

CHAPTER SIX

BURIED SITES OF MEMORY, JEWISH DIASPORA AND THE OTHER

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Introduction

Memory refers to a diverse set of cognitive capacities by which we as human beings retain information and reconstruct past experiences, usually for current purposes¹. Memory is one of the most important means by which our histories animate our current actions and experiences. Memory can be defined as storage of events marking human psyche. This chapter addresses the links between memory and oblivion in the context of migration associated with the 20th Century Jewish Diaspora. Questions about remembering and forgetting, and more specifically, how by the use of technology, these invisible domains of human cognition can be represented are explored.

Contemporary Israeli society consists of, among others, European Jews who immigrated to Israel after the Second World War and native born Israelis. In the process of emigrating, after the Second World War, from various places in Europe to the newly established state of Israel in 1948, the memories of many individuals were put to a test as the ideology of new Israel rejected the image of a weak Diaspora Jew. The tension between memory and history, between the historical record and other narratives regarding what can be conceived as the past, as well as the adaptation of new narratives is examined in the context of the Israeli society of today.

By discussing and analyzing the examples of my video works entitled *Between Homelands* (2008) and *Name* (2009) myself, Inga Fonar Cocos -

¹ The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP), online (Stanford University)

Israeli artist, born in Warsaw, Poland and currently living in Tel-Aviv, Israel - will reflect upon and discuss two paradigms of memory; relating to an existence and an absence of trauma in the context of memory and its influence on the formation of personal identity. These paradigms are mapped onto the background of cultural changes associated with the political transformation of the Israeli state. In such context, the role of historical record is juxtaposed with the processing of personal memory.

Narratives of history and the Israeli State

During the 1990s, Israeli state ideology constructed a new narrative of its own version of history. In part, this change was a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union and more broadly the opening of borders between Western and Eastern Europe, resulting in the ensuing mass wave of immigration from Russia to Israel. The Diaspora Jew suddenly became a legitimate citizen; the so-called new Israeli. Oz Almog (1997) points out that these changes allowed Israeli society to psychologically channel a new version of history and challenge the myth of the Sabra² or the 'rugged' native Israeli. Sabra was the term coined to describe the native Israeli, born between the 1930s and 1940s, educated in the ethos of a love of the land. The Sabra was designated to be the 'new Jew', as an opposite of the 'old Jew', the Holocaust survivor.

Only in the 1990s, the lacuna of memory associated with a formation of identity created during the immigration process, began to be dealt with. Anita Shapira (1997)³ in her book *New Jews, Old Jews* discussing the construction of a new and an old Jewish national identity associated with the consequences of the post-war Diaspora, distinguishes a 'private' memory from a 'public memory'. According to Shapira, the Holocaust has been a central discourse appropriated by the State of Israel in a construction of collective identity. The Holocaust was associated with exilic Judaism, which perpetuated the image of anti-Semitism. The Holocaust accounts and its memories were conceived as belonging solely to the State of Israel. The memory of the Holocaust was turned into anonymous memory through public discourse, and as a consequence,

² Oz Almog, *The Sabre – a Profile*, 1997, Hebrew edition

³ Anita Shapira, *New Jews, Old Jews* Am Oved Pub. Tel Aviv, 1997, Hebrew edition

portrayed as a collective memory, not a private experience or individual memories. Shapira refers to historians including Avi Shlaim, Ilan Pape, Simha Flapan who at the late 1980s addressed the historical events between the years 1947 and 1952; events which are connected to the establishment of the State of Israel, the 1948 independence war and to the subsequent agreements:

“For those historians one can say, history begins in 1948, this was their common denominator... Moments of historical breakthrough turn into “establishment myth” of the discussed society...They declared that everything written before them on the theme of the establishment of the state is merely a Zionist propaganda... this polemic had extensions which deviated from the 1948 experience and from the domain of history, and discourse spread to the fields of sociology, anthropology, political science ...and combined with the polemic about the interrelations between the establishment of the state and the Holocaust, between Zionism and the Jewish diaspora” (Shapira, 1997, 19-21)

