

Star Power: Kirk Douglas, celebrity activism and the Hollywood-Israel connection

Fame and activism seem to go hand in hand in the early twenty-first century. The American actress Sharon Stone, the Senegalese singer Youssou N'Dohr, and the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei epitomize the modern-day celebrity whose brand recognition is increasingly tied to social campaigning. Global inequality, fast travel, and social media are widely considered to have spurred this rush of 'celebrity humanitarians', but the truth is this kind of 'star power' is far from new. At the turn of the twentieth century, the British writer and creator of Sherlock Holmes, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, famously challenged King Leopold of Belgium's autocratic rule of the Congo Free State. The United Nations started recruiting artists, sports stars, actors, novelists, and musicians to draw attention to its activities back in the 1950s. And the charity super-group Band Aid, originally formed by Irish rock star Bob Geldof to combat famine in Ethiopia, recently celebrated its thirtieth birthday.¹

Blending established historical research into the role of culture and the mass media in international affairs² with new scholarship focusing on contemporary transnational celebrity

¹ C. Preece, 'The authentic celebrity brand: unpacking Ai Weiwei's celebritised selves', *Journal of Marketing Management*, 31, 5-6 (2015), 616-45; Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Crime of the Congo* (New York, 1909); M. Wheeler, 'Celebrity Diplomacy: the United Nations' goodwill ambassadors and messengers of peace', *Celebrity Studies*, 2, 1 (2011), 6-18; C. Lousley, 'Band Aid reconsidered: sentimental cultures and populist humanitarianism', in *Popular Representations of Development*, ed. D. Lewis, D. Rodgers and M. Woolcock (Abingdon, 2014), 174-92.

² Over the past two decades, historians have examined the interrelationship between culture, the mass media, propaganda and international affairs in a variety of ways. Most work has

activism,³ this article looks at the part that the world's celebrity capital, Hollywood, has played in one of the world's longest international conflicts, that between Israel and its Arab neighbours, since the 1940s. That the news media has played an important role in reporting and moulding the Arab-Israeli conflict on a day-to-day basis over many decades has long been

focused on the twentieth century. See, for instance, P. M. Taylor, *Global Communications, International Affairs and the Media since 1945* (New York, 1997); *Culture and International History*, ed. J. Gienow-Hecht and F. Schumacher (New York, 2003); *War and the Media: Reportage and Propaganda, 1900-2003*, ed. M. Connelly and D. Welch (London, 2004); D. Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (New York, 2003); J. Fox, *Film Propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany: World War II Cinema* (Oxford, 2007); N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge, MA, 2007); S. L. Carruthers, *The Media at War* (New York, 2011); D. R. Headrick, *The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunications and International Politics, 1851-1945* (Oxford, 2012).

³ Scholars have only recently started taking celebrity activism seriously. On transnational celebrity activism and diplomacy see *Transnational Celebrity Activism in Global Politics: Changing the World?*, ed. L. Tsaliki, C. A. Frangonikolopoulos and A. Huliaras (Chicago, 2011); A. F. Cooper, *Celebrity Diplomacy* (Boulder, CO, 2008); A. C. Budabin, 'Do celebrity humanitarians matter?' Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, 11 Dec. 2011, https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/ethics_online/0100 (accessed 14 March 2019); *The Sage Handbook of Diplomacy*, ed. C. M. Constantinou, P. Kerr and P. Sharp (Los Angeles, 2016).

understood.⁴ Less well recognized is the part the entertainment industry has played in framing and shaping that conflict via, among other things, feature films, television dramas and celebrity advocacy. The absence of sustained research into Hollywood's part in the Arab-Israeli conflict is especially noteworthy given the undisputed power of American film and television, the United States' substantial interests in the Middle East, and the historically strong Jewish presence in the US entertainment industry. We have a hint of the degree to which the Israel-Palestine conflict polarizes Hollywood nowadays thanks to the furore over actor Javier Bardem's allegations of Israeli 'genocide' in the Gaza Strip in 2014, but we know little of this episode's political, cultural and historical hinterland.⁵ Analysis below delves into this territory.

The article focuses on the veteran American actor and liberal campaigner Kirk Douglas. One of the last survivors of Hollywood's golden age, Douglas ranked in in the early twenty-first century as Israel's oldest celebrity ally in the American film industry. Using US and Israeli sources, the article scrutinizes Douglas' pro-Israeli advocacy over six decades, both on the

⁴ G. Wolfsfeld, *Media and Political Conflict: News from the Middle East* (Cambridge, MA, 1997); Y. R. Kamalipour, ed., *The US Media and the Middle East: Image and Perception* (Westport, CT, 1997); L. Peterson, *Palestine-Israel in the Print Media: Contending Discourses* (Abingdon, 2015); G. Tiripelli, *Media and Peace in the Middle East* (Basingstoke, 2016).

⁵ R. Carroll, 'Hollywood divided: passions high as actors and celebrities speak out on Gaza', *Guardian*, 4 Aug. 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/04/hollywood-divided-gaza-support-israel-backlash> (accessed 14 March 2019); E. Hayden, 'Javier Bardem clarifies open letter on Gaza: 'I Have great respect for the people of Israel'', *Hollywood Reporter*, 31 July 2014, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/javier-bardem-clarifies-open-letter-722678> (accessed 14 March 2019).

screen and off it, setting this within the twin contexts of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the wider links sewn between Hollywood and Zionism. It looks at why and how Douglas supported the State of Israel, and considers what the star's long record of advocacy says about the history of celebrity activism and the interconnections between the American Jewish community, Hollywood and Israel. The article shows that Douglas' Zionist 'actorvism' was extremely wide-ranging and argues that the star was a major player in the special relationship that developed between Hollywood and Israel after 1948, one that, despite recent troubles, endures to this day. It begins by exploring the importance of Hollywood and celebrity activism to the overall relationship between the United States and Israel.

I

The close relationship that has developed between the United States and the State of Israel is widely regarded as one of the most intriguing geopolitical alliances of the past century. How is it that Israel has been the largest cumulative recipient of American aid since World War II? Why has Washington consistently favoured the Jewish State over its Arab neighbours, complicating relations with powerful, oil-rich nations and the Islamic world in the process? Has Israel been a net asset to the United States since 1948 or an overall burden? Traditionally, most scholars have sought to answer these questions and to explain American support for Israel through reference to 'hard' factors, that is, mainly in political and geostrategic terms. They point, for instance, to the bipartisan support for the US-Israel alliance in the US Congress, or to the fact that Israel helped Washington contain the spread of communism in the Middle East

during the Cold War.⁷ More recently, other scholars have instead stressed the significance of non-realist, 'soft' factors such as history, ethnicity, ideology and culture in underpinning the US-Israel special relationship. These include Israel being the only democracy in the Middle East, the belief in a shared 'Judeo-Christian' heritage, and American Orientalism.⁸

There is a strong case for adding Hollywood to these 'soft' factors. Several scholars have noted the American film industry's contribution to Israel's positive image in American popular culture, notably via movies like *Exodus* (1960).⁹ They have also outlined the American film industry's negative portrayal of Arabs and its habit of conflating Islam and terrorism long

⁷ See, for instance, A. F. K. Organski, *The \$36 Billion Bargain: Strategy and Politics in U.S. Assistance to Israel* (New York, 1990); A. Ben-Zvi, *Decade of Transition: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Origins of the American-Israeli Alliance* (New York, 1998); G. Steinberg, 'Israel and the United States: can the relationship survive the new strategic environment?' *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 2, 4 (1998), 61-81.

⁸ See, for example, C. Mansour, *Beyond Alliance: Israel in US Foreign Policy* (New York, 1994); D. Little, *American Orientalism* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002); M. Mart, *Eye on Israel* (Albany, NY, 2006); J. Rynhold, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in American Political Culture* (Cambridge, 2015).

⁹ M. McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley, CA, 2005), pp. 159-65; R. Weissbrod, 'Exodus as a Zionist melodrama', *Israel Studies*, 4 (1999), 129-52; M. M. Silver, *Our Exodus: Leon Uris and the Americanization of Israel's Founding Story* (Detroit, MI, 2010); G. Goodman, "'Operation Exodus": Israeli Government involvement in the production of Otto Preminger's *Exodus* (1960)', *Journal of Israeli History*, 33, 2 (2014), 209-29.

before the events of September 11, 2001.¹⁰ But the American entertainment industry's engagement with the Arab-Israeli conflict goes far beyond what has appeared on screen, important though that is given the pulling power and global influence of Hollywood movies. That engagement includes the extensive involvement of Hollywood directors, producers, actors and religious leaders - many though not all of them Jewish - in philanthropy, public relations and political activism relating to Israel. These activities are significant in and of themselves, but exploring them in depth also sheds important light on two particular issues relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict: the role played by Israeli public diplomacy (or *hasbara* in Hebrew) in influencing international opinion on the conflict,¹¹ and the alleged power of the so-called Israel

¹⁰ J. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs* (New York, 2001); T. J. Semmerling, *'Evil' Arabs in American Popular Film* (Austin, 2006); Stephen Prince, *Firestorm: American Film in the Age of Terrorism* (New York, 2009); H. Vanhala, *The Depiction of Terrorists in Hollywood Blockbuster Films, 1980–2001: An Analytical Study* (Jefferson, NC, 2010).

