9 Almost haven

Queer migrants' temporary refuge in Tel Aviv in *Paper Dolls* (2006), *The Bubble* (2006), and *Out in the Dark* (2012)

Nir Cohen

For progressive liberals in Israel, the partially successful fight for LGBTIQ+ rights and increased visibility of members of the community (or, rather, communities) has served, over the past couple of decades, as a prominent symbol of hope for a better, more equal society. The call for greater inclusion of – and protective legislation for – people identifying as LGBTIQ+ has been, for the most part, acknowledged and accepted, just as the rights of other minorities – namely, Palestinians who hold Israeli passports and those who do not and live under Israeli rule in the Occupied Territories – have been eroded. Although these two trends may have developed independently from each other, they are firmly linked. As the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank continues, the Israeli state has utilised its relatively progressive gay legislation to assert itself as a regional bastion of tolerance, thus masking other troubling human rights violations. This tendency has been heavily criticised by those who label Israel's rather late and limited embrace of its LGBTIQ+ citizens as pinkwashing – a cynical attempt to divert public opinion, at home and abroad, from the daily injustice carried out in the Occupied Territories, and in Arab cities and villages within Israel's Green Line. As American writer Sarah Schulman states,

nowhere has homonationalism been more consciously harnessed by governments than in Israel, where the manoeuvring of gay rights to support racist agendas evolved strategically from marketing impulses. This pinkwashing is a paradigm central to an understanding of queers and our relationship to occupation.

(Schulman 2012: 135)

More than any other place in the country, it is Tel Aviv that represents the kind of freedom Israel would like to claim it affords all of its citizens. The city's recent triumph over Jerusalem in the race to become the host city of the 2019 Eurovision song contest is yet another validation of Tel Aviv's secular, enlightened nature and, as such, also the unofficial capital of the country's LGBTIQ+ community/ies.¹ Israel's PR machine has succeeded in

making Tel Aviv a popular gay destination,² with its annual Pride parade in June a seasonal highlight which attracts thousands of international visitors. Although the visibility of LGBTIQ+ groups and their members cannot be denied, gay men, lesbians and trans people in Israel are still discriminated against on a daily basis, and Israel continues to lag behind European countries and even the US in extending to same-sex couples the same treatment their heterosexual counterparts enjoy. For example, as civil marriage does not exist in Israel, same-sex couples cannot marry, and the journey to parenthood is as difficult as it has ever been as Israel's law on surrogacy rights excludes gay men.³ When it comes to migration, Israel's policy – as perhaps can be expected from a country whose *raison d'être* is providing a safe place for the world's Jewish population – is as selective as can be. Israel may not have a constitution, but its Law of Return is one of the foundations on which the country is based.⁴ The immediate acceptance of any Jewish person regardless of his/her country of origin, age and/or occupation stands in sharp contrast not only to the position of Palestinian refugees residing in the Occupied Territories and other Middle Eastern countries such as Lebanon and Jordan – they insist on being granted the right to return to their pre-1948 lands and homes – but also to other non-Jewish migrants: either foreign workers who come to Israel for economic reasons or refugees and asylum seekers who flee war or the threat of persecution.⁵ Migrants who arrive in Israel as foreign workers – as in other countries, they mostly take jobs native residents would not want to do – are granted the right to stay in Israel for as long as they are in employment, but their temporary residence status does not lead ultimately to settlement as is the case in many Western countries.

Tel Aviv may be referred to by its residents as a bubble – a cultural and social sphere whose values are diametrically opposed to those lived by outside the city – but it is still a part of a country that, for the most part, discriminates against both its own LGBTIQ+ citizens and non-Jewish migrants. As such, the city's powers to oppose reactionary laws concerning sexual orientation and non-Jewish migration are at best limited. As much as it offers relief from homophobia and xenophobia, its refugees and migrant workers, queer or not, are still subject to the often racist immigration laws made by decision-makers who perceive them as a grave threat. Tel Aviv's liberal stance alone, it seems, cannot create the cultural and social change required to promote a more forward-looking discourse and legislation.

