

The sound-track of memory: *Ashes and Dust* and the commemoration of the Holocaust in Israeli popular culture

Oren Meyers

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Eyal Zandberg

THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY, JERUSALEM

On January 1988, two Israeli artists, the singer–composer Yehuda Poliker, and the lyricist–musical producer Ya’akov Gilad released the album *Efer Veavak* (in English: *Ashes and Dust*), which is arguably one of the most influential Israeli music albums ever recorded (Lukatch, 1994; Morgens-tern, 1988; Oren, 1988). The album, which achieved exceptional commercial success and critical appreciation, addresses the fact that both Poliker and Gilad are sons of parents who survived the Holocaust. Thus eight out of the album’s twelve songs deal directly or indirectly with Holocaust related themes from varied perspectives.

In this article we maintain that the cultural role of *Ashes and Dust* can be understood through two trajectories: the first deals with the relations between *Ashes and Dust* and the development of Holocaust commemoration in Israel. The second trajectory deals with the relations between *Ashes and Dust* and the conventions of popular culture representation. The assumption underlying this article is that the Holocaust is one of the enduring aspects of Israeli collective memory. Hence Israeli society needs to tell itself its version of the Holocaust story time and again, through changing circumstances and for different reasons (Brug, 1998). In our view *Ashes and Dust* reflects current changes in the Israeli Holocaust story and thus it enables observers to better understand not only this process of retelling, but also its function in the construction of the Israeli public memory.

Ashes and Dust embodies a unique intersection between the conventions of Israeli Holocaust commemoration and the representation of the Holocaust via popular culture. While the representation of the Holocaust has been investigated previously through the study of monuments (Baumel, 1995; Young, 1993), rituals (Ben-Amos & Beit-El, 1999; Young 1990), literature (Dekoven-Ezrahi, 1980; Feldman, 1992), films (Avisar, 1988; Insdorf, 1983; Loshitzky, 1997, 2000), television (Shandler, 1999) and comic books (Des Pres, 1988), little if at all (Gavish, 1998) has been written about the representation of the Holocaust through popular music.

Furthermore, our paper extends its discussion of *Ashes and Dust* beyond the mere contents of the album. By analyzing the frequency and timing of the airing of the album's songs on Israeli radio we manage to capture a dual process of collective memory preservation and construction (Halbwachs, 1992; Schudson, 1997; Schwartz, 1982; Zelizer, 1995, 1998). The transformation of the songs into prominent emblems of Holocaust memory, through their airing on Israel's Holocaust Memorial Day and other phenomena¹ reflects the presence of the present in the past: the Israeli understanding of the Holocaust is now mediated through the tools and conventions of local popular culture. At the same time, the infiltration of *Ashes and Dust*'s songs into the day to day 'secular' flow of Israeli radio broadcasting, particularly when new tragedies occur, reflects the presence of the past in the present: more than 55 years after the end of the Second World War the memory of the Holocaust is still present in the way Israelis experience their lives.

The paper contains three parts. First, we discuss the development of Israeli Holocaust commemoration and the implications of the representation of the Holocaust via popular culture. Next, we probe the cultural role of *Ashes and Dust* as a reflection of four processes: the shift from an official and collective Israeli Holocaust narrative to many private Holocaust narratives; the shift from the survivors to their children as valid storytellers; the shift from the discussion of the Holocaust itself to a discussion of the memory of the Holocaust; and the shift from the past to the present (and vice versa) through the public airing of the album's songs. Finally, we examine the implications of our findings concerning each of these four impulses.

Israeli Holocaust commemoration

Through the first years of the existence of the State of Israel its public Holocaust discourse was dominated by official voices, and the Holocaust was utilized as a political and educational tool (Weitz, 1993; Zertal, 1998, 2000). The fact that most of the murdered Jews did not revolt against the

Nazis did not fit the prevailing Zionist ethos, and thus had several consequences.