¹¹ Public diplomacy, usually regarded in the past as international propaganda, is the practice of state governments and NGOs appealing to elite and mass audiences in foreign states for diplomatic advantage, sometimes above the heads or against the wishes of those foreign states' own governments. The historical study of Israeli public diplomacy, in the United States and elsewhere, is a fast emerging field. See, for instance, J. Cummings, *Israel's Public Diplomacy: The Problems of Hasbara, 1966-1975* (Lanham, MD, 2016); Giora Goodman, 'Explaining the occupation: Israeli hasbara and the occupied territories in the aftermath of the 1967 War', *Journal of Israeli History* 36, 1 (2017), 71-93.

Lobby to influence US foreign policy in the Middle East.¹² In this way, Hollywood valuably helps to blend 'soft' and 'hard' factors.

Adding celebrity activism deepens this approach towards the Arab-Israeli conflict and contributes to the debate about the role that individuals play in international affairs. Alongside the recent shift towards considering the cultural dimensions of international diplomacy has been a realisation that the state-centric view of international affairs has its limits, especially in the early twenty-first century's fast-moving and interconnected world.¹³ Factoring Hollywood into the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict enables us to explore the power that images and celebrity can wield in domestic politics and international relations over a long time period. By looking at the on- and off-screen roles in the conflict of some of the most famous people in the world – such as the actor Kirk Douglas – we can also broaden our understanding of celebrity activism and appreciate that it has entailed campaigning for nations at war as well as for charities and intergovernmental organisations.

¹² E. Tivnan, *The Lobby: Jewish Political Power and American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1987); J. J. Mearsheimer and S. M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York, 2007). R. C. Lieberman, 'The 'Israel Lobby' and American politics', *Perspectives on Politics* 7, 2 (2009), 235–57.

¹³ D. L. Byman and K. M. Pollack, 'Let us now praise great men', *International Security*, 25, 4 (2001), 107-46; S. Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (New York, 2005); See Tsaliki, Frangonikolopoulos and Huliaras, *Transnational Celebrity Activism*; Cooper, *Celebrity Diplomacy*.

II

Born Issur Danielovitch to illiterate, Russian-Jewish parents in Amsterdam, New York, in 1916, Kirk Douglas' Hollywood career began in the 1940s and stretched over six decades, taking in over ninety films. Douglas' fame was at its peak from the 1950s through to the 1970s, when his cleft chin, athletic build and tough-guy persona made him one of the most recognizable figures on cinema and television screens across the world. Off-screen, Douglas was best known in the United States for having helped break the anti-communist blacklist at the turn of the 1960s, for his support for the Democratic Party, and for his donations to numerous charities and liberal causes. Douglas received the US Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1981 for his work as a globetrotting 'goodwill ambassador' for the American government, and was awarded the US National Medal of the Arts in 2001.¹⁴

Given his image and reputation as a quintessentially 'American' star, it might seem odd that Douglas worked so hard for so long to promote another country, Israel. Yet the actor essentially came to think of the State of Israel as an extension of US liberal democracy and of the Israeli people almost as brother Americans. He was not alone in this viewpoint, especially in Hollywood, due in part to the significant number of Jews that worked there and the sympathy for Zionism that many of them had. In Douglas's case, his attachment to and support for Zionism was an evolving process, one that connected to his ethnicity, political views, personal experiences and religious beliefs.

¹⁴ K. Douglas, *The Ragman's Son: An Autobiography* (London, 1988); M. Munn, *Kirk Douglas* (New York, 1985); T. Thomas, *The Films of Kirk Douglas* (New York, 1991); L. Ceplair and C. Trumbo, *Dalton Trumbo: Blacklisted Hollywood Radical* (Lexington, KY, 2014).

When Israel was established in 1948, Douglas was not a member of Hollywood's pro-Zionist vanguard. In the late 1930s, the rise of Nazism and the dire predicament of European Jewry had prompted support for Zionist fundraising from Jewish Hollywood magnates such as Louis B. Mayer (head of MGM Studios), Jack Warner (president of Warner Bros.) and David O. Selznick (owner of Selznick International Pictures), and from Jewish actors like Eddie Cantor, Edward G. Robinson and Paul Muni.¹⁵ The Holocaust and the Jewish insurgency in Palestine against British rule had then rallied a number of other Hollywood and Broadway figures to the Zionist cause, a number of whom, including Frank Sinatra, Marlon Brando and Paul Robeson, were not Jewish.¹⁶ In the late 1940s, the renowned Jewish scriptwriter Ben Hecht caused deep divisions in the Jewish community in Hollywood by actively supporting

¹⁵ 'United Jewish Appeal drive chiefs named', *Los Angeles Times*, 24 Apr. 1928, 1; 'Rabbi ready for journey', *Los Angeles Times*, 15 March 1936, 7; D. Weinstein, 'Eddie Cantor fights the Nazis: the evolution of a Jewish celebrity', *American Jewish History* 96, 4 (2010), 235-63; Cinematic Arts Library, University of Southern California (USC), Los Angeles, Edward G. Robinson Collection, box 29, file 15, Edward G. Robinson to Harry Warner, 20 Oct. 1938; New York Public Library, New York, Paul Muni Collection, Scrapbooks, Series III, box 3, 'Scrapbook of Israel [Palestine] Trip, 1938.

¹⁶ M. Brando, *Songs My Mother Taught Me* (New York, 1994), pp. 107-11; S. J. Whitfield, 'The politics of pageantry, 1936-1946', *American Jewish History* 84, 3 (1996), 221-51; M. Freedland, *All the Way: A Biography of Frank Sinatra* (New York, 1997), pp. 148-9; 'Mayor indorses Hadassah concert by Paul Robeson', *Los Angeles Times*, 1 Dec. 1941, 3.

Jewish terrorism in Palestine.¹⁷ Hollywood's first pro-Zionist feature film about the contemporary conflict over Palestine, *Sword in the Desert*, appeared in 1949, written and produced by a gentile, Robert Buckner.¹⁸

These undertakings aside, active Zionists were not predominant in Hollywood in the late 1940s and 1950s. Jews may have created 'an empire of their own' in Hollywood in the early twentieth century, as Neal Gabler puts it, but many of them had in the process cast off their Jewish roots for assorted personal and professional reasons and come to think of themselves simply as Americans.¹⁹ During the early Cold War especially, no matter how assimilated they were, many Jews in Hollywood had to be wary of being charged with dual loyalty. There was more than a hint of anti-Semitism to the House Un-American Activities Committee's hearings into alleged Communist subversion in the movie industry during this period. Ten of the first nineteen people subpoenaed by HUAC and six of the indicted Hollywood Ten were Jewish.²⁰ Allegations that Hollywood's Jews could not be trusted were often tied to the wider theory, popularized by businessman Henry Ford in the 1920s and promulgated by many others

¹⁷ Newberry Library, Chicago, Ben Hecht Collection, box 55, file 1059, Menachem Begin (Ben-David) to Ben Hecht, [undated but probably 1947]; box 55, file 10696, Peter Bergson to Ben Hecht, 10 Oct. 1946; Ben Hecht, *A Child of the Century* (New York, 1954), pp. 515-630.

¹⁸ Cinematic Arts Library, USC, Universal Pictures Collection, box 35, file 2767, Robert Buckner, Original Screenplay for 'Sword in the Desert'.

¹⁹ N. Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* (New York, 1988).

²⁰ J. Litvak, *The Un-Americans: Jews, the Blacklist, and the Stoolpigeon Culture* (Durham, NC, 2009); T. Doherty, *Show Trial: Hollywood, HUAC, and the Birth of the Blacklist* (New York, 2018), pp. 251-74.

throughout the twentieth century, that there was a conspiracy by Jews to manipulate gentile society through control of the media.²¹

Kirk Douglas had himself abandoned Judaism in early adulthood. In his childhood and youth, he had balked at his mother's socially restrictive Orthodoxy, experienced day-to-day anti-Jewish discrimination, and suffered at the hands of violent anti-Semites. When he started working in the theatres of New York in the 1930s, he therefore swapped his name for a WASP-sounding one to rid himself of the stigma of being Jewish and to enhance his career prospects. The actor went on to marry two gentiles and to raise his children outside the Jewish faith.²²

Despite distancing himself from Judaism in these ways, Douglas began engaging with Israel very soon after its creation. In the summer of 1949, the actor attended a fundraising dinner for the Los Angeles branch of the Women's Zionist Organization of America, Hadassah, at which he offered to freely assist in the making of any film that would further Israel's cause.²³ This was just after Douglas had become an international star courtesy of an Oscar-nominated performance in the boxing drama *Champion*, which significantly enhanced his celebrity power. Douglas' Zionist leanings can be linked to the early interest in the newly-born State of Israel shown by many liberals and progressives in the American film industry. Encouraged by Zionist propaganda and the projection of socialist ideals by David Ben-Gurion's Labour government, these industry figures saw Israel as a cross between a post-Holocaust sanctuary and a workers'

²¹ H. D. Brackman, 'The attack on Jewish Hollywood: a chapter in the history of Modern American Anti-Semitism', *Modern Judaism*, 20, 1 (2000), 1-19; J. J. Goldberg, *Jewish Power: Inside the American Jewish Establishment* (New York, 1996), pp. 279-304.

