

# ***The Juggler in Galilee: Hollywood's Progressives and the Establishment of Israel***

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Abstract: The history of Hollywood's on-screen relationship with the State of Israel is often thought to have begun with Otto Preminger's *Exodus*, an epic account of Jewish bravery in late-1940s Palestine released in 1960. This article takes an in-depth look at an earlier American movie about Israel, Edward Dmytryk's *The Juggler*, released in 1953. *The Juggler* was Hollywood's first film set and shot on location in modern Israel. Written by Michael Blankfort and produced by Stanley Kramer, *The Juggler* tells the story of a German-Jewish variety entertainer who has lost his family in the holocaust and is struggling to settle in Israel in the aftermath of its war of independence in 1948. The film starred Kirk Douglas, who thanks to his work on *The Juggler* became one of Hollywood's biggest supporters. The article uses Israeli and American archival evidence to explore why and how the film version of *The Juggler* differs markedly from the novel on which it was based. It shows that *The Juggler* represented a particular phase in Hollywood's relationship with Israel, one in which a group of political progressives sought to use film as a way of introducing Americans to a Zionism that was left of centre and grounded in the life of the kibbutz. The article examines how those progressive ideals were diluted from script to screen as commercial imperatives took precedence over political ideals. At the same time, the article demonstrates how *The Juggler* inadvertently 'documented' a living symbol of the *Nakba*, the 'disaster' of the Palestinian Arabs during the 1948 war.

*The Juggler* (1953) has the distinction of being Hollywood's first film set and shot on location in modern Israel. Produced by Stanley Kramer and directed by Edward Dmytryk, the protagonist of *The Juggler* is Hans Muller (played by Kirk Douglas), a German-Jewish variety entertainer who has been tortured in the death-camps and his wife and daughter murdered. The film opens with Hans arriving in 1949 at the Israeli port city of Haifa with scores of other Jewish refugees, shortly after the new Jewish state had been established and the first Arab-Israeli war had ended. The traumatized holocaust survivor suffers from hallucinations and violently panics at every sign of authority. Wrongly imagining that he has killed a policeman who asked for his papers in downtown Haifa, Hans flees across the north of Israel. On the way, he befriends a young Israeli teenager named Josh, himself orphaned in the recent war. After Josh is accidentally injured by a border land-mine, the two are taken in by members of a nearby Israeli communal village, a *kibbutz*, called *Tel Hagalil* (Galilee Hill). Here Hans finally finds hope of recovery through the caring love of a young kibbutz woman (Milly Vitalle) and the kind understanding of a police inspector (Paul Stewart), who had pursued him all the way to the kibbutz.

Despite the precedent it set, *The Juggler* has attracted relatively little interest from historians of film and of the US-Israel relationship. Its plot and themes of Zionist regeneration have been discussed briefly within the general context of Hollywood's

depiction of Jews, the holocaust and Israel.<sup>1</sup> Naturally, most academic attention has centred instead on Otto Preminger's *Exodus* (1960) – produced less than a decade later – Hollywood's most successful and influential film about the rise of modern Israel.<sup>2</sup> Yet a close study of *The Juggler* – its genesis, production, content and reception – sheds intriguing light on the origins of Hollywood's attachment to Israel and on its depiction of the Arab-Israeli

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<sup>1</sup> Lester D. Friedman, *Hollywood's Image of the Jew* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1982), 160-162; Patricia Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 215-217; Deborah Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* (Cambridge: Mass., Harvard University Press, 1994), 245-247; Michelle Mart, *Eye on Israel: How America Came to View Israel as an Ally* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 25-26; 65-66; Lawrence Baron, "The First Wave of American 'Holocaust' Films, 1945-1959," *American Historical Review*, 115, no. 1 (2010): 103-104.

<sup>2</sup> Rachel Weissbrod, "Exodus as a Zionist Melodrama," *Israel Studies* 4, no. 1 (1999): 129-52; Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 159-165; M.M. Silver, *Our Exodus: Leon Uris and the Americanization of Israel's Founding Story* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010); Giora Goodman, "'Operation Exodus': Israeli Government involvement in the production of Otto Preminger's *Exodus* (1960)", *Journal of Israeli History*, 33, no. 2 (September 2014), 209-229; Amy Kaplan, *Our American Israel: The Story of an Entangled Alliance* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2018), 58-93; Shaul Mitelpunkt, *Israel in the American Mind: The Cultural Politics of US-Israeli Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 35-73.

conflict. By examining available archival evidence of *The Juggler's* development in book, script and cinematic form, this article argues that *The Juggler* was the outcome of early, strong support for Israel among Hollywood's political progressives, many of them Jewish, but that its final shape was ultimately determined, as most films are, by commercial considerations. These considerations restricted not only the exposition of social values dear to American progressives, but also the film's discussion of the Arab-Jewish conflict. It will be shown, nevertheless, that a film essentially concerned with a mentally-deranged holocaust survivor incorporates – almost unintentionally – powerful imagery symbolizing the effects of the Palestinian *Nakba* (Arabic for disaster) wrought by the 1948 war.

### **Hollywood Progressives and Israel**

Much is known about the central role that Jews played in creating, as Neal Gabler puts it, 'an empire of their own' in Hollywood in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> Less well documented is Hollywood's relationship with Zionism and the birth and development of the world's only Jewish state. Hollywood's pro-Zionist leanings developed slowly but surely in the decades running up to the establishment of Israel in 1948. By this point, Hollywood's Jewish bosses, most of them political conservatives, had been involved in Zionist philanthropy for years: collecting funds to aid the settlement in Palestine of Europe's persecuted Jews. More excited about the promise of Zionism, however, were many of

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<sup>3</sup> Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Crown Publisher, 1988).

Hollywood's political progressives. Like many American leftists after World War II, these progressives sympathized greatly with world Jewry in the aftermath of the holocaust and with Israel's founding Labour government. The blessings of Zionism, as American progressives had it, could make the whole of the Middle East bloom so long as the Arab masses were not held back by 'feudal' Arab governments, British imperialism and powerful American oil interests.<sup>4</sup> The list of Hollywood progressives prominently engaged in Zionist philanthropy and in initiating pro-Zionist film projects in the late 1940s and early 1950s was long and impressive. It included MGM executive Dore Scary, independent producer Otto Preminger, director Billy Wilder, and Jewish and non-Jewish actors such as Eddie Cantor, Edward G. Robinson, Burgess Meredith, Paulette Goddard, Melvyn Douglas, Groucho Marks, John Garfield, Lena Horne and Frank Sinatra.

The first Hollywood director to work at length at putting together a motion picture celebrating Israel's birth was the left-leaning Austrian-born Jew, Fred Zinnemann. In November 1948 – while the first Arab-Israeli war was still ongoing – Zinnemann travelled to Israel, accompanied by a young screenwriter, Stuart Stern. The pair were joined by Montgomery Clift, a recent 'discovery' in *The Search* (1948), Zinnemann's acclaimed on-location drama about the plight of displaced children in post-World War II Europe.<sup>5</sup> The Hollywood trio's visit, which included areas that had recently been battlegrounds, was facilitated by Israel's propaganda officials. Foremost among them was East London-born

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<sup>4</sup> Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 10-57.

