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## After-effects : The representation of the Holocaust, its universal moral implication, and the transgenerational transformation of the trauma based on the Israeli documentary film "Oy Mama"

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The Holocaust has found ample expression in Israeli documentary cinema throughout the years. The cinematic representations were influenced by the changing Holocaust awareness in Israel, and simultaneously influenced these changes, while taking an active part in the changing perceptions. From 1945 until the 1960s, films emphasized the Zionist lessons of the Holocaust and focused on a national transformation of Holocaust survivors from ashes to renewal. Due to various historical events from the 1960s through the 1980s, Holocaust consciousness in Israel began to change (Ne'eman Arad 2003: 5–26; Ofer 2013: 70–85; Porat 2011: 357–378). In documentaries that were produced in that era, the Holocaust, Holocaust survivors, and the Jewish past in the Diaspora began appearing in a more complex way. An immense change in the representation of the Holocaust and the Holocaust survivors in documentaries appeared from the 1980s onward. The role of second-generation Holocaust survivors in this process has been a significant one. Many documentaries began representing Holocaust survivors as the protagonists, focusing on their post-trauma and sometimes examining the relationship of Holocaust survivors with their children (Loshitzky, 2001: 32–71; Gertz 2004: 78–102; Steir-Livny 2009: 96–147).

Since the late 1990s, third-generation Holocaust survivors have been producing documentaries that deal with the Holocaust from their own perspective and represent its effect on the grandchildren and on the Israeli present.

The case study of the paper is the documentary film *Oy Mama* (Noa Maiman; Orna Ben-Dor Niv, 2010). Noa Maiman is a third-generation Holocaust survivor. Orna Ben-Dor is a second-generation Holocaust survivor who has directed several films regarding Holocaust survivors, their memories and their trauma [*Biglal haMilhama haHi* (*Because of that war*), 1988; *Shever Anan* (*Cloudburst*), 1988; *Eretz Hadasha* (*New Land*), 1994 *Ima Tagidi* (*Say Mother*), 2009]. Even though Ben-Dor is signed as co-director, the film is referred to in the media as Maiman's film. In the documentary, third generation Holocaust survivor Maiman explores the way the trauma of her 95-year-old grandmother, Fira, influenced the second and third generation, and the way it combines in the life of Fira's Peruvian caregiver, Magna, and Magna's 5 year-old daughter, Firita, who are about to be deported from Israel.

The paper will start by locating the third-generation documentaries in the context of Holocaust documentaries in Israel. The center of the paper will focus on the analysis of *Oy Mama* and the complex combination it generates between generations, past and present, Jewish-Israelis and foreign workers. As opposed to psychological research, which questions the transgenerational transformation of the trauma, the paper will show how Noa claims that the Holocaust shaped the identity of the second and third generation in her family. The paper will also show how by using the stories of Magna and Firita, Noa preserves stories of a disenfranchised group, which is neglected in hegemonic discourse and turns Magna and Firita to partners in a subversive narrative that challenges the canonic commemoration of the Holocaust in Israel. The paper will show how through the combination of Fira's, Magna's and Firita's stories, Noa asks, not only to commemorate a familial Holocaust story, but also to enable the viewers to interpret the present through the past, hoping it will help the plea of the foreign worker.

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## Introduction: Israeli Holocaust Documentaries

Approximately 450,000 Holocaust survivors immigrated to the Jewish *Yishuv* (pre-state Israel), and after 1948 – Israel. The Holocaust survivors' immigration, their encounter with the native Jewish population and the way they deal with their trauma has found ample expression in Israeli documentary cinema throughout the years, which can be divided to three main periods: 1945 until 1961; 1961 until the 1980s and from the late 1980s until the present (Zimmerman, 2002; Gertz, 2004; Steir-Livny, 2009).

In the first period (1945 until 1961) the documentaries were dominated by ideological considerations and distinctively propagated Zionist ideas. They served as an artistic platform through which the Zionist establishment sought to display its political, national, and economic achievements. To this end, most documentaries were produced in English and then translated into myriad languages and distributed throughout the world.

In the documentaries, life prior to the Holocaust and the effects of the trauma on the survivors were not represented. The filmmakers organized a historical narrative that led from an abstract national disaster to a collective national renaissance that was the center of the films. The Zionist assimilation of Holocaust survivors in these films was linked to the erasure of their memories. This narrative clearly reflected and corroborated the Zionist narrative which regarded the Land of Israel as the only place where the survivors could heal and begin a new life. The national initiation in these documentaries, proved to the world the need to establish a Jewish State in the Land of Israel and, after its establishment – to strengthen it [for example, *The Road to Liberty* (Norman Lurie, 1946); *Behind the Blockades* (Bill Zimmerman, 1947); *Land of Hope* (1947) *Our Way of Life* (Baruch Dinar, 1958) (Zimmerman, 2002: 27–215; Steir-Livny, 2009: 7–68).