²² Douglas, *Ragman's Son*, pp. 34-36, 48, 50-51, 59, 76-8, 383.

²³ 'Hadassah's \$300,000 Gift Lauded', *Los Angeles Times*, 21 June 1949, B2.

paradise. Many of them - like the scriptwriter Michael Blankfort, director Fred Zinnemann, producers Dore Schary and Stanley Kramer, and actors Edward G. Robinson and Kirk Douglas – belonged to a generation of Jewish liberals in Hollywood who were as passionate about Israel and its progressive promise as they were about liberal causes in the United States, and who wanted to use their power to nurture Israel's image and development.²⁴

In 1952, Douglas made his first trip abroad to star in Hollywood's first explicitly pro-Zionist film shot on location in Israel, *The Juggler*. Douglas would later describe his four weeks making the drama, which depicted the absorption of a Holocaust refugee into the new-born state, as the most inspiring and uplifting event of his career.²⁵ Even accounting for Hollywood hyperbole, the actor was genuinely moved by his visit to the Jewish state. It strengthened his

²⁴ The Blankfort papers at the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Centre, Boston University, reveal a deeply committed Zionist over many decades. See, for instance, his correspondence with life-long friend and Israeli diplomat Reuven Dafni, box 77, file 6. On Zinnemann's diary of his tour of Israel in the autumn of 1948 see Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, (hereafter MHL), Fred Zinnemann Collection, box 96, file 1260, 'Sabra notebooks'. For the Israel Humanities Achievement Award presented to Kramer 'in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the arts, his firm support of human rights, and his devoted service to the State of Israel', New York, 14 May 1984, see Charles E. Young Research Library, USC, Stanley Kramer Collection, box 362. On Schary's pro-Israeli activism see, for instance, Wisconsin Center for Film & Theater Research, Madison, WI (hereafter WCFTR), Dore Schary Collection, box 102, files 4-7.

²⁵ H. G. Luft, 'Kirk Douglas's most inspiring event of his career', *Chicago Sentinel*, 8 Oct. 1959, 29.

liberal Zionism, and was enriched by early evidence of the Israeli authorities' public diplomacy programme, designed to bond dignitaries like Douglas with Israel and to advertise their Zionism domestically and internationally. During Douglas' stay, Israel's director of government information services, Moshe Pearlman, personally accompanied him at high-profile events in Tel Aviv and other cities; the actor met Israeli Cabinet ministers, including Ben-Gurion and the military chief Moshe Dayan; and Douglas had, as he told the media at the time, 'a shuddering and long-lasting experience' when viewing relics of Nazi atrocities housed in a museum at the young kibbutz of Lohamei Hageta'ot near Acre.²⁶

The Israeli government gave Hollywood stars like Danny Kaye and Frank Sinatra the same red carpet treatment when they visited in later years. Like Douglas, they too left telling the world of Israel's miraculous economic and political progress. Like Douglas', their public appearances and guided tours were also carefully choreographed to present Israel in the best light. The Jewish-born comedian Kaye was particularly valuable to *hasbara* officials because of his prominent role as the first ambassador-at-large for the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. Sinatra, a Roman Catholic, was not only one of the biggest showbiz names in the world but an avowed advocate of ethnic minority rights. Like many non-Jews in the 1940s, the singer was drawn to Zionism because of the Holocaust, support for those who had 'beaten the odds', and a belief that the Jewish state was an 'underdog', first fighting the British and then the surrounding Arab states.²⁷

²⁶ Eran Tadmor, 'Kirk Douglas conquers Tel Aviv', *Kolno'a*, 9 Oct. 1952, 3-5; 'Light for Israel', *Bnai Brith Messenger*, 3 Oct. 1952, 2; Douglas, *Ragman's Son*, pp. 203, 207; Luft, 29.

²⁷ On Kaye's visit to Israel in 1956 and value to Israeli public diplomacy see Israel State Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter ISA), G/3144/16, Moshe Pearlman to Reuven Shiloah, 2 May

Douglas's affinity with and commitment to Israel grew in the decades that followed his 1952 visit. His Zionism was of the brand that had developed in the United States since the early decades of the twentieth century, one which saw Jewish nationalism as fully compatible with American nationalism and the values of democracy and progress. It did not encompass the ideal, preached by the Israeli leadership, that American Jews should ultimately leave the diaspora and come to live in Israel.²⁸ Yet it was a powerful emotion nonetheless. The actor's strong pro-Israel feelings were by no means unique in Hollywood, nor in the US generally, by the 1970s, but he was consistently among the most active Zionists in the American entertainment community. What Douglas often described as his 'love' for the Jewish state can partly be explained by his frequent visits to Israel (one of which was linked to his role as an American goodwill ambassador) and by the close ties that he established with Israeli officials and politicians, including prime ministers. These kept him abreast of developments in Israel, and gave him a sense of mission as an informal envoy for US-Israeli relations. Like other Americans (Jews and non-Jews alike), Douglas was awestruck by Israel's swift and dramatic victory in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. In his eyes, this, and the Israeli military's combative

1956. On Sinatra's 1962 visit see 'Frank Sinatra arrives in Israel; will help build youth center in Nazareth', *Jewish Telegraph Agency*, 4 May 1962; 'Frank Sinatra a guest of the Histadrut', *Davar*, 4 May 1962, 9; G. Jacobs and W. Stadiem, *Mr. S: My Life with Frank Sinatra* (New York, 2003), p. 189.

²⁸ Zvi Ganin, *An Uneasy Relationship: American Jewish Leadership and Israel, 1948–1957* (Syracuse, 2005); Ariel L. Feldestein, *Ben-Gurion, Zionism and American Jewry, 1948-1963* (London, 2006).

approach to Palestinian terrorism (most famously during its audacious Entebbe raid of July 1976), made Israel a perfect, muscular American ally.²⁹

In the early 1990s, Douglas survived a helicopter crash in which two people died. This, together with a severe stroke that impaired his ability to speak, sparked a search for meaning that led him on a spiritual journey back to the religion he had abandoned in early adulthood. Rediscovering his Jewish faith fortified Douglas' devotion to Israel in later life.³⁰ It also brought him closer to his actor-producer son, Michael, himself a prolific pro-Israel activist who also rediscovered his Jewish heritage during the same period.³¹ The two stars' desire to be 'part

²⁹ Douglas, *Ragman's Son*, pp. 370-7; Kirk Douglas Collection, WCFTR, 'Cast a Giant Shadow' papers, box 7, file 7, Zeev Rav-Nof, "'Marcus – yes; Masada- no!'", *Davar*, 25 May 1965, and box 44, file 4, Tamar Avidar, 'Look! there is Kirk Douglas!' *Maariv*, 24 May 1965; ISA, A/112/15, United States Information Service official news report, 5 Feb. 1976; *Yediot Achronot*, '1200 Hollywood stars made a tribute night to Israel', 4 Feb. 1976, p. 1.

³⁰ This spiritual journey is outlined in Kirk Douglas, *Climbing the Mountain: My Search for Meaning* (New York, 2000).

³¹ For Michael Douglas' 'personal journey' regards Judaism, see speech, undated but probably 2016, in Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Michael Douglas papers, box 170, file 1. For a taste of Michael Douglas's pro-Israel activism see 'IDF Spokesperson, Shoutout to [#MichaelDouglas](#) & [#PatRiley](#) who took the time to see the Hamas terror tunnels up close', 17 June 2015, <https://twitter.com/idfspokesperson/status/611244532898725888> (accessed 14 March 2019) and Eliezer Sherman, 'Actor Michael Douglas in Israel: BDS is 'anti-peace movement'', *The*

of the tribe' reinforced each other's commitment to Israel. In 2015, Israel's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu presented Michael Douglas with the 'Jewish Nobel' (or Genesis Prize), so the actor could lead a campaign to build bridges between Israel and increasingly assimilated Jewish communities around the world.³² The recent introduction of the Genesis Prize testified to the 'trouble' the tribe was experiencing in the early twenty-first century, as many liberal American Jews 'felt' less Jewish and were becoming less willing to unquestionably support the Jewish state.³³

Throughout the decades, Kirk Douglas himself never wavered in his unambiguous support for the Jewish state or for its governments' approaches towards the Arabs. This was despite the marked shift to the right in Israeli politics, away from Ben-Gurion's socialist aspirations, from the late 1970s onwards. And it was despite what many, especially younger

Algemeiner, 17 June 2015, <https://www.algemeiner.com/2015/06/17/actor-michael-douglas-in-israel-bds-is-anti-peace-movement/> (accessed 14 March 2019).

