Feminist Media Studies

Gotta Have An Effeminate Heart

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GOTTA HAVE AN EFFEMINATE HEART

The politics of effeminacy and sissyness in a nostalgic Israeli TV musical

Gilad Padva and **Miri Talmon**

The TV musical Gotta Have Heart *(1997) portrays a love triangle among two men and one woman, located within a musical spectacle, and challenging conventional formulations of gender, sex, and sexualities. Synthesizing American, European, and Israeli imageries of the past—particularly 1950s and 1970s memorabilia, Israeli folk dances, and Eurovision song contests—this Israeli musical generates hybrid visualizations, integrating Israeli mainstream culture and queer imageries. Rather than merely producing a simulacrum of past decades, however, this synthetic utopia rewrites the Israeli masculinity and effeminates the cultural national agenda in regard to the politics of effeminacy, sissyness, and sissyphobia both outside and, particularly, inside the Israeli gay community. This article also examines the female protagonist's positioning in this TV musical as concomitantly a fag hag, a reified diva, and—in her ironic, reflexive performance—a young straight woman yearning for a big-hearted husband and family.*

KEYWORDS   effeminacy; sissy; homosexuality; Eurovision; camp subculture; Israeli cinema; television; musical genre; nostalgia

Introduction

In a significant scene in Eytan Fox's nostalgic musical drama *Gotta Have Heart* (1997) (in Hebrew—*Ba'al Ba'al Lev*, literally "a big-hearted husband"), Nohav, an effeminate youngster, who is openly gay, talks with his hometown friend Guri, a closeted gay man who had served in the Israeli Defense Forces in a combat unit, and now wishes to become an art student. Guri is afraid that he might not be accepted to Bezalel, a prestigious Israeli art academy. "You must be accepted. It's your dream," Nohav encourages him, but Guri is skeptical: "Do you believe that dreams suddenly come true, just because someone dares to dream? What a baby you are." Nohav (whose name in Hebrew means: "we shall love") refuses to adopt Guri's pessimistic approach. "Dreams do come true," he insists. "Your dream came true," he says to Guri. "I remember that when I learned in junior high school, you used to go jogging every day in order to get in shape," he continues, "and everyone said that your dream was to join the paratroopers' commando unit. Finally you made it." Nohav believes that their identities are not to be determined by the narrow-minded, limited scope of the conformist inhabitants of their small village, where all the houses are alike. Guri, however, tries to bring his counterpart down to earth: "It wasn't a dream. It was an aspiration. Besides," he adds, "I worked out for it. If you

worked out too, may be you could also join that commando unit." Nohav responds: "I have totally different dreams," and tells Guri of his own dream, his yearning to dance forever with his male partner. Indeed, Nohav does allow himself to dream and fantasize about gay romance, rather than getting into shape to become a combat soldier.

While Guri reflects conventional hetero-gender perceptions, the effeminate Nohav has made his own little intimate room into a sort of a shrine to an imaginative world of effeminate fantasies about Eurovision stars and extravagant divas. Guri has reshaped his body in the open, natural spaces, traditionally reserved, according to Fiske (1987) the codes of heteromasculinity and military fitness for the television and cinematic male, hence complying with the codes of heteromasculinity and military fitness. Nohav, in contrast, is analogized to the feminine televisual and cinematic heroine of the soap opera and the 1950s "chick flick," confined to the four walls of his private intimate room. The walls are decorated with posters of pop groups and his favorite female icons, with whom he identifies, rather than pin-up girls. These posters fuel his romantic fantasies of having a male lover, a husband to dance with in a glamorous spectacle.

The dialogue in this scene in *Gotta Have Heart* negotiates two masculinities: the militarist, physically fit one, and the arty, romantic, effeminate version that threatens traditional western and traditional Israeli gender categorizations. Considering the hostility toward effeminacy in modern culture, it is relatively unusual to encounter affirmative representations of femininity in men. Yet, as Bristow (2000) points out, there have been notable instances of celebrities and writers turning the effeminate man into an inspiring and powerful icon. In some circumstances, especially in rock and pop subcultures, effeminacy can form part of an acceptable masculinity, for example, David Bowie, Mick Jagger, Prince, Boy George, and Marilyn Manson. Part of their success, however, relies on distancing their effeminate mode of dress and make up from the stigma of male homosexuality. "What, then, gave rise to this widespread connection between effeminacy and male homosexuality?" Bristow wonders. He suggests that part of the answer lies in how some gay men have for hundreds of years developed effeminate mannerisms in order to distinguish their homosexuality. "Although homosexual subcultures sometimes express disdain toward effeminate men, it remains the case that gay male meeting places and friendship networks frequently celebrate effeminate gestures, turns of phrase, and styles of dressing" (Bristow 2000, pp. 268–269).

