

*“This insider's view of the early days of the [Israeli] settler movement is inevitably political. It is also fundamentally brave” -- **The New York Times***

Campfire (Medurat Hashevet)



Directed and written by Joseph Cedar
Israel, 2004 * 96 minutes * 1:1.85 * Dolby SR
In Hebrew, w/English subtitles

Israel's Selection for Best Foreign Film, 2005 Academy Awards
Winner, Five Israeli Academy Awards, incl. Best Picture, Director and Screenplay
Winner, Foreign Journalists' Prize for Best Film, 2004 Chicago Int'l Film Festival
Winner, Don Quixote Awards, 2004 Berlin Film Festival
Winner, Audience Award, 2005 Vesoul International Film Festival of Asian Cinema

US Distributor:
Film Movement
Josh Levin, Exhibitor Relations
375 West Broadway, Second Floor
New York, NY 10012
(212) 941-7744 x. 213
(212) 941-7812 (fax)
josh@filmmovement.com
www.filmmovement.com

Press Contact: Samantha Dean
Samantha Dean & Associates
847a Second Avenue, # 258
New York
N.Y.
Tel 212-490-8006
Fax: 646-472-5700
Email:sam@samanthadean.com

Film Synopsis:

From the director of **Time of Favor** (winner of six Israeli Academy Awards, including Best Picture, 2000), comes **Campfire**, a story of one woman's personal journey, but also a portrait of a movement that has forever affected millions of lives in the Middle East.



The year is 1981. Rachel Gerlik, a 42 year-old widowed mother of two beautiful teenage daughters, wants to join the founding group of a new religious settlement in the West Bank. The problem is that the settlement's acceptance committee won't approve her unless she remarries and demonstrates that she and her daughters can meet the group's religious and ideological standards. When Tami, her youngest daughter, is accused of seducing some boys from her youth movement, Rachel is forced to weigh her allegiances. Only Yossi, a 50 year-old bachelor and the new man in Rachel's life, can show Rachel that living as an outcast is not as bad as it seems.

Credits:

Joseph Cedar... writer/director
David Mandil ... executive producer
Eyal Shiray... executive producer
Gidon Gadi... line producer
Ofer Inov... cinematographer
Einat Glaser-Zarhin... film editor
Ofer Shalchin... music

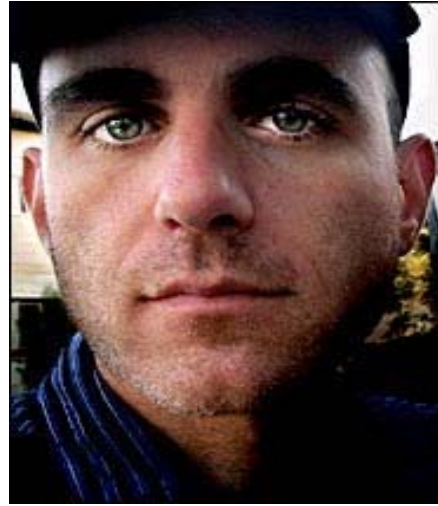
Cast:

Michaela Eshet... Rachel Gerlik
Hani Furstenberg... Tami Gerlik
Moshe Ivgy... Yossi
Maya Maron... Esti
Assi Dayan... Motkeh
Oshri Cohen... Rafi
Yehoram Gaon... Moshe Weinstock

About Director/Writer Joseph Cedar:

Joseph Cedar was born in New York in 1968, and immigrated to Israel with his family at the age of six. Cedar has a Yeshiva background, studied philosophy and theater history at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and is an NYU Film School graduate.

His first feature film **Time of Favor** (Hahesder) won six Israeli Academy Awards, including Best Picture 2000, and was the number one box-office hit that year in Israel of that year. **Campfire** (Medurat Hashevet) is Cedar's second feature film. Cedar currently lives in Tel-Aviv with his wife Vered Kellner, a journalist, and their daughter.



Joseph Cedar on Campfire:

“1981 is the year when most of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank were established. I was 13 then. I grew up in a religious, Zionist family in a Jerusalem neighborhood, the oldest of six children. My teachers, my parents’ friends and my friends’ parents were mostly considered right wing politically and supported the Settlement Movement that gained momentum then as a reaction to the peace treaty with Egypt and Israel’s withdrawal from the Sinai desert.

