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From victims to perpetrators: Cultural representations of the link between the Holocaust and the Israeli– Palestinian conflict

ABSTRACT

This article proposes a reading of films and literary works of Jewish–Israeli directors and writers that represent a link between the Holocaust and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Based on LaCapra’s ‘acting out’ and Hirsch’s ‘postmemory’ it examines the way artists reflect the complex political blend of the Holocaust and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The article shows that, alongside a right-wing narrative that represents the Arabs as the Nazis’ successors, Hebrew literature and cinema, especially in the last decade, reflect mainly the opinions of the left and extreme left wing in Israel, who do not accept this equation, but create what can be called a ‘counter-acting-out’ – a reversed equation in which the resemblance between the Holocaust and the Nakbah and/or Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers and Nazis is represented. The fact that the politicization of the Holocaust is tossed from one political side to the other reflects the confusion and ambivalence in Israel’s postmemory of the Holocaust, and indicates the struggle between different memory agents on the collective memory of the Holocaust.

KEYWORDS

Holocaust
Israeli culture
Israeli–Palestinian
conflict
Israeli cinema
Israeli literature
collective memory

1. For example, Evron ([1980] 2011); Elkana (1988); Zukerman (1993); Zertal (2002); Yurman (2005); Kimmerling (2006); Pappé (2006); Bar-Tal (2007). Analysis and criticism of the post-Zionist notions regarding Holocaust memory in Israel can be found, for example in Mechman (1997); Shapira (1997); Frilling (2003); Ofer (2009); Gutwein (2009); Porat (2011).

INTRODUCTION

The Holocaust as a pivotal experience in Israeli life has strongly influenced the way in which the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is perceived and represented in Israeli culture. In the past three decades, as part of a narrative that seeks to re-evaluate the way in which the collective memory of the Holocaust was endowed to the Israeli public, left-wing and extreme left-wing research has emerged that claims that the Holocaust memory was and is politically manipulated in order to present Israel as an eternal victim. This victimization causes constant fear and paranoia and allegedly was and is used in order to justify violent policies against the Arabs in Israel and the Palestinians in the left bank and Gaza ('the occupied territories'), as well as blocking any opportunity for a peace treaty with the Palestinians.¹

Dominick LaCapra (2001) relies on Freud and distinguishes between two forms of remembering trauma. The first results in 'acting out'. In this mental state, people who undergo a trauma tend to relive the traumatic occurrences of the past, in the present, with no distance from it. In the second, 'working through', the traumatized people try to gain critical distance from the trauma, to be able to distinguish between the past, the present and the future. The victims cannot entirely disengage themselves from the trauma, but they can tell the difference between the past and the present. These two forms of remembering define not only individuals but collective remembrance as well. 'Acting out' results in uncontrolled repetitive elements of the trauma in the political, social and cultural life of a group. 'Working through' is the group's will and ability to control a collective trauma and not let it take over the present.

Marianne Hirsch (1997, 2008) defines 'postmemory' as the memory after the memory. In her opinion this is a very strong form of remembrance, because its connections to the historic source are not mediated by real memories and experiences from the particular traumatic event, but are the result of imaginary completion of 'black holes' in the individuals' knowledge. The memory after the memory is characteristic of those who are mentally dominated by traumatic events that happened before they were born, imagining what they cannot remember. In her research, she relates mainly to the second generation of Holocaust survivors (biological sons and daughters of Holocaust survivors) whose lives have been influenced by their parents' tragedy. They were not a part of the traumatic events but these became part of their biography. Other researchers claim that the definitions 'second- and third-generation Holocaust survivors' do not refer only to biological descendants of Holocaust survivors, but are far wider and also include the generations that were born after 1945 and 'inherited' the Holocaust as a central trauma, especially Jews in Israel, where Holocaust awareness is very intense (Milner 2004; Solomon and Chaitin 2007). Therefore, one can claim that 'postmemory' is reflected in the generations that were born after the Holocaust and not only in the biological descendants of Holocaust survivors.