Sexual regimes and constituted gender identifications are primarily reflected in the formulation, reproduction, representation and consumption of womanliness and effeminacy (Padva 2006). Schacht (2002) notes that the dominant culture most typically views the feminine, especially its extreme manifestations (particularly drag shows) as the stigmatized "other," a burden, a handicap, harmful, and providing the basis for discrimination and a subordinate status. In direct contrast, he contends, gay men commandeer many of these same cultural notions of feminine embodiment and use them as the basis of personal prestige and power (Schacht 2002, p. 156).

Fox's *Gotta Have Heart* is an adaptation of his (male) partner Gal Uchovski's story and scripted by the latter, which focuses on four youngsters who are coming of age in a small, isolated country town. The four protagonists are surrounded by an Israeli idyllic and naive imagined past: orange groves, little houses with red roofs, meadows and birds' singing. They have to choose their path for the future and deal with their erotic identifications and emotions: Guri (Zack Berkman) is a young man who aspires to study art; Nohav (Uri Amanuti) is an effeminate and openly gay teenager who is considering joining the Israeli army; Mitzi (Osnat Hakim) is a young woman who dreams of becoming a famous

singer and yearns to have many children with a husband who has a kind, big heart; and Maritto (Sammy Huri) is a handsome masculine young man who in turn seduces both Mitzi and Guri.

This article focuses on counter-cultural negotiations of masculinities, femininities and effeminacy in *Gotta Have Heart*, first broadcast on an Israeli commercial television network (Channel Two), as part of a series of one-hour dramas titled: "Shorts about Love." The male characters in this particular musical romantic drama challenge the salient masculine stereotypes of the Israeli national, militaristic culture. Mitzi, the female protagonist plays a central role in this challenging and subverting of the Israeli masculine order, although she is not entirely freed of her confining roles within the patriarchal order and of her objectification by the male gaze either as a fag hag, a diva or a sexual object. As this article suggests, the retro aesthetics in Eytan Fox's romantic musical is inseparable from its critical representation of gender roles. This film negotiates specific cultural trends in the Israeli national culture and offers a powerful criticism of hetero-masculinity in the contemporary western media culture.

Musical Masculinities and Effeminate Soldiers

Eytan Fox's films, usually negotiating manhood and homosexuality, are contextualized in a national sphere whose trajectories and anxieties mobilize masculinities, geared at the accomplishment of (impossible) missions (Talmon 1998, 2001). Fox had already set out to defamiliarize Israeli masculinities in an earlier work, *After* (1990), in which he featured homoerotic tensions between a new recruit and his commanding officer in a paratroopers' unit. While Fox's *Shirat Ha'Sirena* (*Song of the Siren*) (1994) focuses on a straight romance between a female yuppie advertiser and a clumsy male food-engineer during the 1991 Gulf War in missile-targeted Tel Aviv, in his TV drama series *Florentin* (1997) he offers different versions of masculinities and (homo)sexualities: one is embodied by the straight-acting protagonist Tomer, a former combat soldier in the Lebanon war, and the other by the campy, extravagant gay man Iggie, who bakes cakes for a living and occasionally entertains his peers with effeminate gestures and drag performances. In his first international film *Yossi & Jagger* (2002), scripted by Avner Bernheimer, Fox presented a secret affair between two Israeli male combatants during the Lebanon war. The narrative ends with one of the lovers falling in battle. The film's resolution, which does not allow the man who survived to mourn his lover openly, offers a powerful criticism of the Israeli collective patterns of mourning and memorials. By these narratives of inter-male romance, locating his protagonists in the traditional and symbolic sites of military masculinity, Fox challenges the oppressive Israeli hetero-masculine codes from within, from inside out.

In his 2004 film *Walk on Water*, co-authored with Uchovsky, Fox replaces the army with the Israeli secret service as another archetypal arena of expressive Israeli masculinity. The film shows the futility of ritual violent routines, practiced by Israeli men in endless chase after Palestinian terrorists in a semi *film noir*-like maze. *Walk on Water* tells the story of an Israeli secret agent (Lior Ashkenazi) and his relationship with a German gay man, the grandson of a Nazi war criminal, whom the secret agent is seeking. This surprising friendship opens up the Israeli protagonist to new realms of masculinity. While the end of this mainstream film clarifies that these two men do *not* become lovers, the agent's redemption is manifested by his inability to exercise violence any longer, and by restoring his emotions so that he can now experience love with the German man's sister.

