Article

Ari Folman's *Made in Israel* (2001): Traces of Trauma in the Israeli Cinema Landscape

Yael Munk

Department of Literature, Language and the Arts, The Open University of Israel, Ra'anana 4353701, Israel; munkyael@gmail.com

Abstract: In the Israeli collective memory, the Yom Kippur's battles in the Golan Heights have become synonymous with a long lasting national scar that fails to disappear. Interestingly, until the release of Yaron Zilberman's recent television series *Valley of Tears* (She'at Ne'Ila, 2020), this war, which was traditionally associated with the pictured northern landscape, had appeared in few documentaries, but was almost absent from Israeli feature films. This article analyzes one of the very few attempts to deal with this memory, Ari Folman's feature film *Made in Israel* (2001). Using a science fiction narrative structure, Folman adopts historian Anita Shapira's contention about the link between this war and the Holocaust, because both confronted the Jewish people with its fear of extermination. His narrative invites the viewer to participate imaginatively in a road movie set against the snow-covered landscapes of the Golan Heights, where a number of hitmen attempt to catch the last surviving Nazi and bring him to trial in Jerusalem. Interestingly, what begins as a Zionist mission in the hegemonic spaces of the State of Israel gradually transforms into various European landscapes as the snow piles up and the Nazi feels increasingly at home.

Keywords: Yom Kippur War; Israeli collective memory; The Holocaust in Israeli culture; surviving Nazis; road movies

1. Introduction

In approximately a year, the State of Israel will commemorate 50 years since its utmost traumatic war: The Yom Kippur War. This war, which burst forth six years after the Six-Day War's legendary victory, came to represent the Israeli nation's unspeakable worst nightmare. For a few weeks in October 1973, the State of Israel faced, for the first time, an existential threat, a threat whose repercussion could be perceived at all levels. Although the State of Israel finally vanquished this threat, it nevertheless left a huge scar on Israelis' memory and imagination, to the extent that it was hardly spoken about in Israeli cultural circles. This notion of psycho-emotional national scars is particularly relevant to Israeli fictional films. Whereas in subsequent decades Israeli documentaries began to grapple with the Yom Kippur War (as in Reuven Hecker's *Bukito*, 1983) or Ido Sela's *Earthquake* (Reidat Adama, 1999), Israeli fiction films[1] generally remained reticent about it, until year 2001, when two feature films were released: Amos Gitai's very personal *Kippur*[2] and Ari Folman's fantastic *Made in Israel*. In 2020, Yaron Zilberman's television drama *Valley of Tears* (She'at Ne'ila, 2020), produced in collaboration with the British Westend Films, brought back the repressed memory of this haunting war. *Valley of Tears* addresses one of this war's crucial battles, "The Vale of Tears Battle" (HaKrav al Emek HaBacha'), which took place in the Golan Heights between 6 October and 9 October 1973. Massively outnumbered Israeli forces were at the point of collapse, yet managed to hold their positions until the Syrians withdrew on the fourth day. The expression Vale of Tears originates from the *Book of Psalms* and refers to the endless sufferings of Jewish pilgrims making their way home to Jerusalem. During the 1973 war, it was adopted to convey the considerable pain and high casualties IDF soldiers suffered during this decisive battle.

The *Valley of Tears* series has already been the subject of research, especially in the field of Israel media and television. Most studies emphasize the creators' boldness in deciding to return to the site of a national trauma[3]. However, it went further. The show's creators decided to emphasize the part played by the *Israeli Black Panthers*[4] in this war, a fact that became an open secret. In fact, most of the soldiers who participated in this battle were Mizrahi Jews originating from the Musrara neighborhood in Jerusalem, and the series director emphasized this crucial fact throughout the narrative. This radical decision distorted the war's hegemonic historiography, a topic yet to be investigated.