First, the official commemorative narrative that determined how the Holocaust would fit into the country's collective consciousness aimed to present the event through a dichotomy between two opposing poles (Zerubavel, 1995). On the one hand there was the term *Shoa* (Holocaust), signifying the 'unfitting' behavior of most of the victims and connecting them to 'traditional' diaspora patterns of passiveness. The other term used was *gevura* (heroism), commemorating the acts of Jews who fought against the Germans and relating them to the Zionist ethos. Thus, for instance, the official Israeli day of remembrance is called 'The Memorial Day for the Holocaust and the Heroism'.

Second, the Holocaust story was incorporated into the Zionist master commemorative narrative as a crucial step towards the establishment of the Jewish State (Friedlander, 1990; Segev, 1991). The clearest proof of this perception can be found in the decision to create the commemorative succession of the Holocaust Memorial Day, the Fallen Soldiers' Memorial Day, and Independence Day. The decision to set the Holocaust Memorial Day seven days before the Fallen Soldiers' Memorial Day, which is immediately followed by Independence Day, creates a mythic order. This continuum is emblematic of a cycle of death and regeneration in which the Holocaust Memorial Day is appropriated by the Zionist narrative as a form of justification. The coupling of the Fallen Soldiers' Memorial Day and Independence Day seven days later, a deliberate choice that stems from the traditional Jewish seven days of mourning symbolizes the Zionist perception of a shift from chaos to cosmos (Handelman and Katz, 1990; Young, 1993). Finally, the construction of the victim/hero dichotomy led to the silencing of the vast majority of the Holocaust survivors who migrated to Israel after the war (Zertal, 2000). Since they did not fight, their stories did not fit into the dominant frame of reference. Hence, in Israel's first years the Holocaust story was told either by the few who fought or by the official agents of memory.

Several researchers identify Adolf Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem in 1961 as a turning point in the shaping of the way Israelis remember and understand the Holocaust. The capture and trial of Eichmann were decided upon by Ben-Gurion in order to achieve educational goals and to establish the idea that Israel is the representative of the Jewish victims (Arendt, 1964). But at the same time the trial also exposed many Israelis, for the first time, to the stories of the victims (Bresheeth, 1997). In later years traumatic experiences such as the waiting period before the 1967 war or the sight of helpless Israeli prisoners of war during the 1973 war led to an increased erosion of the victim/hero dichotomy.

Following the Eichmann trial and through a gradual process during the 1970s and 1980s Israeli perceptions and memory of the Holocaust have

changed. This is not to say that the Holocaust became less prominent as a determining factor in the way Israelis perceive their shared identity. On the contrary, through this period the Holocaust became more significant in Israeli life, to the extent that Liebman and Don-Yehiya define it as 'the primary myth of Israeli politics' and the moral foundation of Israel's 'new civil religion' (1983: 137). Thus the Holocaust is still an enduring influence on Israeli society, but this influence has been altered in three main ways.

First, Holocaust memory has become more privatized through the shift from official memory agents to individual ones. This means that even the official-national rituals have gradually lost some of their collective traits. Second, through the years the Holocaust discourse has exceeded the well-defined borders of the official remembrance days and infiltrated day to day Israeli life. More generally, the Holocaust still functions as a 'filter' through which Israelis interpret issues such as Israel's foreign relations and its reaction to recent atrocities, as well as domestic issues (Zuckermann, 1993). Finally, over the years Israeli Holocaust discourse has gradually shifted from a constant discussion of the event itself to an increasing emphasis on memories of the Holocaust and the challenge of preserving them. This shift reflects two processes: firstly, the ageing of the survivors has focused public attention on the need to preserve their testimony. Secondly, the institutionalization of perceptions and rituals has led to an ongoing discussion about their forms and messages. Thus, scholars, educators and artists are attempting to understand the long term implications of the way Israelis remember the Holocaust.

Holocaust memory and popular culture representations

The representation of the Holocaust, through every possible mode of representation, confronts the presenter with unique obstacles and challenges. It is a moral imperative to tell the story of the Holocaust, while at the same time it is not clear if the main human tool for telling, language, can actually reflect such an 'event at the limits' (Friedlander, 1992: 3).

