CHRONOLOGY AND IDEOLOGY

TEMPORAL STRUCTURING IN ISRAELI HISTORICAL DOCUMENTARY SERIES

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Abstract: This paper examines two major Israeli historical documentary television series, *Pillar of Fire*, produced in the 1970's, and *Revival*, produced in the 1990's. The series deal with the Zionist enterprise and its realization. The research applies Gerard Genette's central narratological typology to the series' temporal structures, through the categories of Order, Duration and Frequency. The findings show that while *Pillar of Fire's* classic, linear, historicist structure serves its celebration of the Zionist narrative, *Revival* employs a unique, complex, multi-dimensional structure, which enables its historical multi-vocality, and supports its critical presentation of the cyclical Arab-Israeli Conflict and its revisionism of traditional Israeli history.

Keywords: Israel, television history, Pillar of Fire, Revival, documentary, series

1 Introduction

This paper examines the part played by temporal structuring in forming the ideology of two major Israeli historical documentary television series. In the history of Israeli television, both series are mythological. Both were produced and broadcast by Israel's semi-official **Channel One,** *Pillar of Fire* in the late 1970s, and *Revival* in the 1990s.

Pillar of Fire covers the period of 1896-1948, from the beginning of political Zionism to the founding of the State of Israel. It was produced at the apex of Israel's most agonizing years, following the traumatic Yom Kippur War and sense of growing international isolation, which culminated in the 1975 UN Resolution that "Zionism is a form of racism". Its creators' expressed goal was to explain and justify the Zionist ethos and celebrate the Zionist enterprise. When it was first broadcast in 1981 it earned a 89% (!) rating (high even when considering that there was only one channel).

Revival was produced in advance of the state's jubilee celebration in 1998, when it was first broadcast. In an era of multi-channel television it still earned a 30% rating. Despite the time gap between them, *Revival* was a continuation of *Pillar of Fire* in that it sought to encompass the first 50 years of Israel. It covers the period from the 30s, the prologue to the 1948 War, until the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin in 1995, and the loss of hope for further development of the Oslo peace process. Its creators' declared wish was to express the state's multi-vocality and present hitherto silenced counter-narratives.

Fig. 1-2. Pillar of Fire and Revival front cover. Source: Israel Broadcast Authority website

While *Revival* deals almost exclusively with events in Israel, *Pillar of Fire* dedicates a considerable part of its historic review to world events, particularly European. A central subject is Jewish existence in Europe. Jewish communities and way of life in Russia, Poland and Germany are described extensively, prior, during and right after the Holocaust. Major events in European history are described: the Russian 1905 and 1917 revolutions, Word War I and the Conventions that followed it, pre-Hitler Germany and his ascent to power, World War II and its major battles. Hundreds of film excerpts, the result of unprecedented, meticulous research projects in European archives, depict life in Europe in the last quarter of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th.

Research on Israeli television and memory is very limited. The periodical *Israel,* for example, published in 2008 a special issue dedicated to History and Memory in Israeli Cinema; no such publication is available on the role of television in shaping national memory. Zandberg[1] researched the shaping of collective memory through daily newspapers. Meyers, Neiger and Zandberg[2] explored the production processes in the electronic media, that shape Holocaust Memorial Day broadcasts. Bourdon and Kligler-Vilenchik[3] researched the connection between television and memories not through texts but through the memories of forty viewers. They suggest that the formation of memory is tightly intertwined with television viewing, and find that even with commercialized, fragmented television, Jewish-Israeli viewers share a strong sense of common memories and a collective past. Ben-Amos and Bourdon[4] researched the programme *Such a Life* (Israeli equivalent of *This Is Your Life*), which was televised on Israel Broadcast Authority Channel One between 1972-2001. They describe how this program made a conscious effort to contribute to the formation of national memory, and how it succeeded in promoting and diffusing the Zionist view of the "life story" of Israel through its major contemporary heroes – something which occurs, to a certain extent, in the series *Pillar of Fire*.