This duality – the aspiration to create a safe environment for ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities in Tel Aviv, and the realisation that this cannot be fully fulfilled under Israel's current rule and given its wider public opinion – is powerfully captured in three Israeli films, made between 2006 and 2012, which all have at their centre a non-Jewish queer protagonist (or, in the case of one of them, a group of characters) whose hope is to make Tel Aviv, and by extension Israel, their home. While Tel Aviv provides refuge for a short period of time, none of the films' protagonists manages to make the city

their permanent place of residence due to strict Israeli migration laws and a nationwide anti-foreign, and especially anti-Palestinian, atmosphere.

Documentary film *Paper Dolls/Bubot Niyar* (2006, Israel, dir. Tomer Heymann) and dramas *The Bubble/Ha'bua* (2006, Israel, dir. Eytan Fox) and *Out in the Dark/Alata* (2012, Israel, dir. Michael Mayer)⁶ portray a city that serves as a halfway haven – a place where queer migrant workers (in *Paper Dolls*) and queer Palestinian refugees (in *The Bubble* and *Out in the Dark*) are welcomed by the city and its residents (in the case of *The Bubble* and *Out in the Dark*, the protagonists also form romantic relationships with Israeli men), but who are betrayed by the Israeli authorities.⁷ In *The Bubble*, the tragic ending offers no hope. In *Paper Dolls* and *Out in the Dark*, a glimmer of hope is indeed found, though, as may be expected, not in Tel Aviv but in Europe. Tel Aviv, therefore, is represented as only a temporary, partial solution – a transitory shelter. In the battle between liberal Tel Aviv and Israel's intolerance, it is the latter that ultimately triumphs.

Paper Dolls

Based on a TV series of the same name first broadcast in 2005, Tomer Heymann's *Paper Dolls* attempts to tackle the acute issue of foreign workers in Israel, especially their precarious immigration status. The film follows the life of five Filipino transvestites who work in Israel as health care providers over a period of several years. At night, they perform at clubs as the drag act Paper Dolls. Heymann, one of the most prolific documentarians working in Israel today, examines the relationships they form with the elderly people they look after, their desire to succeed onstage, their longing for their home country and the families they left behind, and their constant fear of being deported. *Paper Dolls* explores the juxtaposition of two forms of marginality – sexual and ethnic/racial.

As the film shows, some members of the group have grown attached to the people they work for and their families. This is especially true of Salvador Camatoy, known as Sally, who looks after the elderly Haim until his death. Both Haim and Sally describe their relationship as similar to that between father and daughter. But, more often than not, the attempts by Paper Dolls at fuller integration into society fail. Their dream of performing at TLV, the largest gay club in Tel Aviv, comes true with the help of Heymann, but their initial achievement of gaining recognition soon turns sour. Greeting the crowd dressed as geisha in Japanese kimonos, their national and cultural identity is completely erased. Following that, they decide to continue performing only within their own community, a further indication that their stay in Israel can never become permanent, and that even during this period their ties to Israeli culture – even gay culture – are unstable and loose.

As in his previous films,⁸ Heymann expresses in *Paper Dolls* his desire to become part of the group of people whose lives he documents, or at least to make it seem as if he has. He is not only the film director but also

his protagonists' client (the film starts with a scene that shows him having his hair cut by one of the members of the group who also works as a hairdresser), their manager (as stated previously, he facilitates their performance at TLV), and, above all, their friend who shows up at the detention facility where one member is being held for staying in Israel illegally after his visa has been instantaneously and unexpectedly revoked. Here, Heymann seems to position himself in the role of the conscientious filmmaker who is fully involved in the intricate reality of the lives of the Filipinos he follows.⁹