Contrasting with the perception of constant victimization, LaCapra's 'acting out' and Hirsch's 'postmemory' will be used in order to claim that, when examining cultural representations of the integration of the Holocaust and the Israeli–Arab conflict, one distinguishes a clear division, even a contradiction, between two cultural narratives that appear in the last five decades. From the 1970s onwards, one discerns a huge gap between right-wing and

left-wing narratives. The right wing continues to recycle a political 'acting out' resulting in the Arabs=Nazis equation, which appeared in Israeli culture from the 1940s until the 1970s (Shohat 1989; Bar-Tal 2007; Steir-Livny 2009). But the left and extreme left wing turn this equation upside down and create a new equation, a 'counter-acting-out', a reversed equation in which a resemblance between Israeli soldiers and Nazis is presented. In cinema and literature, especially, the narrative not only abandons victimization but uses the Holocaust to create an antithetical equivalency, in which both national traumas are equated and/or Jewish-Israelis in general, particularly Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers, are equated with Nazis. This division and contradiction between acting out and counter-acting-out emphasizes how tangled post-memory in Israel is, how it reflects the confusion and ambivalence in Israel's collective memory of the Holocaust, and indicates the struggle between different memory agents² on the collective memory of the Holocaust.³

In Jewish-Israeli culture, the complex story of the Arab-Jewish dispute that accompanied Zionist settlement in Israel, as early as the late nineteenth century, was often phrased simplistically after the Holocaust. The 1948 war was one of the first events that connected the Holocaust and the Israeli-Arab conflict. Within Israeli territory on the eve of the 1948 war, there were 650,000 Jews and between 900,000 and 1,000,000 Arabs. During the war, 600,000 to 700,000 Arabs went into exile from their country – expelled, fled, chased out – creating the Palestinian refugee problem. The war ended with a series of separate ceasefire agreements between Israel and each of its Arab neighbours. After the war the Palestinians' situation was far worse than that at the time of the United Nation's decision for partition (November 1947). What remained was a small and separate Arab public, lacking all social institutions and social and political power. Therefore, Jewish-Israelis refer to the 1948 war as 'the war of independence', while the Palestinians refer to it as 'the Nakbah' (Al-Nakbah in Arabic means disaster or catastrophe) (Gelbar 2004; Kabha 2010; Morris 2010).

From the late 1940s until the late 1970s a distinct parallel between Arabs and Nazis was discernible in Israeli culture. Wars against Arab nations were termed wars to prevent a 'second Holocaust' that could strike Israel at any moment, and Arab leaders were described as Nazi successors.

Demonizing the Arabs and forging links between the past and the present helped unite the ranks in Israel, and create immediate empathy for Zionism in the western world. If in the past the Allied forces had fought the Nazis, today it became their duty to subjugate the Arabs (Shohat 1989; Steir-Livny 2009; Bar-Tal 2007; Evron [1980] 2011).⁴

From the 1970s onwards the cultural linkage between the Holocaust and the Israeli-Arab conflict changed vastly. Thus, the memory of the Holocaust was and remains a crucial factor in the cultural representations of the Israeli-Arab conflict; still, the perceptions of victimization that were initially commonplace became more ambivalent and complex. From the 1970s onward, one discerns a huge gap between the right wing and the left wing. The right wing continues to recycle the Arabs=Nazis equation (Steir-Livny 2014). But the left-wing politicians, journalists and artists turn that equation upside down. The literary narrative not only abandons victimization, but also uses the Holocaust to create an antithetical equivalency, in which Jewish-Israelis in general, particularly IDF soldiers, are equated with Nazis. This new 'counter-acting-out' is especially obvious in cinema and literature.

One can tie these developments to local political and social changes. The late 1960s until the late 1970s were a period of crisis for the left wing Labour

2. On the changing memory of the Holocaust in Israel in the last three decades, see e.g., Amishai-Maisels (1993); Avisar (2011); Ne'eman Arad (2003); Ofer (2009); Loshitzky (2001); Meyers et al. (2009); Steir-Livny (2009); Gertz (2004); Zandberg (2006, 2010); Meyers and Zandberg (2002); Milner (2004); Pinchevski and Liebes (2010).
3. On collective memory, see Halbwachs (1992); Hobsbaum and Renger (1993); Young (1993); Olick and Robbins (1998).
4. In these decades there were some exceptions – left-wing artists who did not agree with this equation and dealt with the similarities between the Holocaust and the Nakbah. See Steir-Livny (2012).