Fox's latest film *Ha'Buah* (*The Bubble*) (2006), scripted with Uchovsky (who also co-produced this film) focuses on a forbidden love between Noam, a young Israeli man and Ashraf, a handsome young Palestinian. Both men are entrapped in a national-social reality of conflict, occupation, and terror, and are torn between love and devotion to each other, on the one hand, and familial and national loyalties, on the other. The dramatic conflict peaks when the Palestinian's sister marries a member of a terror organization in the West Bank. After she is accidentally killed by Israeli soldiers in Nablus, the Palestinian gay protagonist becomes a victim of fanaticism and bigotry. In his own community, he is persecuted for being gay, while in Tel Aviv he is persecuted for being an illegal Palestinian resident who is often perceived as a security threat. The Palestinian's attempts to find a refuge in Tel Aviv's bohemian district, a sheltering "bubble" in a dangerous region, are doomed to fail, particularly after his sister's tragic death. In the final scene, the Palestinian arrives at a Tel Aviv shop (near a restaurant where he used to work as a waiter), with a bomb strapped to his body. His Israeli lover hugs him in greeting, and the camera moves in a circle around them—until the two protagonists explode. Like Romeo and Juliette, both lovers die together, paying with their lives for challenging not only the familial and social but also the national, ethnic, and sexual borders between two tribes. This overwhelming resolution offers a negative, devastating version of Nohav and Guri's dream-like dancing scene in *Gotta Have Heart*, in which they fantasize about a long-term relationship, growing older in one another's arms until they are two old lovers, to the sounds of Frieda Boccara's nostalgic Eurovision hit song "Un Jour, Un Enfant." While Nohav and Guri's dance is an optimistic sweet dream, the all-male dance scene at the climax of *The Bubble* is definitely a nightmare, a deterministic, fatal *danse macabre* that reflects Fox and Uchovsky's angst and despair over the tragic political situation in the Middle East. When this lethal dance ends—with the couple's explosion—the Tel Aviv bubble and its dreams of peace, solidarity, and equality are blown away too.

Fox's *Gotta Have Heart* negotiates several themes that he deals with in most of his films: the shift from collective commitment to the private, individualistic and intimate sphere, and the quest for a revision of contemporary codes of gay romance, coming out, masculinity, femininity, effeminacy, and sissyness in Israeli society and, particularly, in the local gay community. *Gotta Have Heart* differs from other Fox's films, however, in focusing on the utopian "softy" musical genre, the politics of camp subculture and Eurovision cult, and its postmodern aesthetics of Israeli memorabilia pastiched with the western gay subculture of Eurovision fandom and diva worship.

In *Gotta Have Heart*'s effeminate world, Maritto, one of the queer protagonists, is the ultimate stud with the name and the looks of a Latin lover: he is unshaven, attired in black outfit and leather-jacketed, much like *Grease*'s protagonist Danny Zuko or the television sitcom *Happy Days*' apparent young punk, the Fonz, both of whom were 1970s remakes of 1950s youth and rock-n-roll rebellion male icons. The virile, hirsute Maritto, however, wears feminine platform shoes and moves with the grace of a dancer, defying the strict boundaries between masculinity and femininity. Maritto is portrayed as the horny, dark male with a tough military history, who had seduced soldiers into his military tent.

He moves gracefully on the dancing floor, objectified by the yearning gaze of the female dance teacher, as well as of Mitzi and the other two male protagonists, Nohav and Guri. This local dance floor, where the coupling ritual takes place, serves as the film's most powerful site for criticizing sexualities, masculinities and femininities. It is in this symbolic dance hall that all the protagonists eventually meet for the final symbolic dance, in which each of them must either find their mate, or, not fitting in, be left behind.

The dance floor serves as the ritual setting for romance and coupling; it reflects upon the musical as a genre that ritually bases its plots on front-stage song-dance performances, and backstage romantic coupling. Notably, the musical genre is characterized by its emphasis on artifice and performance rather than on action and phallogocentric narrative motivation (Bergfelder 2000, p. 83). The musical's materials—music and dancing—are sensual, anarchistic and out of control, like the emotions backstage, yet domesticated and aesthetically under control during performance. Like the dance floor in *Gotta Have Heart* ("Everybody dance together, proudly," the dance teacher insists), the musical thematically and narratively constructs a collaborative process (Marshall & Stilwell 2000, p. 2), culminating in communal cohesion, in integrative utopian moments that transcend the limitations of the real space and time. Oppressive socio-political realities are bracketed out in favor of fantasy (Mackinnon 2000), offering to the limitations of the social reality an alternative space and spectacle of abundance, excess, spontaneity, and freedom. Fox adopts these potentials of the musical genre in order to construct and design an alternative vision of the Israeli social reality.

