

LIAT STEIR-LIVNY

ORCID: 0000-0002-3210-0335

Department of Culture, Sapir Academic College

Department of Literature, Language, and the Arts, Open University of Israel

The Portrayal of Holocaust Survivors in Israeli Feature Films Following the Six-Day War

In the aftermath of the Second World War, approximately 450,000 Holocaust survivors immigrated to Palestine and after 1948 – to the nascent State of Israel. The complex encounters of the newcomers with the Jews who had already been living in Palestine were reduced to a series of superficial representations in Israeli feature films. The robust Zionist ideology dominated Israeli filmmaking of the 1940s and 1950s. Films made during that era presented a biased worldview, emphasising the Holocaust’s Zionist “lesson”: the importance of a Jewish state in the land of Israel. As part of this narrative, survivors were often portrayed as people broken in body and in spirit, who could be healed and transformed into strong “new Jews” only in Israel. During the 1961 Eichmann trial, Israelis were exposed – some for the first time – to numerous testimonies which made them more cognisant of the complexity of the Jewish experience during the Holocaust. Following the trial, initial attempts were made at producing feature films which depicted a more multifaceted image of survivors. The article argues that the euphoria that followed the 1967 Six-Day War resurrected the image of the “new Jew” and cast Holocaust survivors into their former role as the antithesis of the powerful Israeli. The rupture of Israeli society following the Yom Kippur War in October 1973, which opened the door to renewed identification with the suffering of Europe’s Jews under Nazism, did not restore these first cinematic attempts of the early 1960s. The article discusses these themes through the analysis of two prominent films that were produced in the decade following the 1967 war: *He Walked through the Fields (Hu halach basadot, 1967)* by Yosef Millo and *Operation Thunderbolt (Mivtsa Yonatan, 1977)* by Menahem Golan.

Introduction: Pre-1967 Cinematic Representations of Holocaust Survivors

The encounter of Holocaust survivors and the native Jews in the land of Israel was complex. The shock of the locals was mingled with anguish and a desire to help the survivors. However, along with the support in immigration and integration came questions about the perceived passivity of the diaspora Jews in the face of the Nazi horrors. In addition, native Israelis wondered how the post-war immigrants had survived while six million other Jews had perished. The answers to these questions were sometimes problematic.¹

The complexity of this encounter was reduced to a series of superficial representations in 1940s and 1950s Zionist films due to the ideological considerations which dominated pre-State and Israeli cinema. Films that propagated Zionist notions served as artistic platforms for the Zionist establishment to display its political, national, and economic achievements. Such films were political in nature, necessarily presenting a biased worldview in order to achieve the goal of promoting the importance of a Jewish state. As part of the narrative which emerged, survivors were often portrayed as broken people who could undergo transformation only in the land of Israel. These films concluded with the healed survivors assimilating into their new country.²

The 1961 Eichmann trial played a large role in raising Holocaust awareness in Israel. Following the trial, Holocaust-themed literature and theatre became more ubiquitous and included increasingly nuanced portrayals of Holocaust survivors. A cinema and theatre researcher Moshe Zimmerman points out that plays such as *Children of the Shadow* (*Yaldei Hazel*, Ben-Zion Tomer, Habima, 1962), *The Burning Season* (*Haona haboe'ert*, Aharon Meged, Habima, 1964), and *The Heir* (*Hayoresh*, Moshe Shamir, Haifa Productions Theatre, 1964) dealt with the inability of survivors to replace their "diasporic identity" by Israeli characteristics. The fraught relationship with post-war Germany and reparations offered by the Germans were also challenged.³ Haim Gouri, one of the most prominent Israeli writers, covered the Eichmann trial as a journalist and in its aftermath published the book *Facing the Glass Booth: The Jerusalem Trial of Adolf Eichmann* (*Mul ta*

¹ D. PORAT: *Café haboker beeiach haashan*. Yad Vashem, 2011, pp. 379–396 [Hebrew]; H. YABLONKA: "Zehuyot sotrot, zehuyot mashlimot, nizolim zichron hashoah vehazehut hayehudit." *Massuah* 2000, no. 28, pp. 301–317 [Hebrew]; A. SHAPIRA: "Hashoah: Zicaron praty vezicaron zibury." *Yehudim hadashim, yehudim yeshanim*. Tel Aviv 1997, pp. 103–186 [Hebrew]; T. SEGEV: *Hamilton hashviyi: hayisraelim vehashoah*. Jerusalem 1991, pp. 101–169 [Hebrew].

² L. STEIR-LIVNY: "Near and Far: The Representation of Holocaust Survivors in Israeli Feature Films." In: M. TALMON-BOHM, Y. PELEG (eds.): *Israeli Cinema: Identities in Motion*. Austin 2011, pp. 168–180.

³ M. ZIMMERMAN: *Al tigu li bashoah*. Haifa 2002 [Hebrew], pp. 223–224.

hazchuchit, 1962), in which he repented the way Israelis judged the survivors' behaviour under Nazism. First attempts to confront the cinematic narratives of the 1940s and 1950s were reflected in feature films such as *The Cellar*⁴ (*Hamar-tef*, Natan Gross, 1963) and *The Hero's Wife*⁵ (*Eshet Hagibor*, Peter Fry, 1963), which – for the first time – portrayed survivors in all their complexity.