“But unlike today’s perception of the settlers as religious and ideological extremists, the settlers of 1981 were mostly middle-class citizens who used the political atmosphere of the time as an excuse to take advantage of what they considered a good real state opportunity, expand their homes and create a sheltered environment for their communal life. Yes, they were idealistic too, but it’s hard to imagine the popularity of the settlements without weighing in the quality of life factor as well. Little did they know that 20 years later, driving to their suburban dream home would entail bullet proof vests and a military armed escort. Not to mention two million Palestinian neighbors without basic human rights.

“My parents didn’t end up moving to a settlement, but many of my good friends did relocate their homes to the hills of Judea and Samaria. As a child I remember feeling disappointed that my parents weren’t adventurous enough to take part in this “historical movement.” Today I think it is safe to say that the Settlement Movement did indeed leave its footprints on the history or our region.

“I decided to set my film in this context because I wanted to examine the social dynamics behind the ideology and politics. In the beginning of my film Rachel expresses her desire to join the settlement and we know that there is nothing political about this desire, all she wants is to belong to a community. By the end of the story, when Rachel turns her back on the settlement, here too there is nothing political, only an act social independence and personal integrity.

“When I think of all the political and ideological ideas that surround me, and effect my life on a daily basis, I sometimes ask myself how much of it is ultimately a result of social dynamics, tribal affiliations, and personal loyalties. My feeling is, and this is the underlying theme of the two films I’ve made, that ideology is merely a mask covering basic human motivations.”

Biographies

Joseph Cedar (Writer/Director)

Born in New York, Cedar immigrated to Israel with his family at the age of six. Cedar studied philosophy and theater history at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and is an NYU Film School graduate. His first feature film TIME OF FAVOR (HAHESDER) won six Israeli Academy Awards, including Best Picture 2001, and was the number one box-office hit of that year. CAMPFIRE (MEDURAT HASHEVET) is Cedar's second feature film. Cedar currently lives in Tel-Aviv with his wife Vered Kellner, a journalist, and their daughter.

Moshe Ivgy (Yossi)

One of the most acclaimed actors in Israel, Ivgy has also garnered awards from around the world. His breakthrough performance was in LOVESICK ON NANA STREET (HOLE AHAVA BESHICUM GIMEL), for which he won an Israeli Academy Award®. He won his second Academy Award® for his role in METALIC BLUES. Ivgy was also nominated for an Israeli Academy Award® for his performance as Yossi in CAMPFIRE (MEDURAT HASHEVET).

Michaela Eshet (Rachel):

Venerable Israeli stage performer received a Best Actress nomination from the Israeli Film Academy for her performance as Rachel, the lead character in CAMPFIRE.

Hani Furstenberg (Tami):

Winner, Israeli Film Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for her performance in CAMPFIRE. Hani Furstenberg was brought up in New York. Hani moved to Israel with her family at 16, and immediately developed a very promising acting career for herself in only a couple of years – including the leading role in Eytan Fox's acclaimed film YOSSI & JAGGER.

Maya Maron (Esti):

Accomplished television and film actress Maya Maron is a former winner of an Israeli Film Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress in 2002 for her performance in KNAFAYIM SHVUROT (BROKEN WINGS). She was also nominated in 1996 for best supporting actress for CLARA HAKEDOSHA (SAINT CLARA).

CAST

Michaela Eshet	Rachel
Hani Furstenberg	Tami
Maya Maron	Esti
Moshe Ivgy	Yossi
Assi Dayan	Motke
Yehoram Gaon	Moshe
Oshri Cohen	Rafi
Idit Teperson	Shula

Yehuda Levi	Yoel
Itai Turgeman	Goslan
Ofer Seker	Yair
Danny Zahavi	Ilan
Dina Senderson	Inbal
Avi Grayinik	Oded

MAIN CREW

Writer and Director:	Joseph Cedar
Producers:	David Mandil, Eyal Shiray, Dan Shiray,
Director of Photography:	Ofer Inov
Editor:	Einat Glaser Zarhin
Music:	Ofer Shalchin
Production Design:	Miguel Merkin
Costume Design:	Laura Sheim
Sound Design:	Alex Claude

Produced by: CINEMA PRODUCTION
With the support of: THE ISRAEL FILM FUND, YES, RESHET