Any attempt to document the Holocaust in a factual manner comes up against several unavoidable paradoxes that might suggest that one of the more appropriate ways of representing the Holocaust is through works of art. The artistic representation of the Holocaust avoids the historian's obligation to describe the indescribable 'just as it was'. Furthermore, works of art readily employ emotions whereas historical narrative is required to stay indifferent for the sake of its 'objectivity'. At the same time, those very advantages of the artistic representation of the Holocaust can also have accompanying drawbacks: while it is extremely hard to perceive the Holocaust as a reality, there is a notion that the scope of the tragedy does

not let the imagination take off (Hartman, 1994), a notion that, of course limits the artist. The aforementioned challenges led to the development of several conventions demanding that the artistic representation of the Holocaust shall be accurate, solemn and it must present the Holocaust as a unique historical event (Des Pres, 1991).

These conventions might conflict with some artistic modes; and to an even larger extent they contradict the givens of the popular culture industry. Current studies mention three points of tension between the characteristics of popular culture products and the conventions of Holocaust representation: first, there is a conflict between understanding the Holocaust as a unique event and the standardized nature of popular culture production. The mere fact that television shows or songs that are aired on the radio are always a part of a flow of entertainment that is frequently interrupted by commercials, necessarily secularizes any representation of sanctified subjects such as the Holocaust (Shandler, 1999). Second, popular culture products strive to attract a very superficial kind of attention, and their main virtue is that they do not challenge the consumer. These traits conflict with the notion that artistic representations of the Holocaust ought to command maximum attention and have long-time effects.

Finally, in order to gain profits and please consumers, popular culture products are designed according to existing schemes that have been proven successful in the past. This reliance on schemes can be especially problematic when popular culture products try to fit the telling of the Holocaust into regular dramatic conventions: the need to focus on one personalized story can blur the scope of the disaster; the need for conventional and active heroes contradicts the complex reality of the Holocaust; and the need for a 'happy ending' contradicts the very essence of the Holocaust (Loshitzky, 1997).

While struggling with the limitations of popular culture conventions, there are two contrasting ways through which creators might try to deal with the problem: on the one hand some creators, such as the director Steven Spielberg in the 19xx film *Schindler's List*, aim to construct their authority as valid storytellers of the Holocaust through the appropriation of modes and styles of higher culture (Zelizer, 1997). On the other hand, some creators might choose the opposite solution and emphasize the conventions and style of popular culture in order to sharpen their message such as in the case of Maus's use of comic aesthetics or the slapstick humor in *Life is Beautiful* (MacCable, 1999).

Ashes and Dust: four processes

Yehuda Poliker and Ya'akov Gilad first collaborated at the beginning of the 1980s in 'Benzine', a successful Israeli rock band. After the breakup of

'Benzine', they worked together on two albums in which Poliker re-connected himself to his Greek roots through the transformation of original Greek songs into Israeli covers. The songs of *Ashes and Dust* were originally written for a radio program that was aired on Israel's Holocaust Memorial Day, 1986, and was dedicated to the experiences of Holocaust survivors' children. In 1988 Poliker and Gilad released *Ashes and Dust*, an album in which eight out of twelve songs deal directly or indirectly with Holocaust related issues. Thus, for example, the theme song, *Ashes and Dust*, was written from the point of view of a son whose survivor mother goes back to visit Poland; *A Song After the Rain*, is about a survivor who returns to his village after the war; and *Because* is a song about the tormented and impossible relations between survivors and their children.

That same year director Orna Ben-Dor released the documentary film *Because of That War* in which she interviewed Gilad and Poliker and two of their parents, Jacko Poliker, (Yehuda Poliker's father) and Halyna Birenbaum (Ya'akov Gilad's mother). The documentary is in many ways an integral part of the *Ashes and Dust* experience. In the film Poliker and Gilad describe growing up in the shadow of their parents' memories, and the parents talk about their war experiences and the ways in which they transmitted their memories to their children. The movie also accompanies Poliker and Gilad through their work on the stage version of the songs, and links the songs to specific events and memories. *Because of That War* reinforces the identification between the album and the Holocaust, and it has been aired on Israel's public television station during Israel's Holocaust Memorial Day.

