

ELA BAUER

ORCID: 0000-0002-9755-4389

Media & Film Department, Kibbutzim College in Tel Aviv

Israelis Look at Poles via the Lens of the Cine-Camera

The ways in which the Holocaust is represented in Israeli cinema is discussed in a rich corpus of research. Nurith Gertz, Yael Munk, Ilan Avisar, Yosefa Lo-shitzky, Moshe Zimmerman, and Liat Steir-Livny point to the relatively wide spectrum of themes, processes, and points of view in which the Holocaust is presented in Israeli cinema.¹ According to these studies, from 1946 until early 1960s, the Holocaust was presented in Israeli films almost exclusively via the lens of Zionism and the formation of the State of Israel. The personal trauma was presented only through the prism of Jewish national trauma.² Europe was presented in dark settings, while the Israeli landscapes were bright.³ The arrival of the survivors – first to Palestine and after May 1948 to the State of Israel – was presented as a salvation, and the State of Israel was presented as the only place where the survivors could recover. However, this successful “healing” could happen only if the survivors left behind their pasts and became Israelis.⁴ This perspective can be found, for example, in *Dima’t Ha-Nehamah (The Great Prom-*

¹ Among these works, see: I. AVISAR: *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema’s Images of the Unimaginable*. Indiana 1988; N. GERTZ: *Makhela Akhere: Nitzolei Sho’ah, Zarim Va’akherim Basiporet Hayisra’elit*. Tel Aviv 2004; EADEM, O. LUBLIN, J. NE’EMAN (eds.): *Mabatim Fiktivi’im al Kolno’a Yisra’eli*. Tel Aviv 1998, pp. 135–178; Y. MUNK: *Golim Be-gevolam: Ha-kolnoa Ha-yisraeli Be-mifne haelef*. Ra’anana 2012; Y. LOSHITZKY: *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen*. Austin 2001; M. ZIMMERMAN: *Al Tig’u li Basho’ah*. Haifa 2002; L. STEIR-LIVNY: *Shti Panim Ba-marrah Izog Nitzolei Ha-sho’ah Be-kolno’a Ha-Yisra’eli*. Jerusalem 2009.

² N. GERTZ, R. YOSEF: *Ikvot Yamim Shod Yavho, Trauma ve Etika Ba-Kolno’a Yisra’eli Ha-acsvi*. Tel Aviv 2017, pp. 33–51.

³ I. AVISAR: “The Holocaust in Israeli Cinema as a Conflict between Survival and Morality.” In: M. TALMON, Y. PELEG (eds.): *Israeli Cinema. Identities in Motion*. Austin 2011. p. 157.

⁴ N. GERTZ, R. YOSEF: *Ikvot Yamim...*, p. 37.

ise), directed by Józef Lejtes (1901–1983) in 1947, and in *Hamartef (The Cellar)*, directed by Nathan Gross in 1963.⁵ On the other hand, films that were made from the late 1980s and onwards reflect the changes that occurred in Israeli society with the social and cultural privatisation processes and the perception of multiculturalism that began to affect Israeli identities, both personal and collective.⁶ In addition, Israeli films from the 1980s and later tend to link Jewish trauma of the Holocaust with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, comparing it to other national traumas, most notably to the Palestinian national trauma.⁷

Over the years, the representation of Holocaust survivors in Israeli films has also changed.⁸ The early films presented the entrance of the survivors into Israeli society as a successful process. The survivors were shown as grateful to the young State that helped them recover, while films made in the late 1980s and onwards did not hesitate to present critical views of the attitude of Israeli society towards the survivors.⁹ These changes were not only a result of inner Israeli developments; rather, they were part of a much broader change. Around 1980s, members of the second generation in the US, several European countries, and Israel began to talk about their pains, sorrows, and personal traumas. In Israel, the role of members of the second generation in determining how Israeli society commemorated the Holocaust began to become more meaningful.¹⁰ This impact of the second generation can also be noticed in the Israeli cinematic arena. In 1988, Orna Ben Dor's documentary film *B'Glal Ha'milhamah Hahi (Because of That War)* was released.¹¹ In addition to presenting the personal experiences of two Israeli rock musicians, Yaakov Gilad and Yehuda Poliker, who grew up with their parents' memories of the Holocaust, the film presents how Gilad and Poliker were able to articulate this experience into their musical creations. In the following years, other Israeli films presented the predicament of survivors and their children in the personal terms of family relationships and gender identity.¹²

⁵ On the filmography of Józef Lejtes, see: <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0500837> (accessed 25.03.2018). On the filmography of Nathan Gross, see: <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0343464> (accessed 25.03.2018).

⁶ Y. LOSHITZKY: *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen...* On the privatisation process of the Israeli collective memory (including the memory of the Holocaust), see: D. GUTWEIN: "The Privatization of the Holocaust. Memory, Historiography, and Politics." *Israel Studies* 2009, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 36–64.

⁷ N. GERTZ, R. YOSEF: *Ikvot Yamim...*, p. 37.

⁸ On the attitude of Israeli society to the survivors, see: H. YABLONKA: *Survivors of the Holocaust: Israel after the War*. London 1999.

⁹ On the representation of Holocaust survivors in Israeli films, see: L. STEIR-LIVNY: *Shti Panim Ba-mareh*. Jerusalem 2009.

¹⁰ On the Second Generation, see: I. MILNER: *Kirei Avar-Biografia, Zehut Vezikaron Besiporet Hador Hasheni*. Tel Aviv 2003; Y. LOSHITZKY: *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen...*, pp. 15–71.

¹¹ On that film, see: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0123474/> (accessed 8.04.2018). See also the review of the film: V. CANBY: "2 Movies Examine Israel." *The New York Times*, 8.03.1991, p. 8.

¹² I. AVISAR: *The Holocaust in Israeli Cinema...*, p. 158.

Additional studies examine the ways in which Nazi Germany, West Germany, and, since the end of the twentieth century, the united Germany are presented in Israeli films. These studies argue that in early films – such as *Givat 24 Lo Ona* (*Hill 24 Does Not Respond*), which Thorold Dickinson directed in 1955, and even the very successful children's film *8 B'ikvot Echad* (*Eight in the Footsteps of One*), directed by Menahem Golan in 1964 – the Nazis were the evil ones.¹³ In these and other Israeli films, former Nazi officers who were able to escape from Europe after the Second World War were presented as collaborators with the Arabs against the State of Israel. This presentation can also be found in non-Israeli films that were filmed in Israel, such as *Exodus*, directed by Otto Preminger in 1960, and *Judith*, directed by Daniel Mann in 1966.¹⁴ In the formation years of the State of Israel, and even around the time when Israel and Germany signed the Reparation Agreement and established a diplomatic relationship, many Israelis were determined not to buy German products or even to visit Germany. Over the years, an ambivalent, or even schizophrenic, attitude towards Germany developed. When Konrad Adenauer (1876–1967), the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, visited Israel in May 1966, the trip was accompanied by violent demonstrations. However, when the first German ambassador began his term in Israel, he found that many Israelis were interested in having cultural connections with Germany.¹⁵ It seems that the close political cooperation between the two states fostered an appreciation of the quality of various Germany products. At the same time, however, a sense of disgust and wariness towards anything German did not entirely disappear. Thus, the Israeli enthusiasm for German efficiency and order was accompanied by suspicion and fear.¹⁶ As several scholars have pointed out, the mix of admiration for German culture together with suspicion and fear can be noticed in several Israeli films: *Lalekhet al Hamayim* (*Walking on Water*), directed by Eytan Fox in 2004, *Metallic Blues*, directed by Dan Verete in 2005, and *Hakhov* (*The Debt*), directed by Assaf Bernstein in 2007.¹⁷ In these films, one can find echoes of the closeness between Israel and Germany that suggest the approach that perhaps the two nations could together find a way to deal with the ghosts

¹³ For more information on *Givat 24 lo Ona*, see: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0048121/> (accessed 9.04.2018). On *8 Beikvot echad*, see: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0138098/> (accessed 9.04.2018)

¹⁴ On *Exodus*, see: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0053804/> (accessed 9.04.2018). On *Judith*, see: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0060568/> (accessed 9.04.2018).