Web Site: www.campfiremovie.com

US Distributor: Film Movement

World Sales:
Showcase Entertainment, Inc.
Warner Center
21800 Oxnard Street, Suite 150
Woodland Hills, CA 91367
(818) 715-7005 (tel)
(818) 715-7009 (fax)
david@showcaseentertainment.com

Cinema Production:
18 Ben Avigdor St. P.O.B 57297, Tel-Aviv 61572, Israel
Tel: 972 3 5617040 Fax: 972 3 5617092
e-mail: cfactory@zahav.net.il

Israel Film Fund:
12 Yehudith Blvd., Tel-Aviv 67016, Israel
Tel: 972 3 5628180 Fax: 972 3 5625992
e-mail: info@filmfund.org.il Website: www.filmfund.org.il

Press and Reviews for Campfire

The New York Times

December 13, 2004

Politics and Prostitution: Israeli Filmmakers Chart Broad, Gritty Territory **By STEVEN ERLANGER**

TEL AVIV, Dec. 12 - Tiny countries with big problems tend to make somber, self-conscious films. In this instance, at least, Israel is no exception.

Still, Israeli directors are making more of an effort to entertain as well, working harder to fit lifelike characters around bigger themes of sexual and religious politics.

One of the most successful is perhaps among the least likely: an American-born Orthodox director, Joseph Cedar, whose portrayal of religious settlers has brought cries of betrayal down upon his head.

His second film, "**Campfire**," released in Israel this year, is a story of sexual yearning and awakening, set in 1981, as a widow with two daughters seeks companionship and community in the early settler movement. The eldest daughter is saucy, the other meek. When the younger daughter is molested during a holiday campfire, it sets off confrontations and quandaries that cause the widow to reject what she comes to see as a repressive communalism.

The leader of the settlers urges her to hush up the incident to protect the community; unsurprisingly, she chooses to support her daughter.

In a slightly awkward effort to be uplifting, given its themes, the film ends cheerily, with the widow finding contentment with the only man in the film who is nice to her.

"She, who wants to fit in, needs someone who has given up on fitting in," Mr. Cedar says in an interview. "They awaken something for each other."

Mr. Cedar, his eye on the larger world of film distribution, insists that he could have set this family drama anywhere, and that the fundamental human themes supersede the intricate Israeli context. "The big trick in making any foreign movie is that it must be specific enough so local audiences don't feel you're turning them into something exotic, but universal enough so that others will recognize themselves," he said.

But this insider's view of the early days of the settler movement is inevitably political. It is also fundamentally brave.

What interests him, he says, are "characters who are able to break out of the community's tribal embrace." But he also admits that the cynicism, hypocrisy and elitism of his fictionalized settlers and their leader are meant to comment on the current situation in Israel, where the settler patriarch Ariel Sharon, the prime minister, has prompted fury by his desire to dismantle all Israeli settlements in Gaza and four tiny ones in the West Bank. "There is something about our reality now that is undeniably influenced by the settlers' movement," Mr. Cedar said. "I resent that, and that resentment is there in the movie."

His first film, "Time of Favor" (2000), was more of a potboiler-thriller about a plan - born of misconstrued religious teaching and unrequited love - to blow up the Dome of the Rock, a Muslim shrine.

The anger his first film created among his own tribe of national-religious Israelis helped provide the spark for this one. "People said, 'When we finally have one of our own, why do you show such things?' I thought I was making a film as a representative of a tribe and found people angry with me. I needed to think about how much I needed to be accepted and loved by that tribe. And this movie is a response," he said.

At the center of "Campfire" is the effort to silence scandal. There has been a similar response to the film, Mr. Cedar said. "That's the flak I'm getting: 'How can you put this out? It's a sacrilege!' The hard core can only deal with me as someone who has left the fold and is betraying confidentiality. But it's about me, too. I'm part of the fold."

"Campfire" ("Medurat Hashevet" in Hebrew) won the top Israeli prize for best feature film this year from a field of 24, and is Israel's nominee for the foreign-language category of the Academy Awards. (It is still seeking a United States distributor.)

With few exceptions, the Oscar has gone to obscure foreign films, "but it can make a difference, especially in the United States, where people pay attention to prizes," said Ruth Diskin, who distributes many Israeli documentaries and features. The last Israeli film to be an Oscar finalist was "Beyond the Walls," 20 years ago.

Israeli films tend to be made on the European model, as joint productions of various companies, with some money from state finances for homegrown cinema. Israel had about \$13.6 million to distribute this year.