Shapira mentions, among others, the writings by Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, a lecturer in Jewish History at the Ben Gurion University, Israel, who discusses the notion of a “negation of diaspora” and defines it as a “lack of attentiveness and un-openness of Zionism to the outsider and to the different” ...and attempts to construct an alternative notion of “affirmation of diaspora”, or an openness in Israeli society towards people different from the ‘new Jew’, and giving them legitimacy and alternative collective memories right to exist with that of the accepted Zionist model. (Shapira citing Raz-Krakotzkin, 1997, 19-21)

Shapira (1997) further elaborates upon the two first decades after the Second World War, and argues that this period was presented as:

“A period of repression of the Holocaust in the Israeli consciousness: at that period the Holocaust was but a marginal component of the solidification of the Israeli identity. It was not a focus of a public discussion... people did not want to hear about the Holocaust, did not want to talk about the Holocaust, the struggle for establishing the state and later the independence war pushed aside the Holocaust shock and its’ impact. In the heroic state established there was no room for weakness and humiliation... There was no dispute about existence of the phenomenon of thrusting the Holocaust to the margins of the Israeli agenda; it was accepted by historians and publicists, and was expressed in popular press and television. It was used as a central component in the severe indictment against David Ben-Gurion, who is identified as the father and head establisher of the state, and against the first Sabra generation, who did not

understand, did not try to understand, ignored or erased in purpose the memory of the Holocaust.” (86-87)

The Holocaust discourse was constructed as a myth, a version of history whereby personal accounts and private stories were suppressed. Private memories could not find its place over the persisting discourse of a collective memory in a newly born state. Moshe Zuckermann (2001)⁴ asks: “what is the essence of the Holocaust?” and he quotes the idea of Theodor Adorno on “the increasing human practice towards the total erasure of the individual, and its conversion into a granule swallowed by a ‘completely managed world’” (p.75). Zuckermann then argues that unremembering the helplessness of the Holocaust’s victims and deriving a Zionist conclusion from it, as an ideological lesson of the state of Israel, betrays the victim and is an act of ignorance of the victims' essence as an object of murderous oppression. Only the universal categorical imperative for preventing a recurrence of Auschwitz can purport to remember this unimaginable rupture in civilization:

“Has the state of Israel remembered it? Has the particular 'lesson' that Israel asked to draw from the horror not betrayed the universalistic meaning of its scope and essence? Has the ‘victim’ not betrayed the victims?” (p. 80)

According to Zuckermann, there is an inherent contradiction between the universal and the particular memory of the Holocaust. The particular or national version precludes the universal and proper version of Holocaust memory.

Historian and journalist Tom Segev, in his book *The Seventh Million: Israelis and the Holocaust* (1991)⁵ also refers to the notion of manipulated memory. He deals with the attitude and relations of the Palestinian and Israeli Jews to the Holocaust. By reconsidering the major struggles and personalities of Israel's past, including Ben-Gurion and Begin, he argues that the nation's legacy has, at critical moments of the *Exodus* affair, the Eichmann trial, the case of John Demjanjuk etc., been molded and manipulated in accordance with the ideological requirements of the state.

⁴ Moshe Zuckermann, *On the Fabrication of Israelism, Myths and ideology in a Society at Conflict*, Fetish: A Series for Cultural Studies at Resling Publishing, 2001, Tel-Aviv, pp.75-80, Hebrew

⁵ Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: Israelis and the Holocaust*, Keter Publishing, 1991, Hebrew edition

Drawing on writings of Shapira (1997) and others mentioned above, it could be argued that not only the memory of the Holocaust was repressed, but at the same time, in the first two decades of the existence of the state of Israel, historians, publicists and the media emphasized the role of the Israeli as a dominant ‘Macho’ in the construction of the state ideology and in nurturing the myth of heroism.