Here, however, I would like to turn to an almost forgotten fiction film directed by Ari Folman in 2001, before his internationally acclaimed *Waltz with Bashir* (2008). What makes it particularly significant is that it relied on the conventions of science fiction to discuss Israeli collective memory. According to Israeli historian Anita Shapira, "collective memory is the picture of a reality present in the public imagination at a given moment, an image-complex reflective of the spirit of the times and the emphases of the era, its ideology and social needs. [. . .] despite the expansion of the areas of historical research, its burgeoning number of investigators ploughing historical fields and the vast improvement in the means of research, academic historiography is losing whatever influence it had on the shaping of the image of the past stamped in public consciousness." ([Shapira 1996](), p. 20). Shapira's contention is particularly relevant to the particular place the Golan Heights hold in Israel's collective memory, especially in its relation to the Yom Kippur War. Although it was canonized as "the country's eyes" by IDF soldier Benny Massas during the Yom Kippur War, the Syrian territory of the Golan Heights soon turned into a kind of "forbidden zone"; it was a controversial part of Israel, due to its ambiguous political status, one that after endless political debates, was internationally recognized as Israeli territory in March 2019.

Thus, though IDF soldiers who participated in this war often related their personal memories in newspapers or documentaries, it remained unrepresented in Israeli fiction films. Moreover, though *Made in Israel* and *The Valley of Tears* concern the same historical event, the Yom Kippur War, the difference between them resides in the former's projection into an eternal future and the latter's entanglement with a never-ending past. As for the landscape chosen for the narration of this national trauma, while Folman chooses the frozen Golan Heights that prevent the Israelis from progressing both conceptually and geographically, *Valley of Tears* is set in a muddy location that creates an intertextual subtext with the 1982 Lebanon War, which was literally and metaphorically described as a muddy landscape with all relevant symbolic implications. These two political film texts find a meeting point in Amos Gitai's hyper realistic *Kippur* (2001). As opposed to the earlier cinematic texts, *Kippur* frames his narration with a couple with painted bodies making love on white sheets. The traces they leave on them are more than their bodies' traces. They leave the traces of this traumatic war. In *Kippur*'s narrative, Gitai re-creates a sense of disorientation that neutralizes all allusion to a concrete past. This disorientation provides fertile ground that enables the trauma to infiltrate the body and mind—in this case, that of the soldier. This may be one reason that the Israeli television drama *Valley of Tears*, which chose to represent such an event in cinematic terms, and the surrealistic film *Made in Israel*, require special attention these days, a time shortly before Israel plunges into the commemoration of this war. Moreover, *Made in Israel* adopts a science-fiction approach to the Israeli present that keeps it somehow relevant.

2. A Short History of Politicized Israeli Cinema

A brief look at the history of Israeli cinema reveals that landscape representation was never neutral. Whether erasing Palestinian traces or changing the narration's point of view in order to express their presence on the territory, an ambivalent attitude was palpable. One of the first films to engage with the inherent dissonance of Zionism's appropriation of the country's primordial landscapes was Ram Loewy's *Khirbet Khizeh* (1978), the televised version of S. Yizhar's eponymous novella, published a year after the founding of the state, 1949. Like the novella, the film examines the subjective meanings of the Zionist

slogan— "making the desert bloom"—and presented it for the first time as the first settlers' colonialist, Eurocentric endeavor. It does so by describing a military operation, or, more accurately, by reconstructing the memory of the evacuation of an Arab village during the War of Independence, from the perspective of a sensitive young Israeli soldier named Micha. Micha's defining quality is his ability to observe as a bystander the wrongdoings committed by others. His passiveness matches the serenity of the Jerusalem hills that Loewy's camera captures so well: only the voice-over reveals the mute rebellion limited to the soldier's mind. The director creates an opposition between the narrator's inner voice who refuses to see reality as it is experienced, a reality of conquest and expulsion, and the pastoral landscapes he describes with the romantic joy befitting a native-born son of the land. As in the novella, the film's narrative, related in the first person, emphasizes the protagonist's belated awakening from the landscape's captivating beauty, and the painful political realization that more than natural beauty is needed to let a person live at peace with his conscience.

A decade later, a similar process is captured in Shimon Dotan's film *The Smile of the Lamb* (Hiyuch HaGdi, 1986), an adaptation of David Grossman's eponymous novel. Here too, the antithesis between the Israeli occupation, which the film's protagonist calls "enlightened occupation," and the entangled and damaged landscape of the occupied Arab village (an imaginary one), personified in the character of Hilmi, a deranged cave-dweller, leads to the realization that the pastoral landscape of the Arab village that Israelis have dreamed about might be more complicated to conquer than they thought. The Arab village is shown in the film as constructed out of a cluster of caves from which angry young Palestinian men emerge, and narrow alleyways where the army cannot impose order. In other words, this unmappable, undecipherable Arab landscape provides a pivotal metaphor for the failure of the Israeli occupation.