"Campfire" received money from the state, which provided about 70 percent of its budget; from two television channels, one of them cable; and from private financing. It was made for about \$900,000 compared, for example, with the multimillion budget for Baz Luhrmann's two-minute advertisement for Chanel No. 5, starring Nicole Kidman.

Mr. Cedar, 36, came to Israel at the age of 5 when his parents emigrated to Israel from New York. He attended Israeli schools and served as a paratrooper in the Israeli army, but then went to New York University's film school, graduating in 1995.

"Time of Favor" was also the Israeli nominee for the foreign-language film Oscar. The critic Stephen Holden praised it in The New York Times for "its underlying concern with the consequences of words and with the complicated emotions fueling terrorist acts." But he also said the film was "quite crudely directed."

Mr. Cedar has improved, it is fair to say. In The Jerusalem Post, Talya Halkin called him "arguably the Jewish state's first-ever Oscar-class filmmaker."

He has also managed to make two films about settlers without a single Palestinian, which comes up a lot, he says, at foreign festivals. "Being an Israeli at a European film festival is one long apology," he said. "The European press expects you to be in exile, and to meet their expectations is to be self-hating."

...

Burning the Self in the Community Bonfire: Joseph Cedar's *Campfire*

By Shai Ginsburg

The year is 1981. Under the aegis of Menachem Begin's first government and, in particular, of its Minister of Agriculture, Ariel Sharon, the right-wing settlement movement enthusiastically looks forward to prospects of unprecedented construction and growth in Judea and Samaria, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights. At the same time, the movement finds itself in an escalating conflict with the very same government over the terms of the Israeli-Egyptian peace accord, the proposed Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula, and the dismantling of the Jewish settlements there. Moving back and forth between construction sites and protest marches, the settlers highlight the link between the desire to build a home—personal as well as national—and the struggle over the borders and boundaries of the State of Israel.

In the Jerusalem neighborhood of Bayit Va-Gan, a hub of the national religious camp, Rachel Gerlik has just ended a year of mourning over her husband, and she and her two teenage daughters, Tami and Esti, struggle to rebuild their home and family and to redefine their relationships with their friends and their community. Eager to assert her position within her community and fearful of being left alone, Rachel seeks to join the founding group of a new settlement in Samaria to which many of her friends belong. Yet, the acceptance committee, headed by her friend Motke, a prominent figure in the Religious-Nationalist camp, is reluctant to admit her as a full member.

Joseph Cedar's *Campfire* follows the Gerlik women as they are caught between their personal needs on the one hand, and communal values and ideals on the other. While in his earlier film *Time of Favor* (2000), Cedar focused on the political dangers of right-wing religious radicalism, in his new film he puts into relief the personal price paid by those who do not fit the ideals of their Religious-Nationalist community.

Early in *Campfire*, the acceptance committee interviews candidate couples for the new settlement. "Why would you like to join the new settlement?" they are asked. "We feel that this is the need of the hour," they respond, but also, they immediately add, "quality of life for the kids; we couldn't afford that in the city." "It's really important to us to have a house with a lawn," another couple stresses. "And who would you like your neighbors to be?" is the next question. "People like us," they all agree. "People like you," answers Rachel at the end of her interview. The settlers are thus motivated less by their ideological commitment to the ideal of the greater Israel than by the bourgeois dream of moving from their apartments to a house with a lawn and their desire to distance themselves from those who are unlike them.

Who are the people from whom the settlers of *Campfire* would like to dissociate themselves? Most directly, they are women like Rachel. In the absence of a husband and a father, her family is seen as incomplete. Without a husband, she is told, her family cannot participate fully in settlement life: "it is one less man for the duty guard, one less man for the prayer quorum," Motke tells her. As Rachel discovers, her friends' empathy for her loss does not lead them to include her

as an equal member in the community; on the contrary, as a woman and single mother in a religious society, she finds herself marginalized and even excluded. She therefore yields to her friends' pleas and agrees to date men with whom they match her.