Inner workings of memory

Since the ‘cell's memory’ or the genetic code of human DNA⁶ is passed from generation to generation, human beings are, biologically determining, the memory of the past. At the same time, we contain what will become the memory of the future. French historian Pierre Nora (1989) argues that:

“Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in a fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by living societies... it remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation” (pp. 7-25).⁷

In one of my installation works, entitled *The Other* (2003), memory is represented as a soft writing tablet upon which images, events, and the accounts of the past are imprinted and etched. The question is what can a black wax tablet mounted under a Plexiglas support on the wall represent? Is it an archeological find, an object from the past or an object of the future? A line of written letters can be seen on the tablet's waxy surface, writing created by the process of inserting pins into the wax. Yet, letters seem partially covered by what may look like an ash of a volcanic eruption. The process of inserting the pins is realized by a pricking of the fragile membrane of the skin containing, holding in, and concealing the chaotic inner flux. This inscribing process designates the wound, the mark

⁶ Leonie Ringrose and Renato Paro, Epigenetic Regulation of Cellular Memory by the Polycomb and Trithorax group proteins, *Annual Review of Genetics*, Vol. 38: 413-443, Dec. 2004

⁷ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*" (trans. Marc Roudebush), Spring 1989, 26: 7-25. In *Representations*, University of California Press

made by a pin and results in a written sentence. This so called constructed Punctum, drawing on concept of Roland Barthes, (1981)⁸ is where the process of marking by the pins points to the viewer's process of seeing:

“A Latin word exists to designate this wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument: the word suits me all the better in that it also refers to the notion of punctuation, and because the photographs I am speaking of are in effect punctuated, sometimes event speckled with this sensitive points... I shall therefore call it *punctum*; for *punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole - and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).”(p.27)

The process Barthes describes can also be related to an experience of the black void or a sense of impossibility to penetrate what may be a historical testimony, experience of another reality, or another personal history that is inhaled in the writing. The writing on the tablet's surface reads: The invisible other the invisible culture the invisible reality. It is a reference to the notion of the invisible advanced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968)⁹:

“Principle: not to consider the invisible as an *other visible* “possible”, or a “possible” visible for an other: that would be to destroy the inner framework that joins us to it. Moreover since this “other” who would “see” it— or this “other world” it would constitute would necessarily be connected to our own, the true possibility would necessarily reappear within this connection – The invisible is *there* without being an *object*, it is pure transcendence, without an ontic mask. And the “visibles” themselves, in the last analysis, they too are only centered on a nucleus of absence” (p. 229)

Merleau-Ponty (1968) goes on to argue that the invisible is what is not actually visible, but could be hidden or situated elsewhere; what, relative to the visible, could nevertheless not be seen as a thing (including the existential of the visible, its dimensions, its non-figurative inner framework); what only exists as tactile or kinesthetically, etc. (p.257)

⁸ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981)

⁹Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Visible and the Invisible”, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1968, pp. 229, 257



The other, 2003, waxes, pins, Plexiglas

The other refers to several aspects of the process of remembering and forgetting. In antiquity, a wax tablet was associated with the idea of an ‘inner surface’ of the soul, with the receptiveness of human consciousness and its affective dimensions, as well as with memory. Kenaan (2009) points out that due to its unique qualities of wax material, it historically has served as a writing tablet, as a support for etching or stamping and, indeed, as a tool of memory. Wax becomes an embodiment of the relationship between materiality and memory.¹⁰ Yet, not everything can be inscribed upon the tablet of memory. Just as light is absorbed in the black tablet, so memory can ‘eat up’ certain impressions, in particular those impressions that the human psyche is unwilling or unable to represent. In a sense, the tablet of memory can be seen as a selective device. It never shows everything, and does not express anything that may crack its surface.