³² J. Fleishman, 'Michael Douglas' sensitive new role: promoting Jewish identity', *Los Angeles Times*, 6 July 2015, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-michael-douglas-20150706-story.html> (accessed 14 March 2019). For Douglas' correspondence in July 2015 with Netanyahu and Hillary Clinton regarding the Genesis Prize see Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Michael Douglas papers, box 165, file 8.

³³ T. Sasson, C. Kadushin and L. Saxe, 'Trends in American Jewish attachment to Israel: an assessment of the 'distancing' hypothesis', *Contemporary Jewry* 30, 2-3 (2010), 297–319; L. Saxe and M. Boxer, 'Loyalty and Love of Israel by Diasporan Jews', *Israel Studies* 17, 2 (2012), 92-101.

liberals in the US and Israel itself saw as the Israeli government's increasingly aggressive stance taken towards its neighbors and those it occupied in the Palestinian territories. The Israel Defense Forces' violent tactics during two Palestinian uprisings (or Intifadas) during the late 1980s and early 2000s polarized things further.³⁴ Douglas' unfailing, whole-hearted backing of Israel set him apart from a number of prominent Hollywood figures. Some members of the younger generation of Jewish liberals in Hollywood, such as the director Steven Spielberg³⁵ and the actress Natalie Portman,³⁶ publicly questioned the wisdom of the Israeli government's

³⁴ D. Waxman, *Trouble in the Tribe: The American Jewish Conflict Over Israel* (Princeton, 2016).

³⁵ Spielberg's position on Israel was reflected in *Munich*, his 2005 thriller about the reprisals Israel launched after eleven of its athletes had died in a Palestinian raid on the 1972 Olympic Games. The film was accused by pro-Israel groups of skewing history and of unfairly criticizing Israeli security policies. Spielberg called the film his 'prayer for peace'. See A. Gumbel, 'Israel attacks Spielberg over 'Munich', his movie on 1972 Olympics massacre', *Independent*, 24 Dec. 2005, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/israel-attacks-spielberg-over-munich-his-movie-on-1972-olympics-massacre-520603.html> (accessed 14 March 2019); 'Spielberg says his new film 'Munich' is a 'prayer for peace', *Haaretz*, 4 Dec. 2005, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/spielberg-says-his-new-film-munich-is-a-prayer-for-peace-1.175824> (accessed 14 March 2019).

³⁶ Natalie Portman was born in Jerusalem in 1981 to an Israeli father and American mother, but grew up largely in the United States. In 2015, Portman heavily censured the governments of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, particularly for their treatment of Palestinians. Critics read *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, her 2015 film about the establishment of Israel, as a

use of force against its enemies. As he reached eighty years of age in the 1990s, Douglas' acting career waned, yet his support for Israel if anything hardened. By this point, Douglas had become a 'legend' outside and within Hollywood. There, his veteran status as one of Israel's special friends kept him at the apex of Hollywood's pro-Israel community, its spokesman and interlocutor with many of the great and the good in entertainment and politics.³⁷

III

Having looked at why Kirk Douglas supported Israel, let us turn to exploring how, beginning with the most obvious way: on film. Across his career, Douglas starred in four major films centred on Israel, more than any other Hollywood actor.³⁸ Each film had a lot to say - implicitly

meditation on present-day Israeli-Arab relations. See D. Kennedy, 'Natalie Portman's Zionist manifesto', *Daily Beast*, 19 May 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/natalie-portmans-zionist-manifesto> (accessed 14 March 2019).

³⁷ Douglas' influence within Hollywood was boosted at the Oscars in 1996, when Steven Spielberg presented him with an honorary award for his fifty years as 'a creative and moral force in the motion picture community'. J. Williams, 'A legend gets his Oscar', *USA Today*, 21 March 1996, D2.

³⁸ Douglas appeared in a fifth film in 1977, Brian De Palma's *The Fury*, which was only partly set in Israel. In the film, a political supernatural thriller, he played a former Central Intelligence Agency operative whose son is kidnapped by Arab terrorists (who turn out to be renegade CIA agents). See K. Thomas, 'Brian DePalma offers 'Fury'', *Los Angeles Times*, 15 March 1978, F16.

or explicitly - about the Arab-Israeli conflict and each was representative of the way Hollywood treated Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict generally during the period in which it was made. Three of the films were produced in Israel, giving the opportunity for Douglas and local public diplomacy officials to work jointly on marketing Israel's image both on and beyond the screen. Together, the films point to important features of Douglas' pro-Israel advocacy and of the history of the Hollywood-Israel relationship.

The Juggler, released in 1953, was written and directed, respectively, by the Jewish liberals Michael Blankfort and Stanley Kramer. It was produced with the help of the Israeli government, which sought to use the film to showcase the new Jewish state and to attract Hollywood dollars to boost its struggling economy. In the film, Douglas played the lead role of Hans Müller, a German-Jewish entertainer whose family has perished in the concentration camps. Hans arrives in Haifa with scores of other refugees in 1949, just after the first Arab-Israeli war. Traumatized by his loss and suffering terrible flashbacks, he assaults a policeman after mistaking him for a Nazi officer. Hans goes on the run from the authorities and is befriended by a teenage orphan, Josh, who guides him around Israel; Hans 'adopts' Josh, who is nearly killed by a leftover wartime landmine, and teaches him how to juggle. The authorities eventually track down Hans but kindly help rather than arrest him when they realize his psychological problems. At the end of the story, Hans is still deeply troubled but his future looks bright. He has found love on a northern border kibbutz with a young woman called Yael and has recovered enough to laugh and entertain the inhabitants with his circus skills.³⁹

³⁹ Michael Blankfort Collection, MHL, 'The Juggler', Script, 1949, box 2, file 8; Stanley Kramer Collection, USC, 'The Juggler', Storyboards, box 375, files 4-7; D. A. Schmidt, 'Charting the trail of 'The Juggler' in Israel', *New York Times*, 23 Nov. 1952, B5.

The Juggler did not do as well at the box office as Israeli officials would have liked.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, Douglas attracted plaudits for his part in the film, including from Hollywood's leading trade paper *Variety*, which described his performance as 'excellent' and *The Juggler's* message as 'inspirational'.⁴¹ The movie's primary message was crystal clear: that Israel was the indisputable home for Jews, a new, compassionate, egalitarian, pioneer-led democracy where Holocaust survivors could find peace and acceptance.⁴² Leaving the subject of the Arab-Israeli conflict and recent Palestinian dispossession largely untouched and unexplained, *The Juggler* has a short but important scene in the ruins of a deserted Arab village. The disturbed Hans is about to unnecessarily shoot a Syrian patrol that appears menacingly close, the patrolmen unaware of his presence. Yael exclaims 'We don't kill people in cold blood!' and pulls the rifle away. Her statement carried overtones, argued Nathan Glick in the Jewish American intellectual magazine *Commentary*, 'not merely of Israel's humanism, but also of the ethics of the American "Western", where you must give your enemy a fair chance to draw'.⁴³

In 1965, Douglas starred in another movie set around the Israeli War of Independence. *Cast a Giant Shadow* was a big-budget action picture based on the true story of Colonel 'Micky' Marcus, a Jewish-American military officer who had died while commanding units of the

⁴⁰ ISA, G/5506/4, Nethanel Lorch, Israeli Consul in Los Angeles, 'Israel and the Film Industry', a report sent to the Hasbara Centre, New York, and others, 19 July 1957.

⁴¹ 'The Juggler', *Variety*, 6 May 1953, 6; see also Bosley Crowther, 'The Screen in Review', *New York Times*, 6 May 1953, 39.

⁴² D. D. Moore, *To The Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* (Cambridge, MA., 1994), pp. 245-47.

⁴³ N. Glick, 'The Juggler: Hollywood in Israel', *Commentary*, June 1953, 615-617 at p. 616.

fledgling Israeli Defense Forces during the 1948-49 war. The film was co-financed by Douglas' own production company, written and directed by the pro-Zionist Melville Shavelson, and distributed by United Artists, whose chairman Arthur Krim was one of the most powerful Zionists in Hollywood and an adviser on Middle East affairs to US president Lyndon Johnson.⁴⁴ Douglas chiefly sought to bolster what was a burgeoning US-Israeli alliance in the mid-1960s by highlighting Marcus' role in 'a moment in history ... that gripped the world'. He also had an eye on the increasing importance of Israel's image in the developing world, hoping that a dramatic depiction of Israel's fight for survival in 1948-49 'against all the odds' would inspire 'the emerging nations who still have much of their struggle ahead of them'.⁴⁵ Both Israel's prime minister, Levi Eshkol, and its military chief of staff, Yitzhak Rabin, facilitated the Israeli Defense Forces' logistical support for *Cast a Giant Shadow*, in exchange for script

⁴⁴ On Krim's role as an adviser to Johnson on US Middle East policy in the late 1960s see *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Vol. XVIII, Arab-Israeli Dispute 1964-1967*, doc. 369, 'Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson', 13 Dec. 1966, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d369> (accessed 14 March 2019); *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Vol. XX, Arab-Israeli Dispute 1967-1968*, doc. 348, 'Information Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson', 11 Dec. 1968, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v20/d348> (accessed 14 March 2019).

