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PALESTINIAN GHOSTS ON
ISRAELI SCREENS
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On the morning of April 9, 1948, Zionist paramilitary forces attacked the Arab village Deir Yassin. The village itself was not a strategic target. In fact, it had signed a nonviolence agreement with the nearby Jewish neighborhood of Givat Shaul, and prior to that morning, both sides adhered to the deal.[1] But now the road to Jerusalem was blockaded and the Jewish forces needed to break through. Deir Yassin was in the way. Some 130 Irgun and Lehi fighters, with the help of Haganah forces, advanced on the village. When they encountered resistance and sniper fire, they went through the streets throwing grenades and blowing up houses. Deir Yassin was conquered; about 100 to 120 villagers were killed. The rest were expelled.[2] News of a massacre in Deir Yassin spread across Palestine, causing panic and leading to a mass exodus of the Arab population.[3]

These events had far-reaching consequences for both Jews and Palestinians: for Arabs, the Deir Yassin massacre led to the displacement of the Palestinian population, creating a refugee problem that is not resolved to this day. For Jews, Deir Yassin paved the way to the establishment of Israel as a Jewish-majority state. After the war, traces of Palestinian presence were gradually erased. The memory of the violence was subsumed by the narrative of the "War for Independence," in which the goal of statehood justified the unfortunate means to achieve it.

The Deir Yassin massacre was a paradigmatic historical event, but not a singular one. Hundreds of villages were destroyed; hundreds of thousands of people were expelled or fled violence.[4] S. Yizhar, a Hebrew writer who fought in 1948, portrayed the expulsion of Palestinians by Israeli troops in his 1949 novella *Khirbet Khizeh*. Its main character, Micha, is plagued by moral anguish

but goes along with military action as justified by the greater good. The novella caused controversy at the time of its publication, when recent veterans wanted to suppress an uncomfortable memory. Another controversy erupted when the novella was adapted for a television film (*Khirbet Khizeh*, dir. Ram Loevy, 1978), which was initially censored from broadcast.[5] With time, the controversies ran their course, and both novella and film became Israeli classics. Most emblematically, the protagonist Micha's position gave rise to the Israeli trope of "shooting and crying" (*yorim ve-bokhim*), a phrase that "refers to those Israelis who announce their repugnance at orders they are commanded to follow but follow them nonetheless; the soldier who 'shoots and cries' cries to ease his conscience and purify himself morally, but shoots out of a loyalty to Israel and Zionism." Within Israeli culture, the discourse of "shooting and crying" casts the soldiers as "victims of the same system that victimizes others" and equates them with actual victims.[6] Palestinian victimhood was erased.

Ever since, the Nakba has occupied the ambivalent place of an ever-present absence in Israel. It is an unpopular and uncomfortable subject, equally missing from historical narrative, public discourse, and cultural representation. Israeli authorities have systematically attempted to conceal archival records of the violence against Palestinians in 1948.[7] Local organizations promoting memory activism, such as Zochrot, meet no public or institutional support in Israel, where their mission is considered too radical for most Jewish Israelis.[8] Israel even passed the so-called Nakba Law, which prohibits public institutions from commemorating the Nakba, entailing a penalty of the withdrawal of state funds.[9] The Palestinian collective memory in Israel is subject to what Ilan Pappe provocatively calls *memoricide*—systematic extinguishing of memory.[10] However, this erasure is never complete. As Yifat Gutman argues, all the efforts that go into this repression paradoxically bring the Nakba into public awareness.[11]

This repression also backfires. It creates what can be called a negative memory of the Nakba—an awareness that something is there, but concealed, not to be spoken about. In other words, the ambivalent situation of Nakba memory in Israel is a recipe for what the sociologist Avery Gordon calls haunting. Freud famously relied on the language of haunting to account for the return of repressed memories from an individual's unconsciousness.[12] Gordon approaches haunting as a sociopolitical-psychological state, a way in which "a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known."[13] Haunting and the appearance of specters or ghosts, according to her, is a sign "that what's been concealed is very much alive and present, interfering precisely with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression ceaselessly directed toward us."[14] These specters or ghosts appear in a society in the moments

"when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view."[15]

Visual culture scholar Gil Hochberg also approaches haunting as a social phenomenon. According to her, haunting expands the realm of the visible and shows the erasure itself.[16] In the context of Israeli culture, where historical violence against the Palestinians is suppressed, it "finds its way into the Israeli visual field as a haunting presence of a visible invisibility."[17] In other words, the Palestinian past comes to haunt the Israeli present. This phenomenon is evident in recent Israeli films that engage with the history and memory of 1948: *Forgiveness* (*Mekhilot*, dir. Udi Aloni, 2006), *Born in Deir Yassin* (*Nolad be-deir Yassin*, dir. Neta Shoshani, 2017), *The Damned* (*Mekulalim*, dir. Evgeny Ruman, 2018), and *The Dead of Jaffa* (*Ha-metim shel yafo*, dir. Ram Loevy, 2019). Each one of these films invokes haunting to grapple with Nakba memory. In each one, the Palestinian victims of 1948 appear as ghosts, literal or metaphorical, haunting Israeli society.