Khirbet Khizeh and *The Smile of the Lamb* were produced a decade apart, a period that has created changes in Israeli cinema's meta-narrative. Yet, though each one engages with a different historical period—Yizhar's semi-autobiographical story is set close in time to the declaration of statehood, while Grossman's imaginary story takes place in a quasi-present-day in which the occupation of the West Bank continues—both choose the Arab landscape as the narrative's central issue in which each of the protagonists realize the complexity of the so-called "enlightened occupation." According to this political perspective, supported by the Palestinians' affinity with their native soil and landscape, the promised land of Israel is presented as the historical bone of contention between Israel and the Palestinians. In both films, the Israeli protagonists fail to acknowledge the local residents' feelings, a failure that creates alienation between them and those around them, and between themselves and the landscape. The narrative's tragic development in both films compels observers to interpret the landscape and the soil as evidence for the existence of the Other, the otherness of their life and culture, and the occupation of those landscapes as an extreme act of violence. Nevertheless, the essential contribution made by the two films, as well as by other films from the 1980s, was the critique of the Israeli appropriation of the Arab landscape.

3. Landscape and Trauma

Israel's history has tainted its landscapes with traces of trauma. Whether the trauma of war, of emigration, or of loss, Israeli cinema history is impregnated by various traumatic events and conditions (Yosef 2005, 2011). Though these traces emerge in various narratives and cinematic structures, few Israeli filmmakers have chosen to embed these traumatic traces in the national landscape. Thus, despite landscape constituting an integral part of reconstructed reality in film, even during periods when films were shot in studios in an artificially reconstructed the landscape (Harper and Rayner 2010), it was always critiqued according to its aesthetic value. A significant turning-point in landscape's role in cinema occurred at the end of the Second World War, with the rise of Italian Neorealism; of this, the renowned French theoretician, Andre Bazin, said "[in those films], the background moves towards the foreground and becomes a protagonist" (Bazin 1971, p. 37). Bazin

referred primarily to Neorealism's political aspect achieved through its outdoor shooting, which aimed to show the post-war Italian reality in a highly accurate and convincing way. Although the era of Neorealism has passed, it seems that realistic landscape representations have returned to haunt post-modern cinema, creating intertextual readings of the cinematic world on screen. This new affinity with landscape became a conscious and direct choice that required the spectators' intervention in deciphering it. Nowadays, considering the general consensus around the political uses and abuses of collective memory (Edkins 2003), landscape has become generally understood as an inseparable part of the cinematic fiction: it encapsulates cultural memory within it (Huyssen 1995) and participates in the political structuring of collective memory (Irwin-Zarecka 1994).

The years that have passed since the beginning of the Zionist project, and the many wars that the Israeli space has known, have changed the country and the meaning of its landscapes beyond recognition. In their wake, they left spaces scarred by a plethora of traumas, crammed with an assortment of memorials. When the Israeli imagination changed and its landscapes no longer resonated with glory-wreathed biblical narratives, the cinematic landscape presented new configurations that challenged collective memory and highlighted individuals' traumatic memory. Raz Yosef (2011) maintains that as in American cinema, contemporary Israeli cinema spurred the undermining—even the shattering—of collective national memory, by exposing the manipulations underlying its creation. As a result, observations of the heritage landscape with its various markings—memorials and commemoration sites—became reflexive endeavors that mirrored the national landscape's exploitation by the hegemonic shapers of commemorative policy. In Israeli cinema's post-national era, a time in which once-sanctified national processes are being demolished and privatized, what remains as markers in the landscape invites the observer to decipher them. The best form of code-cracking is the most personal, the kind that turns the gaze toward the chronicles of trauma.