1. *Between the collective and the private*

... In the square, by the wine shop²
 somebody suddenly shouts, 'Gapozo is back!'
 The people who are sitting in the coffee house and by the bar
 wave their hands at me as if nothing has ever happened.
 Here, the routine never stopped
 I leave the convoy
 and cry all the way back.

(*A Song After the Rain*, from the album *Ashes and Dust*)

An attempt to trace the development of the Israeli artistic response to the Holocaust will reveal similar patterns to the ones defined earlier, in the context of general Israeli commemoration of the Holocaust. Research on the development of the Israeli literary and theatrical representations of the Holocaust (Feldman, 1992; Holzman, 1992) found that the initial response of the canonical Israeli writers to the Holocaust was one of estrangement. At the same time, the few survivors who wrote about the Holocaust during

Israel's first years were heavily criticized for their all-too-personal point of view.

During the 1970s and 1980s, after the breakdown of Israeli myths of heroism, a series of novels and plays presented, for the first time, the moral dilemmas with which the victims had to deal, without attempting to integrate them in retrospect into the Zionist narrative. But this writing, which was, in many cases, highly critical of the political situation in Israel, still incorporated the Holocaust story into an ideological framework and reflected a collective point of view. Only during the late 1980s and the 1990s did some Israeli writers, many of them children of survivors, manage to write in a way that intentionally distanced the Holocaust from the Israeli political scene and focused on either personal experiences or the universal moral implications of the Holocaust.

Ashes and Dust is a significant representative of this latest shift. The album is an example of how survivors and their families have finally spoken out, and in a sense it is no different from memoirs and books of poetry published by survivors and their children in the last few years. The albums' songs do not represent some large-scale Zionist lesson or a critical metaphor about the decay of the Jewish State. They are the personal stories of people who remained silent until not so long ago, precisely because their stories were too private and thus did not offer any useful ideological insight.

But the absence of collective ideology does not make *Ashes and Dust* a 'private' creation. The album tells several individual stories that were shared in varying degrees by many survivors and their children. And since *Ashes and Dust* is a popular culture product it had the possibility of reaching hundreds of thousands of people, and so it did. Hence, this reduction of the Holocaust story to its most personal components made Poliker and Gilad and their parents the symbols of their generation of survivors and survivors' children. In fact, the influence of the album was so dramatic that some critics claimed that after *Ashes and Dust* was released, Poliker and Gilad became 'almost the sole representatives of the second generation in the national trauma' (Orsher, 1988: 12). Hence the unique cultural status gained by *Ashes and Dust* and its creators reflects a society in which the Holocaust is very private and at the same time utterly public.

2. *Between survivors and their children*

Because after that war
I was born
because after that war
you were born . . .

... Because of the war because of the war
 because it is forbidden to forget and there is nowhere to go
 because of the memories because of the memories
 we are also victims. . . .

(*Because*, from the album *Ashes and Dust*)

The aforementioned thematic shift from the presentation of the Holocaust as a collective story with a collective moral to the presentation of many fragmented stories with many optional morals is closely connected to a generational shift in the identity of the tellers. Most of the survivors' children, who are today known as 'second generation survivors', were born almost immediately after the war. The newborn children were supposed to substitute for the families that the survivors had lost, and so the children were confronted from a very early age with impossible expectations. Most of them, including Ya'akov Gilad and Yehuda Poliker, were named after relatives who died in the war, and some of the firstborns were given double and even triple names, so they could commemorate several murdered relatives (Wardi, 1992).

Some of the parents talked with their children about their experiences during the war, while others refused to discuss the subject. Both of these attitudes were problematic, and so the children grew up carrying the double burden of their parents' harsh memories and high expectations. Both Poliker's father and Gilad's mother, who appear in *Because of That War*, shared their past experiences with their children from a very early age. Hence, when Gilad and Poliker are asked to address a question regarding their parents' war experiences it is easy to detect through their voices and gestures the voices and gestures of their parents telling them those same stories again and again. The other way through which the tragic past penetrated into the two children's Israeli childhood was via their parents' over-protective behavior.