FORGIVENESS

I opened with the story of Deir Yassin because the history of that place is so layered. After the massacre, the ruins of the village stood empty for a few years—unlike some other "cleansed" villages, no new settlement was established there, no new immigrants moved in, no natural park was built on the site. Inadvertently, the ruins were a living memorial to the destroyed community. But by 1951, Israel's government finally found a way to "Judaize" the site. A psychiatric hospital called Kfar Shaul was established in what remained of Deir Yassin, and the first patients to be committed were Holocaust survivors.

Today, both Israeli and Palestinian cultures exist in the shadow of historic traumas—the Holocaust and the Nakba. As Raz Yosef comments, "the catastrophic specters of both nations are intertwined."[18] Nothing brings them together as much as the site of Deir Yassin/Kfar Shaul. The intersection of two collective traumas is thematized in Udi Aloni's *Forgiveness*. Aloni, whose work ranges from art to activism, is an iconoclast in Israeli culture.[19] As a member of the Ashkenazi elite (his mother was Israeli politician Shulamit Aloni), he is the ultimate insider. But he is also an outsider: he collaborates with Palestinian intellectuals and artists; he lives in the US; and although his work is embraced on the international festival circuit and in academia, it often draws sharp criticism in Israel.

The protagonist of *Forgiveness*, David Adler (Itay Tiran), is also an insider/outsider. His father (Michael Sarne) is a Holocaust survivor who fought in

1948 for Israel's independence, but soon after moved to the US. David grew up between New York and Israel, conflicted about his belonging. Driven by a search for identity, David returns to Israel to join the army but finds himself in the role of oppressor, patrolling the West Bank. When he accidentally shoots a Palestinian girl, his mind unravels, and he becomes catatonic. He is treated at a mental hospital which sits on the ruins of a Palestinian village—a clear allusion to Kfar Shaul. Such ruins, caused by human violence, writes Dylan Trigg, are sites haunted by a traumatic past.[20] Indeed, both the site of the hospital and David himself are haunted.

In the hospital, he is subjected to two treatments. The first is medical and is administered by his psychiatrist, Dr. Shemesh (Makram Khoury). The other is spiritual and administered by another patient, a Holocaust survivor nicknamed Musselman (Moni Moshonov). The psychiatrist gives David an experimental drug, provided by the army, to force his mind into bridging over "the black hole of the trauma"—and thus return to normality without acknowledging that he is a killer—whereas Musselman tries to open David's heart to face the ghost of the girl he killed.

From there, the film offers us two possibilities, both realized on screen. Taking the army drug ostensibly returns David to normality. Subdued and amnesiac, he returns with his father to New York and tries to resume his life. He meets a beautiful young woman, the Palestinian American Lila (Clara Khoury), and they fall in love. But David is still haunted by suppressed memories, his mind flooded by violent flashbacks that he can't decipher. Ultimately, his mind unravels again, he becomes violent and points a gun at himself—and in alternative endings, at his father and at Amal, Lila's daughter. Looped in the cycle of madness and violence, he is replicating the killing.

Once the drug option fails, the film switches back to the crucial point in time, when Musselman implored David to stay at the hospital and face the ghosts—in other words, to work through his trauma. This time, David stays, despite the psychiatrist's and his father's objections. What follows is a visually compelling sequence of a ritual, set in an underground space lit by torches and candles. In a kind of exorcism, Musselman draws blood from a naked David in the presence of the ghost. David then regains his memory and clearly sees the scene of the killing. He collapses, crying, "I'm the killer, I killed her!" The ghost embraces Musselman in a gesture of reconciliation, while the psychiatrist tells David, "Now you have to live with it."

Forgiveness tells David's story in flashbacks and flashforwards, incorporating elements of fantasy and magical realism. This narrative structure draws on the conventions of mind-game films, a subgenre of psychological thrillers popular in early 2000s. According to Thomas Elsaesser, such films "'play games' with

the audience's (and the characters') perception of reality," including unreliable narrators, multiple alternative timelines, unmarked flashbacks or dreams, causal reversals, and narrative loops as a way to convey the character's pathological mental state.[21] Mind-game films' complex narratives, writes Elsaesser, "enact the very condition their hero suffers from, in the structure of the film itself."[22] In the case of *Forgiveness*, the film's mind-game narrative conveys the character's struggle with traumatic memory. The key question is how to deal with it.