5. *Intifada* – an Arabic word that means ‘to shake off’ and describes a violent outburst, civil uprising against the Israeli government in the occupied territories – the territories occupied by Israel during the Six Day War of 1967. This refers specifically to the territories in which many Palestinians live: the West Bank and Gaza. This term is mainly used by left-wingers, while most right-wingers see these territories as an integral part of Israel.

movement, who governed Israel since its establishment – the 1967 war and the beginning of the debate about the occupied territories, the Yom Kippur War (1973) and the commission of inquiry that followed it, the illegal dollar account held by Leah Rabin (the wife of then Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin) that was discovered in Switzerland, all were events emblematic of the fall of the moderate left. The rise to power of the right-wing movement – the Likud (1977) – was the first time that the left was ejected from political power hubs. Nurith Gertz (1994) maintains that as right-wing attitudes spread throughout the Israeli public, and new militant groups sprang up from the nationalist religious right, the Left lost effective impact on the political establishment. Instead, its dominance increased in intellectual life, art, literature and the academy. The Lebanon War in June 1982, the start of the first *intifada*⁵ (1987) and the second *intifada* (2000), and the new studies of the postcolonial and post-Zionist researchers, from the 1980s onwards, who opposed the Zionist narrative regarding the Israeli–Arab conflict, further entrenched this critical tendency. The culture became the mouthpiece of the disappointed left-wing and radical left-wing circles, who use it to voice their sorrow over Israel’s condition.

The cultural postmemory of the link between the Holocaust and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict reflects the political splits and conflicts in Israeli society. In journalism and in public debate in the last three decades, one can find both narratives: the one that continues to compare Arabs and Nazis and the other that criticizes the first narrative and suggests a reversed narrative that compares the Holocaust and the *Nakbah* and/or Jewish-Israelis in general, and IDF soldiers in particular, with Nazi acts (Steir-Livny, 2014). But in cinema and literature there is a clear and obvious dominance of the second narrative of the Left and Radical Left Wing. The artists’ postmemory does not abolish the link between the Holocaust and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, but tells it in a totally different way. These artists can be divided into two groups. The first group finds the resemblance between the two national traumas (the Holocaust and the *Nakbah*) and treats both Palestinians and Jews as victims. In the second group, one finds that the Arab–Nazis equation is reversed and a new equation takes its place: Israeli soldiers are presented as the Nazis’ successors.

THE COMPARISON BETWEEN THE HOLOCAUST AND THE NAKBAH

According to director Judd Ne’eman, the implications of the geographic-historic trinity Germany–Israel–Palestine are destructive for both sides. In his films *Magash Hakesef (Fellow Travellers)* (1983) and *Rehovot Ha’Etmol (Streets of Yesterday)* (1989) he uses the German space and Holocaust associations to tell the tragic story of the Israeli–Arab conflict. He criticizes both sides’ inability to accept the other’s trauma, and the violence that guides them and prevents them from engaging in a true dialogue (Meiri 2008).

Amos Gitai’s film *Kedma* (2002) describes a few hours in the lives of Holocaust survivors who disembark from the vessel *Kedma* in 1948 Israel, and follows their absurd encounters with the British and the Arabs, and their participation in a battle for which they were inducted shortly after arriving. As they make their way, the Holocaust survivors meet a convoy of Arab refugees who are walking towards the unknown. The lines of people with their bundles evoke connotations of the Holocaust that intensify because of their meeting with the survivors. Both sides are presented as injured refugees.

Gitai refrains from judging the highly charged issue. He maintains he wanted 'to make a film about uprooted people in 1948: Holocaust survivors who were uprooted from their homes and emigrated to Israel, and Arabs uprooted from their villages by the Jewish-Israelis' (Steir-Livny 2009). He hoped to explore how the victim, trapped in his situation, creates another victim. Gitai's ambivalent approach to the issue reflects in the way he represents the 1948 war. He makes it clear that all three groups – the Arabs whose land was expropriated, the veteran Jewish-Israelis fighting for their land, and the Holocaust survivors seeking a home after a history of persecution – are right. Israel's tragedy is that there is no compromising between the different types of justice. This pessimistic outlook is reflected in the film's end. 'That's it, everything's lost, finished', says Janosh, the Holocaust survivor, and drives away with his fellow survivors into an unknown future. The fact that the sentence is spoken in tandem with the declaration of the Israeli state promotes the sense that the end is already inherent in the beginning, and that the Zionist state is beginning at a problematic intersection.

