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Sexual Abuse and Deviancy: Women Holocaust Survivors in Israeli Feature Films

Abstract. Israeli feature films in the first decades of Israel were dominated by ideological considerations and focused on the importance of establishing a Jewish state in the Land of Israel. As part of this process, Holocaust survivors were reduced to a homogeneous negative entity, broken in body and in spirit that, according to the films, can be changed only in Israel. This paper analyzes the sexual stereotypes of women Holocaust survivors from the 1940s until the present. It shows how from the 1940s-1980s women Holocaust survivors were portrayed through negative sexual stereotypes: they were accused of prostitution in order to survive, and were transformed in the films from indecent Jewish women to virtuous Israeli mothers. The paper argues that even though, from the 1970s, the hold of Zionist ideology gradually began to weaken in Israeli society, the cinematic negative sexual stereotype didn't dissolve but expanded. From the 1980s women Holocaust survivors in Israeli feature films don't undergo a change and are represented in the Israeli sphere as seductive & destructive prostitute, Lilith or deviant femme fatale.

Keywords: Holocaust survivors, Israeli cinema, women.

Approximately 500,000 Holocaust survivors immigrated to Israel in the aftermath of World War II. They were met with empathy and an honest attempt to help them, but also with suspicion (Yablonka (a) 301-317). Israelis wondered how they survived while six million Jews perished in the Holocaust. Mothers and women fighters were often depicted as heroes and the attitude towards women in the Holocaust was very diverse (Geva 271-283). But, at the same time, female Holocaust survivors were also depicted as women who committed immoral sexual acts in order to survive (Levenkron 15-44; Shapira 103-186). These problematic sexual images

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also appeared in the Zionist feature films which, in the early decades of the state, were dominated by ideological considerations. In these films, the new Zionist society in Israel was presented as the complete opposite – pure, moral, brave and heroic. From the 1970s, the hold of Zionist ideology gradually began to weaken in Israeli society and cinema. But even then, the problematic sexual image of female Holocaust survivors didn't improve. On the contrary. In this paper I claim that the combination of wrong popular misconceptions regarding the Jews in the Holocaust, and the cinematic use of female Holocaust survivors as political tools, created an ongoing negative problematic sexual image of female Holocaust survivors from the 1940s. In Israeli feature films since the 1980s this image remained and even strengthened.

Saul Friedlander in his book *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death* (1985) analyzed Nazi images that appeared in Western society from the end of WWII (such as tight uniforms, big belts, leather jackets, leather boots, etc.). He claims that these images are represented as frightening but at the same time as attractive and erotic. In representations of Nazism in Western culture from the 1960s onwards, a series of repeated images appeared: red flags with swastikas, carefully pressed SS uniforms, shaven heads, black leather belts and boots, leather jackets, and more. These images describing the Nazis could very well be the way that the Nazis would like to see themselves: perfect, effective and a force to be reckoned with (Friedlander 21-125; Geuens 114-130).

Laura Frust in her book *Sex Drives: Fantasies of Fascism in Literary Modernism* (2002) examined the erotic images of fascism. She claims that the perception of democracy is of a regime that controls sexuality. Democratic states presented one model of sexuality – heterosexual sexuality based on equality and honor. Fascist regimes were portrayed as the exact opposite. The German tyranny was perceived as a free sexual impulse that is uncontrollable. The horrors of the Holocaust have become after World War II, not only a source of disgust and repulsion, but also a source of sexual arousal. Researchers claim that this combination stems from the fact that the topic carries an erotic charge. Oppressive power is an aphrodisiac and symbolizes possibilities of realizing fantasies through coercion. Therefore, the aesthetic Nazi was transformed in Western culture into a series of images that are seemingly despicable but actually attractive. The combination of “kitsch and death” according to a definition by Saul Friedlander in a culture that dealt with Nazism resulted in works that allegedly condemn Nazism but in which may also be found hidden admiration for that culture (Friedlander, 1985). Within this context, the Holocaust simultaneously became part of the repulsive, fascinating and stimulating pornographic images. The world of the concentration camps opened up an arena for pornographic, erotic and sexually arousing books and films.

In cinema, the term for this blend of sexual themes and Nazism is “Nazisploitation” or “Nazi sexploitation.” It is a subgenre of “exploitation movies” and “sexploitation movies” – B movies that, from the 1960s, represent sexual acts that usually take place

in a concentration camp under the Nazi regime, with an emphasis on sadism, gore and degradation. This combination appears not only in B movies but also in arthouse films from the 1960s onward (e.g., *The Pawnbroker*, Sidney Lumet, 1964; *Night Porter*, Liliana Cavani, 1974; *Death in Love*, Boaz Yachin, 2008).

