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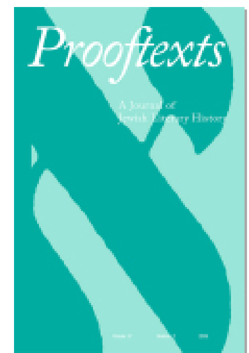

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Trauma from the Perspective of Holocaust Survivors in the Israeli Film *The Cellar* (Natan Gross, 1963)

LIAT STEIR-LIVNY
Sapir Academic College and The Open University of Israel

The Cellar *(*Hamartef, *Natan Gross, 1963) is a groundbreaking film—the only Israeli fictional film created by Holocaust survivors regarding the Holocaust and its aftermath from the perspective of a Holocaust survivor protagonist. Yet it has been largely ignored by studies on the representation of the Holocaust in Israeli cinema and has not been attributed proper significance. This article is the first to give center stage to this pioneering film. It shows that this under researched film was the marker of change, a first cinematic attempt at relating the story of Holocaust survivors with complexity and depth, which threw aside the shallow narrative of national redemption in Israel, that characterized Israeli cinema in the 1940s and 1950s. Instead it focused on 1930s Germany and the return to Germany after World War II, periods which had thus far been neglected in Israeli cinema. Moreover, the article highlights* The Cellar *as exceptional in comparison to fictional films produced after 1963, which focus mainly on the lives of Holocaust survivors in Israel, and which disregard the themes of life in 1930s Europe, as well as the attempts by survivors to return home after World War II.*

Historical research often cites the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann as a turning point in the Israeli public's awareness of the Holocaust.[1] As the trial began in April of that year, approximately a half million Holocaust survivors were living in Israel. Witnesses from Europe and Israel—110 of them—were summoned to testify. The trial marked the first time Israeli society was so intensely confronted with the personal stories of many survivors from various countries. The testimonies were relayed to the Israeli public via radio and press, day after day, over the course of months. This opened the door for observing their trauma profoundly.[2]

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Eichmann was executed in May 1962. The trial served as a catalyst for establishing projects to commemorate lost Jewish communities, projects in which survivors played an integral role. Changes also became visible in education: the Ministry of Education extended the scope of Holocaust studies, Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day was given a uniform structure, and the first Jewish youth delegations traveled in 1966 and 1967 to the German concentration camps in Poland. During those years, works of literature, poetry, and theater by survivors began to gain recognition, and Israeli non survivor authors also broadened their writing about the Holocaust.[3]

This article will focus on an analysis of *The Cellar* (*Hamartef*, Natan Gross, 1963), a film that was produced in the aftermath of the trial. *The Cellar* is groundbreaking, yet it has been largely ignored by studies on the representation of the Holocaust in Israeli cinema and has not been attributed proper significance.[4] It is the only Israeli fictional film created by Holocaust survivors regarding the Holocaust and its aftermath from the perspective of a Holocaust survivor protagonist. It focuses on the personal story of an individual survivor and is dedicated mostly to memories of Germany in the 1930s and 1940s, as well as post-Holocaust Germany. This article will be the first to give center stage to this pioneering film by analyzing its innovative representations and drawing on information from unpublished interviews with the director. It will also describe the exceptionality of the narrative, in comparison not only to the narratives of Holocaust-related fictional films of the 1940s and 1950s, but also to films produced from the 1960s until the present.

CINEMATIC ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS AND ISRAELIS IN THE 1940s–1960s

The encounter between Holocaust survivors and Israeli society was complex and still evokes disagreement among scholars. Some scholars mention a combination of empathy and indifference, a desire to help alongside insensitivity, and the careful phrasing of a charged and contradiction-ridden encounter.[5] Others harshly criticize the native Jews and the leaders of the Yishuv, and of post-1948 Israel, claiming that the absorption process was insensitive toward the survivors, ignored their pain, and treated their plight with indifference.[6] Some claim that the issue of the Holocaust

had been marginalized within Israeli society and culture up until the Eichmann trial, causing survivors to become ensconced in their silence.[7] Others assert that Holocaust survivors were neither silent nor silenced by other Israelis but played a major role in shaping Israeli awareness of the Holocaust.[8]

Few fictional films dealing with Holocaust survivors were produced between 1945 and 1963. These films were produced with the support of the establishment, had clear ideological agendas, served as artistic platform for the Zionist ideological doctrine. The films revolved around the immigration of Holocaust survivors to Erets-Yisra'el and their successful absorption.[9] Through them, the establishment sought to achieve political, national, and economic goals such as donations to the Zionist movement and recognition of Zionism and its struggle toward a Jewish state in the Land of Israel.

The films focused on the Zionist lesson in the framework of a redemption story that leads survivors from the Holocaust to a Zionist revival. The Holocaust stories of individuals were blurred and submerged within one collective story that vaguely touched on the national disaster and focused on national redemption. The complex encounter of Holocaust survivors with the Jews in Erets-Yisra'el was replaced by a simplistic narrative of a mentorship process in which Holocaust survivors arrive displaying negative qualities and undergo a total metamorphosis with the help of the so-called New Jews in a healing environment. This cinematic representation ignored the self-healing, inner strength, and tireless action which were fundamental traits of Holocaust survivors, as historical research points out. Their successful integration was instead portrayed as being solely dependent on the help of the native Jews.[10]

The representation of the Holocaust and of Holocaust survivors in Israeli cinema has been discussed in several studies. Researchers are unanimous in understanding the representation of this subject during the first decades after the Holocaust as problematic, but there are disagreements about when the perception of the Holocaust and of Holocaust survivors changed in Israeli cinema. Some claim that Israeli cinema ignored the Holocaust from the mid-1950s until the late 1980s, some point to the 1960s as the onset of change, and still others claim that it only occurred in the late 1970s or mid-to-late 1980s.[11] In any case, researchers agree that political and social shifts in Israeli society yielded substantial changes in

the representation of Holocaust survivors as of the late 1980s. *The Cellar* is almost ignored in these debates.[12] I would argue that this under-researched film was the marker of change—a first cinematic attempt at relating the story of Holocaust survivors with complexity and depth, which emphasized the importance of memories and mental scars, while throwing aside the shallow narrative of national redemption and focusing instead on 1930s Germany and the return to Germany after World War II, periods that had thus far been neglected in Israeli cinema. Moreover, *The Cellar* is exceptional in comparison to fictional films produced after 1963, which focus mainly on the lives of Holocaust survivors in Israel, and which disregard the themes of life in 1930s Europe and attempts by survivors to return home after World War II.