The Filipinos' unpredictable legal status signals them out as outsiders – in the end they have to leave Israel, despite the number of years they have worked in the country, their fluent command of Hebrew, and other forms of attachment to the land and its people. Religion and race are, of course, a major factor in their exclusion, but the sexuality of *Paper Dolls* plays an important part too: although Heymann is an openly gay man and Tel Aviv a relatively inclusive city, the fluid gender identity flaunted by the members of *Paper Dolls* pushes them further to the margins of Israeli society, and even of the Tel Aviv gay community. Heymann's perception of his homosexuality is significantly different from the way *Paper Dolls* perceive theirs. Those differences are conveyed in the way each party – Heymann and *Paper Dolls* – performs its gay identity. Heymann is pushed to examine the type of identity he performs, holding on at first to his 'straight' appearance and mannerisms shaped by his army service¹⁰ and inspired by the concept of the new 'Muscle Jew', a term coined by Zionist leader Max Nordau (a connection which makes Heymann's gay identity a clear expression of homonationalism), but slowly adopting, if only for dramatic effect, overt expressions of femininity through the act of drag, with the constant encouragement of *Paper Dolls*.

It is Heymann's adherence to strict masculine codes of appearance and behaviour that may explain his complex and conflicted reaction to the gender-bending flexibility celebrated by *Paper Dolls*. Although fascinated by the liminal space that the Filipino workers occupy as transvestites, Heymann makes a deliberate effort at the beginning of the film to assert his masculinity in relation to them, saying to one of the performers: 'It's strange to me. I'm not used to seeing such things. Sometimes I even find it a bit repulsive. Like, aren't you ashamed, shaving your entire body and all? . . . Aren't you ashamed of that?' Admitting that he has never dressed up as a woman, Heymann agrees to let the group dress him up. While having his face made up he says: 'I'm embarrassed. Where I grew up, if you dress like a girl, it's like . . . embarrassing. As a man, you have to act like a man, not like a woman'. Heymann's reaction brings to mind Daniel Boyarin's study of the pre-Israeli 'feminine' Jew of the diaspora, an image Zionism has done its best to erase and one which still makes most Israeli men – whether gay or not – feel uncomfortable. Boyarin argues that the male Jew was often represented as a sort of a woman who gave 'a set of performances that are culturally read as non-male within a given historical culture' (Boyarin 1995: 43). To combat that, as George L. Mosse writes, Zionism decreed that the Jew 'must acquire

solid stomachs and hard muscles, not just to overcome his stereotype . . . but also to compete, to find his place in the world' (Mosse 1993: 164). It is the aforementioned concept of the 'Muscle Jew' – 'the blueprint for the heterosexual and militaristic society Israel has turned out to be' (Cohen 2012: 20) – that has been instinctively embraced by Heymann and many others like him, and which is undermined by the subversive, threatening act of Paper Dolls. Through the performative act of drag, Heymann is shifting from one acquired category of identity, that of the virile Israeli male, to another – one that sees in drag and femininity possible components of gay existence – and exposing in the process the artificiality of both.

The interlacing of national and sexual identities lies at the core of the film. Both Paper Dolls' Filipino looks and feminised appearance stand for an exoticism that at once excites and frightens Heymann (as well as the manager of the aforementioned club, who, by dressing them in traditional geisha attire, expresses his desire to see in them an archetype of the Orient). But it exists also in the persona that Heymann adopts for himself as an Israeli gay

Figure 9.1 Director Tomer Heymann being made up by Filipino members of Paper Dolls in his documentary about the group, *Paper Dolls* (2006)

Source: Paper Dolls/Bubot Niyar (2006), directed by Tomer Heymann © Heymann Brothers Films, and Strand Releasing (USA) (2006).

man. His initial discomfort about other forms of gayness can be read, to a certain extent, as yet another manifestation of the wish of many Israeli gay men to assimilate into the mainstream culture around them. However, his eventual opening up to a different mode of self-expression through the act of drag serves as an acknowledgment of the practice of performing identities and the ability to freely move between them.

The fact that at the end of the film we learn that almost all members of the group had to leave Israel, and that at least some of them have decided to settle in London instead, is yet further proof that Tel Aviv may tolerate its queer, non-Jewish migrants but cannot fully accept them for who they are, or let them stay permanently. Heymann's slight repulsion at first by the unapologetically feminine appearance of Paper Dolls, and the gay club owner's decision to ignore their national identity, expose Israel's intolerance behind its celebrated liberal façade. The members of Paper Dolls, it seems, pose a risk to the religious, ethnic, and also sexual consensus in Israel. Heymann as a liberal filmmaker decided to fight on behalf of his new friends, but before long even he had to acknowledge that the battle had already been lost.