The tense period before the Six-Day War, May 1967 brought about new empathy for Holocaust survivors. Israel was under siege, in a state of heightened anxiety caused by threats of annihilation from the Arab world. Feelings of helplessness that had been heretofore identified primarily with the Holocaust were suddenly understandable. Fears of a second Holocaust were expressed both privately and publicly: in newspapers and by politicians.⁶ However, the rapid and victorious outcome of the war in June 1967 transformed these fears into euphoria.

After-effects of the Six-Day War

Following six days of intense fighting (5–10 June 1967), Israel emerged victorious, having tripled its territory and become the governor of approximately a million Palestinians. IDF soldiers – in particular the generals – became worshiped celebrities, and numerous commemorative volumes with photos and war stories were published and became bestsellers. Children's games, songs, books, and films featuring soldiers cemented the spirit of invincibility and confidence. Heartbreaking accounts by soldiers who had lost their friends and had endured tough battles were published, but even these could not cast a shadow over the general atmosphere of jubilation.⁷ The great victory highlighted the mythic, heroic character of the “new Jew.”

⁴ L. STEIR-LIVNY: “Trauma from the Perspective of Holocaust Survivors in the Israeli Film *The Cellar* (Natan Gross, 1963).” *Prooftext* [in print].

⁵ L. STEIR-LIVNY: “The Hero's Wife: The Depiction of Female Holocaust Survivors in Israeli Cinema Before the Eichmann Trial and in Its Aftermath.” *Polish Political Science Yearbook* [in print].

⁶ T. SEGEV: *1967-veaaretz shinta et paneha*. Jerusalem 2005 [Hebrew]; A. KONFINO: “To Write, Not Only to Remember, the History of 1967.” *Israel – Magazine for the Research of Zionism and the State of Israel – History, Culture, Society* 2008, no. 13, pp. 297–312.

⁷ *Siach Lochaim* [Warriors Discussion] that was published in 1968 was one of the few texts at the time that opposed the sensation of euphoria. The doubtful, uncertain tone of the soldiers' interviewees stood in complete defiance of the atmosphere of arrogance that dominated the public discourse. According to Alon Gan, the euphoria pushed aside the doubtful voices of warriors. See: A. GAN: “Hasufim bazariach vesiach lohamim cezirey zehut mitpazelet.” *Israel* 2008, no. 13, pp. 267–296 [Hebrew].

It was this exhilaration and confidence in Israeli identity which ironically opened the door for a nostalgic return to the *shtetls*, the small Jewish towns of eastern Europe, which had formerly been ignored or ridiculed in Israeli culture. The play *Once There Was a Hassid* (*Ish Hassid Haya*, 1968) by Dan Almagor replaced negation of the diaspora with yearning for a lost way of life. Almagor, who had been raised by an anti-religious father – one of the first members of the *Hashomer Hatzair* youth group in Poland – wrote a play which actually bridged the gap between Orthodox “diaspora Jews” and secular Israeli audiences. In his production, Hassidism was presented as a Jewish movement which balanced religion and humanism. More than a quarter million people in Israel attended the play, and it received enthusiastic reviews in distinctly secular sectors, including the *kibbutzim* of *Hashomer Hatzair*.⁸ After a period of about thirty years in which pre-State and Israeli cinema had been ignoring the diaspora or treating it disparagingly, feature films that focused on life in the *shtetl* started to be produced. The late 1960s saw the production of *A Miracle in the Town* (*Nes ba'ayara*, Leo Filler, 1968), *Tevye and His Seven Daughters* (*Tuvia vesheva bnotaiv*, Menahem Golan, 1968), and *Ha-Dybbuk* (Ilan Eldad, 1968).⁹

Simultaneously, after the Six-Day War, the Holocaust survivors were marginalised. Although the Holocaust survivor and novelist Aharon Appelfeld published books discussing mainly the pre- and post-Holocaust years and some poetry by survivors was circulated, they were not a prominent part of the Israeli public discourse.¹⁰ Two central novels written by non-survivors were *Lizkor velishkoah* (*To Remember, to Forget*) by Dan Ben-Amotz (1968), which follows an Israeli on a journey towards his past identity, and *Adam ben Celev* (*Adam Resurrected*) by Yoram Kaniuk (1969), which depicts a Holocaust survivor who cannot break free from the grotesque identity forced upon him during the Holocaust. The theatre, meanwhile, focused on other themes, leaving a void which lasted for approximately a decade, up until the late 1970s.¹¹ The echoes of the Holocaust seldom appeared when artists dealt with other subjects. For instance, the well-known and controversial political play by Hanoch Levin, *Malcat Ambatia* (*Queen of the Bathtub*, 1970), criticised the sense of euphoria that took hold of Israelis after the Six-Day War and the use of the Holocaust by some as a rationalisation for justifying racism towards Arabs. A discussion on the Holocaust survivors in art

⁸ For more, see: A. SHAPIRA: “Lean halcha shilat haglut.” *Shvut* 2004, pp. 13–61 [Hebrew]; L. STEIR-LIVNY: “Hacomeback shel haglut: meyhudi yashan leyahudi hadash ubehazara.” In: S. MEIRI et al. (eds.): *Zehuyot behithavut bahevra haisraelit*. Ra’anana 2013, pp. 461–481 [Hebrew].

⁹ These films are called “Gefilte Fish movies” in cinema research. See: L. STEIR-LIVNY: “Hacomeback...”

