

This anthology by an interdisciplinary and international group of scholars addresses topics such as rape, forced prostitution, assaults on childbearing, artistic representations of sexual violence, and psychological insights into survivor trauma. These subjects have been relegated to the edges or completely left out of Holocaust history, and this book aims to shift perceptions and promote new discourse.

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—ROCHELLE G. SAIDEL, Director of the Center for the Study of the Holocaust, Genocide, and Humanitarian Studies at Middle Tennessee State University

SONJA M. HEDGEPETH is professor of German at Middle Tennessee State University. ROCHELLE G. SAIDEL is the author of *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp*. She is the founder and executive director of Remember the Women Institute.

EDITORS OF JEWISH STUDIES

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## Sexual Violence against JEWISH WOMEN during THE HOLOCAUST



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# Sexual Violence

## AGAINST

## JEWISH WOMEN

## DURING THE

## HOLOCAUST

Edited by

Sonja M. Hedgepeth and

Rochelle G. Saidel

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This book is dedicated to the victims  
of sexual violence during the Holocaust—  
those who were silenced, those who have spoken out,  
and those who have chosen to remain silent.

Death is a motif that commonly deepens viewers' understanding of and identification with the plot.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the spirit of early Holocaust films was humanistic and usually touched upon human ability to overcome pain and suffering. What nevertheless stands out in these films is the absence of any serious attempt to grapple with the physical and sexual abuse of women,<sup>3</sup> whose role in advancing the plot was significant. Such missing elements include exploitation, forced or "consensual" sexual and mental humiliation, torture, and death in the concentration and extermination camps. An overall survey of the films that refer to sexual abuse shows that very few Holocaust films address such themes, and that the national, religious, and ethnic origin of a film does not seem to play a part in the cinematic treatment of the young women.

### The Female Body as "Public Property": Through the Documentary Prism

The German troops themselves had already been documenting the sexual abuse of women during the course of the war. The documentary film *My Private War* (Dirs. Harriet Eder and Thomas Kufus, Germany, 1989) interviewed five Wehrmacht soldiers who had used their still camera and 8 mm movie camera to document their unit's journey into Eastern Europe and the plains of Russia in 1942. The five documented their lives: becoming soldiers, the invasion of Russia, impressions of the weather, and their encounter with the Red Army and local population. In conversations about the cultural differences between them and the local people, they stated in their own defense that this did not allow too much emotional closeness because they considered the Russians base, too connected to nature itself, and therefore a sub-race to be feared.

From the photographs taken on the Eastern Front and incorporated into the documentary, a terrible picture emerges of an army advancing into a civilian area—burning its synagogues, houses, and pasture lands—as well as revealing women carrying packages and tiny infants in their arms. Facing the scene with equanimity, one of the soldiers films a group of young Ukrainian women separated from the rest, standing at the entrance to a spacious hut. At the top of the staircase stand three officers, examining the woman whose turn it is to enter. She is dressed as a typical villager, covered from head to toe. One of the officers stretches out a hand toward her breasts, his face like that of his fellow officers, split by an amused, lecherous grin. Two young women stand with their backs to these women, their faces looking right in the camera. Despite

## CHAPTER

# 14

## "Public Property"

### Sexual Abuse of Women and Girls in Cinematic Memory

YVONNE KOZLOVSKY-GOLAN

The cinematic medium commemorated the events of the twentieth century in various ways, reaching a new level during World War II. During this period, feature filmmaking transformed itself from depicting the century's events descriptively to documenting all of the stages of the war. The cameramen/directors were among the troops that liberated the death camps of central Europe. They documented the events of the initial days of liberation, traces of the Nazis' deeds, and the "she'erit hapleita," the surviving remnant saved from the flames. Filming was realistic-naturalistic without censorship or considerations of bias. Shots portrayed prisoners and guards alike behind a single fence encircling them. These images, constituting a visual document, served as the proof that brought Nazis and their collaborators to judgment, despite the fact that the cameras were unable to capture the horrors that took place but a moment before the liberators came through the gates.

The documentary material comprising these horror stories and their background was almost immediately translated into the language of the feature film to form a visual language that linked form and content. Film bonded the implicit to the explicit to create a meaningful narrative, with scenes from documentary films integrated into feature films, including footage of terror and abuse. Conventions of the feature film usually include dramatization of reality integrated with a fictional story. The cinematic narrative takes a historical perspective, referring to events that took place during a defined period, and the plot is always dramatic.<sup>1</sup> For example, the protagonist is ripped away from family and home, presenting a story of loss, suffering, torture, death of family and friends, and survival. Through narrative, the event described in a film becomes understandable to viewers, although perhaps difficult to watch.

the cold, they are dressed in lightweight clothing, and it looks as if they were peeled out of their clothing for the officers. Their collars are open, with breasts visible. The braids of one woman are undone. She stands with lowered gaze, looking ashamed, as she hungrily chews a piece of bread that the soldiers have given her. Her friend is dressed carelessly in equally light clothing, combing her disarrayed hair. The women's faces show mental anguish, tear marks clearly visible on their sooty cheeks. Their blouses are open. The camera faces another girl, who is in a modeling stance, dressed only in a skirt; her upper torso bare. She is embarrassed and vainly attempts to cover herself with a shawl, but she is asked to remove it and bare her breasts. She is ordered to wriggle in "exotic" movements for the camera. She ties a scarf around her head as a makeshift Oriental headdress and makes belly-dancing motions as the soldiers greedily watch the spectacle, photographing her while they chuckle with pleasure.