IDF SOLDIERS AS THE NEW PERPETRATORS

In recent decades, many artists voice the charge that Israel has nationalized the Holocaust to justify racism, occupation and oppression. Based on that claim, they use the Holocaust for a contradictory need – to level harsh criticism at the IDF's conduct towards the Arabs in the past, and more so towards the Arabs in Israel and the Palestinians in the occupied territories in the present. Some films and novels project a world-view where Zionism's representatives are the new Nazis, while the Palestinians have become victims of a fascist, trampling ideology. Some of them regress to the past, in order to present the Arabs and Palestinians as dual victims of Zionism – in the past, during the *Nakbah*, and in the present – in the occupied territories.

The film that symbolizes the start of this trend in cinema is Ilan Moshenson's *Roveh Hulirot (The Wooden Gun)* (1979). The film returns to 1950 and describes the conflict between two groups of Jewish-Israeli children in a Tel Aviv neighbourhood: Adi's group versus the protagonist, Yoni Schreiber, and his friends. Raised on the heroic myths of the 1948 war, the children live and breathe military matters and see their friendship as being an army unit. As skirmishes between the groups intensify, Yoni shoots and injures one of the kids with a wooden rifle. Shocked, he runs to the sea. There, he enters the hut of a lonely Holocaust survivor he and his friends refer to as 'Crazy Palestina' and realizes the danger inherent in violence.

Through the children's games, the director reveals his opinion of a militarist society that glorifies wars and killing, educates children through destruction and violence, and is uninterested in the Other. The director represents his political 'counter-acting-out' of the Holocaust through the association he builds between the IDF soldiers in the 1948 war and the Holocaust. In one scene, Yoni looks at pictures from the 1948 war hung on the walls of his room. The photographed battles come to life in his imagination and he becomes one of the Israeli soldiers. At the end of the film, Yoni enters Palestina's hut and discovers her world through photos from her past, on her wall. One photo recalls the famous photograph of the little Jewish boy raising his arms, with the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto. As Yoni watches, the picture 'comes to life', and he is standing opposite the boy, beside the Nazis, and in the soundtrack one hears his friends exhorting him to shoot the child. The

6. In April 1948, during the Independence War, fighters from the Jewish underground movements Lehi and Etzel attacked the village. In the process, 46–110 villagers were killed (opinions remain divided over the number). Immediately after the battle rumours spread about a massacre in the village, that houses were intentionally blown up with their inhabitants inside, the rape of women, disfiguring of corpses and so on. Common assessments were that the number of dead exceeded 250. The battle and the ensuing rumours demoralized Arab society, and spurred other Arabs to flee, out of fear of the Jews. As the Arab population saw it, the incidents of Deir Yassin became emblematic of the Jews' brutality, and a constitutive event. Cries of 'Deir Yassin' accompanied the Arab massacres of the Hadassah Hospital convoy, and in Kfar Etzion, that occurred some weeks later.

blurring between the historical child and the contemporary one, between two kinds of inexplicable violence, positions Jewish-Israelis in the role of the victim that became the successor of the perpetrator.

The drama *Arbeit Macht Frei (Work Sets You Free)*, by Dudu Ma'ayan and the Akko Theater Group (1991), criticizes the ways in which the Holocaust is cited in Israeli culture. Among others, it compares acts committed towards Jews in the Holocaust with acts that Jewish-Israelis are committing towards Palestinians in the occupied territories. The audience participates in several unorthodox theatrical experiences, like spending time in the home of a senior army officer who vulgarly explains the links between the Holocaust trauma and the abomination of European Jews going like 'sheep to the slaughter', that appeared in Israeli culture, and the invention of the figure of the 'Sabra' (this refers informally to Israeli Jews born on Israeli territory or raised in Eretz-Israel or Israel in their formative years). Zelma is a Holocaust survivor and a central character in the play, and utters sentences like 'I read an interesting article recently about why an oppressed group later becomes an oppressor', adding 'what could be easier than taking oppression and channelling every frustration towards some minority living amidst us?'