Fox foregrounds the film's politics of identity and identification by citing a song from the 1966 Israeli film *Shnei Kuni Leml* (*Two Kuni Lemls*) directed by Israel Becker. Guri, in a semi "drag" performance sings lip-synchs the Israeli-American actor-singer Mike Burstyn song "They say that I am not who I am," originally written by the Yiddish poet Abraham Goldfaden. *Two Kuni Lemls* tells the story of Max, an ultra-Orthodox Jew who is masqueraded as Kuni Leml, his identical (though limping, stuttering and blind in one eye) rich cousin from an upper class Jewish family. The confusion about the identical cousins' idently is interrelated to socio-economic constraints and the politics of match-making in the ultra-Orthodox Diasporic Jewish society. In Fox and Uchovsky's queer eyes, however, the Israeli ex-serviceman Guri's "drag" performance of this song, and his dancing gracefully according to the musical's generic conventions, reflect his hardship as a closeted young gay man. "They say that I am not who I am / therefore I'm terrified / because if I am not who I am / then who am I anyway?" he wonders.

Moreover, this "effeminate" performance and the quoted film *Two Kuni Lemls* constitute a reference to the world of the Jewish Diaspora in eastern Europe. This connotative layer is significant, because it evokes the pre-Zionist and pre-Israeli "effeminate" Jew who had been rejected in the nation building discourse and replaced by the "masculine" *Sabra*, the native Israeli (see Boyarin 1997; Gertz 2001; Talmon 1998, 2001).

The effeminate romantic fantasy is fused in this film together with the utopian integrative drives of the musical genre (Arroyo 2000; Feuer [1977] 1986; Schatz 1981). However, along with its utopian vision the musical genre brings a menacing threat of effeminacy. The performing, singing and dancing male of the musical, rather than the traditional male acting within a phallocentric narrative, challenges rigid masculine gender schemes. The very choice of the musical as a generic reference in Fox's film offers an alternative to the traditionally "masculine" genres in Israeli cinema (such as war films).

In its emphasis on the non-rigidity of gender and sexual identities, *Gotta Have Heart* is a sort of queer musical that corresponds to the New Queer Cinema in the US and western Europe of the early 1990s. Queer Cinema (e.g., *The Living End*, *Swoon*, *Edward II*, *Go Fish* and *Poison*) was distinguished by its unapologetic representation of "unattractive" queers, its original cinematic articulations of the AIDS pandemic and its postmodern play with signifiers, narrative forms and visualization of same-sex erotic relationships and desires (Doty 2000; Levy 1999; Rich 1992). Later, from the mid-1990s onward, a new sort of queer film emerged, often parodying mainstream dramas, including coming-out melodramas

(Padva 2004) and, particularly, musicals and musical dramas, such as *Trick*, *Jeffrey*, *The Fairy Who Didn't Want to Be a Fairy Anymore* (see Padva 2005), *The Broken Hearts Club*, *Billy's Hollywood Screen Kiss*, *Broadway Damage*, and *Latter Days*.

The Eurovision Cult and the Politics of Sissyness

Gotta Have Heart's opening scene is a nearly surrealistic spectacle: Nohav, bleached-hair and in a tight colorful shirt, teaches the townspeople an Israeli folk dance to the music of the British singer Sandy Shaw's "Puppet on a String" from the 1967 Eurovision Song Contest. These song contests, particularly admired by many gay male fans in Europe and Israel, have been televised in Europe since 1956 and on Israel's public Channel One since the 1970s, and have become a cult phenomenon in contemporary queer communities in both Europe and Israel since the 1990s. In Tel Aviv, a weekly Eurovision night currently takes place in "Evita," a popular gay bar. The gay fans celebrate the Eurovision's kitsch, glamour, overflowing romance, masquerade, and extravagant wardrobes (e.g., the Israeli transsexual Dana International who won the Eurovision contest in 1998).

The popularity of Eurovision hit songs among gay men has been criticized as "Sweety-sweety emotionless music used by drag queens only to satisfy the common gay taste" (Brosh 1998). However, this critique misses the camp potentiality of the Eurovision cult. As Nohav points out in *Gotta Have Heart*: "The Americans are so miserable—they've got everything: New York, McDonald's, Madonna, Clinton's daughter Chelsea. But what is it all worth if they don't have the Eurovision Song Contest?"