THE CELLAR (NATAN GROSS, 1963)

Natan Gross was born in Krakow, Poland and survived the Holocaust by posing as a Christian. After World War II, he became part of the Polish film industry. From 1946 to 1949, in collaboration with filmmaker Saul Goskind, who established the Kinor film company, Gross directed several films in Yiddish, some of which dealt with Holocaust survivors, such as the documentary *Der Yidisher Yeshuv in Nidershlezien* (*The Jewish Settlement in Southern Shlezia*, 1947); *Der Finfter Yortsayt fun Oyfshtand in Varshaver Geto* (T*he Fifth Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, 1948); *Mir Leben Geblibe* (*We Who Survived*, 1948), about Holocaust survivors and Jewish life in Poland after World War II; and the docudrama *Unzere Kinder* (*Our Children*, 1949), which tells the story of child survivors and their encounter with the Yiddish comedians and survivors Shimon Dzigan and Israel Shumacher.[13] In 1950, Gross immigrated to Israel with his wife and son, Yaakov.[14] In Israel, he worked in the film industry and is considered one of the pioneers of Israeli cinema.[15]

The Cellar's frame story concerns Emanuel Scharf, an aging night watchman who has the job of guarding construction scaffolding. He looks back at various events in his life before, during, and after the Holocaust. The film is composed mostly of flashbacks, mainly to the night at the end of World War II when Emanuel returns to his house in Germany after he was liberated from the Dachau

concentration camp. As Emanuel approaches his former home, he learns that Hans, his former friend who had become a Nazi in the 1930s, has moved in. Emanuel's dog, who remained in the house, recognizes Emanuel and barks, causing Emanuel to flee into the cellar in alarm. Upon hearing suspicious noises, Hans locks the cellar door, trapping Emanuel inside. In the cellar, Emanuel finds out that Hans has stored many of his and his family's belongings. Among the many items he discovers are a grandfather clock and a photo album. Upon seeing those objects, Emanuel recalls events from his prewar life: conversations with his father, his relationship with his non-Jewish German lover Lotte, and his liberal school teacher. Emanuel, who was certain up to that point that Hans also murdered Lotte, recognizes her voice inside the house and realizes that she is now Hans's wife. Emanuel also finds Hans's gun among the other items in the cellar. Near the end, Hans, continuing to hear suspicious noises, goes down into the cellar. Emanuel hides, and a single gunshot is heard, but it remains unclear if he has killed Hans. The end of the film returns to present-day Israel, where morning is breaking as Emanuel rings a bell and calls the workers to their jobs. This one-actor art film stars Shimon Yisra'eli, who portrays five characters: Emanuel as an aging night watchman, Emanuel as a school boy, the adult Emanuel returning from Dachau, Emanuel's father, and Emanuel's school teacher.

The unusual story of *The Cellar* is revealed in the last interview of director Natan Gross by his son, Yaakov, a month before Natan's passing, an interview never published until now.[16] Natan Gross calls it "the first film about the Holocaust," but one might say that it is almost the only fictional film made about Jews in Europe in the 1930s and after World War II. The vast majority of Israeli fictional films from the 1940s until the present do not deal with the European Jewish community before, during, and after the Holocaust, but focus on the immigration of Holocaust survivors to Israel and their relationships with their host society.[17]

Gross initially wanted to write about a Jew's returning from Dachau to his home and accidentally entering a cellar where all of his and his father's possessions have been stored by the German tenant who has taken over the house during the war. The Jew's entire life story lies in that cellar, and pivotal events from his life come back to him upon seeing the objects. Gross and Yisra'eli, both Holocaust survivors, met and became friends on the set of a short film directed by Gross. At the

time, Yisra'eli, was a famous actor who had a successful one-man show called: *Just an Ordinary Day*. For both the director and the actor, the Eichmann trial stirred a desire to produce "[a] modest film with a modest budget." Yisra'eli rented a room at the Ramat Aviv Hotel, where Gross spent about ten days writing the screenplay with the assistance of Yisra'eli, who visited him once a day.[18]

Gross included real-life events from his own life and that of his brother Yoram in the script. Natan recounted that, during World War II, he encountered a Nazi officer in Krakow, who inquired after what Natan was doing, demanded that he join Natan and led him into a cellar. He followed Gross with his gun drawn, demanding that he give him money. When the Nazi saw that Gross was utterly penniless, he shouted at him, "Flee quickly, run." Gross ran up the stairs, escaped to the street and never saw the officer again. Gross's influence on the film is evident not only in the writing of the screenplay but also in the way he designed the cellar and the classroom, which were intended to mirror those of his childhood memories.

Gross states that, as a Holocaust survivor, he was reluctant to make a German-language Israeli film. Yet he was faced with a problem: if the protagonist is German and Germany is the backdrop for the entire storyline, how could the film be in Hebrew? Gross derived inspiration from his brother Yoram, who, after having arrived in Israel completely penniless, started working as a night watchman in a new neighborhood undergoing construction. He guarded the scaffolding, which allowed him an opportunity to observe the lives of the families who had already moved into the neighborhood. Gross used this experience as the frame story of the film and as an excuse for the film to be in Hebrew.