Asher Tlalim's documentary film *Al Tigu Le B'Shoah (Don't Touch My Holocaust)* (1994) foregrounds the drama *Arbeit Macht Frei (Work Sets You Free)* and its cast, presenting excerpts from the play and tracking the processes that unfolded during rehearsals (Zimmerman 2002). The film enlarges on the comparison between Jewish-Israelis and Nazis when the camera follows Khaled Abdul Ali, the Arab actor who is a guide in the Holocaust Museum in Kibbutz Lochamei Hagettaot (Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz). He explains the Holocaust to young people from his village and draws an analogy between Jewish-Israelis and Nazis, and Palestinians and the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Pointing to the improvised Molotov cocktails that the rebels made in the Warsaw Ghetto, he notes their resemblance to the bottles that Palestinians in the occupied territories used in the intifada. To illustrate the size of the Treblinka extermination camp, he tells them that its dimensions resemble those of the football stadium in Sakhnin (an Arab town). The young people say that, compared with Palestinians today, the Jews suffered less in the Holocaust, because the Jews were killed immediately while the Palestinians are being killed slowly and painfully. Khaled also tells the film's viewers that Palestinians cannot understand how the Jews, who went through the Holocaust, can injure and kill so many innocent Palestinians.

Udi Aloni's film *Mechilot (Forgiveness)* (2006) continues the trend of warning Jewish-Israelis about 'the hangman within'. The protagonist of the film is David Adler, a 20-year-old American. His mother died when he was a child. His father is a Holocaust survivor who fought in the 1948 War, but later left with his son for the United States where he became a renowned pianist. With no particular direction in his life, David decides to come to Israel and enlist. While serving in the occupied territories, he accidentally kills a Palestinian child; the trauma shatters him and he is hospitalized in a psychiatric hospital built on the remains of Deir Yassin,⁶ and where many of the inmates are Holocaust survivors.

The film's plot deconstructs time and place, merging the past and the present, reality and imagination, hallucinations and truth. The film shifts alternately from the present in the mental hospital, to David's past in New York and the occupied territories, and to his imagined future in New York, in a relationship with a Palestinian woman whose daughter resembles the

child he killed in the occupied territories. Aloni argues that the complexity of the Israeli situation reaches a peak in insanity, and he thus decided to place his protagonist in a psychiatric institution, built after the state of Israel was founded on the remains of the Arab village Deir Yassin, with Holocaust survivors as its first occupants. Here, symbolically, Jewish victims merge with Arab victims and the link serves the director to mordantly criticize Zionism in general and its attitude to Arabs and Palestinians in particular. The use of that specific geographical site, inhabited by Holocaust survivors, engenders an obvious comparison between the Holocaust and *Nakbah*. But while other artists, like Gitai, present a situation where all involved parties are right, Aloni takes a one-sided position in favour of the Arabs and Palestinians and strongly criticizes Israel's actions in 1948 and in the present.

One can understand the film-maker's point of view from the opening titles, even before we see the first scene – Aloni describes the 1948 war through what happened in Deir Yassin, and calls the Israeli forces 'militias'. This perception of the 1948 war as a huge massacre conducted by the Zionists lies at the heart of this film.

Throughout the film, the hospitalized survivors dig down to the underground tunnels, bringing to the surface evidence of the horrors that the Jewish-Israelis committed. In the opening scene, they dig up a villager's skull. They pass it around from one to the other: Jacob, a Holocaust survivor who calls himself a 'blind prophet', talks to the skull. The way he describes the dead man highlights the Jewish-Israelis' flaws, compared with the Arabs' innocence and helplessness: 'Poor Abed, I knew him well. An amiable man, who one day was slaughtered'. *Mechilot (Forgiveness)* uses the ground as a crypt where coded traumas are condemned to inner silencing (Milner 2004). In this film, it is in the underground tunnels where physical horrors (the remains of the Arabs who were murdered by Jewish-Israelis) and mental horrors (the psychological afflictions that take root in the survivors) are encoded. The film derides the significance of ties with land that were shown in early decades' Israeli films. As the unbalanced survivors dig down, they discover the belongings of the murdered villagers attesting to the horrors that the Zionists wreaked on the Arabs. The piles of shoes, photographs and household utensils recall the famous piles of belongings of Jews in the concentration camps. 'The voices are real', Jacob explains, referring to the voices of the dead Palestinians that are often heard in the site. He talks about a Zionist plot: first they killed 120 people in Deir Yassin, and then they built a mental asylum over their mass grave. So if someone hears the dead crying out, 'they can say it's a lunatic'.