In the lower part of the frame sits a little girl of about three or four years old, watching the soldiers with interest. It seems her turn will come in a moment. The camera does not set out her fate in detail, or what was done to the young women at the structure's entrance, although the hints are clearly there.

The next scene takes place directly in front of the camera: soldiers steal animals from a home belonging to two women. Two others are asked "to clean up" the killing fields left by the Wehrmacht, to take out the corpses, concentrate them in a mass grave, and burn them.

The order of the images in this film makes it clear to us how events unfolded: first the soldiers occupied the villages; then they raped, abused, and defiled the women and young girls of the village, looted their property, and finally forced them to hide the evidence of the deeds of the soldiers who "protected" them and their villages.

We can assume that the women who suffered the embraces of the Wehrmacht were not Jewish, but this scene reveals the attitude of the units toward the civilian population in general and the local women in particular. From here, we can draw conclusions about the treatment by the Wehrmacht and *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing units) and their collaborators who assisted in "purifying" the region of Jewish women and girls.<sup>4</sup> This 1989 documentary was not distributed widely and soon sank into the oblivion of video libraries.

In a surprising move, directors Oliver Axer and Susanne Benze merged these scenes into their troubling film *Hitler's Hit Parade* (Germany, 2003), which aroused many reactions. It is difficult to categorize this film as either a feature or documentary. The filmmakers deliberately did not want it neatly pigeonholed, as their goal was to portray life in Germany as it was seen through the

eyes of Germans who lived under the Nazi regime. Through clips of daily life during the Third Reich, the viewer sees two sides of a mirror image: on one side, German self-satisfaction and national pride, portrayed through film and diaries; on the other, the "Big Lie" perpetrated on the souls of civilians and soldiers—a lie that the film exposes by contrasting patriotic photographs of soldiers in the East and photographs of sexual abuse of women in Eastern Europe and identifying them as part of the same patriotism. The film is considered extremely subversive.

During the first viewing of *Hitler's Hit Parade*, one is likely to miss the directors' cynical irony. On a second and third examination, the sensation of nausea intensifies as the scenes take on their historical significance and contextual value. The documentary photographs were taken by Germans themselves in 1942, as well as from material found by the Allies after the war. Not many photographs actually depict rape of women. Nevertheless, when the concentration camps in Western Europe were liberated by the Allies in 1945, first-hand evidence of sexual abuse was filmed.<sup>5</sup>

For example, the Allies' camera entered Breedonk, a torture camp that was explicitly designed for "special handling" of those who opposed the Nazi regime in Belgium. Ex-prisoners there demonstrated for the camera the tortures they underwent with the instruments left on site. The men were dressed in a dignified manner in gabardine trousers and buttoned-down white shirts. The witnesses in the film take off their shirts. Others roll up their trouser legs to show signs of burns and beatings. Men who underwent surgical tortures to their groin are photographed from the neck down, without showing their faces. The audience receives the impression that the cinematographer was preserving the dignity of the survivors, rather than revealing their injuries provocatively or with an intent to humiliate.

As this sequence ends, a young woman appears in an unusual location: on the roof balcony of a building overlooking the destroyed city, where she is asked to show the result of the tortures she underwent. However, in contrast to the respectful representation of the men's tortures, apparently at a signal from the director, she raises her skirt in one sweep, and exposes her underwear. She turns her back to the camera and displays her buttocks pocked from blows. The camera focuses on her buttocks as the narrator dryly explains that this is "a woman who suffered beatings."

Scholar Lawrence Douglas strongly condemned this shot, stating that it is unworthy to be screened because it is semi-pornographic, in an unlikely setting, and seems staged.<sup>6</sup> Douglas's statement correctly takes into account the way the young woman is placed facing the camera. The setting in which a

voiceover on another subject. His speech deliberately follows hers by only a few seconds. When she speaks in German of the details of what was done to the women, her voice is drowned out by the narrator speaking about the injections of kerosene into prisoners' bodies. The woman doctor's testimony is swallowed up in the bigger story of the war and the horrors perpetrated by human beings on other human beings, some of which can be described in words and others by silence.