These realities are reflected in *Ashes and Dust* in a most acute way. The Holocaust related songs in the album address the issue either through the eyes of the survivors or through the eyes of their children. And so songs such as *A Window to the Mediterranean* or *A Song After the Rain* tell the stories of survivors, while songs such as *When You Grow Up* and *Because* tell the stories of the survivors' children. But beyond this initial division we would argue that all of the songs, or rather the album as a concept, is first and foremost a reflection of the children's experiences. Thus, for example a song such *Ashes and Dust* tells the story (as revealed in *Because of That War*) of Ya'akov Gilad who pleads with his mother not to visit Poland. The album's deepest message, while telling both the stories of the parents and their children, presents the children's side in their complex dialogue with their parents. When they write about a childhood haunted by Holocaust memories or portray the first years of the new migrants in Israel, it is always the children's point of view that dictates the manner of telling.

Furthermore, we would argue that several aspects of the album and its performance reflect this shift from parents to children: the first factor is the language of the album, both textually and musically, that belongs to the world of the children. This becomes clear through the rock-and-roll rhythms and through a comparison between the style of most of the albums' lyrics, written by Ya'akov Gilad, and the only song, *Flowers in the Wind*, that was written by his mother. Other current Israeli aspects of *Ashes and Dust* are the well-established reputation of the creators (especially Poliker) as local rock stars and the way in which the songs were first performed in public. This included a unique concert on the eve of Israel's Holocaust Memorial Day, 1988, a combined initiative of Poliker, Gilad and Shlomo Artzi, another Israeli rock star born to Holocaust survivors. It took place in a Tel Aviv theatre hall and resembled both a rock concert and the traditional singing get-togethers of native Israelis on occasions such as Independence Day and the Fallen Soldiers' Memorial Day (Gvirtz, 1988: 1).

Hence, the central role of the children in Israel's cultural life and their adoption of Israeli patterns of marking events contributed to the ongoing 'Israelization' of the Holocaust. A project such as *Ashes and Dust* reflects the continuing transformation of the Holocaust from the original 'there' and 'then' into an Israeli 'here' and 'now'. The involvement of Israeli survivors' children in the telling of the Holocaust story not only adds their voice to the other voices, but also changes the meaning of the story. The story that the children insert into the Israeli cultural mainstream firmly fixes the understanding of the Holocaust as a current event, which is never isolated from current reality.

3. *Between the event and the memory of the event*

A spring day, Lilac scents
 as you face the ruins of your old town
 the perfect day to go fishing
 deep inside my heart is broken.
 There was your childhood, little woman
 people that nobody knows
 there isn't even a building to recall the past.
 And if you are going, where are you going?
 Eternity is only Ashes and Dust.
 Where are you going? Where are you going?
 Years have passed, nothing has been erased . . .

(*Ashes & Dust*, from the album *Ashes and Dust*)

Although the album *Ashes and Dust* does not directly criticize Israel's official Holocaust commemorations, as is the case of several other current Israeli popular culture representations,³ its messages are certainly focused on the place and role of Holocaust memory in the present. That is, *Ashes*

and *Dust* deals more with the implications of the memory of the event than with representations of the event itself.

This tendency is evident from the careful, if not intentionally vague, references to the Holocaust itself. Most of the songs address the Holocaust through emotionally charged terms such as 'barrack', 'snow', 'wound', 'trains' and 'hasty farewell' that can only gain their Holocaust related meaning through an understanding of the context. The sole exception is the song *The Small Station Treblinka*, that mentions the name of an extermination camp in its title. It was not written, however, by Ya'akov Gilad, but by the Polish-Jewish poet Vladislav Shlengel, who was murdered in the Holocaust. This tendency to address the horror itself through indirect allusions characterizes some Holocaust related creations that use 'allusive realism' filtered through the memory of that period (Friedlander, 1992). In contrast to those indirect references, the representations of the effects caused by the burden of memory, as reflected in such songs as *Because* and *When You Grow Up*, are direct and highly critical. The children of survivors are portrayed through the songs as those who were sentenced to remember, the mediators of an experience they have not gone through but were contaminated by.