¹⁵ T. SEGEV: *Ha-milyon Haseviei: Haisraelim vehashoa*. Jerusalem 1992, pp. 355–359.

¹⁶ M. ZIMMERMAN: *Avar Germany Zikaron Israeli*. Tel Aviv 2002, p. 261; G. YAIR: *Aahva Ze Lo Praktish: Hamabat Yisra'eli al Germania*. Ra'anana 2015. p. 26.

¹⁷ On *Lalekhet al Hamayim*, see: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0352994/> (accessed 22.04.2018). On *Metallic Blues*, see: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0402374/> (accessed 22.04.2018). On *Hakhov*, see: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1226753/> (accessed 22.04.2018).

that are haunting them both.¹⁸ Other films – such as *Hadira (The Flat)*, directed by Arnon Goldfinger in 2011, *Café Nagler*, the 2016 film by Mor Kaplansky and Yariv Barel, and even the earlier film, *Tel Aviv-Berlin*, directed by Tzipi Tropè in 1987 – present the affection that Israelis who were born and raised in Germany retain for German culture, literature, and language.¹⁹ In addition to showing the characters' longings for the German past, the films contrast Germany's alleged higher cultural refinement with the sweaty reality and social vulgarity of contemporary Levantine Israel.²⁰

Even in this short overview, it is difficult not to notice that the wide range of studies that aim at understanding the different ways in which the Holocaust is presented in Israeli cinema does not include references to the various ways in which Polish-Jewish relations are portrayed in Israeli films. It is true, however, that these relationships are addressed in several Israeli films, and a relatively large number of studies are devoted to this issue.²¹ The Poles' and Jews' living together in close proximity over hundreds of years created various challenges for the two ethnic groups before and during the Second World War. As David Engel notes, the history of Polish-Jewish relations can be identified as a relationship between groups that have been in conflict with each other at different points in their history.²² In most of the scholarly references to Polish-Jewish relations, however, the Israeli angle is missing. Needless to say, this angle can contribute a great deal to the discourse.

In the following pages I would like to open scholarly discussion on the ways in which Jewish-Polish relations are presented in the latest Israeli cinema. I will do so by presenting and discussing several aspects of Polish-Jewish relations that can be seen in several documentary and fictional Israeli films: *Aba'le Bo La-lonapark (Daddy Come to the Amusement Park)*, directed by Nitza Gonen

¹⁸ A. PREMINGER: "Lalekhet Al Hamayim o Le'hakdim et Elohim: Beni Ha-dor Hashni ve Hashlishi Mechapsim Karka Mozaka Le'raglihim." *Slill* 2012, no. 6, p. 61.

¹⁹ On *Hadira*, see: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2071620/> (accessed 22.04.2018). On *Café Nagler*, see: [http://www.gesherfilmfund.org.il/\(S\(esoza2igvdez42ocv4rkaql\)\)/Movie.aspx?MovieID=344](http://www.gesherfilmfund.org.il/(S(esoza2igvdez42ocv4rkaql))/Movie.aspx?MovieID=344) (accessed 22.04.2018). On *Tel Aviv-Berlin*, see: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0145517/> (accessed 22.04.2018).

²⁰ I. AVISAR: *The Holocaust in Israeli Cinema...*, p. 159.

²¹ On Polish-Jewish relations until the twentieth century, see: S. URY, T.R. WEEKS: "O Brother Where Art Thou? The Search for Interethnic Solidarity in the Late Imperial Era." *Gal-Ed* 2012, no. 23, pp. 97–130; J. MICHŁIC: *Poland's Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present*. Nebraska 2006. On Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War, see among others: E. RINGELBLUM: *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej*. Warsaw 1988 (in Hebrew: IDEM: *Ketavim Akaronim Yakasi Polanim Yehudim 1943–1944*. Jerusalem 1994); I. GUTMAN: "Yehudim Polanim Antisemiyout." In: I. BARTAL, I. GUTMAN: *Kiyoum Veshever*, II. Jerusalem 2001, pp. 605–641; H. DREIFUSS: *Anu Yehudeyi Polin? Hayakasim Byin Yehudim Vepolanim Min Haibut Hatehudi*. Jerusalem 2004 (the English version: EADEM: *Changing Perspectives on Polish-Jewish Relations during the Holocaust*. Jerusalem 2012).

²² D. ENGEL: "Editor's Note." *Gal-Ed* 2012, no. 23, p. 97.

in 1995; *Spring 1941*, directed by Uri Barbash in 2007; *Pizza b'Auschwitz* (*Pizza in Auschwitz*), directed by Mosh Zimmerman in 2008; *Ema shel Valentina* (*Valentina's Mother*), directed by Arik Lubzki and Matti Hararri in 2009; and *Hakatayim* (*Past Life*) by Avi Neshet in 2016. It is true that several of the studies that examine the ways in which the Holocaust is presented in Israeli cinema do refer to some of these films; however, they do so without paying attention to the articulation of Polish-Jewish relations in the films.²³

Aba'le Bo La-lonapark (*Daddy Come to the Amusement Park*), 1995

Shmuel (Shmulik) Vilozni is a well-known Israeli entertainer; he was one of the first to begin performing stand-up comedy in Israel in the 1980s. In early 1990s, the Vilozni family, consisting of Mordecai (1931–2008), who arrived in Palestine in 1943 at the age of twelve, and his two children, Shmulik and Yael, took a family heritage trip to Poland. The director Nitza Gonen and her crew documented their visit. The family visited Pshaytsh, the town where Mordecai grew up, as well as Treblinka, Kraków, Auschwitz, and Warsaw.²⁴ In addition to following the Vilozni family in Poland, the film presents segments of Shmulik's stand-up comedy routine that correspond with several themes of the film. He refers, for example, to his experience of growing up with a parent who is a Holocaust survivor by means of a joke on the Israeli attitude towards the quality of German consumer goods. He even shares with his audience the audition he did for the movie *Schindler's List*. During the trip, Mordecai, the father, has the opportunity to return to the landscape of his childhood. He can show his children the spaces in which he played as a child, along with the town square where he saw his father for the last time. For the first time Mordecai can go to Auschwitz, where his father (Shmuel) lost his life. Seen predominantly from the perspective of Shmulik, the family has the opportunity to see Pshaytsh, where the family's trouble began. During their visit to Poland, Mordecai and his two children experience a change in relations between one another. They begin growing closer, hugging and supporting each other in difficult moments. For the first time in many years, they cry and laugh together. Mordecai, Yael, and Shmulik are aware of this new intimacy they have shared during the voyage. They even admit that

²³ In her book, *Makhela Akhere*, Nurith Gertz refers to *Aba'le Bo La-lonapark* when she examines the ways in which young Israelis look in contempt at anything that is part of the Diaspora, including their parents. N. GERTZ: *Makhela Akhere...*, pp. 15–17. Liat Steir-Livny refers to *Pizza b'Auschwitz* when she discusses humour references to the Holocaust in Israeli culture. L. STEIR-LIVNY: *Har Ha-zikaron Yizkoe Bimkomi*. Tel Aviv 2014, pp. 44–46. In another article dedicated to *Pizza b'Auschwitz*, the writers discuss the connections between the Holocaust, trauma, and nostalgia. See: H. DAGAN, G. DSHON: "Nostalgia Shoa: Eyon Mechodash Betrauma ve Nostalgia Leor Hamikre Shel Pizza b'Auschwitz." *Tehoria Ve- Bikoret* 2011, no. 39, pp. 185–209.