#### Later Evidence

The tendencies to conceal and repress the abuse of women in general and sexual abuse in particular also took root in postwar cinema. The most outstanding examples of concealment were perpetuated precisely by the survivors themselves, many of whom were interviewed in Israel decades later. In interviews conducted as part of the project founded by Steven Spielberg, now an ongoing project of the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, women survivors extensively describe their past according to a particular order of topics, as if illustrating the Nazis' orderly mechanism of destruction.<sup>7</sup> They describe their parents and family and conditions under which they lived, which included hunger, fear, hard labor, abuse by those in control, and death. They tell only in hints of the painful events that damaged their bodies and their femininity. Some of these testimonies were later incorporated into films.

In Tor Ben-Mayor's documentary *Love in Auschwitz* (Ahava b'Auschwitz, Israel, 2003), the protagonist describes an affair between an SS officer and a Jewish prisoner in the camp, through which the woman and her sister's lives were saved. The description of the relationship and the site of the event raise reasonable suspicions that this so-called love takes place on the thin seam between an emotional relationship and sexual exploitation. The survivor claims that the woman did not love the officer but had a sexual relationship with him in circumstances that saved her life. The context of exploitation did not prevent the officer from later asking "his survivor" to testify on his behalf before an Austrian war crimes tribunal. She did so, despite her distaste, out of a feeling of obligation and gratitude.

Marco Carmel's documentary film constituting part 1 of *A Matter of Time* (Israel, 2005) relates the destruction of the Jews of Libya, based on interviews and factual research. A survivor who had been a young girl at the time of World War II states only one sentence: "They did terrible things to them [the mothers

lovely young girl is made to pose for the camera on the roof of a building overlooking the city seems a poor choice, if not cynical. It expresses lack of consideration and basic understanding of what victims suffered in general, and what women endured in the camps in particular. However, I do think that this scene has narrative importance and gives us hints about information concealed from view.

The entry into the camps and the authentic photographs of what was done there moments prior to liberation enables the Allies to represent their covert partners: those who were left alive and those who paid with their lives for the liberation. Filming just the men who experienced torture only partially reflects the events of the war; filming a woman who was physically tortured is no less important. Even portraying a woman whose intimate organs were abused to humiliate her can be seen as contributing to completing the missing pieces of the story regarding the sexual abuse of women.

Another fact revealed in this short scene is the type of torture experienced by members of the Resistance. Among the men who were filmed, 90 percent testified to physical torture, such as cigarette burns, broken fingers, being scraped with barbed wire, and receiving beatings on their back, and beatings of their upper and lower limbs without breakage. As the film continues, it portrays another type of torture, one more of the nature of sexual abuse—the young woman whose signs of torture are shown in the close-up of her buttocks pockmarked from beatings. Although the narrator does not state anything about sexual abuse, it does not require a great leap of imagination to span the short distance from the site of the beatings to the woman's sexual organs. However, the way in which the young woman is filmed swallows up her narrative in a wave of details transmitted to the shocked viewers, due perhaps to the director's lack of attention or lack of sensitivity toward the women in the camp.

As the film continues, after many transitions between the camps, a woman doctor who had been incarcerated in 1945 in Bergen-Belsen women's camp stands before the camera. She testifies to the camera, with numerous women standing behind her. She is talking in German while the narrator only partially translates her words into English. The woman doctor tells about life in the camp explicitly, including lack of food and cannibalism. She describes her work as a doctor and tells how some doctors abused the prisoners under the guise of "medical experiments." Her testimony is lengthy, and her voice is often muffled by the narrator who translates her words. When she begins to tell about the gynecological "experiments" on women, the way they were executed and their essential nature, her voice is entirely silenced by the narrator's

and daughters in the camp] . . . I don't know . . . I was just a little girl . . ." The elderly narrator blushes, and refuses to continue her testimony.

### Through the Cinematic Prism of the Feature Film

As suggested above, in order to create the fictional world of concentration camps for postwar feature films, filmmakers used iconographic imagery of the survivors who appeared in the footage of liberation films.<sup>8</sup> These documentaries were extremely powerful, and almost impossible to ignore. They became, in practice or potentially, the cornerstone of feature films. In addition, strong, postwar cultural messages penetrated into feature films. Although these messages were covert, their stamp is obvious in films made after World War II, which tended to avoid implications or deep treatment of the physical and sexual abuse of the women inmates, choosing instead to blend the issue into the general mistreatment of all camp prisoners.