Traumatic memory is symbolized on screen by the ghost of a Palestinian girl, killed in 1948. She appears in a white dress, which emphasizes her innocence and fragility. Although she haunts David, she can also be seen by his father and by Musselman, both Holocaust survivors, as if the trauma is what enables haunting. Musselman is in touch with the ghosts—in other words, he embraces traumatic memory, both his own and others'. In making a connection between the Jewish trauma of the Holocaust and the Palestinian trauma of the Nakba, *Forgiveness*, as Raz Yosef argues, "confronts the exclusivity of the Holocaust trauma in Israeli collective memory and brings a comparison between the refugees of both peoples to the fore."[23] Musselman treats the site of the hospital as a mass grave, leading an archeological dig there and preserving the traces of the Palestinian lives he uncovers. Because of his connection to the ghosts, he acts as a conduit between the dead and the living. He teaches David to listen to the ghosts instead of denying their existence, mediating reconciliation between David and the ghost of the girl (see figure 3.1).

David's father, Henry, is another story. He winces when he sees the ghost. He is an ambitious man who is in denial of both his own trauma, as a Holocaust survivor, and of the pain of others. He is more than a cruel father to David. The film hints that Henry, who fought in the 1948 war, was implicated in the killing at Deir Yassin—maybe even in the killing of the girl in the white dress. Perhaps this is why he moved to the US decades ago, so soon after Israel's establishment. Perhaps this is why he pressures David to leave the hospital, which is, in his words, "a terrible place." If Musselman is a victim, empathetic to others' pain, Henry's trauma has turned him into a perpetrator. David seems to have inherited from his father both the "second-hand" trauma and the role of killer. The intergenerational transmission of trauma and violence is highlighted by the casting—the same young actor (Tamara Mansour) plays the roles of the 1948 ghost, of the girl in the West Bank that David shot, and of Amal, Lila's daughter. This choice indicates the continuity of trauma, erasing distinctions between historical and current violence.

Through the characters of David and his father, the film shows how repressed trauma can resurface as violence. Only by accepting responsibility for the killing and working through the trauma can the spirits be put to rest

Figure 3.1. *Musselman mediates between David and the ghost of the girl in the white dress. Still from* Forgiveness.

and the haunting stop. As Slavoj Žižek points out in his writing on the film, "This simple recognition saves him [David] from an ethical catastrophe and acts as an ultimate moment of reconciliation; it opens the possibility of seeking redemption through accountability. And redemption through accountability is the very opposite of that which results from granting forgiveness to oneself as the perpetrator."[24] In that refusal, *Forgiveness* departs from the usual representational pattern of Israeli films, which portray the IDF soldier as both "conquering hero and impotent victim."[25] David is neither. By making him acknowledge that he killed an innocent child, the film disavows the discourse of "shooting and crying," which is used to justify violence for the greater good. As Žižek sums up, "The crime he commits is not an individual failure within a healthy ethical structure, but an ethical failure built within the ideological structure itself."[26]

BORN IN DEIR YASSIN

If *Forgiveness* approached Deir Yassin/Kfar Shaul with the tools of a psychological thriller mixing reality and fantasy, *Born in Deir Yassin* returns to the site with a documentary lens. The film, set in the present day, opens on Dror Nissan, an Israeli man who was born to a mentally ill woman in Kfar Shaul. His

mother, Hannah Nissan, was a reluctant patient in the hospital in the 1950s and '60s. She got pregnant, believing that the birth of a child would heal her. That didn't happen. In fact, the medical establishment deemed her dangerous to the child, and young Dror was taken away from her. Hannah was despondent and spiraled further into illness. She remained confined in Kfar Shaul until her death, writing diaries and letters to her beloved son.

The film offers a tasteful reenactment of this harrowing story, shot on location at night. On screen, the ruins of Deir Yassin turned into a mental hospital are eerily empty, lit only by haunting blue light. The traces of Hannah's presence are signaled by abstract shapes—a fragment of a nightgown or a hospital sheet—like a ghost. On the soundtrack, she is represented by a disembodied voice, set to music in a minor key. "What did you do to me? Why did you take my son away from me?" she asks not only her doctors, but also us, the audience. She is a ghost who can't find peace until the past injustice is rectified.

Hannah's pleas to her son depict the hospital as a cursed place. "This is an evil place," she writes to him from Kfar Shaul. "Never come here." But he does. The connection between the two narratives, that of Deir Yassin and that of Kfar Shaul, comes to the fore in the words of Dror Nissan: "When I came to visit here," he says, "I was shocked. I understood that it was the ruins of the village—Deir Yassin. . . . No suburb or village was built here, and life didn't go on. A tragic continuity remained: victims exited; other victims entered. History came to a halt here. It remained a ghost town." Filmed at night, sitting behind a fence, as if behind bars, Nissan thinks out loud about the difficult history of the place and his own painful memories. He wishes he could escape his biography, but, he adds, "We are victims of our past."