Rumors about the murders committed in Europe caused solemn mourning during and especially after the war within the Jewish community in Israel. The shock was mingled with great concern and a desire to help the survivors through their suffering. But gradually, even during the war and especially after it, questions and doubts began to arise as to how the European Jews responded to the acts of the Nazis during the Holocaust. Alongside the assistance and immigrant absorption activities, there were reservations about the behavior of most European Jews who did not fight against the Nazis and who allegedly exhibited passivity and humility – qualities often attributed to Diaspora Jews. The partisans and ghetto fighters were treated in a completely different fashion. They were not considered descendants of Diaspora Jews rather as part of the people living in the Land of Israel; many were members of youth movements and were raised on a pioneering education in Israel (Shapira 103-186). The term “Holocaust and Heroism”, which was the most prevalent in those years, created a clear distinction between walking to death “like lambs to the slaughter” as opposed to a “respectable death” while fighting and resisting. Alongside the division between rebels and non-rebels appeared another concept that created a division between those who died and those who were still alive, claiming that “the best had been killed”. The thought behind this concept was that those who had survived had probably been able to “get by”, and not always with integrity. As a result, the absorption of Holocaust survivors in Israel was often accompanied by suspicion of their actions during the Holocaust (Segev 101–169; Porat 381-415).

As part of the concept of “the best had been killed” appeared a stereotype according to which Jewish women had survived the Holocaust because the Nazis had used them as prostitutes or they had used their sexuality in one way or another.

The phenomenon of forced prostitution by Jewish women in the Holocaust revealed degradation and perversion at their peak, expressing the helplessness of the Jewish men in the Holocaust, a helplessness associated with stereotypical negative features of the Diaspora Jew (passivity and softness) (Shapira 103-186).

It is a known fact that during wars, women’s bodies are considered a part of the “loot”. There is a study regarding sexual exploitation during the Holocaust by Jews who helped the Nazis and by the Nazi local collaborators in the different states. However, according to the Nazi Nuremberg Laws (1935), sexual contact between Nazis and Jewish women was forbidden. Because of the racial doctrine, it is difficult to determine whether Jewish women were used as prostitutes in the camps, and there were no apparent so-called Jewish prostitutes on the front (Heineman 22-66; Levenkron 15-44). Even though up to the present day, historians cannot establish the extent of sexual abuse of Jewish women, the sexual abuse and prostitution of

Jewish women in order to survive was presented in Israeli culture as an extensive phenomenon. The combination of Holocaust, sex and sadism appeared in Israeli poetry, cinema and literature, as well as in public discourse and interpersonal relationships (Steir-Livny (a) 52-53; Zartal 233-234; Bartov 347). "Once, when I was taking a shower, my aunts came into the bathroom". recalls Lilka Miller, who had survived Auschwitz and came to Israel in her youth. "They checked every part of my naked body and wanted to make sure that the tattoo of an SS whore was nowhere to be found. Only after they had checked that everything was all right did they leave."¹ "Here in Israel, I was asked by Jews: How did you stay alive? What did you have to do to survive? And in their eyes was a flicker of suspicion: Capo? Whore?" says journalist, Ruth Bondy, an Auschwitz survivor. Questions such as these led Bondy during her second year in Israel to remove her tattoo on her arm (44-45).

In the area of literature, in the late 1940s and later in the 1950s and 1960s, decades during which cultural and educational dealings with the Holocaust were minor, books by Ka-Tsetnik (the literary name of Holocaust survivor Yehiel De-Nur) were published that sharply criticized Jewish leadership that had not rebelled and the Jewish population in the ghettos and the camps, placing emphasis on sadistic, sexual and pornographic aspects during the Holocaust. For example, in the *House of Dolls* (1955), he described Daniela, a high school pupil sent to a brothel for German soldiers. Many of those who were teenagers in the 1950s and 1960s remember his books as a jarring experience that shaped their knowledge and perception of the Holocaust. Historian and Journalist Tom Segev wrote about this: "I belong to an entire generation of Israelis who had identified the Holocaust primarily with what they had read in their youth in books by Ka-Tsetnik". Today, criticism is raised in the study of his books and of the identification that was created in Israeli society between his theory and the Holocaust. Critics claim that the representation of the Holocaust in his books is sick and distorted, defining his books as being part of the "art of nausea" in Holocaust literature, and they believe that his books present Jewish society from the point of view of hatred, which can even be identified with the aggressor (Bartov, 148-75; Glazner-Hadar, 167-200). Literary scholar Nitza Ben-Ari, who examined Israeli literature on eroticism and pornography, claims that Ka-Tsetnik had intended to describe the concentration camp experience and not write sexual fiction, but the absence of any other erotic literature had placed his books in this status (Ben-Ari 152-162; Tsach, 44-50).