Paradigms of remembering and forgetting: Jewish post-war Diaspora

In this section, I attempt to map two alternative paradigms of memory onto my recent video works: first, a paradigm that highlights the process of forgetting by denying memory, while forming a new identity in the post-war Diaspora context; second, an antithesis of the first, a paradigm that describes a pursuit of memory as a process of delving into memory

¹⁰ Hagit Kenaan, *Inga Fonar Cocos: Viewer's Version, Where Are The Invisible Trains Headed?* Museum of Art, Ein Harod, Cat. 2009

gaps, motivated by the will to embrace and to integrate the missing memory pieces in an effort to broaden the construction of identity. I discuss these two memory paradigms drawing on concrete examples of the Jewish Diaspora after the Second World War and associated with times of a formation of a new Israeli society. I attempt to address the questions of how memories of the past influence the present. How in contemporary Israel, migrants from Europe, conceive their personal identity as being between two homelands? What happens internally during this process of Diaspora? What is the 'internal' migration route – what a person chooses to adopt in that process, and what is buried under the layers of oblivion? In my recent video works, I attempt to represent these internal workings of memory associated with the Diaspora experience, illuminating the linkage between memory, history and processes of migration; analyzing what is present but may also be obscured.

Name (2009) is a 19 min 45 sec video that deals with the process associated with a change of names during immigration. The video features five interviewees, representing five individuals that had to change their



Name, video stills

name after relocation to a new geographical and cultural environment and therefore lived a period of their lives under a different name from that given to them at birth. *Name* deals with the process of name changing which also characterizes the notion of a wandering Jew, always immigrating and changing his/her environment. Dealing with present time, memory and pain, through the interviews with five individuals, the film is a comment upon the inner conflict of the characters and their confrontation with society. The interviewees were photographed with a still camera and their stories were recorded, but their voices are not heard in the film. Fragments from the interviewees' words appear only through subtitles. The video is comprised mostly of still images, slow movements and close-ups of their faces and hands.

The video documents words which are not spoken. The inner conflict of the characters and their confrontation with society are further accentuated by the slow motion in the film. The original sound track is based on fragments of their stories transformed into a sound-text piece that is chanted through whispering by a vocal artist, reflecting the multiple layers of feelings and the ‘inner-conversation’ of the characters.

Wilhelmina is one of interviewees who feature in the video, a woman who emigrated in the late 1940s from Eastern Europe to Israel, where she still lives today. She represents the paradigm of forgetting, suppressing memory due to trauma associated with experience of relocation. Wilhelmina explains:

“When I came to see the school nurse, she asked me what was my name and I said Wilhelmina. And she said: ‘what kind of name is this?’ ‘So I will be Zeeva’, I said, because my grandpa was Wolf. ‘You – Zeeva? You weigh 19 kg. We will call you Ziva!’ ‘What a name, Ziva? I was afraid’” (narration by Wilhelmina, Inga Fonar Cocos, *Name*)

Ziva was a new Hebrew name given to her, Wilhelmina. In front of the camera, at a certain moment, the concealed memory which Wilhelmina had so hermetically sealed is suddenly exposed. She cries. During my interview with Wilhelmina (not to the camera) she also explained that after many years of psychotherapy, she was expected to overcome these impossible memories and feelings of shame and inner rupture. Wilhelmina raises a crucial question: What is the significance of the shame? She lives with the consciousness of a sense of shame that affects her whole being, her very identity. She lives with a vast lacuna, denying a memory of her childhood, as well as her given name; indeed, in her own words – while still living, she buries alive a part of herself. Wilhelmina explains further:

“My mother never called me Ziva among friends, she called me Wilushiu, and I felt ashamed... With the name Ziva, I erased that identity. With the settling down in Israel, Wilhelmina was buried deep down. I saw Wilhelmina not fitting in, I was polite. Wilhelmina could give away that little girl I was. I was a kid of the war, at the age of 3, in a Pravoslavian orphanage, struggling for her life. I wanted to fit in at any price.” (narration by Wilhelmina, Inga Fonar Cocos, *Name*)

Wilhelmina's personal biography is told in simple words; she does not use familiar cultural locutions with given significance (i.e. Holocaust, trauma, loss, etc.). It is she herself confronting the event; not a history of facts, but a history of a person. Wilhelmina understood that when she

immigrated, the transmission and conservation of collective values and an entire history of painful past events was to be sharply cut off. Instead, a new identity and a new name signaling this new identity were bestowed upon her. From that point in time, she was to have new future memories. As a result, it became all but impossible for her to contain certain parts of herself. The internal gaze was substituted by the external gaze, that is, by the newly constructed cultural conventions. She experienced a brutal eradication of personal memory by a new dictatorial future history.