In one scene, the chief psychiatrist ponders on camera whether to give David a medication that will wipe out his memory. He has doubts because David came to Israel because of memory, because of the principle 'never forget'. 'Can we really erase the memory of his trauma and yet keep the memory he inherited from his father, whose family was murdered for no other reason than for being Jews?' the doctor wonders. His dilemma is parallel-edited with shots of IDF soldiers abusing Palestinians in the occupied territories. And thus the link between the two traumas is shown visually; this time IDF soldiers play the role of Nazis.

The fact that David is a second-generation Holocaust survivor strengthens the argument that memories of the Holocaust furnish a basis for a policy of killing, repression and occupation. His Holocaust survivor father fought in the 1948 war that was symbolized, according to this film, by what happened in Deir Yassin. David continues the murderous chain and kills a harmless

7. David Grossman's *Hiuch hagdy (The Smile of the Lamb)* (1983), which was a sort of prequel to the intifada, was unusual. See Oppenheimer (2008).
8. For a broader discussion of the Israeli soldier of the *intifada* in Israeli prose, see Mendelson-Maoz (2011).
9. The narrative that blends IDF soldiers and Nazis is also presented in the works of Arab-Israeli writers as, for example, Sayed Kashua. See Steir-Livny and Mendelson-Maoz (2012).

Palestinian child. To clarify the link between the murderous past and the murderous present, David is hospitalized while still wearing army uniform. The Palestinians, according to the film, were and remain victims of Jewish brutality. Although David is Jewish, and it is his point of view, the focus on him does not create Jewish superiority – quite the contrary. Palestinian superiority finds expression in the soundtrack and the designing of language and space. In many scenes, the soundtrack is Arab music, and songs imbue the film with Arabic, while Hebrew is hardly heard (the film is English-speaking). Palestinians are shown in their villages, while Jewish-Israelis are presented as penetrating a space that is not theirs (the occupied territories) or closed away in spaces that were not theirs (the hospital for the mentally sick). The Jewish-Israeli side in the dispute goes unheard, while the Palestinian side is constantly shown: in demonstrations on New York streets, in Arab rap music of protest in clubs, in the voices of different Palestinian characters throughout the film, scenes of abuse of Palestinians on the streets of Ramallah, and the murder of the innocent Palestinian child. All of these detach viewers from any possibility of identifying with the Israeli side (Steir-Livny 2009).

In literature, one can find similar narratives. The first two novels that dealt with the intifada were published in Israel in 1989 – *Shahid* (Valentin 1989), and *Ta'atuon (Delusion)* (Ben-Ner 1989).⁷ In those works, and in other books written then, leftist authors sought to come to terms with the unbearable routine in the occupied territories that undermined the soldiers' worlds.⁸ In the wake of the Oslo Accords and their breakdown in the mid-1990s, and the second intifada (2000), a growing number of authors began dealing with Jewish-Israelis' experience while serving in the IDF in the occupied territories, whisking away the soldiers' heroic guise in the process. These texts do not suggest solutions but represent intolerable situations and raise hard questions regarding the role the Israeli soldiers play in the Palestinian sphere.

Some Jewish-Israeli authors use the Holocaust to criticize the IDF's conduct towards the Palestinians. The texts focus on the moral flaws that are an attendant part of the occupation and, the writers believe, are reminiscent of the Nazis' deeds. They raise questions and hesitations, but the 'counter-acting-out' that blends the Holocaust and the occupation in order to represent the Jewish-Israelis as the oppressor is clear, dominant and painful.⁹

In Asher Kravitz's *A'ani Mustafa Rabbinoitch (I, Mustafa Rabbinoitch)* (2004), the protagonist, an IDF sniper named Yair Rabinovitch, portrays the intolerable routine of the occupied territories. Voicing the comparison between IDF soldiers and Nazis is Yirmi, a good friend of the protagonist, who is later killed. 'I can't bear it that our soldiers are doing to the Palestinians what the Germans did to our parents', Yirmi says. Yirmi's legacy is a verse from a poem he had written: 'Why Daughter of Zion have you gone astray/Your children vanquish their neighbors in the fray/They strike with clubs, their eyes full of terrors /Why have they become like the swastika bearers?' (Kravitz 2004: 148)

At first, Yair is appalled by the comparison ('What kind of bullshit is that?! The Jews in Germany didn't blow up shopping malls and restaurants. Jews in Germany didn't park car-bombs outside discos! Think before you talk such crap!') (Kravitz 2004: 148), but later on, after Yirmi is killed, he absorbs his ideas. He is a sniper who swore at the start of his service not to shoot Palestinians, but when he sees a female terrorist wearing a suicide belt moving towards his friends, he shoots her. The killing intensifies his already divided identity: 'There were two people in my body: one of a savior, one of a murderer' (Kravitz 2004: 158).