²⁴ On the director and its filmography, see: <http://www.directorsguild.org.il/siteFiles/1/36/5291.asp> (accessed 26.04.2018).

they had to go to Poland in order to be able to laugh together. As has already been pointed out on several websites, thanks to the trip, Mordecai is able to free himself from the trauma of the Holocaust, while his son is able to free himself from the shadow of the trauma that is a part of his father's life.²⁵

During the Vilozni family's stay in Pshaytsh, Kraków, and Warsaw, they have several encounters with Poles; the only locations in which they do not encounter Poles are Auschwitz and Treblinka. Throughout the film Shmulik does not veil his contempt for the Polish language, the landscape, and the typical local behaviour, even in situations that take place in locations from which the father has happy memories of his childhood. In one scene, the father and son are playing with wooden "szabia" (swords) near the river in Pshaytsh; they are playing the same way that Mordecai used to play as a child. It seems that this game causes the father to use Polish words. "Did I take you all the way back here so that you will start telling me 'dziękuję'?" asks Shmulik. When, during the game, the father tells his son "Ja ce bedo," the son's disdain at the sound of these words is evident. In another scene, when the family eat at a Polish restaurant, presumably in Warsaw, the son criticises the different kinds of Polish foods and the "Polish" ways in which his father eats and enjoys his meal.

The son's contempt for the Polish language and behaviour is not aimed only at his father. During their visit to the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw, the father and son meet a Polish soldier.²⁶ Shmulik starts a casual small talk with the soldier. When he finds out that the soldier has to take off his glove every time he needs to shake someone's hand, Shmulik repeats the action again and again. He enjoys seeing the Polish soldier make such an effort. He also does not hide his disrespect towards the way in which the soldier marches, and forces him to demonstrate it. The conversation between the two is in English, and the soldier's English is not very good. Nevertheless, although his father is nearby, Shmulik does not ask for his help in translation; he has no desire to try and make the situation easy for the Pole. It seems that it is important to Shmulik Vilozni to ridicule the Polish soldier, not only because it reflects the enormity of the contempt he feels for any Polish habits, but also because of his father's remark that the soldier's boots and his marching remind him of the past, even though the soldiers that he thinks of were of course German and not Polish.

It becomes clear during their trip that Mordecai did not completely erase his connections to his Polish past, and it seems that his children disapprove of this. After all, Israeli society expected that the survivors would disconnect themselves from the past. When the family is making its way to Pshaytsh, Shmulik looks at

²⁵ See, among others, the description at: <http://www.habama.co.il/Pages/Event.aspx?Subj=4&Area=1&EventId=2681> (accessed 26.04.2018).

²⁶ The soldier is at the Jewish cemetery since he and perhaps others are preparing for a ceremony that will honour the Jewish soldiers who fought in the Polish army.

the view and points out that the houses are ugly and that the scene is a typical view of the diaspora. Since the time when Y.L. Perez described this view in his stories, nothing has changed, as Shmulik declares in a rather decisive tone.²⁷

The only place on the entire voyage in which Shmulik does not articulate his negative attitude towards the Polish language and people is the Auschwitz museum. At the site, Mordecai, the father, is the one who declares that the Germans were the bitter enemy. The son does not share his father's opinion regarding who the enemy was. Indeed, in the parts of the movie that are dedicated to Shmulik's stand-up routine in Israel, we can notice that Shmulik makes a number of funny references to Germans and their responsibility for the Jewish trauma. Nevertheless, during their trip to Poland, Shmulik does not mention the Germans at all.

When the family walks along the streets of Pshaytsh, they notice various Polish ultra-nationalist graffiti. They observe sketches of swastikas on some of the walls they pass. On other walls, the Stars of David appear with what looks like ropes tied into nooses. To the Israeli visitors, these graffiti illustrate that nothing has changed in Poland. When the family walks along at the central avenue of Pshaytsh, a semi-conversation develops between Shmulik and a local resident. Neither of them understands the other. The local resident addresses Shmulik in Polish. However, Shmulik replies in Hebrew. He continues to speak Hebrew even when the Polish person tells him "nie rozumiem," and he continues to repeat his words, "nie rozumiem; mówię po polsku." After declaring in Hebrew "I don't understand Polish" in a very aggressive tone, Shmulik slips in such words as Lech Wałęsa and Communism. Then he continues in Hebrew: "I don't know Polish and I don't want to know [Polish]. Where were you and what did you do during the war? When my father was pushed out, you did nothing! Well, you are drunk! No point talking with you!" When the family is in Kraków, Shmulik asks people on the street about anti-Semitism in Poland. He is very sceptical when some of them try to present a positive approach regarding the anti-Semitic situation in Poland. Nevertheless, his interactions with the people in Kraków are less intense than they were in Pshaytsh.

Hence, regarding the ways in which Polish-Jewish relations are articulated in this film, there are two aspects worth paying attention to. The first is the son's attitude to his father's affection towards the Polish language and culture. The son does not acknowledge his father's feelings for the language, culture, and places of his youth. In his attitude towards his father's past, Shmulik is no different from earlier members of the Zionist hegemony who demanded that all the people who have immigrated to Israel (the *olim*), including the Holocaust survivors, must

²⁷ The reference to Perez's work is not to a specific story. Vilozni uses the term "Perez's stories" to connect what he sees around him with writing that was done many years ago, which provided numerous descriptions of the Polish landscape.

give up their entire early cultural baggage, such as language, culture, traditions, and even names in order to become Israelis. Yet, at the same time, the father has never told his children whether as a child he had Polish friends or what the relations were like between his family and their Polish neighbours. Throughout the entire film, it is the son who confronts the Poles, while the father is the only one who mentions the German's responsibility for the "Final Solution" to the Jewish problem during the Second World War. Thus, could it be that Shmulik – like other members of his generation in Israel – is willing to forgive the Germans but not the Poles?

Pizza b'Auschwitz (Pizza in Auschwitz), 2008

Pizza b'Auschwitz follows the journey of the Hanoch family – the father, Danny, and his grown children, Miri and Shrage (Shagi).²⁸ In the film, as in other circumstances, Danny introduces himself as someone who has acquired his B.A. degree from Auschwitz.²⁹ Despite his young age, during the war Danny was in five different camps in Poland, Germany, and Austria. He also participated in the Death March. Like Shmulik Vilozni, Miri Hanoch is a well-known person in Israel, while her brother Shagi, a *baal teshuva* (newly ultra-Orthodox person), is quite anonymous.³⁰ The director, Mosh Zimmerman, who himself is a second generation Holocaust survivor, is known not only as a television and film director but also as a scholar who studies Israeli cinema, including the ways in which the attitude of Israeli society towards the Holocaust is articulated in assorted Israeli films.³¹

The original plans for this trip were to visit Lithuania (where Danny had grown up before the Second World War), Poland, Germany, and Austria. Mostly, they wanted to go to see the camps where Danny had been: Auschwitz, Mauthausen, and Gunskirchen.³² However, after the family's stay in "Danny's lager" in Birkenau, Miri, the daughter, demands to put an end to the family journey. Although the father views the trip as a failure, both of his children (led by Miri, who dominates the dynamics) explain that he should not be disappointed. Yes,

²⁸ Shmuel (Shmulik) Vilozni, like Miri and Shrage Hanoch, is named after his grandparent who was killed in the Holocaust. In the secular Israeli discourse, these names are considered as diaspora Jewish names. Nevertheless, all of these people, including the less-known Shrage, have a very typical Israeli prototype.

²⁹ In Hebrew, the abbreviation of B.A. can also stand for "Graduate of Auschwitz."

³⁰ Hence, like the Vilozni family, there is one child who is well known while the other child is more anonymous.

³¹ M. ZIMMERMAN: *Al Tig'u li Basho'ah*. Haifa 2002. For more information on him, see: [https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D7%9E%D7%A9%D7%94_%D7%A6%D7%99%D7%9E%D7%A8%D7%9E%D7%9F_\(%D7%A7%D7%95%D7%9C%D7%A0%D7%95%D7%A2%D7%9F\)](https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D7%9E%D7%A9%D7%94_%D7%A6%D7%99%D7%9E%D7%A8%D7%9E%D7%9F_(%D7%A7%D7%95%D7%9C%D7%A0%D7%95%D7%A2%D7%9F)) (accessed 26.04.2018).

³² On the history of Danny Hanoch's family during the Second World War, see: <http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/he/exhibitions/1944/chanoch.asp> (accessed 26.04.2018).

the war put his life on hold. Yes, his family members cannot understand his loss and they never will. But he should be happy that he is surrounded with people who love him, even though they do not understand him and he does not understand why they refuse to cooperate with him.

The film is constructed according to the days of the voyage. This may be because, during the family's stay at the *lager* in Birkenau, Danny explains that in Auschwitz-Birkenau time had no meaning. This trip is not the first time when Danny returns to the places where was during the war; *Pizza b'Auschwitz* is not the only film in which he engages with this topic.³³ However, it is the first time he returns to these sites with his children. Throughout the film, he repeats more than once that his return to these places with his children is very meaningful to him. In *Aba'le bo La-lonapark*, the son complains about his father's silences. In *Pizza b'Auschwitz*, the daughter complains that during her childhood, her father talked about the Holocaust too much. Danny shared almost everything that happened to him during the Second World War with his children, without the benefit of any "filters," as Miri – who is doing the voiceover of the film – describes. Because of this large outpouring of information, his children believe that they did not need to travel to these places in order to learn what happened to their father during the war. Also, Miri and Shrage did not need to travel together with their father to Lithuania, Poland, and Austria in order to re-create the intimacy lost over the years. On the contrary, even though the children do not hide the anger they feel towards their father, the family's closeness is articulated quite well. Their close relationship integrates a great deal of humour and sarcasm; the humour and sarcasm about the Holocaust are, in fact, part of the family's routine. These elements are notably strong in various parts of the film, including moments of crisis that the family experiences. After all, as Danny explains to the director and not to his children, on the ramp in Auschwitz-Birkenau – as in the other camps where he spent time during the war – he lost his ability to cry.

During the days the family spends in Lithuania, Danny, like many other survivors, is interested in introducing his children to the places in which he grew up before the war. It is important for him to share with his children the happy memories he has of eating raspberries near the river. It is important to him to take his children to visit the Hebrew gymnasium in Kaunas, along with the local synagogue. Finally, it is important to him to show his anger at those who interfered with his life at school and near the river. In Lithuania, there are several encounters with the local residents, such as the descendants of the people who helped his family during the war. Yet, Miri believes that the places

³³ In 2004, Danny participated the experimental film *Milchama Ba Me-Lekhem (Hungers)*, which was directed by Yvonne Miklosh. In 2012, he took part in *Sfurim (Numbered)*, directed by Dana Doron.

they visit in Lithuania were and remain imminently hostile against Jews.³⁴ However, since this article is devoted to understanding the presence of Polish-Jewish relations in Israeli cinema, when I address *Pizza b'Auschwitz*, I will relate only to the parts of the film that engage with the visit of the Hanoch family to Poland and, specifically, to the Auschwitz-Birkenau museum. Danny's original plan was to spend the entire night with his children at "his *lager*" in Birkenau. However, even before the family's arrival to Auschwitz-Birkenau, Danny is not sure that he will be able to implement his plan. From the phone call he makes to Mr Mansfield, the film's viewers can infer that there are some bureaucratic obstacles.³⁵ Danny believes that, as an ex-prisoner of the camp, he is entitled to spend the night there. He understands that because of the film he will need to pay for extra expenses, such as electricity, but he does not agree to pay for the permission to visit and film in "his *lager*." He asks Mansfield to "make the road smooth," but in the same phone call he says, "Forgive me, I am very tense." In an additional call that he makes to Yad Vashem, Danny says, "They don't have any right to impose difficulties on me." Hence, it seems that the conflict between the Israeli visitors and the Polish employees at the Auschwitz-Birkenau museum is inevitable.

It does not take long; shortly after the arrival of the family and the entire film crew at the site, what looks like a bureaucratic misunderstanding develops into a stormy, unpleasant argument between Danny and the female employee who is responsible for arranging the filming at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The woman is not willing to be filmed, insisting, "I am not an animal that you can shoot without asking my permission." Danny connects what seems to be a bureaucratic misunderstanding to the gigantic shadow of the war: "With the S.S. I knew how to act, with you I don't." He shows her the number tattooed on his arm and says, "You need to respect me. If a prisoner wants to visit the camp with his children, you need to help him." The woman then loses her temper and asks for the assistance of someone who is senior to her. When the deputy director arrives, he explains to Danny, "We don't like this kind of attitude towards our staff." However, Danny's response is, "You should accept everything I say. You should tell me that I am right! My opinion is stronger than yours. Don't try to teach me. I don't need your education."

Eventually, the family and the shooting crew receive the permission to film at the *lager*. Perhaps it is for this reason that when Danny and the crew are making their way across the camp, several guards accompany them. It seems that they are trying to film several scenes outside the *lager*. Danny confronts the guards in broken Polish, saying, "To jest moja [mój] doma [dom] dobrze, rozumions

³⁴ When Miri, the daughter, found out that her brother, who had a very obvious Jewish appearance, went to the hotel by himself, she asked her father: "How did you send a Jew by himself?" Her father replies that no one harmed him when he was a Jewish child.

³⁵ Probably Jarosław Mansfield, the spokesperson of the museum of Auschwitz.

[rozumiesz]?” The bureaucratic misunderstanding is not the only reason why Danny loses his temper. During the war, Danny arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau from Dachau when he was eleven years old. He was not sent to the crematoria like the rest of the children who came with him. Instead, he began to work on the ramp collecting the remains of those who were sent to their deaths. He did not know that his father, Shrage, was among them. Hence, it is important to him to say Kaddish near the crematoria as he wants to pay respect to his parents. However, this leads to an additional confrontation with the Polish guards. Again, Danny talks with the guards in broken Polish, “Co ty czyić? ja chcieć respecto Papa and Mamma.” When he and his children move a little farther away, Danny can be heard mumbling, “cholera police.”

From the stories that Danny tells his children while they walk along the site, it is clear that Danny is aware of the fact that the Germans were the ones who built the camp. When he and his children enter the *lager*, they meet several young Germans who also have come to visit the camp. As Miri says in the voiceover, they have come on their own heritage trip. In a combination of German and English, Danny tells them his story, saying, “It is your people who killed young children and babies here.” His daughter does not like the way that he accuses the young Germans: “Father, they are not guilty.” One of the young Germans tells him that not all the Germans were guilty. Danny ends the conversation with a kind of apology, saying, “I don’t want to ruin your vacation. You know something, and I know something.”

Can it be that the entire hostile communication that Danny enters into with the various Polish employees at the museum is only an aggressive reaction to the bureaucratic misunderstanding? Unlike Mordecai Vilozni, Danny was not born in Poland, and he did not grow up there. He does not have happy memories from the time before the war. Nevertheless, it seems that he thinks that the Polish employees at the Auschwitz-Birkenau museum do not try to understand him at all, while he and his children appear to be willing to conduct a civil dialogue with the young Germans. We cannot notice a similar willingness towards the Poles throughout the film. In this, the reactions of the Hanoch family are no different from those of the Vilozni family. However, while Mordecai Vilozni and other members of his family probably had all kinds of relations with Poles before the war, Danny Hanoch did not have such relations. Now, it is worth asking whether fictional films also mirror the ambivalent attitude of Israelis towards Poles, or one can perhaps notice echoes of other attitudes, such as those which can be seen in the film *Spring 1941*.

Spring 1941, 2007

While in the other films discussed in this paper – as well as many other Israeli films that deal with the Holocaust – the events of the Second World War are linked with the formation of the State of Israel or the lives of the survivors in

Israel after the war, *Spring 1941* does not present the lives of survivors in Israel. The entire film takes place in Poland in different years: 1941 and 1972. At the centre of this film stands Clara Planck, an acclaimed Canadian-Jewish cellist who, in 1972, is invited to her hometown in Poland to inaugurate a concert hall. She returns to Poland with her daughter, now a doctor, who was born after the war. During this visit, Clara's memories take her to 1941, when she and her family hid at a farm belonging to Emilia, a Polish peasant. As with Mordecai Vilozni in *Aba'le Bo La-lonapark*, also in *Spring 1941* a survivor returns to the traumatic space, Poland, with a family member. However, Clara returns to Poland in the 1970s – during the time of Communism, when Israeli survivors cannot yet come to Poland with their families.

The script was written by Motti Lerner, a well-regarded Israeli playwright and screenwriter who has made a significant contribution to the Israeli discourse on the Holocaust.³⁶ The director is the well-known Israeli director Uri Barbash.³⁷ Neither Lerner nor Barbash is the second generation survivor; their biographies are rooted quite deeply in Israel. Nevertheless, the two of them are behind several Israeli films and television series that deal with the Holocaust.³⁸ *Spring 1941*, which is entirely in English, has no affiliation to Israel or to the arrival of survivors to Israel. The sources of inspiration for the film are several stories written by Ida Fink (1921–2011).³⁹ In fact, Fink received the Israel Prize for Literature in 2008. And yet, although she immigrated to Israel in 1957, it was only in 1975 that a series of her stories was published in Hebrew for the first time.⁴⁰ Perhaps because she wrote about the Holocaust very differently from the way in which many Hebrew writers wrote about it, she was at the margins of the Israeli literary circles.⁴¹ The script of *Spring 1941* is not exactly an adaptation of Fink's stories. Lerner was inspired by Fink's works, but the motifs of the stories are presented in the film very differently from the stories themselves. In their reviews, several Israeli film critics point to numerous weaknesses of this film.⁴² Nevertheless, the attempt of Israelis to make a film about the Holocaust that does not deal with aspects that relate to Israel is significant, as is the fact that *Spring 1941* is the first film created as an Israeli-Polish cooperation. It is worth

³⁶ For more on Motti Lerner, see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motti_Lerner (accessed 29.04.2018).

³⁷ For more on Uri Barbash, see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uri_Barbash (accessed 29.04.2018).

³⁸ As the three-part television drama *The Kastner Trial*, 1994, and the film *Kapo in Jerusalem*, 2016.

³⁹ Fink's stories that serve as the inspiration for that film are "Shiva" and "Boker Aviv".

⁴⁰ I. FINK: *Pisat Zman*. Ramat Gan 1975.

⁴¹ SH. LEV-ARI: "Gevirti Kacha Lo Kotvim al Ha-Shoa." *Ha-arets*, 20 October 2007.

⁴² Y. RAVEH: *Aviv 41 Bikort*. 31.10.2008, <http://cinemascope.co.il/archives/1584> (accessed 29.04.2018). M. SCHNITZER: *Aviv 41: Shoa Lefi mytav Hastriotipim*, 2 November 2008, <https://www.makorrishon.co.il/nrg/online/47/ART1/805/642.html> (accessed 29.04.2018).

asking what impact this cooperation has had on the ways in which Poles are presented in this movie.

When we meet Clara, her husband Artur, and their daughters Lisa and Eva in the beginning of the film, Clara is wearing a necklace with the Star of David, but it is quite obvious that the family members are linked to the Polish language, culture, and landscape. During the war, they were planning to hide at the hospital where Artur worked. When this could not happen, they arrived at Emilia's farm. Until the Germans enter the city, Emilia has been providing the family with agricultural products. Emilia is willing to hide Artur, Clara, and Lisa⁴³; however, her motivation is not yet revealed. Since Clara and Lisa have a clear Jewish appearance, they have to stay hidden in the attic at all times. Artur, as Emilia explains, "looks like us [Poles]." Thus, he can pretend to be Emilia's cousin; he does not have to hide in the attic all the time. A relationship develops between him and Emilia. He loves Clara and cares very much about her and their daughters, but Emilia is not willing to hide them without fulfilling her love. Clara discovers the relationship and, realising that her life depends on it, agrees that Artur will sleep in Emilia's bedroom. After a while, the arrangement becomes explosive. They need to leave Emilia's house. They do find another place to hide, in the home of a former patient of Artur's, but a day later they are discovered by the Germans and sent to be executed. Lisa and Artur are killed at the mass grave. Clara, who falls into the pit, is unhurt. She crawls out of the grave and escapes.

In 1972, Clara comes back to the city where she lived before the war and to Emilia's farm. It is the first meeting she and Emilia have had after the war. In her stories, Fink articulates quite well the complex relationship that developed between the Poles who took a risk in order to hide Jews and the Jews who were hidden. She discusses this complexity both during and after the war. In *Spring 1941*, one can find some echoes of this complexity. However, the convoluted relationship between the hidiers and the hidden is presented rather superficially in the film.⁴⁴ The film nearly ignores the problematic behaviour of those Poles who collaborated with the Germans against their Jewish neighbours and friends. Clara returns to gain respect and recognition in the place where she lost her family. Does she know that the Germans found her, Artur, and Lisa because of a Pole's informing on them? It is hard to tell.

The film acknowledges that the Polish rural environment was hostile towards Jews. However, it presents this fact in elusive ways.⁴⁵ When Clara, Artur, and

⁴³ Eva is killed when they need to leave their house as the Germans enter the city.

⁴⁴ Despite what happened during the war, when Clara arrives at Emilia's house in 1972, she apologises that she has not come earlier, and Emilia still refers to her as Madam Clara. But the subtext of this meeting is not clear enough.

⁴⁵ When Stefan, Emilia's brother-in-law, meets Artur at her house, he does not like the fact that Artur is there. However, it is hard to judge whether he just does not like the idea that there is a man in his sister-in-law's house or whether his disapproval stems from a different reason.

Lisa are marched along the streets together with other Jews towards the mass grave, a few Poles are standing on the street corners. They watch the marching Jews in silence. It is hard to assess whether they recognise the Jews who are on their way to their deaths, who have been their friends or neighbours. They do not express any feelings. When Artur works on Emilia's farm, he meets Wlodek Kowalski, who used to be his patient. Kowalski does not challenge the hiding of Artur and his family. When Clara, Artur, and Lisa have to leave Emilia's house, Kowalski is the one who hides them. Only when Clara and Kowalski meet after the war does he tell her what he and Emilia faced because they helped her family. It is then that Clara finds out that the Germans arrested Kowalski and killed his neighbours. It is only then that Clara learns that when the war ended, people in the village refused to talk to Emilia. They helped her deliver Artur's baby, but her husband's family then strangled the infant. When the Germans arrived at Emilia's house, she did everything she could in order to prevent them from going to attic. They abused her. Thus, Emilia is the one who was harmed while nothing happened to Clara and Lisa.

It is very clear from this film that both Jews and Poles were the victims of the Germans. Poles were not just bystanders. They suffered from the fact that the Germans turned their country into a mass Jewish grave. This point of view is very different from those of other Israeli films. However, most of the relations between Poles and Jews during the war are presented in *Spring 1941* through a romantic angle. The film was not successful in Israel. Its failure was not due to the narrative nor the ways in which Poles are presented in it, but rather because of its artistic shortcomings. Nevertheless, it is important to mention this film in the context of the current discussion because it is one of the few Israeli films in which the Holocaust is not presented through the prism of the State of Israel. It is difficult to tell whether the presentation of the Poles as victims is a result of the fact that the film is a Polish-Israeli cooperation, or that the film was made in 2007, at a time when the diplomatic relations between Poland and Israel were relatively good. The fact that present-day developments affect the ways in which relationships between Poles and Jews are articulated in Israeli films can also be seen in the film *Ema shel Valentina*.

Ema shel Valentina (Valentina's Mother), 2009

The script of the film was written by Ilana Weiser-Senesh and Arik Lubetzky, and it was directed by Lubetzky together with Matti Harari. The film is the adaptation of a novella with the same title written by Savyon Liebrecht.⁴⁶ At the centre of the novella and the script stands the relationship between Paula Lewinska, an elderly Holocaust survivor living in Tel Aviv, and Valentina, a young Polish woman who has come to Israel to work in order to send money to her

⁴⁶ Savyon Liebrecht's novella is published as *Nashim Bethoch Katalog*. Jerusalem 2000.

family in Poland, who need it for medical treatment. Valentina's arrival in Israel for work reflects a social and economic phenomenon that started in Israel in the early 1990s. At that time, migrant workers from various countries began working in Israel in several fields, including agriculture, nursing, and construction. Among these migrant workers were Poles. In the 1990s Poland was yet to become a member state of the European Union.⁴⁷ Its diplomatic relations with Israel turned Israel into a destination for Poles who were interested in working to save money or to financially support their families. The fact that in Israel at that time there was a relatively large number of elderly people who spoke Polish gave Poles an advantage over other migrant workers who were interested in work in nursing the elderly.

The arrival of Poles in Israel created the opportunity for new encounters between Jewish Israelis who were born in Poland before the Second World War and Poles who were born after the war, and who grew up in Poland at a time in which the Jewish presence was relatively low. In the 1990s, the encounter between Poles and Jews in Israel was one in which the Jewish Israelis were the majority and the Poles were the minority; indeed, they were foreigners and even outsiders in the State of Israel.

Paula, who needs live-in help, refuses to employ a migrant worker from the Philippines, as her son recommends. Yet, she is willing to employ a young Polish woman – Valentina – to whom she is introduced by a priest who works in a church in Jaffa. When Paula was a child in Poland, her best friend and neighbour was named Valentina. At first, it is hard for Paula to adjust to Valentina's presence in her house. Eventually, the ice between the two women begins to break thanks to a song Valentina sings while working. It is the same song that Paula used to sing with her friend Valentina. The presence of the young Polish woman in her home evokes many memories for Paula. Paula feels that the mutual cultural baggage she and Valentina share has created an intimacy and closeness that she does not share with her son. Nevertheless, slowly the past and present blur as repressed memories of the Holocaust resurface and overwhelm the elderly woman. The complex relationship between the two women builds towards a shocking climax.

This climax happens in Paula's flat in Tel Aviv. Paula does not need to travel to Poland in order to remember that her Polish friend did not help her when she asked for help. Nor does Paula need to go back to Poland in order to remember the good things. Paula's strong links to the Polish language and culture are presented clearly in the film. As she explains to her son, the fact that she can hear a young voice speaking Polish again is meaningful for Paula, as is the fact that someone knows the songs she used to sing when she was a child, the meaning of getting lost at the forest, the flavour of blueberries right after you

⁴⁷ After Poland's entrance into the European Union in 2004, Poles could work in other member states. As a result, Israel was no longer as attractive a working place for Poles.

pick them, and the experience of snow falling in February. She even remembers the smells of her youth, including the smell of *kielbasa*. At the beginning of the encounter between the elderly Israeli *Pani* and the young Pole, the ability to speak Polish again evokes in Paula the positive perspective of the mutual life of Poles and Jews as friends and neighbours. She does not recall the Polish hostility that Jews experienced before the war. The closeness that Paula feels to Valentina highlights the gap between her and her son. Her son does not make any efforts to understand his mother's world; he is uninterested in her past and all of the components that shape her cultural identity. Paula chooses to believe that she and the young Pole share an intimacy because they share common cultural baggage. Nevertheless, after a while it seems that the expectations Paula has had from the relationship she believes she is developing with Valentina are unfitting. This evokes in her the echoes of other things beside the mutual "ideal" existence of Poles and Jews. As we find out, Paula believes that her good friend Valentina was not different from other Polish bystanders who betrayed their Jewish friends and neighbours. She also believes that in the present time, the Poles who are in her life – such as the priest Aleksander and Valentina – should compensate her for what the Poles did during the war. As Paula explains to the Polish priest, "[...] you [Poles] did not do anything. This is your last chance to do penance for doing nothing when the Germans came to take us [the Jews]." When Valentina explains to Paula that she wants to go back to her mother, Paula says, "I also wanted to be with my mother. No one cared about it. Did you hear how the Jews in Poland were killed?" Valentina responds, "But it's not my fault." Paula's answer merges the past and present together: "Why didn't you open the door to me? You took everything from us. Tell the priest that this is what your God loves." The film ends in a very symbolic scene when Paula suggests that she and Valentina have a last supper before Valentina leaves.

Hence, could it be that the presence of the young Polish woman in her life is a trigger for Paula to think of the ways she can take revenge on her Polish best friend and neighbour, who did not open her door to Paula and her young brother Yaakov when the Germans came to take the Jews? Not necessarily. Despite the tragic way in which the film ends, Paula does not want only to punish the Polish people for their behaviour during the war. Still, she wants to express her deep disappointment at the betrayal of her Polish friend and the others with whom she shares a language, culture, and pleasant memories from the time before the war, disregarding the fact that in the late 1930s there were many violent and anti-Semitic attacks against Jews in Poland.

The screenplay presents a different understanding to that of the written novella. The novella ends with the following sentences being said by the rescue team who break into the locked house when the neighbours report a foul odour: "So she is the murderer, they are a nation of murderers. It's in their blood. It is well known! Did you not hear how the Poles killed six million of us Jews?" "The

Germans murdered us, Hayim [not the Poles],” to which Hayim replies, “Poles, Germans... [it is all the same].”⁴⁸ The novella ends in what can be considered a common perception held by a relatively large number of Israelis, namely that the Poles were worse than the Germans. Anti-Semitism was always a part of the mutual Polish-Jewish existence. The film, on the other hand, seems to be interested in presenting the idea that because Jews such as Paula belonged to the Polish culture and language, the Poles’ betrayal of their Jewish friends – such as Valentina’s – was much more painful.

When Paula confronts Valentina – perhaps because this confrontation takes place in Israel – we have almost no Polish perspective. The facts that during the Second World War the Poles were also victims who suffered from the German occupation and saving Jews during the war was to risk death are not presented in this film. This, however, does not lessen the film’s unique attempt to present the tragic Polish-Jewish relationship in the present-day Israel and the opportunity for the Jewish Israelis and Poles from different generations to meet, not necessarily in Poland. Yet, even though the meeting in Israel is between different generations, it can still be quite intense.

There are several patterns by which *Emá shel Valentina* follows a number of visual motives that can be noticed in other Israeli films.⁴⁹ One such pattern is the dichotomy between the Israeli outdoor landscapes and the indoor habitat of the survivor. The Israeli exteriors are full of light and sunny, while Paula’s flat is dark. The blinds of the apartment are always closed. It has heavy furniture with many decorative European items. These visuals make Paula’s alienation more noticeable, along with her strong need to be with Valentina.

Ha’kataim (Past Life), 2016

As in *Spring 1941* and *Emá shel Valentina*, the script of *Ha’kataim* is also based on a literary text. While the other films are based on short stories and a novella, this film is based on a diary written by Baruch Milch (1907–1989) and published under the title *Can Heaven Be Void*.⁵⁰ The diary was written during the time when Milch hid after losing his child and wife. It was a means, as Milch himself wrote, to deal with the depression and insanity he faced during the time he was hiding.⁵¹ After the war he gave his diary to the Jewish Historical Institute (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny). He immigrated to Israel, where he remarried and had two daughters.⁵² After his settlement in Israel, Milch tried to get back

⁴⁸ S. LIEBRECHT: *Nashim Bethoch Katalog...*, p. 206.

⁴⁹ Such as *Tel Aviv-Berlin*, directed by Tzipi Tropé in 1987 and *Hadira (The Flat)*, which Arnon Goldfinger directed in 2011.

⁵⁰ B. MILCH: *Veolay Ha-shamim ryikim*. Jerusalem 1999.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

⁵² Baruch Milch’s daughters: Shosh Avigal (1946–2003) was a well-known theatre critic and Ella Sheriff (1954) is a well-known Israeli composer.

the diary he had written during the war, but his efforts were unsuccessful. He therefore decided to rewrite the diary according to what he remembered. Only after his death were his daughters able to get the diary back from the Jewish Historical Institute, after several Polish activists who were engaged with Solidarity (Solidarność) found out about the diary. The diary interested them because it presents several observations that were not known at that time in Poland, such as the involvement of the Poles in the killing of their Jewish neighbours.⁵³ In 1999, the original diary was published without any censorship and with an introduction written in Hebrew by Milch's daughter Shosh. In 2001, Milch's diary was published in Polish, and later it was published in English as well.⁵⁴

In her prologue to her father's diary, Shosh Avigal describes the entire saga of learning about her father's life before the war, what the family needed to do in order to return the original diary to their possession, and how they found out that someone was interested in deleting some of the things written by Baruch Milch during the war. It was a long, multi-layered, and complicated discovery.⁵⁵ This episode is not mentioned in the film, although the attempts to edit out some of the things that Milch wrote in his diary not only are interesting but also have implications on the Polish-Jewish relations during the war and in other periods.

The script of *Ha'kataim* includes several components from the story of the Milch family, but, at the same time, various parts of the plot – including the way in which the diary found its way to the Jewish Historical Institute – are fictional. As in *Spring 1941*, the script of *Ha'kataim* presents what happened to Baruch Milch during the war through the prism of the present day in the 1970s. The film-makers are careful to include all the central historical events that really occurred in Israel in the 1970s. Among these are: the historic election in 1977 in which the Likud party, led by Menachem Begin, won and ended the almost thirty years of left-wing rule; the historic visit of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat (1918–1981) to Israel in November 1977; and even the first time the Maccabi Tel Aviv basketball club won the FIBA European Champions Cup. While these events are presented, we meet the Milch family: the parents, Baruch and his wife Lusia, and their daughters, Sephi and Nana. The father, a gynaecologist, is a rather “difficult” person who refuses to speak Polish or to travel to either Germany or Poland. The daughters are close with each other. They form a treaty of sorts against their father, but, at the same time, they are jealous of one another. Nana believes that their father loves Sephi more because she reminds him of the son he lost during the war.

When the younger daughter, Sephi, performs at a choral concert in Germany, she begins to become partially aware of what happened to her father during the

⁵³ SH. AVIGAL: “Introduction.” In: B. MILCH: *Veolay Ha-shamim ryikim...*, p. 9.

⁵⁴ B. MILCH: *Veolay Ha-shamim ryikim...*; IDEM: *Testament*. Warszawa 2001; IDEM: *Can Heaven Be Void*. Jerusalem 2003.

⁵⁵ SH. AVIGAL: Prologue to B. MILCH: *Can Heaven be Void...*, pp. 13–33.

war. This leads to an additional attempt by the sisters to learn more about what their father went through. The two girls become aware of the horrible ethical dilemmas that their father faced during the war, as well as the dreadful decisions he, like other Jews, had to take in order to stay alive. They also learn something about the complicated relations that existed between the Zielinski family, who risked their lives when they hid Jews, and the Jews they saved.

Although the entire saga of the discovery of Milch's diary is not depicted as it actually occurred, the film succeeds in presenting the multiple implications resulting from the fact that there were more than a few Jews who were able to survive because they did unethical things, and that they had to deal with the effect of those things on their conscience for the rest of their lives. The film not only portrays this dilemma from a Jewish perspective; it also presents the point of view of the Poles who saved Jews. Those Poles were witnesses to the controversial decisions that a relatively large number of Holocaust survivors had to take during and after the war. Echoes of these dilemmas can be found in the film's title in Hebrew: *Ha'katomim*, "the sins."⁵⁶ Nana, the older daughter, asks Ms Zielinski to forgive her father since she believes in the concept of ancestral sin, as it is described in several Jewish sources.⁵⁷

Unlike *Spring 1941*, which uses the theme of a romantic triangle, *Ha'katomim* succeeds in better presenting the complicated relationship that developed between the Poles who risked their lives and the Jews they saved during and after the war. By telling the stories of the Israeli family, the Milchs, and the Polish family, the Zielinskis, the film explores several significant implications of the relationship between the Poles and the Jews they rescued. It does not present all the Poles as bystanders who betrayed their Jewish friends and neighbours through collaboration with the Nazis. Baruch Milch's written diary, however, does present a much more complicated reality. In the film, the character of Baruch Milch refuses to speak Polish. When there is a possibility that his daughter will go to Poland, he disapproves of the trip. This is perhaps the director's way to articulate Baruch Milch's reaction to those Poles who betrayed their Jewish friends, colleagues, and neighbours, despite the fact that he has to be grateful to the Zielinski family, who saved his life and, in doing so, risked their own.

Although the Israeli and German second generations in the 1970s are presented in this film as ready to think about how to deal with the trauma together, it is not at all clear whether the young Jewish and Polish generations are ready to do the same. Nevertheless, one needs to remember that in the 1970s, encounters of young Israelis and Germans were already occurring on a regular basis while there were no connections between the young generation of Israelis and Poles at all. Thus, it seems that the film provides several important angles to view

⁵⁶ In the film's English name, *Past Life*, there is no reference to this dilemma.

⁵⁷ Jeremiah 31:28, Ezekiel 18.

Polish-Jewish relations during the war. However, various websites that provide information about the film present it through the prism of an odyssey of two sisters in the late 1970s as they discover what happened to their father during the war, which casts a dark shadow over their entire lives.⁵⁸

Discussion

At the centre of the two documentary films discussed in this paper, *Aba'le Bo La-lonapark* and *Pizza b'Auschwitz*, stand heritage trips taken by Israeli families to Poland. The phenomenon of such journeys emerged around the time in which the Israeli youth trips to Poland began.⁵⁹ Israelis were only able to make such trips to Poland since the end of the 1980s, after Israel and Poland renewed their diplomatic relations.⁶⁰ It was only from that point that survivors could go back with their families to Poland in order to see the places in which they had grown up. While their descendants could see the childhood landscapes of the parents, the survivors would see the places where family members whom the second generation did not even know had lived and died.⁶¹ These trips allowed for encounters between the survivors, their family members, and others who travelled with them and the local residents of the places that had previously been the survivors' homes. The residents they encountered were sometimes the tenants inhabiting the houses that more than seventy years before had been the homes of the survivors, their neighbours, or merely passers-by whom they met in the streets or in other public spheres. As can be seen in *Aba'le Bo La-lonapark*, the entrance of the survivor and his family into the home in which he and his family lived before the Second World War raises questions. Can we find a similarity between this kind of visits and the longings of Palestinian refugees to the places and the houses in which they lived prior to 1948?⁶² Perhaps by examining this similarity, we can better understand the different ways in which the Jewish trauma is examined in Israeli films as opposed to how the Palestinian trauma is

⁵⁸ <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5787384/> (accessed 29.04.2018).

⁵⁹ On the Israeli youth voyages, see: J. FELDMAN: *Above the Death Pits beneath the Flag: Youth Voyages to Poland and the Performance of Israeli National Identity*. New York 2008.

⁶⁰ The experiences of the first Israeli group that visited Poland in the 1980s are presented in the film *Ha-gan (The Garden)* from 1984. The director of the film, Niza Gonen, is the director of *Aba'le Bo La-lonapark*.

⁶¹ For more on the families' heritage trips, see: C. KIDRON: "Being There Together: Dark Family Tourism and the Emotive Experience of Co-presence in the Holocaust Past." *Annals of Tourism Research* 2012 (April), vol. 41, pp. 157–199.