The second period (1961 until the 1980s) was affected by some historical events. During the Adolf Eichmann trial (1961) Israelis were exposed to numerous testimonies which drew them closer to the complexity of the Jewish predicament during the Holocaust (Yablonka, 2001). This ideological shift intensified during the waiting period before the Six Day War (May, 1967), and after the Yom Kippur War (October, 1973) This period is characterized by identification with the Jewish Diaspora in Europe and by creating similarities between Jewish fate and Israeli fate. (Gutwein 2009: 36–64).

The documentaries produced in that era started to display a more complex picture of the past in Europe and its echoes in the Israeli present and began to discuss previously marginalized topics. The films began to convert the Zionist revival to an in-depth discussion of the Holocaust [*Holocaust* (Ben Kurtzer, 1975); *Why Not Bomb Auschwitz?* (Hananiah Amotz, 1972)]; a discussion of personal traumas [*Like a Phoenix*, (Igal Bursztyn, 1972)] and the complex immigration to Israel [*The 8<sup>th</sup> Blow* (Jacques Ehrlich, Haim Gouri and David Bergman, 1974); *The Last Sea* (Jacques Ehrlich, Haim Gouri & David Bergman, 1979)] (Gertz, 2004: 78–102. Steir-Livny 2009: 69–95).

In the third period (from the 1980s onward), the Holocaust became an important part of Israeli everyday discourse. It was made a permanent feature in both the high school curriculum and matriculation exams. In addition, more and more Holocaust survivors began to publish their memoirs while the second and third generation Holocaust survivors began to discuss the ways in which the trauma had affected their lives, and showcase the relationship with

their parents and grandparents through art (Porat 2011: 357–378; Steir-Livny 2009: 96–204; Milner: 19–35).

*Sboah* (1985), the nine-hour film by Claude Lanzmann that garnered considerable praise, greatly influenced discussion of the Holocaust as part of the documentaries made in the world and in Israel. In every country where Holocaust survivors found shelter, testimonial films began to be produced. In addition, technological advances that lowered the costs of filming led to a wave of Holocaust documentaries.

In this era, the numbers of Holocaust documentaries had intensified and their narratives deepen the changes that had already begun to appear in the 1960s and 1970s. The documentaries of the 1980s and 1990s, many of them directed by second-generation Holocaust survivors, focused on individual stories, rather than on the collective story and addressed the Holocaust's impact on Holocaust survivors and their offspring. The protagonists were often the Holocaust survivors, and these documentaries afforded a great deal of screen time to the survivors and to their memories [for example, *Because of that War* (Orna Ben-Dor, 1998); *Choice and Destiny* (Tzipi Reibenbach, 1993)]. Unlike films from the previous decades, the documentaries from the 1980s and 1990s rejected the utopian representation of the initiation process and portrayed a mosaic of identities of Holocaust survivors who were portrayed in a complex way, living between the past and the present [*Hugo* (Yair Lev, 1989); *Hugo 2* (Yair Lev, 2008); *Menucha's Film* (Eliezer Shapiro, 2004)]. Some films described journeys of Holocaust survivors and their children back to Europe [*Tango of Slaves* (Ilan Ziv, 1992), *Daddy, Come to the Fair* (Nitza Gonen, 1993); *Pizza in Auschwitz* (Moshe Zimmerman, 2008)] or journeys conducted by the second generation after their parents' death [*Six Million and One* David Fisher, 2011]. Other films deal with the complexity of inner relations between Jews in the concentration camps [*Kapo* (Danny Sutton, 1999); *The Kozalchik Affair* (Roni Ninio, 2015), criticize the attitude of the Jewish *Yishuv* leaders towards European Jews in the Holocaust [*The Drain Dilemma* (Erez & Nahum Laufer, 2006)], and criticize the way in which the Holocaust memory affects the relationship to Arabs in Israel's present [*The Servants of Memory* (Eyal Sivan, 1990); *Don't Touch Me in the Holocaust* (Asher Talalim, 1994)] (Gertz 2004: 78–102; Steir-Livny 2009: 96–147).