The first is Yossi Moraly, a fifty-year old bus driver who has never married. During one of their conversations, he admits to Rachel that he has never even slept with a woman. As a bachelor, he cannot find his place within his religious community, and he finds himself ever more removed from his sisters and friends whose lives revolve around the ideal of the family. The second is the self-centered and pompous Moshe Weinstock, a world-renowned cantor. While Moshe is deemed the appropriate match for Rachel by her friends, she grows closer to the candid Yossi and together they explore the links between romance, marriage, and sex: "Is there any chance of you sleeping with a man you're not married to?" Yossi asks Rachel daringly. Rachel hesitates and then addresses the question back at him. "I've decided that I would," he replies. In the context of a community that sanctifies the tie between sex and marriage and that forbids unmarried men and women to touch each other, Yossi's candor and sincerity transgress the proper boundaries between the sexes. Nevertheless, his kindness and compassion turn his forthrightness into an assurance that allows them both to develop a mature and honest relationship that does not rely on the approval of the community.

Cedar's most direct examination of the boundaries of home and community, of sexual behavior and romance, and of 'us' and 'them' is through the characters of the two daughters. Esti, a rebellious eighteen-year-old, objects to her mother's plan to move the family to the rocky hills of Judea and Samaria. Accordingly, she informs Rachel that she would rather stay in Jerusalem, live on the street, and support herself as a prostitute than move to the new settlement. Testing the boundaries between what is forbidden and what is allowed, she spends an evening with her soldier boyfriend locked in her room. The following morning, Rachel smashes her bedroom glass door, asserting, "No one locks doors in my house." Privacy within the house—especially insofar as a young woman's sexuality is concerned—is seen as a threat to the religious values upheld by the family and demanded by the community.

The parts of the plot that involve Tami, Rachel's fifteen-year-old daughter, are the most disturbing. A member of the Bnei-'Akiva religious youth movement, she falls in love with Rafi, who attends the meetings of the local group with a few of his friends from a neighboring Sephardi slum. Ultimately, these Sephardi youth constitute the gravest threat to the Ashkenazi community of Bayit Va-Gan and to the chastity of its daughters. During a mesmerizing sequence that takes place on Lag Ba-'Omer eve, Tami leaves the bonfire of her cohorts to join the one made by Rafi and his friend. While those gathered around the Bnei-'Akiva bonfire sing in chorus, "Sanctify your life with the Torah and purify it through labor," Rafi's friends encircle Tami when she approaches and chant, "Tami the whore opened the store; everyone standing in line with a huge hard-on." Tami, however, is fascinated by the explicit sexual talk of Rafi and his friends; she joins their bonfire and so crosses the boundary that defines—for her community as well as for Rafi and his friends—modest behavior for young women. Her transgression, unlike those of her mother and sister, has grave consequences. Though the film remains ambiguous about what exactly transpires at the bonfire, it is clear that she is sexually harassed at best, perhaps even raped.

When Rachel consults with Motke about the incident, he pressures her not to inform the police. "We know who they are," he tells her, "this isn't the first time we've had trouble with them." Still, he reassures Rachel in a second conversation, "things will probably be much easier in the settlement." Motke expresses his resentment—shared by Ashkenazi religious-nationalists and secular-liberals alike—of the Sephardi underclass that started in the late 1970s to make its way to

Israel's center stage. His words reveal that the establishment of the new settlement is motivated in part by a desire to reconstruct the boundaries between the community and the underclass, boundaries that were slowly disappearing in the urban setting.

Still more troubling is Motke's insinuation that Tami is responsible for the incident. "You don't know what happened there," he tells Rachel, reminding her that Tami willingly joined the other bonfire. In placing the blame on Tami and on the Sephardi kids, Motke conveniently keeps silent about the role of the community in victimizing Tami. In fact, his own son witnesses the attack on Tami, yet neither interrupts it nor calls for help. When she later turns down his advances, the neighborhood is sprayed with "Tami Gerlik is a whore" graffiti. In pressing Rachel to just let the incident "blow over," Motke reveals the communal unwillingness to pursue the matter and provides the official seal to the communal condemnation of Tami.

At first it seems that the incident will undermine the chances of the whole family's admittance to the settlement, but in an attempt to buy Rachel's silence, Motke convinces the founding group of the new settlement to accept her and her daughters. The settlement thus becomes yet another mechanism of internal oppression, serving to co-opt women into the values of patriarchal society.