The history of Kfar Shaul is told on screen in parallel with story of the Deir Yassin massacre. Both unfold in the same traumatic territory of the unresolved past. Clearly, the film's title, *Born in Deir Yassin*, refers equally to Dror Nissan and to the State of Israel. However, if the story of Kfar Shaul is told predominantly from a victim's perspective, the story of the massacre is told from the point of view of its perpetrators. To recover the memory of the events, the filmmaker, Neta Shoshani, interviews former Zionist underground fighters who stormed Deir Yassin on April 9, 1948. These veterans are in their late eighties and nineties today, and they've had a chance to reflect on their roles in the events. Some of them remain proud of the part they played in what they called a battle for Deir Yassin. Ben Zion Cohen, a fiery former Irgun operative, says, "I kicked out the Arabs. They ran away crying 'Deir Yassin is upon us!'" Uri Yanovsky of Haganah emphasizes the importance of Deir Yassin, which "made possible the establishment of the state." Shimon Moneta of Lehi, self-identified as a "Jewish terrorist," calls the 1948 war justified. In his view, it was a war for

survival—"We had to fight so that the next generation could be here." Filmed sitting in their comfortable living rooms, surrounded by art or family photographs, these men project a confidence that comes with their class and status. They are not simply unrepentant of the sins of their youth—they see themselves as national heroes, a position that reflects the mainstream Israeli view of the War of 1948.

But for other veterans, the assessment of the events is less clear-cut. Sarah Ben-Or, who fought with Haganah, speaks of her own trauma. She recalls the terrible silence that settled on the village after the battle was over and the piles of corpses that needed to be buried. "It still haunts me," she admits. Others recall disturbing memories of their own: a horrified Arab child, a woman with her head cut off, the stench of burnt corpses, body parts flung into the air—they do not fully agree on the nature of the events, and their scattered memories do not all add up to a coherent story. But in fact, these ghastly sights were documented. Shraga Peled, who was with Haganah, remembers taking pictures for official documentation. But he doesn't recall seeing the photos himself; "I repressed the images," he explains.

That repression took place not only on an individual but also on a national level: the photographs are held at the IDF archives, which bans access to them. Shoshani tries to see them, but to no avail. Facing rejection after rejection, she gets all the way to the Supreme Court. The judges examine the photos and deny her appeal. According to them, the exposure of photographs of such graphic nature may harm Israel's public relations. Paradoxically, this judgment is an implicit acknowledgment of the incriminating nature of the images. But it is also a vivid testimony of Israel's attitudes to its dark history—the attempt to recover it is halted. Even in this film, we see very little by way of visual evidence of the massacre. We can only surmise it through the perpetrators' testimonies.

Like *Forgiveness*, *Born in Deir Yassin* engages with the "shooting-and-crying" discourse. But if *Forgiveness* rejects it, the later film in some ways taps into it. David is neither a hero nor a victim, whereas the former Israeli-forces fighters appear as either self-appointed heroes or traumatized victims. The ultimate victimhood, though, is transferred to a mentally ill Jewish woman, whose "ghost" the film enables to speak to us in her own words. Unlike Hannah's, the voices of the Palestinian victims are never heard, suggesting that Israeli public is not yet ready to listen.

But the film does make us see the victims. They are children—the orphans of Deir Yassin, sent to Jerusalem after their parents were dead (figure 3.2). The children's faces appear on-screen in black-and-white frontal shots, taken at the orphanage in Jerusalem. Some boast winning smiles, others are shy or distraught. But all of them look into the camera—and hence right into our

Figure 3.2. *Orphans from Deir Yassin. Still from* Born in Deir Yassin.

eyes. Set to the same minor-key score as Hannah's story, these faces also have a haunting presence. We don't know anything about them. Who are these children? What are their names? Where did they live their lives after the loss? Are they still alive? As children, their images bespeak innocence and growth. Here, however, their history as survivors of massacre robs them of their innocence, while the black-and-white still photos freeze them in time, leaving them forever as nameless, ageless children, their futures denied. With their trauma unacknowledged, and their loss unrectified, they appear to be specters, calling out to us across time and distance. Like Hannah, they seem to be asking for something—if not justice, then at least recognition.