Between 1945 and the 1960s, approximately 120 feature films were made worldwide with the Holocaust as a central theme. However, they were never blockbusters, and they had very little relative impact on how history was recorded.<sup>9</sup> These were the years of minimal means, of *arte povera* and Hollywood's almost complete avoidance of the Holocaust as subject. In contrast, in European countries, several films were made that reflected what went on within their borders during the Nazi occupation. Surprisingly, the subject of these films was not historiographic but anecdotal. Numerous scholars have classified the films into two categories:

1. Films that refer to Nazism as a phenomenon, a colossal social disturbance expressed primarily in the association between Nazism/Fascism and sexual domination. See, for example, these films by Italian directors: *Kapò* (Dir. Pontecorvo, 1959), *The Night Porter* (Dir. Cavani, 1974), *Seven Beauties* (Dir. Wertmüller, 1975), *The Damned* (Dir. Visconti, 1969) and *Salò* (Dir. Pasolini, 1975).
2. American-made Holocaust films featuring heroism, such as *Exodus* (Dir. Preminger, 1960) and *The Pawnbroker* (Dir. Lumet, 1964). *Exodus* includes a controversial scene in which a survivor describes his work in the Sonderkommando (gas chamber and crematoria crew), and mentions the "work" of the women serving the Germans. *The Pawnbroker* has an explicit scene in which Professor Nazerman is forced to watch his wife being raped by Germans as part of the "special handling" meted out to him. In both

films, the victims experience physical and mental rape simultaneously. Both women and men were sexually abused in one way or another during their incarceration in the camps.

While these categories are useful, a deeper look at the film industry in the West during these years shows that both types of films share a common narrative: woman as a vehicle for conveying the Nazi/Fascist message, for carrying out their sex crimes, sexual exploitation, and pimping, and as a means through which pure evil works itself out in all its ugliness. Despite all this, women are missing from the films' central discourse, as the real "heroes" are men.

### *Kapò*, *The Night Porter*, and *Witness from Hell*

The central plot of the film *Kapò* is the story of Nicole, a young Jewish woman who takes the identity of a non-Jewish political prisoner, and her status as one of the *Prominenten* (important prisoners) after she is lured into providing sexual services to the men. The potentially life-saving "choiceless choice" of this young woman to be a sex slave to the Nazis stands out in the conversation between her and a friend who attempts to dissuade her. Their conversation ends with Nicole's challenge, her consent to barter sex for food, which means life, in contrast to her friend who represents sublime human values. The German soldier's "conquest" of the fifteen-year-old girl is mentioned in a scene in which she is led to his room, as he jokes with his friend that he likes them young and thin. Nicole's body therefore represents a model of male fantasy, especially that of a pedophile, who believes that the young girls really desire him. The film problematizes the essential choice that Nicole makes. This is why the importance of Nicole's narrative disappears and she will pay for it with her life. From the filmmaker's viewpoint, she is not a "heroine" who can become part of the pantheon of "heroes of the Holocaust." The opposite is true: it is obvious that the director is embarrassed by the "job" that the protagonist has "chosen." Thus the film abandons Nicole and presents instead the figure of the brave Soviet soldier, who enters the plot in the last third of the film as the central figure through whom the deeds of the Nazis and their collaborators will be condemned.

*The Night Porter*, an extremely controversial film from 1974, has been studied a great deal and classified as a film on the border of power relations and sex. I would like to disagree with this classification, which usually originates in the male gaze that interprets the sexual discourse between man and woman as



simply what is on the surface.<sup>10</sup> However, this film can be seen from a viewpoint that has never before been treated in full: this is the stance of the child-woman who learns the “secrets of love” from a much older man.<sup>11</sup> He beats her and rewards her with the head of a prisoner who had tormented her. He tortures her physically and mentally, uses her for sadistic experiments, and explains to her that therein lies the root of his love. Her absolute love for him is a love conditional on her humiliation. Her reflex reaction to him, even many years later, is as automatic as her behavior as a battered woman who returns to the “scene of the crime” again and again out of love and blind faith in her beloved. Patterns of love associated with survival were, in her case from a very young age, patterns that were violent, humiliating, and painful—and patterns that were imprinted upon her. Any other analysis of the film misses the point. The power plays and domination between the child-woman and the man, which others tend to focus on, are misconstructions. They come from the position of the viewer who wishes to see sex between the two characters as pornography and does not look more closely at the psychological layers of the relationship that bring about the tragic death of the heroine who cannot behave otherwise.

The film *Witness Out of Hell* (*Zeugin aus der Hölle*, Dir. Artur Brauner, 1965) made about a decade earlier, is similar and aroused a no less sensational reaction. What is obvious in this film is the heroine’s struggle to cope with narratives from the tortuous labyrinths of the past that flooded her in the present. Leah Weiss, a survivor of Auschwitz, is summoned to testify against Nazi officers who had abused her as a sex slave in the “Moulin Rouge” camp brothel as well as used her for horrific “medical” experiments. The ghosts of the past (a lobby of Nazi officers and their relatives who survived the war) pursue Weiss in an attempt to prevent her from testifying. And, indeed, her testimony does not receive the screen time one expects. Instead, the viewer accompanies Weiss’s memories through flashbacks.<sup>12</sup>

The film’s covert message is that Leah Weiss’s humiliation and survival are her illusion. She herself is represented as an unstable woman due to the trauma she underwent, while preserving morality and justice in court are the film’s overt messages. This ploy is the sterile means through which the viewer is supposed to be impressed by the plot. The testimony of *Witness from Hell* reads a very narrow path of silence and repression,<sup>13</sup> although the covert message bubbles up and penetrates through the bones the more one looks deeply into the film. Leah Weiss becomes twice a victim: first, of the past, and second of a present in which she must bear witness and then defend herself for lack of corroborating evidence. Before she can testify and let the world hear her truth, Leah Weiss dies.