A group of Weimar-period art films sometimes labeled as "German expressionism" might have strongly influenced the aesthetics of this film. These art films, which appeared in Germany in the 1920s, were characterized by contrast lighting, twisted perspectives and proportions of space and people, a nightmarish atmosphere, madness, and horror. They are often analyzed as prophetic representations of the collective dark mad forces beneath the decent and rational appearances of the German nation, forces which would erupt during the period of Nazism.[19] Even though Gross writes in his book that German expressionism didn't influence Polish cinema in the 1920s, he notes that Jews who engaged in cinema were up to date

regarding the genres in European and American cinema.[20] One can only assume that Gross, who was well acquainted with Polish, Yiddish, and Western cinema and culture was affected by these representations.

A Survivor's Perspective

Cinematic productions of the 1940s and 1950s reflected the perspective of the absorbing Jewish society. *The Cellar* changed that perspective right from the beginning of the film. During the opening titles, the camera pans overs Emanuel's belongings, scattered all over the cellar. In later scenes, Emanuel puts together the pieces of his past through his renewed encounter with his belongings: clocks, broken dolls, torn books, photo albums.

Unlike the films of the 1940s and 1950s, which were designed to establish Zionist myths and thus focused on large-scale, abstract processes such as the transition from Holocaust to national revival, *The Cellar* focused on small, concrete details. It was the first time that an Israeli Holocaust fictional film put aside the national perspective and focused on the personal and private. Emanuel's voice-over accompanies the scenes, whether in the made-up dialogues he holds in his head (in voice-over) with Lotte or through questions, thoughts, and reflections about the past and present, which he shares with the viewers. The perspective is entirely his own, and the absorbing society is absent in *The Cellar*.

In the films from the 1940s and 1950s, Holocaust survivors appeared to be the protagonists, those undergoing a change from the film's beginning to its end. But in fact they were not the central theme and instead constituted a political tool designed to glorify the Land of Israel and its people, who were the actual center of discussion. This narrative was abandoned by *The Cellar*. Emanuel is at the center of this film, and his past, his memories of his former lover, his thoughts, and the reflections he shares with the audience take over the film. *The Cellar* was the first Israeli fictional film that attempted to enter the mind of a traumatic Holocaust survivor. Because the entire film relies on one actor to portray all the characters, the characters he faces are often represented as shadows, a technique which ties in with the general concept of the film: dealing with demons from the past in a world full of shadows.[21]

Back to Europe: The Representation of Pre- and Post-Holocaust Eras

Europe's pre- and post-Holocaust eras were not represented in Zionist fictional films before *The Cellar*. The ideological political-national and economic goals of the establishment created a didactic narrative in which the Holocaust was reduced to one aspect: the Zionist lesson—proof that the Jewish people need a state of their own. The films opened with the arrival of Holocaust survivors in Erets-Yisra'el. None of the protagonists in these films were represented as people who attempted to go back to their European homes after the Holocaust because such a storyline would have interfered with the desire to portray all Holocaust survivors as devoted Zionists. There was no room in such a narrative for the past as itself, only the past as reflected in its Zionist outcomes.[22]

Unlike these films, *The Cellar* moves among several periods of time. Prewar Germany is shown in scenes with Lotte, memories of Emanuel's father and teacher, and scenes from *Triumph of the Will* (Leni Riefenstahl, 1934) that showcase Nazi parades after the Nazi rise to power.[23] The postwar period appears in scenes of Emanuel's returning from Dachau to his home in Germany. The various aspects of the past make up the lion's share of the film. The Israel of the 1960s is represented only briefly at the beginning and at the end, in contrast to earlier films, which were devoted mainly to a description of the revival in Israel.

The films of the 1940s and 1950s, completely ignored Jewish reactions to Nazism. *The Cellar*, for the first time in Israeli cinema, revealed the dilemmas that plagued the Jews of Europe in general and the Jews in Germany in particular. Emanuel's memories of his father reveal the image of an honorable watchmaker in Germany, dressed in a suit, standing alongside his prestigious clocks, projecting wealthy, peaceful bourgeoisie in every way. The story of his father's deep connection to Germany and perception that Germany was a part of him reflects the tragedy of the prewar German Jewish community, which was sure that the storm was bound to pass. "Yes, there are scoundrels," Emanuel recalls his father saying. "So what? Germany will not change […] the world has not gone mad; it will pass. Like everything else, it will pass." Contrary to the perception as seen in the Israeli public discourse in the 1940s and 1950s, which denounced the Jews of Europe for their

blindness to Nazism, *The Cellar* does not contain any such criticism.[24] It expresses great sadness over the lack of ability to predict what was coming and even explains the father's refusal to flee as a form of fighting back—a refusal to succumb to the forces of evil; an attempt to stand up to the Nazis and not give in to their authority. "Why run away? Because a gang of madmen decided we haven't the right to remain?" roars the father. In Israel, which was built on models of heroism by force, *The Cellar* generated for the first time a cinematic representation of "other heroism," which would only enter Israeli consensus in the 1980s.

The cinema of the 1940s and 1950s omitted a discussion of Germany and the Germans. The only German who appeared in a film during these decades (in *Hill 24 Doesn't Answer*, Thorold Dikenson, 1955) was presented as a Nazi who joins the Egyptians in fighting against Israel in 1948 in order to continue the extermination of Jews in the Middle East.[25] Israeli cinema in those years did not make any attempt to further explore the various types of Germans who were influenced by Nazism in the 1930s.

The Cellar marks the first time in Israeli cinema that the perception of Germans in the 1930s was broadened to include the notion that not all Germans were Nazis. Lotte is represented in the film by an actress filmed only from behind and voiced by the actress Zaharira Harifai. She echoes Emanuel's memories and represents the Germans who resisted surrendering to the Nazis. Despite the Nuremberg Laws, and despite the fact that she was persecuted by Hans and her father and received threatening letters from Nazis, she is represented as fighting over her right to an intimate relationship with the Jewish Emanuel until he is deported to Dachau. From Emanuel's memories, it is clear that she was the one pursuing him. She does not succumb to threats, continues to write to him, and demands that they meet. When Emanuel tries to distance himself from her out of concern for her safety ("I love you too much"), she refuses to surrender.