THE DAMNED

Palestinian ghosts haunt Israeli soldiers in the horror film *The Damned*, written by the theater director Irad Rubinstein, together with writers Yoav Shutan-Goshen and Ayelet Gundar-Goshen. Before embarking on their creative careers, Rubinstein and Shutan-Goshen served in the elite combat corps of the Israeli army. Solitary, nighttime navigation exercises left an indelible mark on

them: "Before we'd go to the desert alone at night, we'd fantasize what scary things could happen to us there. Each one of us would come up with his own terrifying scenario."[27] These fears inspired the screenplay of *The Damned*. Set in the present, the film opens on a remote IDF base in the Negev Desert, next to the remnant of a Bedouin settlement destroyed during the 1948 war. What follows is a story full of paranoid, slow-burning suspense. The desert around the soldiers is haunted by the ghosts of the Bedouin people who were wronged by history's winners.

The film encapsulates both the events that took place in 1948 in the Negev (*Naqab* in Arabic) Desert and the Israelis' dismissive attitudes to this history. The population of Negev Bedouins in 1948 was approximately one hundred thousand.[28] During the 1948 war, nearly 90 percent of them either were expelled by Israeli forces or fled in terror.[29] The few who remained were forced to live in a limited area, under military administrative control. The state declared ownership of much of the rest of their land, turning large portions of it into closed military zones, like the one depicted in *The Damned*. Even after military control was abolished, the situation of the Bedouin community didn't improve much. According to Israeli law, they no longer held rights to their ancestral lands.[30] As the legal disputes have stalled in courts, Bedouins remain on the lands to which they are linked by collective memory and historical ties; but Israel considers their settlements "unrecognized villages" and has pressured Bedouins to give up their land claims and resettle in state-built towns.[31] Many have refused. Out of the total Bedouin population of two hundred fifty thousand, about one hundred thousand continue to live in the "unrecognized villages," in great poverty and without access to government infrastructure.[32] These Bedouin villages are "invisible" in Israel, and their residents are "transparent" to other citizens.[33] The villages themselves are left off official Israel's map, their existence disavowed, their presence ghostly. With their loss denied and their trauma unacknowledged, haunting is an apt metaphor for the situation of the Bedouins in Israel.

Moreover, the Bedouins living in "unrecognized villages" are called *polshim*—"trespassers" in Hebrew, a term suggesting that they are seen as "a hostile element" that threatens not only law and order for the Jewish population, but the State of Israel itself.[34] *The Damned* gives expression to present Israeli fears underlying this hostility, as well as makes visible the denial of responsibility for the historical crimes that Israel committed against the Bedouins. Like most Israelis, the characters on screen are either oblivious of this history or in denial about it, illustrating the "visible invisibility" of Palestinians in Israel.[35]

The Damned is a horror film, and its use of ghost and haunting tropes is deeply indebted to its cinematic influences. Following *The Blair Witch Project*

(1999, Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez) and *Ringu* (1998, Hideo Nakata), *The Damned* creates atmospherically suggestive psychological horror. It relies on subtlety and indirection to generate an overriding sense of dread, a feeling that Matthew Hills called "objectless anxiety."[36] As Daniel Martin notes, "The unseen is potentially more powerful than the seen."[37] Another important influence is Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), a film to which *The Damned* owes its premise: in the same way in which the violation of a Native-American burial ground extends a curse over the hotel, the destruction of the Bedouin communities during the Nakba plagues the present-day Israeli desert. By literalizing Bedouins as ghosts, *The Damned* shows that the violence inflicted on them in 1948, and left unaddressed up to today, comes to haunt Israel. But *The Damned* is also thematically connected to the recent cycle of Israeli horror films, many of which are set in the military.[38]

The stage for haunting is set when the three protagonists, Aviv (Amit Rahav), Tomer (Daniel Gad), and Barhash (Nimrod Hochenberg), are about to leave for a navigation exercise. Tomer, who aspires to be an officer, leads the briefing: "Not far from here is Jabl Kanier, a former Bedouin settlement; there is nothing there now. In the War of Independence, the IDF went in and evacuated from there all the Bedouins." In a later dialogue, Tomer explains, "There wasn't a battle. The IDF came, the Bedouins fled. Later they said their children were killed, their wells were poisoned, crap like that."

As Tomer is speaking, an old Bedouin woman (Abeer Haddad) in black approaches him from behind. "This is a military zone, ma'am, please stay out," Tomer tells her. But the woman keeps advancing, and upon reaching him, she digs her nails into his arm. "My boy, my boy!" she screams in Arabic. "Where is he? I've been looking for him all day!" After the soldiers pry her away from Tomer, she collapses. The wide shot of an old woman wailing on the ground, surrounded by a large group of young men with guns establishes the power imbalance. "God will avenge you," she says, rocking hypnotically. "The land will devour you. Welcome to *Bab Jahannam* [Gates of Hell]!"

The woman's words turn out to be both a prophecy and a curse. On their trek, the soldiers have mysterious encounters with a young Bedouin boy—who, we are led to believe, is the woman's lost son (figure 3.3)—and a black dog that the soldiers keep killing, again and again. Both the boy and the dog are constructed by the film as the specters of past violence.