Campfire sets its female characters against a hostile male environment (with the exception of Yossi) that seems to be threatened by their independence and sexuality. Motke's unwillingness to acknowledge the legitimacy of women's needs reveals the disingenuousness of the elevated rhetoric about communal and family values and the ideal of settlement, for this rhetoric conceals a reality of abuse and violence. Directed against the most vulnerable members of the community, the widow and the orphan, these ideals become the means of malice that threatens to undermine the Gerlik women's sense of community, home, and security. In the end, Joseph Cedar suggests, the community seeks to secure its reputation and ideals by repressing and denying the violence and transgression in its midst.

TIKKUN MAGAZINE July/August 2005 issue (Vol. 20, No. 4)

An Interview With Joseph Cedar:

Shai Ginsburg: Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?

Joseph Cedar: I was born in the U.S. My parents immigrated to Israel when I was six and settled in Jerusalem in the Bayit Va-Gan neighborhood. I grew up in the Beni-'Akiva [religious] youth movement and attended a rabbinical high school. I served three years in the IDF paratroopers. I did my B.A. at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in Theater Studies and Philosophy and then traveled to New York to study Filmmaking. From an early age I was engaged with the "stage." Every group needs someone to produce events: for Purim or Chanuka or the end of the year, you always have to stage something.

SG: There are very few "skullcap-wearer" filmmakers in Israel ...

JC: That's true. I am one of the few; there are not enough "skullcap wearers" who are interested in making movies. Out of some hundred filmmakers, perhaps two succeed in transforming their stories into film. But I think that is accidental rather than something inherent [in the Israeli film industry]. I don't think that the cinema apparatus in Israel prevents religious people from making films. Nor do I think that religious circles attempt to dissuade creators from making films. It's merely a matter of numbers.

SG: Do you think that you, as a religious filmmaker, face any special difficulty in working in a medium that appeals, in a large measure, to a secular audience?

JC: The greatest difficulty is in answering this question, because it assumes that a religious lifestyle has a say not only in art but also in the profession one chooses. At least as far as I am concerned, there is a complete separation between my religious lifestyle and my choice of profession.

SG: Do you think that your lifestyle affects the way you represent subjects and themes in your movies? Are there things you would not deal with or would deal with in a certain way because of your lifestyle?

JC: There are no subjects that I wouldn't engage with, and I don't think there is something that restrains me. Still, I do find myself attracted to things that I am familiar with from my close environment and, therefore, I focus on "skullcap wearer" characters from the religious sector. I don't think, however, that I tell stories that are unique to the religious sector. The knowledge of my close environment and the intimate familiarity with a certain people fuel my writing; I don't know how to write in any other way. The outcome is that I deal with religious people. I don't think that this is an ideological choice.

SG: On the other hand, the close environment doesn't always like what you do or, at least, is divided about it. Some, indeed, acclaim your films, but others harshly censure them.

JC: That is true. I think that there's something treacherous in dramatic writing. One of the most useful tools I have when I write a scene or develop a story is to look for the flaws, for dirt, for the bad things; this is not because I want to air dirty laundry or to sully someone, but simply because that's where the drama is. Even if I have no agenda of saying something about the religious sector, I do want to bring the story I tell to a climax and to realize its dramatic potential. Since this is what motivates me, I find myself scratching people's blemishes and, if you write about the environment in which you live, this may be treacherous. If I were writing about some remote society, they probably would not have called me a traitor; they might have called me ignorant.

SG: Do you feel that you somehow betray your close environment?

JC: No. I feel that my desire to exhaust a story, to bring it to a dramatic climax is something I cannot escape. I think this is part of the storyteller's role in every society. The storytellers who succeed in creating interest from an audience are those who are attracted to examining their own boundaries as well as the boundaries of their audience. A society that knows how to accept the criticism of these storytellers is often a strong society; the rejection of the criticism often testifies to the weakness of that society. For me this is not a [political] position but, rather, a fact of life. I don't see how you can tell a "reversed" story. What would have happened had I been telling a story about my group, and all those people who now criticize me had patted me on the shoulder and said "good"? Ultimately, the work on a story is inherent to the story itself. You bring the story to a climax because you must, and everything beyond that is almost not your responsibility.

SG: *Time of Favor* and *Campfire* have very different kinds of climaxes. What is the relationship between the two movies?