### Sadistic Torture in Feature Films

Spielberg’s box-office hit *Schindler’s List* (1993) hints unambiguously in the scene in the cellar that Helene, the Jewish housekeeper/servant of the sadistic camp commandant Amon Goeth, is beaten by him and probably serves him in bed as well. Goeth not only beats her but also humiliates and exploits her, similar to Lucia’s story in *The Night Porter*. In return, each time he grants her life for another day.

In all of the films discussed here, the figure of the heroic woman remains absent from the screen. The tortures that were done to women have been presented under the guise of medical experiments, such as in the “sexploitation” film *Isa, She-Wolf of the SS* (Dir. Don Edmonds, USA, 1975) in which pornographic depictions of the female body are shown for a great deal of time, featuring full nudity and torture with objects such as electrical vibrators. However, there are no close-ups of the experiments historically made on the vaginas of torture victims, which would demonstrate the ability to tolerate pain.

Another type of hint at an unexpected kind of rape is seen in the Chinese production *Red Cherry* (Hong Ying Tao, Dir. Daying Ye, 1995). This film narrates the true story of an elementary school student from China, brought by her parents for ideological reasons to Soviet Russia to attend a boarding school. When the Nazis occupy the area, they imprison her in a castle fortress under the command of an army doctor whose favorite hobby is tattooing his victims. The women prisoners have tattoos on their upper and lower limbs, as well as on intimate areas of their bodies. After torturing and threatening the protagonist, the Germans undress her, and her back becomes the “canvas” for the doctor’s masterpiece: the Nazi eagle in full color. She is unable to hide the tattoo because it is so big. In great mental distress, she attempts to burn it off with a torch and kill herself. However, the Russian liberating forces save her. The trauma remains with her for her entire life as she lives by herself, never marries, but carries her suffering and shame alone.

Tim Blake Nelson, director of *The Grey Zone* (USA, 2001), boldly depicts two scenes of sexual abuse and sadism, which were never screened in full. One scene represents in detail the sadistic and vicious torture of the young women in Auschwitz who had assisted in the *Sonderkommando*’s revolt, as a way of forcing them to give up their accomplices. Against the backdrop of hellish tortures filmed explicitly, the viewer has time and opportunity to understand the motives of the young women, their heroism, and their choice of death over a life of humiliation and deathly tortures. It is doubtful that any other films devote enough screen time to the participation of the young women in the dynamiting



the Diaspora Jews—"these women," according to the director—follow them to their new homeland. The protagonist willingly becomes the whore of another conqueror, the British. In *Tel Aviv-Berlin* (Dir. Tsipi Trope, Israel, 1987) three young German-Jewish women whom the Berlin-born hero meets are represented as German field-whores, which is supposed to explain their survival.

None of these films depict or explain the actual act of rape. Nor is there any narrative depth enabling viewers to understand these women, identify with them, and have compassion for them. On the contrary: the explanation is concealed according to the taste of the filmmaker, who decided in advance to point a finger of blame at the survivors. The viewer is imprisoned in this view as if by historical truth. It is interesting to note that all three of the above films were directed by women. However, in contrast to Wertmüller and Cavani, who depicted rape and coercion within the context of the immediate need for survival and had psychoanalytic views of human behavior, these Israeli women directors show no understanding for the women victims, but only offer selected slogans to advance the plot.

### Love as Abnormality

The film *Death in Love* (USA) premiered in 2008, directed by Israeli filmmakers Boaz Yakin and Alma Harel, both of whom live in the United States. The film is exceptionally crude in its view of the relationship between survivors and what has come to be called "the second generation of the Holocaust." A seemingly normal American family copes with the shadows of the Jewish mother's past, which impact unbeatably upon her husband, her children, and herself. She had been a prisoner in the infamous block 11 in Auschwitz-Birkenau, where terrible medical experiments were perpetrated upon the women. Most of the experiments were of a brutal sexual nature, accompanied by crude rape of the young women, amputation of limbs, and destruction of the women's bodies in horrific ways. In the film, all this is a prelude to a surrealistic "love affair" taking place between a sadistic doctor and one of the prisoners, initiated by the woman to save her life. She receives preferential treatment, such as food and warm shelter, in exchange for frequent sexual relations with the doctor. When the war ends, the doctor promises to search for her when the time comes. Many years later, he seeks her out. By then, she is unhappily married and the mother of two. One child has a self-destructive bent, and the second, who lacks life skills, is codependent upon the mother and an irritable complainer.

of the crematoria at Auschwitz. The director is to be commended for his decision to integrate their part in the plot and give them considerable footage, including the vicious collective punishment meted out to the women in their block. However, gender-specific experiences do recede into the background of the cinematic portrayal of the insurrection by the *Sonderkommando* in which crematoria I and III were destroyed with the smuggled explosives.