When I was working on the video *Name*, I took two major decisions concerning the audio dimension of the work. First, a decision concerned the absence of the interviewees' voice. The decision was taken intuitively, and only post factum I analyzed the reasons which lead me to make the interviewees voice absent. After listening repeatedly to all the recorded interviews, I did not want to produce an archival documentary. Instead, I wanted to channel a more condensed image and mediated feeling of the interviewees and the worlds they represent. What is important are the words chosen by interviewees, the silence between one sentence and the next, and the difficulties of verbalizing the memories, which brings about a whole part of their lives and their complex identities. Second, I decided to use a silent film technique, using subtitles as images, thus giving the words said by the interviewees a visual representation. I felt that words and names of the participants should be heard, and should be part of the sound track of the video. What also added to the final soundscape in the video was a decision to use a preliminary language, comprised of syllables and low whispers, which accentuates emotional charge and yet transgresses the meaning of words. This process resulted in the sound track which is chanted/spoken by a vocal artist, comprised of some layered repetitions of the voice, giving the video a sense of emotional space, and creating the impression of the inner-talking of the interviewees.

Testimony by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (2008) draws on the crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis and throughout history. Felman and Laub write about the distinction between the subjective and objective in narrating history, which is significant in the process of understanding interviewees in the video work *Name*. They quote Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*:

"The term history unites the objective and the subjective side, and denotes ...not less what *happened* than the *narration* of what happened. This union of the two *meanings* we must regard as of a higher order than mere outward accident; we must suppose historical narrations to have appeared contemporaneously with historical deeds and events... Can contemporary narrative historically bear witness, not simply to the impact of the

Holocaust but to the way in which the impact of *history as holocaust* has modified, affected, and shifted the very mode of the relationship between narrative and history?" (Felman and Laub, 2008, 97-98)¹¹

Felman and Laub (2008) draw on 'The Fall' by Albert Camus, relating to the silence of a person who was an accidental witness to a suicide, and he never told/reported about it. Felman and Laub call it an act of silence (138-139). Referring to the meaning of silence, they mention that Camus accused Sartre by not condemning Stalin's oppression and the Soviet concentration camps. That by doing so, he actually was covering by silencing, on the historical fact of the actual existence of the camps. This kind of silence becomes an erasure of the victim's cry, as well as the witness's cry, according to Felman and Laub (p. 141). The authors claim that silence is not only the absence of the act of talking, but also a refusal to know and to recognize that something has happened. In my view, this definition of silence and silence dynamics echo mental and psychological state of the interviewees in the video *Name*.

This could be the case of Wilhelmina, who by remaining silence about past memories and events, erases them as if the events never had happened, never had existed. She adopts the looks, the style and the jargon of the local Sabra. Hers is not a testimony in the regular, common sense, but a testimony directed inward, towards her inner self. The complex case of Wilhelmina lies in her being a victim and simultaneously by her own erasure of her cries and a need for compassion and comfort.

It is often silence that is referred to as the most authentic communication that is taking place. The absence of the interviewees' voice, especially in the video *Name*, has a function of a Lacuna - the impossibility to speak and explain something which is associated with a traumatic experience. Felman and Laub (2008) point out that this kind of Lacuna can be seen in the documentary film *Shoah* by Claude Lanzmann which presents testimonies by survivors and witnesses and who in a crucial and emotionally loaded moments become silent, unable to account their stories (191-211). A process of silencing, similar to witnesses experiences in Lanzmann's film, occurred when I was interviewing Ziva/Wilhelmina for the video *Name* in a discussion about her childhood during the war. Suddenly, she was not able to carry on talking. She leaned back on the sofa, diverting her eyes towards the ceiling, trying to swallow her tears. She was not able to testify about something which seemed like

¹¹ Shoshana Felman & Dori Laub, *Testimony*, Resling Pub., 2008 Hebrew Ed. pp. 97-98

could threaten to crack the seemingly solid identity she had built and nurtured for years, since her immigration to Israel.

