Traces of War: Memory, Trauma, and the Archive in Joseph Cedar’s Beaufort

by RAZ YOSEF

Abstract: One of the most striking phenomena in contemporary Israeli cinema is the number of films that explore repressed traumatic events from the First Lebanon War—events that have been denied entry into the shared national past. This essay analyzes Joseph Cedar’s film Beaufort (2007), arguing that the film exposes a traumatic rupture between history and memory. Yet at the same time, Beaufort nostalgically expresses an impossible yearning for lost archival collective national memory.

Modern memory is first of all archival. It relies entirely on the specificity of the trace, the materiality of the vestige, the concreteness of the recording, the visibility of the image.

Pierre Nora

It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away.

Jacques Derrida

The Israeli documentary film Wasted (Nurit Kedar, 2006) opens with archival footage of Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Minister of Defense Ariel Sharon visiting the Beaufort fortress on June 6, 1982, after it had been captured by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) during the First Lebanon War. Beaufort, a mountain fortress in Southern Lebanon, was established in 1150, during the Crusades. In the context of the First Lebanon War, the fortress had served as a Palestinian military stronghold from which settlements in northern Israel had been shelled.


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Its capture followed one of the war’s most famous battles, and it came to represent Israeli control in Lebanon. The media accompanied Begin and Sharon to the fortress, where they hastened to report that there had been no fatalities in the battle for Beaufort, even though the word was already out that a Golani commando officer and five other soldiers had fallen in the fighting. The Israeli media talked of the fighters’ “supreme heroism” and “utter commitment,” without mentioning the heavy losses suffered by the IDF.

The name of the film, Wasted, recalls the Vietnam War, where “to waste” someone came to mean “to kill” them. Thus, the film, as Judd Ne’eman notes, creates a linkage between the United States imbroglio and defeat in Vietnam and Israel’s failure as it got stuck in what came to be known as “the Lebanese swamp.”3 In contrast to the Israeli statist media, which emphasized the heroism of the capture of Beaufort, the film reveals and restages repressed and private traumatic memories through the testimonies of eleven soldiers who served there six months before the IDF pulled out of Lebanon in May 2000. The soldiers are haunted by the ghosts of the war: they remember the images, the sounds, and the smells of the battlefield; they remember a war in which they never saw the enemy. One of the soldiers asks, “Who are we guarding? What are we guarding? There’s only darkness. We started to get the feeling that we were only guarding ourselves. Why am I here?” Their memories are of horror, paralyzing fear, and death.

At the heart of the film stands the trauma of the destroyed body of the killed or wounded male soldier. Israeli war films of the 1950s and 1960s repressed this traumatic vision. In those films, the warrior who sacrificed his life on the nation’s altar was represented through the myth of the “living dead,” the soldier, whose physical body is absent, dead, yet nonetheless present and alive in the imagined national consciousness. Through the mythic metaphor of the “living-dead” soldier, the national culture of war confirmed its preparedness to sacrifice victims.4 The existence of the individual was subsumed by the collective, and the death of the warrior was endorsed and justified by being given a greater and more general national, and thus transcendent, meaning. Nationalism, like religion, argues Benedict Anderson, “concerns itself with the links between the dead and the yet unborn, the mystery of regeneration. . . . It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny.”5 Ella Shohat argues that in Israeli war films, “[t]he death of the protagonists . . . is allegorically compensated for by the rebirth of the country—the ultimate protagonist of the film[s].”6 Or, to put it in terms of the body, the real death of the individual, and the materiality of the male body—its skin, flesh, blood, bones—are disavowed and incorporated into the process of the national body’s rebirth. In He Walked Through the Fields (Yosef Millo, 1967), for example, the death of the soldier, Uri, is not shown on screen. The spectacle of his dead body

3 Judd Ne’eman, “All Family Movie” [in Hebrew], Ma’ariv, April 27, 2007. All translations from Hebrew are by the author unless otherwise noted.


is replaced by a freeze-frame image of Uri's surprised face seconds before he is killed. The cinematic freeze-frame becomes a metonymic signifier for the threshold between life and death, and constructs the national myth of the “living dead.” The frozen image of Uri’s face dissolves into an image of the sea, from which new immigrants to Israel are arriving. Individual death is suppressed by its incorporation within the national continuity. The sacrifice of Uri’s life while blowing up a bridge has assured the safe arrival of Jewish immigrants and paved the way for the establishment of the imagined national community of Israel. According to Anderson, the creation of an imagined national community is founded on the simultaneous and shared existence of people who do not know one another personally, and have not met face to face. Therefore, the more blurred the individual identity of the object of memory is, the greater the power of national and collective identity and identification. Individual death is detached from the soldier’s body and, thus, can serve as a source of identification for all.

Wasted exposes the trauma of the soldier’s dismembered body that had been hidden from view by earlier nationalist war films. “You see people being blown up, you see people screaming,” says one of the soldiers. “When I’m treating their wounds, at some point I have to touch the wounds, expose them. . . . You’re covered in blood, and then you take out your bandage to bandage him up, you try to open it but it’s slippery from the blood, and you put it in your mouth to rip it, and you’ve got the taste of your friend’s blood in your mouth.” In between the soldiers’ chilling descriptions of the pounded and lacerated male body, Kedar inserts clips of male dancers wearing khaki pants and tight black tank-tops over their well-toned muscles. These male bodies crash to the floor, twisting and writhing against the background of phosphorescent lighting—similar to military flares—to simulate the hell of the battlefield. The beautiful, perfect, and whole bodies of the dancers stand in contrast to the horrifying images of the shapeless, pulverized, and helplessly wasted body described in the soldiers’ testimonies (Figure 1).