According to writer and cultural critic Susan Sontag, the United States chose to address the horrors of the Holocaust rather than America's own past history of genocide and human rights abuse.<sup>14</sup> Europe, in contrast, is ashamed of its past and prefers to expose well-known events through intellectual Holocaust literature that attempts to explore the recesses of the human soul. Authors who reflect this are Jean Améry, Jorge Semprun, Imre Kertész, and Primo Levi. Precisely because of this European dedication to intellectual approaches, films such as *Seven Beauties* by Lina Wertmüller and *The Night Porter* by Liliana Cavani were considered perverted, scandalous films. Directed by women, both films had as their subject women and femininity in the camps, women crushed under the male boot, or women who were victims of themselves.

### Israeli Feature Films on the Holocaust

Israeli cinema has treated the subject of the Holocaust in a different manner than has the rest of the world.<sup>15</sup> The theme is not really part of the repertoire of the Israeli film industry, which offers very few films on the subject. The few that do mention the Holocaust summon the ghosts of postwar survivors, their arrival in the Homeland and the chilly reception from the *sabras* (native-born Israelis). I have found a clear and consistent narrative line common to all of the Israeli filmmakers in relation to the Holocaust: ~~mate and some women survivors~~ are insane, and women survivors, especially, were the Germans' whores or worked for them (hence, their survival). The concepts of rape, coercion, and abuse did not exist except in the frame of insanity. The survivors were haunted by their past, which had no concrete details, and bear the scars of their past in their outward appearance.

The number tattooed on the forearm of a young Jewish woman survivor from Salonika, the heroine of *Newland* (Eretz Hadasha, Dir. Orna Ben-Dor Niv, Israel, 1994), was considered by the *sabras* in the *ma'abara* (transit camp) as solid evidence that she was a whore in Auschwitz. Otherwise she would not have survived. In *Henrik's Sister* (Dir. Ruti Peres, Israel, 1997), survivors arrive in Palestine before the Germans can murder them, but the behavioral patterns of

in contrast, or its demonstration by actors, can often transmit the reality better than words can.

Why, then, we may ask, has the issue of abuse of women not been raised more explicitly in cinema about the Holocaust (except in pornographic films not included in this category)? After all, we use the power of photographs to determine our relationship to reality,<sup>17</sup> and the image of a woman being raped could be useful when the goal is to show the horrific situation of the lives of the women in the camps, in hiding, and in secret, and the specific act taking place between aggressor and victim. Filmmakers might have desired to preserve the dignity of the survivors, not to injure or damage the memory of those who were murdered and of those who survived and live among us. In addition, we need to consider the extent of the filmmaker's sense of responsibility and desire to expose human ugliness without creating antagonism in the viewer. To that end, the director treads a tightrope and navigates between terror and curiosity, between the viewer eager for knowledge and the viewer who comes to the movies to be entertained.

Susan Sontag notes that in the modern age, the viewer prefers the photograph to the thing itself, the copy over the original, the representation over reality, the appearance above the experience.<sup>18</sup> The casual viewer who looks at photographs is likely to adopt them as reality itself and to appropriate the contents as the real thing. This phenomenon is so obvious that often some subject seems "better" in a photograph, or at least creates the impression that it is preferable to the "real" event. And indeed, as Sontag states, one of the functions of photography is to improve the look of things (because of this, we feel disappointed when we see a photograph that is unflattering).<sup>19</sup>

In the case of films such as those about the Holocaust, any attempt to beautify what is ugly and horrific will be considered unreal, grotesque, or lacking sensitivity.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, to arouse the viewer's active response, the director must shock the viewer. From a practical viewpoint, if he or she does so, the shock of seeing sexual abuse, which offers no enjoyment but only pain and humiliation,<sup>21</sup> is likely to do fundamental damage to the sensitive narrative of young women who were exploited. Filming for shock effect can transform a scene from a war crime to a kind of commercial pornography that may injure not only the image of survivor women but also that of the actresses themselves.

Furthermore, a director filming to shock may dilute the crime by equating it to pornography by virtue of his choice of actress. An outstanding expression of this problem is the American "star" system: the representation of a woman

When the Nazi doctor and survivor meet after so many years, there are no sadomasochistic relations as in *Night Porter*. Instead, we view relations that border on mental illness. As an act of foreplay, the doctor murders two of the survivor's acquaintances, an act meant to demonstrate his love for her and desire to be with her again, whether she likes it or not. When they finally rendezvous in a luxury hotel, despite their advanced age they replay their first meeting in the camp and make love. The camera exposes the sex act between the elderly partners, a former victim and perpetrator.