A different approach to past memories and to testimony about the past events can be seen in the case of Jan, another interviewee featuring in the video *Name*, who during the war kept writing small notes of his experiences and events, and wrote a book about his war memories. An echo of him we can see in Laub's quotes from a video testimony of a survivor (from the Yale university archive) who says:

"I told myself, I want to live the day after Hitler, one day after the war is over, so I can tell the story" (p.84)

He observes that the survivors not only had to survive in order to tell their story, but that they had to tell the story in order to survive. Jan uses the same words when describing his efforts to encourage himself to live: "I have to live in order to tell the story", and this gives him the mental and emotional strength needed. But, Laub says:

"there will never be enough words in the 'dictionary' of thought, memory and speech to tell it."¹² (Laub p. 85)

This allegation of Laub may have been in the back of my mind when making the decision not to use the interviewees' voices in the video. On a personal note, the fact that my father, who lost his family, his first wife and a small child during the Holocaust, and never spoke about it, could have been a factor of this decision as well.

"This is the story of a man marked by an image from his childhood." an opening narration in the first voice of Chris Marker's film *La Jeteé*. Chris Marker, artist, writer and film maker influenced my work and research on the paradoxes of memory and the linkage of memory and trauma. The inclusion of the past that lives on within a person's as an image, as a secret, is a mechanism revealed to me when interviewing the participants of the video work *Name*, as well as my own thoughts and experience when working on another video work entitled *Between Homelands*.

Marker points out:

¹² Shoshana Felman & Dori Laub, *Testimony*, Resling Pub., 2008 Hebrew Ed. pp. 84-85

“Nothing sorts out memories from ordinary moments. Later on they do claim remembrance when they show their scars. That face he had seen was to be the only peacetime image to survive the war. Had he really seen it? Or had he invented that tender moment to prop up the madness to come?”¹³ (*La Jetée* : ciné-roman, 1962).

The elusiveness and psychological complexity of processes of remembrance and oblivion, and the key ability to survive a trauma which Marker refers to is the essence of my own research and practice. Marker, who investigates the cultural memory of the 20th Century in a subtle but yet incisive way, writes in the text for his film *Sans Soleil*, a meditation on the nature of human memory:

“I will have spent my life trying to understand the function of remembering, which is not the opposite of forgetting, but rather its lining. We do not remember, we rewrite memory much as history is rewritten. How can one remember thirst?”¹⁴ (*Sans Soleil* (*Sunless*), 1983).

Between Homelands, video stills



He describes in a philosophical and visually intense manner the inability to recall the context and nuances of memory and how, as a result, the perceptions of personal and global histories are affected.

Another paradigm of memory, is about remembering, not forgetting. It is about digging into the memory gaps in order to integrate the missing pieces of history into the complete story. The 5 min 45 sec video *Between Homelands* (2008), attempts to address a paradigm of remembering. This video is motivated by the postcards collection from the 1940s and the 1950s which belonged to my parents and was kept in a large photo album,

¹³ Chris Marker, *La Jeteé: ciné-roman*, <http://www.markertext.com/index.htm>

¹⁴ Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil* (*Sunless*), http://www.markertext.com/sans_soleil.htm

black-and-white photographs that were taken after their return to Warsaw at the aftermath of the Second World War, and photographs that I took during my sojourn in Poland in 2007. This was, for me, the starting point of a voyage in time and in place.