¹⁰ H. YAOZ KAST: “Safrut hashoah beivrit – yozrim nizoley shoah.” *Bishvil hazicaron* 1998, no. 27 [Hebrew], <http://lib.cet.ac.il/pages/item.asp?item=16243> (accessed 20.01.2010) [Hebrew].

¹¹ A. BEN NAFTALI: “Ma hayta hamila shoah.” *Massuah* 2005, no. 33, pp. 10–26 [Hebrew].

was minimal as well.¹² Only from late 1980s onwards, the Holocaust became a central focus of Israeli culture.¹³

In the decade after the Six-Day War, the film industry, which had produced nearly twenty films dealing with survivors during the previous two decades, began to tackle other subjects and genres. The personal genre, influenced mainly by European cinema, usually dealt with universal themes while popular cinema primarily explored relationships between ethnic groups (Ashkenazim and Mizrahim).¹⁴ The only two films in which survivors appeared during the decade after the 1967 war featured them in supporting roles, which restored the negative stereotypes found in films made prior to the Eichmann trial.

He Walked through the Fields

Moshe Shamir's novel *He Walked through the Fields* (*Hu halach basadot*, 1947) represents the essence of the Sabra myth (the young, Israel-born, handsome, fearless, and free "new Jew"). The book idolises the character of Uri, a young *kibbutz* member and Palmach soldier who is ultimately killed in action. Adapted for the theatre in 1948 and directed by Yosef Millo, the production had a run of eighteen years.¹⁵ In 1967 it was adapted into a film, also directed by Millo, starring Assi Dayan (the son of Moshe Dayan, the minister of defence during the Six-Day War), who was the epitome of a Sabra.¹⁶ The film follows Uri as he returns to the Gat Ha'amakim *kibbutz* in 1946 after attending the Kadoorie agricultural school. Born and raised in the *kibbutz*, Uri attempts to integrate back into communal life and his family. After having a romance with Mika, a Holocaust survivor and *kibbutz* member, he eventually decides to join the Palmach. His squad embarks on a mission to distract the British and allow a ship of illegal Jewish immigrants to reach the shore. While carrying out the

¹² B. BRUTIN: "Mehashulayim el hamercaz – hashoah baomanut haisraelit." *Massuah* 2005, no. 33, pp. 110–138 [Hebrew]; BEN NAFTALI: "Ma hayta hamila..."

¹³ D. OFER: "The Past That Does Not Pass: Israelis and Holocaust Memory." *Israel Studies* 14.01.2009, pp. 1–35; D. PORAT: *Café haboker...*; L. STEIR-LIVNY: *Har hazicaron izcor bimkomi: hazicaron hahadash shel hashoah batarbut hapopularit beisrael*. Tel Aviv 2014 [Hebrew].

¹⁴ E. SHOHAT: *Mizrah vema'arav bakolnoa haisraeli* [*East and West in Israeli Cinema*]. Ra'anana 2007, pp. 110–122 [Hebrew].

¹⁵ "Hu halach basadot." Cinema department, The General Union of Workers in Israel, *Tel Aviv Cinematheque Library Collection* [Hebrew].

¹⁶ For example, on the television programme *Uvda* (Channel 2, 7.06.2006), Ilana Dayan described his biography. With photos from the film in the background, she claimed that he was the Sabra everyone wanted to be like. For more examples, see: E. SHOHAT: *Mizrah vema'arav...*, pp. 110–122; M. SCHNITZER: *Hakolnoa ha israeli*. Tel Aviv 1994, pp. 80–81; N. GERTZ: *Sipur mehasratim...*, pp. 63–94; M. TALMON: *Bluz lazabar haavud: havurot venostalgia bakolnoa haisraeli*. Tel Aviv 2001, pp. 134–138 [Hebrew]; M. ZIMMERMAN: *Al tigu...*, pp. 203–207. For the comparison between *He Walked through the Fields* by Moshe Shamir and its cinematic adaptation, see: N. GERTZ: *Sipur mehasratim: siporet Israeli veibudeha lekolnoa*. Tel Aviv 1994, pp. 63–94 [Hebrew].

mission, Uri is killed in action. Afterwards, Mika gives birth to their son, the heir who will eventually become a fighter in the Six-Day War.

The film places the character of the Sabra front and centre, and focuses on the uncertainties in his life. Assi Dayan relates that, in addition to his good looks, being Moshe Dayan's son was an asset, since his father – like the other commanders of the 1967 war – was idolised. In contrast, the Holocaust survivors in the film are merely supporting characters, who cross paths with Uri at the *kibbutz* and in the Palmach. In both cases, the survivors are the antithesis of Uri, playing the “diaspora Jew” to his “new Jew.”

Among the negative stereotypes associated with the portrayal of survivors in feature films in the 1940s and 1950s was that of Jewish women surviving the Holocaust through prostitution or by using their sexuality.¹⁷ The film portrays Mika through a sexually problematic perspective, implying that she underwent an abortion during the war. Mika not only has had a difficult past, but also continues to use her sexuality in the present. She is a seductive adolescent who repeats her sexual mistakes and does not comprehend the consequences of her actions. She flirts with Uri and embarks on a sexual relationship with him after a brief acquaintance, which results in an unplanned pregnancy. Upon discovering that she is pregnant, Mika sobs to the doctor: “[It is] like in Tehran, it's exactly like in Tehran.” In order to comfort her, the doctor assures her: “Back then you were a little fool in a refugee camp [...], here, you have a guy that loves you.” Yet, these words are no comfort to Mika, and the doctor is ultimately proved wrong when Uri goes on to start another sexual relationship with another woman she meets at the Palmach camp.