The Bubble

In *The Bubble*, veteran Israeli director Eytan Fox explores similar themes to those presented in his previous projects, namely the Israeli-Arab conflict, the tension between army and civilian life in Israel, youth culture, and the place that the urban, Ashkenazi (read in Israel as white European), gay male occupies in the complex political and cultural life of the state. The ethnically and sexually marginalised Arab protagonist in *The Bubble*, therefore, acts as a foil for his secure and connected Israeli-Jewish counterpart. Although it seems at first that Arab-Jewish coexistence is indeed possible in Fox's cinematic realm, that option is ultimately vehemently rejected.

The film's title refers to the way Tel Aviv is often discussed in the Israeli media. Criticised as a hedonistic haven for indifferent people or celebrated as a place tolerant of those who challenge Israel's prominent right-wing, nationalist inclinations, Tel Aviv is regarded as an almost separate entity. Whereas the rest of the country is seen as mobilised and on the frontline, Tel Aviv is the rear-guard, enjoying a carefree existence and accepting of non-Jewish refugees, foreign workers, and immigrants. Even though that sentiment about the distinction between Tel Aviv and the rest of the country serves as the backdrop in Fox's film, the plot itself refutes this myth. As the film shows, Tel Aviv, being a prime target for terrorists, is anything but immune to the threat of violence, and its allegedly complacent existence is thrown into doubt time and again.

The film centres on the story of gay lovers Noam (Ohad Knoller) and Ashraf (Yusef 'Joe' Sweid). Originally from Jerusalem and an Israeli citizen, Ashraf grew up in Nablus after the Israeli army destroyed his family home and is now in need of a special permit to enter Israel. He first meets Noam at one of

Figure 9.2 Palestinian Ashraf (Yousef 'Joe' Sweid) (left) and Israeli Noam (Ohad Knoller) futilely trying to live as a couple in Tel Aviv in *The Bubble/Ha'bua* (2006)

Source: *The Bubble/Ha'bua* (2006), directed by Eytan Fox © Dov Gilhar, Israeli films, and TLA Releasing (2008).

the Israeli army checkpoints on the West Bank. Ashraf is standing in line to be checked by the aggressive representatives of the Israeli forces. Noam is standing on the other side, as a soldier in reserve duty. They both witness the tragic birth of a stillborn baby to a Palestinian woman who has been held up in the queue. Noam is then seen going back to the apartment he shares with his friends Yali (Alon Friedman), a gay man, and Lulu (Daniela Wircer), a heterosexual woman. Their secure urban existence is in sharp contrast to the reality of violence and humiliation the Israelis are responsible for at the checkpoints.

Noam's difficulty in accommodating his pacifist, left-wing views with the role he assumes as a soldier (even if only temporarily as a reserve soldier) is expressed in his indifference to the strict army rules regarding filming in the checkpoint area (he allows a political activist with a camera to keep filming despite his commander's disapproval), as well as in his elaborate attempt to dissociate himself from what is happening around him: while at the checkpoint and on his way back to Tel Aviv, Noam is listening to music on his iPod, the music serving as a barrier between himself and reality.

Shortly after Noam's arrival in Tel Aviv, Ashraf shows up at his door carrying Noam's army ID, which he lost while at the checkpoint.¹¹ This unexpected meeting between the two triggers a passionate affair, which ends tragically with Ashraf blowing himself up in front of the busy Tel Aviv café

where Noam and his friends work and hang out. Ashraf and Noam die in the explosion, their bodies lying next to each other, a testimony to the futility of war, or, as may be read by others, the hope for peace. Their death also attests to the precarity of gay existence, especially one that dares to defy the existing status quo in Israel which dictates a total separation between Israelis and Palestinians. The film makes clear that no place in Israel – not even Tel Aviv – can contain a gay Palestinian-Israeli love story. Their affair was allowed to flourish in the city, but only up to a point. The tragic ending of their story is the only acceptable ending for their dual – sexual and ethnic/religious – transgression.