Unlike previous films on the subject, *Death in Love* attempts to discuss several aspects associated with sex, sexual abuse, and the Holocaust. First, the sexual relations between the Nazi and the Jewish prisoner take on a loaded meaning because of the power construct of their relationship and the emotional tie that develops beyond the relations coerced by authority. Second, everything that the young woman experiences in the camp through her repeated meetings with the Nazi has direct implications on her life after liberation and on that of her children, the so-called second generation. She suffers from an eating disorder, is extremely neurotic and frigid with her husband, and engages in repeated infidelities with his friends. In addition, she displays compulsive behavior toward her codependent sons, who are erotically bound to her in a love-hate relationship.

Alma Harel's screenplay is structured as a chapter hanging in the middle of this family's lives. There is no consolation for the survivors, whose past will continue to haunt them and the subsequent generation that has not personally experienced the Holocaust. There is no making peace with the past, but only emptiness and failure when facing the future. The memory that the mother (played by Jacqueline Bisset) thought she had, which had sustained her for all those years, contains nothing but emotional and spiritual death and lust that has not abated at an advanced age. The film is extremely critical, with an obvious, strong desire to shatter accepted conventions in collective memory referring to the survivors' righteousness and the Nazis' evil-doing.

### Rape and Its Cinematic Representations

In the arena of rape, as Ariella Azoulay has stated, only the victim and hangman exist, and whatever happens, it is his word against hers.<sup>16</sup> Violence directed against the woman under these circumstances, hidden from view, creates a closed space very difficult to describe in words. The imagined representation,

raped can miss the point if a "soft core" porn star such as Sylvia Kristel plays the heroine. In addition, the representation of the raped woman is problematic if portrayed by cultural figures well known to viewers from other films, such as Meryl Streep in the film *Sophie's Choice*. The audience identifies with Streep as a strong, independent woman, so it is difficult for them to imagine her as a victim. Likewise, much of the controversy surrounding the film *The Accused* (Dir. Jonathan Kaplan, USA, 1988) was due to the part of the raped woman being played by a star, Jodie Foster.

### Conclusions

Despite all we know about sexual violence, coercion, and rape, and despite photographic records of the horrors that simultaneously reinforce and confirm facts, we still perceive rape in terms of shame and respond to it by silencing it. Thus the difficulty in cinematically depicting the explicit violent sexual act and its implications still exists, and many filmmakers prefer, out of shame or respect for survivors, not to directly show the act. Yet if we, as viewers, witness no example of this act in a film in which rape figures, we may consider the abuse exaggerated. The absence of rape in film can be contrasted with the representation of death. Here the most horrific form of death can be depicted but not felt, because the visual aspect of the dead person, no matter how violent the death, is peaceful and looks asleep. Death in war is universal and constitutes an axiomatic consensus. Rape and sexual injury, however, are not included in this consensus. Death in war is easier to stage on film and speaks for itself. In contrast, rape, with all its ramifications, involves physical and emotional injury that cannot be seen.

Films engaged in the depiction of war in all forms have created and structured cinematic consensus according to which the mood and spirit of the time are expressed, as well as the tone of social and cultural events associated with wars. Rape and sexual abuse do not appear as conventions of war.<sup>22</sup> The narrative of the Holocaust, although a unique event related to World War II, is in this context considered a sub-category of the genre of war movies. The conventions of war in cinema apply to this sub-genre as well.

Furthermore, because publications based on historical research do not provide enough evidence that rape and sexual exploitation were part of the bureaucratic directives for managing the death camps, some have stated that these events took place sporadically and were not institutionalized.<sup>23</sup> It is possible that filmmakers working with Holocaust materials have not seen fit to

depict sexual violence because they lacked images that clearly proved it existed. But it is more likely that, with a covert or overt hint, the filmmakers have had one purpose: to advance the plot and have the viewer enter the hellish atmosphere in which the women prisoners and men prisoners were incarcerated together, and no more.

On one hand, some films have succeeded in taking rape and abuse out of its sexual context and restructured it as an act of violence. On the other hand, cinema represented the heroine's stance to the viewer so that the viewer could identify with the protagonist as injured party and someone with legitimate grounds for complaint. Several Italian and American films of the 1970s attempted to attribute an additional, broader interpretation to sexual abuse. Perhaps their sin was writing the screenplay and focusing the camera with inappropriate emphasis, with resulting derivative interpretation.<sup>24</sup> However, European cinema seems to have fallen silent in the 1980s, when the United States came to the forefront. In the American films of the 1990s, filmmakers created a "balance of terror" between all of the horrors and humiliations perpetrated on all the female and male prisoners. Most Israeli cinema did not do so, but instead seems to have treated the women survivors scornfully, selecting less flattering, backhanded ways to delineate the complexity of women's character.