Emanuel's much-admired literature teacher is another character who represents the other Germans who opposed Nazism. The students call him "Faust" because he refuses to blindly follow the Nazi doctrine and is eventually dismissed from the school because of his humanistic and liberal views. When Emanuel looks back at his school days, in a scene that takes place in a classroom, the teacher uses *Hamlet* in order to explain the importance of the dilemma: "The symbol of the man who

refuses to become a murderer." The teacher uses Hamlet's story in order to criticize the German officers who are preparing to conquer Polish regions only for the lust of battle. "To say that Hamlet was a coward because he thinks, is saying that thinking is cowardice," states the teacher, referring mainly to an essay written by Hans, in which he asserts that Hamlet was a coward. The scene shows how, despite the students' Nazi attitudes, their rude opposition to the teacher's opinions (stomping their feet, throwing their books on the floor, and finally—and demonstratively—leaving the classroom), the teacher does not cave in. He stands firm and stays true to his beliefs even as he stands in a classroom where the Führer's portrait hangs on the wall. The teacher repeatedly speaks of the "greatness of humanism," and he, like Emanuel's father, believes that this "madness will pass."

The representation of these themes is unique in comparison not only to the Zionist films of the 1940s and 1950s but also to Holocaust-related fictional films that were produced after *The Cellar*, up until the present time. Due to many changes in Israeli society, the post-1970s cinematic image of native Israeli society in Holocaust-themed fictional films has changed from welcoming and embracing to cold, cruel, and indifferent—depicting a culture that ignores the pain of Holocaust survivors. The critique of Zionism that permeates contemporary fictional films disrupts the Zionist transformation process represented during the first decades. In these films, there is neither Zionist redemption nor a happy ending. Yet these changes do not serve to broaden the horizons of Holocaust representation because they do not engage with Jewish life under Nazism, the various facets of the Germans themselves, or the attempts of Jews to return home after the Holocaust, making *The Cellar* an exceptional attempt to subvert the traditional Israeli Holocaust narrative.[26]

The Past in the Present

The contrastive lighting throughout the film highlights traumatic times and Emanuel's traumatic "repetition compulsion," in which the traumatized individual mentally returns to the traumatic experiences while blurring the boundaries between past and present, thus reexperiencing the trauma. In this compulsion, the traumatic past continues to exist in the present as a repetitive event that returns again and again as time seems to stand still.[27]

The clock theme that runs through the film symbolizes the fact that Emanuel is imprisoned in a constant reenactment of the past within the present, an interlocked state that is expressed cinematically. Emanuel's blend between past and present, which stops the linear time, is also depicted in a scene that describes Lotte. She stands in the middle of a blooming field, which hints at their lives and their love before the war. But the somber voice of Emanuel that accompanies the scene, already aware of the broken dream, interrupts this lost delusion of harmony. The two eras—the idyllic prewar past and the traumatic period of war—are combined, stopping chronological time. Emanuel's voice-over emphasizes this blend between past and present: "fifteen years in a second […] and already you are in the ruins." The fact that he also lives among ruins in the present (as a watchman on construction sites) reinforces that oneness and blending between past and present.

According to Maureen Turim, cinematic flashbacks represent a juncture between present and past that implies memory and history, images of memory, and "the personal archives of the past" that represent subjective memory.[28] Turim maintains that a flashback is, in a general sense, "an image or a filmic segment that is understood as representing temporal occurrences anterior to those in the images that preceded it." It is a representation of the past that intervenes within the present flow of film narrative.[29] Flashbacks and nightmares escape full consciousness. They provide "a form of recall that survives at the cost of willed memory or of the very continuity of conscious thought."[30] This form of remembrance is a cinematic tool used to represent trauma, because trauma prevents the traumatized individual from portraying a linear life story.[31]

Classically, visual cues represent a return to the past. Turim continues: "the flashback is introduced when the image in the present dissolves to an image in the past, understood either as a story being told, or a subjective memory." But other less obviously marked forms of flashback have also appeared in film history.[32] *The Cellar* fluctuates between Emanuel's current life in Israel and flashbacks to various periods in the past, and these transitions are not accompanied by a blurring of the frame (such as fade or dissolve). The flashbacks abruptly penetrate into the present without warning and without any accepted visual or auditory mark.[33] This cinematic choice strengthens the blur between past and present and emphasizes his repetition compulsion. For example, in a scene in which Emanuel recalls a conversation with

his watchmaker father at his shop, the conversation ends when his grandfather clock is shattered by a stone thrown at the shop window by Nazis. In the subsequent scene, the older Emanuel, recently returned from Dachau, looks up and gazes at the same shattered clock. Past and present become one.

Different periods of the past blend within Emanuel's mind and are represented in the flashbacks. For example, the train in which he returns from Dachau is the same train in which he was taken to Dachau seven years earlier. The blending of the Holocaust and life in Germany after World War II, turning the two periods into one, is further reinforced by the fact that Emanuel is still wearing his striped uniform when he travels to his home after the liberation of the camp. "Like then, like always," he says to himself as he looks at the German houses, still standing in his city. The repetition compulsion is also reflected in his continued feeling of being a prisoner under guard. When he returns to his old city at night, there is no one outside, yet he says he feels as though he is being watched from every house, followed in order to check whether he is on his way to Hans. The viewers can clearly see, however, that there is no one watching him through the windows. When he recalls his teacher and a specific incident that happened in class, the scene cuts from the view of the classroom to the adult Emanuel, who seems to be sitting in the corner of the classroom looking over events of the past. At the end of the scene showing his last meeting with Lotte, he jumps back in fear, letting out a scream. His different clothes are the only indication that the person screaming is the adult Emanuel, who is recalling the events, and not the Emanuel of 1938, who is experiencing them. After Hans is shot, the camera pans aside, revealing present-day Emanuel, hunched over his watchman's desk in the 1960s, recalling the situation. The blend of various periods broadens the narrative shaped in early Israeli cinema, which contained only two contrasting periods, and allows for a primary deep look into the post-trauma of Holocaust survivors.

