



Shattered Encounters:

From *My Father's House* (1947) to *My Father's House* (2008)

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Abstract: *In the aftermath of World War II, approximately 500,000 Holocaust survivors immigrated to pre-state and post-1948 Israel. The complex experiences of this shattered group and their encounters with Israeli society were reduced to a series of superficial representations in Israeli fiction films. In films produced both in pre-state Israel and in the early decades of the fledgling state, Holocaust survivors were depicted as traumatized individuals healed by the veteran Jews and transformed into active, strong, healthy civilians in the new land. By the late 1970s, however, Israeli society had changed, as did the cinematic representation of the encounter between native Israelis and Holocaust survivors. Films from that era onwards represent the survivors as neglected by veteran Israelis and relegated to the margins of society. This article will analyze the profound change that took place between these earlier and later cinematic depictions through the lenses of two films that tell the same story – but from completely different perspectives: Beit Avi [My Father's House], directed by Herbert Kline in 1947, and Beit Avi [Homeland], directed by Dani Rosenberg in 2008. While sharing the same Hebrew title, these films were produced in different eras and thus shed light on vastly different depictions of similar encounters.*



In the aftermath of World War II, approximately 500,000 Holocaust survivors immigrated to pre-state and post-1948 Israel. The complex encounters of this traumatized population with the veteran Jews were reduced to a series of superficial representations in Israeli fiction films. In films produced both in pre-state Israel (the Jewish Yishuv) and in the early decades of the fledgling state, Holocaust survivors were depicted as traumatized individuals saved by other Jews and transformed into active, strong, healthy civilians in the new land. By the late 1970s, however, Israeli society had changed, and, with it, so had cinematic representations of the encounter between veteran Israelis and Holocaust survivors. A dystopian shift resulted in films featuring survivors as a traumatized group of people, neglected by Jewish-Israelis, and relegated to the margins of society. This article analyzes the profound changes that took place between these earlier and later representations and discusses these different cinematic depictions through two films that share the same Hebrew title and represent

Holocaust survivors' immigration to Eretz Israel, but from different perspectives: *Beit Avi* [*My Father's House*], directed by Herbert Kline in 1947, and *Beit Avi* [Homeland], directed by Dani Rosenberg in 2008. The article will argue that each film's depiction of Holocaust survivors and their absorption process is influenced by the distinct era in which it was produced and the differing socio-political agenda of its directors; both portrayals, however, ultimately damage the image of the survivors.

Cinematic Representations from the Late 1940s until the Late 1970s

The Zionist narrative, publicly cultivated during the 1940s and 1950s, viewed newly developing Jewish society favourably, as opposed to the old, maligned Jewish diaspora (see Shapira, "Denial"; Steir-Livny, "Comeback"). Rumours about the murders committed in Europe were cause for solemn mourning within the Jewish community in the Yishuv, during and especially after World War II. Shock was mingled with anguish and a desire to help the Holocaust survivors, but, both during and after the war, questions and doubts began to arise as to the response of European Jews to the Nazis during the Holocaust. Alongside the assistance in immigrant absorption that was offered, there were also reservations about the perceived passivity and meekness of the diaspora Jews in the face of Nazi horrors. In addition, veteran Israelis often wondered how the immigrants had survived, while six million Jews had perished. The answers to this question were sometimes problematic. As a result, the encounter between Holocaust survivors and veteran Israelis was complicated (Porat 379–96; Segev 101–69; see also Yablonka, "Contradictory"; Shapira, "Holocaust").

The cinema of the Yishuv and of Israel in its first decades was dominated by ideological considerations. Films that distinctively propagated Zionist ideals served as an artistic platform for an ideological outlook through which the Zionist establishment sought to display its political, economic, and national achievements. Most films focused on the Zionist struggle, the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz Israel, and the model of the "new Jew." They were designed

to influence western audiences and to raise public opinion, support, and donations. To this end, a number of films were produced in English and then translated into myriad languages for worldwide distribution (Shohat 29–86; Gertz, *Different* 18–37).