LaCapra (2001) defines different states of acting out, for example, in flashbacks. The protagonists of the literary works in the last decade relieve the overall feeling of an oppressor, alongside specific scenes that are taken from the most famous images of the Holocaust. These images strike them as flashbacks, even though they did not experience the trauma but inherited it through the Israeli collective memory.

When the 6-year-old son of the suicide bomber runs out of the house in alarm, his hands raised, Yair looks at him through the rifle's sight, which helped him shoot down the boy's mother: 'I remembered the famous Jewish boy photographed sixty years ago, raising his hands as the Warsaw Ghetto was demolished ... you bastard, Yirmi! I wish you could come and see how lousy we are at being Nazis' (Kravitz 2004: 159). Here, Kravitz compares IDF soldiers to Nazis, but at the same time undermines it and tries to represent two perspectives, and a situation that combines question marks with harsh self-criticism.

The question whether one should even make that comparison between IDF soldiers and Nazis also appears in Boris Zeidman's book *Safa Shesua (Torn Language)* (2010).¹⁰ Zeidman describes his protagonist who zigzags between childhood memories from Russia, his experiences in the first intifada as a soldier in the occupied territories, and in the present touring France with his girlfriend. Memories of the Holocaust are a part of his past and current experiences. His girlfriend calls it a 'Holocaust game', and also 'your paranoid, *galuti* obsession' (*galuti* means exiled). Memories of the intifada takeover the protagonist's stance, positioning him on a continuum between victim and perpetrator: '*Here and now, we are playing the role of them, there*' (Zeidman 2010: 30–33, original emphasis).

The yelling and shouting of the IDF soldiers at the Palestinians remind him of Nazi commands and, like in *A'ani Mustafa Rabinovitch (I, Mustafa Rabinovitch)* (2004), a specific flashback creates the 'counter-acting-out':

And the child threw the stone [...] maybe because the child raised his arms [...] instead of him, that picture appeared, the boy with the Barrett [...] that black and white photo, blurred, enlarged [...] he even looked at the top of another, less famous-clichéd photo, but didn't find [...] and the fact that everything was washed with sunlight, not Polish gloom, none of this did anything to affect that grim analogy and that fucked-up feeling that now he was on the wrong side [...].

(Zeidman 2010: 30–33)

Although the hero tries to persuade himself and the readers that there is a difference, he simultaneously reminds himself and the readers that the boy facing him does not and should not understand those differences. For him, he is facing someone with a gun, who can kill him instantly (Zeidman 2010: 32–33). In the protagonist's memory, the pendulum swinging between perpetrator and victim, complements his Russian childhood. He is taken back to the anti-Semitic curses he incurred as a child in Russia 'stinking Jew'. Then they called him '*zhid*' (an insulting term to refer to Jews in Russia): now the Jews call the Palestinians 'towel-heads' (Zeidman 2010: 34–35). According to him, the victim has become victimizer: 'he, the little *zhid*, Tolek [...] there, and now twenty years after, here and now, he is the Nazi [...] in the eyes of that little towel-head' (Zeidman 2010: 34–35).

Like *A'ani, Mustafa Rabinovitch (I, Mustafa Rabinovitch)* (2004), the author plants contradictory views in the mouth of his good friend Abadi, to flesh out

10. Literally this means 'cleft lip', but also 'divided language'.

the argument. Abadi presents the 'old' Zionist acting out: the Arabs are the Nazis: 'Let them change places with us for one day, and you'll see what a Holocaust is [...] they'll kill us all'. Abadi reminds him of the 1929 pogroms in Palestine, the Arab Revolt in 1936, and Haj Amin el Husseini who was 'the same as Hitler'. For Abadi the rules of the game are clear – far better to be an occupier; 'it's us or us'. But these opinions that are represented briefly and in a hesitant manner do not contradict the harsh counter-acting-out – the transition from victim to victimizer, which the protagonist feels and presents in depth and fluently in the novel.