Between Victim and Perpetrator

Amos Goldberg claims that trauma erases not only the sequence of time but also the differences between past and present, male and female, subject and object, victim and perpetrator.[34] This obliteration of boundaries is apparent not only in

blending periods of time but also in Emanuel's character. The image of Emanuel's tormented soul is further sharpened toward the end of the film in a scene where he talks to himself in the mirror. The figure reflected in the mirror has his face but presents an entirely different identity—an Emanuel who is determined, firm, and aggressive, and who vehemently argues that Hans needs to be killed. Facing him is a very different Emanuel—fearful, still trying to grasp the fact that Lotte is alive and married to Hans. His body language is completely different; he mumbles, goes back and forth in his mind, not sure what to do.

Hans has destroyed and taken over Emanuel's life. He was responsible for the murder of Emanuel's father, has robbed him of his lover and made her his wife, has taken over his house and lived in it, has turned Emanuel's beloved dog into his own, and has thrown all of his belongings into the cellar.[35] Hans has even gone so far as to remove all of Emanuel's pictures from his photo album (which bears his initials), replacing them with his own photos, depicting him in Nazi uniform, witnessing events surrounding the demolition of Jewish houses, executions, and deportations. This replacement within the photo album, into the life that Hans has made for himself, brings into focus an idea that was hinted at the beginning of the film: the notion that Hans is a part of Emanuel's identity, a part that he will never be able to get rid of, a part that is so dominant in his life.

After returning from Dachau, Emanuel recalls how his beloved teacher spoke of the need to restrain oneself from seeking vengeance. Emanuel, however, is not capable of doing so. Like Hamlet, he debates within his mind. On the one hand, he sees himself strangling Hans or setting him and his family on fire, and even regrets that a person cannot be killed more than once. On the other hand, he is doubtful. "What will come back to life if Hans is to die?" he asks himself. "At least I'll have the pleasure of revenge. You, too, deserve to enjoy the death of at least one person," he answers to himself. "You have always been a coward," the reflection in the mirror reproaches Emanuel. "You are afraid of killing. There are too many people who must die […] Even her [Lotte's] memory was taken away from me by him […] You had wanted to mourn so badly. Now you're sorry she is alive." Emanuel's image in the mirror mocks him. Emanuel makes these statements while the camera zooms in on his hand as it is squashing an ant. The problem is that thoughts about killing Hans generate a problematic proximity between victim and aggressor.

In fact, the film depicts Hans's taking Emanuel's former life and entering his shoes, while Emanuel enters Hans's shoes as a murderer. This analogy is validated toward the end of the film when Hans goes down to the cellar one last time. His features are not visible; only his shadow on the wall can be seen. In the same way, Emanuel's character is also blurred; only his shadow is visible. They stand across from one another, one shadow facing the other, until Emanuel's shadow approaches and eclipses Hans's shadow. The camera represents them as one shadow, and its symbolic meaning is one entity: a past murderer and a soon-to-be murderer. The viewers remain unaware of Hans's fate, but, whether he is alive or dead, the end of the film clarifies that his shadow continues to be a part of Emanuel's life. This perception completely contradicts the early narrative of Israeli culture and films, which created a clear division between Jews and Nazis, victims and perpetrators.[36] This blurring of roles would resume its appearance in Israeli cinema only in the late 1970s, this time, from a different leftist political perspective.[37]

No Redemption

Most films of the 1940s and 1950s outline a shallow linear process, beginning with Holocaust survivors' appearing as representations of the diaspora and all of its faults. As the films progress, the survivors begin to shed their old identities via a Zionist mentoring process, eventually becoming New Jews who are well integrated into society.[38]

In contrast, *The Cellar* has a circular script, a structure that further emphasizes Emanuel's imprisonment within his own memories. The absorbing society is absent, and there is no personal or national redemption. Unlike the films made in the 1940s and 1950s, which presented a national story and often focused on wide open spaces conquered by the New Jews and the Holocaust survivors undergoing change, *The Cellar*, in its depiction of open areas in a country under construction and the survivor walking through them, tells a story not of revival but of the complete opposite. Lotte's voice is heard against the backdrop of construction workers rushing to their jobs: "All these buildings, still completely vacant, unlike one house that is still populated. I live in it with your son." Her story suggests that when Emanuel was taken away, she knew that she was pregnant and married Hans as

a result. "[I am] hated by him [Hans] more than I am hated by you." With these words, Lotte places Emanuel firmly in the past, in his memories. That is his real home: the place where he lived before the war, the place where his loved one and his son live. For Emanuel, the Zionist space is not home. "Now you have a new home again," Lotte's voice tries to tell Emanuel. "A new house is not a home. Just a building," replies the voice of Emanuel, fixing himself in the past. "Is anything more real than the past? The present is just a small moment in the infinity," replies Lotte, accepting his ruling. "When do you stop remembering?" Emanuel's voice asks. The frame accompanying the question shows the face of Emanuel in close-up, blended through superimposition with the image of the train racing toward Dachau. The visual combination of Emanuel's face in 1960s Israel and the train to Dachau clarifies that this is a rhetorical question; for him, the past will never be a distant memory.

At the end of the film, morning has come, the sun shines, and a new work day commences at the construction site where Emanuel is a watchman. This seems as though it could be the symbol of a new beginning—after a night of confronting his memories, the survivor is reborn. But this is not the case. Morning has broken, and Emanuel traverses the open spaces accompanied by Lotte's voice-over, telling him about his son. "My boy," mutters Emanuel. "It really is awful to always remember," says Lotte, clarifying that his physical whereabouts do not change the fact that Emanuel is immersed somewhere else. His body is in Israel, but his mind is in Germany. That is where his past is, and that is also where his future (his son) is, but he will never go back. The mention of Hamlet in the scene with the teacher foreshadows the end of the film, which, like the Shakespearean play, is a tragedy for all characters involved. Hans has (possibly) been killed. Even if not, Hans lives with a wife he doesn't love and a son who is not his own. Lotte has married a man who hates her and has (maybe) become a widow, raising her son away from the man she loves. Emanuel remains unable to start over and continues to dwell in his memories. Living in Israel does not provide him with a new beginning but, in many senses, kills him.