Israeli films 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. As part of this goal, Holocaust survivors were reduced to a negative, homogeneous entity undergoing a successful transition thanks to the land, its healing powers, and its people. According to Nurith Gertz, in these films, the survivors’ function was to “strengthen and define the male Hebrew identity” (*Different* 14), thereby undergoing a symbolic process which led “from death to revival” (19).¹ Zimmerman identifies three repeating themes common to films from the period: “repression of the atrocities the Holocaust survivors underwent, [...] legitimation to pressure the survivors to act according to the Zionist code, [...] [and] an ideological use of the Holocaust in order to justify Zionism” (57). In this way, Ilan Avisar argues, these films formed the basis of “the linkage between the Holocaust and Israel” (“Holocaust” 151); they “usually featured Holocaust survivors arriving in Israel as traumatized victims and being transformed to healthy, happy people thanks to the adoption and cultivation of Zionist ideals[.] [...] Thus the manifest compassion toward the victims came with a patronizing attitude that sought to project a new identity onto them” (153).

These films share a very similar format: they begin by focusing on the numerous problems of the survivors; represent them as stubborn, rebellious, introverted, and antisocial; and depict the mental breakdowns that some survivors experienced. At the end of the films, the survivors’ problems and emotional issues are resolved, thanks, of course, to the great help of the veteran Jews. Only a few films of that era avoided this narrative, instead representing an encounter that did not end with integration: Henri Schneider’s *Yonatan and Tali* (1953) portrays a

¹ All translations from Hebrew are my own. Sources published in Hebrew are notated accordingly in the Works Cited.

mentally broken female survivor who sends her children to live on a kibbutz; Larry Frisch's *The Pillar of Fire* (1959) features a Holocaust survivor unable to function during the battles of 1948 and whose life is eventually saved by a kibbutz member (Steir-Livny, *Two Faces* 65–68).

***My Father's House* (Herbert Kline, 1947)**

Beit Avi [*My Father's House*], directed by Herbert Kline in 1947, was one of the first fiction films produced in the Yishuv after World War II. The film follows David, an eleven-year-old Holocaust survivor, as he searches for his father in Eretz Israel. Just before their separation during the war, David's father promises that the family will someday be reunited in the Holy Land, and, after surviving the Holocaust, David desperately searches for his parents in the hope that his father's parting words will come true. The film follows his quest, portrays his grief when he discovers that his parents have been murdered in the Holocaust, and depicts his eventual revival through the love of the Jewish Yishuv community.

Like other films from these decades, the film's discussion of the Holocaust is minimal. The audience understands that David's parents have been murdered and that Miriam, a fellow survivor, was forced into prostitution during the Holocaust. The camera also focuses several times on the number tattooed on David's arm. But the vast majority of the film deals with his absorption process in the Yishuv. Eretz Israel and its Jewish settlers are therefore the film's focus, and the Holocaust survivors become merely a cinematic tool used to emphasize the land's rejuvenation and the Jewish political claim regarding the importance of a Jewish state.

The Jewish National Fund (JNF), whose main objective was the development and building of the Land of Israel, produced and funded the film, and most of the film-related discussions at the time dealt with the way the Land of Israel should be portrayed. Meyer Levin's script was approved by Elias Epstein, the head of the public relations division of JNF, provided that its two main themes would be the Jews' struggle for an independent state and the Jewish pioneers' success in

making the land fertile and fruitful. David's story, therefore, is simply a cinematic excuse to demonstrate the development of the Jewish Yishuv. In the film, David roams the land, looking for his father, and, through his journey, the audience learns about different aspects of the Yishuv: the agricultural settlements (*kibbutzim*), industry (the Dead Sea factories), and culture (the Philharmonic Orchestra). The JNF's demands suited Levin's goal of glorifying Zionism (Levin 310–357; Kronish). The Jewish Yishuv is portrayed as a utopia, a sunny, flourishing landscape filled with fruit and happy children running naked in the grass – symbols of new life – all accompanied by a cheerful soundtrack.