Indeed, the traumatic history of the landscape at the center of Folman's film, *Made in Israel* (2001), connects it to past events occurring there, namely the Yom Kippur War. In real time, these events evoke for Israelis past helplessness associated with the Holocaust. In this futuristic film, the landscape links these dimensions that together constitute its critical basis. Folman had already anticipated the future in his first feature film *Saint Clara* (1996),[5] co-directed with Ori Sivan. There, landscape constituted an integral part of his apocalyptic vision about the alienated world that will take root in the Israeli setting. In his second feature film, *Made in Israel*, the director deals with a more blurred future, indicating "Somewhere in the near future," a description that helps preserve the speculative distance required of any discussion of the future. Folman constructs much of that speculative distance through the landscape's ambiguous character, an element that functions politically and historically, aesthetically and ethically. Orchestrating them creates a form of magic realism that is familiar from the Iron Curtain era of Eastern European cinema, a genre that enabled the discussion of profound themes in a lighter, less serious way, though still subversive and thought provoking (Jameson 2005).

The main subversive element in *Made in Israel* results from the fact that the landscape presented appears more European than Israeli. Although the dramatic events are located entirely in the northern Golan Heights, on the Syrian border, there is nothing familiar or evocative of Israel for Israelis in the film (apart from the Israeli flag that appears only once as the Nazi crosses the border) because the snowdrifts that pile up in the frame make it hard to identify the place as an Israeli setting. Furthermore, the landscape functions as part of the grandiose spectacle through which Folman presents the film's defining Israeli national issue: Jewish revenge against the last Nazi.

Few Israeli films have been shot in the Golan Heights,[6] a region annexed to Israel after the Six-Day War and to which Israeli law was first applied in 1981. Despite its vast cinematic potential, this landscape has rarely been used in Israeli cinema (Shemesh and Zeev 2008), for national/historical rather than pragmatic/cinematic reasons. The Golan's vistas, reminiscent of European landscapes, were the scenes of a major trauma, the 1973

Yom Kippur War, which many Israelis still find hard to overcome.[7] Folman was too young to have been personally affected by the trauma of that war, and thus inherited it as "post-memory"; this is a memory defined by culture researcher Marianne Hirsch as typifying the experiences of those raised in the shadow of narratives that preceded their birth. According to Hirsch, the second generation of the Holocaust trauma feels their individual narratives repressed by a previous generation's 'more important' story, but are nevertheless shaped indirectly by such traumatic events (Hirsch 2001, pp. 5–6).

As mentioned above, the Yom Kippur trauma provides the backdrop to events unfolding in another film, *Kippur* (2000) by Amos Gitai. The proximity of the films' releases is interesting because they have nothing in common apart from featuring the Golan heights landscape and engaging with the Yom Kippur War, which Gitai experienced personally, while for Folman it constitutes part of the collective traumatic memory created and replicated in the Israeli culture.

4. "Made in Israel:" Fantasies of Redemption

Understanding the reversals in representations of the landscape in Israeli cinema is essential to grasping the great innovation in the Israeli landscape in Ari Folman's futuristic film, *Made in Israel*.[8] The film deals with the extradition, from Syria to Israel, of the last living Nazi. The purpose is to put him on trial in Jerusalem, as was the case with Nazi criminal Adolf Eichmann in 1961, and what had been planned for another Nazi criminal, John Demjanjuk, in 1987. The meticulously directed opening scene is wordless. Against the backdrop of blue fog that drifts for miles over a snowy landscape, three figures move in slow motion. A caption appears that informs of "somewhere in the near future." Such captions appear frequently in the science fiction genre and indicate that some change, possibly a threatening one, will soon and dramatically transform sociopolitical conditions. One character breaks away from the group and draws closer to viewers in slow movements towards the camera. He is a burly man, in a long black coat. As he advances through the snow, a quiet metallic soundtrack begins and gradually intensifies. The two remaining figures continue moving in a sort of weird choreography, coming closer then receding. The man[9] turns to take a final look at the landscape he abandons and moves nearer the camera, while a Syrian flag appears on the right side of the frame and the title "Made in Israel" appears on his massive body. These words that traditionally appear on the labels of items for export are sarcastically shown here against the background of a typical European landscape, one where snowdrifts impede people's movement. This snow gives the German prisoner an advantage before he has even uttered a word, since, in contrast to the half-frozen Israeli police officers and detectives alarmed about having to step out of their vehicles, the Nazi (and the Russian hitmen who appear later in the plot) feel at home in this Golan Heights terrain. Unthreatened, the prisoner looks confidently at the camera, revealing his aging features. In the next shot he stands with his back to the camera. Behind him, a completely different landscape unfolds: the snow and fog have vanished. Police cars with illuminated headlights park along a wet road, and young men in dark police-uniforms walk in slow motion towards the magnified figure. Another flag, this time an Israeli one, now appears at the side of the frame. The older man extends his hands and an Israeli police officer handcuffs him and helps him into a large truck, boasting about this Israeli achievement: "made in Israel, especially for Nazi convicts."