<sup>5</sup> J.E. Smyth, *Fred Zinnemann and the Cinema of Resistance* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 20-93.

socialist Moshe Pearlman, head of the publicity department jointly established by the nascent Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).<sup>6</sup> Most of Zinnemann's attention focused on the collective rural settlements known as kibbutzim.<sup>7</sup> Already famous among western progressives for their agricultural achievements and spartan, socialist ideals, the kibbutzim had borne the brunt of the fighting. The story-line of Zinnemann's draft script accordingly told of the founding of a new kibbutz on the rocky terrain in Galilee in the dying days of the British mandate and of its heroic withstanding of Arab attacks during the war of independence. Zinnemann's script failed to reach the screen for a combination of creative and commercial reasons.<sup>8</sup>

### **Michael Blankfort and the new Jewish State**

Another Hollywood progressive, Michael Blankfort, was soon in Israel, and his efforts resulted in *The Juggler*. Blankfort was born in 1907 in New York City and had an observant Jewish upbringing. He studied psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, then at

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<sup>6</sup> Reuven Dafni to Moshe Pearlman, 21 October; Moshe Pearlman to Reuven Dafni, 8 December 1948, G/3940/1, Israel State Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter ISA).

<sup>7</sup> Fred Zinnemann diary, Box 96, file 1260, Fred Zinnemann Papers, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy Motion of Motion Pictures Arts and Sound (hereafter FZP-AMPAS).

<sup>8</sup> Sabra Summarized Continuity Outline, Box 95, file 1255; See draft scripts, Box 95, file 1254, FZP-AMPAS; Reuven Dafni to Moish Pearlman, 7 February; Pearlman to Dafni, 20 February; Dafni to Pearlman, 8 March; Dafni to Pearlman, 6 April 1949, G/3940/1, ISA.

Princeton. In 1927, Blankfort travelled to Palestine and the Soviet Union. Like many young Jewish intellectuals of his generation, with the onset of the Great Depression Blankfort got heavily involved in Marxist politics. He wrote articles for the *New Masses* and *Daily Worker* and founded a radical theatre group in New York with the writer Albert Maltz and others, authoring plays about social justice and the Spanish Civil War. In 1937, Blankfort moved to Hollywood, hoping that scriptwriting could support his main ambition of becoming a novelist. By the late 1940s – following a wartime interlude in the Marine Corps writing training films – Blankfort had published several novels and become an established Hollywood screenwriter. Blankfort's chief strength lay in exploiting his background in psychology, most evident in *An Act of Murder* (1948), which starred Fredric March as a judge torn over whether to kill his terminally-ill wife.<sup>9</sup>

Having recently published a biography of World War II Marine Corps hero Evans Carlson, in the summer of 1948 Blankfort turned his attention to Jewish bravery in Israel's war for independence, which was currently at its height. Blankfort's initial interest, stirred by young American-Jewish actress Shelly Winters, lay in a story about Zoharah Levitov, a young, American-trained Israeli female pilot recently killed in action in a plane crash in Jerusalem. Widely covered in the American press, Levitov's story combined youthful heroism with lost love and had an American angle: the very stuff of Hollywood scripts.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Blankfort, "The Education of a Jew: A Fragment", *The American Mercury* (July 1953): 35-40.

<sup>10</sup> *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, "Girl Who Flew With Israel Air Force Killed in Crash," 4 August 1948: 20; Philip K. Scheuer, 'Betsy Drake Wins Star', *Los Angeles Times*, 19 August 1948: 21.

Nothing came of this but Blankfort's interest in Israel did not die with it. Blankfort told his editor at Little, Brown – the leading mainstream progressive publisher of the day – that since the 1930s he'd had in mind a large, sweeping historical novel about the Jews' three-thousand-year struggle to return to Palestine.<sup>11</sup>

Later in 1948, Blankfort's plans for a film about the new Jewish state grew more concrete, thanks to his association with Baruch Diener and Joshua Brandstaetter, two founders of Israel's nascent film industry. Diener, the son of a Jerusalem rabbi, had studied with Elia Kazan in the famous 'Actors Studio' in New York and had directorial aspirations.<sup>12</sup> Joshua Brandstaetter, a former kibbutz-member and cattle-breeder in Palestine, had been involved in the production of Zionist films since the 1930s and had recently come to Hollywood to raise funds to set up Israel's first modern film studio. In December 1948, the three associates signed a formal agreement stipulating that Blankfort would make a three-month research trip to Israel in order to develop a script for a film about the new Jewish state which Diener would direct. Funding for the project was provided by Brandstaetter and two

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Blankfort to Angus Cameron, 1 December 1948, Box 87/9, Michael Blankfort Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University (hereafter MBC-HGARC).

<sup>12</sup> In 1949, Diener would serve as technical advisor on Universal's *Sword in the Desert*. Filmed entirely in California, *Sword in the Desert* was Hollywood's first film about the pre-state Jewish insurgency and illegal immigration, themes that would later appear in *Exodus*. About the film see Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 230-233.

Los Angeles Jewish investors.<sup>13</sup> Blankfort loftily told the press that he wanted to find a story that was not 'propagandistic' or 'Hollywood' but 'stamped with the life, the characteristics, the atmosphere which is Israel.'<sup>14</sup> The Israeli Consul in Los Angeles, Reuven Dafni, alerted officials back home of the screenwriter's imminent arrival. Blankfort was no 'second Fred Zinnemann', Dafni told Pearlman. Nonetheless, he was 'quite a name' in Hollywood and Israeli officials should therefore give him all the help they could.<sup>15</sup>

In late January 1949, Blankfort arrived in Israel and spent two months in the country, mostly based in Tel Aviv. Seeing the newly-born Jewish state first-hand had a deep impact on the writer. Blankfort recounted his activities and observations in a diary-like series of articles for the American Jewish magazine, *Congress Weekly*. The writer participated in celebrations for the inauguration of the new Israeli parliament in Jerusalem, was moved to tears during a commemoration ceremony for those who had died fighting in the War of Independence and joined a parade in honor of President Chaim Weizmann in Tel Aviv. With the help of the Israeli government's Press Information Office and Brandstaetter's contacts,

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<sup>13</sup> Edwin Schallert, 'Israel Cinema Enterprise Progresses', *Los Angeles Times*, 18 December 1948: 7; Margot Klausner, *The Dream Industry: Memories and Fact*, (Tel Aviv: Herzliya Film Studio, 1974), 41-42. Baruch Diener to Michael Blankfort, 15 July 1949, Box 76/1, MBC-HGARC.

<sup>14</sup> 'Israeli Film Co. Takes First Step In Making Movie', *Bnei Brith Messenger*, 31 December 1948: 14.

<sup>15</sup> Reuven Dafni to Moish Pearlman, 22 December 1948; Dafni to Pearlman, 7 February 1949, G/1940/1, ISA.

Blankfort travelled the country from north to south. He toured the recent battlefields of the Negev desert with the legendary (and avowed socialist) Israeli commander, Yitzhak Sadeh, and befriended the military governor of the conquered Arab territories in the Western Galilee, Rehavam Amir, who would later become a senior Israeli diplomat and remain a life-long friend. In the northern port of Haifa, Israel's main gateway to the world, Blankfort watched the arrival of immigrants, a sight that would become the opening scene of *The Juggler* and noted the mixture of optimism and disappointment as they began the hard process of absorption into their new society. Like so many other visitors from the progressive left, such as Fred Zinnemann a few months earlier, it was the kibbutzim that attracted most of Blankfort's attention. Blankfort visited a dozen kibbutzim, including Ein Gev, a war-scarred and isolated kibbutz on the eastern shores of the Sea of Galilee which listed Reuven Dafni among its founders. Spending days and nights in kibbutzim to deepen his experience, the writer studied the many ideological, psychological and material aspects of kibbutz life, learning lessons about the possibilities and challenges of close-knit communal life. Blankfort believed that these had universal value for the future of mankind.<sup>16</sup>

### ***The Juggler* becomes a novel**

The chief purpose of Blankfort's visit was of course to develop a story for a film. Blankfort seems to have had the outline of a story in mind even before he arrived in Israel,

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Blankfort, 'An American in Israel', *Congress Weekly*, 14 February: 8-9; 21 February: 7-9; 28 March: 5-7; 11 April: 9-10; 9 May: 10-12; 16 May: 10-12; 23 May 1949: 9-10.