⁴⁵ A. Meisels, 'On the beach with Kirk Douglas', *Jerusalem Post*, 13 June 1965, 4; Kirk Douglas Collection, WCFTR, 'Cast a Giant Shadow' papers, box 7, file 7, Z. Rav-Nof, "'Marcus – yes; Masada- no!', *Davar*, 25 May 1965.

approval.⁴⁶ Shavelson and Douglas hired some of the heaviest Hollywood hitters of the era to appear in the movie, including John Wayne, Frank Sinatra and Yul Brynner. Sinatra publicly donated his fee to an Arab youth centre he had helped set up a few years earlier in Nazareth and that bore his name.⁴⁷

A behind-the-scenes look at *Cast a Giant Shadow* demonstrates the tensions that could sometimes arise between Douglas, his Hollywood colleagues and the Israeli authorities during film productions, thereby showing that the creation of pro-Israel images was not always plain sailing. The Israeli military assigned *Cast a Giant Shadow* not one but two technical advisers, who often provided contradictory information. Melville Shavelson found it frustrating working with inexperienced Israeli film technicians and fell out with the military over its unwillingness to provide support for free and over its insistence on checking every foot of film after production had ended. Douglas argued constantly with Shavelson over the finer details of *Cast a Giant Shadow*'s script and later argued that the director's inclusion of too many jokes had weakened the film's message and showed that the picture would have been better had it been directed 'by someone with deep conviction'. The inevitable rivalry between the stars over the

⁴⁶ M. Shavelson, *How to Make a Jewish Movie* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1971), pp. 39, 43-7, 96-7, 216; Israeli Defence Forces Archive, Tel Hashomer, Israel, file 1974/262/38, 'Inspection report of IDF film-making and support for outside bodies', June 1968.

⁴⁷ 'Sinatra to donate film fees to Nazareth centre', *Jerusalem Post*, 25 June 1965, 8; Shavelson, p. 175; ISA, GL/2122/1, Camel Mansur to Meir Jarach, 1 July 1964.

size and prominence of their roles - with Douglas insisting on a hefty \$500,000 top billing - made perhaps for a case of celebrity activism overload.⁴⁸

Despite these troubles, in publicity terms *Cast a Giant Shadow* ticked all the right boxes as far as Douglas and the Israeli authorities were concerned. It showcased a bevy of macho Hollywood stars fighting and dying for Israel's freedom. It portrayed John Wayne's World War Two US general, a sceptical gentile in early scenes, converting to Zionism outside the gates of Dachau. It presented the Israeli-Arab conflict in David-and-Goliath terms, a salient feature of Israeli *hasbara* since its inception. It underscored the narrative of Arab culpability for the 1948 war then prevalent in western popular culture. It demonstrated that pragmatic Arabs accepted the Jewish presence in Palestine and Israel, and depicted irrational, hostile Arabs - who paint Swastikas on the backs of Jewish female victims - as Nazi sympathizers. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, in the shape of Marcus/Douglas, it showed that Zionism was an extension of Americanism.⁴⁹ *Cast a Giant Shadow* quickly became an important fundraising vehicle for Zionist organisations in the US, while the Israeli Ministry of Foreign

⁴⁸ Shavelson, *Jewish Movie*; Kirk Douglas Collection, WCFTR, 'Cast a Giant Shadow' papers, box 44, file 2, Shavelson-Douglas correspondence regarding scripts, 21 Feb., 11 May, 1965; Kirk Douglas loan-out details, undated, file 2, Douglas, *Ragman's Tale*, p. 383.

⁴⁹ On how both the film and its advertising material were crafted to emphasize these messages see Walter Mirisch Collection, WCFTR, 'Cast a Giant Shadow', Shooting Script, 3 May 1965, box 1, file 4, and **pressbook # 3**, box 17, file 3, 'Cast a Giant Shadow' pressbook, undated.

Affairs promoted special screenings in various countries. Commercially, the movie did well, without breaking any records.⁵⁰

A decade later, in December 1976, Douglas appeared alongside an even larger galaxy of Hollywood stars in another film that celebrated Israeli military prowess, this time not in the past but in the present - *Victory at Entebbe*. Israel's daring anti-terrorist rescue mission at Entebbe Airport in Uganda in July that year had left much of the world's media spellbound. Immediately afterwards, the Israeli government effectively auctioned the movie rights to the mission in Hollywood in order to fully exploit its political and propaganda value. Two star-studded Hollywood tele-movies and one Oscar-nominated Israeli drama-documentary followed. *Victory at Entebbe* won the race to appear on screen first and was the most overtly propagandistic of the three films.⁵¹

Both the chief financier of *Victory at Entebbe*, ABC Television's president Leonard Goldenson, and its creative overseer, David Wolper, were long-time friends of Israel. Wolper had made the seminal pro-Zionist TV documentary *Let My People Go: The Story of Israel* in 1965.⁵² Being a strong supporter of the Israeli-led war on terrorism, Douglas considered it close

⁵⁰ 'Cast a Giant Shadow', *Boxoffice*, 4 Apr. 1966, 8; ISA, HZ/1395/16, Shaul Ramati, Hasbara Department, to Israel Representatives Abroad, 4 Nov. 1966.

⁵¹ T. Shaw and G. Goodman, 'Hollywood's raid on Entebbe: behind the scenes of the United States-Israel alliance', *Diplomatic History*, 42, 4 (2018), 590-612.

⁵² Leonard Goldenson, *Beating the Odds* (New York, 1991), pp. 39, 225-6, 406. On *Let My People Go* see David Wolper Collection, Cinematic Arts Library, USC, Boxes 082-009, 237-029 and 237-030.

to his right and duty to appear in *Victory at Entebbe*. The star as good as begged Wolper for the part of Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, whom he knew well, and cited *The Juggler* and *Cast a Giant Shadow* as evidence of his longstanding pro-Israeli credentials. When Wolper instead cast Anthony Hopkins as Rabin and Douglas as the distraught father of a teenage Israeli hostage, Douglas peppered Wolper with script advice, some of which he followed.⁵³

Victory at Entebbe was a straightforward, dramatized account of the Entebbe crisis, as seen from the Israeli perspective. Its cast of Hollywood stars, all of whom played Israelis, 'Americanized' the story, thereby bringing many US viewers closer to the action. This included two friends of Douglas' who were also passionate pro-Israeli campaigners, Elizabeth Taylor and Burt Lancaster.⁵⁴ *Victory at Entebbe* took something of a battering from critics. Several thought that Douglas and Taylor - who played husband and wife in the film - had completely

⁵³ David Wolper Collection, USC, box 215, file 5, Kirk Douglas to David L. Wolper, 28 Oct. 1976; Kirk Douglas Collection, WCFTR, box 62, files, 13-14, 'Victory at Entebbe', Final Script, by Ernest Kinoy, annotated, 6 Nov. 1976.

⁵⁴ Taylor's campaigning for Israel started after her marriage to the Jewish actor Eddie Fisher and conversion to Judaism in 1959, and lasted until her death in 2011. Details of her early lobbying activities can be found in the Max Nussbaum archive, Temple Israel of Hollywood, Los Angeles, Elizabeth Taylor file. For a short but useful journalistic account of the actress's fifty-year relationship with Israel see N. Burstein, 'Elizabeth Taylor and Israel, A Lasting Love', *Washington Post*, 27 March 2011, B2. On Lancaster's support for Israel during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war see H. Dudman, 'Moses TV stars insisted on staying', *Jerusalem Post*, 9 Oct. 1973, 5. For his very early support for the state see 'Celebrities Join for Israel Night', *Los Angeles Times*, 17 Oct. 1949, 27.

over-acted. One British journalist took offence at the crude way in which the film compared the Entebbe hijackers with Nazi death camp officers, warning that 'its chronic Zionist overlay may be too strong for some stomachs'. Be that as it may, some 41 million viewers watched *Victory at Entebbe* when it aired on American television in December 1976. Many more people saw it when one of Hollywood's biggest studios, Warner Bros., distributed the film in cinema theatres outside the US in the months afterwards.⁵⁵

By the mid-1980s, the stock Hollywood figure of the Arab terrorist hijacking and menacing Israelis and westerners was fully formed.⁵⁶ In the summer of 1982, however, Douglas journeyed to Israel to star in a film that carried a different sort of message. The NBC network telemovie *Remembrance of Love* was a gentle, seemingly apolitical family melodrama, stylistically the opposite of *Cast a Giant Shadow* and *Victory at Entebbe*. It showed Israel's 'softer' side and, though it too linked Zionism with the Holocaust and Arabs with terrorism, did so more subtly. The production also demonstrated the strength of the links that had developed between the American and Israeli film industries, assisted by Douglas and others since the 1950s. *Remembrance of Love* was a joint US-Israeli production, supported logistically and

⁵⁵ Shaw and Goodman, 'Hollywood's Raid on Entebbe'.