This depiction of the Yishuv as a utopian sphere and perfect safe haven for Holocaust survivors resulted in a false representation of the Jews' relationship with the British authorities who ruled Eretz Israel at the time. Tensions with the British Mandate are not mentioned in the film; to the contrary, the British are portrayed as pleasant people who live in harmony with the inhabitants of the country and who even help David search for his father. Moreover, acts of Arab violence that both slowed and damaged the film's production are not evident, nor is there any hint as to the numerous demonstrations by the Arab League, who were opposed to any kind of film that glorified Zionism. Followers of the Arab Mufti, Haj Amin El-Husseini, had threatened Arab actors and forced them to withdraw from the cast. In another instance, the shooting of a scene in Jerusalem, in which the character of David is seen searching for his parents, was interrupted when an Arab salesman from a local store forced some Arab extras to stop participating "in this Jewish film." A riot broke out, and the crew had to stop filming and leave the location; it took several days for them to come back and hastily shoot the scene. A similar incident occurred when the crew attempted to shoot a scene in which David walks through an Arab village. The producers presented the residents of the village with sheep in exchange for allowing filming to take place, but, while shooting the scene, the village teacher caused mayhem.

Once again, crew members had to hastily conclude filming and flee the scene (Steir-Livny, *World* 33–34).

Epstein was of the opinion that the film should include no mention of the tension and violence, and Levin believed that a saccharine image of the Yishuv would have a more positive effect on American audiences. Kline, meanwhile, though very enthusiastic about the Zionist project, held an opposing view, since he wanted his film to be realistic. Many disputes took place between Kline and Levin during production; in the end, however, Kline had no choice but to acquiesce to Epstein and the JNF's point of view, as they were financing the film. Therefore, the violent disputes between Jews and Arabs, even those that influenced the production of the film itself, are not reflected in *My Father's House*. On the contrary, the film includes scenes in which David befriends an Arab boy and visits his village, and Arabs are shown serenely riding their camels, a natural part of the scenery.

As in many other films of that time, the Holocaust survivor protagonist is portrayed in the beginning of the film as disengaged and peculiar. David's arrival in his new country is marked by difficulty in understanding his surroundings, and even seemingly simple things become complex. Unable to answer a kibbutz member's question about his father's name, David replies, "I've always called him Dada, and Mammy called him 'dearest.'" He is portrayed as being unstable; he neither works nor studies; and, even though the kibbutz members try to help him assimilate, he is unable to do so. They therefore decide to send him to Shfia, a children's home where most of the children are orphaned Holocaust survivors like David. But, even there, he fails to fit in. After being involved in a violent fight with a child who claims that his parents are dead, David, refusing to believe the bitter truth, runs away.

David roams many different parts of the country, eventually arriving at the Jewish Agency office in Jerusalem, which maintains lists of the Jews who were murdered by the Nazis. The agency's clerks compassionately try to avoid David's

questions, as they are reluctant to tell him that his parents are among the murdered, but he realizes the truth anyway. “If you haven't found them, they are dead!” he screams, running outside and collapsing on the sidewalk. When he regains consciousness, it is apparent that he has suffered a mental breakdown and has regressed to infancy; he mumbles, sucks his thumb, and is unable to speak or walk. While hospitalized in a mental institution, David hallucinates, seeing his parents in the form of a fellow survivor, Miriam, and a kibbutz member named Abraham, who visit him. The regression to infancy that David experiences is a defense mechanism, since, as an infant, he cannot properly experience grief (Levin 310–57).

Films of that era portrayed female Holocaust survivors as either unfit mothers, mentally ill, forced into prostitution, or using their sexuality to survive. In most of these films, the women undergo a purifying change, a transformation that enables them to become a part of Jewish society in the Land of Israel, thanks to the love and sensitivity of the native Israeli community. By the ends of these films, female Holocaust survivors are portrayed as modest and asexual; in some cases, they become mothers (Gertz, *Different* 28–30). In the beginning of *My Father's House*, Miriam, the survivor who accompanies David to Palestine, is detached. She never smiles and keeps to the margins of kibbutz society. In one scene, she confesses to Abraham that she was one of many Jewish women who had been forced into prostitution. Although historical accounts point to the prevalence of war-time rape, the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 forbade sexual contact between Nazis and Jewish women. Historians have been unable to establish the extent of the sexual abuse of Jewish women by Nazis, Nazi collaborators, and even other Jews (see Heineman; Levenkron). Nevertheless, sexual abuse and the prostitution of Jewish women as a means of survival were represented in Israeli culture and cinema as historical fact and as an extensive phenomenon (Zertal 233–34; see also Steir-Livny, “Threefold”).