Traumatic Recollections. Wasted insists on representing the trauma of the soldier’s mutilated body although, according to Cathy Caruth, trauma is an unrepresentable experience. Trauma is “a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event.” One of the central features of trauma is its belatedness: the trauma victim cannot grasp or represent the traumatic event at the time of its occurrence, and so the traumatic experience continues to haunt the victim over and over. In other words, there is a repetition of the traumatic event, which can

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only be represented, understood, or known after the event itself. Trauma is thus a crisis of knowledge and representation.\textsuperscript{10} The traumatic event is not repressed, but returns in a deferred action to consciousness. The Freudian concept of “deferred action” (Nachträglichkeit) refers to a figure, an experience, or a secondary scene that comes too late, that reenacts the scene that has already taken place, thereby constructing it as a scene that is emotionally important or meaningful. In other words, trauma is established through a relationship between two events: a first event that is not initially necessarily traumatic, because when it occurs it is still too soon to comprehend its full significance, and a second event that may not be inherently traumatic in itself but that triggers a memory of the earlier event, which is only then filled with traumatic significance.

In keeping with this understanding of trauma, \textit{Wasted} does not focus on the catastrophic event itself, but rather on the shocking emotions and experiences as remembered by the soldiers, and on the ways that the interviewees express themselves. For instance, one of the soldiers relates, “Sometimes, when I’d light a cigarette a long time later, that smell would rise up in my nose again . . . [a] smell that’s hard to forget . . . [a] pungent smell, a burnt smell. . . . It was a vision that I didn’t want to remember and

\textsuperscript{10} On trauma as a crisis of representation, see Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, \textit{Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History} (New York: Routledge, 1992); and Cathy Caruth, \textit{Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History} (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
that I can’t forget.” The appalling smells and images of scorched flesh return involuntarily to the soldier’s consciousness and become a traumatic memory only in relation to a different time and place, the smell of the cigarette reenacting memories of the war that now, in a deferred action, take on a traumatic meaning. The soldier wanted to forget, not to know, not to remember the ordeal of the defiled body in real time. Thus, the threatening event continues to haunt him and repeatedly reappears both in his dreams and in his everyday life. He says, “It’s unbelievable that you’re there, and that’s what you’re seeing. Sometimes I see myself going up to my position, I don’t remember everything that happened there, but I want to remember.” Another soldier says that “it’s like becoming part of a film, really, a film,” and “basically, what you see there is like stuff from the films . . . war films.” Another soldier testifies, “I’m running for my life and I’m unable to run.” For the soldiers, the battle is remembered as a nightmare, or a war film. Like a viewer at the cinema, the soldier sees himself trapped in a sequence of horrendous images that unfolds in front of his eyes.

The soldiers’ traumatic recollections do not necessarily consist of linear relations between cause (the traumatic event) and effect (its representation in memory), between the referent in reality and the sign that represents it. Rather, fantasy and the unconscious play a central role in the formation of the soldiers’ catastrophic memories of the historical past. Janet Walker describes the connection between reality and fantasy in cinematic representations of traumatic memory as “disremembering”: “The process described by psychological literature as that of conjuring mental images and sounds related to past events but altered in certain respects shall be termed ‘disremembering.’ Disremembering is not the same as not remembering. It is remembering with a difference. . . . Disremembering can become urgent when events are personally unfathomable or socially unacceptable. Disremembering . . . is a survival strategy par excellence.”

The soldiers’ traumatic memories are “disremembered” memories: they are discontinued recollections, constructed by forgetting, and altered by fragments of fantasy. Disremembering makes it possible for the soldier to talk about and represent an event that is too threatening to experience directly. Memories of this kind testify to the very unrepresentability of the event that the soldier is trying to remember. It is no coincidence that the director Nurit Kedar chose to interview the soldiers on the artificial set of the feature film Beaufort (Joseph Cedar, 2007) that fictitiously re-created the famous military post. Kedar points to the central role of cinema—as a kind of fantasy—in representing the unrepresentable and in exposing muted traumatic memories.

Wasted marks one of the most striking phenomena in contemporary Israeli cinema: films that explore repressed traumatic events from the First Lebanon War,


events that have been denied entry into the shared national past. Another such film is *Beaufort* (winner of the Silver Bear at the 2007 Berlin International Film Festival and a nominee for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film), which is based on a best-selling novel by Ron Leshem, *If There Is a Heaven* (2005), itself based on the memories of soldiers who served at Beaufort in 1999–2000. *Beaufort* deals with the trauma of the IDF’s withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, and with the soldiers’ anxieties and fears that they have been abandoned by the army and the state on the isolated outpost. Another film that explores repressed traumatic events is *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008), an animated documentary based on video footage that describes the journey taken by the director—who is also the film’s central character—in search of his lost and forgotten memories of the horrors of the First Lebanon War, in particular of the massacre in the Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camps. Finally, the film *Lebanon* (2009)—which is based on the traumatic war memories of the scriptwriter-director, Shmuel Maoz—portrays the attempts to rescue a group of Israeli soldiers who were trapped inside a tank in a Lebanese village that was surrounded by Syrian commando forces. The film documents the distress and anxiety of the soldiers who observe the horrors of the battle outside through the tank’s gun sights.\(^{13}\)

The First Lebanon War left searing marks on Israeli national memory. The longest and most controversial of all Israel’s wars, it started in 1982 with what was meant to be a short two- or three-month operation—euphemistically called “Operation Peace for Galilee”—with the objective of protecting Israel’s northern settlements. The war ended three years later, in June 1985. However, it was only after eighteen years that the Israeli government declared a final withdrawal of all IDF forces from Lebanon. When the war began, it enjoyed wide support from the Israeli public, but this diminished as the extent of the battles, their true objective (bringing about a new political order in Lebanon and the Middle East), and the number of casualties came to light. It was a political war that weakened the Israeli right and led to Begin’s resignation as prime minister and his departure from politics. It was a war that aroused widespread opposition, with the public asking whether the war’s objectives had been met, whether Israel’s presence in Lebanon was necessary, and whether the cost in terms of casualties was worth paying. As the IDF became embroiled ever deeper in the problems of Lebanon’s internal politics, public opposition intensified, reaching its peak after the massacres in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila. The war would later be known as “a war of choice” and “the other war.”\(^{14}\)


The First Lebanon War has featured in a number of Israeli films, such as *Ricochets* (Eli Cohen, 1982), *Fragments* (Yossi Zomer, 1989), *Cup Final* (Eran Riklis, 1991), and *The Cherry Season* (Haim Buzaglo, 1991). These films are critical of Zionist ideals and the Israeli government’s belligerent policies, and they aspire to offer a “leftist” political portrayal of a war that exacted a heavy price from both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, the films are ultimately subservient to a pro-Israel “liberal-humanist” ideological perspective. From this perspective, the films mostly describe the Israeli soldier’s psychological deliberations and pangs of conscience. This soldier is represented as an “enlightened” occupier who “shoots and weeps,” sensitive to and identifying with the Palestinians’ suffering, and feeling and seeing himself as persecuted.