⁶² See, among others, the film of Danae Elon, *Another Road Home*, 2004. For information on this film: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0457277/?ref_=nm_knf_i3 (accessed 29.04.2018).

dealt with. This is only one example from which we can understand how much the discussion of Polish-Jewish relations in Israeli films can broaden our understanding of several significant issues that are not necessarily connected solely to the cinematic aspects of the topic.

The leading Polish scholar on the Holocaust, Barbara Engelking argues that the attitude of Poles towards their actions against Jews during the Second World War hurt and offended Jews much more than the attitude and actions of the Germans. After all, the Jews did not expect anything different from the Germans in those times, as they were the enemy: the ones who occupied Poland. The Poles, on the other hand, were their friends and neighbours. Both the Jews and the Poles belonged to the same nation. They were supposed to be on the same side of the barricade.⁶³

At the beginning of the 1990s – long before we knew what had happened at Jedwabne in the summer of 1941, and long before the recent political developments in Poland – the Israeli scholar Tom Segev wrote that the State of Israel and the Israelis were already reconciled with the Germans. This was because Germany had admitted its crimes against humanity and the Jews. Germany had even compensated the State of Israel and the survivors. However, the attitude of Israelis to the Poles is much more complicated. For many Israelis, it was easier to blame the Poles for everything that had happened to the Jews during the Holocaust, since Poles had always been anti-Semitic.⁶⁴

Throughout *Aba'le Bo La-lonapark*, Shmulik Vilozni expresses a great deal of anger towards the Poles. He reacts in a way similar to Segev's description of the behaviour of Israeli students who participated in Israeli youth trips to Poland in the late 1980s and early 1990s. According to Segev, it was explained to the young Israeli students on these trips that anti-Semitism was part of the Polish landscape. Some of these students, according to Segev, felt an inner need to find signs of this anti-Semitism; this corresponds to the ways that Shmulik Vilozni searches for visual signs of anti-Semitism on his journey.⁶⁵

As can be seen in *Pizza b'Auschwitz*, it seems that anger against the Poles is not experienced solely by Israelis who have Polish origins. At the Auschwitz museum, members of Hanoch's family express their anger towards the Polish employees at the site and not necessarily towards those who built the actual camp. In her study, Engelking argues that during the war and the years that followed, the Poles developed a fear of the Jews. During the war, this fear was a result of the fact that they bore witness to the killing of the Jews, while after the war, they became afraid that despite the absence of Jews from Poland, the "ac-

⁶³ B. ENGELKING: "Reflections on Subject of Polish-Jewish Relations during World War II." *Polish Sociological Review* 2002, no. 137, pp. 103–107.

⁶⁴ T. SEGEV: *Ha-milyon Haseviei...*, p. 454. In 1989, Yitzhak Shamir, who at that time was the Israeli Prime Minister, said that Poles sucked anti-Semitism with their mother's milk.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

cusing Jewish finger” remained.⁶⁶ The echoes of this fear can be observed in the reactions of the Polish employees of the Auschwitz museum to Danny Hanoch.

Spring 1941 and *Ha’kataim* present Poles who did take a risk and hid Jews. Indeed, these films were made after the renewal of diplomatic relations between Poland and Israel. However, at the same time, these films were made after the year 2000, namely after the time when Poland partially admitted that there were Poles – such as those in Jedwabne – who had taken part in the killing of Jews, and prior to the latest political developments. Still, this is not the reason why in both *Spring 1941* and *Ha’kataim* (and as has already been mentioned here regarding *Ema shel Valentina*) Germans are almost absent from these films despite the fact that they are present in the literary texts upon which the scripts of these films are based, where the German involvement is mentioned in a more significant way.⁶⁷ Both *Ha’kataim* and *Spring 1941* present Poland in the 1970s, at a time in which Poland was a very gloomy place. In *Spring 1941*, no other site is presented although it is quite clear that Clara is coming to Poland from a much more modern location. In *Ha’kataim*, it is obvious that both Germany and Israel are modern places in the 1970s, while Poland is not. Indeed, Poland in the 1970s was a gloomy place; however, it is possible that Israeli film-makers believed that the darkness and gloominess were a punishment of sorts for what the Poles had done during the war.

Nevertheless, as is true of any films that are based on various kinds of literary texts, the cinematic adaptation can present different perspectives. It seems that these perspectives mirror the arguments such as those that Engelking and Segev present in their studies. This calls for our attention. In some of the films, it appears that the connection of the protagonists to Polish culture and language is challenging.

In *Aba’le Bo La-Ionapark*, Shmulik does not respect – or even disregards – the connection that his father has to the Polish language, culture, and the place in which he spent his early childhood. In *Ema shel Valentina*, one can notice that there is greater understanding and empathy towards the connection that the survivors retain to the Polish culture, language, and landscape. Despite this, Paula’s son does not understand his mother’s affinity with the Polish culture and language, nor does he make any effort to understand it.

The people who stand behind the cameras of these films are as fascinating as those whose stories are being told in the films. This group includes several people who are central to Israeli cultural life. This fascinating collection of film-

⁶⁶ B. ENGELKING: “Reflections on the Subject of Polish-Jewish Relations...” pp. 103–107.

⁶⁷ In his diary, Milch described how the Ukrainians carried out pogroms in Podhajce and Tluste (Eastern Galicia). This fact is not articulated in the film. In her short stories, even if it is done in a few sentences, Fink succeeds in describing the cruelty of the Nazis. But this cruelty almost does not exist in *Spring 1941*.

makers presents an important additional angle to Polish-Jewish relations during and after the Second World War even though there is not yet sufficient scholarly – and other – awareness to this issue.

Over the recent years, a number of Polish film-makers made several significant films that present various controversial aspects of Polish-Jewish relations during and after the war.⁶⁸ Recent films that were made in cooperation with Israeli, Polish, and American film-makers also do not hesitate to present problematic dimensions of the mentioned relations.⁶⁹ The film-makers responsible for these films introduce Polish society to scenes that are not always easy to watch. In addition to hoping that Polish film-makers will continue to create such films, let us hope that Israeli film-makers will also be able to challenge their audiences and provoke discussion among Israeli audience regarding the crucial issue of Jewish-Polish relations.

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⁶⁸ W. PASIKOWSKI: *Poklosie*, 2012; P. PAWLIKOWSKI: *Ida*, 2013; M. WRONA: *Demon*, 2015.

⁶⁹ Among those films we can mention are *Scandal* by Ivansk and *Bogdan's Journey*.

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Ela Bauer

Izraelczycy spoglądają na Polaków przez obiektyw kamery filmowej

Streszczenie

Próba zrozumienia różnych sposobów ukazywania Holokaustu w kinie izraelskim była już podejmowana w licznych opracowaniach naukowych. Chociaż badania te wyróżniają się szerokim zakresem tematów, procesów i perspektyw, nie zawierają one odniesień do różnych ujęć relacji polsko-żydowskich obecnych w kinie izraelskim. Niniejszy artykuł rozpoczyna dyskusję nad sposobami ukazywania relacji polsko-żydowskich na podstawie takich filmów dokumentalnych i fabularnych, jak: *Aba'le Bo La-lonapark* Nitzzy Gonen z 1995 roku, *Wiosna 1941* Uriego Barbasha z 2007 roku, *Pizza b'Auschwitz (Pizza w Auschwitz)* Mosha Zimmermana z 2008 roku, *Ema Shel Valentina (Matka Walentyny)* Arika Lubzkiego i Mattiego Harariego z 2009 roku czy *Hakatayim (Past Life)* Aviego Neshera z 2016 roku. Proponowana dyskusja o postrzeganiu relacji polsko-żydowskich zaprezentowana w powyższych filmach może wzbogacić naszą wiedzę o nich po II wojnie światowej i w jej trakcie.

Słowa kluczowe: ocaleni z Holokaustu w filmach izraelskich, Holokaust w kinie izraelskim, relacje polsko-żydowskie podczas II wojny światowej