Even as the film depicts kibbutz members trying to help the survivors adjust to their new lives, Miriam decisively announces that every survivor should be treated like “a sick person,” thus perpetuating the generalization that all Holocaust survivors were mentally ill. These negative images were aimed at glorifying the veteran “new Jews,” who were portrayed as the complete opposite of the survivors. The film features low angles that elevated the Jews of the Yishuv as they tame the land, build new settlements, and nurture the younger generation. Many of the male “new Jew” characters in the films of that era were handsome young men, shown intensely working the soil. In *My Father's House*, this figure is best represented by Abraham, the handsome young kibbutz member who helps David and Miriam adjust to their new surroundings. He accompanies David during his nervous breakdown and also has a relationship with Miriam, thus expiating her past and “purifying” her for future motherhood (Gertz, *Different* 19).

Historical research, especially that of the past three decades, has described a complex relationship between Holocaust survivors and the Jews of pre-state Israel. The collisions, of course, do not appear in *My Father's House*, since they had no place in a film which glorified Zionism and represented the Land of Israel as the only place for Holocaust survivors. The Jews of the Yishuv are represented one-dimensionally as generous, sensitive, and ready to help the survivors. According to the films' narratives, survivors are transformed into useful citizens only because of the aid given to them by the native Jews, without which they would have remained on the fringes of society.

At the end of the film, the kibbutz members establish a new settlement and agree to accept David, in spite of his mental state. When David arrives at the new settlement, he is miraculously “cured”: he is able to walk again, regains his strength, talks and communicates like other children his age. As he embraces Abraham, the veteran kibbutz member explains that, in the new settlement, they have found an ancient stone with the name Halevi on it. “It is my family name!” David proclaims excitedly. Abraham and Miriam explain to David that Eretz Israel

is the land of all of his fathers. In the closing scene, as he gazes at the horizon, David acknowledges that it is “the land of my father Israel.” The name of his new adoptive kibbutz father, Abraham, echoes the name of the biblical Abraham, father of the nation. The name of his murdered father is also the name of the forming state. Therefore, although David has lost his personal family, he has symbolically gained a collective family and a collective father, a realization which heals him. This conclusion represents a happy ending to the story of the Holocaust survivor: through the narrative format of collapse, regression, and rebirth, Levin erases David’s past and gives him a fresh start as a new and pure Zionist. It provides closure that carries a clear political Zionist message – that Jews need their own state in Eretz Israel in order to rehabilitate the shattered Holocaust survivors currently in displaced persons camps in Europe with nowhere else to go. This representation, however, ignores the initiative and strength of the survivors themselves, in order to reinforce the political message that only Zionism – the land and its people – can save and heal survivors. The subtitles that appear at the beginning of the film declare, “What you are about to see is reality. [...] [The Yishuv’s Jews] asked that the film represent their life as it is. And we’ve promised that we will present this truth.” These statements transform the film from a fictional narrative into historical documentation of Holocaust survivors and their rehabilitation in the Yishuv.

Cracks in this utopian narrative began to appear in Israeli cinema in the 1960s. The 1961 Adolf Eichmann trial changed the perception of the Holocaust in Israel and exposed Israelis to numerous testimonies which highlighted the complexity of the Jewish predicament during the Holocaust (Yablonka, *State* 175–214). The films produced in the 1960s and 1970s, however, imply that the change was neither immediate nor particularly drastic. In the few films produced during those decades that dealt with Holocaust survivors, the negative stereotypes persisted, though some changes were made in the cinematic representation of the absorption process. Instead of the transformative process evoked during films of

the 1940s and 1950s, survivors in films from the 1960s and 1970s did not undergo dramatic change and were not always assimilated into society (Steir-Livny, *Two Faces* 69–95). For example, Natan Gross's *The Cellar* (1963) – tellingly, the only fiction film directed by a Holocaust survivor – follows a survivor who fails to integrate and instead lives on the margins of society, compulsively reliving his memories (Gross 98–99).