Ka-Tsetnik was not the only one to introduce these concepts into literary discourse. A poem by Yitzhak Sadeh, *My Sister on the Beach*, was published in the Palmach² periodical, (Noded 725), one of the major and most important books of the period and a key publication in shaping the spirit of the combat units. The poem deals with an encounter between the Palmach and Holocaust survivors who had come to the beach and focuses on one of the survivors: "This dirty, unkempt, disheveled women had a tattoo imprinted in her flesh – 'only officers'. In answer to her question: 'Am I worthy enough that young men will risk their lives for me?' a Palmach member helps

her down onto the beach: 'You have a place in the world my sister... your feet have walked the path of agony, and tonight you have come to your home here with us'."

Pornographic stories were added to these descriptions in the Stalag fiction of the 1960s that depicted pornographic sadistic-masochistic relations between a Nazi male or female commander and the prisoners, which began to be published following the Eichmann trial in Israel (1961). The books were sold at kiosks and became bestsellers. Sometimes they reached record sales of 25,000 copies per book. In 1964 *The Stalag I Was Colonel Schultz's Dog*, was published. This book described a female prisoner who had become a sex slave to a Nazi officer. This time, the publisher was put on trial for pornography, was fined, the printing house received a warning, and it was determined that copies of the book would be destroyed. This event marked the end of the Stalag fiction era (Ben-Ari 152-162). However, the end of this era did not remove the moral-sexual stain that clung to the image of the Holocaust survivor.

Like in other cultural fields, Israeli film directors had also avoided the historical uncertainties and represented the prostitution of Jewish women in Nazi camps as an historical fact. Israeli films in the first decades of Israel were funded by the State and propagated Zionist ideas. They focused on ideological notions: they did not deal directly with the Holocaust but rather with its Zionist "lesson": the importance of establishing a Jewish state in the Land of Israel. The films were presented to the public as reflecting factual truth about past and present. But, in actuality, they did not reflect reality, but the ideological world-view of the society in which they acted, its desires and its aspirations, – the desired and the imagined more than the real and the actual (Avisar 151-167).

As part of this narrative, Holocaust survivors were reduced to a homogeneous negative entity, broken in body and in spirit that, according to the films, could be changed only in Israel. Female Holocaust survivors were portrayed through negative sexual stereotypes: they were accused of prostitution in order to survive and in the films had to undergo a process of purification. Only in Israel, claimed the films, could they be transformed from indecent Jewish women to virtuous Israeli mothers.

My Father's House (Herbert Klein, 1947) is a melodrama that tells the story of David Halevy, an 11-year-old Holocaust survivor who survived Bergen-Belsen and came to Israel to look for his father and mother who had disappeared during the Holocaust. Miriam, also a Holocaust survivor, arrives with him on the ship. Miriam, a secondary character, gives David a comb in one of their encounters – "the only thing I was allowed to keep there". David wondered why she was allowed to keep this comb, while the hair of other women was shaved, and she hints that there were women whose hair was not shaved. When visiting David in the hospital, she reveals to Abraham, a kibbutz³ member accompanying their absorption in Israel, that in Auschwitz she had been forced to engage in prostitution. As evidence, she presents him and to the camera a tattoo indicating her role in the camp. The filmmakers were quick to explain that Miriam's case was not exceptional, and put words in her mouth. Later in the

scene Miriam claims that many women had been forced into prostitution; since they could not bear to live with this, they had committed suicide after the war. As part of the noble image of the country's residents, Abraham explains to her immediately that he would be willing to forgive her and accept her despite her past. Thus, the film producers convert the gray shades of the Holocaust through a clear division between black and white, and describe a clear moral gender dichotomy between individuals who bear the seal of immorality and moral or altruistic individuals.

In films describing the initiation process, the male survivor is converted from a mentally and physically broken individual to an active ordinary citizen. In the female initiation process, special place is given to sexuality – the women survivors in these films undergo a process of “purification”. At the end of the film, Miriam turns from being a prostitute into David's adoptive mother. Avoiding the description of the intimate relationships that develop between Miriam and Abraham reinforces her new pure image (Gertz (b) 28-30; Valentin, 169-196).