They get lost. Finally, they reach the army outpost but discover it eerily empty. Without tents, vehicles, or soldiers, it looks like what it is—a ruin, the vestige of a Bedouin settlement, destroyed and abandoned in 1948. In Israel, according to Gil Hochberg, such ruins "function as a reminder of the open secret situated at the heart of the Israeli national narrative"—visible traces of

Figure 3.3. *The ghost of a Bedouin boy. Still from* The Damned.

what remains invisible—the Nakba.[39] With the outpost's disappearance, the goal of the soldiers' quest changes: it is no longer an exercise, but an actual navigation under increasingly precarious circumstances. They get separated: Tomer disappears in the pursuit of a black dog, and Aviv and Barhash keep walking in circles. As the night descends, they finally see Tomer. The scene is hallucinatory: Tomer sits on a dead tree in the middle of a desert, petting a dead dog. The wounds on his arm are festering. "I killed it. Once again," he says. Then he gets up, stumbles forward in the shaky gait of the reanimated dead, and dips his fingers into a blood-covered, still-beating dog's heart. He drags his fingers across his shoulder to draw two stripes, appointing himself first lieutenant (an IDF rank indicated by two stripes on a shoulder mark). In this perverse way, he accomplishes his earlier aspirations: "I'm an officer," he says, laughing. The close-up of the blood-drawn stripes is a sinister symbol—a metonym of military violence, conveying the film's indictment of the IDF.

With the three soldiers reunited, a brutal fight breaks out between two of them. Ultimately, Barhash prevails, killing Tomer by smashing his head with a rock. The scene is terrifying, not only due to the barbarity of the murder, but also because the killing is not instigated by the supernatural forces. It is simply one Israeli soldier killing another Israeli soldier. Soon, another fight will follow, with Aviv killing Barhash. The film here reenacts the "shooting-and-crying" trope—as Aviv literally weeps while firing his automatic rifle at Barhash—and then turns the trope on its head. In the classic trope, a soldier "cries to ease his conscience and purify himself morally, but shoots out of a loyalty to Israel and Zionism."[40] The soldiers in *The Damned* are way past that point. Loyalty to the state or its ideals doesn't figure at all. In this version of "shooting and crying," there is no external enemy; their fear and aggression turn inward, and the

soldiers shoot and kill each other. Like in other Israeli horror films, "the IDF is a self-destructive perpetrator, turning on itself."[41]

Like *Forgiveness*, *The Damned* also talks about generational perpetuation of violence. After killing Barhash, Aviv comes across human remains—a small skull and a Bedouin dress strewn over bones—evidence that the Bedouin boy, whose ghost chased the soldiers across the desert, died a violent death in that place many years before. The desert is cursed because it bears the bodies of Bedouin victims of Israel's violence, still unacknowledged and unatoned. In the narrative logic of the film, the current generation of Israelis pay the price for the violence that was committed in 1948 in their name. In emphasizing the connections between past and present, *The Damned* joins other Israeli horror films, thereby suggesting "that issues have not been resolved and issuing a dire warning that they are destined to continue and repeat themselves in the future."[42]

The Damned is one of the few Israeli films that addresses openly the violent uprooting of the desert's Indigenous population. In its course, the film makes the victims visible (at least as ghosts), disrupting the Israeli practice of systematic erasure of both the people and the memory of their past. In the final shots of the film, the camera follows the same Bedouin woman, in her black dress, walking across the sand. Then, only the vast desert landscape remains on-screen, as in the opening scene. Whatever haunted the soldiers is still out there, be it supernatural ghosts or their own aggressions. There is no narrative safety; the curse continues. That terrifying thing that Irad Rubinstein and his fellow soldiers imagined during their army service turns out to be their own reflections in the mirror.

THE DEAD OF JAFFA

The Dead of Jaffa also draws on the ghost trope, although it is not a horror film. The plot links Palestinian history and contemporary reality, showing how the suppression of memory haunts the present. *The Dead of Jaffa* was directed by Ram Loevy, one of the figureheads of Israeli culture, known for his cutting-edge political works. He started his career producing a documentary, *My Name is Ahmad*, which shocked Israeli audiences in 1966 by putting a dispossessed Arab into the center of the narrative. His 1978 television film *Khirbet Khizeh*, based on S. Yizhar's novella, mentioned above, became controversial for its sympathetic portrayal of the Arab villagers displaced from their homes in 1948. These and other films of his are considered classics today, and Loevy

himself was awarded the prestigious Israel Prize. But only in 2019, at seventy-nine, did he finally direct his first feature for the big screen. Written by his long-time collaborator, the late Israeli writer Gilad Evron and a Palestinian Israeli author, Ala Hlehel, the film was sixteen years in the making. In that sense, *The Dead of Jaffa* is both Loevy's debut, and a culmination of life-long work.