This emphasis on the burden of memory seems natural considering the personal histories of *Ashes and Dust's* two creators. But in a deeper sense the decision to reveal the most private difficulties of survivors' children reflects a broader social phenomenon. While the songs always tell the personal stories of a particular migrant who is haunted by his memories, or of one survivors' child who is concerned about the messages he will pass on to his own children, these are also reflections of the dilemmas that confront Israeli society. The conflict between the obligation to remember and the awareness of the mental and moral costs of carrying such a burden is a highly public issue (Elkana, 1988). Thus, the personal focus on survivors' children is also a metaphor for a whole society that is, in many senses, a second-generation survivor in its entirety.

4. *Between the sacred and the secular*

After I arrived to Jaffa
 hopes were born from disparity
 I found myself a small room
 on the roof of a deserted house.

There is a folding bed
 In case the three of us will want to sleep
 You, me and the kid
 In front of a window looking to the Mediterranean . . .

(*A Window to the Mediterranean*, from the album *Ashes and Dust*)

The case study of *Ashes and Dust* also demonstrates the tensions between Holocaust representation conventions and the working patterns of the popular culture industry. This manifests particularly around the question of when the songs in the album are heard and under what circumstances. At first glance, the 'when' question does not seem relevant to this discussion since every consumer who buys the album *Ashes and Dust* can listen to it whenever he or she wants. But two factors raise doubts about this initial assumption.

First, popular culture products such as *Ashes and Dust* gain their meaning through a complex process in which the creators of the product have an important but not exclusive role. Music albums, like movies or television shows, are created by groups of people who are in charge of different aspects of the production. On another level it is extremely important to acknowledge the role of the musical editors at Israel's radio stations who decide which songs will be aired, in what frequency and exactly when. Since radio stations have an important role in the marketing of music in Israel (Adoni, 1986; Regev, 1997), those musical editors play a role in the process of introducing new music, rejecting other music and positioning music in a larger cultural context.

This point leads to the second factor that mediates the 'when' factor, and thus influences the cultural understanding of *Ashes and Dust*. As explained in the previous part of this article, the State of Israel has created a commemorative continuum that begins with the Holocaust Memorial Day, continues with the Fallen Soldiers' Memorial Day, and ends with Israel's Independence Day. Through the years, an unwritten tradition developed according to which on both remembrance days local radio stations air only solemn Israeli songs, which are related, either through their texts or only through their somber music, to the themes of those days (Segev, 1991). The framework of this paper does not allow us to discuss in detail the lyrics of those songs, but two general remarks are worth making.

First, over the years the once relatively strict differentiation between Holocaust related songs and the Fallen Soldiers' related songs has eroded. Hence nowadays it is rather customary to hear songs that were initially related to the Fallen Soldiers' memory, of which there are many more than there are Holocaust related songs, broadcast on Holocaust Remembrance Day. Second, with the passage of time, when tragedies occur, mainly those which are related to the Israeli-Arab conflict, it has become customary for all radio stations to cease broadcasting foreign songs or cheerful Israeli songs, and to broadcast only those somber songs, which are well recognized from the Remembrance Day repertoire.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the meaning of Israeli songs can be defined, to a different extent and under different circumstances, through a complex process which involves the creators of the songs, the professionals of the music industry, the music editors at the

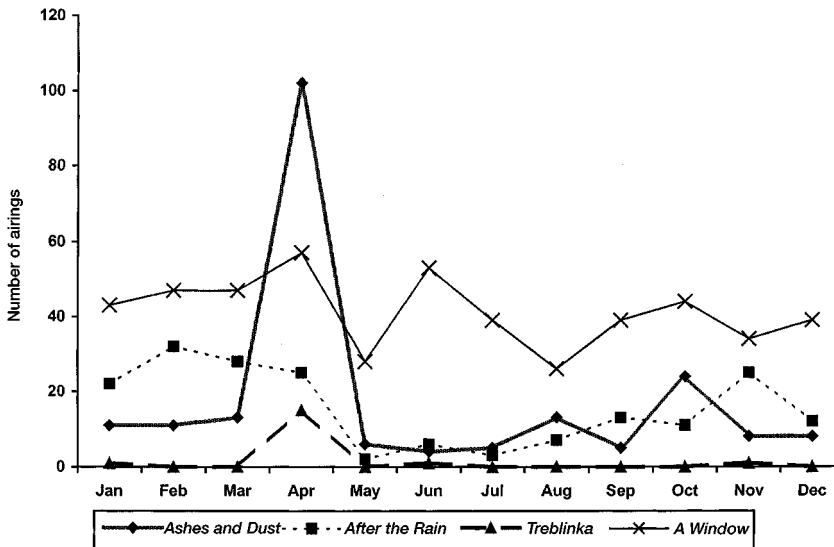
radio stations and, of course the audiences. The case of *Ashes and Dust* enables us to study this process through which such songs gain their public meaning as an outcome of Israeli cultural preferences and the conventions of the popular culture industry.