⁵⁶ A number of movies in which these 'Bad Arabs' appeared, such *The Delta Force* (1985), were made in Hollywood by Israel's leading film producer, Menachem Golan. On the production and contested messages and influence of these movies see Shaheen, p. 580; Robert Cettl, *Terrorism in American Cinema* (Jefferson, NC, 2009), pp. 22-4, 101-2; Prince, *Firestorm*, pp. 17-70; Tony Shaw, *Cinematic Terror: A Global History of Terrorism on Film* (New York, 2015), pp. 123-143.

ideologically by the Israeli Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Israeli consulate in Los Angeles. Both were very pleased with the results.⁵⁷

Remembrance of Love was set in the present day and centred on Joe Rabin (Douglas), a Polish-American Holocaust survivor and widower who travels to Israel for a reunion with fellow victims of Nazi persecution. Secretly, Joe is also hoping to find an old girlfriend that he left behind in the Lodz ghetto and who was pregnant with his child. Joe is initially sceptical about attending the reunion but warms to it when he sees how sensitively Israel treats Holocaust victims. His liberal-journalist daughter, who has travelled from the US with Joe, is at first offended by what she interprets as the Israeli security service's over zealousness but ends up falling in love with a high-ranking security officer. When Palestinians try to bomb the reunion, demonstrating their barbarity, the officer bravely thwarts the attack and nearly dies. Joe eventually finds his old girlfriend, Leah, who tells him that she was forced to abort their child in the death camps. Clearly still in love with him, Leah guides Joe around some of Israel's high spots, showing him how beautiful, modern and cosmopolitan the country is. Ultimately, she decides she must return to her Israeli husband on their kibbutz. The film ends with a moving ceremony at Yad Vashem and with Joe's daughter telling him she is moving to Israel permanently.⁵⁸ In December 1982, some 38 million viewers on NBC's 'Monday Night Movie' slot watched *Remembrance of Love*, which *The New York Times*' reviewer described as 'a glossy advertisement for Israel'. The reviewer noted that the telemovie's 'underlying

⁵⁷ ISA, GL/21183/9, Avi Rosenthal to Yoram Golan, 7 Dec. 1982.

⁵⁸ Israfilm Motion Picture Productions Ltd.'s advertisement for *Remembrance of Love*, *Variety*, 1 Dec. 1982, 55; 'NBC Monday Night At The Movies', *Variety*, 6 Dec. 1982, 8.

righteousness of tone' seemed 'slightly hollow' in view of the questions raised about Israel's recent invasion of Lebanon, 'not least by the Israelis themselves'.⁵⁹

IV

Associated with and often tied closely to these film roles was Douglas' assiduous, highly-publicized support for Israel away from the screen. This came in various guises at different points in his relationship with Israel, and sometimes involved his working with or rallying other celebrities for the cause. Douglas was, first, a generous financial donor to and tireless fundraiser for Israel. In the early 1950s, he and several other Hollywood stars, led principally by Eddie Cantor, encouraged Americans to fortify the Jewish state's precarious economy via the purchase of Israel Bonds.⁶⁰ In 1958, Kirk, his German-born, Christian wife Anne, the

⁵⁹ John O'Connor, 'TV: Kirk Douglas Role', *New York Times*, 6 Dec. 1982; *The Associated Press*, 'CBS Takes Seven of Top 10 and Wins Weekly Nielsen Ratings', 14 Dec. 1982.

⁶⁰ On Douglas' photo publicity shots for Israel Bonds during the filming of *The Juggler* see *Kolno'a*, 'Filming the Juggler', 9 Oct. 1952, 14-15. The first Israel Bonds sales drive was launched in 1951 in New York by David Ben-Gurion; his coast-to-coast tour of the United States reportedly raised some \$52.6 million. See The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, http://magnesalm.org/notebook_fext.asp?site=magnes&book=156765, Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley, Israel Bonds Development Corporation of America (San Francisco Office) records, 1954-1995. In 1962, Eddie Cantor was presented with the Medallion of Valor from Israel in recognition of his services to Israel Bonds and for Israel generally during

scriptwriter Michael Blankfort, and the actors Jeff Chandler, Ernest Borgnine, Charlton Heston and Marlon Brando established the Anne Frank Memorial Foundation to build and equip libraries in Israel, starting with a new Fine Arts library at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.⁶¹ The Hebrew University was a sacred seat of learning for Zionists, whose main campus on Mount Scopus had been lost to the Jordanian army during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. In future years, Douglas took part in and chaired many meetings of the New York-based American Friends of the Hebrew University, whose annual Scopus Award ceremony in the US publicly thanked those who had assisted the university's and Israel's development. Recipients included novelists, economists, businessmen, politicians and entertainers, including Frank Sinatra, Bob Hope, Steven Spielberg, Billy Crystal and Larry King.⁶²

Douglas' philanthropic efforts on Israel's behalf largely reflected the liberal vision that dominated American Jewish support for Israel after 1948. In 1975, for instance, Douglas, who

its first years. Gregory Koseluk, *Eddie Cantor: A Life in Show Business* (Jefferson, NC, 1995), p. 393.

⁶¹ A. Archerd, 'Just for Variety', *Variety*, 16 Jan. 1958, 2; 'Anne Frank Memorial Foundation Established By Hollywood Actors', *Jewish Telegraph Agency*, 12 June 1958; Michael Blankfort papers, Gotlieb Archival Research Center, box 66, file 4, Minutes of a meeting of the Board of Directors of the Anne Frank Memorial Foundation, 17 Feb. 1958.

⁶² A. Archerd, 'Frank Sinatra presented Scopus award; Hebrew U. to name new bldg. after him', *Variety*, 16 Nov. 1976, 6; 'Sold out', *Variety*, 17 Dec. 1987, 31; 'A visual history of AFHU', <https://www.afhu.org/a-visual-history-of-afhu/#.WVJXn1GQzIU> (accessed 14 March 2019); 'The Scopus award: list of the recipients', <https://www.efhu.org/index.php/hu/european-events/109> (accessed 14 March 2019); A. Archerd, 'Just for Variety', *Variety*, 2 Aug. 2002, 4.

was an avid collector of art, compered an event in Israel celebrating the tenth anniversary of Israel's national museum in Jerusalem. The museum had been the brainchild of Jerusalem's mayor, Teddy Kollek, one of Israel's public diplomacy giants who had made many friends in Hollywood, and was an important symbol of Jewish nationhood and of its claim to promote universalist cultural values.⁶³ In the 1990s, Douglas gave \$2 million for the building of the Kirk Douglas Movie Theatre in a large orthodox yeshivah opposite the Western Wall in Jerusalem, where worshippers could watch films on the history of Judaism.⁶⁴ This reflected his new-found religious awareness yet the old liberal impulse remained too. In the same period, Douglas began financing playgrounds and community centres built in his name in both Jewish and Arab areas of Jerusalem in the hope of breaking down ethnic and religious divisions in the city. In July 2000, Douglas opened one of his playgrounds personally in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City. Two months later, the Second Intifada erupted close by, newly re-dividing Jerusalem.⁶⁵

Douglas used his celebrity status in another way: to engage actively in public debates about Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict. His vocal support for the Israeli invasion of Lebanon

⁶³ Kirk Douglas Collection, WCFTR, Ruthie Goldmuntz to Kirk Douglas, 29 Aug. 1975, box 10, file 9; T. Kollek and A. Kollek, *For Jerusalem: A Life by Teddy Kollek* (Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 132-3; 162-70.

⁶⁴ T. Tugend, 'Kirk Douglas' greatest role', *Jewish Journal*, 18 Sept. 1997, http://jewishjournal.com/old_stories/401/ (accessed 14 March 2019).

⁶⁵ Douglas, *Climbing the Mountain*, pp. 128-38; 'Spartacus rides again', *Yediot Achronot*, 18 July 2000, 18.

in 1982 highlights this most clearly. In the early summer of 1982, the Israeli military's penetration deep into Lebanon and the costly siege of the Palestinian stronghold of West Beirut became the subject of extremely negative international headlines and was publicly criticized in Israel and by many American Jewish liberals. Sixty-six prominent American Jews, including the author Saul Bellow and political scientist Michael Waltzer, signed a full page advertisement in the *New York Times* supporting the anti-war movement in Israel and calling on American Jewish 'supporters of Israel' to speak out against 'policies which we know to be mistaken, self-defeating and contrary to the original Zionist vision'.⁶⁶

Flying in the face of this criticism, while he was in Israel to make *Remembrance of Love*, Douglas worked closely with Israeli public diplomacy officials tasked with convincing the international media that Israel's invasion of Lebanon had been necessary.⁶⁷ The Israeli military gave Douglas a tour of the Lebanese battlefield, taking him first to Beirut and then to the Bekaa Valley, where he was photographed with Israeli soldiers and excitedly drove one of Israel's latest high-tech tanks. Douglas later spoke of the Israelis ('our ally') having shot down Syrian-piloted Soviet aircraft, thereby placing the Israeli war in Lebanon in a wider, Cold War context – an important point for many Americans. The actor was also privately briefed about the war by Israel's Minister of Defence, Ariel Sharon, the driving force behind the controversial

⁶⁶ 'American Friends of 'Peace Now': a call to peace', *New York Times*, 4 July 1982, E7; S. T. Rosenthal, *Irreconcilable Differences? The Waning of the American Jewish Love Affair with Israel* (Hanover, 2001), 67. On American Jewish responses to the Lebanon war see also O. Seliktar, *Divided We Stand: American Jews, Israel, and the Peace Process* (Westport, 2002), pp. 69-77; Waxman, pp. 42, 45.