sending a rough draft of it to RKO's femme-fatale star Jane Greer in January 1949 in order to interest her in the part of an American girl.<sup>17</sup> Over the course of his stay in Israel, however, a quite different story took shape, one that involved no American characters. Blankfort wrote his story in the form of a novel rather than a film script. He worked up some 40,000 words, established the basic plot and the main characters, and tentatively called it *The Juggler*.<sup>18</sup> On his return to Hollywood in the spring of 1949, before showing his novel-cum-script to Brandstaetter and Diener, Blankfort touted it among a number of directors and studios. Fred Zinnemann, Lewis Milestone (*All Quiet on the Western Front*, 1930) and David Miller (*Billy the Kid*, 1941) expressed interest in directing the project, Blankfort told Brandstaetter. Executives from Warner Bros. and Twentieth Century Fox were keen to get on board too, he said. Blankfort's insistence on *The Juggler* being a Hollywood production disappointed Baruch Diener. He had hoped to direct the film and was concerned now about Hollywood 'compromises' in the production. This proved to be prescient.<sup>19</sup>

By the end of August 1949, Blankfort had carved a script out of his 40,000 words, entitling it 'Sabra'. Based on the Hebrew word *Tsabar* for a local cactus fruit, 'Sabra' had over recent decades become the English synonym for the Palestine-born Jewish youth associated with the Labor and kibbutz movements. The Jewish youngsters were said to be like the

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<sup>17</sup> Edwin Schallert, 'Jane Greer Bid for Palestine Feature', *Los Angeles Times*, 19 January 1949: 17.

<sup>18</sup> Blankfort to Cameron, 1 March 1949, Box 87/9, MBC-HGARC.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Blankfort to Yehoshua Brandstaetter, 25 June 1949; Diener to Blankfort, 15 July 1949, Box 76/1, MBC-HGARC.

*Tsabar*, prickly on the outside but sweet inside, and the term had become especially popular in American accounts of Jewish-Arab fighting during the 1948 war. 'Sabra' had been the title of Fred Zinnemann's abortive film project earlier that year, and it was also the nickname of a leading character in *Sword in the Desert*. In fact, the Hebrew term originated from the word for cactus in Arabic – *Sabr*, meaning patience – signifying the plant's persistent re-rooting. The stubborn *Sabr* would become a powerful symbol of Palestinian resistance and endurance in the decades to come, largely because it was the only thing that remained of hundreds of Arab villages in Palestine deserted in the 1948 war.<sup>20</sup> One such village appeared in the book and film versions of *The Juggler*, but Blankfort's use of the term 'Sabra' was of course in its Zionist meaning.

Turning the script of 'Sabra' into the film *The Juggler* would actually take more than three years in total. This long process started with Blankfort first sending his script to Brandstaetter and Diener in Autumn 1949. The latter returned a critical appraisal. Diener especially disliked the second half of the script, which centred on a kibbutz, thinking it far too slow and lacking in action. He found the character of Yael, the young kibbutz woman with whom Hans Muller falls in love, unconvincing because she sounded so didactic – 'like a Zionist speech'.<sup>21</sup> Blankfort had already started revising the script and renamed it *The Juggler*.<sup>22</sup> Whatever its title, the script, despite Blankfort's earlier claims, failed to attract the

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<sup>20</sup> Dora Apel, *War Culture and the Contest of Images* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 195-196.

<sup>21</sup> Diener to Blankfort, 30 November 1949, Box 76/1, MBC-HGARC.

<sup>22</sup> Film Script, 'The Juggler', 1949, Box 33/4, MBC-HGARC.

interest of any Hollywood producer. Blankfort therefore put it aside while he worked on the script of Lewis Milestone's World War II action movie, *Halls of Montezuma*, which was released in 1951.

In the autumn of 1950, Blankfort returned to his Israeli project, focusing his efforts on completing a manuscript for the novel that he had worked up in the spring of 1949. After reading this, however, his editors at Little, Brown made similar criticisms to those made by Baruch Diener. The novel lacked suspense, they argued, because everybody in Israel, the police included, were so well-meaning and eager to help Hans. The editors did not think Blankfort had fully solved this problem after further revisions either, when the book's final draft was, rather surprisingly, accepted for publication.<sup>23</sup> Little, Brown promoted *The Juggler* in the general book market, with Jewish readers mostly in mind. Blankfort urged his publisher to put an endorsement on the cover from a well-known author rather than an American Zionist leader or an Israeli, thinking this would more likely help sales.<sup>24</sup> His friend Herman Wouk, author of the recent Pulitzer Prize-winning World War II book *The Caine Mutiny*, came through, calling *The Juggler* 'the best novel about Israel that I have read so far.'<sup>25</sup> In March 1952, *The Juggler* became, in fact, the first such book to be written by an American. Despite this, no Jewish or non-Jewish magazines serialized it in advance or pre-published a chapter. Americans generally seemed to have little interest in Israel in the early

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<sup>23</sup> Cameron to Blankfort, 14 November 1950; Blankfort to Cameron, 5 March; Cameron to Blankfort, 3 May 1951, Box 87/9, MBC-HGARC.

<sup>24</sup> Blankfort to Cameron, 11 June 1951, Box 87/9, MBC-HGARC.

<sup>25</sup> Herman Wouk to Michael Blankfort, 7 November 1951, Box 87/9, MBC-HGARC.

1950s and reflecting this, an editor at *Ladies Home Journal* politely praised the psychological study but felt 'the interest was too limited for our audience.'<sup>26</sup> *The Juggler* had some decent reviews, mostly for its Israel subject matter, but it did not receive the book-club treatment or have anything like the public impact Blankfort wanted.<sup>27</sup>

### **A Stanley Kramer film production**

Blankfort's disappointment at the poor reception of his novel in Spring 1952 was tempered by Stanley Kramer's decision several months earlier to turn the script of 'Sabra' into a film. Born to a Jewish family in New York, Kramer was one of the most prominent and politically progressive independent producers to have risen in postwar Hollywood. Originally a screenwriter, and often a director of his films, Kramer was known as a producer who liked to get closely involved in the creative process. In April 1951, the Stanley Kramer Company had signed an unprecedented \$25-million deal with Columbia Studios to make thirty films over the next five years.<sup>28</sup> Kramer's own interest in an Israeli film project had been growing steadily since the late 1940s, believing Israel was 'something special' and that

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<sup>26</sup> Mary Lea Page to Max Lieber, 24 July 1951, Box 87/9, MBC-HGARC.

<sup>27</sup> Frederick Morton, 'Home to a Strange Country', *New York Times Book Review*, 9 March 1952: 20; *New Yorker*, 'Briefly Noted', 29 March 1952: 128-129; Gerold Frank, 'A Fugitive in Israel', *Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine*, 16 March 1952: 34.

<sup>28</sup> Jennifer Frost, *Producer of Controversy: Stanley Kramer, Hollywood Liberalism, and the Cold War* (Lawrence, Ks: University Press of Kansas, 2017), 21-35.

the extra cost of filming there would be rewarded artistically and commercially.<sup>29</sup> Having just employed Blankfort as the screen-writer of *My Six Convicts*, a film-comedy about a prison psychologist, Kramer bought from him the rights to *The Juggler*. According to the film deal, the screenwriter himself would direct the movie on location in Israel. In line with this, Blankfort started to plan a pre-production visit to Israel, and began corresponding with Brandstaetter in Israel, with Reuven Dafni, now working for Israel's Information Service in New York, and with his replacement as Consul in Los Angeles, Harry Beilin, who promised full Israeli government co-operation.<sup>30</sup> Blankfort's excitement about the new Jewish state and making a film there was palpable; the screenwriter told his friend, communist screenwriter Albert Maltz, that he even planned 'to move there for good when the kids are grown up.'<sup>31</sup>

However, Blankfort's film plans then ran into the McCarthyite winds blowing through Hollywood. The FBI had been monitoring the screenwriter's radical political activities since the 1930s. In court in June 1949, an anonymous FBI informant alleged that Blankfort,

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<sup>29</sup> B. David, 'A Talk With Stanley Kramer', *Davar*, 8 August 1952: 20.