In the final scene, Emanuel rings the bell marking the beginning of a new work day. Only his shadow is seen with the bell in the background, creating the impression of a hanged man. The film thus clarifies that the new beginning

offered by the building-up of Israel is not necessarily a new beginning for Holocaust survivors. This claim was a highly daring and unusual statement for the time.

Historical Importance versus Commercial Failure

The Cellar won a prize at the Berlin International Film Festival in 1963 but did not appeal to Israeli viewers, selling only 61,000 tickets, in contrast to the all-time Israeli box-office leader, *Sallah Shabati* (Efraim Kishon, 1964), which sold over a million tickets the following year.[39] The film's commercial failure has three main causes, both local and international. Locally, it seems that the Zionist narrative of immigration to Israel as redemption was still solid during those decades. In a sense, the Eichmann trial represented the essence of Zionist redemption, the Jews portrayed as the "strong ones" who put the Nazi perpetrator on trial. In this cultural climate, Israeli society had difficulty accepting a Holocaust story without any closure or Zionist happy ending. Israeli cinema would start to deal with these observations only two decades later. *Sallah Shabati*, which dealt with the absurd absorption process of Jews from Islamic countries, was very critical and lampooned many central institutions in Israel but did so in a satirical way, which softened the harsh representations. In addition, Israeli artistic films were generally not popular in Israel during the 1960s and 1970s. For example, only 5,000 people came to watch the film *Hole in the Moon* (*Ḥor balevana*, Uri Zohar, 1964)], and this low number of viewers also characterized other artistic Israeli films that were produced, especially at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s (the Israeli New Wave).[40] Internationally, only a few films during that era dealt with the Holocaust and Holocaust survivors. Western fictional films would begin to address the subject widely and gain commercial success only from the 1990s onward.[41]

In spite its commercial failure, *The Cellar* has great importance in the chronology of Holocaust representations in Israeli cinema. It was and remains a first and unique attempt to broaden the borders of Holocaust commemoration in Holocaust-related Israeli fictional films. It is the first film which tries to enter into the depths of the soul of a Holocaust survivor, with all its problematic symbolism, while breaking

free of the national narrative and focusing on the realms of the personal and the private. Its representation of pre- and postwar Germany and of the German peoples of the 1930s remains an exceptional attempt that was not to be continued in later Israeli fictional films.

NOTES

1 Yechiam Weitz, "Bein qatarzis leqrav sakinim: 'mishpat qastner,' 'mishpat aikhman,' vehashatam ʿal haḥevra hayisra'elit" in *Mishpat vehistoriyah*, ed. Daniel Gutwein and Menachem Mautner (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1999), 395–421; Hanna Yablonka, *Medinat Yisraʾel neged Adolf Eichmann* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aḥronot, 2004), 175–214; and Anita Shapira, "Hashoʾah: zikaron prati, zikaron tsibburi" in *Yehudim yeshanim yehudim ḥadashim* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1997), 86–103.

2 Yablonka, *Medinat Yisraʾel*, 175–214 and Amit Pinchevski and Tamar Liebes, "Severed Voices: Radio and the Mediation of Trauma in the Eichmann Trial," *Public Culture* 22, no. 2 (2010): 265–91.

3 Judith Tydor Baumel, "In Everlasting Memory: Individual and Communal Holocaust Commemoration in Israel," *Israel Affairs* 3, no. 1 (1995): 146–70; Batya Brutin, "Min hashulayim el hamerkaz: hashoʾah baʾomanut hayisraʾelit," *Massuʾah* 33 (2005): 110–38; Dan Laor, "Hashinuy bedimuy hashoʾah: heʿarot al hahebeit hasifrutiy," *Qatedra* 69 (1993): 164–69; Nurith Gertz, *Makhelah aḥeret: nitsolei shoʾah, zarim veʾaḥerim baqolnoʿa ubasifrut hayisraʾelim* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved and The Open University, 2004) 105–50; and Avner Holtzman, *Ahavot tsiyyon: panim basifrut haʿivrit haḥadashah* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2006), 319–414.

4 The film is briefly mentioned only in some studies about the representation of the Holocaust and Holocaust survivors in Israeli cinema; see Natan Gross and Yaakov Gross, *Haseret haʿivriy: peraqim betoldot hariʾanoʿah vehaqolnoʿah beyisraʾel* (Jerusalem: self-published, 1991), 255–56; Meir Schnitzer, *Haqolnoʿah hayisraeli* (Tel Aviv: Kinneret, 1994), 60; Moshe Zimmerman, *Al tigʿu li bashoʾah: hashpaʿat hashoʾah al haqolnoʿa vehaḥevrah beyisraʾel* (Haifa: Haifa University Press, 2002), 186–87; Liat Steir-Livny, *Shtei panim bamara: yetsug nitsolei hashoʾah baqolnoʿa hayisraʾeli* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2009), 51–68, 83–85; and Ilan Avisar, "The Holocaust in Israeli Cinema as a Conflict Between Survival and Morality," in

Israeli Cinema: Identities in Motion, ed. Miri Talmon and Yaron Peleg (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 155.