⁶⁷ ISA, A/4317/6, Hasbara Department to Moshe Yegar, 8 June 1982.

invasion.⁶⁸ Having seen the war for himself, and claiming that 'as an actor' he knew the difference between 'fact and fantasy', Douglas told the American media that reports of the Israeli military purposely inflicting heavy civilian casualties in Lebanon were entirely bogus and that they should keep in my mind that Palestinian terrorism was the root cause of the war. Douglas' comments overlooked the fact that the Israeli policy of targeting armed Palestinian militias in densely populated areas was, as critics argued, bound to result in heavy civilian casualties.⁶⁹ Back in Los Angeles, other Hollywood figures, including the actor Jack Lemmon and the president of 20th Century Fox, Sherry Lansing, were urging colleagues to do everything in 'our power for Israel's survival'.⁷⁰ Israeli public diplomacy was in dire need at the time of any endorsement it could find, not least from Hollywood celebrities. In September, news broke that Israel's Christian Phalangist allies had massacred hundreds of Palestinians in the Sabra

⁶⁸ Douglas, *Ragman's Son*, p. 455; A. Archerd, 'Just for Variety', *Variety*, 31 Aug. 1982, 3; 'Kirk Douglas at 100', *Variety*, 6 Dec. 2016, 108.

⁶⁹ A. Archerd, 'Just for Variety', *Variety*, 31 Aug. 1982, 3; Michael Goldfarb, 'Kirk Douglas: picking the roles is the important part', *Washington Post*, 5 Dec. 1982, TV section, 3. On the fighting and civilian casualties in Beirut see Benny Morris, *Righteous victims: a history of the Zionist-Arab conflict, 1881-2001* (New York, 2001), pp. 533-537; Yazid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for a State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 528-37.

⁷⁰ A. Archerd, 'Just for Variety', *Variety*, 2 Aug. 1982, 3.

and Shatila refugee camps near Beirut. The massacre caused American public sympathy for Israel to dip temporarily to an historic low level.⁷¹

As a liberal, Douglas never closed his mind to the prospect of peace between Israel and the Arabs. Indeed, on two occasions he played the highly unusual role of celebrity go-between in Arab-Israeli peace processes. In the aftermath of the historic Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty signed in Washington in March 1979, Douglas hosted a group of senior Egyptian officials, including one of President Anwar Sadat's close advisers, Sa'id Mari, at his house in Los Angeles, an event arranged by the US State Department. A year later, in November 1980, Mari invited Douglas to Egypt. The actor made a point of flying to Cairo via Israel. As part of the visit Douglas discussed peace for more than hour with Anwar Sadat, whom the actor praised publically as 'a heroic figure at a time when heroes are scarce'.⁷² Douglas was deeply upset when Egyptian Islamists assassinated Sadat in late 1981 because of his overtures to the West and to Israel, believing it dealt a heavy blow to Israel's prospects of a wider peace with the Arab world.⁷³

⁷¹ D. J. Albert, 'The role of American political culture in the development of the US-Israel 'special relationship' and the lost opportunities for achieving Middle East peace' (Ph.D diss., University of Texas, Austin, 2007), 22.

⁷² J. Borsten, 'Egypt whitelists Kirk Douglas', *Los Angeles Times*, 19 Nov. 1980, VI2; J. Hanauer, 'Sadat host', *United Press International*, 22 Nov. 1980, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1980/11/22/SADAT-HOST/4821343717200/> (accessed 14 March 2019).

⁷³ Douglas, *Ragman's Son*, p. 448.

Two decades later, on a visit to Israel in the summer of 2000, Douglas publicly offered prayers for Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak's success at the upcoming Camp David Summit with the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. On the same trip, Douglas visited the new king of Jordan, Abdullah, an Arab 'moderate' and keen supporter of the Middle East peace process. Abdullah had gone to the same school in Massachusetts as Michael Douglas and had recently cracked down on the presence of the Palestinian fundamentalist organisation Hamas in Jordan after pleas from the United States, Israel and Yasser Arafat. It is not known whether the star was acting under any official auspices on this occasion.⁷⁴

When the Camp David peace process disintegrated, and the Second Intifada further exacerbated Israel-Palestinian relations, Douglas grew more outspoken in his support of Israel. In August 2002, Douglas, supported by *Variety* magazine's veteran columnist Army Archerd (himself an influential pro-Israel activist),⁷⁵ treated a Palestinian attack on Jerusalem's Hebrew University as akin to a terrorist attack on Hollywood itself. The attack had targeted the Frank

⁷⁴ E. Muller, 'Kirk Douglas: an active legend', *Jerusalem Post*, 16 July 2000, 3; A. Archerd, 'Just for Variety', *Variety*, 18 July 2000, 2.

⁷⁵ Archerd, who was Jewish, served as the official greeter of the Academy Awards for 47 years and was a columnist for *Variety* for over fifty before retiring in 2005. His 'Just for Variety' column, which appeared four or five days a week, was an industry institution. Through it, Archerd did not proselytize explicitly on Israel's behalf but instead consistently supported the country's interests indirectly by, for instance, publicising Zionist fundraising activities and reporting on Hollywood stars' visits to Israel. T. Gray, 'Variety's Army Archerd dies at 87', *Variety*, 8 Sept. 2009, <http://variety.com/2009/film/markets-festivals/variety-s-army-archerd-dies-at-87-1118008272/> (accessed 14 March 2019).

Sinatra Student Centre at the university, built two decades earlier,⁷⁶ and killed nine people, including five American students. In the press, Douglas drew on his experience of visiting the Middle East and of funding playgrounds and schools in Israel, and testified that Arab schools were teaching their pupils to become martyrs by killing Jewish children. Such allegations were widespread in a period marked by the horrifying increase in Palestinian suicide bomb attacks in Israel.⁷⁷

In publicly defending Israel, Douglas sometimes felt the need to challenge critics either in his own backyard or in Washington, DC. In July 2006, the actor Mel Gibson was embroiled in a furious controversy in the US amid claims that he had launched an anti-Semitic tirade after being arrested in Los Angeles on suspicion of drunk-driving. Gibson was reported to have said, among other things, that Jews were responsible for all the wars in the world, a comment that many people took to be a reference to Israel's recent, second invasion of Lebanon. In the cacophony of noise that followed, Douglas publicly urged Gibson to seek spiritual help to heal the anti-Semitic 'cancer' in 'the recesses of his mind'. Douglas then alluded to the recent incident which had precipitated the Israelis' wide-scale attack on the Iranian-backed Hezbollah group in southern Lebanon: 'When Hezbollah dug a tunnel into Israel, killed eight soldiers, kidnapped two more and showered Israel with bombs, did Mel think that the Jews were starting a war?'⁷⁸ Douglas advocated again for Israel later the same year, this time in response to former US president Jimmy Carter. In his best-selling, provocatively-titled book *Palestine: Peace Not*

⁷⁶ On the 'caravan' of Hollywood stars that Sinatra invited to Israel in 1979 to celebrate the opening of the student centre see Gregory Peck Collection, MHL, box 225, file 2427.

⁷⁷ A. Archerd, 'Just for Variety', *Variety*, 2 Aug. 2002, 4.

⁷⁸ 'Guest column by Kirk Douglas', *Variety*, 11 Aug. 2006, 23.

Apartheid (published in November 2006), Carter had criticized Israel's recent invasion of Lebanon and called for Israel to dismantle the security barrier it had built segregating Israelis and Palestinians, a barrier that had allowed Israel to claim land previously held by Palestinians. Douglas wrote a personal letter to Carter - subsequently published in his 2007 memoir *Let's Face It* - likening Carter's call for Israel to give up land for peace with the British government's appeasement of Adolf Hitler in the 1930s. Carter replied to Douglas in a long letter, a measure both of the former president's civility and of Douglas' perceived influence.⁷⁹

Douglas was, finally, a staunch lobbyist for Israel within Hollywood itself. This he did on a number of levels. On many occasions, the star appealed to the self-interest of those in Hollywood by condemning the Arab League's boycott of Israel, introduced in the 1950s and which targeted American movies and actors connected in one way or another with the Jewish state, as illegal and undemocratic. This had the added advantage of drawing Hollywood and Israelis together as victims.⁸⁰ Douglas put his weight behind and appeared in two prime-time American television spectacles that celebrated Israel's birthday, in 1978 and 1998 – to date the only US TV programmes to fete a foreign country. In the first, which ended with Barbra Streisand interviewing the former Israeli premier Golda Meir and singing the Israeli national anthem, Douglas made a heartfelt speech comparing the heroic screen roles he had played with the 'real heroes' that he had seen build Israel over the years. In the second programme, which

⁷⁹ Kirk Douglas, *Let's Face It* (Hoboken, 2007), pp. 225-32.