Beginning a new life in a homeland promised to provide redemption was a prevalent theme in Israeli cinema of the 1940s and 1950s. In particular, female survivors often emerge “purified” by the end of the films.¹⁸ In the same manner, in *He Walked through the Fields* Mika turns from a seductive survivor to a Zionist mother. The film's epilogue briefly reveals that their son grew up to fight bravely in the Six-Day War. Mika thus achieves redemption by becoming the mother of a hero who contributes to the great victory of 1967.

As in the films of the 1940s and 1950s, the image of male Holocaust survivors in *He Walked through the Fields* has negative associations. In one of the central scenes, Uri works in the vineyard together with the children of Tehran.¹⁹ They speak Yiddish among themselves instead of Hebrew, and they squabble

¹⁷ N. LEVNIKORN: “Ha'alamot vehamavet.” *Teoria vebikoret* 2008, no. 32, pp. 15–44 [Hebrew]; L. STEIR-LIVNY: “Sexual Abuse and Deviancy: Women Holocaust Survivors in Israeli Feature Films.” *Ekphrasis* 2015, vol. 2, no. 15, pp. 72–87.

¹⁸ N. GERTZ: *Makhela aheret: nizoley shoah zarim veaherim bakolnoa ubasafrut haisraelim*. Tel Aviv 2004, pp. 9–38 [Hebrew].

¹⁹ Children of Tehran are Holocaust child survivors who fled from Poland and arrived in Eretz-Israel via Iran in February 1943.

or play backgammon instead of working. Uri scolds them, but in vain. These scenes establish, as do earlier films, the division between the “new Jew” and the survivors. Uri, shot from a low angle, crosses the vineyard in his cart while he looks down at the Holocaust survivors from above. He is serious and dedicated to his work. The survivors, on the other hand, are shot from a high angle that diminishes them. The *kibbutz* and its values hold no interest for them, and they are interested only in destruction and mayhem. During a *kibbutz* celebration, a Holocaust survivor sexually harasses Mika, who finds shelter in the arms of Uri, her “Sabra saviour.”

At the Palmach camp, Uri meets Semion, a Holocaust survivor who provides contrast to the protagonist and thereby highlights his heroic characteristics. When the two characters are shot together in the same frame (two shots), the differences between them become glaring: Assi Dayan (Uri) is tall and devastatingly handsome, while the short and overweight Yaakov Ben-Sira is cast as Semion. Uri becomes indispensable to the commander, while Semion is a simple soldier, despite having fought as a partisan during the Second World War. Semion is the “other” who is ridiculed. Mostly alone, he is a social outcast, and during training sessions he lags behind. Semion volunteers for the central mission in the film: his job is to demolish a bridge and create a diversion so that the British will not notice the illegal immigrants arriving by sea. Yet, when difficulties arise, Semion is unable to carry out the assignment, and Uri volunteers to step in instead.

The film alters the narrative of the 1940s and 1950s on one issue only – the assimilation of survivors within Israeli society. In *He walked through the Fields* no assimilation occurs. The survivors and the Sabras remain two separate groups.

Relative to other Israeli film productions, *He Walked through the Fields* was a massive undertaking,²⁰ which received substantial support from the State. Levi Eshkol lent his patronage for the world premiere, which was held in the presence of ministers, members of parliament, and public figures. The Prime Minister’s office asked the film’s producers, Ya’akov Shteiner and Yitzhak Agadati, to note that *He Walked through the Fields* was being screened to celebrate the twenty-year anniversary of the founding of the state, and it was advertised as such on the film’s posters in Hebrew and English. In fact, so many public figures attended the Tel Aviv premiere that Shteiner remarked, “We can have a government general assembly meeting here.”²¹ Screenings over the following days were held under the patronage of the Commander in Chief of the IDF, Yitzhak Rabin, and under the patronage of Yigal Alon, the much-admired commander of the Palmach. As the film made its way around the country, the mayor of each city was present

²⁰ M. PERHOVSKY: “Assi Dayan – ra’ayon.” *Tel Aviv Cinematheque Library Collection* [Hebrew].

²¹ Z. HARNOF: “Hu halach basadot al hamasach.” *Davar*, 21.12.1967, *Tel Aviv Cinematheque Library Collection* [Hebrew].