Between the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, a panoramic Polish landscape seen from a moving train accompanies a narrated story of constant impermanence and impossibility to settle down anywhere on the globe. The movement and the changing landscapes parallel to the movement between reality and memory, flashes of remembrance and moments of reflection. The moving images (the film consists mostly of still images) evoke awareness of time – time fleeting, dreamlike time, gaps in time, memory of time. By bringing together images of the present and represented dimensions of the past the film reveals hidden ties between remembering, trauma and self. In reviewing this work, Galia Bar-Or points out:¹⁵ (2009)

“The moving train and changing landscapes parallel the movement between the realms of reality and memory, flashes of remembrance and moments of reflection. This film successfully translates Fonar Cocos’ three-dimensional language into a flow of moving images that motivate changing rhythms of consciousness, while also harbouring a continuum of absence – a dark screen devoid of images” (p.16).

When I was a child, I had a ceramic owl standing on a bookshelf in my room. An owl appears in the video as an indication of what is about to come next. In the scene with the owl, its gaze suddenly turns from one direction to the opposite. This is the signalling moment for the narration dialogue, when the poem is recited. It appears also in homage to Chris Marker and his studies of the cultural memory of the 20th century in various medium including photography, cinema, writing and video art. Bar-Or further discusses the fluid boundaries of the term home in *Between Homeland*:

“Fonar Cocos touches upon this ‘untouched thing’ (in the words of David Avidan, Israeli artist and poet)...her journey does not circumvent sites of blindness and disruption; it traverses biographical regions and represents worlds both near and far, hoping for the place where one may touch on understanding without touching.” (Bar-Or, *Viewer's Version, How to Touch on Understanding Without Touching*, 2009, p.17)

¹⁵ Galia Bar Or, *Inga Fonar Cocos: Viewer's Version, How to Touch on Understanding Without Touching*, pp. 16-17

My curiosity and my urge to acknowledge and confront history, concealed in the images of my parents' postcards and photo album, made me to go back to Poland. My aim was to collect present time photographs of places, and attempt to decipher the significance and the context of the old photographs and the world they suggested, shrouded in what I had come to think of as a 'white fog', or this familiar and unfamiliar feeling these uncanny representations projected.

It was both a strange and pleasant feeling to be back in my native land. I had vague memories of Warsaw, since I left as a child, and it was my second visit to Poland as an adult in 2007. Actually, I first visited Poland in 1996 for only a short period of time as I was afraid of the feelings it would evoke in me. I was afraid of possible disappointment when facing the sights of my childhood, which in my memories were exalted and idealized. I had a happy childhood in Warsaw of the late 1950s.

The video has a non-linear narrative structure and juxtaposes images of the beautiful present-day Saski Gardens in central Warsaw, the Mediterranean beach of Tel-Aviv, monuments like *The Ghetto Heroes Monument* in Warsaw of 1948, commemorating the Warsaw ghetto uprising of 1943, family photographs and abstract images of a white void, embodying the changing rhythms of consciousness and aiming to reveal the affinities between remembering, trauma and individuality.

The words recited in the video are from a poem by the Polish poet and writer Stansilaw Baranczak *Only Porcelain*. His poetry is dominated by the ethical and the political concerns as well as literary criticism. I was acquainted with Baranczak's poetry in 2007, on an occasion of my sojourn in Warsaw. Two women, an older woman (my mother) and a young woman, recite the poem:

"If porcelain, then only the kind you won't miss under the shoe of a mover or the tread of a tank; if a chair, then one not too comfortable, lest there be regret in getting up and leaving; if clothing, then just so much as can fit in a suitcase, if books, then those which can be carried in the memory, if plans, then those which can be overlooked when the time comes for the next move to another street, continent, historical period or world: who told you that you were permitted to settle in? Who told you that this or that would last forever? Did no one ever tell you that you will never in the world feel at home in the world."

An older sounding voice is repeating after the younger sounding voice, representing two generations. The course of time seems to be reversed – here the older generation follows the younger's generation reciting. Allen

(2011) points out that recitation, used as the sound track, was a means of telling stories and passing history from one generation to the next in order to preserve the collective memory and the cultural identity.¹⁶ Yet, something in the inter-generation transference of memory has been distorted here. Perhaps, using voices of woman's narrating could indicate a concealed connection to a matriarchal function in society. It seems that it is 'she' who is perceived as the one responsible for the transference of memory.