The Eurovision cult is strongly associated in this film with Nohav's flamboyant effeminacy. His musical taste reflects his identification with sissiness, stylishness, colorfulness, and extravagance, ignoring mainstream society's masculine imperatives. Correspondingly, in the significant scene in Nohav's campy room, the place is full of Eurovision memorabilia; and the song of Dana Rosemary Scallon (better known as Dana) "All Kinds of Everything" (which represented Ireland in the 1970 Eurovision Song Contest) is heard. Guri, the visitor, wears a drab gray sweatshirt and brown jacket, while Nohav is in a tight sweater patterned with rhombuses, revealing his smooth chest. The wall behind them is covered with black and white pictures of the Israeli singer Yizhar Cohen performing his hit song "Abanibi" and winning the 1978 Eurovision Song Contest, and colorful pictures of the Eurovision winning Swedish group ABBA as well as covers of other Eurovision albums. Nohav tells Guri that his mother had performed with Cohen's group and that he has been an avid fan of these song contests for years. Nohav adds that he had been ridiculed at school for being a Eurovision fan, but he is defiant and assertive in his preferences, and tells Guri that he is going to leave their small town anyway. Guri's assertion (in a previous scene) that he also likes the Eurovision songs can be interpreted as an encoded confession that he, like Nohav, is gay too.

For Guri, however, Nohav symbolizes that particular sort of gayness with which he has most misidentified himself. Simpson (2001) comments on the prevalent sissyphobia outside and, particularly, inside the gay community: "Fem boys are simply bad news. And bad luck. They may not be able to catch, but their sissiness is something that other boys might. They represent the most fundamental failure of masculinity—an inability to separate from Mom. A sissy is, by definition, a momma's boy" (Simpson 2001, p. ix) and he adds: "Hence, the persecution of sissies is a necessary inducement to other boys not to give up their own

struggle toward manhood by showing them what happens to those who chose who fail" (ibid).

While Nohav fantasizes about a romantic relationship with a male lover, dancing with his lover to the sounds of the Israeli diva of the 1950s, Hannah Aharoni's nostalgic Hebrew song "Etz Ha'Rimon" ("The Pomegranate Tree") and the French Eurovision singer Frida Boccara's "Un Jour, Un Enfant," living with his same-sex partner happily ever after, Guri's perception of Nohav's gayness is much more pessimistic. He tells Nohav that he must accept the fact that he is different and will never get married or have children. "At most, you will experience daily miracles," he whispers, "like a match lit by some guy in the darkness at the most unexpected moment." Before Guri leaves the room he apologizes for having ignored Nohav when he saw him in a Tel Aviv gay club. "It was the first time I'd gone to such a club on my own . . . I'm sorry. It was foolish to act like I did." This admission of his visit to a (probably) gay club was anticipated by his earlier confession to liking Eurovision song contests.

Lemish (2004), in her study of the popularity of the Eurovision Song Contest specifically among Israeli gay men, contends that the contest's fans are connected by their gay identity, but, at the same time, they are also proud (or shameful) Israelis. Although some of Lemish's interviewees seem to be struggling against attempts to associate homosexuality with femininity, they also applaud the transsexual Dana International and have claimed her as their own. Moreover, "they put down the musical taste of 'serious' uncritical Eurovision fans yet adore that same music as glorified camp" (Lemish 2004, p. 60). In particular, Lemish (2004, p. 54) specifies *Gotta Have Heart* as a campy television drama that was often referred to by her Israeli gay interviewees with great sympathy and identification.

Performative Effeminacy and Camp Subculture

Camp is defined in the *Oxford Dictionary* (1996) as "affected, theatrically exaggerated; effeminate; homosexual." Camp was defined by Susan Sontag in "Notes on Camp" as a vision of the world in terms of style—but a particular kind of style:

> It is the love of the exaggerated, the "off", of things-being-what-they-are-not . . . The androgyne is certainly one of the great images of Camp sensibility . . . What is most beautiful in virile men is something feminine; what is most beautiful in feminine women is something masculine. ([1964] 1999, p. 56)

Jack Babuscio identified camp with queer subculture based on *gay* sensibility as a

> creative energy reflecting a consciousness that is different from the mainstream; a heightened awareness of certain human complications of feeling that spring from the fact of social oppression; in short, a perception of the world which is colored, shaped, directed, and defined by the fact of one's gayness. ([1978] 1999, pp. 117–118).

Queer theorists emphasize the political effect of camp, as a gay sensibility and counter-cultural resistance (Dollimore 1991; Dyer 1976; King 1994; Kleinhans 1994; Meyer 1994). Camp uses its "deviancy" in contesting the oppressive social order, ruled by hetero-dominance, as a momentum of innovation and inspiration. Its "deviant" visibility, since its earliest expressions, has been a *political* one as an essential component of queer counter-praxis. This deviation from the social and sexual consensus is also political because camp reflects an aesthetic and ethical refusal to be visually "normalized" or silenced by dominance (Padva 2000).