at each showing, thus making the film a national event.²² A cinema researcher Nurith Gertz noted that the film received widespread acclaim,²³ while Dayan claimed that the film was loved by audiences.²⁴ Iris Yotvat – who, at 17, played Mika – related that she and Dayan were treated “like gods,” and her picture appeared on the covers of various newspapers.²⁵ Yet, my research of the topic reveals that reviews by the press were actually mixed: *BaMahane* wrote that the film was almost flawlessly made, that it portrayed the *kibbutz* realistically, and that the acting of the two protagonists was excellent.²⁶ *Al HaMishmar* claimed that the film engaged the viewers with every scene, that “everything [brought] up memories”; Stefan Gilbert proclaimed: “this is a film that should be watched.” Gilbert also wrote that Millo had succeeded in taking his first steps as a director.²⁷ *Davar*, however, showed less enthusiasm and gave a lukewarm review, opining that it was a mediocre film, full of good intentions and heartening efforts; in short, it was described as follows: “[...] not a bad film. It has a right to exist and a right to be seen.”²⁸ *Lamerhav* wrote that the film’s approach was too theatrical, yet agreed that Assi Dayan was an important cinematic discovery.²⁹ Ram Evron wrote that the plot “lacks a dimension of persuasion. It is difficult to find innovations in the cinematic version that are interesting conceptually or socially.” In his opinion, Iris Yotvat was miscast in the role of Mika, and Assi Dayan – although undoubtedly a cinematic discovery – should have received more direction. He also felt that the supporting actors gave rather exaggerated performances. According to him, the film suffered from an old-fashioned style of artistic expression and “sometimes it appears you are watching an old Soviet film.” He regretted that the important topic highlighted in the film was not executed with appropriate cinematic tools, and that Israeli cinema still had not learned how to overcome technical problems.³⁰ Another reviewer wrote that, in spite of the film’s “apparent professional disadvantages,” he still recommended it to the audience.³¹ None of the newspaper reviews, however, tackled the issue of the portrayal of Holocaust survivors. Ram Evron referred to the character of

²² Ibidem.

²³ E. SHOHAT: *Mizrah vema'arav...*, p. 20.

²⁴ M. PERHOVSKY: “Assi Dayan...”

²⁵ L. AGINSKI : “Cim’at jane fonda.” *News*, 26.06.1991 [Hebrew]; A. ARGAMAN-BARNEA: “Hi halcha.” *Yediot Aharonot*, *Zmanim modernim*, 3.07.1991, pp. 4–5 [Hebrew].

²⁶ “Hu halach basadot.” *BaMahane*, *Tel Aviv Cinematheque Library Collection* [Hebrew].

²⁷ S. GILBERT: “Ha’ahava hashniya shel milo.” *Al HaMishmar*, 26.12.1967, p. 2, *Tel Aviv Cinematheque Library Collection* [Hebrew].

²⁸ Z. HARNOF: “Hu halach basadot al hamasach...”

²⁹ R. EVRON: “Bayamim hahem bazman haze.” *Lamerhav*, 1967, *Tel Aviv Cinematheque Library Collection* [Hebrew].

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ “Hu adain holech basadot.” No writer signified, no newspaper signified, no date, *Tel Aviv Cinematheque Library Collection* [Hebrew].

Mika only in terms of the actor's suitability for the role. According to him, the problem was that a girl that was too young and too much of a Sabra was cast as a new immigrant from Poland, and was unable to relate to all the difficult life experiences entailed in that role.³²

Operation Thunderbolt

On 6 October 1973, the euphoric period ended with a siren that blared countrywide on Yom Kippur afternoon, while most Jews were marking the holiest day of the year by fasting and praying in synagogues. Scholars still argue whether the political leadership was aware of the looming threats, but the Israeli public was stunned. It took the army three weeks to stabilise and counterattack. The results were devastating: over 2,200 soldiers were killed, and over 7,000 were wounded. The war and its harsh consequences deconstructed the image of the invincible "new Jew."³³ Yet, even that crucial episode in Israel's history did not renew attempts to create a more nuanced image of Holocaust survivors. In the 15 years following the Yom Kippur war, Israeli cinema marginalised the image of Holocaust survivors. The few times they appeared, it was as minor characters in shallow, negative portrayals. *Operation Thunderbolt*, one of the last national-heroic feature films produced in the 1970s, is an example of this type of representation. The film is based on the true story of the hijacking of an Air France plane by a group of German and Palestinian terrorists and the eventual rescue of the passengers by Israeli commandos on 4 July 1976.

The story which gripped the world first found its way to Hollywood screenwriters even before the hostages were released. Writers at Universal Studios began crafting a script based on the unfolding crisis, and after the attack was over, Merv Griffin Productions started making preparations for producing a film about the operation. As the days passed, more and more studios showed interest in the story, and in the summer of 1976, there were no fewer than seventeen production companies in the USA dealing with the subject.³⁴

An Israeli director Menahem Golan relates that a fellow director Boaz Davidson phoned him the same night the hostages were released and enthusiastically told him about it. Golan immediately decided to produce a film about the event, and the following day, he started recruiting people. He signed the famous singer and actor Yehoram Gaon for the role of Yoni Netanyahu, using a paper napkin as a contract. Then he rented rooms at the Tel Aviv Sheraton Hotel, recruited an American screenwriter, and hired the journalist Shaike ben Porat, military reporter Eitan Habar, and Brigadier General Avraham Arnan as consultants. Golan claimed that he had received the Israeli government's blessing, together with a guarantee that he would receive all the assistance needed from the IDF.

³² R. EVRON: "Bayamim haheem..."

³³ A. SHAPIRA: "Hashoah..."

³⁴ T. SHAW: *Cinematic Terror*. New York 2015, pp. 123–143.