5 See, e.g., Hanna Yablonka, "Zekhuyot sotrot, zekhuyot mashlimot: nitsolim, zikhron hashoʾah vehazehut hayisraʾelit," *Massuʾah* 28 (2000): 301–17; Shapira, "Hashoʾah"; Daniel Gutwein, "The Privatization of the Holocaust: Memory, Historiography, and Politics," *Israel Studies* 14, no. 1 (2009): 36–64; Dina Porat, *Qafe haboker bereiaḥ haʿashan: mifgasham shel hayishuv vehaḥevrah hayisraʾelit im hashoʾah venitsoleha* (Jerusalem: Am Oved and Yad Vashem, 2011), 379–98; and Dalia Ofer, "She'erit hapleta bahistoriografia hayisraelit," *ʿIyyunim bitequmat Yisraʾel* 17 (2006): 465–511.

6 See, e.g., Shabtai Beit Zvi, *Hatsiyonut hapost ugandit bemashber hashoah* (Tel Aviv, 1977); Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); Yosef Grodzinsky, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust: The Struggle between Jews and Zionists in the Aftermath of World War II* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage, 2004); and Idith Zertal, *Haʾumah vehamavet: historiyah, zikaron vepolitiqah* (Or Yehuda: Dvir, 2002).

7 Shapira, "Hashoʾah"; Brutin, "Min hashulayim", 110–38; Zimmerman, *Al Tigʿu*, 125–215.

8 Na'ama Shik, "Haguf hamisken hazeh" (MA thesis, Tel Aviv University, 2004); Sharon Geva, *El haʾaḥot halo yeduʿa: gibborot hashoʾah baḥevrah hayisraʾelit* (Tel Aviv: Kibbutz hameuhad, 2010).

9 Zimmerman, *Al Tigʿu*, 27–144; Steir-Livny, *Shtei panim*, 7–68; Gertz, *Makhelah aḥeret*, 11–41; Avisar, "Holocaust," 151–67.

10 Most of the films produced in the 1940s and 1950s describe a national mentorship process, which comes to a successful end. Two films which were produced in the 1950s go against the idyllic description of the mentorship story and present survivors who do not assimilate in the new society: *Yonatan and tali* (Henry Schneider, 1953) and *Pillar of Fire*, *ʿAmmud haʾesh* (Larry Frisch, 1959). For more information, see Steir-Livny, *Shtei panim*, 51–68.

11 For those who claim that Israeli cinema ignored the Holocaust from the mid-1950s until the late 1980s, see Ronie Parciack, "Ha'intimi hu haqoleqtivi," *Dimuy: Journal of Literature and Art* 13 (1996), 38–41 and Yosefa Loshitzky, *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 32–71. On the general change in Israeli cinema as of the late 1970s, see Nurith Gertz and Yael Munk, *Bemabat leʾaḥor: qeriʾah ḥozeret baqolnoʿa hayisraʾeli* (Ra'anana: Open University

Press, 2014), 112–68; Miri Talmon, *Bluz latsabar ha'avud: ḥavurot venostalgiyah baqolnoʿa hayisraʾeli* (Tel Aviv: Open University Press, 2001), 141–276; and Ella Shohat, *Haqolnoʿa hayisraʾeli: mizraḥ/maaʿrav vehapolitiqah shel hayetsug* (Ra'anana: Open University Press, 2007), 234–66.

12 Schnitzer, *Haqolnoʿa hayisraʾeli*, 23; Gertz, *Makhelah aḥeret*, 42–102; Jeannine Levana Frank, "Yetsug hashoʾah baseratim hayisraʾelim bishnot hashmonim: bein patsifizem lemiletarizm," *Yalkhut Moreshet* 80 (2005): 85–108; Avisar, "Holocaust," 151–67; and Yehuda (Judd) Ne'eman, "The Tragic Sense of Zionism: Shadow Cinema and the Holocaust," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, 24, no. 1 (2005): 22–36.

13 Natan Gross, *Toldot haqolnoʿa hayehudi bePolin* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990), 98–99; Steir-Livny, *Shtei panim*, 50; and Gabriel N. Finder, "Child Survivors in Polish Jewish Collective Memory after the Holocaust: The Case of Undzere kinder," in *Displaced Children in Russia and Eastern Europe, 1915–1953: Ideologies, Identities, Experiences*, ed. Nick Baron, (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 218–47.

14 Yaakov became a director and a cinema researcher and, after Natan passed away, commemorated his cinematic enterprise. He passed away in 2017.

15 Ze'ev Rav Nof, "Historiyah shehafkhah nostalgiyah," *Davar*, January 31,1979, accessed April 25, 2016, http://jpress.org.il/Olive/APA/NLI_Heb/SharedView.Article.aspx?parm=cP7sRhE4UAQbjLAzXpb3EJF7GQBbXhc0dbU1LWlVEav%2FlOUWN3ICUPajzu6AmBCiYw%3D%3D&mode=image&href=DAV%2f1979%2f01%2f31&page=7&rtl=true and Gross, *Toldot Haqolnoʿa* , 90–107.

16 Yaakov Gross interview with Natan Gross, September 2005, private archive of Yaakov Gross.

17 Few Israeli films (so-called *Gefilte Fish* films) that were produced in the late 1960s dealt with the Jewish shtetl; examples include *The Flying Matchmaker* (*Shnei quni lemel*, Israel Becker, 1966), *A Miracle in the Village* (*Nes baʿayarah*, Leo Filler, 1968), *Tuvia and his Seven Daughters* (*Tuvia vesheva benotav*, Menahem Golan, 1968), and *The Dybbuk* (*Hadibbuq*, Ilan Eldad, 1968). See Liat Steir-Livny, "Haqambeq shel hagalut," in *Zekhuyot behithavut baḥevrah hayisraʾelit*, ed. Yael Munk, Adia Mendelson-Maoz, Sandra Meiri, and Liat Steir-Livny (Ra'anana: Open University Press, 2013), 461–81. Only a few fictional films dealt with the Holocaust itself. For example, *Spring 1941* (*Aviv 1941*, Uri Barabash, 2007) and the coproduction *Tsili* (Amos Gitai, 2014). In the film *Wooden Horse* (*Susʿets*, Yaki Yoshea, 1978)] the protagonist asks to produce a film about his parents' memories from Germany.