The album includes eight songs addressing the issue of the Holocaust, directly or indirectly, which at the same time vary in their melodiousness. Thus, a study of the patterns of the songs' airings on the radio can indicate how this inherent tension between the songs' varied content and 'packaging' was resolved under different circumstances. The graph in Figure 1 presents the number of times each of four songs,⁴ *Ashes and Dust*, *A Window to the Mediterranean*, *A Song After the Rain* and *The Small Station Treblinka*, were aired on three national, publicly owned Israeli radio stations⁵ between 1993 and 1999, excluding 1997.⁶

Several conclusions can be drawn from this graph:

a) There is a dramatic difference between the number of the airings of *The Small Station Treblinka* and the three other songs, throughout the period. The same is also true for the song *Because*, that was not aired at all in the years 1993, 1994 and 1996.⁷ This difference can be attributed to two circumstances. The first is that *The Small Station Treblinka* and *Because*, are not actually sung but rather recited to the sounds of monotonous background music. This manner of presentation clashes with the relaxed flow created by most of the songs that are aired on the radio, focusing the attention of the listeners on the songs' lyrics. This brings us to the second

FIGURE 1
Ashes and Dust songs' airings 1993–1999 (excluding 1997)



reason: the lyrics of the two songs directly address Holocaust related themes. This is especially salient in the case of *The Small Station Treblinka* in which the song's title includes the word Treblinka and thus forces the Israeli listener to acknowledge the fact that this song is directly related to the Holocaust.

b) One of the most important points in time for making a comparison between the airings of the songs is the month of April: in six out of the seven years under consideration Holocaust Memorial Day was marked in April, and in five out of the seven years both Holocaust Memorial Day and the Fallen soldiers' Memorial Day were marked in April. The findings show that in many respects the song *Ashes and Dust* has become identified with those two remembrance days. In contrast to *The Small Station Treblinka* and *Because*, *Ashes and Dust* has become an emblem of official Holocaust remembrance through popular culture. At the same time, *The Small Station Treblinka*, a song directly related to the Holocaust, was seldom aired even on Holocaust Memorial Day. The same is true in regard to the song *Because* that was not aired at all in 1993, 1994 and 1996.