The Jewish National Fund officials who financed the film and did not want to leave an impression that they were producing a propaganda film, signed the filmmakers on to a contract of confidentiality. Furthermore, they sought to leave an impression on the observers that this was a documentary film. For example, the title opening the feature film *My Father's House* indicates clearly that the film is a documentary: “What you see is reality itself... This film tells the story of Palestine and its people... The people of Palestine just wanted this film to be true to their lives and we promised them that we will pass on this truth, which is eternal.” Statements such as this, which were scattered generously through Israeli Holocaust films of that period, made films from a text written by screenwriters into an authentic anthropological testimony of Holocaust survivors.

In the 1950s, in addition to dealing with the emotional scars, Holocaust survivors were integrated into various fields of work in the country: military and defense industries, industry, banking, commerce, arts, culture and education. They excelled in self-reliance, relying minimally on state institutions. In terms of the national memory, the Holocaust still appeared on the public agenda, and in the 1950s, the Law Punishing Nazis and Nazi Collaborators was passed (1950); the Yad Vashem Law (1953); the Nazi War Invalids Law (1954); and the Holocaust Memorial Day Law (1959). Moreover, at the center of public discourse in the 1950s were two events related to the Holocaust: the debate on reparations (1951-1953) and the Greenwald Trial (better known as the Kastner Trial, 1954 to 1968). But these laws and events did not bring about a change in perception by the general public of Holocaust survivors (Shapira 103-186)

Suppressing the Holocaust and later on the problematic concept of Holocaust survivors in general and female Holocaust survivors in particular is reflected in films produced during these years, and they restore the negative stereotypes associated with the image of the female Holocaust survivor.

The film *Faithful City* (Joseph Lates, 1952) describes a group of orphaned children arriving in a youth farm in Jerusalem in 1947. The leader of the group, all Holocaust survivors, is Max – an aggressive and violent boy who brings with him nihilistic overtones, which according to the film typified his ways during and after the Holocaust in Europe. Accompanying him is Anna, a teenager who learned during and after the Holocaust to make manipulative use of her sexuality.

The children are presented as not wanting to work the land, demanding monetary compensation for their work, playing cards and smoking. Anna exhibits individualistic behavior combined with sexuality. She refuses to wear modest khakis like the other girls or to braid her hair in a simple fashion. She continues to cling to her “ballroom” clothes, piles her hair on top of her head, flirts with Sam the instructor, looking at him with a piercing gaze and assuring him that a relationship between them would be “wonderful”. She also tells her friends and the viewers about the survival techniques she has learned: in the past, she had met a German officer “who had beautiful blue eyes”, and she realized, she says, that if she stared into his eyes she could get what she wants. On their trip to Jerusalem, she prances around the city and gazes admiringly, in a seductive Hollywood-actress pose, at a poster under which the slogan ‘My Way’ was written. The next scene shows that Anna had painted a picture of her eyes and hung them on the wall in Sam’s room, who looks at them, shocked.

The individualism combined with Anna’s sexuality is presented as a double sin. In the film *My Father’s Home*, Miriam, the female Holocaust survivor, was presented as someone who had in the past served as a prostitute, but in present day exhibits a modest demeanor. The film *Faithful City* strengthens the problematic image of a female Holocaust survivor who brings her blatant and overt sexual behavior to present-day Zionist life, and undermines the puritan peace. Since Anna does not change her ways, she is called to Sam’s room for a discussion. By being in close proximity with Sam, Anna strengthens her efforts to flirt openly with him, but he, the symbol of integrity and ethics, calls her to order. He explains to her that she is a very pretty girl, but she does not “give herself a chance”. She should be “like everyone else”. He gives her a symbolic gift – a headband. In this way, he is hinting that she should abandon her individualistic ways (“My Way”) and go with the flow. Indeed, towards the end of the film, Anna trades in her clothes for khakis, braids her hair into a simple braid, works on the youth farm and is even put in charge of the first-aid equipment (which was so very important on the eve of the War of Independence).

