian honor mentalities. Portraying both as macho, adolescent, insensitive and hurtful, this film suggests that the parallel honor mentalities perpetuate the Israeli-Palestinian blood feud. Further, the movie demonstrates how both honor codes preclude the adherence to and cherishing of universal human dignity.

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