The third-generation Holocaust survivors in Israel grew up and matured in the late 1960s and the 1970s, times in which the awareness of the Holocaust in Israel underwent a significant change. Characteristics of this intense Holocaust awareness in Israel are imprinted in the third-generation Holocaust survivors and are represented in different cultural fields: art, television, fringe theater, alternative ceremonies, literature and cinema (Steir-Livny, 2014).

The documentaries they have been producing since the late 1990s [such as *Hadira* [*The Flat*], (Arnon Goldfinger, 2011); *Heye Shalom Peter Schwartz* [*Goodbye Herr Schwartz*], (Yael Reuveny, 2013); *Hasodot shel ida* [*Aida's Secrets*] (Alon Swartz, 2016)] continue the narrative of the second-generation documentarists, but also turn to highlight new and other subjects, which are an integral part of contemporary Holocaust awareness in Israel.

## Oy Mama as an I Movie

*I Movies* are films whose protagonists are the directors, and they focus on their life, memories, family, encounters with their surroundings, and the

conflicts that bother them. But these films do not only document a private story; they mostly reflect wider cultural, social, political, historical and/or economic issues. These films connect private memory and collective memory, and reflect broader subjects than just a specific personal story. As opposed to the classic perception of the documentary as 'objective' and the director as a spectator – 'a fly on the wall' – in these films the directors are the protagonists and they are completely involved in the scenes. The 'voice of God' that appeared in documentaries in the first half of the 20th century and sounded full of confidence from a position of absolute knowledge is replaced by the directors' voices who share their questions, hesitations and dilemmas with the audience. This cinematic structure generates a self-journey which has wider social implications. Thus, the *I Movie* serves to establish the director's identity, and simultaneously presents social, political, cultural or economic issues that are a part of a much wider social discussion (Marangoly George 1996; Lane 2002; Duvdevani, 2010).

Duvdevani claims that the personal films of the second-generation Holocaust survivors are not considered *I Movies*. He claims that these films reflect the need to listen to the survivors' stories and make peace with them (Duvdevani, 2010). The grandchildren grew up at a period in which the Holocaust was an integral part of the Israeli cultural center stage, a time when the memory of the Holocaust in Israel and around the world was better known by the memories of the survivors through documentation (such as the documentation project of Holocaust survivors' testimonies by Spielberg and Yale), through memorial institutes (such as *Yad Vashem*, which in recent years has uploaded testimonies to the Internet and, by doing so, has disclosed them to the public), through books of memoirs that have multiplied in recent decades by Holocaust survivors, and through films that placed the survivors and their stories at the center of the cinematic collective memory.

In *Oy Mama*, Noa deals with bits and pieces of her grandmother's story: the abortion she had to undergo in the ghetto, her attempts to survive, her encounter with Stacha – the Polish lady who hid and saved her. The Holocaust is always present in the film, which also deals with the trauma's effects. Many scenes deal with the way the Holocaust had affected Noa's life and identity. Noa appears in the scenes, reveals her feelings, narrates the film with her voice over, and does not just interview others; she seeks to describe the mental processes she undergoes, and her journey to the past is a self-reflecting journey into her hybrid identity.

Noa photographs herself at home in her grandfather's chair, which she kept, and shows how she has made her home into a personal museum to the Holocaust. She places herself in scenes talking to her family members and especially to her grandmother, Fira, and in scenes depicting key events in the lives of her family associated with the Holocaust. She includes scenes of intimate conversations held between her and her father and brother in which she tries to understand the significance of intergenerational transference of the trauma, and she accompanies the film with her voice-over explaining her pain, identification and the way she experiences the journey into the past.

The personal dimension of *I Movies* is not expressed only in the director's voice-over accompanying the film, but also in the special way Noa makes herself present and arranges the secondary voices in the film (voices of interviewees or events depicted in the film, helping to shape the world of the filmmaker/protagonist (Lane 2002; Gottlieb-Kimchi 2009).

*Oy Mama* is not only an attempt to perpetuate the trauma but, for Noa, it is an opportunity to examine how her family experiences the trauma, and

how they differ from or resemble her regarding the issue of intergenerational transference. Noa reveals in conversations with her father that this is her journey, her search. She tries to understand why she is trying to preserve and perpetuate, why she is living her grandparents' past. She indicates that the trauma influenced her as early as the age of eighteen to become 'the family historian.' During the film, she shows how she tries to write her family's history, working on the family tree. She knows all the details, the dates. She is anxious to know, to ask, to research. She wants to know exactly every detail (for example, what Stacha, who saved her grandmother, looked like, what clothes she wore, etc.).