The Cinematic Representation of the Encounter from the Late 1970s

From the late 1960s through to the late 1970s, the Labour Party, which had governed the Jewish Yishuv since the 1930s and governed Israel since its establishment, underwent a period of crisis. Many factors, among them the Yom Kippur War of 1973 and subsequent corruptions discovered in the Labour party, expedited the fall of the moderate Left. The rise to power of the right-wing Likud party in 1977 marked the first time that the Left was ejected from political power hubs in Israel. Gertz maintains that, as right-wing attitudes spread throughout the Israeli public, the Left lost its influence on the political establishment but increased its dominance in other fields, such as intellectual life, art, literature, and the academy (*Motion* 175–288). The 1982 and 2006 wars in Lebanon, the first and second intifadas² of 1987 and 2000, and the various military operations since then further entrenched this tendency to critique. Culture became the mouthpiece of a disappointed left wing and of radical left-wing circles, who used it to voice their disillusionment over Israel's state of affairs.

These many changes in Israeli society also resulted in the emergence of post-Zionist research that examined the first decades of Israel in a harsh and critical light. These researchers oppose, among other issues, the utopian Zionist narrative regarding the absorption of Holocaust survivors and offer a conflicting, dystopian account in which the native society is represented as cruel, violent, and

² Intifada, an Arabic word that means “to shake off,” describes a violent civil uprising against the Israeli government in the occupied territories (the territories occupied by Israel during the Six-Day War of 1967), specifically territories in which many Palestinians live (the West Bank and Gaza). The term “occupied territories” is mainly used by those on the Left, while most on the Right view these territories as an integral part of Israel.

indifferent towards the survivors and their difficulties (Zertal 237; Grodzinsky 167–224). This group of researchers also opposes the Zionist narrative regarding the 1948 war.

On the eve of the 1948 war, approximately 600,000 Jews and 750,000–900,000 Arabs were living in Israeli territory. During the war, 600,000–700,000 Arabs went into exile, some having fled while others were evicted by the army. The war ended with a series of separate ceasefire agreements between Israel and each of its Arab neighbours. After the war, the Arabs' situation in Eretz Israel was far worse than at the time of the United Nations' November 1947 partition plan: what remained was a small and separate Arab public, lacking all social institutions and political power. Jewish Israelis refer to the 1948 war as the war of independence, while Arabs refer to it as the Nakbah – that is, “disaster” or “catastrophe” (Kimmerling and Migdal 115–42; Morris 382–96). The Zionist narrative asserts that the war was initiated by the Arabs' refusal to accept the UN partition plan, and it testifies to violent and brutal acts committed by Arabs towards Jews during the war. It also notes that Arabs were in the minority after the war not only due to being expelled but also because many had fled, promised by their own leaders that they would soon return safely “after the Jews were destroyed” (Gelber 466–80). Post-Zionist researchers from the 1980s onwards, however, oppose this narrative of the 1948 war. Their varied critiques take aim at the Zionist forces, claiming that many or most Arabs were expelled (Morris 382–96; see also Kimmerling). Others assert that the Jews acted brutally during the war or committed an ethnic cleansing of the Arabs (Pappé 48–68, 106–25)

Israeli cinema from the late 1970s, which became the mouthpiece of the Left and extreme Left, mostly presents these post-Zionist attitudes. Films produced from the late 1970s onwards that represent the Jewish–Israeli–Palestinian conflict can be divided into two groups: (1) films that find similarities between the two national traumas (the Holocaust and the Nakbah) and treat both Arabs and Jews as victims; and (2) films that voice the post-Zionist charge that Arabs became the

victims of the Zionist regime, with some even labelling Zionism's representatives as the "new Nazis," while the Arabs are represented as victims of a trampling ideology (see Meiri; Shohat 234–66; Gertz and Munk 112–68).

***My Father's House* (Dani Rosenberg, 2008)**

In the Zionist narrative of the 1940s and 1950s, the image of the Holocaust survivor was used to glorify the achievements of Zionism. Israeli fiction films from the late 1970s onwards also represented Holocaust survivors, but the purpose was inverted: survivors were used to criticize the erosion of the Zionist ethos. Unlike films from the 1940s and 1950s, these newer films depicted Israeli society as difficult and violent, unscrupulously using Holocaust victims and relegating them to the margins of society. Dani Rosenberg's *Beit Avi* (2008) – which directly translates to *My Father's House* but was distributed abroad under the title *Homeland* – reflects this trend. The film, which began as a short graduation project for the Sam Spiegel Film and Television School, tells the story of Lolek, a Holocaust survivor who, upon arriving in Israel during the 1948 war, is sent directly to a desert military outpost where he meets another survivor, Minz, who is in charge of the stand. The pair develops a destructive relationship, which leads to a tragic ending.