The Adolf Eichmann trial (1961) changed the perception of the Holocaust in Israel. After years of repression, Israelis were exposed to numerous testimonies that made them understand the complexity of the Jewish predicament during the Holocaust, such as the difficulties in resisting the Nazis, utilizing the mechanism of lies and deception, and clearly determining right from wrong. Following the trial, both the Holocaust and the Jewish past in the Diaspora began appearing more often in literature and theater. For example, after the trial, the Ministry of Education expanded

the scope of the school curriculum on the Holocaust to six hours, and in 1966 and 1967 the first delegations of Jewish youth went to Poland. Holocaust Memorial Day became a regular event and commemorating the Holocaust was placed on the public agenda (Yablonka (b) 175-214)

The couple of films produced in the 1960s and 1970s, however, imply that the change was neither immediate nor particularly drastic regarding the image of female Holocaust survivors. This character had almost disappeared from the films, and when it appeared it reconstructed forbidden sexual behavior.

The film *He Walked in the Fields* (Joseph Milo, 1967) tells the story of Uri Kahana, who returned to the kibbutz in 1947 after studying in the Kadoorie Agricultural School and tries to integrate into working life and to reconnect with his parents. Afterwards he joins the Palmach and is killed during a military operation.

At the center of the film is the "sabra"⁴ – his deliberations and attempts at finding his way in life. Mika, a Holocaust survivor, with whom Uri is having an affair, is a secondary character. Upon arriving at the kibbutz, Uri listens outside a window to her conversation with the doctor and discovers that she wants to hide her past experiences in Tehran.⁵ The Camera shots her in a little closed room, which symbolizes how she is trapped in her dark sexual secrets from the past. Later on, it is hinted that she had to undergo an abortion there (Steir-Livny (b) 497-520). Similar to the film *Faithful City*, the female survivor is presented not only as having been stained, but as someone who uses her sexuality in the present day. Unlike the sanctimonious female kibbutz members, Mika is portrayed as being seductive, flirting with the boys on the kibbutz and with Uri. In her relationship with Uri, Mika is the one who turns to him, initiates their first dates and accedes quickly to a sexual encounter. In a cinematic atmosphere of Zionist ideology that refrained from showing intimate relationship, Mika is shot from the back, while taking her shirt off and in a sensual scene she and Uri are sleeping together. A tilt shot of a tree symbolizes the male phallus. Scenes like that rarely appeared in Israeli films in those decades and her permissions character is intensified when the audience learns that she got pregnant as a result of this encounter. Just like in the film *My Father's Home*, despite Mika's problematic sexuality, Uri is still interested in starting a family with her, and she moves from being a slutty girl to a mother. The film's epilogue, which briefly describes events in 1967, reveals that her son had fought heroically during the Six Day War. In other words, Mika the Holocaust survivor becomes a national womb and, in fact, purifies herself.

An unusual film in this decades is *Blazing Sand* (Rafi Nussbaum, 1960). The film connects, like in many other films, a female Holocaust survivor to her destructive sexuality, but does not represent an initiation process. Dina, a Holocaust survivor, is depicted as being a femme fatale who drags four men to their death following a trip to Petra after her boyfriend had been injured and left there holding the valuable Dead Sea Scrolls. The film points an accusing finger at her and presents her as being

manipulative, someone who uses her sexuality to achieve her goals, and who is directly responsible for the loss of lives of the men.

Dina lives in Tel Aviv and returns to the kibbutz in order to recruit David, her former boyfriend. She is fancily dressed and made up, and the kibbutz members immediately look at her suspiciously. Her former teacher explains that she is a Holocaust survivor and suffered considerably before coming to the kibbutz. That is, just like in the film *Faithful City*, present-day sexual promiscuity is clearly associated with past events. The kibbutz members are reluctant to accept this explanation and claim that Hannah, David's current girlfriend, is a Holocaust survivor, and yet is humble and dedicated to the kibbutz. The film seemingly juxtaposes the two images of Holocaust survivors, but Hannah is a minor character who is given little screen time compared to Dina who takes over the film and the screen, and whose image is much more dominant. She manages to lure David to go out with her and in this way neutralizes the influence of the "good" Holocaust survivor (Zimmerman, 188-194). The disappearance of the purification process is very surprising and exceptional in these decades. This film is the first sign of the direction Israeli cinema will turn to from the 1980s.

In the 1970s, the hold of Zionist ideology gradually began to weaken for several reasons: the 1973 Yom Kippur War and its harsh consequences; stagnation and corruption in the left wing party Labor movement that had been in power since the days of pre-statehood; the consequent ascent of the right-wing party Likud to power (1977); and the growing legitimacy of multicultural trends that replaced the dominant ideas about a homogeneous Israeli society. The glorification of the Zionist ethos and the absorption process was replaced by a profound criticism of early Zionism and its treatment of marginal groups (Kimmerling 185-493; Gertz (a) 175-288; Shohat 234-266).