<sup>30</sup> Blankfort to Brandstaetter, 14 September; Blankfort to Reuven and Rinna Dafni, 8 October; Blankfort to Brandstaetter, 9 November 1951, Box 87/9, MBC-HGARC.

<sup>31</sup> Albert Maltz was must less enthusiastic about Israel, reflecting communist criticism of Israel's 'capitalist' class-structure and its growing alliance with the West. See Michael Bankfort to Albert Maltz, circa December 1951; Maltz to Blankfort, 2 January 1952, quoted in Jones, 'Letters from the Blacklist: The Un-Friendship of Albert Maltz and Michael Blankfort', (Master of Arts thesis, Boston University, 2017), 66-69.

alongside Hollywood stars like Fredric March and Edward G. Robinson, was a member of the Communist Party. Blankfort emphatically denied this charge,<sup>32</sup> but in January 1952 he was named a 'concealed' past member of the Communist Party by the FBI informant and witness, Louis Budenz, during a hearing of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Blankfort was subpoenaed and appeared before HUAC a fortnight later. There, he denied Communist Party membership and described his past support for various Communist front organizations as not clearly thought through. Humiliatingly, towards the end of his testimony, Blankfort was pressured into commending HUAC's work.<sup>33</sup> Blankfort's attempts at walking the HUAC tightrope both enraged friends like Albert Maltz, a member of the renowned Hollywood Ten, who would never talk to him again, and failed to clear his name

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<sup>32</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 'Film Stars Listed in Red Orbit by Reports of FBI and Tenney', 9 June 1949: 1; 20; 22. In January 1951, Blankfort was publicly attacked for his past communist 'associations' by Westbrook Pegler, the right-wing syndicated columnist. See Westbrook Pegler, 'Communism in Hollywood', *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 21 January 1951: 48.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Blankfort testimony, 28 January 1952, *Communist Infiltration of Hollywood Motion-Picture Industry, Part 7: Hearings before the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives*, 82nd Congress (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1952), 2327-2365.

in the eyes of the federal authorities.<sup>34</sup> As the consequence, the US State Department denied Blankfort a passport.<sup>35</sup>

Given Kramer's desire to make *The Juggler* in Israel, Blankfort's inability to travel overseas ruled him out as the film's director. First choice as his replacement seems to have been Fred Zinnemann, who had just directed the Western *High Noon* for Kramer, but he seems not to have liked the story.<sup>36</sup> The job eventually went, somewhat ironically, to another progressive and HUAC victim, Edward Dmytryk. In 1948, Dmytryk had been nominated for an Oscar for directing RKO's *Crossfire*, the first major Hollywood film to focus on American anti-Semitism. Dmytryk's movie career then imploded after his refusal to testify before HUAC and his imprisonment for contempt of Congress in 1950 as one of the Hollywood Ten. After

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<sup>34</sup> See Jones, 'Letters from the Blacklist', 72-78. Maltz expressed 'contempt' after Blankfort's appearance before HUAC, yet in the summer of 1948, Blankfort had courageously agreed to serve as a public 'front' for the blacklisted Maltz, hired at the time to write the script of the western *Broken Arrow*. This could have ended Blankfort's career had it become public. See Larry Ceplair, 'Who Wrote What? A Tale of a Blacklisted Screenwriter and His Front', *Cinéaste*, 18, no. 2 (1991): 18-21.

<sup>35</sup> *Daily Variety*, 'Blankfort Can't Get Passport; Dmytryk May Direct "Juggler"', 7 May 1952: 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Daily Variety*, 'Dmytryk Gets "Juggler", At Least "Temporarily"; Blankfort Can't Leave', 15 May 1952: 1.

his release, Dmytryk appeared before HUAC, recanted and named names, actions that rendered him employable again.<sup>37</sup>

### **Filming *The Juggler* in Israel**

Moshe Pearlman and his staff did all they could to accommodate Dmytryk and Kramer during their pre-production missions to Israel in the summer of 1952. *The Juggler* offered Israeli public relations officials an excellent opportunity to boost their country's international image. The movie also brought in valuable dollars to help alleviate the new state's economic crisis. Israel's Jewish population doubled in the early 1950s due to the mass absorption of refugee immigrants, putting severe strain on the country financially and socially. Israeli government promises of administrative support for the production of *The Juggler* ensured that \$70,000 would flow into Israel. This figure would have been higher but for contractual obligations between Kramer and Columbia which dictated that much of *The Juggler* would be filmed as interior shots in Columbia Studios in California. Blankfort – still tied to the project as screenwriter and associate producer – was instructed for the final shooting script to re-write certain scenes to convert them from out-door to in-door. The Israeli authorities were disappointed by this, but at least the head of the Israeli Press Office's

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<sup>37</sup> Victor S. Navasky, *Naming Names* (New York: The Viking Press, 1980), 232-238; Edward Dmytryk, *Odd Man Out: A Memoir of the Hollywood Ten* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 145.

photographic section was flown over to Hollywood to serve as a paid advisor on building the sets.<sup>38</sup>

Initially, Blankfort and Kramer had tried to interest Fredric March in the role of Hans Muller. Blankfort believed the highly-regarded actor would be 'wonderful' in the role, but after a quick look at the script, March replied: 'I don't think any Goy should do it.'<sup>39</sup> The role went instead to Kirk Douglas – born Issur Danielovich – who had recently become an international star in Kramer's boxing film *Champion* (1949). For the role of Hans' love-interest, Yael, Kramer seems to have wanted a foreign-accented actress for the role rather than an American, presumably to enhance authenticity. To avoid a 'very unwelcome and unnecessary controversy', Israeli Consul Harry Beilin persuaded the producers not to hire the German actress Ursula Thiess to play Yael.<sup>40</sup> The role eventually went to the unknown 19-year-old Italian actress Milly Vitale.<sup>41</sup> Joseph 'Joey' Walsh, a 15-year-old American who had just appeared as Danny Kaye's companion in *Hans Christian Andersen* (1952), was cast to play the role of Joshua, Hans' young 'Sabra' companion. The progressive writer and actor,

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<sup>38</sup> Harry Beilin to Lionel Pyetan, 15 May; Pyetan to Beilin 28 May; Beilin to Pyetan, 1 July 1952, G/3940/1, ISA.

<sup>39</sup> Fredric March scribbled reply on Blankfort to Fredric March, 8 October 1951, Box 87/9, MBC-HGARC.

<sup>40</sup> Beilin to Pyetan, 1 July 1952, G/3940/1, ISA.

<sup>41</sup> Philip K. Scheuer, 'Bombs in Italy Start Milly's Rise as Star', *Los Angeles Times*, 21 September 1952: D1.

Paul Stewart (born Sternberg), was to play police detective Karni, who pursues Hans and Joshua across the north of Israel.