As the convoy departs, the camera lingers on a green hill topped by a sculpture of a red deer, where a lone trumpeter plays to a little group of locals and tourists. The camera passes over his shoulder and reveals police cars crossing empty roads. This is the end of this unusual road movie's exposition, which contrasted cinematic language in order to ridicule the Israeli fantasy of bringing the last living Nazi perpetrator to justice. It ends with a comic–tragic sequence as the armored truck stops at a gas station. The Nazi peers out of the truck's small, barred window and two little children come and watch him through the bars.

"Who's that man?" asks the younger child.
"Don't you know? That's the Nazi Beast."
"What beast?"
"The Nazi Beast."
"I never heard of such an animal," says the younger child.
"Of course, you haven't heard of him. There aren't many left."
"Where do they come from? "
"Mostly from South America."

With this conversation, the director lays bare one of mythic dimensions of Israeli collective memory, which is coded in metaphorical concepts—"the Nazi Beast." In Israeli State ideology, the Nazi Beast is a horrific monster that appeared once, before the State's creation, and was responsible for the deaths of six million Jews. Ever since, it threatens to erupt at any given moment and destroy the Jewish people. Israeli children, like the ones standing in front of the truck, have internalized this national discourse, take this metaphor literally and are convinced that they now confront one of the nation's founding myths: "the Nazi Beast."

At this point, a police officer (Tzahi Grad) bangs on the truck with the Nazi locked inside, and shouts "let's go." Again, the convoy progresses through a landscape that gradually becomes an ordinary Israeli winter landscape of muddy ground and drenched trails. Due to the State's religious laws, they cannot take the Nazi to Jerusalem, as planned, because it would mean desecrating the Sabbath. Therefore, they decide to spend the night on Mars Mountain,[10] but not before they halt at several important stations, such as the Americans' hamburger truck, where the Nazi orders a double hamburger and devours it quickly. Afterwards, the Nazi skinny-dips in the Sea of Galilee while bone-chilled Israeli police officers watch him in amazement.

The film's road movie plot grows complicated when the convoy is joined by two teams of hitmen dispatched by Hoffman, the son of a Holocaust survivor who promised his father to exact vengeance on all living Nazis. Following the exoneration of John Demjanjuk, Hoffman realized he could no longer rely on Israel's judicial system and ordered the two teams (without telling one about the other) to bring him the Nazi alive so he himself can execute him. The first team is a pair of accident-prone Israelis, Perach (Sasson Gabai) and Tiktak (Dror Keren); the second consists of Vassily (Egor Mirkovnov) and Dudu (Evgenya Dodina), two professional Russian hitmen. The duplicate job order makes the situation both absurd and entertaining. Watching the chase from afar is another, equally eccentric, character: the trumpet player Eddie Zanzori (Menashe Noy), a Golan Heights resident who makes a living playing his trumpet at the memorials frequently held there ("sometimes even three a day," he notes) and lives in a hut in the mountains with the surprising name "the Pink Tank."

Hoffman has promised a large prize to whoever brings him the last living Nazi alive. However, as the plot progresses, it grows increasingly complicated; the Nazi is now in a secondary position compared to the existential dilemmas that the assortment of colorful characters confront. Neither Israel's national fantasy of obtaining historical justice, nor Hoffman's personal fantasy of killing the last Nazi on earth, come to fruition. The whole film becomes a carnivalesque chase in which characters with competing interests must survive the horrendous cold to try and catch a man acclimated to cold.