During these decades, the Holocaust became an important part of the Israeli everyday discourse. It was made a permanent feature of both the high school curriculum and matriculation exams. Likewise, more and more Holocaust survivors began to publish their memoirs while the second- and third-generation Holocaust survivors – the children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors – began to discuss the ways in which the trauma affected their lives, and showcase their relationship with their parents and grandparents through art (Porat 357-378; Steir-Livny (a) 96-204; Milner 19-35; Loshitzky 15-71).

Cinema researchers suggest that these changes are also reflected in the image of Holocaust survivors, and claim that the survivors are depicted in feature films from the late 1970s onward as being emotionally scarred but treated with respect and empathy (Gertz (b) 42-77; Zimmerman 301-316; Avisar 160-178). I argue, to the contrary, that most of the Israeli feature films from those decades continue to replicate the same negative images and even deepens them.

Nurith Gertz ((b) 175-288) 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 its ability to influence the political establishment. Instead it

rose to dominance in the country's intellectual life, art, literature, and academia. The Lebanon War that began in June 1982, the beginning of the first intifada in 1987, and the second intifada of 2000 further entrenched this critical tendency. Many films from the 1980s onward return to the early years of the State to tell the story of the encounter between the survivors and native Israelis somewhat differently. Unlike films from the 1940s and 1950s, they present Israeli society as being a difficult, closed society that adversely affects Holocaust survivors. They shutter the utopian representation of the initiation process and present a scenario in which Holocaust survivors are not integrated into Israeli society, and in the end remain in a place similar to where they had been at the beginning of the film. I argue that while the feelings directed towards the survivors in these films are empathetic and the attitude towards the surrounding society is critical, the Holocaust survivors are still presented as sexual deviants.

I claim that from the 1980s, the image of the native Israelis had indeed changed – from a loving embracing society to a cold, cruel and indifferent society that ignores the pain of the Holocaust survivors. But this cinematic change didn't improve the negative image of Holocaust survivors. On the contrary – it worsened it. Because the films that were produced until the 1980s wanted to glorify Zionism, Holocaust survivors were presented as a group that undergoes a change and is assimilated into society. The "happy end" turned them into moral pure citizens. As opposed to the early films, which presented transformation and claimed that in Israel, Holocaust survivors can release themselves of their past, in contemporary films, the criticism breaks the transformation/initiation process. Contrary to films produced in the 1940s and 1950s, Holocaust survivors in these later films do not undergo a change and are not assimilated into society. Holocaust survivors are portrayed from the beginning of the films until their end on the bizzare margins of society. The deviant sexuality is portrayed as an integral part of the survivors' identity in the present day.

Foucault (1996) argues that the public discourse on sexuality defines the boundaries of permitted and forbidden, acceptable and deviant, and fixes them in a specific format. The discourse on sexuality is part of the mechanism of power, a controlling mechanism that determines and decides what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. The purpose of the discourse is to establish the concept of normal sexuality as "normative", i.e., socially and politically effective sexuality intended for breeding and offspring, as opposed to sexual "deviancy", which is not intended for such purposes. Those not included in the category of normative sexuality are "punished" in that their identity is described through the sexual act. That is to say, sexual "deviancy" becomes a description of identity and social stigmatization. Stuart Hall (223-290) claims that stereotyping is a set of representational practices that are part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order that sets up a symbolic frontier between the normal and the deviant, what belongs and what is the other. I claim that, the sexual image of female Holocaust survivors from the 1980s is much worse than in the first cinematic decades. The films portray a world in which the deviant

acts that were allegedly practiced during the Holocaust permeate into the present, and becomes the main character of female Holocaust survivors, who through their deviancy, ruin the lives of those who surround them.

Tel Aviv-Berlin (Tzipi Trope, 1987) describes the life of Binyamin, a Holocaust survivor living in Tel Aviv in 1948. Like many other films of this era, *Tel Aviv-Berlin* criticizes the Israeli absorption process. Binyamin is completely detached from Israeli society and from the 1948 war. The cinematography heightens the feeling that Tel Aviv is a continuation of the ghetto and the camps, highlighting Binyamin's estrangement, loneliness, and the memories that engulf him.