1 Eyal Zandberg, 'The Right to Tell the (Right) Story: Journalism Authority and Memory', *Media, Culture and Society* 2010, 32(1), p. 5-24

2 Oren Meyers, Motti Neiger & Eyal Zandberg, 'Structuring the Sacred: Media Professionalism and the Production of Mediated Holocaust Memory', *The Communication Review* 2011, 14(2), p. 123-144

3 Jerome Bourdon & Neta Kligler-Vilenchik, 'Together, Nevertheless? Television Memories in Mainstream Jewish Israel', *European Journal of Communication* 2011, 26(1), p. 33-47

4 Avner Ben-Amos & Jerome Bourdon, 'Old Heroes in a New Medium : The Television Program *Such a Life* and the Formation of Israeli Collective Memory', *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* n.s. 2011, 17(3), 156-181

2 Historiography And Narratological Analysis Of Time

A historical documentary series is essentially a historiographic text. As such it may seem surprising that it has so much in common with literary texts and fiction films, particularly, from the point of interest of this article, in its construction of the element of Time. Temporal structuring in a text is a central category of Narratology, which examines the relationship between the *story* (*fabula)*, events in their chronological order, and the *text (syuzhet),* the structured representation which narrates them. Literary theorists like Genette[5] and Rimmon-Kenan[6] analyze and demonstrate in detail how authors manipulate temporal structure in order to enhance the rhetoric and ideological aims of their texts. In the writings of White[7] this practice is extensively attributed also to historiographic texts. White (1974) claims that the explanatory function of historiography is derived from temporal reconstruction, rather than from adhering to "naïve" chronology. He sees no difference in this respect between literature and history. Zerubavel[8] shares his view and enumerates a variety of narratological strategies, which reshape Time according to the historiographer's point of view. "Commemorative Time" is her term for the amount of time allotted to a period or event according to an ideological standpoint. Manipulation of Time is determined also by changing trends in historical writing. Traditional historiography is historicist, relating past events as a linear, one-directional, basically chronological process. The "New History", on the other hand, as described for example by Burke,[9] employs a Time structure which serves its relativism and its interest in investigating structures and processes, rather than relating a chain of cause-effect events. Accordingly, the new historical narrative, also described by Burke,[10] shapes the Time element so that it expresses a complex, multi-facet reality. It is characterized also by crossing the barriers between the past and the present.

It is interesting to observe the parallelism between these new historiographic trends and new concepts of the historical film. In a volume edited by Sobchack[11] the profile of the "new historical film" is depicted. It is characterized by post-modern construction (fragmentation, collage, lack of closure), invention mingling with facts, reflexivity, avoidance of the classic, realistic, logical, linear narrative. A major researcher in this area, Robert Rosenstone,[12] claims that for a film to better fulfill its task as a 'mediator' of history, it has to abandon the classic Time structure of beginning-middle-end and cause-effect, in favour of a more complex pattern, allowing the expression of multiple perspectives, as well as a continuous dialectic of past and present. Such structure enables, he says, true historical revisionism. Heinen and Deines[13] discuss the German series *Heimat* as such an example of a complex historical reconstruction, based on these new concepts of narrative. Edgerton,[14] researching television histories, claims that they should come from the present's perspectives and needs if they wish to create "a usable past", i.e. a past that is relevant and useful for the present.

3 Genette's Typology Of 'Tense'

Genette[15] has developed a central narratological typology, of which Tense is a major category. 'Tense' deals with the temporal relations between *story* and *text*, within the framework of three sub-categories: Order, Duration and Frequency. Altogether it practically covers all kinds of manipulation that authors can execute, so as to serve their ideological goals.