Noam Hayut's novel *Ganevet Hashoah Sheli (My Holocaust Thief)* (2010) presents, with no nuance, IDF soldiers and the author among them behaving in the occupied territories like Nazis. As opposed to the two former novels, Hayut replaces question marks with exclamation marks. The book focuses, according to him, on his autobiographical experiences, with special emphasis on awareness to the Holocaust and its impact on his life from infancy to maturity. The story reveals a radical transfer from Zionist acting out to counter-acting-out, from believing that he is an eternal victim and must be strong against the Arabs in order to never let a 'second Holocaust' occur, to the perception that the IDF soldiers are committing Nazi-like acts in the occupied territories.

Hayut relates how he was raised in a society where the Holocaust dictated his life: 'Anything rather than being like those wretches' [meaning the Jews under Nazism]. As a child, he mourned being part of a people that were slaughtered while 'the world was silent' (Hayut 2010: 20–21). He wanted to be different – a Jew with a weapon: 'sexy' (Hayut 2010: 31). He was positive that Zionism was justified, and believed the Nazis were the absolute evil until he served in the occupied territories. Hayut surveys what he sees as brutal acts of the IDF in the occupied territories. He says that what broke him and changed the way he perceives the Holocaust's memory was the terrified expression of one little girl. Her look turned his beliefs upside down, and remained indelibly in his memory. From a gung-ho soldier he morphed into someone who sees himself and his fellow soldiers as brutal tyrants. He had always deemed the Nazis as absolute evil, but suddenly understood:

For that girl, I was the absolute evil [...] Ever since, I've been left without my Holocaust, everything in my life has new significance: belongingness has blurred, pride is absent, belief is unraveling, remorse intensifies, and forgiveness has taken shape.

(Hayut 2010: 63)

The protagonist realizes – he says – that he was brainwashed by the myth that the IDF is the most moral army in the world (Hayut 2010: 187). He fills dozens of pages with soldiers' testimonies about violent acts in the occupied territories (Hayut 2010: 194–203), testimonies that led him and his friends to found the 'Breaking the Silence' organization. He describes values that became warped, senses that became blunted at the occupied territories' checkpoints. 'Today my eyes are wide open, the repression mechanisms have disintegrated and collapsed, the so-called security grounds have dissipated' (Hayut 2010: 214). Hayut ends the book by addressing that nameless little girl:

I know that I'm the absolute evil for you [...] when I was your age, there was also an absolute evil for me. Though I never came face to face with

it, like you did, I inherited its memory, [...] even though I never saw it, its form confronted me no less clear and new, as when I confronted you [...] I said goodbye to the absolute evil of my childhood [...] when I became absolute evil myself [...] Now I'm a free spirit, because I've lost my Holocaust [...] There's no weapon in my hands, and I'll never rule over anyone else. And it's because of you. If you could steal the Holocaust from all the hundreds and thousands of IDF soldiers, you would certainly liberate the whole of Palestine [...] My apologies again, Your evil, Noam.

(Hayut 2010: 221–24)

This monologue reviles the way postmemory of the Holocaust is combined in powerful political themes. The counter-acting-out he presents shuns completely the Zionist political acting out of the Holocaust and replaces it with a pessimistic inner look and criticisms. The Jewish–Israelis, in his book, turn from victims to oppressors and the Jewish trauma is replaced by the Palestinian trauma of life in the occupied territories.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of cinematic and literary representations of the link between the Holocaust and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict shows that the political post-memory of the Holocaust is much more complex than simple victimization. Until the 1970s the cultural narrative indeed emphasized victimization, and represented the Arabs as the Nazis' successors. But from the 1970s onwards, the cultural narratives show that Jewish-Israeli society is torn between acting out and 'counter-acting-out', nationalization of the Holocaust and a counter story of harsh self-criticism. The new cultural counter-acting-out that took over cinema and literature compares the Holocaust and the *Nakbah*, or represents IDF soldiers as Nazis. It creates an antithetical equivalency to the cultural representations that appeared from the late 1940s until the late 1970s, and claims that, since the Holocaust, Israeli Jews have turned from oppressed to oppressors. What was in the past a deliberate victimization is now replaced with a profound accusation. These narratives reflect the perplexity in Jewish-Israeli society regarding the postmemory of the Holocaust and the political lessons drawn from the Jewish national trauma.

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