One of the places in which Binyamin secludes himself is the house of Gusty, a Holocaust survivor he met in Tel Aviv. Within the confines of this house, Gusty and her friends reveal how they survived in Auschwitz. Gusty's friend attempts to engage Binyamin in the same seductive games that, according to her, they learned from Nazi officers when they were prostitutes in Auschwitz. Thus, the film repeats the same accusation that appeared in earlier films and even reinforces it. In the early films, female Holocaust survivors undergo a purification process and release themselves from their past. According to films from the late 1970s onward, however, the survivors who were sexual victims during the Holocaust retain this identity in the Israeli present and maintain the same behavior while hurting the people around them (Steir-Livny (b) 497-520).

Gusty's antithesis is Lea, Binyamin's wife, who immigrated to Israel prior to WWII. Lea is a devoted wife and mother who tries to keep the family together despite Binyamin's problems. In her encounter with Gusty, there is a clash of two well-known female stereotypes: the saint and the whore. Gusty's image is damaged even more because she seduces Binyamin and tears him away from his family.

Alex is Lovesick (Boaz Davidson, 1986) is a comic-nostalgic story of growing up against the background of the period of austerity in Israel in the 1950s. The film's hero is 13-year-old Alex during the time before his bar mitzvah ceremony. His cousin Lola comes to his family from Poland looking for Tadek, her lover who had disappeared during World War II. Alex falls in love with Lola and she gives him his first sexual experience. The film's researcher, Laura Mulvey, defined the cinematic view as a male "penetrating view". In her opinion, the role playing is about a man being an active observer, a Peeping Tom, opposite the passive woman shaped according to the male fantasy, serving as a sex object; her image is designed to create an erotic effect. A female cannot exist on her own, rather only through her dependence on a male. Lola is a shallow figure. We don't know her last name, where she came from and how she survived the Holocaust. Her image consists of the sexual experience. She is presented as a sex object; her see-through clothes and windblown hair are scenes photographed from the point of view of Alex, who lusts after her. The camera angles turn Lola into a figure who is also flirting with the audience. Making Lola a sex object gets reinforcement when she brings Alex to her bed and he loses his virginity in her arms.

New Land (Orna Ben-Dor, 1994) deals with the integration attempts of two young brothers, Jan and Anna, who come to Israel from Poland in the early 1950s looking for their mother. The film severely criticizes the surrounding society and accuses it of a callous and cruel attitude to the survivors, but in parallel repeats the old deviant stereotypes of female survivors.

For example, when an Israeli physician in a Ma'abara⁶ encounters Rosa, a female Holocaust survivor from Greece, he declares that the Jewish females had survived the Holocaust because they had served as prostitutes. This statement causes Rosa, a Holocaust survivor, to singe the number tattooed on her arm with a hot iron. Therefore, the film's creator, on the one hand, criticizes the negative sexual stereotypes associated with female Holocaust survivors, and on the other hand, reinforces them because Rosa doesn't contradict this assumption. Moreover, another female character is Marusha, a Polish woman who had slept with a Nazi officer during the Holocaust to save the life of her Jewish husband, Pinchas. In the Ma'abara Pinchas is ill and there are no medicine to be found. Berdugo, the pimp, who runs the camp in practice, requires Marusha to sleep with him in return for medicine for her husband. She comes to his hut to this end, but at the last minute, breaks down. Berdugo, in a burst of generosity, gives her the medicine anyway, but when she returns, she discovers that her husband, who had heard her walk to the hut and understood the implications, had committed suicide. The subtext of this narrative is that her sexual behavior saved him in the past, but killed him in the present.

Letters to America (Hanan Peled, 2006) creates a link between mental illness and sexual deviancy in the image of Rozka, a Holocaust survivor. The film goes back to Tel Aviv in the year 1962. Moishe Waldman, originally from Radom in Poland, is a Holocaust survivor who has lost his wife and son Yankel in the Holocaust. He begins to believe that Yankel, who had been sent to Auschwitz during the war and was murdered in the camp, had miraculously managed to escape the inferno, reach the United States and today has taken the name Jack Waldman, a brilliant, young Jewish consultant to President Kennedy. Moishe's mental state deteriorates and he leaves home to live with Rozka, a Holocaust survivor who lost her family in the Holocaust. But, her catatonic state distances him from her and in the end, he returns to his family.

Rozka and her friend Hannaleh are questionable club girls, "sexual" friends of Proyka, Moishe's friend, who had acquainted them with Moishe for quick sexual encounters. Rozka's husband and daughter were murdered in the Holocaust, and Rozka strongly identifies with Moishe. This solidarity is expressed in the symbol that accompanies her – the large aquarium in her room. The fish are dead, but she is careful to drop food into the water for them. Like in *Tel-Aviv- Berlin*, Rozka's character returns the Holocaust survivor to the myth of Lilith – the seductive femme fatale who destroys families. She is reduced to the image of a sexual, mentally ill women, who appears on screen mostly in bedroom scenes. She seduces Moishe, who because of

her, cheats on his wife. In the end, even he, who undergoes a mental crisis, he leaves her because he is unable to bear her difficult emotional state.