The coproduction *The Bride* (*Hakalah*, Nadav Levitan, 1985) represents the Jews in 1930s Czechoslovakia before and after the Nazi occupation of March 1939.

18 After the end of filming, Yisra'eli and Gross got into an argument about the film's credits, as Yisraʾeli demanded that he also be recognized as a director. A compromise was ultimately reached: Gross would be credited as the director, and Yisraʾeli would be credited for the screenplay; see Yaakov Gross interview with Natan Gross, September 2005, private archive of Yaakov Gross.

19 Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947); Siegbert Solomon Prawer, *Caligari's Children: The Film as a Tale of Terror* (London: Oxford University Press, 1980); Ofer Ashkenazi, *Halikhah el ʿever halaylah* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2010), esp. 43–126; and Sabine Hak, *German National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 27–63.

20 Gross, *Toldot Haqolnoʿa* , 103.

21 Zimmerman, *Al Tigʿu*, 27–144; Steir-Livny, *Shtei panim*, 7–68; Gertz, *Makhelah aḥeret*, 11–41; and Avisar, "Holocaust," 151–67.

22 The representation of 1930s Germany and the Holocaust in Israeli fictional films, apart from *The Cellar*, has been minor until the present. Most of the films dealing with the Holocaust and Holocaust survivors do not return to those times but rather engage primarily with survivors and their offspring from the moment they arrive in Israel until the present; see Steir-Livny, *Shtei panim,* 83–85, 89; and Hila Lavie, "ʿAl hadimui hanatsi baqolnoʿa hayisraʾeli haʿalilati," *Slil*, 8 (Spring 2014), 8, accessed October 10, 2018, http://slil.huji.ac.il/sites/default/files/slil/files /03-israeli-view-of-nazism.pdf.

23 It was the first and last time the image of Hitler appeared in an Israeli fictional film.

24 For more on the various arguments regarding the reactions of European Jews to Nazism and the different values given to different kinds of deaths, see Roni Stauber, *The Holocaust in Israeli Public Debate in the 1950s: Ideology and Memory* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007), 19–118; Holtzman, *Loves,* 319–414; Liat Steir-Livny, "Near and Far: The Representation of Holocaust Survivors in Israeli Feature Films," in *Israeli Cinema: Identities in Motion*, ed. Miri Talmon-Bohm and Yaron Peleg (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011) 168–80; Dan Laor, *Alterman—biografiyah* [(Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2013), 437–55; and Porat, *Qafe haboker bereiah. haʿashan:* 381–96.

25 For more on the cultural association between Arabs and Nazis see, e.g., Daniel Bar-Tal, *Liḥyot ʿim haqonfliqt*, (Haifa: Carmel, 2007), 112–37 and Liat Steir-Livny, *Har hazikaron izkor bimkomi*, (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2014), 79–112.

26 Zimmerman, *Al Tigʿu*, 250–334; Steir-Livny, *Shtei panim*, 96–204; Gertz, *Mekhelah aḥeret,* 42–77; and Avisar, "Holocaust," 154–67.

27 Sigmund Freud, "Meʿever leʿiqaron haʿoneg" (1920), *Kitvei Sigmund Freud* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1968), 3:95–137.

28 Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film,* (London: Routledge, 1989), 1–20.

29 Ibid.

30 Cathy Caruth, "Recapturing the Past: Introduction," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 151–53.

31 Amos Goldberg, *Trauma beguf rishon: ketivat yomanim betequfat hashoʾah* (Or Yehuda: Devir, 2012), 78–103.

32 Turim, *Flashbacks*, 1–20.

33 This cinematic blur also appears in later films that feature intrusive flashbacks haunting a Holocaust survivor, such as *The Pawnbroker* (Sidney Lumet, 1964) *High Street* (Rue Haunte, Andre Ernotte, 1976) and *Sophie's Choice* (Alan J. Pakula, 1982); see Joshua Hirsch, "The Pawnbroker and the Posttraumatic Flashback," in *Afterimage: Film, Trauma and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 85–110; Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 27–42; and Henry Gonshak, *Hollywood and the Holocaust* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 117–30, 163–74.

34 Goldberg, *Trauma*, 102.

35 In his interview, Gross recounts that it was important to him that the Nazi photo album, on which the camera focuses in the scene, be authentic. In Yad Vashem, he managed to find the photo album of a German Nazi who stayed in Lodz and documented the Nazi acts carried out in the city; see Yaakov Gross interview with Natan Gross, September 2005, private archive of Yaakov Gross.

36 The films of 1940s Eretz Israel portrayed young survivors who feel that the kibbutzim or youth villages to which they are sent remind them of the ghettos or concentration camps from which they had come. These films' endings prove that the early observations of the survivors were completely mistaken, and that Eretz

Israel is a new land that heals the survivors' bodies and minds; see Gertz, *Makhelah aḥeret*, 11–41.

37 Steir-Livny, *Har hazikaron*, 79–112.

38 Zimmerman, *Al Tigʿu*, 27–144; Steir-Livny, *Shtei panim*, 7–68; Gertz, *Makhelah aḥeret,* 11–41; and Avisar, "Holocaust," 151–67.

39 Gross and Gross, *Haseret ha'ivriy*, 256.

40 Yehuda (Judd) Ne'eman, "The Death Mask of the Moderns: A Genealogy of 'New Sensibility' Cinema in Israel," *Israel Studies* 4, no. 1 (1999): 100–128 and Ariel Schweitzer, *The Israeli New Wave: New Modern Israeli Cinema in the 1960s and 1970s* (Tel Aviv: Third Ear and Bavel, 2003).

41 See, e.g., Shlomo Zand, *Qolnoʿa kehistoriyah* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2002), 226–59; Judith E Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film,* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002); Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows*; Lawrence Baron, *Projecting the Holocaust into the Present: The Changing Focus of Contemporary Holocaust Cinema* (Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005); Omer Bartov, *Hayehudi baqolnoa* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2008); and Gonshak, *Hollywood.*