It may seem that by the beginning of the twenty-first century the bounds of cinematic representation of sex would have broadened and that the representation of sex and sexual abuse of women during the Holocaust would have broken through previous boundary lines. However, I found that the discourse on sexual abuse is still private and represented only in suggestive ways.

### Notes

1. Alan L. Mintz, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 36–84. Mintz proposes two models for the study of Holocaust culture and its cinematic representation, the exceptionalist and the constructionist approaches.
2. Catherine Russell, *Narrative Mortality: Death, Closure and New Wave Cinemas* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 1–30.
3. "Women" in this article refers to girls, adolescents, and women of all ages, religions, and nationalities.
4. Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, Hebrew ed. (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, 2004), 186–198 (first published in English, New York: HarperCollins, 1992).
5. *The Nazi Concentration Camps*, directed by George Stevens (1945: Department of Defense, European Command, Office of Military Government for Germany (U.S.), Office

of the Chief Counsel for War Crimes). Produced and presented as evidence at the war crimes trial of Hermann Göring and twenty other Nazi leaders held at Nuremberg.

6. Lawrence Douglas, *The Memory of Judgment: Making Law and History in the Trials of the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 11–38.

7. Liat Ben-Haviv, director, *Yad Vashem Visual Center*, interview with the author, August 2008. Between 1994 and the end of 2008, 52,000 testimonies were filmed by the Shoah Foundation. They joined 15,000 testimonies, some of which were collected on videotape (since 1987) and others on audio tape (since 1953) in the Yad Vashem Archives. See <http://college.usc.edu/vhi/testimoniesaroundtheworld/location.php> for more information on where the collection is housed (Accessed March 24, 2010).

8. Yvonne Kozlovsky-Golan, "The Shaping of the Holocaust Visual Image by the Nuremberg Trials: The Impact of the Movie *Nazi Concentration Camps*," in *Search and Research*, vol. 9, *Lectures and Papers* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2006): 6–50.

9. Lawrence Baron, "Representations in Film and Television," in *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies*, ed. Peter Hayes and John K. Roth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2010). Also see Lawrence Baron, *Projecting the Holocaust into the Present: The Changing Focus of Contemporary Holocaust Cinema* (Rowman & Littlefield: New York, 2005), 10: "the American film industry accounted for 40 percent of movies about the Holocaust produced between 1945 and the 1960s."

10. It is important to note that this is one of the few films directed by a woman; its messages may be understood as opposite of what they seem. The male critic must, therefore, view the film from the director's viewpoint, and even read it differently. See Marcia Landy, "They Were Sisters: Common Sense, World War II, and the Woman's Film," in *Film, Politics, and Gramsci* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 99–120.

11. Dana Renga, "Staging Memory and Trauma in French and Italian Holocaust Films," *Romanic Review* 97 (May–November 2006): 461–483.

12. Lili Nagler, "Passenger and Witness Out of Hell: Can Women's Traumas Return as Film?" in *Gendered Memories: Transgressions in German and Israeli Film and Theater*, ed. Julia Köhne and Vera Apfelfthaler (Vienna: Turia and Kant, 2007), 27–42.

13. Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 9, 24.

14. Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 87–88.

15. Yvonne Kozlovsky-Golan, "The 81st Blow: Representation of the Holocaust Survivor in Israeli Cinema in the Last Decades of the 20th Century," in "Beyond Camps and Forced Labour," *Proceedings of the Current International Research on Survivors of Nazi Persecution—60 Years On* (London: Second Multidisciplinary Conference at the Imperial War Museum, 2006), 771–785.

16. Ariella Azoulay, "The Civil Contract of Photography," *Fetish: An Israeli Series for Cultural Studies* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2006). See also, Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008).

17. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 158.

18. *Ibid.*, 153.

19. Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 81.

20. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 4–6.

21. In contrast, for example, to a pornographic film containing pain and humiliation designed for viewers' "enjoyment."

22. In June 2008, the United Nations defined rape as "a means of warfare." The language formulated stated that sexual violence was a "military tactic designed to humiliate, control, frighten, and deport civilians of certain ethnic communities or ethnic origins." Violence is likely to worsen the state of armed conflicts and prevent peace-making and security measures (see Shai Roth, *Ha'aretz*, June 27, 2008, 9).

23. Because of regulations against mingling with "non-Aryans," direct sexual contact was prohibited between Nazis and Jewish women, but contact under the guise of medical experimentation opened the narrow door to bend the prohibition "for the benefit of science."

24. Some critics consider this genre a sign characterizing male filmmakers who describe women unwittingly from a male viewpoint or ignore the feminine narrative. In my opinion, Wertmüller's and Cavani's films were analyzed with tools foreign to the directors' feminine viewpoint. In time, the analysis pattern became an inseparable part of their films and caused their reputation to suffer.