Marianne Hirsch argues that the Holocaust, as represented in the cultural works of second-generation Holocaust survivors, is not based on direct experience. It is an indirect affinity, structured on imagination and on memory that is more inherited than an actual memory. Hirsch defines that affinity as 'postmemory,' and she maintains that it is a very strong form of memory, because its links with the source are not mediated by real memories of experienced events. Instead, they derive from the filling-in of open divides through imagination and creative work. 'Post-memory' characterizes the experience of those controlled by events that happened before they were born, and who apply their imagination in places where they could not remember (Hirsch 1996: 659–667). Hilene Flanzbaum contends that one can also apply Hirsch's 'postmemory' to members of the third generation, who engage with places where they never stepped foot, in traumas they never underwent (Flanzbaum 2012: 32–35). Their theories echo Noa's self-representation.

Noa films herself surrounded by piles of documents, photographs and old items belonging to her grandparents while relating in voice-over: 'In recent years, I have been sinking into recollections that are not mine.' When she arranges her grandmother's pictures, she says in the voice-over that Fira would not have believed had she known how much Noa is lost in her past.

The blur between the grandmother's past and the granddaughter's present is also reflected in the way the film is edited. The testimonies of Fira do not appear as a linear narrative but as branches spreading throughout the film, integrated in scenes that describe Noa's feelings, her research, her sinking into the memories. Furthermore, in the interviews themselves, Fira often starts to tell her stories, has difficulty in finishing them (because of the emotional burden), stops, and Noa complements what was missing in voice-over. For example, when Noa asks Fira to talk about her separation from her husband, Roman, the scene becomes so difficult for Fira that she gets confused, needs a glass of water and cannot complete the story. Only from a distance, in the editing room, is Noa able to add in her voice-over the end – Roman was murdered in Treblinka. Thus, the historical narrative is presented not just by the witness herself but also by Noa. This cinematic choice breaks the division between the direct witness and the granddaughter who is submerged in memories that are not hers. The way Noa lives her grandmother's past proves the intensity of the postmemory.

During the film, Noa confesses in her voice-over how the process of becoming the family historian and the many interviews she conducted with her grandmother, which drew her even further into her grandmother's world, were difficult for her emotionally: 'everything was blurred for me, the past, the present, her memories and my imagination,' she says in her voice-over while she presents a photomontage of two photographs: one of herself and the other – a photograph of her grandmother, that merge into a single entity. The

memories take Noa over until she declares: 'I felt I was losing grip. At the end of the visit to Poland, I had to take a break from everything. Even from my grandmother. Once I had gathered enough strength, I could go back to my grandmother.' At the end of the film, she seals the crates stamped 'Memoirs of My Grandmother' and hopes that the journey has helped her relieve the burden from her grandmother's shoulders, and no less 'from myself as well.'

## Transgenerational Transmission of the Trauma to the Second Generation

There are more than 400 articles discussing the question of intergenerational transmission of the Holocaust trauma, from the survivors to their children. In the 1960s, when the issue began to be studied, it was clear that the second generation had common characteristics of unique mental health problems, unifying them as a group. In the last decades, however, the perception that they are a separate group is being questioned (Kellermann 2007: 286–303).

The research studies examine whether the individuals belonging to the second generation are a distinct group in terms of their characteristics and whether this group has unique and more substantial psychological disorders compared to other groups in the population. The results of the studies can be divided into three main schools of thought. The first school of thought claims that second-generation Holocaust survivors have clear characteristics that are unique and distinguish them from other groups. Examples of typical attributes are: suspiciousness, fear, over-protectiveness, interpersonal problems, feelings of grief and guilt, anger, withdrawnness, a constant, haunting preoccupation with the Holocaust, and more (For example, Wardi, 1990; Solomon 2007: 304–336).

Research studies from the second school of thought argue that second generation Holocaust survivors have no significant psychological disorders, and that the Holocaust has no long-term consequences on the offspring of the survivors. According to studies from this school of thought, the assumptions made by the first school are stereotypical and plagued by stigma (Hazan 1987: 104–107; Sagi-Schwartz et al 2008: 105–121).

Scholars from the third school of thought speak of an interaction between parents and children, which is unique to the relationship between the Holocaust survivors and their offspring, but it is expressed in many different ways and varies from family to family (Solomon and Chaitin 2007).