5 Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse,* Blackwell, 1980; *Narrative Discourse Revisited,* Cornell University Press, 1988

6 Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics,* Methuen, 1983

7 Hayden White, 'The Historical Text as a Literary Artifact', *Clio,* 3(3), 1974, p. 277-303

8 Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition,* Chicago University Press, 1995

9 Peter Burke, 'Overture: The New History, Its Past and Its Future', in Peter Burke, eds., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing,* Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992, p.1-23

10 Peter Burke, ' History of Events and the Revival of Narrative', in Peter Burke, eds., *New perspectives on Historical Writing,* Pennsylvania State University, 1992, p. 233-248

11 Vivian Sobchack, eds., *The Persistence of History,* Routledge, 1996

12 Robert Rosenstone, 'The Future of the Past: Film and the Beginning of Post-Modern History', in Vivian Sobchack, ed., *The Persistence of History,* Routledge, 1996, p. 201-218

13 S. Heinen & S. Deines, ' History and Biography in *Die Zweite Heimat*: Narrative Strategies to represent the Past', in G. Allrath & M. Gymnich, eds., *Narrative Strategies in Television Series,* Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p 191-210

14 G. Edgerton, 'Introduction: Television as Historian', in G. Edgerton and P. Rollins, eds., *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age,* Kentucky University Press, 2001, p. 1-16

15 Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse,* Blackwell, 1980; *Narrative Discourse Revisited,* Cornell University Press, 1988

Order examines the chronology of events against the order of their appearance in the text. When "naïve" chronology is broken the reason has to be sought and defined: is it done, for example, so as to create an impression of causal relationships between events where none exists? Connection between events can be created or strengthened also by "prolepses" (cinematic flashforward) and "analepses" (flashback) or by relating them simultaneously. The end of an event may be separated from it and told later, if it does not suit the ideological impact the author seeks.

Duration has to do with the "rhythm" of events as well as the "space" they are allowed. The authors choose whether to accelerate or slow-down the story. They can summarize an event, i.e. shrink the descriptive time allotted to it, thus accelerating, or, contrarily, slow it down, i.e. extend its description, according to the importance they attach to it. Of course, they can choose to omit an event from the narrative altogether.

Frequency examines the ratio between the number of times an event takes place and the number of times it is mentioned in the text. The most common case is one representation of a specific event. Repeated descriptions of such an event can emphasize its importance, express various points of view or just serve the ideological unity of the text.

Genette's typology, though formulated on the basis of literary texts, has been adapted extensively to historiography and also to film (Stam et al.[16]) and television (Kozloff[17]). This article deals with a special televisual historiographical text: the documentary series. Not much research has been done on this specific genre; adjacent genres, such as the television historic-documentary film, docu-drama or historically based fictional series have been researched more extensively.

The serial narrative is unique in that it enables the relation of a series of historic simultaneous events, in a way closer to the true complex nature of historical reality than the ordinary linear narrative. The series of episodes, autonomous yet connected, can cope successfully with the parallel sequences of history. Therefore, it seems that an additional category is needed here, which may be named *'thickening'* i.e. referring to a period or event in more than one episode. It is a sub-category of Order as it disrupts chronology by creating overlapping segments. It also affects Duration by extending the time allotted to periods or events, and Frequency as well through the function of repetition. By employing 'thickening', creators of historical documentary series can linger on a specific period or event, presenting it from various angles, and emphasizing its context and connections to other parallel events.

4 'Order' In Pillar Of Fire And Revival

The series *Pillar of Fire* is chronological and diachronic, structured according to the historical order of past events. This can be easily observed even at a first glance in chart 1,[18] which presents its temporal structure. In this chart, the series' 19 episodes are placed in order, in blocks matching the period they 'cover' on the Time axis on the right. It is clear that most episodes are tightly connected in a chain, and the temporal ending point of one episode is usually the starting point of the next.

Chart 1. *Pillar Of Fire*.