In *Muki Boera* (Lina and Salva Chaplin, 2010), Muki lives with his mother, a troubled Holocaust survivor. His father died and his mother's boyfriend "Uncle Yanek" takes his place. His mother is seductive and Muki's relationship with her is erotic. In one of the scenes, it is hinted that this relationship has deteriorated to incest. This narrative is the last nail in the female Holocaust survivors' cinematic sexual image coffin.

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In conclusion, the changes in the Israeli perception of the Holocaust in general and of Jewish women during and after the Holocaust in particular,⁷ the changes in the perception and role of women in society, and the complex representation of women who are not Holocaust survivors in Israeli cinema in recent decades (Lubin 253-275; Knispel, 2011; Zamir, 2015), which is a byproduct of social changes, has bypassed the representation of female Holocaust survivors. The initial boundaries set by the cinema in the 1940s and 1950s, which created a binary division between normative sexuality and deviant sexuality, continue to accompany the image of female Holocaust survivor to the present day, making no room for a complex point of view.

Even though from the 1980s Israeli society changed – Holocaust awareness deepened and Israeli cinema broke away from the Zionist dogma that characterized it in its early stage – in the last 35 years a majority of directors still portray Holocaust survivors negatively, as being sexually violent and deviant.

The preponderance of this stereotypical imagery is surprising in light of the changes that Israeli films underwent and their increasing tendency toward social and ideological critique. Since the late 1970s Israeli cinema has been representing formerly marginal groups in increasingly complex and sophisticated ways. These include not only women, homosexuals, Mizrahi Jews, the Orthodox, Bedouins, Druze, and Palestinians, who enjoy in-depth cinematic representations, but also newer groups such as immigrants from the former USSR and foreign migrant workers. Holocaust survivors are the only group almost entirely unaffected by the changes that have taken place in this discourse (Steir-Livny (a), 205-211).

Holocaust survivors were and have remained a political tool in the hands of Israeli directors. Until the 1980s, they were used to glorify Zionism and the absorption process that "changes" and cures them. In the last four decades, they are used to criticize Zionism and the absorption process. The problem is that both then and now, their political use hurts their image. Seventy years of cinema and Israeli feature films are still shaping female Holocaust survivors as the sexual demons of Israeli society. These persistent negative stereotypes stand in direct contradiction to the historical research on the subject. The representations cast a dark shadow on the collective memory of one of the most important and successful groups in Israeli society who,

despite having to cope with deep emotional scars, left a profound mark on economics, politics, medicine, education and Israeli culture.

Films do not reflect reality; however, they both influence and are influenced by public opinion. The negative sexual image of female Holocaust survivors in Israeli feature films indicates that, although the attitude towards the Holocaust has changed in Israel over the years, the attitude towards female Holocaust survivors remains problematic.

Endnotes

- 1 Interview with Lilka Miller, April 30, 2001.
- 2 The Palmach – A fighting force of the Haganah, the underground army of the Jewish community in Eretz-Israel during the 1940s.
- 3 Kibbutz – An Israeli communal settlement.
- 4 Sabre – a Native born Jew in Eretz-Israel.
- 5 Tehran children were children Holocaust survivors who were transferred to pre-state Israel during World War II.
- 6 Ma'abarot – Transit camps that were built in Israel's first decade in order to house the immigrants that arrived in Israel.
- 7 For example, in Hebrew: a book edited by Esther Herzog *Women and Family in the Holocaust* (2006) contains a collection of articles about the special difficulties and distress of women during the Holocaust. The articles describe coping in a world where on the one hand women strengthened the stereotypical female roles as a wife, a mother, a sister, a nurse, a cook, and on the other hand, because of the persecution and changes in families and communities, she often also fulfilled male roles as head of the family, as a smuggler and as a fighter. In the book by Iris Milner, *Narratives of Holocaust Literature* (2008), the chapter "Women and children of Holocaust literature" (113-137) is about the female experience in the Holocaust as reflected in the literature and reveals a weakness as well as a strength and vulnerability, but also benefits such as clinging to the home that is crumbling, but also breaking into masculine territories of active resistance. In the last three decades many women survivors' autobiographies were published in Israel. See also endnote 24.

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