*Ricochets*, for example, purports to demonstrate the Israeli soldier’s moral supremacy. On the one hand, it sketches out an optimistic fantasy of the relations between the Israeli soldier and Lebanon’s Shiite refugee population: Effi, one of the soldiers, gives some chocolate to a Shiite woman, who gives him some cherries in return. On the other hand, the film also portrays the political situation as a dead end. In one scene, Georgie, the army cook, explains the complexities of the situation in Lebanon to Gadi, the new officer: “The Christians hate the Druze and the Shiites—so do the Sunni and the Palestinians. The Druze hate the Christians, the Shiites and the Syrians. . . . The Sunni hate whoever their bosses tell them to hate, and not only do the Palestinians hate everyone else, they hate each other as well. . . . And they’ve all got one thing in common: they all hate—and you’ve no idea how much—we Israelis.” This comic representation of Lebanon’s sociopolitical dynamics leads to the final and seemingly “correct” conclusion that Israel is the innocent victim of the Arabs’ irrational hatred.15

Other films, such as *Cup Final* and *The Cherry Season* were more radical in their critique of the First Lebanon War. As the Israeli film scholar Nurith Gertz argues, “just as *Ricochets* portrays the justice of the Israeli cause and *Cup Final* repudiates it, *Cherry Season* portrays Israeli justice as utterly irrelevant and the war as utterly perverse.”16 And yet, rather than telling the Palestinian story, the aim of these films is to ease the liberal consciences of not only their viewers but also their directors, who belonged to the Israeli peace camp. Israeli cinema of the 1980s and early 1990s represents the embarrassment and helplessness of the Israeli left after it had recognized the Palestinian other as the victim of Jewish-Israeli oppression. The failure of the war, and the traumatic events associated with it, are not fully addressed and mourned by the Israeli cinema of that time.

In revisiting the traumatic and unspoken recollections of the First Lebanon War, the films *Wasted*, *Beaufort*, *Waltz with Bashir*, and *Lebanon* are less concerned with the

15 Dorit Naaman also points to the ways recent post-Oslo Israeli cinema has distanced itself from concrete reality and from realism as a style. While Naaman argues that this distance ignores the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and avoids charting a clear notion of borders, I suggest that in the films discussed in this article, this rupture marks a radical and traumatic break from national collective memory and history. Dorit Naaman, “Elusive Frontiers: Borders in Israeli and Palestinian Cinemas,” *Third Text* 20, no. 3/4 (May/July 2006): 511–521.

history of the war than with the private and subjective experiences and memories of the soldiers who fought in it. They describe combatants for whom time has stopped, who are haunted by the horrifying images of the battlefield, sometimes even after the war has ended. Their emphasis on the subjective dimension of memories and experiences of the war distances these films from the war’s historical context—which is represented only partially and sometimes hazily—and leads them into an atemporal zone marked by symbols and private hallucinations. Drawn away from the continuities of national history, the films enter an ambiguous world of individual allusions, a mysterious world signified by the displacements and repetitions that characterize dreams and fantasies. These films point both to the tremendous need to remember and represent one of the most traumatic wars in the history of the State of Israel and to the difficulty of doing so.

To an extent, the specific forms taken by memory in these films—the distance between memory and history, the subjective and personal nature of memories, and the difficulty of representing and capturing the past—have been analyzed, albeit in a different context, by the French historian Pierre Nora. Despite its title, Nora’s “Between Memory and History” is less an analysis of the relations between “history” and “memory,” and more a melancholic reflection on the loss of the tradition of national historical memory. “Memory is constantly on our lips,” Nora claims, “because it no longer exists.” In analyzing why memory “no longer exists,” Nora describes a number of stages of loss. He begins with “primitive” or “archaic” societies, whose memories were “real” and through which values were transmitted from one generation to the next. These were societies that connected people with their ancestors and to “the undifferentiated time of heroes, inceptions, and myths.” With the collapse of these societies and the subsequent “acceleration of history,” people became detached from “real” memory and were forced to enter the world of history. Here, Nora contrasts history and memory:

Memory is life, always embodied in living societies. . . . History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is always a phenomenon of the present. . . . History is a representation of the past. . . . [it] calls for analysis and critical discourse. Memory situates remembrance in a sacred context. . . . Memory is rooted in the concrete: in space, gesture, image, and object. History dwells exclusively on temporal continuities, on changes in things and in the relations among things. Memory is absolute, while history is always relative.

17 Nora, “Between Memory and History.” This is the introductory article to a multivolume collaborative project overseen by Nora on the national memory of France.
19 Nora, “Between Memory and History,” 1.
20 Ibid., 2.
21 Ibid., 3.
Despite the basic distinction between them, Nora argues that the traditional idea of the nation enabled proximity between history and memory. He believes that national historical memory—or what he terms “history-memory”—provided a sense of unity and continuity, a dimension of “sacredness,” which had previously characterized the “real” memory of traditional societies. Aspects of the nation such as “the political, the military, the biographical, and the diplomatic were all pillars of continuity.”

However, with the post-Enlightenment disintegration of the idea of the nation as a sacred entity based on shared values and traditions and the rise of the secular multicultural society, historical memory lost its national role. As a result of the decline of the idea of collective national identity, history lost its mission, its pedagogical purpose, and its sacredness. History was no longer the essential link between the past, the present, and the future; it ceased to be imbued with the “collective consciousness” and no longer served the nation: “history became a social science; and memory became a purely private phenomenon.”

Thus, Nora claims, private memories replaced collective national memory. Such personal memories express the experiences and ensure the continuity not of the nation but rather of various social groups. These groups, which are united through common historical experience or by religious or ethnic affiliation, are dependent on private memories for their communal identity and solidarity. When memory departs from the realm of the nation, Nora argues, it undergoes a shift “from the historical to the psychological, from the social to the individual. . . . As a result of this psychologization, the self now stands in a new relation to memory and the past.” While the historical memory of the nation offered a spontaneous connection with the past, today people depend on private memories in order to make sense of their identity. Thus, they experience memory as a duty. This duty to remember drives people to create archives, “places of memory” (lieux de mémoire) aimed at preserving each and every trace or fragment of the past. Paradoxically, however, these places—from museums and monuments to symbolic ceremonies and festivities—actually distance us from the past. Places of memory stop time, thus creating a discontinuity that separates us from what came before. “Places of memory,” writes Nora, “have no referents in reality; or, rather, they are their own referents—pure signs. This is not to say that they are without content, physical presence, or history—on the contrary. But what makes them lieux de mémoire is precisely that which allows them to escape from history.”

Nora’s account of modern memory largely accords with the structure of memory in Beaufort, a film which reveals and highlights a rupture, or a discontinuity, between history (or national historical memory) and memory. Yet at the same time, the film nostalgically expresses an impossible yearning for lost collective national memory. In the film, the war is represented as the private memory of a distinct social group—the combat unit that manned the famous outpost in the final months before the IDF’s withdrawal from Lebanon—and not as collective memory, as a lived and practiced

22 Ibid., 5.
23 Ibid., 6.
24 Ibid., 11.
25 Ibid., 19.
tradition that conditions Israeli society. The period surrounding the withdrawal is represented as traumatic for the soldiers, who feel that they have been abandoned by the army and the state, have lost their national purpose and identity, and have been excluded from the nation’s historical memory. This detachment from national collective memory pulls the film into a world marked by a persistent blurring of the historical context and by private and subjective impressions, a timeless world of dreams, hallucinations, and myths. However, the trauma of abandonment, which both produces and marks the distance from the national shared past, arouses in the soldiers, especially the unit’s officer—and indeed in the film itself—anxieties about the loss of masculine national authority and domination. Faced with the absence of national supervision and collective historical memory, the unit’s officer, Liraz Librati (Oshri Cohen), feels personally obliged to remember the national past. He constructs Beaufort as a “place of memory,” a kind of national archive, so as to give meaning to his identity. However, the protagonist’s archival desire for the national past, his nostalgia for a lost collective memory, is rendered impossible by the traumatic distance between national history and memory. Beaufort thus mourns the loss of collective memory and bears witness to the collapse of historical national memory in Israel.

**Forgotten Army.** The withdrawal from Lebanon damaged the IDF’s status both within and beyond Israel. Most of the Israeli public, which had become tired with what it saw as pointless military fatalities in Lebanon, and which refused to continue sacrificing human lives for control over territories outside Israel’s borders, supported the full and unilateral withdrawal of IDF forces from the “security zone” in southern Lebanon. The army’s leadership opposed the withdrawal because the retreat of a large army with plentiful resources in the face of a relatively weak enemy such as Hezbollah might have undermined the IDF’s image in the eyes of both Israeli soldiers and citizens, as well as in the eyes of the enemy. In March 2000, Prime Minister Ehud Barak gave the order for an immediate withdrawal. The IDF was pleased with how the withdrawal proceeded, especially in bureaucratic and operational terms: it was a fast exit that took less than forty-eight hours, with no loss of life, following the dismantling of a great deal of equipment. However, neither the army nor the government was able to prevent the Palestinian public and the wider Arab population—or even Israelis to some extent—from seeing the withdrawal as shameful for Israel. The IDF was perceived as a humiliated and defeated army that had lost its power and the aura of courage and heroism associated with it for so many years. The IDF’s image as a failing army was also highlighted after the second Intifada broke out in September 2000, when IDF Chief of Staff Moshe “Boogie” Ya’alon said, “We have renewed our power of deterrence. We have compensated for the outcome of the withdrawal from Lebanon.” Ya’alon’s comments emphasize the idea that the violent suppression of the Palestinian Intifada was intended to counter the image of the IDF’s defeat—an image that had been dismissed from the official national

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narrative—and to restore a sense of national unity to Israeli society and revive its belief in the power of the army.

*Beaufort* expresses fear of the loss of the Israeli army’s authority and dominance in light of the approaching withdrawal from Lebanon. The film does not deal with the actual historical event but rather focuses on the soldiers’ subjective experiences and sense of anxiety, expressing individual and traumatic experiences and memories of the war that had previously been denied entry into the national historical narrative. The withdrawal from Lebanon is described in the film as traumatic for the soldiers, who feel as though they have been abandoned both by the army and the state, and by the Israeli public. These combatants, who were brought up on heroic myths of sacrifice and death, feel that their national mission has lost its way and its purpose, and that they have been forgotten on foreign soil. They feel like victims of a national and political conflict, with nothing to do but wait for the politicians to determine their fate while the enemy kills them almost daily. At the beginning of the film, the soldiers are physically trapped on the mountain because the access road has been mined; the only way in or out of the post is by helicopter. Ziv Faran (Ohad Knoller), a bomb disposal officer, arrives at the outpost in order to clear the road. For the soldiers, his arrival carries the promise of fresh supplies reaching the mountain and of having some contact with the world beyond. The commander of the unit, Liraz, and his second-in-command, Oshri (Eli Eltonyo), welcome him: “Have you come to rescue us?” they say, in a mixture of jest and desperation. Frightened by the constant shelling of the outpost, Ziv asks with concern, “Is it always like this?” Liraz and Oshri reply sarcastically, “No, until you arrived everything was fine. Welcome to Beaufort!” (Figure 2).

![Figure 2. “Welcome to Beaufort!” (Kino International, 2007; courtesy of Joseph Cedar).](image-url)
The spatial layout of the Beaufort outpost reflects the soldiers’ feelings of helplessness, entrapment, and isolation. The distance the film takes from Israeli nationalism leads it to represent Beaufort not only as a historical site, but also, if not primarily, as a site detached from a specific time and place, a twilight zone between reality and myth, past and present, life and death. The outpost is made up of an intricate network of narrow and winding underground corridors. As they make their way through them, the soldiers look like laboratory mice running through a twisting and claustrophobic maze. The soldiers sleep in beds hanging from the ceiling of a long container that they call the “submarine,” a name that highlights their detachment from the external world (Figure 3). Just like in a “submarine,” the soldiers are dependent on technological equipment in order to maintain contact with the outside world. Aboveground, the outpost is made of many concrete layers that have been added over the years, appearing to bury the soldiers alive (Figure 4). The concrete walls block the cinematic frame that closes in on the soldiers, restricting their movement in space. Much of the time the outpost is cloaked in heavy fog, which impedes the soldiers’ visibility and their spatial orientation. It also gives a sense of anti-realism to a place that is simultaneously constructed as real and imagined, that exists and does not exist.

The space of Beaufort can be described in Michel Foucault’s terms as a heterotopia. In contrast to a utopia, which is a site that doesn’t really exist, even if the conditions required to make it materialize are clear, a heterotopia—which literally means “other place”—is a real place, a site that subsists in time and space, a place that exists and yet does not exist. One of Foucault’s examples of a heterotopia is the ship—or in the case of this film, the “submarine”—which is in itself a closed space, while at the

Figure 3. The internal space of the Beaufort outpost: Koris in the “submarine” (Kino International, 2007; courtesy of Joseph Cedar).
same time floating on an infinite sea. Heterotopias are part of the social order, reflecting and reinforcing it, while also inverting it. According to Foucault, heterotopias are “sometimes like counter-sites, a kind of effective enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within our culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted.”

Because it is a conquered space, the Beaufort outpost reinforces the Israeli national and ideological order. At the same time, though, its workings are disrupted and it lacks a clear purpose. According to a notice hanging in the outpost, the purpose of this space is “[t]o protect the northern border of the State of Israel.” However, because they cannot see the enemy, the soldiers do not understand what they are protecting or from whom. The Beaufort outpost represents military law and order and is supposed to control the space that surrounds it, but in fact it is a chaotic and claustrophobic space that functions in an entirely disorderly and confused fashion, a space that is constantly on the defensive. The outpost is an enclave within enemy territory that abides by the rules of the State of Israel, yet it is also detached from it, or has perhaps even been abandoned by it. Foucault claims that heterotopias are “simultaneously mythical and real.” In one scene, one of the soldiers, Tomer Zitlawi (Itay Turgeman), ironically describes their purpose on Beaufort: “We’re guarding the mountain to make sure it doesn’t run away.” The mountain of Beaufort is simultaneously marked as real and mythical. The soldiers’ presence makes it real, as if the mountain would not exist if they were not there. Foucault also discusses cemeteries as heterotopic spaces that


exist and do not exist: they contain the remains of the dead along with the fact of their death or non-existence. In one episode in the film, Ziv wanders around the surreal space of Beaufort. Scared and confused, he loses his way in the winding labyrinth of corridors until he eventually finds himself aboveground, where the outpost is immersed in a thick fog. In addition to the living soldiers, the outpost’s guard positions are also manned by mannequins dressed in army uniform. These are ersatz “living-dead” soldiers, designed to deceive the enemy and draw their fire. However, Ziv thinks that the mannequin is a real soldier, and starts talking to it. The mannequin is charged with the effect of the Freudian uncanny, the “living dead,” both familiar and friendly, while at the same time alien and threatening.29 Between the sandbags and the fortifications, Ziv meets Zitlaui, who calls him from his guard post: “You got lost? . . . You’ve come far away, as far as you can get. You only come here by mistake.” Zitlaui concludes their conversation by howling like a wolf, in keeping with the morbid graveyard atmosphere of the scene.

Throughout the film the soldiers are portrayed as children who have been abandoned by their parents. When Ziv arrives at Beaufort he asks the soldiers, “Do your parents know you’re here?” Even Liraz, who calls his soldiers “my children” a number of times during the film, is represented as an abandoned child. (“My mother hasn’t known where I am since I was nine.”) These sentiments of abandonment are constructed in the film as a crisis in the relations between fathers and sons, and also between soldiers and their commanders, who are perceived as defeated men who have submitted to public and political pressure to avoid military action against the enemy, and who are therefore neglecting their soldiers. The failure of patriarchal military authority to take care of its “children” makes the soldiers anxious about their loss of power and the decline of masculine heterosexual dominance. “We’ve become an army of pussies! They’re shafting us, wasting our men, and your answer is protection?!” protests Liraz stridently to his commander, Kimchi (Alon Aboutbul), who refuses to initiate combat so close to the withdrawal. Liraz asks for permission to go out “with the children” and fight the enemy: “Why isn’t the IDF reacting? If we’re retreating then let’s go, give the order, we’ll get in the vehicles and get the fuck out of here. If we’re staying, and I don’t see us leaving right now, then let us do our job. . . . You stand here like an idiot and get hit by a missile. We’re bankrupt. Four old ladies beat us. They’re right!” From Liraz’s perspective, preventing the soldiers from fighting places them in a passive and “feminine” position that is seen as unheroic, humiliating, and castrating, a position that is represented as threatening to male heterosexual dominance and autonomy. The soldiers’ masculinity is not only endangered by the enemy, but also by women: the Four Mothers movement—or, as Liraz calls them, the four “old ladies”—a protest movement, founded in 1997 by four female residents of northern Israel whose sons had served in Lebanon, with the aim of bringing about the IDF’s

withdrawal from Lebanon. In a different scene, Zitlaui describes the “Four Mothers” movement as “four old whores who don’t know shit about the army and who are telling lies to the whole country.” According to the soldiers, the women’s protest against the war has feminized the army, which in turn has undermined the fighters’ military and masculine worthiness and has disconnected them from the paternal authority of their commanders.

The trauma of abandonment, which creates and signifies the rupture between the soldiers’ personal experience and national history, is represented, therefore, as a crisis of heterosexual masculinity. This crisis, which has befallen Israeli masculinity just prior to the withdrawal from Lebanon, compels Liraz to assume the position of the failed father and to try and reconstitute masculine military national memory. Liraz is represented as a cold and determined officer who is steadfastly faithful to the army and its national mission (Figure 5). Even though, or perhaps precisely because, he is aware that he and his comrades are merely sitting ducks for the enemy, he does not question the importance of the soldiers’ presence on the mountain. As the unit’s medic, Idan Koris (Itay Tiran), observes, “Liraz is just what the army needs here. Someone who’ll thank them for letting him be in charge of this mountain.” Liraz refuses to accept the news of the impending evacuation of the outpost and rejects his historical role as the last commander of Beaufort. He says, “I don’t deserve to be the one who fled from Beaufort.” He fanatically sustains both the myth of the heroism of the soldiers who conquered the mountain and the memory of those who fell in the battle. In one scene, Ziv—whose father fought at Beaufort and whose uncle died in the battle to capture it—tells Liraz and the other soldiers that an order had actually been given not to
capture the mountain, but that it appeared not to have reached the soldiers. “They could have come up here without a battle and without casualties,” he says. Defending the honor and bravery of the soldiers, Liraz replies, “You could say that about every battle. The fact is that the troops fought here like men!” Liraz sees himself and his soldiers as carrying on a dynasty of combat soldiers. He calls the mannequin soldiers “reinforcements” who are “doing their job.” He sees them as ghosts of soldiers whose death leads continuously to the future of the nation, just as the names of all of Beaufort’s fallen soldiers are engraved on the huge memorial board that hangs in the outpost’s canteen. Through their deaths, these “living-dead” soldiers direct the lives of Liraz and his generation who are carrying on the legacy of male warriors and the national heritage. Liraz commemorates and remembers the heroic soldiers, gives their lives and deaths a national meaning, shapes himself through them, and sees himself as if he were them.

Moreover, Liraz wishes to pass down this legacy to the next generation of combat soldiers. When his soldiers ask him about the impending evacuation, he answers: “Look, calm down. We’re not leaving so quickly. I think your children will be here too.” By creating an intergenerational linkage, Liraz hopes to heal the crisis in relations between fathers and their combat soldier sons. He produces a narrative of masculine historical memory by which the second generation is continuously linked to the past generation, thus “making sense” of its national (male) identity. Liraz therefore sees himself as responsible not only for looking after his soldiers but also for guarding the patriarchal national memory that has been preserved, accumulated, and stored within Beaufort. Toward the end of the film, a few hours before the IDF troops leave Beaufort, one of the soldiers says to him, “Try to imagine the mountain without the outpost . . . just nature, no memory of anything.” Liraz is unable to imagine it. For him, Beaufort is not just another military outpost but rather a “place of memory,” a kind of national archive. He desires to find a forgotten heroic national past in this archive, a trace of the lost patriarchal origin that would enable him to define and attribute meaning to his own identity.

**Archive Trauma.** However, the archive is not a place that innocently and neutrally preserves and contains the past. Rather it is unreliable, selective, and incomplete, and is based on excluding and repressing traumatic content that threatens to return from it. In the case of Beaufort, the trauma is that of paternal abandonment, which signifies the discontinuity between the past and the present, between history and memory; this is precisely what Liraz tries to repress. In *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida writes that, “Nothing is less reliable, nothing is less clear today than the word ‘archive.’ . . . Nothing is more troubled and troubling.” His examination of the archive begins with the

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Greek *arkhe* that “names at once the *commencement* and the *commandment.*”\(^3\)\(^2\) It names at once “the principle according to nature or history, *there* where things *commence*—physical, historical, or ontological principle—but also the principle according to the law, *there* where men and gods *command*, *there* where authority, social order are exercised *in this place* from which *order* is given—nomological principle.”\(^3\)\(^3\) The archive yearns to return to the origin, to discover the primordial memory, to preserve the past, to find and possess the moments of beginning that appear to us as a kind of truth. However, preserving the past is always violent. The archive, which decides what is worthy of being remembered, thereby determines which things will be forgotten. In other words, the archive’s desire to rescue and document the past, to possess human memory once and for all, cannot be satisfied without the perpetual threat of silence, without the possibility of forgetting.

According to Derrida, the excessive, infinite, and inexhaustible passion of the archive to return to the moments of the beginning is fundamentally linked to the Freudian death drive, which seeks to destroy the archive. The death drive is a destructive, aggressive, and violent force that encourages forgetfulness, amnesia, and the negation of memory. It is “*anarchivic*” or “archivolithic”: “If there is no archive without consignation in an *external place* which assures the possibility of memorization, of repetition, or of reimpression, then we must also remember that repetition itself, the logic of repetition, indeed the repetition compulsion, remains, according to Freud, indissociable from the death drive.”\(^3\)\(^4\) According to Freud, repetition compulsion is acting out without remembering, repeating without recollecting. Following Freud, Derrida argues that the archive is established through repetition compulsion, which is related to the death drive. Time and again we return to the archive, to the memory of the past, in order to confirm and preserve it. Yet there is no repetition without the death drive, without violence, without the possibility of forgetting traumatic content that would sabotage the archive’s desire to return to the absolute beginning, to return to the original past event. Therefore, the death drive is a violent force that simultaneously generates and destroys the archive. The archive is self-contradictory in that it must necessarily incorporate forgetting, and because it is produced by repetition compulsion of both memory and forgetting. We are destined to make this “fatal repetition,” and thus we cannot control the archive; we cannot place ourselves outside the archive and say, “that is the correct and true meaning,” or, “that is exactly how things happened.” We are forever included within the archive, trapped in the repetition compulsion of remembering and forgetting the past.

However, the national archive does not recognize the violent repetition that structures the archive and represses the fact that the archive can never be complete and final. “The archive,” summarizes John D. Caputo, “has also come to mean the house, *arkheion*, where the records are stored, a house overseen by *archons*, the keepers of the

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\(^{32}\) Ibid., 1.

\(^{33}\) Ibid.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 10-12.
house, the patri-archival powers that be who supervise and control the archive. That is why there is always the danger of a ‘politics of the archive,’ . . . the feverish control that is exercised by institutional authority, above all by the state, over archival materials, the politics of . . . the ‘official story.’ Political power requires control over the archive, the monitoring of memory.’35 It is a power that “aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration. In the archive, there should not be any absolute dissolution, any heterogeneity or secret which could separate, or partition, in an absolute manner.”36 Derrida argues that this power lies at the basis of nationalism—the desire to kill and burn the other’s memory, to silence and delete all traces of traumatic events within the archive.

In Beaufort, Liraz is a kind of archon, the gatekeeper of the Beaufort archive, supervising and controlling the memory stored within it. He longs to make his version of the memory of the battle into the authoritative, normative, and nomological version. He wants to see it as the origin and the law for everyone else, and he exercises power and control over the other’s archive in order to oppress and repress alternative interpretations of past events. As a “patri-archival” power, he insists on the patriarchal heritage of the war, and because Ziv’s version of the capture of Beaufort questions the myth of the national memory of heroism and sacrifice, Liraz rejects it outright. In one episode, Liraz’s commander tells him about his own personal traumatic experience from the time that Beaufort was captured: “I was wounded before the battle even started. I was lying in the APC, hearing on the radio about how my friends were being killed.” “Yes, but you conquered it like heroes!” Liraz replies. “At least you fought! There was an enemy, a goal, a purpose. You took the most important mountain in Lebanon.” Liraz seeks to exclude threatening specters that have not been properly addressed or sufficiently mourned, and he tries to impose a national meaning on both the dead and the living. He wants to control the archive, to protect and preserve the national past, to remember it in order to produce a complete and coherent masculine national identity for the generations of fighters that preceded him, for himself, and for those who will come after he has gone.

Koris is the only soldier who openly contradicts his commanding officer’s authority and his attempt to repress traumatic events—Ziv’s unnecessary death, and the soldiers’ abandonment: “The man just died for no reason. I still haven’t understood what he died for. And why aren’t we allowed to talk about the evacuation at all? Are we stupid children? . . . I want him [Liraz] to stand up like a man and to tell us to our faces that in two weeks the Hezbollah’s going to be sitting here, and that everything the IDF is doing now is bullshit.” Liraz is a “boyish-man,” a boy who is not yet a man, who desperately longs to assume the role of the failed father, to become a figure of parental authority for his soldiers, to heal the rift between national historical memory and

personal memory. However, his desire to seek out the lost patriarchal origin, to return again and again to the memory of heroism, which is seen as the unique archive of the “truth,” is always violent and includes the forgetting of traumatic events that threaten to unsettle the official national narrative that is stored in the archive. In other words, Liraz wishes to return to the national archive and, from a meta-archival perspective, to a point outside the archive where one can supervise and oversee the extraction of “true” meaning from it, without acknowledging that this repetition compulsion must always be violent and based on forgetting and repression. Liraz’s efforts to return to and sustain the national myth and to identify with the paternal position necessarily involve repeating the repressed trauma of abandonment that is preserved in the archive. Therefore, he has no structural control over the archive; he is incorporated within it, trapped in the repetition compulsion of both remembering and forgetting. He is unaware of this fatal repetition and is fated to blindly reproduce the past and to act out the traumatic event of abandonment without remembering it.

Liraz’s reaction to the wounding and death of four of his soldiers demonstrates this notion of repeating the trauma of being abandoned by the father without remembering it. When Ziv arrives at the outpost, he refuses to disarm the mine that is blocking the access road to Beaufort, saying that it is too dangerous. Liraz rebukes him and orders him to carry out the mission. He tells Ziv, “I know it’s dangerous. . . . Who asked you anyway!” The order is finally given, and Ziv embarks on his mission. Later on, Liraz apologizes for his outburst, and tries to assume a position of paternal authority when he volunteers to keep guard over Ziv while he neutralizes the mine, and also by calling him “youngster.” Ziv, however, resists the infantile position in which he has been placed, and in turn calls Liraz “child,” thus pointing out the young officer’s unattainable aspirations to take on the role of the father. Ziv succeeds in clearing the route, but pays with his life when the mine explodes and kills him. Paralyzed and shocked, Liraz is unable to drag himself away from the horrendous sight of Ziv’s mutilated body. Liraz has failed in his parental role; he abandoned his “son” and sent him to his death. The traumatic event of the abandonment is too overwhelming, and it is not recorded in his consciousness. Liraz represses the catastrophe of Ziv’s abandonment only to return to it once again when Zitlaui is killed by a rocket that hits his guard position. Liraz rushes to the bombed-out guard post but arrives too late to save Zitlaui. The film marks this scene as a kind of fantasy: we see Liraz falling asleep and then waking up in a panic and running to his friend, who has already been hit. Thus, Liraz phantasmatically repeats the prior traumatic experience of abandonment, which was too shocking to be given meaning as a trauma. In his fantasy, Liraz acts out the trauma of abandonment that he did not want to remember. He tries once more to take the role of the father, but again fails to save his “son,” who ultimately dies.