One can discern two cases of deviation from chronology in the above chart. The first and very obvious one has to do with the period of time between the breaking out of the first World War, 1914, and the mid 1920's. Overlapping 'coverage' of these years can be seen in episodes 1-5. Examination of the episodes' content reveals that the period is described from various angles: the conquest of Palestine by the British as an opportunity for the Zionist Movement (episode 1); the birth of Arab-Palestinian nationality (episode 2); revolutionary Socialism in Russia and Liberalism and Assimilation in Germany as false attractions to Diaspora Jewry (episode 3); civil war and pogroms (organized

16 Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne & Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics,* Routledge, 1992

17 Sara Kozloff, 'Narrative Theory and Television', in Robert Allen, ed., *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled (2nd ed.),* University of North Carolina Press, 1992, p. 67-100

18 Only the parts that are relevant to the topic of this article have been translated in the charts presented here. Pillar of Fire chart should read from right to left, and Revival chart from left to right.

massacres) in Russia as incentives to the Third Aliya (Jewish immigration wave) to Palestine (episode 4); persecution of Polish Jews resulting in the Fourth Aliya (episode 5). This 'thickening' of the period, describing it through changing locations and contexts (though not from differing ideological standpoints), emphasizes its importance in the series' narrative. In the overarching serial plot this period is the transforming point: the old order is changing, new conditions are created and new opportunities are opened for the Zionist enterprise.

The second obvious disruption of chronology concerns the Holocaust. Episodes 12 and 13, which are dedicated to it, have the years 1941-1943 included in their titles, thus making them unique among the other chapters. This also indicates that these two episodes compose one unit, overlap in parts and provide between them an extensive treatment of the period. The Holocaust is so emphasized as that outstanding, darkest, lowest period in the story of the Jewish people. Its centrality in the process is strengthened also by the many "flashforwards" prophesying it, starting from episode 3, which laments the fact that Jews were blind to the danger, and refused to respond to the call and immigrate to Palestine in the 1920's, while they still could. The Holocaust thus takes on the major role assigned to it in the Zionist narrative: an ultimate expression of the Anti-Semitism dominating Jewish life in the Diaspora, a proof that justifies Zionist total negation of the Diaspora, as well as the turning point in the long journey towards the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.

Revival exhibits a totally different temporal structure, also immediately apparent by glancing at the chart (see chart 2). The absence of linear chronology is obvious, as well as the prominence of parallel, overlapping periods in most episodes. Indeed *Revival* is structured very differently from *Pillar of Fire,* and according to a much more complex principle. Basically the series is chronological: it opens with a Prologue situated in the 1930's, presenting the crucial period preceding the War of Independence and the Declaration of the State of Israel in 1948. It ends in 1996, just after the murder of Prime Minister Rabin. But inside this 60-year period of time the series progresses on two different axes: one is chronological, dealing with the continuous Israeli-Arab Conflict, while the other is thematic, dedicated to socio-cultural phenomena and processes in the young State.

Chart 2. *Revival*

In the Conflict axis (see chart 2) three central chronological sequences are apparent: The War of Independence (episodes 2 and 3), the Six Day War leading to the Kippur War (episodes 8-10) and the closing sequence, describing the Intifada (the first Palestinian uprising of 1987-8) and the failure of the Oslo peace initiative (episodes 21 and 22). This, and the additional episodes dealing with the Conflict (5, 13, 16), define it as an enveloping, central essence of Israeli existence. It is clearly seen that more than half of the series' episodes go back in time to 1948-1949, thus pointing to the major place this period plays in Israeli history, and its 'responsibility' as an establishing period for much that is going on in the present, politically and socially.

Episodes of the thematic axis are interwoven between the Conflict episodes, in the suitable place. Thus, for example, episode 4, dealing with the massive Aliya (immigration to Israel) just after the establishment of the State, is placed between the War of Independence episodes (2 and 3) and the 1956 Sinai War (5). This overall structure expresses the ideological standpoint of the creators: the central Arab-Israeli Conflict is in constant interaction with socio-cultural developments in the country. Its events have shaped those processes and were also influenced by them. This will go on as long as the Conflict continues.