The third-generation Holocaust survivors began to be studied in the 1980s, when psychologists in the United States who were treating a seven-year-old boy, the grandson of Holocaust survivors, claimed that the effects of the Holocaust strongly affected the child, and that the issue deserved comprehensive treatment in the psychiatric community (Rosenthal and Rosenthal 1980: 572–580). Since then, psychologists and psychiatrists have been arguing about the term 'third-generation Holocaust survivors' and its characteristics. From the many studies, three main schools of thought may be found: In the first school of thought, there are researchers who claim that it is possible to find 'intergenerational transference' in the third-generation (Scharf and Mayseless 2011: 1539–1553; Scharf 2007: 603–622). Researchers in the second school of thought claim that the third generation, as a group,



do not have distinguishing trauma characteristics (Sagi-Schwartz et.al 2008: 105–121). In-between these two schools of thought is a third approach that discusses the impact of the Holocaust on grandchildren, but notes a wide spectrum of reactions to trauma (Bar-On 1994; Litvak-Hirsch Dan Bar-On 2007: 243–271; Litvak-Hirsch and Lazar 2014).

As opposed to the research, which claims that second-and third generation Holocaust survivors don't have clear characteristics, Noa represents a clear transgenerational transfer of the trauma to the second and third generation which completely shaped their lives and their identity in various ways. Furthermore, the film represents the differences in the way the trauma was transferred to the second and third generations in the Maiman family, and unveils the differences between the way Noa's father and her aunt interpreted the Holocaust as well as the way she, Noa, understands the trauma and is affected by it.

*Oy Mama* shows how Fira's (the survivor) children were named after their family members who perished in the Holocaust: her daughter Michel is named after Fira's brother (Michael) and her son Arie is named after her unborn child (Fira had an abortion in the Ghetto because she understood that she would not be able to raise a family in that situation). In one scene, Michel tells Noa that the dead were always an integral part of their lives. According to her, the anxiety from the unexpected had transferred from Fira to her and to Arie her brother and they were always preoccupied with planning an escape route, so if a disaster would happen, they would know what to do. That perception of life drove them to learn various languages – because one could never know if and when they would have to escape to another country and start over. That is why they learned not to get attached to property ('Good education you can take with you when you need to escape, houses and dolls you can't'). This was also the reason they always had private lessons and not dancing classes and activities, such as those which just 'waste your time.' Michel relates that from childhood she understood that she always had to be prepared for a disaster 'wherever you are, always prepare the next destination...have a gateway plan, and these notions were transferred to me.' Liat, her cousin, claims that this is the reason Michel speaks seven different languages.

In another scene, Arie, Fira's son and Noa's father, relates that the perception of the beat-up, humiliated Jew accompanied him all his life and caused him to shape his identity as the complete opposite ('Burning self-esteem is the worst...it's a terrible feeling of anger and frustration [...] I feel that my people and my family were humiliated and the anger is so deep and doesn't dissolve'). According to Arie, his father's (Fira's husband) story, how he felt like a bird whose wings were chopped off was tattooed in his soul. Arie tells Noa that he had promised himself that he would never be like that. There would never be someone who would be able to have control over him in that way, or as he phrases it: 'It won't happen again.'

## Changing Perspectives: Second Generation versus Third Generation

The film echoes many studies regarding the close and warm connection between many Holocaust survivors and their grandchildren in Israel. For example, Bar-On and Litvak-Hirsch ((2007: 243–271) note that the third generation living

in Israeli society differs considerably from the society in which their parents had lived in terms of awareness of the Holocaust. For the third generation, the Holocaust is more of a myth than a reality of ongoing life, yet the family's past shapes the perception of their reality. The third generation, unlike their parents, who had experienced being close to Holocaust survivors at the height of the tension of instability between past and future, grew up in a sheltered atmosphere with a generation separating them from the direct trauma. The study shows that the grandchildren of Holocaust victims were educated in a society that had already changed its complex attitude to Holocaust survivors. Problematic perceptions that appeared in the first decades of Israel, such as the dichotomy between those who had fought and those who had not (and the question of how they survived) were replaced by the view of survivors as heroes who had proven their immense ability to overcome atrocities. It seems that this cultural atmosphere facilitated their closeness to their grandparents. The third generation are able to see their grandparents in a more intimate light than their parents. From the survivors' side, the third generation represents a return to 'normalization': the grandchildren are proof that they have indeed succeeded in rebuilding their lives after the War (Chaitin 2007: 418–435; Telem 2013: 4–5).

These studies show that the grandchildren perceive their grandparents as figures who can help them, and they express interest in their past. The grandparents, in turn, function as the connecting link with the extended family and provide a sense of continuity. Usually, they contribute to the grandchild's development and have a positive impact on their values (Goren 2004; Hogman 1995; Fogelman 2008).