This strange ensemble is intent on reaching Mars Mountain, where they plan to spend the night. On their way, Perach and Tiktak kidnap the Nazi and bring him to an army bunker used during the Yom Kippur War. Here, Holocaust memory intersects with the memory of that war: the last Nazi on earth is literally introduced into this war's space[11]. However, now, the two hitmen face moral dilemmas: should they feed the Nazi, should they strike up a conversation with him about dog training (Tiktak's hobby), or just stick a bullet in his head? Ultimately, they realize that they are incapable of doing the deed; they relax their supervision of the prisoner and let him go free into the snow. All the Israelis, apart from the trumpet player and Dudu, the Russian murderer who turns out

to be a beautiful woman, die in the snow, including the little daughter of Hoffman—the businessman who dreamed of "sticking a bullet in the last Nazi's head." When everyone has disappeared, the Nazi realizes that Nazis require enemies to exist and decides to end his life in the snow.

With the story of the last Nazi, the director constructs a symbolic–parodic dimension for interpreting this part of the Israeli landscape: while the German comports himself as if at home, the Israelis experience it as a foreign, alienating landscape. Converting the Israeli landscape into a European one, a commonly voiced wish in Israel, does not work for the Israelis in *Made in Israel*: they are so cold that they cannot continue walking through the snow. This interpretation is reinforced at the end of the film when Hoffman, the sworn avenger of Nazis willing to use his wealth to pursue and execute the Nazi, loses his daughter in the cold and abandons the hunt.

As in Italian Neorealist films, the landscape in *Made in Israel* takes center-stage and marginalizes the flat characters, who are almost reduced to caricatures. Illuminated by celestial bodies, the landscape is identified as the film's true hero, and the protagonists' interactions with it communicate its character. Since this is a road movie, the protagonists set out from one point to reach another and the landscape is revealed gradually in accordance with the progress of the Nazi and his captors through the space. Despite Israel's small size, the journey is a long one, thereby actualizing the symbolic distance from the hegemonic perception of Nazis ("the Nazi Beast") to the unexpected recognition of his humanity that the characters must traverse to complete their mission.

That distance has another significance: the presentation of Otherness, including the exoticism of the Golan Heights landscape. Its otherness seems to preclude its ever becoming an inseparable part of Israel's traumatic historic memory. The strange colorful memorials, scattered through the space and bearing the names of animals, as well as the memorial ceremonies held there, evidence the efforts encouraged "from above" to include it as part of the national landscape. However, those memorials function only as simulacra, copies of copies of signs that once held meaning for someone. Intended to commemorate battles now long forgotten because their significance was lost, they are ostensibly the mythological battles of the Yom Kippur War, associated in Israeli history with the Golan Heights; however, the film's narrative hints that time has consigned most to oblivion. What remains are empty ceremonies and rituals; clinging to them is supposed to facilitate the redemption of a post-traumatic people, exactly like the fantasy of tracking down the last Nazi and bringing him to trial in Jerusalem.

In this way, *Made in Israel* combines the nation's two innermost desires into a single fantastic narrative at the end of which the Israeli people, signified metonymically by the multicultural group pursuing the Nazi, succeeds in overcoming the trauma of the Yom Kippur War, one that for many evoked the Nazi desire to erase the Jewish people (Shapira 1996). Vengeance against the last Nazi also signifies purification from the national religious trauma (the Holocaust and the Yom Kippur War) that has afflicted Israelis for decades. To illustrate the affinity between the two traumatic narratives, the film uses narrative motifs and characters from the past that challenge the Israeli collective memory. The most notable is the snowy terrain that caused the death of unprepared Jews in Europe and that prevented Israeli soldiers from defending themselves during the Yom Kippur War. Folman's film thus challenges Israel's collective memory of the war, and its fetishization, distancing the past instead of bringing it closer. In doing so, the film also transforms the landscape of the Golan Heights into a simulacrum, a copy lacking an original that only legends (such as those the tour-guide tells) can inject with meaning; however. this meaning is also invented.[12]