5 'Duration' In Pillar Of Fire And Revival

Pillar of Fire extends descriptions of periods or events it considers ideologically important, as is so obvious in the case of the Holocaust described above. Its adherence to the Zionist narrative affects time-allotment decisions along the series. We find, for example, that events like the establishment of new Jewish settlements or heroic defence of them against Arab attacks are described at length, including personal testimonies, archive films, glorifying music in the background etc. An example is the battle of Mishmar Ha'Emek (episode 19, min. 14:20-19:47). An event like the Dir-Yassin massacre, on the other hand, where Jewish forces killed Arab inhabitants of this small village during the

battle of Jerusalem, receives very little 'commemorative time' (episode 19, min. 19:48-20:26). It is reported succinctly and without any illustrations except newspaper headlines, as it damages the image of the 'purity of arms' of the Jewish army.

Pillar of Fire, episode 19

Looking again at chart 1, one can discern a clear process of *deceleration* – an obvious slow-down of the series as it progresses towards its end. The expository first episode summarizes a long period of about 35 years. The initial few episodes are also condensed, but as the series moves on the periods of time covered in each episode shorten, and the two final chapters cover between them a period of less than half a year. The final episode describes extensively the weeks around the Declaration of the State, while the ceremony itself is presented in an extensive sequence (episode 19 - min. 44:22-49:25). At the end it seems that the progress of time comes to a standstill, as the goal of the long journey towards a Jewish State is achieved. It is evident that the final stage of the Zionist struggle, i.e. the three crucial years following the end of World War II in 1945 and the establishment of the State in 1948, is of the utmost importance, and is described in detail over the 5-6 final episodes.

In *Revival* no such unequivocal serial process is discerned. It is obvious, though, that the episodes of the Conflict axis are the slowest and most stretched-out in the series. They cover the shortest periods of time in comparison with the socio-cultural thematic episodes. This indicates again the centrality of the Conflict in the series. The most 'thickened' period is that of the establishment of the State, i.e. 1948 and around it; it is repeatedly described in about half of the series' episodes. Content analysis shows no adherence to the master Zionist narrative, and a prominent critical approach. This can explain the exact opposite choices of 'duration' with regard to certain events, when compared to *Pillar of Fire.* In the cases mentioned above, for example, we find that the battle of Mishmar- Ha'Emek is reported here dryly in a few sentences (episode 2, min. 41:58-43:14), while the event of Dir-Yassin is elaborated on (episode 2, min. 40:23-41:57), showing the place itself as well as presenting testimonies of both an Arab refugee and an Israeli fighter.

Revival, episode 2

6 'Frequency' In Pillar Of Fire And Revival

20 cases of 'repetitive events', i.e. an event that is described more than once, are found in *Pillar of Fire.* As it employs the classic serial structure, *Pillar of Fire* maintains high continuity between episodes by, among other techniques, using "conjunctive events", which link the closure of one episode to the beginning of the next. Thus, for example, the ceremonial entrance of General Allenby to Jerusalem is described both at the end of episode 1 and in the introduction to episode 2. Repetitive connecting events sometimes appear in the course of two consecutive episodes, not necessarily as closures or introductory units. The repetition serves to bind together the narrative, but also to emphasize the importance of the events themselves, for example the breaking out of World War I or the ascent of Adolf Hitler to power.

Examination shows that most repetitive events reinforce Zionist ideology. Thus the victorious entrance of Allenby to Jerusalem, the Balfour Declaration supporting a Jewish State, as well as the arrival of the first British Commissioner, Herbert Samuel, to Palestine, strengthen the messianic feeling of a close-by realization of Zionist aspirations through British assistance. Founding the Jewish Defence Force in Palestine, the German invasion of Poland, German destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto, the UN decision of 29 November 1947 to divide Palestine into two States: Jewish and Arab – these are all examples of repetitive major events which possess special symbolic meaning in the Zionist narrative.

In most cases the repetition expresses no significant change in the description of the event; details, mode of presentation or ideological point of view remain the same. Thus additional uniformity is achieved, as well as considerable strengthening of the series' ideology.