Unlike the second-generation Holocaust survivors who often focused in their documentaries on a complex and difficult relationship with their parents, *Oy Mama* which discusses the influence of the Holocaust on the family generates a much more accepting perception of the Holocaust survivors. Noa lacks any kind of hard feelings, critique or judgment. The way she represents her grandparents is with much more admiration, closeness and curiosity and the film reflects a deep emotional bond between her and her grandparents.

While the transgenerational transfer of the trauma to the second generation already appeared in second-generation Holocaust survivors' documentaries, their tone is completely different than *Oy Mama*. Despite the fact that Arie and Michel's stories resemble the stories told in the second-generation documentaries, Noa's control of the film gives them a different meaning. These stories are transferred to the audience without any bitterness, accusations or the hard feelings that are often found in the second-generation documentaries. The film does not turn to a painful representation of a complex relationship with the survivors. In *Oy Mama* the trauma's affect is represented without any judgment.

The research that claims that the grandchildren's relationship with the Holocaust survivors is much more open and warm is reflected in the film. Even though her father and aunt do not turn against Fira, Noa doesn't show any great intimacy between them. They respect her, they sit together and have a family dinner, and there is no resentment. But when describing her relationship with her grandmother, a closer and more symbiotic relationship appears.

During the interviews in *Oy Mama*, Noa holds her grandmother's hand. In other scenes, she supports her grandmother when she breaks down emotionally, hugs and kisses her. In her voice-over, Noa tells the viewers that she misses her grandfather whom she adored very much, and who passed away when

she was eleven years old. She claims that, at the very moment he died, she felt a strong, unbearable pain, like a sword in her chest. In the final titles of the film, she writes, ‘This film is to honor people like my grandfather who had inexhaustible strength to live a life after an inconceivable tragedy and to start new families on the ruins of their old world.’

On the one hand, *Oy Mama* shows a resemblance between the way the Holocaust was integrated in the lives of the second generation and the third generation. Noa, the director, and Ohad, her brother, like their father and their aunt, are very affected by the trauma. The constant anxiety from an unknown but always close disaster causes Ohad to keep a Ninja sword by his bed. Noa claims that both of them are drenched in exile: her brother traveled across the ocean to live in a different country and she constantly travels to Europe through Fira’s albums. Arie’s perception that the lesson of the Holocaust is power, is transferred to Ohad (‘the concept of a strong Jewish state is a self-perception that I’m proud to be a part of’), but he simultaneously tries to run away from his original identity: he moves far away and claims that New York enables him to free himself from the burden of the past by becoming a citizen of the world (‘There is something in New York that enables you to ignore the place you came from’). For Noa, the ‘lessons’ of the Holocaust are more universal than Jewish or Zionist. She tries to make Israeli society understand that the lesson of the traumatic past is also compassion towards ‘others,’ in the Israeli present, such as the foreign workers in Israel.

## Moral Implications of the Holocaust

Research studies claim the pride that the third generation holds towards their grandparents is being channeled into empathy, political activism and awareness about the suffering of others (Hogman 1995; Fogelman 2008). Beyond the personal family story depicted in *Oy Mama*, Noa uses this story to address the persecution of foreign workers in Israel. She does this by focusing not only on the past, but on Fira’s present: she lives in an elderly person’s home with her foreign worker caregiver from Peru, named Magna, and Magna’s daughter, five-year-old Firita, who is facing deportation.

The issue of foreign workers in Israel has been on the public agenda in recent years. In the late 1980s, foreign workers from many countries began arriving in Israel, including Thailand, China, South America, West Africa and the Philippines. They worked mainly as household workers, caregivers, and agricultural and construction laborers. Those who stayed legally and others who sometimes stayed illegally put down roots in Israel, raised families and had children. From the 1990s, an attempt was made to reduce the number of foreign workers in Israel through deportation procedures. In recent years, the struggle has been revolving not only around the workers themselves but also around their children who were born in Israel (Natan 2015). In August 2010, the government adopted recommendations of the inter-ministerial committee to examine the status of children of foreign workers (Cabinet Resolution 2183) which decided to grant residency to hundreds of children who met specific criteria, such as integration in the education system, duration of their stay in Israel and knowledge of the Hebrew language, and to deport children who did not meet these criteria back to their home countries.