The Dead of Jaffa continues the difficult conversation Loevy started in *Khirbet Khizeh*. But where the earlier film narrated the events of 1948, the latter fuses history with current events, by intertwining two plotlines. The main plotline springs into action when three children from the West Bank are smuggled into Israel. With their mother dead, and their father serving a life sentence in an Israeli jail, they are effectively orphaned. They arrive at the home of George (Yussuf Abu-Warda) and Rita (Ruba Bilal-Asfour), Palestinian citizens of Israel living in Jaffa. George and Rita are childless. For Rita, the children's arrival is an answer to her yearning for motherhood. George is more cautious: in a world where even a friendly neighborhood cop hunts down and brutally arrests "illegal infiltrators" from the West Bank, harboring the orphans is an enormous risk.

All three children are traumatized, but where the younger two are thrilled to be again with loving adults, the older one, Talal (Jihad Babay), is already a rebellious teenager with budding political consciousness. It is through Talal's story that the film dramatizes the younger generation's encounter with the past using the trope of haunting. The subplot starts when Talal sneaks into an abandoned house nearby. George finds him and, to keep Talal out of trouble, tries to scare him away from the property. "Dead people live here," he tells the boy. "It's their house and they are mad! You know why? Because they were kicked out of here." This story is both factually correct and richly metaphorical. In the film, the house belonged to Palestinian neighbors expelled in 1948. George's family has been protecting it from Israeli appropriation for decades. Gradually, it turned to ruin—like so many other former Palestinian properties. Given the time that has passed, its owners are likely dead. But the description also taps into the trope of a haunted house, evoking the ghosts who inhabit the house now. George continues, "You want to live here with the dead? . . . If you stay here, they'll attack you, watch out!" Talal sheds a tear but doesn't leave his encampment in the house.

Sure enough, Talal does have an encounter with ghosts. The scene opens when he hears a mournful tune played on traditional Arabic flute, sounding as if from a distant past. As he rises from his mattress, his face is awash in a radiant light, signaling that something miraculous is about to happen. He peeks out of a barred window, and the courtyard in front of his eyes comes alive with people

and music. Men in white keffiyehs set out tables to prepare for a celebration. A man in a tarboosh plays oud, and three young girls in blue dresses (calling to mind the twins from *The Shining*) prepare to dance. Framing the scene, the ruin's window seems to have become a portal into another realm.

"Want to see dead people?" he calls to his siblings later. The children follow him to the window. The camera cuts from their faces, glued to the window, to what looks like a vision from the past. People in 1940s clothes enter the same courtyard and greet each other: an old man in a Hasidic coat hugs another elder in a keffiyeh; a British policeman shakes someone's hand. On the center stage, a dervish is about to dance (figure 3.4). His white gown radiates light, and he starts twirling, accompanied by an exquisite string melody, and slowly floats up into the air. The camera tilts up, following his upward movement toward the sky, and the music rises, too.

But when a camera appears on-screen, the source of magic is revealed. The dervish was lifted into the air by a pulley. Alas, the figures in the courtyard are not ghosts, but actors in a foreign film being shot in the neighborhood. The fact that there was nothing supernatural about the scene doesn't detract from its power. This is an emotional fulcrum of the film that connects the past and the present, setting in motion the tragic events to take place in the lives of Talal, George, and Rita. The past haunts the present, even if it is on a movie set.

The film-within-a-film is being made by a British director (Jonny Phillips) who has set out to recreate his parents' love story, which started when both were stationed in Mandate Palestine. He is entitled and oblivious; his dynamic with the people in the neighborhood ironically replicates the colonial hierarchies from the time he is trying to depict. To add local color, he asks George to play the small part of a Palestinian doctor, only to humiliate him in the process of filming. An actor playing a British soldier is to shoot George's character, and George is to fall and die, covered in blood. The director shoots the scene in multiple takes, and George must die again and again, visibly distraught by the experience. The scene points out that nothing has changed for Palestinians between then and now, when George lives in constant fear of Israeli police. Placing George into a historical simulacrum highlights the connection between past and present—the central theme of *The Dead of Jaffa*.

Later, the director recruits people from the neighborhood to act as extras, marching through the streets. At first, the locals are giggling on camera. But gradually, as they get into it, their chants of "Free Palestine!" grow stronger, and Talal joins the demonstration, swept by the emotion. Soon, he is leading it, throwing actual rather than prop rocks toward the actors playing British police. The make-believe protest becomes real, past and present fuse, and tensions erupt. Events come to a head when the procession reaches the checkpoint

Figure 3.4. *Palestinian "ghosts" framed by the window of a ruined house. Still from* The Dead of Jaffa.

of the actual—Israeli—police, who spring into action. In the tussle, Talal is lethally wounded.