The nature of repetition differs in *Revival*. Here 'thickening' is the central structuring principle, so the series of parallel events produce numerous repetitions. Many events are referred to several times, not just twice as is the general case in *Pillar of Fire.* Most notable repetitions concern Conflict events. Thus the Palestinian refugee problem is referred to in 5 episodes, the Sinai War in 3, the Six Day War in 12(!), the Kippur War in 9 and the peace initiative in 4. This again emphasizes the centrality of the Arab-Israeli Conflict in the series' narrative.
Here, information, description, as well as point of view of the 'repetitive' event in question change (contrary to the case in *Pillar of Fire*). This is clear, for example, in the case of the Palestinian refugee problem. It is first described extensively in *Revival* episodes 2 and 3, which deal with the 1948 War. Perspectives switch as interviews with Arab refugees and Jewish fighters alternate, presenting different views of the realities of the War. In episode 5, the problem is approached through the angle of settlements: Jewish new immigrants occupy evacuated Arab villages and inhabit the frontier. Here alternate points of view present refugees as both dangerous, murderous infiltrators and as victims of deportation, who try to get hold of their former property. Testimonies of a Palestinian refugee-infiltrator and a Jewish Yemenite woman in a frontier settlement show both sides as victims of the situation (min. 17:50-20:25).

Revival, episode 5

Episode 11 deals with the situation of Arab Israelis in the country, and shows the creation of the refugee problem and its effects from their angle, while episode 15 describes it from the perspective of Palestinian terrorist organizations from the 1970's on. These repeated versions complete each other and broaden the scope of the event. Far from creating uniform ideology, the repetition here produces interplay between various historic perspectives, and draws an integrative yet multi-faceted picture of the period described.

Conclusion

Clearly, the two series present totally different temporal structures. It is interesting to note how much can be deduced about each series' historical and even ideological approach, just from examining their formal structure exhibited in the chart. These findings are then supported by content analysis. *Pillar of Fire* presents a classic historicist continuous narrative, which serves well its "from Diaspora to Revival" plot. *Revival*, contrarily, employs a complex, multi-dimensional structure, which enables its historical multimodality. Its unique, exceptional structure places it within the realm of the "new historical film", as described above, and serves its ambitious historical revisionism.

Pillar of Fire tells a linear, one-directional story, which leads from a beginning to a clear unequivocal closure. It presents a "happy end", as the goal of the serial journey is achieved. *Revival*, on the other hand, tells a cyclical story, characterized by repeated, intensifying rounds of the Conflict. There is no closure, as the murder of Rabin in the final episode takes a torn country into an uncertain future. *Pillar of Fire* is a commemorative narrative, aimed at perpetuating the memory and the myth of the Zionist enterprise, as it was at its prime, clear of any cracks or doubts. *Revival,* though it does not step completely outside the Zionist narrative and expresses great pride in the achievements of the state's first 50 years, is still very critical of the manner in which the Zionist ethos was realized. Its critical audacity was considered exceptional at the time of its first broadcast in the late 1990s, and probably still is, particularly the parts which give expression and legitimacy to the Palestinian narrative concerning the Conflict. At the time it aroused a heated public debate in the media, which doubtlessly contributed, together with the writings of Israel's "new historians", to the continuous reshaping of collective memory.

Pillar of Fire's temporal structure is *teleological*: in tracing the journey towards renewing Jewish nationalism in its old homeland it aims at the goal at the end. *Revival*'s structure, by contrast, is *deterministic*, as it turns back to the initial period of the establishment of the state with the wish to understand how that beginning has caused all the lights and

the shadows of the Israel we know today. The past here is taken down from the pedestal, examined, criticized, and made 'useful' to the present.

Biography

Bosmat Garami has recently received her PhD from Tel Aviv University with a dissertation on a comparative study of Israeli historical documentary series entitled "Zionism on the Small Screen". Her research focuses on televisual historiography. She has taught courses at Tel Aviv University and presented her work at conferences of the Israel Communication Association. Her work includes an adaptation of her academic research to teacher's guides, encouraging the teaching of Israeli history through televisual texts. Some of her relevant publications include an article in *Kesher* on the representation of Tel Aviv in television series, and a forthcoming article on the representation of the 1948 War, published under the auspices of the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem.