An Identity that Surmounted the Walls of Hope: Multi-Layered Identities in a Documentary

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Abstract

A good documentary film affords a glimpse of numerous and multi-dimensional identities and the dilemmas related to the character. Presenting a protagonist’s numerous and multi-layered historical and cultural identities in a documentary may contribute to the ability of the viewer to identify with the protagonist and understand his or her complex feelings. Consequently, the viewer may gain a deeper understanding of the historical period. In this article an example of complex identities will be presented as they are manifested in the documentary *The Art of Living* (Har-Gil, 2004), which focuses on the love story of a Jewish man and a German woman; the complexities will be illustrated in two scenes.

Introduction

In 2004, I directed a documentary whose protagonist was my father. The film, *The Art of Living*, documented the love story of Shraga (my father), and his German girlfriend, Ulla. He is a Holocaust survivor, whose extended family perished in Auschwitz, and she - the daughter of a man who produced the gas cylinders for Auschwitz. Their relationship reveals historical-social events and a personal biography, which are interwoven into their love story. The film presents multiple identities manifested through a variety of cinematic devices. In this article I will specify the various methods which I employed and the diverse identities presented in the film (mainly the historical ones), and will review them while examining several aspects: cinematic, ethical, social, period-oriented, political, personal and psychological. I will illustrate these facets by analyzing the opening and closing scenes – in which several identities appear through diverse cinematic devices.

The Role of the Documentary

Documentaries have served and still serve us, inter alia, by describing historical events and subjectively conveying past events. Their capacity to reach large audiences (Marcus & Stoddard, 2009), as well as the magic touch of the realistic, grants added value to the documentary (Burstein, 2005) – rendering the film an alternative memory, a vehicle of memory, and in addition, creates an alternative for traditional historical research (Waterson, 2007, p. 70).

Historian Yosef Mali (1991) argues that the great advantage of a film lies in the number of viewers it reaches, in comparison with the number of readers who read history books, and that films enable, the viewer, inter alia, to understand the emotional complexity of the protagonists in a particular historical period. Unlike news broadcasts and feature films, documentaries are still perceived as the representatives of “truth”, that provide an essential communicational channel that engages in building a collective
memory, and their power is based in their commitment to extant reality, analytic capacity, and ability to state an opinion. Documentaries can often arouse emotion no less, and at times more, than fictional films that describe a specific event (Cortese & Rubin, 2010). “Documentary has become the flagship for a cinema of social engagement and distinctive vision” (Nichols, 2010, p. 2).

Documentaries possess a great deal of momentum in representing the past. “The documentary creators of today are building the archives of tomorrow” (Fisher, 2005, p. 16); in a few years from now it will be possible to learn about contemporary complex identities by viewing the documentaries that are being currently created.

The Development of the Film’s Narrative

Based on my belief in the importance of the relationship between the documentary and its historical referent (Filtn, 2009), I was faced with several choices when building the narrative of The Art of Living, in which I sought to tell the story of Shraga, the film’s protagonist, and through it to deal with contemporary Jewish-Israeli identity. I chose between the following narratives:

- The story of a person
  The chronological events of his personal life, tangential with the political events, and an overall view of the period: the wars in which he participated, either as a survivor or a fighter, his work as a journalist that combined social-political critique and making a living.

- The war hero
  The story could have evolved around Shraga, the man who paid with his own blood for the establishment of the State of Israel, and the country with which he settles old scores 50 years later, after reviewing his dreams and those of his friends, what they expected would happen after the war, the price he paid for the dream of the state compared with reality, the state as he sees it today, what it turned into over the years.

- Father and son
  Another alternative was to tell the story of a father and son, who love one another, trying to communicate, to become more intimate, to better understand one another, but know so little about their different worlds. A family love story through which both generations learn about their dissimilar worldviews.

- A love story
  The fourth alternative was the love story of a man and a woman, through which I would relate the historical period in which their private lives interlinked.

Ultimately, I chose the last alternative, and interlaced the love story of Shraga and his German girlfriend Ulla with national and personal milestones. Through their story I
sought to offer the viewer a certain degree of profundity and identification, not only for the sake of television entertainment (Posterman, 2000), but also in order to understand the period and its historical events.

The bond between documentary and the historical world is deep and profound. Documentary adds a new dimension to popular memory and social history (Nichols, 2010, p. 2).

Indeed, the film touches upon several layers of Jewish history: the Nazis’ rise to power, World War II – the Holocaust – the British army, the establishment of the State of Israel, and contemporary Israeli and German reality. All these are integrated as layers in the current narrative, thus facilitating the examination of the life story more profoundly and on several dimensions.

**Identities**

There are multiple identities in the film. “For years researchers regard this concept as indicating cultural-historical affinity which is above and beyond the circumstances of time and place” (Ben Raphael & Ben Haim, 2007, p. 16). The authors go on to say that engaging in the essence of social life motivates people to interpret the reality of their lives as a realization of a historical continuity while they connect themselves to this reality through a collective identity. Identity comprises three components: (a) a value component, (b) a content component and (c) an expectancy component associated with the individual’s beliefs regarding his or her ability to enact diverse behaviors (Eccles, 2009). These identities are at times enacted directly, and at times indirectly, in the character of Shraga.

**Identities in the Film**

**Jewish identity**

Jewish identity can be interpreted as a race, a religion, a nation, a culture and a common history, all of which are included in the film in varying degrees of emphasis.

The identity of the Jew is highlighted in Shraga, the protagonist, and particularly in the scene in which Ulla reveals to me that her father was an ardent Nazi and produced the gas cylinders that were used to murder Jews in Auschwitz. In this scene my father remains silent, attentive, smoking a cigar. Suddenly he begins singing softly a Jewish prayer-song, which he possibly learned as a child raised in an ultra-Orthodox school. The song is the supplication of a Jew who believes in God: “Lift up your eyes on high, and see what God has done. Did you know? If you have not heard what God has done, what God has done.”

His reaction in moments of distress and emotional storm is to return to a religious psalm that he used to sing when he was a child, despite the fact that he is secular. This moment correlates with the Jewish perception that accepts reality as the wish of God and bows its head in understanding – if that is what God wants, so be it. At this moment, Shraga, listening to Ulla revealing the fact that she comes from a Nazi family, sings the prayer in order to protect himself against the accusation, that I did not express in words,
but was unavoidable and present in the room: how is it that you are befriending the daughter of your family’s murderer and how you, my father, failed to tell me the truth about Ulla, He responded through the words of the song – it was God’s will; as if he was adopting the Jewish approach that did not attempt to understand what had happened but rather accepted reality as force majeure.

**German identity**

In addition to Shraga’s Jewish identity, he also had a German identity. My father was the son of German Jews who regarded Germany (prior to World War II) as their primary and exclusive homeland, a product of the German "bildung", which meant refining personality and the “self” in accordance with the ideals of the Enlightenment Movement. Even when they remain Jews, the "bildung" and the "kultur" will transform them into full-fledged Germans (Elon, 2004, p. 69). As early as the 18th century, Moshe Mendelsohn wrote in his book Jerusalem that one could be an observant Jew and an enlightened German at the same time, without any contradiction (Elon, 2004, p. 53). The German identity is manifested numerous times throughout the film. For example, in the renewed meeting of Ulla and Shraga; in the background a woman singing in German:

I am a Christian and you are a Jew  
Your ancestors lived in our country  
Even though we shed your blood  
You put your hand out to me, your hand  
You are a German like me  
Stand by me like a brother  
Come, share our pain  
Our homeland, our joy.

**The identity of a Holocaust survivor**

Shraga’s family escaped from Germany before the second world war, after his father had been persecuted by the Nazis, as a Jew and a socialist, despite the fact that he was a decorated German officer who fought in World War I. Minutes after the film’s opening, comes a description of Shraga, his brother and his parent’s escape from the Nazis, until they finally arrive in Palestine (Israel of today). Shraga appears at the beginning of the film as a Holocaust survivor and as a Jew persecuted by the Germans. This identity appears early in the film because I, as the director, regarded it as an important emotional focal point for understanding Shraga’s personality, and perhaps even that of the Jews, who lived in Germany prior to World War II. The humiliating feeling of persecution, scorn and a lack of belonging attends Shraga throughout his life.

**The identity of a German Jew in Israel – a Yekke**

The Jews who came to Palestine from Germany were new immigrants whose European culture was different from those practiced by other immigrants and residents. They were called “Yekke”. “A Yekke is an Israeli who came from Central Europe, mainly
from Germany… and a derogatory name for German Jews, which relates to their sternness and rigidity” (Rosenthal, 2005, p. 167). It also means overly serious, lacking a sense of humor, excessively straight-laced, precise, and organized.

The *Yekke* identity appears in the scene in which Ulla, Shraga and I visit the house in which Shraga grew up in Israel. There he says that he was never ashamed of his “*Yekke*” identity despite the fact that it was considered a disparaging term. He tells that once, when a friend of his - also a *Yekke* - said to him: “Stop behaving like that, everyone will see you’re a *Yekke*” he replied that he *was* a *Yekke*, and he behaved like a *Yekke*, and was not ashamed of it.

**The identity of an Israeli, "sabra", Zionist, one of the 1948 generation, founders of the State of Israel.**

Shraga realized the Zionist vision, came to Israel, volunteered and fought in the War of Independence and actively took part in founding the State of Israel. This is how Zionism came into being. As Haim Weizmann once said when speaking about the relentless adherence involved in realizing the Zionist idea: “The hunger of the halutzim [the pioneers] is part of the Zionist budget” (Zur, 2008, p. 15). Zionism means establishing a national homeland for the Jews in Eretz Israel (land of Israel). This is the realization of the vision of Theodore Herzl, visionary of the State of Israel, and the response to the annihilation of six million Jews in the Holocaust. The vision sought to provide a radical definition of the character of Jewish existence, and a deep-seated and conscious solution for the Jewish problem (Kollat, 2008). In one of the film’s scenes Shraga is seen walking in the fields of Western Galilee; an IBA television crew is documenting him and he is describing the brutal battle in which he participated in 1947. In this battle Shraga was shot in his chest and belly, injuries that endangered his life. In the scene we see the IBA television crew that had selected Shraga as one of the protagonists of a series that tells his story vis-à-vis the establishment of the State of Israel. The crew regarded him as a hero, and in the narration I explain that I realized that my own private hero was also a national one.

There is a reversal in Shraga’s story: on the one hand he is the humiliated and ostracized child, and on the other, a war hero who fought in the war of independence, “free of all the Jewish inferiority complexes” (Shochat, 2005, p. 53).

As the Israeli "*sabra*" (native born Israeli) is often perceived as a person whose mother tongue is Hebrew, his speech is rough and direct, he is knowledgeable about the country, he has a deep sense of being native, and an ardent Zionist idealist (Almog, 1999). Shraga was not a "*sabra*" (he was born in Germany) but the characteristics of his identity – at least the salient ones – can be identified with the "*sabra*" myth of the healthy, heroic, proud, courageous, both tough and gentle young man.

As one who belongs to the generation of idealists who made sacrifices for the country and hoped for a just and humane state, he is disappointed with extant reality. Shraga feels frustrated in view of the current face of Israel. He is perturbed and feels that he has no impact over what is happening, nor do people like him; all the authority is in the hands of radicals with whom he cannot identify; in his name they perform actions which he disputes and scorns. This is manifested in a narrative: “I wonder whether my father, every time he is hospitalized or undergoes surgery – settles scores with the state, the state for
which he fought and for which he suffered wounds which still plague him today?” In the following scene Shraga answers my question: “If you are asking whether fifty years ago I would be willing to do everything in my power in order to obtain the country that we have here today – my answer would be No! I feel very frustrated living here.”

The secular identity

It is customary for religious Jews to wear a skullcap; on the other hand, not wearing a skullcap attests to the fact that you are secular. Shraga appears in the film as a secular Jew without a skullcap.

In the film *The Art of Living*, only one holiday is represented, which also attests to the secular nature of Shraga and his environment. The holiday is Independence Day, which is not a religious holiday, but marks the establishment of the State of Israel, of whom Shraga was one of its founding members. The holiday is meaningful to Shraga more than any other holiday, because it symbolizes the essence and significance of being a secular Jew, one who takes responsibility for his own fate and acts to establish his own state. This holiday is manifested, inter alia, by the custom of attaching the national flag to cars.

The flags on cars appear in two scenes in the film: the scene in which the creased and torn flag is picked up from the road, and the scene in which Shraga is walking slowly along the road, causing the cars decorated with flags that are behind him to slow down. Another scene shows Ulla and Shraga on a trip to the Dead Sea. In this scene Shraga is seen covering Ulla’s exposed body in black mud. This carefree behavior of a man and a woman in public is not customary among religious Jews and is far more common among secular people. As these two examples show, this identity – a secular one – is only suggested.