The film follows the tradition of what film scholar Yosefa Loshitzky has called the ‘forbidden love’ story in Israeli cinema, that between an Israeli Jew and an Arab. The importance of telling stories of ‘forbidden love’, Loshitzky argues, lies in their power to expose the effects of the conflict and the occupation at the ‘microlevel’: ‘The displacement, taking place in Israeli cinema, of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the territory of forbidden love, makes it easier for the Israeli audience . . . to encounter the conflict whose roots are complex and painful’ (Loshitzky 2001: 113). I would like to suggest that for Fox it is not only the characters’ racial and ethnic origins that make their love story a transgression of the norm, but also, perhaps even primarily, their sexual orientation.

As in Fox’s previous films, *The Bubble* blends the political and the personal to maximum effect: not only do the Jewish characters oppose the occupation on moral, political, and ethical grounds, but they also experience its devastating impact first-hand. The explosion for which Ashraf is responsible was planned by Jihad, his brother-in-law, as an act of revenge for the death of his new wife, Ashraf’s sister, who was killed accidentally by Israeli soldiers. They shot her while looking for those responsible (among them Jihad) for yet another suicide bombing in Tel Aviv, in which Yali was severely wounded. Jihad’s participation in the planning of those deadly attacks stemmed from feelings of fury and frustration, a direct result of being discriminated against and humiliated by the Israeli army (like Ashraf, he is present in the film’s opening scene in which the heavily pregnant woman gives birth to a still-born). The two protagonists oppose violent acts and are engaged in political protest, but this, as it turns out, amounts to very little: their main course of action is organising a rave on a Tel Aviv beach.

This moderate, not to say ineffective, form of ‘leftist’ protest demonstrates Fox’s full identification with the mainstream and his wish not to upset any side in the debate: the Israeli-Palestinian love affair comes to satisfy those who preach coexistence, whereas the violent acts that follow are used as a proof of the futility of that hope. If anything, Fox seems to be more inclined towards a pessimistic picture that corresponds to the failure of the left in Israel, depicting its followers as naïve. The violent actions on both sides that the protagonists are either forced or encouraged to take part in (Noam as a soldier serving at the checkpoints, Ashraf as a suicide bomber), and their

end result, are much more pronounced and fatal than their peacemaking endeavours.

Out in the Dark

Like *The Bubble*, *Out in the Dark* focuses also on a gay Palestinian-Israeli love story where the life of the Palestinian character is under threat at home because of his sexual orientation, and in Israel owing to his homosexuality and ethnicity. Tel Aviv – as in *The Bubble* – serves as a temporary safe place only, and permanent refuge needs to be found elsewhere. Unlike *The Bubble*, however, *Out in the Dark* ends with a happy ending of sorts, albeit one which requires both Jewish and Arab lovers to flee to Europe, away from their families and native land.

The narrative centres on Israeli lawyer Roy Schaefer (Michael Aloni) and Palestinian student Nimr Mashrawi (Nicholas Jacob), who fall in love after meeting at a gay Tel Aviv bar that caters to both Palestinian and Jewish clientele and plays traditional Arab music (so further promoting Tel Aviv's image as a tolerant city). Kissing outside the bar, they catch the attention of two passers-by who shout terms of abuse at them. This incident shows that even in Tel Aviv expressions of intolerance are possible, but it also allows Nimr and Roy to present a united front as proud gay men (who then chase after and scare their abusers), a stance that renders their ethnic and religious differences irrelevant.