Moments of the void are represented as a white or a black screen. Nothing happens, just the sound of a moving train can be heard and voices of two women reciting-telling-repeating some lines of a poem: "Did no one ever tell you that you will never in the world feel at home in the world." The monotonic voices, in a monotonic rhythm against the background of monotonic moving train, accentuate a meditative-like state, evoking a sense of a journey, a sense of going on and on, as if in a loop. At times, the voices disappear and only the monotonic rails sound can be heard. Against the black void screen, a whispering voice of a little girl asking: "what will happen? Where are we going? When are we arriving?" is heard and the rails sound.

In the video, silence represents the voices of persons who are not able to speak, or perhaps who are not among the living. This silence also refers to the silence I personally experienced from my father, who could never speak about some memories of his past. It may also refer to a child's gaze, observing the incomprehensible past with silent eyes.

Grover-Friedlander's analysis (2002) of the silent dimension in the human voice illuminates the use and construction of sound in my video-works *Name* and *Between Homelands*. In her essay *The Voice and the Gaze, the Lost Voice of the Opera in the Silent Movie*¹⁷ Grover-Friedlander claims that the matching of the silent movie with the operatic voice indicates an indirect relationship between the two. In the case of *Name* – it is chanting, whispering etc. Grover-Friedlander points out that the medium of Opera touches that which is beyond, it points to the edges of expression and to the decomposition of the voice up to the degree of insignificance, thus revealing the materiality of the voice. The cry and the dumbness are a

¹⁶ Jennifer Allen, *Frieze, How memory has changed*, Issue 141, Sept.2011, editorial

¹⁷ Vered Lev Kanaan & Michal Grover-Friedlander ed., *The Voice and the Gaze*, Resling Pub. 2002 Heb. Ed. pp.109-113

thing which exists at the edge of the vocal expression. This actually creates an analogic situation between the silent movie and the operatic voice (Grover-Friedlander, 2002, 109-113).

This could also possibly imply that the sound track in the videos puts the voice under a threat of its own loss, in the realm between existence and disappearance, and its dissolution into silence. It could serve as an additional component of the emotional impact and identification directed towards the viewer.

Closing comments

Both paradigms of the workings of memory that I have discussed in this chapter comment on the dictatorship of history on the personal process of memory:

The taboo to talk about the Holocaust which ruled in the Israeli society up to the 1990s, materialized in an ever-lasting internal wound. The work *The Other*, a wax tablet is a symbolic object representing the fragile nature of memory. The surface of the wax could be compared to a mere thin skin whereas a tablet is a container of a violent, explosive energy of a memory threatening to burst out of control. This reflects on the story of Wilhelmina and the process of denying her personal biography, which is shared by a whole generation and which reveals something important about contemporary society. Israel emerged as a community of immigrants that has paid the hefty price of partial self-death for suppressing memories and surrendering to the constraints of history's grand narrative.

Between homelands is a work that represents a different generation, a generation that feels liberated from the ideological injunction to forget the past, motivated to embrace the unknown, often traumatic memories. In his book *Blindness*, Jose Saramago describes the predicament of a man suddenly stricken by white blindness as that of swimming in milk:

“Abandoned in the middle of the road, feeling the ground shifting under his feet, he tried to suppress the sense of panic that welled up inside him. He waved his hands in front of his face nervously, as if he were swimming in what he had described as a milky sea, but his mouth was already opening to let out a cry for help...”¹⁸ (Saramago, *Blindness*, p.4)

¹⁸ José Saramago, *Blindness*, Ha-Kibbutz ha-Meuhad Publishers, 2000, p.4, Hebrew ed.

A sense of blindness is usually associated with darkness, symbolized by a black color. Saramago describes a situation in which blindness is represented by a blind person as a sea of milk, as a white color. This could also refer to human inability to see through a fog, and a sense of disorientation. It was precisely a sense of disorientation that I experienced in attempt to put together connecting pieces of different levels of documentary material in my work.

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