JC: *Time of Favor* is a first movie. A large part of what's in it wasn't under my control; there are so many things that happened accidentally. The second movie is the outcome of many of the lessons of the first movie. It reflects a style of which I'm more conscious at the present. Still, the two films reflect two sides of the same story. *Time of Favor* focuses on radicals, on characters that the story defines in advance as particularly charismatic or unique, while *Campfire* focuses on ordinary people. Itamar [a supporting character] in the first movie is a person who is dragged, who acts because of social pressure. In the end, his character interested me more than any of the main characters. The real story was of Itamar, not of Menachem, Michal, or Pini [the main

characters]. In *Campfire*, all the characters are Itamar. I was trying to tell a story about peer pressure and its victims.

SG: Many of the characters that pay the price of peer pressure in your movies are women—Michal in *Time of Favor* and the Gerlik women, and Tami in particular, in *Campfire*. What makes women special for you?

JC: The character played by Moshe Ivgy [Yossi] in *Campfire* is also presented as a victim or, at least, as different. Rachel's story, on the other hand, is more tied to the fact that she's a woman, and it's derived from a true story. If I have to choose a character from my movies in which I see myself, it would be Tami. I am not certain that I treat her specifically as a woman, but rather as someone with an internal world that is similar to mine. A part of what happens to her is tied to this internal world or to her disconnection from the real world. In the dance scene, she discovers that she speaks with the body. She has very little dialogue throughout the movie and she has very few complete sentences. The most intimate moment she has in the movie is with her reflection in the mirror. Her sexuality constitutes a language, but a language that hasn't passed the test in front of an audience and, thus far, she speaks in this language only with herself. Once it reaches an audience, it goes out of her control; she doesn't realize how it is interpreted.

SG: In both of your movies the women are very sexual while the men are much more uncertain about it. Is this how you see your society?

JC: No. I don't think that's representative. All of my male characters are perplexed, and I find it convenient to direct such confused characters. I don't really know why.

SG: You studied filmmaking in the U.S. and you work in Israel. Where do you see the influence of Israeli cinema in your work and where is the influence of American cinema?

JC: Despite the fact that there are Israeli movies that I very much like, there isn't much influence of Israeli cinema on my work. My declaration of intent at the beginning of the work on *Time of Favor* was a reaction against the failure of Israeli cinema to reach an audience. My insistence on a very tight plot that continuously progresses is a reaction to my frustration with Israeli films that I've seen, which simply ignored audience's need for a plot. If, then, Israeli cinema has influenced me, it is in what I do *not* want to do rather than what I would do. I do consume American mainstream cinema that appeals to the entertainment needs of the audience, even if the films that have influenced me are not that mainstream. If I have to point at someone that I appreciate, it would be someone like James L. Brooks, who did *The Simpsons*, *Terms of Endearment*, *As Good as it Gets*, and *Spanglish*. His is a warm cinema, very popular without demeaning its audience.

SG: What is the place of politics in such cinema?

JC: There is hardly any separation between my political life and my private life. When I go on reserve duty, the act of serving in the Territories is political but it also means being away from my family for a month. Everything is connected, and so are the movies. The bite of politics into the family life of the characters of my films is something that I experience all the time. I love the chance to be politically relevant, but I hope that I succeed in doing this indirectly. The political debate in Israel is very good—it is very divergent and many voices are heard in it. Culture can contribute to this debate not if it deals with the main issues as they are, but rather if it sheds light on aspects that don't [otherwise] make it into the public discourse. At least in *Campfire* I feel that I dealt with something relevant but that no one speaks about—something I wish people would—the social aspect of the settlement project, its elitist aspect.

SG: Should we read your social criticism of the settlement project as political criticism?

JC: I don't know. Some of the things in the movie that ultimately are received as criticism are in the movie without my knowledge. I did not think that I [created] Motke as such a ridiculous

character, but this was the outcome. I do not withdraw my responsibility for him, but I don't think that what Motke represents is as ridiculous as it seems from the movie, despite the fact that I think Motke is real, is authentic. I thus find it difficult to assume responsibility for all of the criticism in the movie; I think that some of the criticism is to be located in the one who watches the movie, not in the one who created it.

Shai Ginsburg is assistant professor of Hebrew and Jess Schwartz Professor of Modern Hebrew Literature at Arizona State University.



Sep. 6, 2004 6:15

'Campfire' lights up the screen

By HANNAH BROWN

CAMPFIRE ****

Written and directed by Joseph Cedar. 95 minutes. Hebrew title: Madurat Ha Shevet. In Hebrew, many prints have English titles.

With Michaela Eshet, Hani Furstenberg, Moshe Ivgy, Assi Dayan, Maya Maron, Yehoram Gaon, Idit Teperson, Oshri Cohen, and Yehuda Levy.

In 2000, Joseph Cedar burst onto the Israeli film scene with Ha Hesder (Time of Favor), a compelling drama about a religious soldier whose rabbi and friends plot to bomb the Temple Mount.

It was notable for its vivid characters and its refusal to demonize those who took the most extreme actions. It also stood out because although religious extremism was the subject of nearly every news broadcast, it was almost entirely absent from the movies.

Now, with his second film, Campfire, Cedar more than delivers on the promise that was evident in Ha Hesder. A brilliant mixture of drama and gentle humor, Campfire is the best Israeli movie since Yossi & Jagger. But it's not just a wonderful Israeli movie - it's a wonderful movie.

Campfire brings an insider's knowing and affectionate but not uncritical perspective on the religious Right to the screen again. The drama and social critique in the film are interwoven seamlessly; and Cedar has succeeded, as few directors before him have, in putting the political dimension of Israeli life into human terms.

Set in Jerusalem in 1981, Campfire focuses on the Gerlick family - Rachel (Michaela Eshet) and her two teenage daughters, Esti (Maya Maron) and Tami (Hani Furstenberg). Rachel is a widow whose husband died a year ago. Her dream is to join a new settlement

in Shomron, and her challenge is to convince the organizer of this settlement, Motke (Assi Dayan), that she will fit in, even though she is single.

Unlike the other hopefuls, Rachel is passionately ideological. While it might seem that this would make her a better candidate, Motke seems to find her threatening. Partly out of goodwill and partly to make Rachel a more suitable candidate for the settlement, Motke's wife Shula (Idit Teperson) fixes her up with two men, Yossi (Moshe Ivgy, in possibly the best performance of his long career), a mini-van driver, and Moshe (Yehoram Gaon), a pompous businessman and cantor.

As composed and in control as Rachel may seem in public, at home she is struggling with her daughters. Esti, who is doing her national service, is openly rebellious and tries to steal away with her soldier boyfriend (Yehuda Levy, who played Jagger in *Yossi & Jagger*) every chance she gets. Tami is more obedient but is in the midst of her own sensual awakening. She has a crush on Rafi (Oshri Cohen) and is drawn away from the comfort and boredom of the crowd she has grown up with in the B'nei Akiva youth movement to a bunch of outsiders who are exciting and threatening at the same time. An incident in which she is molested at a bonfire with these boys on Lag Ba'omer creates a crisis for all the characters, particularly for Tami and her mother, both of whom lose a certain innocence.

The plot summary for this movie may make it sound like a soap opera, but it is far more complex than that. The story unfolds with a subtlety and authenticity that create a moving drama.

At the heart of it all is Rachel, a woman who, at 42, realizes she has never done anything for herself. In so many American movies on similar themes, a man appears who is too good to be true; but in this film, Rachel's suitors are all too real. The friendship that develops between her and Yossi is an extraordinarily touching depiction of middle-aged romance.

One of the strengths of the film is the terrific acting. The ensemble cast, which features a high percentage of the country's most talented actors, works beautifully together.

Michaela Eshet, who has worked more in theater than films in recent years, gives a spectacular, star-making performance. There isn't a false note in her work or a moment when you can take your eyes off her.

It might have been a bit problematical to cast the gorgeous Hani Furstenberg as an awkward teenager, but she manages to bring conviction to the film's other pivotal role. She brings out the both the insecurity and sensuality that are central to her character.

Moshe Ivgy has never been more subtle and touching than he is here.

Assi Dayan is dead-on as the pompous Motke, just as he was in a similar role as the charismatic rabbi in *Ha Hesder*.

Yehoram Gaon, Maya Maron, and Idit Teperson all do great things with their small roles, too.

The one weakness in the film is that Cedar isn't quite sure how he wants us to take the group of boys at the bonfire who abuse Tami. She is infatuated with one of them, and it isn't clear how we should interpret his passivity at crucial moments or Tami's continued interest in him after the incident. Are these outsiders from underprivileged families, deserving of pity, or do they symbolize some deeper evil? The scenes following the bonfire might have had more impact if we knew more about them.

But this is a minor flaw. *Campfire* is this year's richest and most enjoyable movie.