After shooting at Columbia in Hollywood during September 1952, the cast and principal technical crew flew to Israel on an El Al plane for three weeks of filming. This was mostly carried out in and around Haifa, kibbutz Hanita on the Lebanese border, and other locations in the Upper Galilee. According to the producers, the Israeli authorities 'worked tirelessly to meet every problem' that arose.<sup>42</sup> This being the first Hollywood production filmed in and about the modern state of Israel, the Israeli press covered the production's progress with great interest.<sup>43</sup>

Kirk Douglas was the idol of the Hollywood production road show. Reflecting the Israeli fascination with Hollywood films and celebrity, hundreds of fans mobbed Douglas on his way to a special screening of *Champion* in Tel Aviv. Accompanied by Moshe Pearlman, Douglas addressed the ecstatic audience in English and Hebrew, a little of which he had learned as boy in Jewish scripture lessons. Douglas later met David Ben-Gurion ('in a bare, Spartan room with his sleeves rolled up,' the actor later recalled), foreign minister Moshe Sharett, and military chief of the northern command, Moshe Dayan, who visited *The Juggler's*

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<sup>42</sup> Dana Adams Schmidt, 'Charting the Trail of "The Juggler" in Israel', *New York Times*, 23 November 1952: X5.

<sup>43</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, "'Juggler" Climax Shot Yesterday', 9 October: 3; *Maariv*, 'Hollywood Comes to Hanita', 10 October: 4; B. David, 'Filming The Juggler in Israel', *Davar Hashavu'a*, 31 October 1952: 8-9.

shoot near the Lebanese border with his wife and children. Wherever he went, Douglas signed autographs (in Hebrew and English) and found time for a love affair with a female Israeli soldier, whose uninhibited approach to relationships he thought spoke for her country's refreshing outlook on life. At the holy town of Safad during New Year holidays, the actor and former Talmud student joined the traditional prayers. At the young kibbutz of Lohamei Hageta'ot (Ghetto Fighters), near Acre, Douglas had 'a shuddering and long-lasting experience' when viewing relics of Nazi atrocities in the local museum. Douglas later described his time making *The Juggler* in Israel – his first trip abroad – as the most inspiring and uplifting event of his career. He remained a passionate, active supporter of Israel throughout his long life.<sup>44</sup>

*The Juggler* was released in the US in May 1953. Influential American press critics were roughly divided on the coherence and plausibility of the plot – and on Kirk Douglas's acting.<sup>45</sup> How much *The Juggler* served Israeli interests divided Zionist opinion. Some American Zionists maintained that the film did 'a poor public relations job' by focusing attention on the unstable characters like Hans Muller that were entering the country and

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<sup>44</sup> Douglas, *The Ragman's Son: An Autobiography* (New York: Pocket Books, 1989), 180-187; Ya'akov Ba'al-Teshuva, 'The Men of "The Juggler" are Leaving the Land', *Kolno'a*, 30 October 1952: 3; 16; Herbert G. Luft, 'Kirk Douglas's Most Inspiring Event of His Career', *Chicago Sentinel*, 8 October 1959: 29.

<sup>45</sup> Bosley Crowther, "'The Juggler,' With Kirk Douglas', *New York Times*, 6 May: 39; Philip K. Scheuer 'Douglas DP Who Flees in "Juggler"', *Los Angeles Times*, 30 May: B7; Richard L. Coe, 'Israel Is Setting For "The Juggler"', *Washington Post*, 3 July 1953: 8.

likely to damage its reputation. Others argued that it was a sign of moral strength that Israel, despite its security and economic troubles, cared for all homeless Jews and sought 'to mold them into new citizens', very much like the United States had previously done with its own immigrants.<sup>46</sup> American progressives in particular were excited by this pro-Zionist theme – that Israel and the United States had shared values and were both immigrant sanctuaries.<sup>47</sup>

In Israel, press critics on the nationalist right and communist left lambasted the film's Hollywoodish depictions of Israeli life: for instance the cosmetics freely available for a kibbutz girl.<sup>48</sup> However, a press critic in the government-supporting newspaper *Davar* argued that despite 'small deficiencies', the plot's sympathetic illumination of Israeli life – carrying the 'objective seal of Hollywood' – was much more effective, like all such 'indirect propaganda', than the 'direct propaganda' in Israeli films.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Herbert G. Luft, 'As We See It: "The Juggler" on Screen', 26 June: 4; Phineas J. Baron, 'Strictly Confidential', *Bnai Brith Messenger*, 28 August 1953: 5.

<sup>47</sup> Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 29-30.

<sup>48</sup> Yizhar Arnon, 'In Screenland', *Herut*, 13 October: 3; B. Moked, 'Reflections on The Juggler', *Kol Ha'am*, 4 November: 3; Ami Nadav, 'Give Us This Day', *Al Hamishmar*, 1 December 1953: 2.

<sup>49</sup> B. David, 'The Juggler', *Davar Hashavu'a*, 16 October 1953: 14.

## Depictions of the Kibbutz and Israel in *The Juggler*

Examining the differences between the novel and the film of *The Juggler*, as well as the stages of the script's development, uncovers some of the filmmakers' initial intentions – and the cinematic result. They reveal the efforts to tone down the story's original ideological content – Zionist and progressive – and to turn it into a more palatable product for a general American audience. In the novel, for instance, and in the early versions of the script, the police detective pursuing Hans across the country is a deeply religious man named Ben Yehuda (the son of Judah), who seeks divine help and guidance for the moral questions raised by his hunt.<sup>50</sup> In the final script and film his name has been changed to Karni and he shows no hint of religious conviction. Blankfort felt that there was an unexpressed desire on Kramer's part not to make the film 'too Jewish'.<sup>51</sup> No doubt the reason was mostly

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<sup>50</sup> *The Juggler* (Novel), 65-67; 171-175; 'The Juggler' Screenplay by Michael Blankfort, 7 May 1952, 43 48-49; 148, Box 295, Stanley Kramer Papers, University of California Los Angeles Library Special Collections (hereafter SKP-UCLA).

<sup>51</sup> Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema*, 217.

commercial, the trade journal *Variety* commenting that the film was 'smartly presented without undue race or religious emphasis, so the entertainment is non-sectarian.'<sup>52</sup>

Even more noteworthy, in view of the progressive forces behind the making of *The Juggler*, is the omission of any discussion of the ideological aspects of life on a kibbutz. The film informs the audience in one short sentence that the kibbutz is a farm community, but no other explanation or detail is offered. There is no attempt to present the socialist aspects of the kibbutz – such as the communal rearing of children – which fascinated Blankfort and other progressives, and which had occupied whole scenes in the early scripts and in the novel.<sup>53</sup> The role of dedicated kibbutz member Daniel, initially Hans' rival for Yael's love, was cut down so much in pre- and post-production that more than one reviewer wondered why Kramer had hired such a talented actor as the Swede Alf Kjellin for 'a virtual walk-on.'<sup>54</sup> The final script did include a joyous scene in which the kibbutz cows are brought back from sheltering elsewhere when the war is over. It conveyed through lofty but light-hearted speeches the kibbutz commitment to child rearing, cow-breeding, and Zionist sacrifice. Yet on screen it was cut down to a mere 30 seconds and lacked any dialogue.<sup>55</sup> Images of arduous agricultural labour on kibbutzim were a staple of Zionist cinematic propaganda, yet they

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<sup>52</sup> *Weekly Variety*, 'The Juggler', 6 May 1953: 6.

<sup>53</sup> See for instance the kibbutz communal gathering to decide whether to turn Muller over to the police or not, in Film Script, 'The Juggler', 111-120, Box 33/4, MBC-HGARC, MBC, See also *The Juggler* (novel), 106-108; 179; 190-191; 204.

<sup>54</sup> *Daily Variety*, 'Film Review: The Juggler', 1 May 1953: 3.