The identity of the New Israeli

This implies the Western type of Israeli, who speaks several languages, travels abroad, is self-confident, is not shy, loves his country, spends his time in cafés, listens to music from all corners of the world, and wants to get the most out of life.

In the film this identity can be found in the scene in which Shraga and Ulla go to Israel, when he is trying to introduce her to the country, in the café scenes in which they behave like a pair of lovers, stroking one another, drinking wine on his birthday, singing “Happy birthday” in English, a language in which he is fluent. Singing in English attests to the impact of Anglo-Saxon culture on the protagonist’s group of Israeli friends: members of the middle-high socioeconomic class, secular, "Ashkenazi" (Jews of central and eastern Europe). The celebration of a birthday is a Western, not Jewish custom. A birthday celebration is mentioned only once in the Old Testament, in Genesis, Chapter 40:20: “And it came to pass the third day which was Pharaoh’s birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants.” According to this we can infer that this was an ancient “custom of the Gentiles” and Jewish culture adopted it only in recent centuries (Ta-Shema, 2002), and it became part of new Israeli culture.
The identity of a disabled war veteran

Shraga was injured severely in the War of Independence and was classed as 100% disabled. He suffers from numerous physical problems; however he tries to oppose this identity, which was forced upon him. Perhaps his fight against being classified as a disabled person characterizes this identity.

The battle scene is followed immediately by the hospital scene with this narration:

Father is in hospital again and his condition is critical. Ulla is coping with the situation for the first time. I, as a young boy, took on the role of a protector – I made sure that he took his medication that the doctors gave him the fullest and best treatment. But then I was unaware of that fact that he was classed as 100% disabled and that I might lose him. It was clear to me that he could overcome, and indeed he did: the injury to his spinal cord, his left lung, the heart attacks, blindness in one eye, high blood pressure, injury to the spleen, dialysis treatment, and even a kidney transplant.

The identity of a Jewish soldier in the British army

As a young man, Shraga volunteered for the British army. He was one of 27,000 Jews from Palestine who volunteered to fight the Nazis. (Gelber, 1984, p. 300) This identity appears in the film, backed by stills of Shraga dressed in his military uniform. In addition, music, reminiscent of the World War II period (Lilly Marlene) is playing the background of the scene on the pier, where Shraga and his beloved Ulla are spending time on the banks of the Rheine in Germany.

The identity of the wandering Jew

The Jew with no roots, who has been living in the Diaspora for 2000 years in isolated communities with their distinctive customs, is very far from the environment in which he lives. He often tries to assimilate into the society around him, is often persecuted, frequently suffers from anti-Semitism, and is always ready to move to a better place. Shraga too, despite the fact that he participated in founding the new State of Israel for the Jews – has an additional passport that allows him to travel in Ulla’s footsteps and remain in Berlin indefinitely. This is illustrated in the narration of the scene in which Shraga goes to Germany:

[…] He does not ask for German reparations. On the other hand, he does issue a German passport. He, who as a child was forced to have his photograph taken with his face to the wall, takes out German citizenship. Despite the fact that the country he helped establish has been in existence for over 50 years, you merely need to scratch the surface to discover the persecuted Jew. As a German citizen, my father can remain with Ulla in Germany for as long as he likes.
Non-historical identities

In addition to the protagonist’s historical identities specified above, there are other identities in the film that are not historical: my father, as Romeo, a Tel Aviv bon vivant, a divorcée, a womanizer – Casanova, the wandering Jew, the writer, a private person, blind, old.

The multi-layered identities in the opening and closing scenes

The opening scene

Description of the scene

Music accompanies the scene from beginning to end, and evokes a somewhat sad atmosphere. The scene opens showing fingers typing on a Latin-letter keyboard. Hebrew text appears on the screen, part of which is enlarged by a magnifying glass and a voice is heard reading the writing. The magnifying glass follows the text in accordance with the rhythm of the voice reading the text. Shraga’s face is revealed; he is reading the text that appears on screen:

When the second year of kindergarten came to an end, they decided to commission a photographer to take a group photo of the children. We all went outside to the Hofgarten public park; it was the Bishop of Würzburg’s garden. We stood in one row, some of the children hugged one another, as friends do, and suddenly the kindergarten teacher came over to me and said: “Not you. You’re a Jewish child!” and she turned me around with my face to the wall, so that only my back was visible, because I was a Jewish child and could not spoil the picture.