Gotta Have Heart's excessive camp aesthetics challenges the social and cultural paradigms of masculinity. Nohav, in particular, never tries to camouflage his otherness. "Effeminacy" in dress and deportment—a revolt against prescribed masculinity—and homosexuality were conflated in both the popular imagination and the gay community as early as the birth of the "dandy"—a man concerned almost entirely with style and public presentation in the early nineteenth century (Bronski 1998). As mainstream images of heterosexual masculinity changed during the twentieth century, so too did gay men's images of themselves. Michael Bronski suggests gay men, told by mainstream culture they were less than "real men," continually reinvented themselves:

> Denied access to traditional gender identity, they improvised and imagined new gender possibilities. Through style, imagination, and wit, gay male culture has always sought new ways of presentation. These shifting styles and shapes are responses to mainstream culture; they are often critiques, and sometimes parodies. (1998, p. 99)

In Fox and Uchovsky's revision of Israeli masculinities in *Gotta Have Heart*, Guri, the allegedly straight guy and combat unit fighter, is both attracted to the effeminate Nohav and, at the same time, threatened by him. Nohav's eccentric, campy gayness mirrors Guri's repressed homosexuality. In contrast, Maritto's tough masculinity does not intimidate Guri. Not only does Maritto not "look" queer, but he also appears to be a chauvinist masculine womanizer, managing to hide his bi-sexuality under a hyper-masculine cover. In visualizing the desire between Maritto the hyper-masculine stud, and Guri, the masculine former combat soldier, Fox deconstructs the binary polarities typical of the hetero-normative regime: masculinity-femininity, top-bottom, hetero- and homo- sexualities.

Gender, as Butler (1990) notes, is a performative effect of reiterative acts which are neither natural nor optional. Dyer (1993) maintains that the gay macho, in particular, unlike the straight macho, performs a self-conscious, reflexive masculinity as a signifying performance or a set of signs. It is a theatrical masculinity, turning gender into a performative fiction. Raz Yosef (2004) contends that the western objectification of Meritto, the dark, muscular bisexual oriental stud in *Gotta Have Heart* as everyone's object of desire, leaves no space for the institution of oriental gay identity. Alternatively, the Israeli gay and lesbian monthly magazine *Ha'Zman Ha'Varod* (*The Pink Time*) has emphasized Maritto's queerness behind his masculine and arrogant appearance:

> This male who performs as the Israeli straight macho is penetrated by the young 'nerd' in the most daring scene ever broadcast on the Israeli television screen. When the sexual act is over, Guri's initiation is complete, the glorification of machismo fades away, and all Guri now desires is to win the kind, tolerant, tender love of Nohav the *okh'tch*.

(The term *Okh'tch*—created and reproduced within the Israeli gay community's politics of sissiness and sissyphobia—is a nickname for an effeminate gay man in the Israeli gay community itself, possibly derived from *akhotti*, the Hebrew for "my sister".)

Ba'al Ba'al Lev equally represents Maritto, Guri and Nohav's masculinities and homosexualities. The three male protagonists embody different degrees of conformity and transgression of the heteromasculine codes. Notably, they mediate a queer discussion of gender and sexual identification to wide mainstream audiences which are rarely exposed to queer perspectives and alternative erotic identifications.

Subversive Dreams of an Agonized Fag Hag

In the liminal space of *Gotta Have Heart*, all options seem to be open for the four protagonists, all of whom yearn for love: The effeminate youngster Nohav fantasizes about a romantic relationship with Guri, the former combat soldier and a future art student; the young man Guri hopes to be accepted to the Art Academy, and dreams of loving and being loved by a man; Maritto hopes to move to Tel Aviv and experience what the big city can offer to him; and Mitzi, the young woman with a name typical of a pet cat, is Guri's "fag hag," who longs for a passionate lover who will light her fire at nights and break her heart.

According to Button (2000), the term "fag hag" dates back to the late 1960s in the USA, dismissively directed at women who were considered not attractive enough to hang around with "real men." But like so many derogatory terms, it was reclaimed in the 1990s as a stereotypic term to be worn with pride. Gay men introduced their female friends to a world free from sexual harassment by men, where the emphasis was on fun and where more often than not they would find themselves the center of flattering and unthreatening attention. Hence, "Fag haggery was in fashion" (Button 2000, p. 46). Further, Button remarks that a *frisson* of sexual flirtation, or some kind of sexual dynamics, does in fact often occur between gay men and straight women when they first meet. As Stephen Maddison points out:

> If hags and fags are "sisters," then we are indeed queer ones. The sistership we have the potential to share by virtue of our mutual oppression within hetero-patriarchal regimes is "queered" as a function of the way our identities are circumscribed by the homosocial narratives that uphold those regimes. (2000, p. 194)

In contrast, Thompson (2004) suggests that fag-haggery has the "potential" to challenge hetero-patriarchy. She notes that what defines the fag hag is not only what she is identified as—usually a straight woman—but, rather, and more importantly, who she identifies with—namely, gay men. A new identity politics, one modeled on fag hag identification, would put primary value on the possibilities of *identification* as an active, plural, sometimes self-conflicting process, rather than on *identity* proper. Thompson believes that such radical politics of identification could lead to a reconceptualization of community and of family (Thompson 2004, p. 45).

Mitzi hopes for a good husband with "good genes" who will help her—as she cynically explains—to produce "many healthy brave soldiers." Although she knows about Guri's closeted (homo)sexuality and his longing for a male partner, she is willing to settle and have children with him, if she does not find a husband by the age of 35. Apparently, she complies with the patriarchal dictates that female protagonists of romantic dramas conventionally yearn to obey, get married, and have children that will ensure social regeneration through coupling (Rubinfeld 2001).

Thus, at first glance, this film inscribes a stereotypical, reactionary feminine role on its female protagonist. Whereas the male protagonists are free to choose their dance partners, Mitzi has to wait passively to be chosen, and is not herself free to choose. Whereas they can rebel against their traditional male or macho roles and aspirations, she is confined to her conservative position that maintains the traditional agenda, in which her "duty" is to bear healthy children that will become good soldiers in the Israeli army. Apparently, she succumbs both to the patriarchal order that subjects her to self-realization in marriage and reproduction, and to the militarist national agenda. However, Mitzi's conservative statements regarding marital and parental duties can also be seen in a different light.

The social imperatives to get a husband and raise children are expressed by her in an ironic manner in what might be perceived as an elaborate charade that must be played out.

This irony is expressed particularly in her campy drag performance of the film's theme song, the nostalgic Hebrew song "Ba'al Ba'al Lev" (meaning in Hebrew: "big-hearted husband") by Moshe Sakhar, quoted from *Two Kuni Lemls* (1966). In a central episode in the latter film, the future bride of Kuni Leml, a young ultra-Orthodox Jewish woman, sings about her wishing for a kind and generous husband, who will buy her stiletto shoes, a fancy dress, and help her become the object of her girlfriends' envy. Mitzi sings lip-synchs to Edna Goren, the original female singer's voice, with excessive gesturing and traditional, nostalgic East-European-Jewish folk dancing of the townspeople around her. This performance reflects Mitzi's awareness of her "puppet-on-a-string" position, creating a subversive perspective on traditional gender roles in the bourgeois society. In a campy manner, Mitzi reflects an ironic awareness of her performativity, posing *as if* she were a passive woman waiting for Prince Charming. From this perspective, she is "entrapped" within the patriarchal order as much as her gay male counterparts. Her reflexive politics of resistance, however, illuminates both a postmodern aesthetics that challenges gender boundaries, and a post-masculinist Israeli cultural agenda that revises traditional cultural norms, which shift from the national, hegemonic sphere to the private, personal sphere of self-realization and romantic fulfillment.

Further, Mitzi's mediated "despair," her excessive, theatrical yearning for a husband resembles the excess of Bree's character in the American television series *Desperate Housewives*. The desperate housewife Bree adopts upper-class, pseudo-British aristocratic mannerisms mixed with traditional nostalgic values of 1950s America. Her grotesque playing out of her marital and parental duties ridicules and subverts the hegemonic codes of visibility and behavior in contemporary American suburbia (see Richardson 2006).

Hybrid Memorabilia and Effeminate "Pastness"

The fictional world of *Gotta Have Heart* represents an optimistic vision of a remade, or revised, Israeli past, with the cheerful folk-dancing floor, the colorful (inspired by 1950s America) hot dog and ice-cream stands in warm yellows and reds. It is a world of retro and nostalgic imageries, that harmonically hybridizes a mythical Israeli cultural past, the American 1950s pop and rock culture connotative realm, and the sub-cultural gay cult of the Eurovision past, which resists the masculinist and heteronormative cultural order.

The film is characterized by colorful visual memorabilia of the 1950s and 1970s: Israeli commercials from the 1950s that "Israelize" and domesticate brands such as "Hobby" soft drinks, or "Tip Top" in cola and orange flavors; huge art prints in Andy Warhol style of Israeli female singers/divas from the 1950s, such as Hanna Ahroni (who brought Israeli folk songs to the *Ed Sullivan Show*), Yaffa Yarkoni and Shoshana Damari, as well as the 1960s Eurovision French singer Frida Boccara. The 1950s and 1960s are also reflected in Sigal Arad's (the art director) designs for this film, mostly the pastel-colored and warm yellow sets, and the costumes that signify the naivety of past times through the flowery, polka-dotted or checked frocks and embroidered blouses.