According to the director, he took liberties with the storyline: "The truth is I tried to tell the stories of people that seemed real, but I made them up. Arnan knew all the details and he knew what to hide as well, yet there was an enormous dramatic force in the film and a good structure of an action movie."³⁵

While they worked, Golan learned that two major American production companies (Warner Brothers and 20 Century Fox) were also planning on producing a film. He found out that Warner Brothers had signed an exclusivity contract with the State of Israel in which they, too, were guaranteed that only they would receive all possible help from the IDF. Franklin Schaffner, one of the biggest American action movie directors, arrived in Israel with his entourage, rented rooms at the Tel Aviv Hilton, and began planning a production. Asher Hirschberg of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry phoned Golan, apologised, and told him that the government had committed only to Warner. Golan was deeply hurt and left Israel for the USA. A month later, Warner Brothers heard that Fox had recruited the biggest stars and had built a set for the film in their Los Angeles studios. Since they feared that Fox would precede them, they packed up and went back to Los Angeles to build a set there as well. Hirschberg phoned Golan at his new home in the USA to tell him that the Americans had left, and that Rabin had personally promised to provide him with everything needed for the film. Golan returned to Israel, started filming a month and a half after the Americans had left, and entered a race against the other companies. It was clear to him that whoever completed the film first would have an enormous success. It was a guaranteed blockbuster, a film "that would conquer the world. A great and well-known story, very easy to adapt for screen; humane and full of action."³⁶

Golan said that the production was conducted like a military operation. The team built a replica of Entebbe at Lod airport, and actors were quickly hired. To highlight the realism, some Israeli Knesset members and members of the government made cameo appearances, including Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, Yigal Allon, and Gad Yaakobi.³⁷ The end credits thanked the IDF and the government of Israel.³⁸

National-heroic films produced after the Six-Day War focused mainly on Israeli soldiers. The narrative structure created a struggle between the Israelis, who were portrayed as the forces of light, and the Arabs, who were portrayed as the forces of darkness, while traces of the Holocaust provided a cause for action.³⁹

³⁵ S. DUVDEVANI, M. PERHOVSKY (interviewers): "Menahem Golan." *The Israeli Testimonies, Tel Aviv Cinematheque* [Hebrew].

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ M. SCHNITZER: "Rosh hamemshala mar Menachem Golan." *The City*, 2.07.1987, *Tel Aviv Cinematheque Library Collection* [Hebrew].

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ E. SHOHAT: *Mizrah vema'arav...*, pp. 110–122.

Operation Thunderbolt ignored the problematic aspects of the operation⁴⁰ and devoted itself to the bravery and courage of the operation's commander, Yoni Netanyahu, and his colleagues, who represented the epitome of the "heroic Jews." As did many of the films produced after the Six-Day War, *Operation Thunderbolt* created a clear division between good and evil. In this context, the Holocaust was used to exhibit associative connections between Arabs and Nazis. The use of the Holocaust became an instrument to strengthen the notion that Israel should build itself in the spirit of "never again."⁴¹

In a scene which takes place before the hijacking occurs, the camera focuses on a conversation between two of the passengers: Nurit Aviv, an Israeli, and an unnamed German passenger. The German tells her that he would like to visit Israel. "Many German tourists come to Israel," Nurit says, "it's funny how the world changes." The hijacking that occurs minutes later and is led by Germans proves she is mistaken – the world has not changed completely since there are also Germans who continue to assault and hurt Jews. The combination of German and Palestinian hijackers and the flow from the past to the present turns the Jews into eternal victims. Aviv's mistake does not remain on a symbolic level. "They are going to kill us. Like the Nazis," she tells her seatmate after the plane is hijacked. Her fellow passenger plays the role of the "good German" as he attempts to reason with the hijackers, but is portrayed as an exception to the rule. "Haven't we caused enough harm?" he asks a terrorist. "We are not fighting Jews but Zionists and your German government," she replies. Yet the camera, connecting the Holocaust and the present terrorism, clearly contradicts her claim.

Tobias Ebbrecht argues that the many cultural representations of the Holocaust in Western popular culture have turned the Holocaust into a "master paradigm" – a series of well-known Holocaust narratives and visuals that have appeared so often in Western popular culture that they have almost become clichés. These familiar historical images are dissociated from their original background and sources, and migrate into popular culture as emblematic signs to convey contemporary themes.⁴² Many scenes in the film resonate with Eb-

⁴⁰ T. SHAW: *Cinematic Terror...*, pp. 123–143.

⁴¹ From the 1940s onward comparisons between Arabs and Nazis can be found in various cultural fields. See: I. ZERTAL: *Hauma vehamavet: historia zicaron politica*. Or Yehuda 2002, pp. 137–178 [Hebrew]; D. BAR-TAL: *Lhyot im hasichsuch*. Haifa 2007, pp. 112–137 [Hebrew]; L. STEIR-LIVNY: "The Link between the Holocaust and the Israeli-Arab Conflict in Israeli Culture 1950s–1970s." In: L. ALEKSANDROWICZ-PEDICH, M. PAKIER (eds.): *Reconstructing Jewish Identity in Pre- and Post-Holocaust Literature and Culture*. Frankfurt am Main 2012, pp. 157–168; 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 2013, pp. 151–167.

⁴² T. EBBRECHT: "Migrating Images: Iconic Images of the Holocaust and the Representation of War in Popular Film." *Shofar – An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 2010 (summer), vol. 28, no. 4, pp. 86–103.

brecht's claims. During the hijacking, the terrorists require the passengers to raise their hands. One of the passengers' raised arms reveals the Auschwitz tattoo. The camera focuses on the number while the hijacker yells "schnell! schnell!" (fast! fast!). The combination of the survivor, the German terrorist with a gun, and the German yelling clearly echo the Holocaust. The survivor gives her a terrified look and she, in turn screams at him, "Why are you looking at me that way?" He does not reply, yet the answer is clear – she is forcing him to relive his past. The past is also re-experienced through the instructions of another German kidnapper as they land in Entebbe. As he herds the passengers off the plane, he says, "Do not worry, your personal belongings will be brought to you later," which is a clear echo of arrivals in the death camps. When the passengers run from the plane to the terminal they are filmed from behind the barbed wire that is in front of the frame. Through the use of the fence, the Holocaust association is strengthened.

The suggest similarity images of Holocaust survivors in *Operation Thunderbolt* are even shallower than those in the films of the 1940s and 1950s. Here, they are nameless and voiceless with no other significance than their victimhood. The survivor is symbolised by the number on his arm, and his role is nothing more than to create a comparison between Arabs and Nazis. "My husband was in the Nazi camps and he said no one in the entire world came to the rescue," yells his wife, one of the hijacked people who gather in Israel trying to find a solution to save their family members. "We have spoken to the French and to the Americans and to many people around the world who are helping," says a government representative, "there will be no separation between the foreigners and the Israelis, trust me." Yet the separation does occur in the very next scene as the terrorists call out Jewish surnames. Reminiscent of scenes in Holocaust films, a couple named "Cohen" pretend that their name is "Kohn" and that they are not Jewish; "[t]hey are Jews. They are lying. Take them away from here," shouts the German kidnapper, contradictory to her previous claim about "not fighting Jews." "Why are they not calling us, mommy?" a little boy asks. "Because we are not Jewish," his mother answers, again undermining the previous German claim of "only targeting the Zionists" and highlighting Holocaust associations.

As the nameless Holocaust survivor approaches the hijackers, the soundtrack plays melancholic Jewish music that further highlights the Holocaust films' associations. Here, the survivor faces German murderers in a scene echoing the selection processes at Auschwitz. A couple of Israelis who hold green cards for the USA wave them, thinking it will help, but they, too, are violently sent to the Jewish side. When Nurit Aviv's name is called, she turns to her German friend and says, in dialogue taken straight from a Holocaust film, "Doctor, if you get out first, tell the world what is happening here." "We are in 1976, can you believe it?" says one of the foreign passengers to a friend, thus sealing the comparison to the past. It should be noted that Golan often drew comparisons between Arabs

and Nazis in previous films, reflecting his views on Arab attitudes towards Israelis during those years.⁴³

Yoni Netanyahu and his unit are glorified in the film. The scenes depict them storming the terminal and releasing the hostages while the dramatic music swells. As in *He Walked through the Fields*, the fact that the hero is killed does not detract from the glory-filled Zionist “happy ending,” since he has sacrificed his life for his country.

Although Golan began filming later than the American production companies, he claims that he managed to finish before them.⁴⁴ My research of the topic, however, reveals that the two American films – *Victory at Entebbe* (Marvin J. Chomsky) and *Raid on Entebbe* (Irvin Kershner) – preceded Golan by several months, and were broadcast as television movies in the USA at the end of 1976 and the beginning of 1977. *Victory at Entebbe* was also screened in cinemas, and when it was screened in Germany and Italy, pro-Palestinian activists hid bombs in the cinemas where it was being shown, claiming that the film was “Zionist propaganda.” Meanwhile, *Raid on Entebbe* won the 1977 Golden Globe for the Best Motion Picture made for Television.⁴⁵

Operation Thunderbolt premiered in South Africa and afterwards in Los Angeles. The marketing of the film in the USA emphasised that the release of the hostages occurred on 4 July, the American Independence Day. The film’s marketing materials highlighted the assertion that it was the only “authentic production.”⁴⁶

The premiere in Israel took place in March 1977, ten months after the actual event. Government officials such as Rabin and members of the IDF leadership attended the premiere. The film received fairly good reviews. For example, Meir Schnitzer wrote that it was an “internally not-bad” film without any unusual contradictions and that “Golan even managed to deftly touch upon the connotation-loaded conflict between Jews and Germans.”⁴⁷ Golan, for his part, noted proudly that the entire country was talking about the film and that “it was the first time that [he] received good reviews from the critics as well.”⁴⁸ Since the events were still fresh, various claims were occasionally made by the people who had taken part in the operation. For example, Dan Shomron, who had planned the Entebbe rescue operation and commanded it, strongly objected to the film.

⁴³ S. DUVDEVANI, M. PERHOVSKY: “Menahem Golan...”

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ T. SHAW: *Cinematic Terror...*, pp. 123–143.

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ M. SCHNITZER: “Rosh hamemshala...” Shamgar claims that this film is “one of the most hilarious contempts of Hollywood’s history.” *Victory in Entebbe* was originally a television film, and later on a cinematic version was produced, which failed miserably. See: I. SHAMGAR: “Ha’emet, col haemet vehaseret.” *Ma’ariv*, 29.06.1994, pp. 20–21 [Hebrew].

⁴⁸ K. BEN SIMCHON: “Mivtza leumi.” No newspaper name, *Tel Aviv Cinematheque Library Collection* [Hebrew].