This film, which has the same Hebrew title as Kline's 1947 film, is not a remake. Rather, it employs the same title and theme of the earlier film – that is, the encounter of Holocaust survivors with the Jewish society in the Land of Israel in the late 1940s – to tell a markedly different story. The title thus rings with irony, a cynical homage to Kline's work and the utopian representations that abounded in Israeli cinema of that period. The Israel portrayed in Rosenberg's *My Father's House* is not a new home for Holocaust survivors but, rather, an extension of a horrible past, which turns Israel into a dystopian space filled with subtextual insinuations equating Zionism with Nazism.

The inspiration for Rosenberg's project, which he eventually developed into a forty-minute film, was a photo from 1948 of his grandfather, a Holocaust

survivor, who was drafted immediately upon arriving in Eretz Israel. Rosenberg, a third-generation Holocaust survivor, says: “You see three soldiers standing next to a hill near a deserted Arab house, wearing sloppy uniforms, gazing at the camera with frightened expressions. [...] I remember my grandfather’s look: this contradiction between the ethos of war and his frightened expression” (qtd. in Feldman).

Kline’s *My Father’s House* both features and glorifies the Jews in Eretz Israel: they are represented as a people who build the land and absorb the survivors in a sensitive and successful way. Rosenberg’s *Homeland*, on the other hand, depicts these years differently, first and foremost through the absence of Jewish Israelis, both from the film and from Lolek’s life. The film opens with Lolek sitting in the dark, riding in a truck that is headed to an unknown place. When the truck stops suddenly, he is helped down by an IDF soldier whom we hear but cannot see. The soldier makes Lolek swear an army oath and then, with no explanation, leaves him alone in the middle of the desert, a stark departure from the sort of military heroism that was an integral part of earlier films depicting the 1948 war (Gertz and Munk 23–32; Shohat 68–122). In Rosenberg’s film, heroism is replaced with bizarre ceremony: the anonymous IDF soldier reads an army oath written on a wrinkled piece of paper to a newcomer who barely understands Hebrew. Lolek misunderstands the Hebrew word “nishba” [“I swear”] and says, in Yiddish mixed with Hebrew, “Nisht ba” [“doesn’t arrive”]. This linguistic error forms the core of the film, as, of course, Lolek never arrives at his titular father’s house.

Film scholars suggest that, from the late 1970s onward, Holocaust survivors have been treated with respect and empathy in Israeli films. Avisar claims that the protagonists in these films are usually “sensitive” characters – “symbol[s] of sensitivity and wisdom” – through which directors reflect their disappointment in Israeli society. Avisar reconciles the problematic representation of the mentally ill survivor with the reminder that we “must remember that madness is also an expression of a prophetic wisdom, [...] which in some circumstances can be a

positive substitute to a society” (“National” 173–74). Gertz claims that these films changed the way the survivors were represented and judged: “What was considered egoism is now represented as individualism; what was considered in the past as a detached Jewish passivity is now a spiritual wealth; what was represented as cowardice is now represented as sensitivity” (*Different* 42). Zimmerman, too, asserts that these films represent Holocaust survivors in a much more complex way than do the earlier films, “addressing their pain and illness and their strength and adaptive powers, [...] which enabled them to rebuild their lives anew” (331).

I would argue, to the contrary, that most Israeli fiction films from those decades continue to repeat, and even deepen, negative images of Holocaust survivors. Since the late 1970s, the cinematic image of native Israeli society has indeed changed – from loving and embracing to cold, cruel, and indifferent – a culture ignoring the pain of Holocaust survivors. But this cinematic shift did not improve the negative image of the survivors themselves; rather, it worsened it. Films produced up until the 1980s attempted to glorify Zionism, and the Zionist happy ending transformed Holocaust survivors into “pure and moral” citizens. The critique of Zionism that permeates contemporary films, meanwhile, acts to disrupt the transformation process. As a result, survivors are portrayed, from beginning to end, as belonging to the bizarre fringes of society. There is neither Zionist redemption nor happy ending. In highlighting the supposed suffering of the survivors, the directors of these films aim to critique Israeli society but paradoxically deepen the problematic cinematic representation of Holocaust survivors.