The title of a photograph appears: *The Art of Living*, The story of my father – Shraga Har-Gil

Analysis of the scene

Some of the identities that stand out in the first scene will reappear, even numerous times in the following scenes, and others will appear - in this scene only. Some of the messages conveyed to the viewer are conspicuous and hard to ignore, and others are alluded to and associative and their presence will become obvious only after repetitions in the following scenes.

The subject of this scene is the story of the souvenir photo taken at an end-of-year party at the kindergarten. The camera pans slowly from right to left, the full width of the photograph – several children are looking at the photographer; the camera is focused on one child whose back is facing the camera. This picture exposes the feeling of a Jewish child humiliated by the Nazi kindergarten teacher, in 1932, in Würzburg, Germany. Thus, an initial and main identity in this scene is that of the persecuted and humiliated Jew – a foreshadowing of the identity of the Holocaust survivor who suffered, but who survived, Nazi anti-Semitism in Germany.
Additional identities that are revealed in the scene are that of the Jew and the German-Jew trying to assimilate into Christian-German society. The story reveals the fact that the majority of the kindergarten children were not Jewish. Shraga was sent to a mixed kindergarten, but actually he was the only Jew there. Since the photograph is a souvenir of the year, which shows an entire age-group, the small number of children in the photograph attests to the fact that it was an exclusive kindergarten. Accordingly, it is clear that Shraga came from a Jewish family that was seeking to have their children assimilate into a Christian-German environment. Since the fact that he is discriminated against due to anti-Semitism is emphasized in the story and in the photograph – the identity of the Holocaust survivor is also present.

The film begins with a shot of a hand typing text on a Latin-letter keyboard. The picture creates the association of a writer. The German keyboard evokes the association of a person well-versed in German and European culture. This alludes to the identity of a writer and a Yekke, in other words, a man of German origin who immigrated/escaped to Israel. The Israeli who still thinks and writes in a foreign language, and in Shraga’s case – in German.

The next shot is of a Hebrew text with letters enlarged by a magnifying glass, which moves in accordance with the rhythm of the reading. The emphasis on the Hebrew language stresses the identity of the writer as an Israeli. The magnifying glass that moves in accordance with the rhythm of the reading guides the viewer to read the words and affords a glimpse into the world of someone whose vision is challenged, and is almost blind. Here is the first indication of an additional identity that will be clearly revealed later in the film, the identity of the disabled war veteran. When Shraga appears, and tells his story, his head is shown without of a skullcap, an allusion to his secular identity.

At the end of the scene, when the title appears on the photograph, an additional identity clearly emerges – that of the father. This is underscored by the sub-title: “The story of my father, Shraga Har-Gil.” Shraga is a Jewish name, characteristic of older people, or of the elderly. Today almost no one would name a child this name. Har-Gil is an Israeli surname, composed of two words: A mountain of joy. The name is a new Israeli name, dating from the period when people changed their names to Israeli (Hebrew-sounding) names. To the Israeli ear, it is clear that the name’s origin is different, a name that was Hebrewcized. And indeed, this name is the literal translation of the German name – Freudenberg: Freud – joy, berg – mountain, er – a typical German ending. Thus Freudenberg became Har-Gil, like so many surnames of Jews who came from different countries and "Hebrewcized" their names. This change was the result of the new identity which the new immigrants wanted to create for themselves. There was a desire to disconnect oneself from the language of the country you left, or from which you fled, and assimilate in the new homeland. It was customary to say – “Ivri, daber Ivrit” (Jew/Israeli, speak Hebrew). This alludes to the identity of the New Israeli. In addition to the identities mentioned, there is also the identity of an individual, who has a first and last name – Shraga Har-Gil – who has his own individual characteristics and singular life history.
The concluding scenes

Description of the scene

The scene opens after my father, Shraga, visits a hospital in Dusseldorf, in a final attempt to save his eyesight. After the visit Ulla and Shraga are seen walking arm in arm along a verdant path beside a stream in Germany; Shraga is holding a walking stick. Romantic Israeli-style music accompanies them. The narration:

I look at my father and Ulla and am happy that they’re together. I feel happy that I have managed to ignore her family history and like her for what she is. They are walking along in the landscape in which he was born, and he can barely see. It seems that he will remain in Germany with Ulla. Disappointed by the country he helped to build, almost blind, a Jew, an Israeli, a German, a disabled war veteran, my father.