By incorporating the conventions of the Hollywood musical genre into an Israeli gay locale, *Gotta Have Heart* creates a hybrid realm in-between center and margins. The distinction between the two is contested, as images rooted in Tel Aviv's bohemian districts, associated in the Israeli media with urban yuppies, bohemian inhabitants and the

gay community, merge with images that belong to the traditional, rural Israel. The merging of these two worlds—the urban, queer subculture and the traditional-rural Israeli folk culture has never seemed so natural, authentic, and sensual.

Nohav fantasizes about a joint concert by the Israeli female singer Hanna Aharoni and the French singer Frida Boccara. Both artists are an organic part of the same visual past. In this multi-layered past, appropriated into the utopian and naive fantasy land of this colorful musical, the huge diva icons that loom over the *mise en scène* function as a common denominator; they suture two distinct decades, cultures, and cultural agendas. Whereas the Israeli singers Hannah Aharoni and Yaffa Yarkoni evoke the Israeli countryside of the 1950s: collectivist, ascetic, hard-working farmers and their social and national collective endeavors and communal cohesion. The French singer Frida Boccara evokes the Eurovision culture, which prioritizes fun, fashion and glamour, thus symbolizing the private sphere, and its material pleasures.

Jameson (1991) maintains that in postmodernism, intertextuality functions as a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect and as the operator of the connotations of "pastness," creating a pseudo-historical depth. Through visual citations and intertextual references, a history of aesthetic styles displaces "real" history (Jameson 1991, p. 20). The attempt of American nostalgia films to appropriate a missing past, for example in *American Graffiti* (1973) or *Body Heat* (1981), the colonization of the immediate past, and the preference in American culture for films that rely on quotation (of past versions, other remakes) is viewed by Jameson as a symptom of a lost sense of historicity. He sees forms of nostalgia and retro manifested in American cinema in films such as *Star Wars* (1977) and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981). These films, according to Creed (1994, p. 373), reinvent the 1930s and the 1950s adventure serials awash with "alien villains, true American heroes and heroines in distress."

Creed argues that the intensely polarized gender roles of the nostalgic adventure serial, with its valiant heroes and distressed heroines, invoke a desire to relive a "time" when gender roles were clearly defined, stable, and predictable (1994, p. 373). Hence, American nostalgia films satisfy a desire to relive an imaginary order in which gender identity was secured, an imaginary order that validated the social contract established by the myth of romantic love. Furthermore, "the 'missing past' that lies at the heart of these films is that which once validated the paternal signifier" (Creed 1994, p. 473). It is the failure of the paternal figure and the power of the phallic mother from the remade *film noir* that the nostalgia films try to rewrite in their revision of the past.

Differing from the latter American films, the Israeli TV musical *Gotta Have Heart* radically yields both a critical remake of the past and an alternative masculine order that challenges the Israeli collective agenda. The retro imagery of *Gotta Have Heart* rewrites Israeli history and collective identity and challenges its sexual hierarchies. The utopian vision of the film reflects an alternative effeminate collective identity, challenging the hegemonic, masculinistic and militaristic order. In its attempt to escape traditional, nationalist and masculinist patterns, *Gotta Have Heart* demonstrates the new trends in Israeli culture of the late 1990s, to turn away from the national demanding battlefield to the more private, familial sphere.

The divas in this film, however, manifest passivity, talking or singing about their desperate need for a male partner, feeling like "puppets on a string." While the gay men in the film have the possibility to realize an alternative vision of masculinity and symbolize an alternative national agenda, the heroine Mitzi apparently becomes a realization of Nohav's

fantasized and objectified divas, colored by blue lights, like a typical revered female star (Haskell 1978), trapped in her fetishizing frame. Her reflexive performance of the theme song "Big-hearted husband," however, in an excessive, flamboyant campy "drag" show criticizes such patriarchal subject-positioning.

Gotta Have Heart creates a synthetic utopian vision, in which the Israeli repertoire of past memorabilia, artifacts and accessories becomes "queerified," or, rather, a queer repertory of images and icons becomes "Israelized." In this unique integration of classic Israeli iconography and camp aesthetics, the filmmaker creates innovative interrelations between past, present and future. As a cultural product of contemporary Israeli visual media, *Gotta Have Heart* uses the power of the musical genre to challenge conventional conceptualizations of masculinity and sexuality and to criticize the national agenda concerning war and peace, desperate housewives, and effeminate husbands.

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