He claimed that it gave the impression that it was the “private” operation of Yoni Netanyahu and his unit, and not of the IDF. “If the film producers wanted to highlight Yoni, I would prefer they dropped my character all in all,” he said to journalists.⁴⁹ As with *He Walked through the Fields*, there was no discussion of Holocaust associations and the representation of Holocaust survivors. The American critics unanimously rated Golan’s film better than the two American productions, yet not all the reviews in the USA were positive.⁵⁰ In addition to winning the Golden Globe award, it was nominated for an Oscar in 1977 in the category of best foreign language film. This nomination was unusual since the Academy usually does not allow action films to be nominated. Golan lost the Oscar by one vote to Moshe Mizrahi, an ex-Israeli director who migrated to France and directed a version of *The Life before Us*. Golan claimed that the fact that two Israelis were competing against each other was a great thing, not only for the two of them, but also for the Israeli film industry. For him, the nomination represented the peak of his cinematic career.⁵¹

Conclusion

The Eichmann trial exposed Israeli society to numerous lengthy testimonies of Holocaust survivors. These revelations began to change the ways in which survivors were portrayed in Israeli feature films, as opposed to the shallow portrayals of the 1940s’ and 1950s’ films, in which broken people turned into “new Jews” thanks to the help of Sabras. The myth of the “new Jew” that peaked after the Six-Day War and continued until the Yom Kippur War was problematic for the image of Holocaust survivors, and brought back the shallow, even negative representations from the 1940s and 1950s. Even the harsh consequences of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, which shattered the image of the invincible “new Jew,” did not restore the nuanced images of Holocaust survivors. From 1967 until the late 1980s, the complex portrayal of Holocaust survivors was marginalised within the discourse of Israeli cinema. *He Walked through the Fields* and *Operation Thunderbolt* placed Holocaust survivors only as supporting characters and strengthened their role as antithesis to the heroic “new Jew.” Israeli feature films placed Holocaust survivors in the role of protagonists again only from the late 1980s onward. Cinema scholars claim that as of that period, the negative homogeneous and superficial representation of survivors dissipated and was replaced by

⁴⁹ “Mivza Yonatan.” 4.05.1995, no author, no newspaper name, *Tel Aviv Cinematheque Library Collection* [Hebrew].

⁵⁰ T. SHAW: *Cinematic Terror...*, pp. 123–143.

⁵¹ S. DUVDEVANI, M. PERHOVSKY: “Menahem Golan...”

a more complex image. Contrary to these notions,⁵² I argue that the problematic image of Holocaust survivors as broken people living on the margins of society has remained almost unchanged in Israeli feature films until the present (besides few exceptions). Instead of addressing the complexity of the trauma and the varied facets of survivor identities, Israeli feature films from the late 1980s often continue to replicate the same superficial imagery, portraying negative images of survivors collapsing under the burden of the past and losing their grip on reality.⁵³

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⁵² N. GERTZ: *Makhela aheret...*, pp. 42–77; M. ZIMMERMAN: *Al tigu...*, pp. 250–334.

⁵³ See also: L. STEIR-LIVNY: *Shtei Panim bamar’a yezug nizolei hashoah bakolnoa haisraeli*. Jerusalem 2009, pp. 96–204 [Hebrew].

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Liat Steir-Livny

Obraz ocalałych z Holocaustu w izraelskich filmach pełnometrażowych powstałych po wojnie sześciodniowej

Streszczenie

W wyniku drugiej wojny światowej około 450 tysięcy osób ocalałych z Holocaustu wyemigrowało do nowopowstającego Izraela. W izraelskich filmach fabularnych skomplikowane relacje nowoprzybyłych z Żydami, którzy już zamieszkiwali te tereny, zostały przedstawione w sposób niezwykle powierzchowny. Ocaleni często byli ukazywani jako ludzie podupadli na ciele i duchu, których rany mogły się zagoić wyłącznie w Izraelu. Po procesie Eichmanna w 1961 roku pojawiły się pierwsze próby kinematograficzne dążące do ukazania bardziej zawiłych obrazów ocalałych. Takie filmy jak *In Hamartet* czy *Eshet Hagibor* starały się zbudować taki obraz, przedstawiając ocalałych jako osoby odbudowujące swe życie w cieniu traumy, co przeciwstawiało się reprezentacjom wyniszczonych ludzi, którzy dzięki wsparciu Żydów weteranów mogą stać się „nowymi Żydami”, powielanym w kinie lat 40. i 50. XX wieku. Mit „nowego Żyda” osiągnął punkt kulminacyjny po wojnie sześciodniowej. W niniejszym artykule autorka pokazuje, że euforia wywołana wojną z 1967 roku była niezwykle problematyczna dla wizerunku ocalałych z Holocaustu, przywracając ich powierzchowne, a nawet negatywne, reprezentacje znane z lat 40. i 50. Teza ta oparta jest na analizach dwóch niezwykle wpływowych filmów powstałych w pierwszej dekadzie po wydarzeniach z 1967 roku, mianowicie: *Hu halachbasadot* (Yosef Millo, 1967) oraz *Mivtsa Yonatan* (Menahem Golan, 1977). Artykuł pokazuje, w jaki sposób oba te filmy lokowały ocalałych na marginesie opowieści, umacniając ich antytetyczną pozycję względem heroicznego i wojowniczego „nowego Żyda”.

Słowa kluczowe: Holocaust, ocaleni z Holocaustu, kultura Izraela, kino izraelskie, konflikt izraelsko-arabski