Activists on this subject, such as the *Israeli Children Association* and others are working for this cause and demonstrating against the implementation of the deportation decisions in order to keep these foreign workers and their children in the country. In this struggle, they sometimes combine the Holocaust with the foreign workers' plea. Websites dealing with foreign workers and their rights allocate a place for the rights of Holocaust survivors, and the responses by Holocaust survivors to this issue are widely reported in the media. For example, in a letter sent to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu that was made publicly available, Holocaust survivors wrote: 'We were witnesses to the 'Selection,' we cannot look at the pictures of unhappy children who are not responsible for their situation and remain indifferent.' Some intellectuals and scholars are turning the spotlight onto the universal moral implications of the Holocaust, which, they believe should be implemented in Israeli policy. They are raising the claim that the lesson of the horrors of the Holocaust should affect the shaping of the policy expressing sensitivity and openness, sometimes even more than the obligation arising from the rules of international law (Gabison 2009).

Noa began to be active in the fight against the deportation of children of foreign workers in 2009, volunteering in the *Israeli Children Association*. She even announced that if the deportation orders were carried out, she and other activists would hide the children of foreign workers in order to prevent them being deported. 'The connection to the issue was created at the most personal level when my grandmother, a 95-year-old Holocaust survivor, asked us to take care of "her granddaughter, Firita" the five-year-old daughter of Magna, her grandmother's Peruvian caregiver.' Noa adds in an interview:

'My grandmother was terrified of the whole idea, and we were all concerned about the fate of our friends when the 'Oz Unit' [the Unit that looks for illegal workers in order to deport them] started to operate [...]. My grandmother, a Polish Holocaust survivor, was hidden for two and a half years. I'm not comparing things, but there is a kind of feminine kindness prevailing and perhaps an attempt by my grandmother to bring good to the world' (Weiler Polak 2009).

In her film, Noa obscures the boundaries between the Holocaust and the foreign workers struggle, as the film moves between two timelines: the past, when during the Holocaust Fira was saved thanks to Stacha, the Polish woman who had hidden her and a number of other Jews in her home; and the present, when Fira relates to Magna, her caretaker and her daughter, whom she treats like her own granddaughter. The idea that unites these two timelines is the idea of 'feminine kindness' that should affect wider circles.

The 50 minutes' documentary opens with little Firita running around the elderly person's home shouting 'You won't catch me, you won't catch me'. The symbolic elements in her game are discovered very quickly as the film turns to introduce Magna and Firita, and the way they are being hunted in Israel. Almost 9:30 minutes at the beginning of the film are dedicated to them, their familial warm relationship with Fira and their poor condition in Israel. Only later, does Noa turn to deal with the Holocaust's effect on Fira's biological offspring. Noa relates to their persecution also in other scenes. Thus, Magna and Firita are not supporting characters, and their plea is an integral and very important part of the film.

The film reveals Fira's process of transfer – a condition in which the individual receiving care transfers the emotions he/she feels towards someone who had been part of their life in the past, to someone else in the present. Fira transfers the feelings for Stacha, the Polish woman who had hid her

during the Holocaust, to Magna and Firita. While Magna takes care of Fira, in fact it is Fira who is portrayed in the film as being a strong and dominant woman, taking Magna and Firita under her wings and protecting them from persecution. Fira tries to give Magna a home and shelter, just as Stacha had given her. The parallelism between the past and present is clearly echoed in a scene in which Fira says that she was giving back with all her heart to Magna that which Stacha had given her (Habia 2012). Noa uses her brother as a mouthpiece when, in a conversation between them, he claims that 'there is something symbolic when someone helps another person at some point, and years later, life comes back in the same way. Basically, Magna and Firita also owe a favor to that Polish woman.'

The question – who is saving whom – arises again in the story of Romek, Stacha's nephew. Stacha had not received the 'Righteous Among the Nations' award. The film shows that Fira and her family had worked for years to bestow this title upon her, but the establishment commemorating the Holocaust only consented after Stacha's death, and her nephew Romek received the title in her place. The film shows how the Maiman family located Romek and brought him to Israel to accept the award in Stacha's name. Against the background of scenes of Romek's visit to Yad Vashem, Noa wonders in her voice-over whether when they had brought Romek to Israel after his recovery from cancer in order to award him with the 'Righteous Among the Nations' title, they had given him a few more years to live, and so here, her grandmother 'is the one who saved a Polish person.'