Folman's film suggests that Israeli wars have transformed the Golan Heights landscape into a mythic setting where the Israeli people have always felt small and insignificant. Moreover, Israelis await a day when it will be possible for ordinary citizens to be heroes. In the case of *Made in Israel*, the intention to find and bring to justice in Jerusalem offers fictional inspiration. Yet, the terrible failure of the 1973 Yom Kippur War repeats itself in Folman's' fiction too: though the last Nazi is led across the snowy landscape by his Israeli

captors, his confident steps through the historical landscape of the Golan Heights do not inflect that place with heroic associations—quite the opposite. In tandem, a question is voiced: has justice been served? The Nazi's old, exhausted features hint that the waiting was too long, that revenge should have been taken years ago, and that this can no longer disguise the Jewish people's dual historical failures: The Holocaust and the Yom Kippur War, failures imprinted in the landscape. At the end of the film, the joy of victory is neither Jewish nor German: after the last of his pursuers vanishes, the last Nazi takes his own life.

5. Summary, or a Fantasy about an Unscarred Landscape

Perhaps the most discordant tone in Folman's apocalyptic fantasy is that peace with Syria, a neighboring country with open boarders, according to the film's narrative, has not succeeded in healing the traumas of the Yom Kippur War. The protagonists delude themselves by thinking that the last Nazi's trial will heal the wounded Israeli soul and repair the failed attempt to convict another Nazi, John Demjanjuk. However, in the film's landscape, the memory of trauma is replicated by the memorials scattered throughout the Golan Heights, which act as landmarks in a seemingly boundless terrain that can easily cause disorientation. It is a sensation that typifies the post-traumatic condition and constitutes the essence of Israeli society's discomfort at the beginning of the Third Millennium—the sense of an utter lack of control over events. In an article for the American-Jewish journal, *Azure*, the film scholar Ilan Avisar (2009) writes that *Made in Israel* is "ultimately a cynical film, one that aspires to dismiss the notion that some topics are off-limits to criticism, and some cultural values above ridicule." Not only does Avisar's description restrict the reading of the film and the potential identification of subversive criticism in it, it also ignores Folman's discussion of Israeli society's obsession with memory, a process that entails creating symbols and transforming memories into simulacra.

Watching the film suggests that eliminating all heroes involved in the chase is the director's way of trying to eradicate the Israeli obsession with remembering at all costs. Everything is distorted, everything wears away; only the landscape remains untouched, waiting for someone to reinterpret it without linking it to previous events. The song that ends the film "This is how we parted", sung by the Mizrahi vocalist Avner Gadassi to words by Smadar Shir, is heard while viewing the landscape. Now, the horrors are over and the sun has risen. The snow of the Golan Heights, with its symbolic traumatic connotations, has disappeared, replaced by a different atmosphere, another landscape, evidencing a possible alternative interpretation of the Golan Heights landscape. In the fantasy that the film creates, one can interpret the snow's disappearance as the end of a traumatic, even post-traumatic, period in which the protagonists and all of Israeli society were completely enmeshed: people pursued by the traumatic past they inherited from previous generations who believed unconditionally in that ethos. The failure of the definitive Israeli fantasy (judging the last Nazi in Jerusalem) hints that Israelis must shake off the past and look to the potential in the future—as noted in the film's opening caption: "somewhere in the near future." However, it is unclear what will become of Israel and its citizens without those constituting traumas, when the landscape is no longer suffused with trauma. When the film jumps ahead chronologically (by noting the time as "somewhere in the near future"), it also speculates about the potential for healing an entire people pursued by its own history. *Made in Israel* envisions redemption from past trauma and the healing of bearers of traumatic memory. From now on, snow will no longer symbolize the terrible traumas in which Jews died in Europe and Israeli soldiers on the Golan Heights: rocks and mountains will no longer be sites for clinging to traumas and will return to being just rocks and mountains. However, the recent release of *Valley of Tears* teaches us that Israelis are not close to being separated from their constitutive trauma. Not only because of the message suggested by a prayer repeated over and over—"In each generation there are those standing up against us to destroy us"—but also and mostly because, just like the Holocaust that Shapira compared to the Yom Kippur War, it created a trans-generational trauma, affecting those who did not experience it but suffered its after effects.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Notes

1. This road movie is exceptional in many respects, namely because of its minimalistic representation of this war based on a very personal experience of this war. See Raz Yosef (2005).