⁸⁰ Kirk Douglas Collection, WCFTR, 'Cast a Giant Shadow' papers, box 7, file 7, Zeev Ravnof, "'Marcus – Yes; Masada- No!'", *Davar*, 25 May 1965, and box 44, file 4, Tamar Avidar, 'Look! There is Kirk Douglas!' *Maariv*, 24 May 1965.

was co-hosted by Michael Douglas, Douglas made a touching appeal for religious tolerance.⁸¹ Douglas also encouraged filmmakers who made movies portraying Israelis positively. In early 1977, the star wrote to congratulate director John Frankenheimer for *Black Sunday*, the first Hollywood feature film to depict Palestinian terrorists on American soil and which climaxed with an Israeli agent thwarting plans for mass murder at the US Super Bowl. Douglas and many others in the industry predicted the movie would be a blockbuster, but it performed well below expectations.⁸²

What Douglas really excelled at within Hollywood itself, however, was fronting or helping to coordinate dozens of events in Los Angeles supporting Israel. These made millions of dollars for Israel and inculcated an esprit de corps among Israel's many allies in the entertainment community. Many of the events also enabled actors, producers and directors to press the flesh with Israeli dignitaries, and led on to further pro-Israel activities. Douglas hosted a vast banquet in April 1977, for example, attended by Israeli diplomats and Hollywood stars in honour of Zubin Mehta, the Indian-born director of the Israeli and Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestras. Money raised at the banquet went to Israel's emergency medical and blood service, a cause many associated with Israel's fight against terrorism.⁸³ Almost two decades later, in

⁸¹ S. Gitell, 'A Night To Remember', *Tablet*, 28 May 2008; Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Michael Douglas papers, box 170, file 3, Script for CBS programme *To Life! America Celebrates Israel's 50th*, broadcast Apr. 1998.

⁸² John Frankenheimer Collection, MHL, Scrapbook #4, box 1, file 10, Kirk Douglas to John Frankenheimer, 21 March 1977.

⁸³ Kirk Douglas Collection, WCFTR, 'Zubin Mehta, 1977', box 1, file 29 and 'Zubin Mehta Dinner', box 10, file 11, Otto Schirm to Kirk Douglas, 21 Apr. 1977.

June 1994, Douglas hosted another glittering dinner in Los Angeles in aid of Israel's medical service. This time he presented humanitarian awards to Anwar Sadat's widow Jehan and Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin's wife Leah.⁸⁴ And in December 2000 in Beverly Hills, Douglas arranged and chaired a star-studded tribute to Jack Valenti, veteran head of the Motion Picture Association of America, at the American Friends of Hebrew University's Mount Scopus Awards. Actors Shirley MacLaine and Gregory Peck – long-time pro-Israel activists – were among those who attended.⁸⁵ All of these events and activities received media attention, thus trumpeting Douglas' and Hollywood's pro-Israel endeavours more widely.

V

History shows that celebrity activism is not a new phenomenon, nor has it been confined to broad humanitarian causes such as famine relief, the environment and world peace. Celebrity activists have added glamour and excitement to the daily grind of day-to-day domestic politics and have enlivened and brightened international affairs, including war. The movie star Kirk Douglas is an outstanding example of this. For a combination of personal, political and religious reasons, Douglas actively supported the State of Israel for over half a century. From the early 1950s to the 1980s, he starred in a series of films promoting the principal Zionist themes that Israel was a sanctuary for Holocaust survivors and that its establishment and fight for survival in the face of Arab aggression was a just and moral cause. Douglas' remarkable

⁸⁴ B. Goodwin, 'RSVP: big thoughts of peace at a smallish gathering', *Los Angeles Times*, 15 June 1994, E6; Douglas, *Climbing the Mountain*, pp. 133-5, 193-4.

⁸⁵ 'Tributes aplenty for Valenti', *Variety*, 5 Dec. 2000, 32.

range of pro-Israeli activities off screen – philanthropy, public relations, petitioning, diplomacy, and event coordination – was just as if not more significant, drawing on the power of Hollywood celebrity to solicit funds for Israeli institutions and to garner support for Israeli policies. The star was aided in his endeavours by Israelis of many stripes: filmmakers, public diplomacy officials, military officers, politicians and even prime ministers. Douglas was not a mere spokesman for Israel, but used his communications experience to help craft pro-Israeli messages.

Because the effects of celebrity activism are so difficult to gauge, it is impossible to measure the overall impact of Douglas’ various pro-Zionist activities or to pin down his net worth to Israel. What can be said is that not all of the films about Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict that Douglas starred in were as commercially successful as he and Israeli public diplomacy officials would have liked. At least one of the films, *Cast a Giant Shadow*, was also marred by behind-the-scenes arguments between Douglas, the director and Israeli officials over logistical, financial and political issues – thus showing that the Douglas-Israel connection was not without its difficulties. Moreover, we should consider the extent to which Douglas was preaching to the converted when he lobbied for Israel within many quarters, especially the American Jewish community, or whether, conversely, the support for Israel from famous Jewish figures like him was counter-productive because it fed longstanding allegations that Jews only looked after themselves and that they had too much media power.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ For websites critical of Douglas’ support for Israel, for instance, see <https://rebelvoice.blog/2017/09/22/know-your-zionist-enemies-kirk-and-michael-douglas/> and http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v17/v17n5p-2_Sindi.html (accessed 14 March 2019). Both of these sites are known for promoting antisemitic conspiracy theories.

This said, Kirk Douglas was most definitely an asset to Israel. He was a bone fide star, one whose long and glittering film career kept him in the spotlight for decades. On the one hand, his rough-and-ready, tough-guy image helped project Israel as a virile and vibrant country where Jews were healthy and could look after themselves. On the other, his liberal credentials acted as a counterweight to those who alleged that Zionism had condemned native Palestinians to refugee status and, in later decades, that Israel was a discriminatory state. His experience as a roving goodwill ambassador for the United States lent him an open-minded, internationalist air and enhanced his public diplomacy skills and contacts. And his acting and communication talents made him a highly persuasive lobbyist and fundraiser. All of this helps to explain why the Israeli government consistently showered Douglas with thanks and accolades, including from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu personally in 1997. This culminated in 2016 when, on reaching one hundred years of age, Douglas received the inaugural Teddy Kollek Award for the Advancement of Jewish Culture from the World Jewish Council.⁸⁸

Yet it is what Douglas represents that is just as important as what he did for Israel. Douglas did not plough a lonely furrow. He was a leading player in a much wider, special relationship that developed between Hollywood and Israel after 1948. That relationship can be tied to many of the same 'hard' and 'soft' factors that drew Americans in general to sympathize with or support the State of Israel over the decades, but it should also be attributed to the prominent role that Jews played in creating and sustaining Hollywood. This is not to say that

⁸⁸ 'Indifference is silence and silence is consent', *World Jewish Congress*, 10 Nov. 2016, <http://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/indifference-is-silence-and-silence-is-consent-biden-tells-wjc-gala-upon-accepting-herzl-award-11-4-2016> (accessed 14 March 2019).

all Hollywood supporters of Israel were Jewish – Frank Sinatra, a Catholic, and Marlon Brando, a Christian Scientist, show this. Nor is it to say that all Hollywood Jews were active Zionists; for all those who were that – like Michael Blankfort, Danny Kaye, Arthur Krim and Army Archerd – there were many others who were not. Nor is to say that Jews simply dictated how Hollywood treated Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict on and off the screen over the decades. For one thing, Hollywood had to take into account wider American political and public opinion on the conflict, and, as a business, it had to put profits before propaganda and market appeal before ideological-cum-ethnic affinity.

The fact is, however, that the strong interconnections between Hollywood Jews, Zionism and the State of Israel certainly helps to explain why, over the decades, American films by and large framed Israelis as the 'good guys' in the Arab-Israeli conflict and why so many powerful Hollywood figures advocated for Israel off screen. To these people, Israel was not just a key ally in the Middle East or at the epicentre of the revered Holy Land. It was first and foremost the world's only Jewish state. Given Hollywood's cultural and political power, this was of inestimable value to Israel and its American supporters. It helped give ordinary Americans and Israelis a sense of unity, marginalized Arab opinion, and acted as a cultural gluing agent in the US-Israel alliance. Hollywood cemented US-Israeli relations not simply by reflecting existing pro-Israel sentiments in American society on screen, but by magnifying these and giving them a sharper political direction. Simultaneously, it lobbied for the Jewish state off screen. These interlocking roles made Hollywood more than America's entertainment capital and gave it a unique position in the US-Israel alliance..