<sup>55</sup> 'The Juggler' revised final draft, 10 July 1952, 121-122, Box 5, SKP-UCLA.

make no appearance in *The Juggler*.<sup>56</sup> No one, in fact, is ever seen at work; Hollywood's kibbutz in Galilee resembled, as one reviewer in the American Jewish magazine *Commentary*, put it, a comfortable 'American adult vacation camp where people sit around reading newspapers, joking about the coffee..., watching entertainments, or dancing the hora.'<sup>57</sup>

Actually, a prolonged act of hora dancing by the kibbutz members, at night around a large bonfire, provided in visual and musical form the film's essential moments of Zionist uplift. A happy Hans joins the jubilant circle with Yael, before the two break out for a love scene. Originally a Rumanian dance, the hora had been adopted by the Zionist movement and turned into an expression of a reborn Hebrew folk culture. It was performed mostly in a large and whirling communal circle, occasionally breaking into smaller groups and couples. By the early 1950s, dancing the hora was not just a favourite with the Zionist youth movements. It had had become a widespread pastime in the American Jewish community, inculcating Jewish heritage and pride. It was also very popular with the American non-Jewish 'folk dance movement', which middle-class urban progressives promoted in particular as a place for communal democratic values and international understanding.<sup>58</sup> In fact, the hora dance around the bonfire was the only outdoor scene in *The Juggler* filmed in Hollywood itself,

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<sup>56</sup> See Hillel Tryster, "'The Land of Promise' (1935): a case study in Zionist film propaganda', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 15, 2 (1995): 187-217.

<sup>57</sup> Nathan Glick, 'The Juggler: Hollywood in Israel', *Commentary*, June 1953: 617.

<sup>58</sup> Emily Alice Katz, *Bringing Zion Home: Israel in American Jewish Culture, 1948-1967* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015), 49-80.

using local Jewish and Israeli musicians and performers.<sup>59</sup> Here too, however, this cultural symbol of Zionism was toned down in the film. According to the script 'the lively music of the Hora' was also supposed to pervade the final scene, in which Hans falls into the hugging arms of Yael.<sup>60</sup> But the scene was accompanied in the end by the soaring string-orchestra sound of conventional Hollywood drama, composed by George Antheil.

Surprisingly, the *The Juggler* makes relatively little use of the Israeli landscape. Capturing authentic exterior scenery was the main reason for filming in Israel and there were plenty of opportunities to have done this in a tale of a police cross-country hunt for a fugitive. Yet filming in the port city of Haifa was largely confined to close-quarter shots in empty city streets, while a view of Nazareth serves, uninspiringly, as just background for a short argument between Hans and Joshua. The script had called for the director to catch 'the fire-like reflections of the afternoon sun' on the 'wonderfully beautiful' town, but the audience sees nothing like this on screen. The importance of long-shots of Nazareth and Jerusalem was similarly emphasised in the script with exclamation marks, highlighting their significance to American audiences, but viewers aren't treated to these either.<sup>61</sup> The failure

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<sup>59</sup> The hora scene triggered a lawsuit in Israel against Columbia pictures, for infringement of copyright while performing two Israeli songs during the dance. Like their Hollywood counterparts, Israeli artists found profits no less important than Zionist propaganda. *Al Hamishmar*, 'The Right to Play "Sovevuni" and "Hey Daroma" to AKUM alone', 18 December 1953: 7.

<sup>60</sup> 'The Juggler' revised final draft, 139, Box 5, SKP-UCLA.

<sup>61</sup> 'The Juggler' revised final draft, 121-122, Box 5, SKP-UCLA.

seems artistic. In the case of Jerusalem, the actual filmed scenes of 'the majestic city' stipulated by the script were so poor and indistinctive that Blankfort suggested during editing to cut them out altogether.<sup>62</sup> On the flip side, the camera of acclaimed cinematographer J. Roy Hunt does capture some decent images of the hilly terrain of the Western Galilee. There is also a short moment of picturesque beauty overlooking the cultivated Hulah Valley – one of the prides of the Zionist movement in the early years of Israeli statehood – during a romantic hike by Hans and Yael. And there is a long-shot towards the Mediterranean Sea, with a new Jewish settlement visible in the distance, as the couple stand on the ruins of a deserted Arab village depopulated in the recent 1948 war.

### ***The Juggler*, the 1948 war and the Arab-Israeli conflict**

There is almost no mention in *The Juggler* of the cataclysmic 1948 war that established the state of Israel and set in motion the film's story. In Blankfort's novel and early scripts there were numerous references to the war that had just ended. Naturally, these mostly expressed the grief and sacrifice on the Jewish side, but most were deleted in the final scripting stage. On screen, Josh curtly tells Hans that he lost his parents in the war but nothing more about the circumstances.<sup>63</sup> A reference in early scripts to 'our noble war' became simply 'our war'

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<sup>62</sup> Blankfort to Stanley [Kramer] and Eddie [Dmytryk], 4 February 1953, Box 87/9, MBC-HGARC.

<sup>63</sup> According to the novel, Josh had lost his parents in the Hadassah hospital convoy of doctors and nurses that had been massacred by Arabs in Jerusalem in April 1948: see *The Juggler*

and was then cut out from the film altogether.<sup>64</sup> When Hans first kisses Yael, the film erases the scripted line which has her recalling 'a man I loved very much' who 'was killed in the war', thus serving to make her declaration of loneliness on the kibbutz before Hans arrived less heartfelt.<sup>65</sup> 'What's such a handsome girl doing unmarried on a community farm?', asked the *New York Times*' chief critic Bosley Crowther.<sup>66</sup>

Whether artistic, commercial, political or other reasons led to the screen version of *The Juggler* downplaying the wider Arab-Israeli conflict is unclear from available documentary evidence, but the changes made to Blankfort's novel and early scripts, especially after Kramer became involved, are unmistakable. Nearly all references to Israeli concerns about the postwar situation of enmity with its Arab neighbours, abundant in the

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(novel), 97. Another story in the 1949 scripts was of a group of kibbutz children recently killed by an Arab aerial bombardment. This was based on a real story that Blankfort had come across in 1949. Michael Blankfort, 'An American in Israel – VIII', *Congress Weekly*, 16 May 1949: 10-12; Film Script, 'The Juggler', 85-86, Box 33/4, MBC-HGARC.

<sup>64</sup> 'The Juggler' Screenplay by Michael Blankfort, 46, Box 295, SKP-UCLA; 'The Juggler' revised final draft, 43, Box 5, SKP-UCLA.

<sup>65</sup> 'The Juggler' revised final draft, 101, Box 5, SKP-UCLA.

<sup>66</sup> *New York Times* review, 6 May 1953: 39. In the early scripts and novel Yael is a more mature woman, whose husband was killed in 1942 fighting for the British army at El Alamein. See *The Juggler* (novel), 199-201.

novel, were cut out of either the final shooting script or the film itself.<sup>67</sup> In Blankfort's first version of the script, still called 'Sabra', Hans and Josh stray across the truce lines officially declared in early 1949 and are taken captive by troops of the Jordanian Arab Legion commanded by an English-mannered and Oxford-accented officer named Abu Abdul. They later manage under the cover of darkness to escape from the Arab Legion camp.<sup>68</sup> This lengthy part of the plot had already been omitted in the second version of the script. Furthermore, in the early scripts and novel there is an attack by Arab infiltrators from across the Syrian border, who manage to set the kibbutz cowshed on fire. The elimination of any reference to the contentious subject of cross-border attacks from the final scripts and film deprived the plot of much needed moments of drama and tension, as well as a chance to show Hans in a positive light, rushing into the cowshed and saving the life of Mordechai, the old and likeable cow-herder.<sup>69</sup> These changes also left out an effective depiction of the mortal threat of Arab infiltration, which Israeli propaganda constantly highlighted in its early years to explain its own controversial policy of deadly cross-border retaliation.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> An idea of inserting a map showing the proximity of Damascus was dropped too. See Michael Blankfort to Stanley [Kramer] and Eddie [Dmytryk], 4 February 1953, Box 87/9, MBC-HGARC.

<sup>68</sup> 'Sabra' by Michael Blankfort, 1949, 36-60, Box 33/3, MBC-HGARC.

<sup>69</sup> 'Sabra' by Michael Blankfort, 110-119, Box 33/3, MBC-HGARC; *The Juggler* (novel), 224-231.

<sup>70</sup> Benny Morris, *Israel's Border Wars, 1949-1956: Arab Infiltration, Israeli Retaliation and the Countdown to the Suez War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

Another Zionist propaganda theme eliminated from the film was the character of the 'friendly Arab', who welcomes Zionist settlers in his midst.<sup>71</sup> In Blankfort's early scripts and book, for instance, druze Arab neighbours warn the kibbutz members of the impending attack by Arab infiltrators.<sup>72</sup> Blankfort's reports from Israel for *Congress Weekly* during his lengthy research trip in 1949 show him well aware of how resentful the Arab communities in Galilee were of Israeli occupation in the 1948 war. In the same reports, he also notes the questionable sincerity of the declarations of loyalty to the victorious Israelis by the Druze Arabs, a Middle East minority known to survive by allying themselves with the powerful.<sup>73</sup> Druze suspicion of dealings with the Israeli authorities is candidly presented in the novel too.<sup>74</sup> In the scripts, however, Blankfort also supported Israel's claims that the Arabs it had conquered were contented and being treated as equal citizens. The scripts had an implausible scene in which an 'attractive' young Arab shepherdess named Shirah appears in the dark of night and invites Hans and Joshua to sleep overnight in her village: with Josh explaining to Hans that 'there is nothing to fear' because the Arabs 'are Israeli citizens.' When detective Karni later arrives in Shirah's village in pursuit of Hans, seeking information from his old friend the dignified *mukhtar* (headman), the girl is called and recognizes a picture of

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<sup>71</sup> The figure of the friendly Arab would play an important role in the future Hollywood films *Exodus* (1960) and *Cast a Giant Shadow* (1966).

<sup>72</sup> Film Script, 'The Juggler', 85-86, Box 33/4, MBC-HGARC; *The Juggler* (novel), 187-188.

<sup>73</sup> Michael Blankfort, 'An American in Israel - IV', *Congress Weekly*, 14 March: 9-12; 'An American in Israel - VIII', *Congress Weekly*, 16 May 1949: 10-12.

<sup>74</sup> *The Juggler* (novel), 88-92.

the fugitive.<sup>75</sup> These two short scenes seem to have been filmed in Columbia's studios in Hollywood, but were later cut out of the film. Playing the Mukhtar in the deleted scene was Ralph Moody, an American actor who had recently played a series of Indian chiefs in TV westerns.<sup>76</sup>

The sole Arab character in the screen version of *The Juggler*, who makes two brief appearances, is an old woman vending in a kiosk in Nazareth – the scene was actually filmed in the nearby village Shefa 'Amr – with the oriental character of the Arab street emphasized by the conspicuous placing of three nearby camels. The Arab woman, who later helps Karni, can expertly read the Hebrew newspapers and assures Hans, who she thinks is a tourist, that in Nazareth the holy places are 'all cared for'. This echoed a promise the Israelis made to international opinion and especially the Christian world as soon as they took control of the town in July 1948. About the tense postwar relationship and occasional violence in Nazareth under Israeli military occupation nothing of course is said in the film.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> 'The Juggler' revised final draft, 73-74; 119-120, Box 5, SKP-UCLA.

<sup>76</sup> *Daily Variety*, 'Short Shorts', 24 September 1952: 5.

<sup>77</sup> About Nazareth see under Israeli rule in the 1950s see Jeremy Forman, 'Military Rule, Political Manipulation, and Jewish Settlement: Israeli Mechanisms for Controlling Nazareth in the 1950s', *Journal of Israeli History*, 25, 2 (2006), 335-359; Leena Dallahseh, 'Troubled Waters: Citizenship and Colonial Zionism in Nazareth', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 47 (2015), 467-487.

### **Iqrit: filming in a depopulated Arab village**

The postwar enmity between Israel and the Arab world amid the ongoing consequences of the 1948 war is solely represented in *The Juggler* in one scene, which takes place in an unnamed deserted Arab village. The scene was inspired by an event Blankfort had witnessed in 1949, in which the American founders of a new kibbutz in the Western Galilee loaded a truck with 'precious stones' taken from a nearby deserted Arab village to build a cistern.<sup>78</sup> Much of the Israelis' postwar colonization of the land made use of deserted Arab homes and building materials. In this vein, in the film Yael plans a trip with Hans to a nearby 'damaged Arab village' to see 'if it can still be lived in'.<sup>79</sup> In contrast with the novel, however, the film tells us nothing about how the village had been damaged and deserted in the recent war.<sup>80</sup>

On their way to the village, Yael is armed with a rifle because the dangerous Syrian border is nearby. The couple encounter a small Syrian patrol mounted on horseback. Yael explains to Hans the risk of being taken captive. The final shooting script cut out her saying

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<sup>78</sup> Michael Blankfort, 'An American in Israel', *Congress Weekly*, 21 February 1949: 7-9.

<sup>79</sup> In the script, Yael assures Hans that 'of course, there are no Arabs there now', to which he replies (smiling) that he had 'never seen an Arab village even with Arabs.' These words are deleted from the film. See 'The Juggler' revised final draft, 92, Box 5, SKP-UCLA.

<sup>80</sup> In the novel, Yael explains that the Arabs had 'run away' from the village following which the fictional village, called El Nebi, 'was almost completely destroyed by our guns' because the Syrian army set up a command outpost there. See *The Juggler* (novel), 141.

that 'I sometimes feel I'm living a Wild West movie, everything but the covered wagons.'<sup>81</sup> Despite this, at least one reviewer, in the *Baltimore Sun*, saw the American-Israeli connection: 'like the early Americans', he wrote, the armed 'border farm community' pioneers were building a country 'with hostile tribes over the frontier.'<sup>82</sup> When later in the film, in the ruins of the deserted Arab village, the Syrian patrol reappears menacingly close, and the disturbed Hans is about to open fire, Yael pulls the rifle away, exclaiming 'We don't kill people in cold blood!' . Her statement carried overtones, argued Nathan Glick in *Commentary*, 'not merely of Israel's humanism, but also of the ethics of the American "Western," where you must give your enemy a fair chance to draw.'<sup>83</sup>

While pulling the rifle away, Yael inadvertently reveals the tattooed concentration-camp number on Hans' wrist. This is the cue for an extraordinary scene in which Hans opens up about the horrors he suffered in the camp, with the Arab village ruins serving as a backdrop. When Yael insists that despite the trauma, he can still make a new home on the kibbutz, Hans twice utters his favourite line that 'home is a place you lose.' Against the background of a deserted Arab village, as Deborah Dash Moore notes, such a statement could inadvertently represent Arab rather than Jewish homelessness, perhaps suggesting even a link between both.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> 'The Juggler' Screenplay by Michael Blankfort, 107, Box 295, SKP-UCLA.

<sup>82</sup> Donald Kirkley, 'New Triumph At the Little', *Baltimore Sun*, 10 August 1953: 8.

<sup>83</sup> Glick, 'The Juggler': 616.

<sup>84</sup> Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 331n.

Blankfort had himself reflected on the subject of Arab homelessness in February 1949, writing in *Congress Weekly* that the postwar ruins of the large Arab town of Jaffa reminded him of the ruined Warsaw Ghetto. He described a large pile of shoes left on the beach by an Arab family which had escaped to Gaza and asked on whose head 'rests the sin of those shoes?'<sup>85</sup> The tragedy of Arab refugees became the sore spot of Israel's international image after the 1948 war. Israel claimed that despite Zionist promises of peace and co-operation, the Arab refugees had run away, having been misled or frightened by their own fanatical leaders, and that now the refugees should settle permanently in the neighboring Arab states. Blankfort, like other American Jews and progressives, shared these convictions.<sup>86</sup> In his novel, Yael tells Hans that she had known the village since she had been a child on the kibbutz, did not like their 'feudal way of life' – a common charge from progressives – but recognized that this was their home. Like Blankfort on the beach of Jaffa in 1949, she examines a torn child's shoe found in the ruins and muses about the child's fate: 'sitting in a plague-infested concentration camp in Syria or Egypt or Trans-Jordan?' having been 'carried off, uncomprehending, by frightened parents', never to see home again. 'Damn them!' Yael's anger turns towards the refugees but for a very different reason: 'Why didn't they stay? Haven't we enough on our head without feeling guilty about them too, too? Why

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<sup>85</sup> Blankfort, 'An American in Israel – IV', *Congress Weekly*, 14 March 1949: 12.

<sup>86</sup> On the liberal consensus in the US supporting Israeli claims see Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 49-57.

didn't they believe us when we told them we'd be their friends? Why did they let their bosses frighten them away?'<sup>87</sup>

The film leaves all this out: Israeli claims, progressive feelings of guilt, or any other comment on the village's former inhabitants. This first, short, cinematic depiction of a deserted Arab village following Israel's War of Independence does not make any reference to the people who lived in the village or their fate. Only the ruins exist on celluloid.

However, the fact that this scene was shot in the village of Iqrit in Western Galilee infuses *The Juggler* with even greater significance. In late October 1948, the Arab Christian inhabitants of Iqrit, close to the Lebanon border, had not resisted the Israeli occupation of their village. Nonetheless, a week later they were ordered to evacuate and to move for security reasons to another Arab village inland. They were told this would be just for a fortnight, until the situation in the border stabilized. When this failed to happen, a decades-long political and legal campaign started, turning Iqrit into a symbol of the forced expulsion of Arabs in the 1948 war, and their determination to return to their homes. In September 1951, the Israeli High Court ruled for the first time that the Iqrit refugees should be allowed to return to their village. But the army was determined to obstruct their return and on Christmas Eve 1951 it blew up all of the houses in the village, making them uninhabitable.<sup>88</sup> Claiming it had no prior knowledge or given consent to the demolition, the Government tried

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<sup>87</sup> *The Juggler* (novel), 155-156.

<sup>88</sup> Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 506-509.

– unsuccessfully – to control the spread of the story abroad through cable censorship. The whole area had already been declared a closed security zone in 1949, and even an American embassy official failed to receive permission to visit the site, having to confirm the destruction from a far with the aid of field glasses.<sup>89</sup>

It is therefore all the more remarkable – and testifies to the importance with which Hollywood was regarded in Israel – that less than a year later, in October 1952, the Israeli authorities should allow the filming of *The Juggler* to take place at Iqrit. Having turned down the filmmakers' request to shoot at another deserted village, the military high command allowed filming to take place in a ruined house on the explicit condition that the village itself would not be filmed and that its exact location or name would not appear in the movie or anything involved with it.<sup>90</sup> Despite this, there is enough in the images to enable sharp-eyed viewers to recognize the village, and the name of the site was mentioned at least a couple of times in the press. Enthusing in the *New York Times* about the 'genuine backgrounds' available in Israel, Edward Dmytryk estimated that 'to build a ruined Arab village like Iqrit'

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<sup>89</sup> Erwin P. Keeler (American Embassy, Tel Aviv) to Department of State, Washington, 'Destruction of the Arab Village of Ikrit in Northern Galilee', 29 January 1952, 784A.00/1-2952, Box 4081, RG 59, Decimal Files, 1950-54, National Archives of the United States, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>90</sup> Gabriel Louria to IDF Press Relations Unit, 16 September; Milton Feldman to David Landwher, 22 September; Aryeh Hager to head of Chief of Staff office, 24 September; Gabriel Louria to IDF Press Relations Unit, 25 September 1952, file 540/55/97, Israeli Defense Forces Archive, Tel Hashomer, Israel.

in Hollywood would cost 'a quarter million dollars.'<sup>91</sup> The connection of *The Juggler* with Iqrit was never fully made at the time though, nor has it been by researchers since.<sup>92</sup> As the damaged houses of Iqrit have long been totally razed, the images of *The Juggler* have in retrospect an unexpected documentary power and symbolic significance that neither the film-makers nor Israeli authorities could have ever envisaged.

## Conclusion

*The Juggler* was not only Hollywood's first film set in modern Israel but also a principal expression of the attachment of Hollywood progressives to Zionist ideals in the early years of Israeli statehood. Its writer, producer, director and leading actor were all Hollywood artists who viewed Israel as a force for good, both for Jews and the Middle East. The ethnic elements of Blankfort's original story and scripts were heavily diluted to make the film version more accessible to non-Jewish audiences. Despite this, *The Juggler* projected a pro-Zionist view of Israel as the benevolent recipient of poor holocaust survivors,

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<sup>91</sup> Schmidt, 'Charting The Trail of "The Juggler" In Israel': X5.

<sup>92</sup> The film's editing (and Syrian border plot) confounded at least one researcher to erroneously believe that the abandoned village overlooks the Hulah valley, in the Eastern Galilee. See Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 246.

ingathering to rebuild themselves and their national home. Images of kibbutz socialism and hard labor were omitted during production, but a long scene of hora dancing still provided a recognizable and romanticized moment of Zionist progressive inspiration. Hora dancing in Galilee would be repeated in the pro-Zionist 'birth of Israel' films *Exodus* (1960), *Judith* (1966) and *Cast a Giant Shadow* (1966), Kirk Douglas once again enthusiastically joining the circle in the latter.

The presence of Arabs in the book version of *The Juggler* was also primarily cut out of the shooting script or left on the editing room floor. As a result, in contrast to its sixties successors, the film did not include scenes of Arab violence or 'friendly' Arabs who welcomes Zionist settlement. Progressive musings about the depopulated Arabs of Palestine and the reasons for their fate were also left out. But unknown to viewers at the time or since, a substantial scene about homelessness was inadvertently filmed in one depopulated Arab village that would become a living symbol of the Palestinian *Nakba*.

The production of *The Juggler* in Israel did not bring the economic and propaganda rewards that the Israeli authorities had hoped for. It was not a box office success, thus denting the lure of Israel for further Hollywood productions in Israel for almost a decade.<sup>93</sup> However, the commercial failure of *The Juggler* did not lessen the desire of its chief creators, Blankfort and Kramer, to make films in and about the Jewish state. In the late 1950s, Kramer tried but failed to put on screen a big-budget production of *My Glorious Brothers*. Howard Fast's thrilling novel of the Maccabean revolt against Greek rule in ancient Judea had captured many Jewish and progressive hearts when first appearing during Israel's war of

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<sup>93</sup> Netanel Lorch, "Israel and the Film Industry", 19 July 1957, G/5506/4, ISA.

Independence.<sup>94</sup> In the early 1960s, Michael Blankfort tried to make a film about Zionist espionage in World War One Palestine. Later that decade, he drafted a script about American volunteers in the Israeli air-force during the war of independence. Despite the hook of the Israeli air-force's astounding victory in the 1967 war, this project did not make it to the screen either. The last scene of the film would have been a telling sign of the times. It would have portrayed "ecstatic" mass dancing of hora not at a kibbutz in Galilee but at Jerusalem's conquered Western Wall.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Gerald Sorin, *Howard Fast: Life and Literature in the Left Lane* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 148-156; Michael Wall, "The Defiant One," *The Guardian*, 8 July 1960: 7

<sup>95</sup> 'Warhawks' bound script, 23 January 1968, Box 46/3, MBC-HGARC.