The shot shifts to a close-up of two pairs of hands holding one another, and while moving away, Shraga and Ulla are seen on a Tel Aviv street, walking and holding hands. The music changes to a German romantic tune. The narration continues:

To my delight, my father returned with Ulla two months later. They decided to live together in Tel Aviv despite the difficulties and the fear of the war in Iraq. To hope, to love, to live. The art of living

Now comes Ulla’s voice, explaining in English:

What is clearer now for me, I'm not coming to Israel for a mission. I love Shraga and now I come because Shraga is in Israel.

They enter the building in which Shraga lives. Ulla opens the door; Shraga’s voice is heard speaking Hebrew:

I, I am so angry at this country, but despite everything, it’s my home, just like you can become angry with your child, he’s not nice and does bad things and takes drugs - who knows what else - but in the end you care for him, because he’s your child, not someone else’s.

The shot focuses on an artistic picture of Mary, Jesus’ mother, hanging among many other photographs and pictures on the wall of Shraga's living room. From there the camera shifts to Ulla and Shraga sitting. They take an NBC gas mask out of the box; (the gas masks were distributed to all the residents of Israel by the Israeli Home Front Command). Ulla is trying to read the Hebrew but fails, and hands it over to Shraga. Shraga tries to read, but finds it difficult because of his faulty vision, together they manage to decipher the writing:
Ulla in Hebrew: “Against being h-a-r-med by gas.”
Shraga, in Hebrew: “Harmed by gas.”
Ulla in Hebrew: “N-e-r-v-e.”
Shraga, in Hebrew: “Nerve”
Ulla in German: “Does the nose go in or does it stay outside?”
Ulla: “Cuckoo”

Shraga and Ulla smile at one another. The frame freezes. Cheerful Israeli music is heard in the background.
The final titles appear on screen.

**Analysis of the scenes**

In the final scenes the identities of the loving couple emerge – the adult *Romeo* and *Juliet*. A romantic couple walking along a verdant path, moving away, while the man is holding a walking stick – an association with the closing composition of the Charlie Chaplin films, the character of the vagabond, a distant association with the wandering Jew. The association of the Israeli identity is created by Israeli music played against the background of German landscape. The music is reminiscent of a well-known Israeli song sung by one of Israel’s most famous singers – Arik Einstein. The recorder is also a typical Israeli musical instrument suggestive of the early days of the State of Israel. The presence of Israeli music in the German scene alludes to the fact that he does not belong – the wandering Jew. The narration first defines Shraga in the film by a continuous definition of identities: disappointed by the state he helped to establish, almost blind, a Jew, an Israeli, a German, a disabled war veteran, my father.

This is a summary of several identities that clearly appear in the film. Later, the Israeliness is underscored by the pair walking along a busy Israeli street with music of a Germanic character on the background. The two shots suggest that either Ulla in Israel or Shraga in Germany – will never fully belong. They continue walking hand in hand despite the changing landscape. Here, their identity as *Romeo* and *Juliet* is highlighted. When they enter the house, Ulla opens the door, a reminder of the scene in which Shraga tried to open the door but failed to do so, because he could not see the keyhole. Here again - his identity as an almost blind disabled war veteran, in the living room of his home. The shot that focuses on the picture of Mary attests to Shraga’s taste, to his cultural world and is an association with his being a German-Jew trying to assimilate into German culture. It is a memory of his numerous visits to the church, with his Jewish grandmother who was educated in a monastery. Even after her marriage she would sometimes go to church together with her grandson Shraga.

When Ulla opens the gas mask it reminds us that she is the daughter of a person who manufactured the gas cylinders for Auschwitz, murdering the relatives of Shraga – the Holocaust survivor. Shraga’s difficulties in reading the text on the gas mask box allude to his identity as a disabled war veteran, who is visually challenged. Ulla’s speaking to Shraga in German, reinforces the fact that he is also German. This is their common ground. Finally, she makes him laugh, he laughs and the frame freezes, and at the same time a cheerful Hebrew tune can be heard in the background. Here they appear once again in their identity as an adult version of *Romeo* and *Juliet*. Love conquers all. The
music on the freeze frame helps to create this feeling. A blatantly cheerful Israeli song. Once again, Israeli identity.