Nimr, who is rejected by his family when they find out about his sexuality later in the film,¹² tries to settle in Israel. Having been granted a student visa, his wish seems at first a feasible option – temporarily at least. The visa, however, is revoked following Nimr's refusal to succumb to pressure put on him by the Israel Security Agency, whose representatives seek to recruit him as an informant, an arrangement Nimr's friend Mustafa enjoys too.¹³ As in the case of Mustafa, the Israeli authorities use, or rather misuse, the knowledge they have of Nimr's homosexuality to force him into a gravely dangerous situation: Nimr has to cooperate with them or they will inform his family of their son's sexual deviation. Israel may present itself as a staunch protector of gay rights, but its representatives will not hesitate to use their knowledge of their targets' homosexuality against them if they think it may advance their idea of security. Based on Mustafa's experience as an informer, Nimr has reasons to be concerned: when Mustafa is no longer deemed a good source, he is deported back to the West Bank, where he is brutally murdered, for both his act of treason and his gayness.¹⁴ Mustafa implores his contact to allow him to stay in Israel, reiterating that his life would be at risk if he was sent back, but his Israeli 'employer' seems to take a certain pleasure in sending the 'faggot', as he calls him, to his death, thus throwing much of Israel's public discourse about LGBTIQ+ rights into question. In the cases of both Mustafa and Nimr, it is representatives of the State of Israel who fail law-abiding, Palestinian citizens in need of the

state's protection because they cannot live safely in the West Bank, and that turn their sexual preference – apparently fully accepted in Israel – against them as they see fit. As Jason Ritchie states,

most queer Palestinians describe their experiences at checkpoints (and with Israeli police and soldiers generally) in uniformly negative terms; and their queerness, to the extent that it emerges as all, tends to constitute an additional source of abuse rather than a means of tempering it, more of a liability than an asset.

(Ritchie 2015: 624)

In order to escape his friend's fate, Nimr has to flee his hometown. Barred from both Palestine and Israel, he has to find a way to leave for Europe, where he hopes human rights organisations will be able to help him and where he and Roy will be able to live – and love – freely. Reaching Europe, however, is a daring operation facilitated by Roy (who, as a result of his involvement, gets arrested by Israeli police) and helped by one of his shady clients. Though it is ultimately Nimr's life that is at risk, Roy, too, pays a heavy price, as the state refuses to acknowledge his choice of partner. And although it is Nimr's Palestinian identity that is the core obstacle to fulfilling the couple's desire to live a normal life in Tel Aviv, his – and Roy's – gay identity and relationship make it all the more difficult.

Figure 9.3 Palestinian student Nimr (Nicholas Jacob) (right) and Israeli lawyer Roy (Michael Aloni) fleeing to Europe so they can stay together in *Out in the Dark/Alata* (2012)

Source: *Out in the Dark/Alata* (2012), directed by Michael Mayer © m-appeal, and Network (2013).

Out in the Dark portrays Tel Aviv as a tolerant city, a place that can accommodate the needs of a Palestinian gay runaway and provide him with a relative sense of security and a community (of both Palestinians and Jews). In Tel Aviv, Nimr's sexuality should no longer be kept a secret, and despite his ethnicity and place of origin he is not seen as a national threat but as the bright student that he is. He is free to go out to bars, meet other men, and fall in love. But any sense of normalisation is short-lived. Nimr may be allowed to fall in love, but he cannot possibly hope to establish steady relationships, or be granted long-term permission to stay in Israel (or, indeed, settle permanently). As in the case of the members of *Paper Dolls*, a lasting solution to his plight cannot be found in Israel, not even in Tel Aviv, and he needs to move further away – to Europe.

Much has been written about the refugee crisis in Europe over the last few years, with tragic stories of thousands of human lives destroyed on their way to the promised continent. Nonetheless, as two of the three films discussed in this chapter demonstrate, Europe is still seen as a beacon of hope by those individuals whose religion and sexuality cannot be contained in a country like Israel which lies so close both geographically and culturally. Israel may be a desirable gay destination, and the Tel Aviv Pride events have become legendary, but, having been led since 2009 by a right-wing government (that of Benjamin Netanyahu) propped up by ultra-religious and ultra-nationalist parties, the state's stance on non-Jewish immigration, let alone non-Jewish queer immigration, is not going to change any time soon. It is, therefore, Europe or deportation (often meaning a death penalty) for those non-Jewish queer foreigners. The promise of freedom that Tel Aviv represents can only be briefly experienced, for it remains ultimately far out of reach.