The way *The Dead of Jaffa* weaves together present-day events and the historical film-within-a-film allows Loevy to engage with memory and representation of the 1948 events. In the film-within-a-film, the Arab dispossession appears only as a colorful backdrop in a British family saga. The historical Palestinians are relegated to the margins of the plot, their story erased again. But not in *The Dead of Jaffa*. Loevy's film revises the narrative of marginalization, placing the plight of contemporary Palestinians in the center of the story. Their absence from the historical narrative haunts the present, although at the end, it is not the ghosts who kill.

The four films I discussed here engage with the memory of the Nakba, a subject rarely represented on Israeli screens. It is not by chance that they draw on the trope of haunting; this choice allows the films to make the Palestinian victims visible at least as ghosts—as specters of violence, lurking in the shadow of Israeli nationalism.

These specters or ghosts, as theorized by Avery Gordon, are not passive.[43] The essence of a specter is to demand its due, to call for our attention: as in traditional ghost lore, it appears in the aftermath of great injustice and seeks retribution in order to be laid to rest. The appearance of Palestinian ghosts on Israeli screens signals a moment when the historical violence can no longer be suppressed, and when the specters can no longer remain invisible. They call on us to repair the injustice. Although these calls are rarely heard in the Israeli public sphere, these films insist that we listen. Rephrasing Karl Marx, a specter is haunting Israel—the specter of the Nakba.[44]

NOTES

1. Morris, *Palestinian Refugee Problem*, 91.

2. Morris, 237–238.

3. Morris, 239–240.

4. For the history and memory of Nakba, see Sa'di and Abu-Lughod, *Nakba*.

5. Shapira, "*Hirbet Hizah*"; Sagiv, "Expulsion and Exile."

6. Grumberg, *Place and Ideology*, 49; Peleg, "Perpetuating Victimhood?," 264.

7. Shezaf, "Burying the Nakba"; Sela, "Rethinking National Archives," 79–92.

8. For instance, Zochrot's annual Nakba film festivals are often protested, with officials threatening to cut funding (see, e.g., Gostoli, "Film Festival"; Heler, "Searat Festifal"). For further discussion of memory activism in Israel, see Lentin, *Co-Memory and Melancholia*; Gutman, *Memory Activism*.

9. For a discussion of the Nakba Law (2011), see Gutman, *Memory Activism*, 90–112.

10. Pappe, *Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*.

11. Gutman, *Memory Activism*, 90.

12. Freud, "The Uncanny," 59–83.

13. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xvi.

14. Gordon, xvii.

15. Gordon, xvii.

16. Hochberg, *Visual Occupations*, 37–38.

17. Hochberg, 38.

18. Yosef, "Identity of the Victim," 157.

19. Aloni's notable work includes films *Local Angel* (2002), *Art/Violence* (2013), and *Junction 48* (2016), as well as an anthology of his own and other scholars' writing, *What Does a Jew Want?* (2011).

20. Trigg, "The Place of Trauma," 87–101.

21. Elsaesser, "Mind-Game Film," 14, 18.

22. Elsaesser, 20.

23. Yosef, "Identity of the Victim," 156.

24. Žižek, ". . . I will move the underground," 81.

25. Peleg, "Perpetuating Victimhood," 254.

26. Žižek, 81.

27. Irad Rubinstein, introductory remarks at the premiere of *The Damned* (Cinema Citi, Ramat Ha-Sharon, Israel, November 23, 2018).

28. Meir and Zivan, "Sociocultural Encounters," 241–267.

29. On expulsion of Bedouins in 1948, see Pappe, *Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. For an account of a massacre in a Bedouin village, see Rego, "1948 and Memoricide," 205–215.

30. Zerubavel, *Desert*, 139–141.

31. These towns lacked in infrastructure, employment, educational prospects, and were not a good fit for traditional Bedouin lifestyle. Zerubavel, 142.

32. Zerubavel, 142, 147.

33. Swirski, "Transparent Citizens," 25–45.

34. Zerubavel, *Desert*, 152.

35. Hochberg, *Visual Occupations*, 37–57.

36. Hills, *Pleasures of Horror*, 27.

37. Martin, "Japan's Blair Witch," 37.

38. For further discussion of Israeli horror films' preoccupation with the army, see Gershenson, "Zombies and Zionism"; Rosen, "National Fears."

39. Hochberg, *Visual Occupations*, 49.

40. Grumberg, *Place and Ideology*, 49.

41. Gershenson, "Zombies and Zionism," 170.

42. Rosen, "National Fears," 97.

43. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xvii.

44. I'm referring here to the famous opening line of *The Communist Manifesto*: "A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of Communism." Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, 218.

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