In one of the first scenes in the film, Fira teaches little Firita a Polish lullaby, and they sing it together. Noa uses this joint song as a soundtrack for other scenes describing the daily life of Fira, Magna and Firita – scenes of them preparing food, playing, preparing for sleep. The contrast between these scenes that describe the everyday life in Israel and the song that belongs to the past in Europe symbolizes similarities between times and obscures the dichotomy between native Israelis and foreign workers through the scenes that document two major myths in Israeli culture: Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day and Independence Day: In one scene, little Firita tells Fira enthusiastically that she learned about the Holocaust in kindergarten, and how 'The soldiers fought against the Nazis.' In another scene, Noa films the celebrations in the kindergartens in Herzliya. Little Firita is presented as a symbol of Israelis: wearing a T-shirt with the Star of David, an army cap and saluting like a soldier. According to the film, all the Israeli myths are already embedded in Firita, but the Israeli government refuses to acknowledge it.

Towards the end of the film, on the background images of Magna and Firita, Noa tells in a voice-over that they are living in Israel on probation. Firita's aunt was deported from the country and Firita's father is pending deportation. 'No matter how hard my grandmother is trying to give her a safe home, Firita cannot be a citizen of no place,' she states. Noa concludes the debate on the subject in a transition to discussions with her grandmother about how the Holocaust affected her ('Is the woman you were before the War and the woman you were after the War one and the same?'). This personal question represents a much wider collective 'lesson' of the Holocaust Noa wishes to highlight in the film – how Jewish-Israelis, remembering what they have been through, should treat foreigners and others.

## Partial Redemption and Lack of Catharsis

Documentary films produced during the first decades of Israel, represented national salvation of the Holocaust survivors – assimilation into Israelism as an act of being liberated from memories of the past. The ending of these films was final, unambiguous and bore a clear message that national consciousness heals the trauma.

The documentaries produced since the 1980s turned the Holocaust into a personal experience. They made it clear that the endings that appeared in early documentary films do not exist in reality. Immigration to Israel, settling into the country, and raising a new family represent only a partial redemption that do not erase, and will never erase, the memories of the past. In contrast to the documentaries in the first decades of Israel which represented the Holocaust survivors as a homogenous group, the second-generation Holocaust survivors' documentaries presented various ways of dealing with the traumatic past. Their films represented Holocaust survivors who chose to remain silent and not tell their children about the Holocaust, others who talked, some who commemorated through art, others who repressed, some that use music in order to relieve the haunting memories, and others who use black humor as a defense mechanism. According to the films, on the one hand, the protagonists have acclimatized into Israeli society; on the other, they are unable to break free from the past and from its horrors. For them, the family often plays a pivotal role in this partial redemption and serves as a tremendous source of comfort. But the new family does not remove the burden of the memory, either from the survivors or from their children (Gertz 2009: 78–102; Zimmerman 2002: 250–334; Steir-Livny 2009: 96–147).

*Oy Mama* continues this theme of partial family redemption: In reference to her deceased grandfather, Noa tells the viewers that he has left the world with a smile, 'surrounded by his two children and his wife, loved and embraced by his grandchildren.' For Fira, the family is the salvation, both her biological family and her alternative family that she established together with Magna and Firita. In many scenes, Noa shows the warm, loving relationship prevailing between Fira and Magna, and especially between Fira and Firita, who is like a granddaughter to her. The warmth and love she receives from Firita lights up her face during the interaction between them and Firita, who very naturally refers to her as 'grandmother'.

*Oy Mama* leaves the viewers with open-ended questions about the way the third generation bears the trauma and tries to cope with family memories. Towards the end of the film, Noa films herself packing the family photo albums and documents into boxes, explaining the end of the process for her:

"In these boxes are stored small and large items – my grandmother's past, the memories, the nightmares, the dreams, everything. I am closing them in Pandora's boxes in order to give room for life and to leave the dead behind, to remove this journey from her burdened shoulders and perhaps to get away from it myself."

The focus on the 'I' both in this scene and throughout the film reveals that the film is not just her grandmother's journey to the past. It is, to a great extent, a journey of the third generation into the same past that does not let go. Noa closes the box and pushes it aside, and in this way ends the film. But her inability to let go of the past is expressed symbolically when the film

ends: after the fade out to black (a common ending of films) Noa adds scenes from an interview with her grandmother, in which Noa asks Fira to keep on telling her stories ('a few more minutes'). 'Maybe I am talking too much,' protests Fira. 'No, you are not talking too much,' answers Noa, 'You are not talking enough.' Afterwards, Noa continues to postpone the ending of the film, and before the final credits, adds a written thanks to her grandmother and grandfather, and again mentions that her grandfather's first wife and children were murdered by the Nazis. 'I am also living for them,' she adds in the subtitles, thus making it clear that the box that she tried to close and set aside in the final scene has indeed not closed the door on the past.

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