Rosenberg’s *My Father’s House* is set in the middle of a desert where nothing can be seen but a deserted Arab village, whose former inhabitants have either been killed, expelled, or have fled. This dystopian space does not encourage a successful integration process, and Minz and Lolek remain estranged throughout the film. Rather than undergoing some process of absorption, their wretched state at the

beginning of the film only changes for the worse, until it reaches its tragic conclusion.

The Hebrew spoken by the IDF soldier for a few moments in the opening scene is replaced by Yiddish for the duration of the film, and Rosenberg explains that his choice of Yiddish was intentional: it was his way of fighting back against attempts by the state's collective memory agents to erase diasporic mentality and culture (that is, Yiddish language and culture) and replace it with Hebrew: Yiddish "is an alternative to Hebrew and to representations of the 1948 war in the Israeli films of the state's first decades. [...] It is a culture that was erased, and it is a great loss. [...] Even though there was a great demand for Yiddish in the first decades, Yiddish was forbidden, for example, in theatre. In the film, I try to protest against the demolition of this culture" (qtd. in Arad). This decision demanded quite an effort from Rosenberg and the film's two main actors, Itay Tiran and Mickey Leon. Rosenberg wrote the script in Hebrew, learned Yiddish, and then translated the script with the help of his teachers. Tiran and Leon, meanwhile, knew only basic Yiddish and learned the language with a private tutor (Feldman). Rosenberg stated after completing the film that "now both of them speak it fluently and even read poetry in Yiddish" (qtd. in Arad).

The absence of native Israelis in Rosenberg's film transforms the sadistic Minz into Lolek's mentor. The noble values taught to Holocaust survivors by the Jews of the Yishuv in the earlier films are here replaced by Minz's twisted interpretation of Zionist values. At the beginning of the film, Minz appears to be the epitome of a successfully integrated Holocaust survivor as portrayed in the early films: he is dominant, tanned, manly, and strong; and he repeats slogans from the cultural atmosphere of the 1940s and 1950s, telling Lolek, "A couple of days in the sun and no one will know that you came from *there*" and, later, "you should work and exercise." But it turns out that Minz's integration into Jewish-Israeli society was more fraught than initial appearances suggested. He is quickly revealed to be a sadist who abuses Lolek both physically and mentally. When he

hears that Lolek is searching for his girlfriend, Nina, who had left Poland before the war and moved to the Israeli city of Haifa, Minz cruelly lies: he tells Lolek that Haifa was destroyed in the war and that all of its residents were killed.

As opposed to the portrayal of a nurturing Israel in the early films, here Israel is a dystopia that does not revive but, instead, destroys. Kline's 1947 film presents a warm relationship between Jews and Arabs, while Rosenberg's film in 2008 presents a harsh critique of Zionism that portrays the victims of the Nazis as perpetrators in their own right. Minz's abuse of Lolek and his worship of power has Nazi undertones, and the director's attempts to draw a parallel between Zionism and Nazism can also be found in the portrayal of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. In one scene, Minz exploits Lolek by sending him to bring water from the Arab village down the hill. While early Israeli cinema focused on the Zionist pioneers who worked the land and succeeded in pumping water from the soil, thus bringing fertility to the land for both Jews and Arabs, Rosenberg erases this image: Lolek enters a deserted Arab house and drinks from the water the Arabs have left behind, thus symbolically taking life from them. Instead of creating life and roaming the land, Lolek takes over a house that does not belong to him, and this invasion is a symbol of Rosenberg's perspective of the 1948 war. Moments later, while in the house, Lolek discovers the body of a young Arab. He lies down on the ground opposite the dead boy, unconsciously mimicking the position of the dead body. The similarity in posture highlights the resemblance between them: one is physically dead; the other is mentally shattered, dead on the inside. For Rosenberg, both are victims of Zionism.