Notes

- 1 Contrast this with the US government's decision, enthusiastically encouraged by Israeli authorities, to relocate its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in 2018, a move signifying both countries' ultra-national and reactionary current regimes. President Trump's promise of building a wall to protect the US against Mexican illegal immigrants, and Israel's existing wall (also known as the Israeli West Bank barrier), are perhaps the strongest symbols of both nations' official stands towards migration and multiculturalism.
- 2 Tel Aviv was chosen as 'Best Gay City' in an American Airlines competition in 2012 (Schulman 2012: 184).
- 3 This despite Israeli society's unique obsession with the birth rate and the fact that many gay men and women have been accepted into mainstream society because of their readiness to adopt heteronormative values, such as raising families (Yaron et al. 2018).
- 4 Passed in July 1950, just over two years after the establishment of the state, the law grants any Jew who has at least one Jewish grandparent, and regardless of their connection to Israel, the right to gain Israeli citizenship upon arrival.
- 5 As is the case of refugees escaping ethnic cleansing in the Sudan's Darfur region, or others fleeing genocide in the country's Nuba region.

- 6 All filmmakers, it is important to note, are Israeli Jews.
- 7 Tel Aviv is depicted as a queer haven of sorts also in *In Between* (in Arabic: *Bar Bahar*; in Hebrew: *Lo Po, Lo Sham*) (2016, Israel/France), a drama directed by Palestinian filmmaker Maysaloun Hamoud which follow the lives of three young female friends, one of whom is a lesbian, in Tel Aviv. The film depicts internal migration from an Arab village or town to a Jewish-populated metropolitan area where one can live and love freely. However, the film's protagonists, as well as Hamoud herself (in sharp contrast to the protagonists of Heymann's, Mayer's and Fox's films), are Israeli citizens, a status that allows them the freedom of movement and settlement.
- 8 In his first film *It Kinda Scares Me/Tomer VeHasrutim* (2001, Israel), for example, Heymann documents his work with a group of disenfranchised teenagers from Azur, a poor suburb of Tel Aviv.
- 9 It is significant that Heymann plays a central part in many of the films and television series he has directed; *The Way Home/BaDerech HaBaita* (2009, Israel), an eight-part TV series from 2009, is based on home movies of Heymann's family he filmed over 13 years, a documentation through which the complex relations between its members – parents, siblings and nephews – are carefully delineated. The personal vicissitudes of his family, as well as of his love life, echo those of Israeli reality during this period. In *I Shot My Love* (2010, Israel/Germany), he examines his relationship with a German dancer who follows him to Israel.
- 10 As we learn about Heymann from some of his other films, he is one of five sons who were born to 'salt of the earth' Ashkenazi parents in a pastoral moshav in Israel. In an attempt to assert his masculinity, Heymann chose to join the paratroopers as part of his compulsory army service. It was only after his time in the army that he started to explore his gay identity and came out to his family.
- 11 This follows a similar plot device in *Time Off/After* (Israel), Fox's short film from 1990, in which the soldier hands his commander his ID after the latter left it in the park where he had anonymous sex with another man. By handing the ID to his closeted commander, the soldier makes clear that he knows about the commander's homosexuality.
- 12 Nimr's older brother Nabil is a member of a terrorist cell that plans attacks on Israeli citizens. Nabil's character brings to mind that of Jihad's in *The Bubble*, yet another similarity between the two films.
- 13 The option of political asylum, as we learn from a scene where Nimr and Roy meet a lawyer who specialises in such cases, is not available to Palestinians.
- 14 Mustafa's feminine appearance and gestures seem a threat within the context of the Palestinian nationalist movement, which follows strict and clear gender specifications. As Joseph A. Massad, writing on the formation of Palestinian nationhood, states: '[a] nationalist performance would seem to be then imbricated with masculine performances which guarantee its definitional coherence and without which it would become impossible' (Massad 2006: 49).