2. Some researchers argue that there is no such a thing as "national trauma." Traumas are always individual ones. But Israeli culture has chosen to designate the Yom Kippur War as its national trauma, a situation described in Anita Shapira's article "Historiography and Memory: Latrun 1948".

3. The Black Panthers (*HaPanterim HaShkhorim*) were an Israeli protest movement in 1971 in the Musrara neighborhood formed by second-generation Jewish immigrants from North Africa and Middle Eastern countries in reaction to the Israeli State's discrimination against Mizrahi Jews that existed since the establishment of the State. Inspired by the Afro-American Organization Black Panther Party, they saw their mission as working toward the achievement of social justice for Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews.

4. One must add to these films Danny Waxman's film *Hamsin* (1982) "a work whose allegorical suggestiveness continues resonating powerfully 30 years after it was made" as Uri Klein writes (Klein 2011). Its plot unfolds in the Galilee against the backdrop of a dispute over land, which the Israeli government wants to expropriate from the Arab residents of the region. The film's protagonist is a farmer named Gedaliya, who is continuing his late father's work, raising cattle close to the Galilee village. The hostility against the backdrop of land receives a symbolic turn here, when a Palestinian laborer falls in love with the landowner's sister, violating the equilibrium between occupied and occupier.

5. Together with Ori Sivan, Folman directed a short documentary *Shaanan Si* during the first Gulf War, in 1991. To judge by his filmography, the Gulf War matched exactly the apocalyptic vision that marks all his work thus far.

6. In fact, since the appearance of *Kippur* and *Made in Israel*, and up until the recent *Valley of Tears*, only two significant Israeli texts have used the region for their plots: the film by Eran Riklis, based in turn on Suha Araf's film *The Syrian Bride* (HaKala HaSuritm 2004), and the fantasy-apocalyptic TV series by Noach Stollman and Oded Davidoff, *Pillars of Smoke* (*Timrot Ashan* 2010–2011), produced for "Hot"—the Israeli cable TV channel.

7. Interesting in this context is the special legal status of the Golan Heights: the region had been under military control since it was conquered in 1967. Following 1981 legislation, it became an official Israeli space, where the laws of the state applied. That legislation ostensibly ended the status of the Golan Heights as an occupied region. Nonetheless, international law, and particularly UN Resolution 297, holds that the annexation of the Golan Heights by Israel has no international validation. In other words, that space still awaits a decision pertaining to its juridical status, identity, and significance.

8. In the past few years, Israeli directors such as Joseph Pitchhadze, director of the film *Year Zero* (2004), have chosen to present the Israeli landscape in winter. Like Folman, Pitchhadze also chooses snow as a way of defamiliarizing the traditional Israeli landscape (the kind immortalized by Uri Zohar, for example), with shots of winter in Tel Aviv, in order to change the traditional character of the place and to instill it with new content.

9. Playing the role of the last Nazi in Folman's movie is the late German actor Jurgen Holtz, who became famous thanks to his role in the film *Goodbye Lenin!* (2003) by German director Wolfgang Becker.

10. In the film, Mars Mountain is the country's highest mountain. It is also the name of a classic collection of science fiction stories by Eugene George Key (1935). Folman's reference to a classic site in science fiction literature joins a series of iconographic signifiers hinting that the Golan Heights is a site that cannot exist in reality, hinted at in the opening title "Somewhere in the near future." The signifiers in fact annul the validity of the pursuit and make it a reflection on the Israeli fantasy of tracking down the last Nazi on earth, a fantasy that actually exists only in science fiction.

11. This scene echoes a scene in the classical Israeli-British film Thorold Dickenson's *Hill 24 doesn't answer* (1955), where Jewish soldiers encounter in a bunker a Nazi disguised as an Arab fighter.

12. The tour guide's talk to a group of tourists is fascinating; it connects the Holocaust narrative to a narrative of heroism specific to the 1973 war: "His name was Marco and everybody called him Super-Marco, of course. And Marco was a tank commander, he heard about the war on the radio at home, he came here on his motorcycle, took a tank on the way and started to fight. He was of course fully motivated because Marco was the son of two survivors from Treblinka. He stood here, on this hill, looking back in anger at the Sea of Galilee and he knew that he was taking the whole the country on his back, Marco knew there could not be a second Holocaus".

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