**Conclusion**

Despite the numerous identities and historical and individual complexities, *The Art of Living* attempts to create balance and make a focused statement. The film manifests hope and an aspiration to overcome innate hatred based on historical animosity.

The film deals with the past but also with hope, and thus combines the two kinds of documentary films described by Nichols: “documentaries of wish-fulfillment and documentaries of social representation” (Nichols, 2010, p.1).

In order to enable the viewer to identify with the protagonist, I adopted the multiple identity approach presented on different layers in the film and through diverse cinematic means. A viewer who feels empathy or sympathy for the protagonist, even with only one single identity, can more easily identify with the protagonist’s other identities (Coplan, 2006). Nevertheless, in this film identification with the protagonist is not self-evident.

This is an alternative Holocaust film, because in the familiar Holocaust films the Germans are portrayed as evil and strong, and the Jews as good and weak. Jews suffer and Germans make them suffer. The Jews are just and the Nazi Germans are guilty. This film presents a more complex relationship.

I accepted the approach of the documentary-historical film creator, Allen Rosenthal, who wrote: “I want to encourage the viewers to ask questions after they see the film. I want to tell an interesting story that will appeal to the mind and the heart. I want to connect the viewers with the past in a way that academicians cannot.” (Rosenthal, 2005 p. 55) In this film I made an attempt to bring the viewer closer to diverse identities – historical and others: the Jewish identity (as a race, culture, religion and common historical identity), the *Yekke* – a German-born Jew, the Israeli, the Holocaust survivor, the assimilated Jew in Germany, the secular, the "sabra", the New Israeli, the soldier in the British army fighting against the Nazis, the Jewish soldier – one of the founders of the State of Israel – fighting against the Arabs, the disabled war veteran, the wandering Jew, the Tel Aviv bon vivant, Casanova, the divorcee, Romeo and the old man. Shraga represents the different identities on different levels. Thus, for example, the identity of the secular Jew is only suggested, while the identity of the Holocaust survivor is emphasized.

Only the presentation of a character that has numerous and complex identities can help the viewer understand and identify with a person who lived in a specific time, whose life in many senses was the result of historical events in which he participated either of his free will or due to the circumstances. Thus, for example, the identity of the Jewish Holocaust survivor is an identity which Shraga did not chose, but the identity of the volunteer soldiers in the war of independence. This complexity and multi-layered quality enables viewers to identity with and understand different facets of the character portrayed. In every period different identities exists in a person concomitantly. Separating between them falls short of the complex truth. Only presenting a person with multiple identities can create understanding of the “other” and hence the ability to identify with him/her as a human being. In order to bring the viewer to full identification with the protagonist, I had to choose the right character.
Kobi Niv said that when choosing the main character of the film, one should ensure that is has several characteristics – it should be sufficiently strong to carry the film on its shoulders, its behavior should not be arbitrary, it should engender identification, it should not be stereotypical and it should undergo a process in the film (Niv, 1994, p. 105). I am hopeful that in choosing the protagonist – my father – and directing the film I enabled the viewers to understand the “other” and see the world through his eyes (Murdock, 2000) because this is a remedy for hatred and racism that in turn lead to war. I hope that I have made a modest contribution to achieving more love and peace in this world.

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**Notes**

1. 2006, Audience Choice Award (from: Professional Feature, Professional Short, Professional Animation, Professional Documentary) for the film *The Art of Living*, Reel to Real Film Festival, North Carolina, USA;
2. One of the five nominees for the Israeli Oscar, category: Best Israeli Documentary for the film *The Art of Living*, director and producer: Amir Har-Gil.
3. Historical identity, defined as the psychological awareness of family and cultural inheritance, received by the group in which individuals happen to be born (Leone & Curigliano, 2009, p. 305).
3. The Israeli Home Front Command deals with civil defense in times of war.

**References**


Burstein Y. (2001). What is a documentary: is there really no difference between a documentary film and a document? *Cinémathèque*, 112, 26-33. [Hebrew]