Later in the film, two scenes that depict the wounding and deaths of other soldiers reproduce the structure that had appeared in the two earlier scenes, thus reinforcing the notion that Liraz compulsively repeats and acts out the trauma of abandonment without recalling it. While recovering Zitlaui’s body, Oshri, Liraz’s second-in-command, is wounded when a rocket lands just outside the outpost. Lying
bleeding on the ground, Oshri calls out to Liraz to rescue him. Once again, though, Liraz stands paralyzed in front of his abandoned comrade, observing him from the outpost and unable to offer assistance. Liraz is incapable of coping with the trauma of abandoning his “son” (he even refuses to leave Beaufort in order to visit the injured Oshri in hospital), but is doomed to repeat the tragic event once more when another soldier, Yonatan Shpitzer (Arthur Perzev), is killed by a rocket fired at the same guard position that Zitlaui had been manning when he died. None of the soldiers had wanted to guard that cursed post, and Shpitzer had only volunteered after persistent pleading by Liraz. Before Shpitzer’s death, taking leave of his usual cold and distanced self, Liraz had tried to get closer to Shpitzer, to cheer him up and offer some paternal support for his frightened “son.” The scene in which Shpitzer is killed is also marked as a kind of dream: Liraz has fallen asleep for a few minutes, and he wakes up in a panic to see the smoldering outpost and the dead body of his “son.” Having sent his “son” to die at the cursed guard position, Liraz now runs toward him, desperately calling his name. Once again, though, he is too late. The traumatic experience of abandonment by the father keeps on returning phantasmatically to haunt Liraz while he wishes to forget that which must be remembered.

The film thus points to the intergenerational trauma that returns from the archive to haunt the protagonist: the son, who identifies with the role of the parent, repeats the trauma of abandonment inflicted upon him by the father, and fails to step into the paternal position. This intergenerational trauma is also given expression through the song that Shpitzer sings before he dies. The song is called “Fathers and Sons,” and the chorus contains the line, “A father is crying over a son is crying over a father.” In another scene, Liraz is watching a television interview with Ziv’s bereaved father. At one point in the interview, the father looks directly into the camera, that is, at Liraz, and says, “You could blame the army, the generals, but the army isn’t really responsible for my son. They don’t know him at all. I am responsible for him. I brought him up. Apparently, I didn’t bring him up well. . . . I feel as though I abandoned my child.” In contrast to the bereaved father, Liraz does not take responsibility for the abandonment of the soldiers and tries to censor and repress the traumatic phantoms that return from the archive.

**Beaufort Fever.** Liraz insists on remembering and commemorating the national past, and continues to deny the trauma of abandonment until the very last moments of the film. When the order is given to evacuate Beaufort, mines are laid throughout the outpost, turning it into an enormous powder keg. When all the preparations for the explosion have been completed, Liraz is told that the evacuation is to be delayed twenty-four hours. Koris warns of the danger to the soldiers who remain on the mined outpost, and is angry at his commander, whom he sees as lacking the courage to evacuate them. “They’ve left us exposed!” he says. Liraz denies that they have been abandoned: “If need be, an entire army will come and get us out of here. . . . They wouldn’t abandon us!” Koris shouts at him angrily, “You think that anyone cares about us?!” to which Liraz painfully admits, “I cannot abandon this mountain.
Something is physically holding me back.” Liraz is suffering from archive fever, from a painful desire for the unattainable origin. As Derrida puts it,

> It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there’s too much of it, right where something in it anarchives itself. It is to have compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement. No desire, no passion, no drive, no compulsion, indeed no repetition compulsion, no “[@it:mal-de]” can arise for a person who is not already, in one way or another, en <del>mal d’archive</del>.37

Liraz’s archive desire is an infinite passion for absolute law, an interminable passion to return to the very beginning, to the apparently original event of the glorious capture of the mountain, an irrepressible and sick nostalgia for the heroic memory of the past of Israeli national masculinity. Little wonder that during his last night at Beaufort, Liraz raises the Israeli flag up the flagpole on which it had previously been lowered. Repetition is a necessary part of Liraz’s unique and select archive; it keeps that archive alive. However, this repetition compulsion leads to the death drive, to the violence of forgetting the trauma, which returns from the archive and prevents Liraz’s passion from returning to the most archaic place of “absolute commencement.” In other words, the death drive is a violent force of forgetting that generates the archive, while at the same time working in silence and under concealment to destroy the archive. It bears “the possibility of putting to death the very thing, whatever its name, which carries the law and its tradition.”38 Because the traumatic specters that are stored in the archive sabotage Liraz’s efforts to “settle all accounts,” his desire for the lost origin is thus a desire that can never be satisfied. The Beaufort archive is a heterotopic space that resists any attempt at homogenization of the past. It disrupts the protagonist’s endeavors to produce a unified and continuous narrative and myth of national memory, and emphasizes the discontinuity between collective and contemporary memory. The death drive at work in the archive acts against the intentions of its maker.

And indeed, at the end of the film, the Beaufort archive explodes and is destroyed, eliminating any chance of closure or totalization of past events (Figure 6). Liraz watches the burning outpost from a distance as it is consumed by fire and turns to ash (Figure 7). Liraz’s burning archival passion is destroyed by the same aggressive force that created it. In other words, the law bears its own death. All that remains of the archive are the ghosts of the mannequin soldiers and the memorial board with the names of Beaufort’s fallen. They too go up in flames, remnants and traces of the silenced trauma that haunts Beaufort and the protagonist.

37 Ibid., 91.
38 Ibid., 79.
Figure 6. The burning archive: the explosion of Beaufort outpost (Kino International, 2007; courtesy of Joseph Cedar).

Figure 7. Liraz’s “archive fever”: gazing at the burning Beaufort outpost (Kino International, 2007; courtesy of Joseph Cedar).
In the final scene of the film, the soldiers leave Beaufort and Lebanon. They hug one another emotionally and call their parents to tell them excitedly that they have come home. Liraz is the only one not to share in their joy. He walks down the road by himself, removes his heavy protective flak jacket and military overalls, leans forward, places his hands on his bent knees, breathes out heavily and cries, as if nauseous, or maybe sick—sick with archive fever.

Beaufort expresses a melancholic nostalgia for a lost mythical world through the archival sickness of its protagonist and his feverish desire for the memory of the national unity of a paternal community free of internal divisions. However, the traumatic loss of collective national memory ruptures the continuity between past and present, indicating the decline of Israeli national memory.

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