As Minz sends Lolek to the Arab village, he warns him about the village's ghosts. But the ghosts of the past overwhelm both Minz and Lolek in the film. They appear in Minz's nightmares, as he calls out in his sleep every night to his mother, who was murdered in the Holocaust. Lolek's ghosts, on the other hand, appear at the end of the film in the form of his dead parents, as he wanders in the desert on the verge of death. The clear consonance between the ghosts of the Arab

village and the ghosts of the Holocaust creates yet another parallel between the Holocaust and the Nakbah, between Arabs and Holocaust survivors. Both groups are represented in the film as shattered peoples, victims of the Zionist project. The early films ended by representing Holocaust survivors as the personification of a successful integration process. In Rosenberg's film, however, Minz and Lolek come to symbolize the failure of precisely this process of integration. When Lolek returns to the army outpost, he and Minz sit alone in the middle of the desert in surreal anticipation, as if lifted from a Beckett play, waiting for an enemy that never shows up. This anticipation turns the 1948 war, glorified in the early films (see Cohen; Feldstein), into an incomprehensible war that has caused numerous casualties for no apparent reason. At one point, Lolek asks, "What do Arabs look like?," strengthening the film's representation of the war as absurd.

The assimilation of survivors in the early films was always linked to the erasure of their past: they were required to leave their memories behind in order to integrate into Israeli life. In films produced since the late 1970s, however, there is no happy ending of total integration, as the dystopian space does not encourage a successful assimilation process. This theme figures in Rosenberg's film, too. As Minz's sadistic characteristics intensify throughout the film, Lolek tries to find shelter from the stifling desert heat and comes upon an Israeli flag, which he uses to cover his face. The bright and sunny space, which favourably represented the idyllic Eretz Israel in the early films, is here turned into a destructive power against Lolek, who seeks protection. The use of the Israeli flag as a means of shelter, without addressing its national meanings, is thus another subversion of the Zionist ethos. And the flag goes on to instantiate murder: when Minz orders Lolek to stop using the flag to cover his face, Lolek, whose mental state has deteriorated and who has learned violence from his "mentor," shoots Minz in order to end their sadistic relationship and then runs into the desert.

Kline's *My Father's House* ended with the healing of David and his assimilation into a new agricultural settlement, while acknowledging the

collective therapeutic aspects of the Zionist enterprise. Six decades later, Rosenberg's *Homeland* destroys this happy ending and turns assimilation into a nightmare. Instead of being reborn into the Zionist collective, Lolek wanders in the desert, mentally broken, drenched with sweat, and suffering from sunstroke. On the verge of death, he collapses and hallucinates coming upon and entering an apartment, which appears to be his family home in Poland before his parents were murdered by the Nazis. In his hallucination, his mother kisses him and expresses concern that Lolek wants to bid farewell to Nina before she immigrates to Haifa. Lolek sits down and eats his last meal as his mother stares at him tenderly, uttering his name for the first time in the film, as though she has finally given him his identity. Lolek finishes eating and leaves to visit Nina; he hugs and kisses his mother, as if for the last time, and closes the door. He experiences, in this hallucination, what life snatched from him: the ability to bid farewell to his parents.

The depiction of the encounter among Holocaust survivors, the Land of Israel, and its inhabitants has changed fundamentally over the years. The earlier utopian vision of broken survivors being welcomed, healed, and saved by the Jews of Eretz Israel was replaced by a representation of a cruel society indifferent to the distress of Holocaust survivors, a depiction of a country in which survivors were marginalized and even exploited. The problematic image of the Holocaust survivor in Israeli cinema has thus changed for the worse. Instead of addressing the complexity of Holocaust trauma and the varied facets of Holocaust survivors' identities, cinematic representations of survivors in recent decades have deepened the problematic characterization further. Contemporary representations portray survivors in a perpetual state of collapse under the burden of the past, foreclosing on the integration process and depicting survivors as traumatized people at the margins of society, from beginning to end. Whether used in order to glorify Zionism and integration or to criticize Zionism and the assimilation process, Holocaust survivors have remained a political tool in the hands of Israeli directors.

Both in the 1940s and in the 2000s, this political exploitation ultimately damages the image of Holocaust survivors. Israeli film ignores the successful integration of most Holocaust survivors in Israel and erase the tremendous effect they have had on Israeli society, which is acknowledged in the historical record (see Yablonka, Guterman, and Shalev). Instead, these representations of traumatized people cast a dark shadow on the collective memory of one of the most important and successful groups in Israeli society, people who have left a profound mark on Israeli economics, politics, medicine, education, and culture – despite their emotional scars.



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