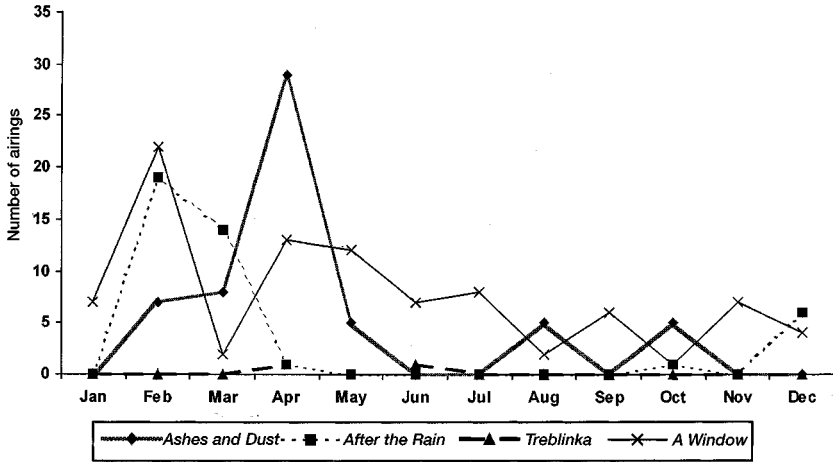
c) In six out of the seven years, *A Song After the Rain* was aired with greater frequency on months other than the month in which the two remembrance days were marked. The song includes implicit references to the Holocaust, but is not charged with terms that would mark it as an exclusively Holocaust song, or rather it is open to other readings. One possible explanation for the song's popularity in months other than April (November 1993, February 1994, February 1997, January 1999) may be that these were relatively rainy months,⁸ and so *A Song After the Rain* was grasped as referring to climatic changes. A similar pattern can be found in the airing frequencies of *A Window to the Mediterranean*. The song addresses Holocaust themes in an implicit way ('The wound is still open/If only you were here with me/I would surely tell you/All that can't be said in a letter . . .'), but its melodic rhythm enables it, just as *A Song After the Rain*, to 'infiltrate' day to day broadcasting. This is especially true during summer months (August 1993, July 1994) and might suggest that the song's title, *A Window to the Mediterranean*, made it a popular summer song.

The airing frequency of the four songs during two specific years, 1994 and 1996, also upholds some of the aforementioned findings.

There was an increase in the number of airings of all songs apart from *The Small Station Treblinka* and *Because* (that was not aired at all, through the whole year) during February and March 1996. This increase might be attributed to the fact that during those two months three large-scale terror attacks occurred in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem and dozens of citizens were killed.

The airing pattern of the songs during 1994 demonstrates some of the points that were discussed previously. *A Song After the Rain* was most

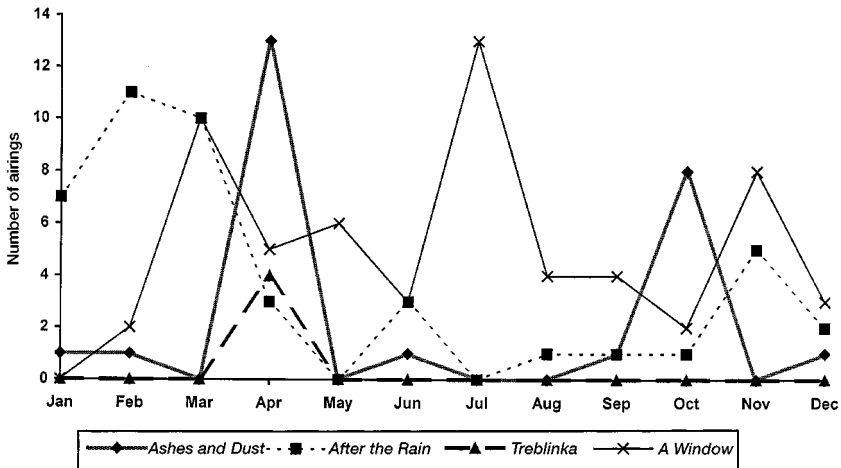
FIGURE 2
Ashes and Dust songs' airings 1996



frequently aired during the rainy months of January, February and March, and *A Window to the Mediterranean* was most frequently aired during the summer, in July. *Ashes and Dust* was aired most frequently in April, mainly during the Holocaust Memorial Day and later through October.

During the month of October two tragic events grasped the attention of Israeli media consumers: on 10 October 1994 members of the Palestinian Hamas organization kidnapped Nachason Waxman, an Israeli soldier, and

FIGURE 3
Ashes and Dust songs' airings 1994



held him hostage for five days. The drama reached its tragic conclusion when members of an elite Israeli army unit stormed the house, in which Waxman was held. During the failed rescue attempt Waxman and the commander of the operation were killed. Five days later, on 19 October a suicide bomber exploded in a Tel Aviv bus, killing more than 20 passengers. Following those two events Israeli radio halted its regular broadcasting and aired a mix of news updates and solemn Israeli songs, among them, as can be seen in the graph, *Ashes and Dust*.

In conclusion, the findings suggest a recurring pattern by which the songs of *Ashes and Dust* that were examined here can be divided into three groups: the first group includes the songs *The Small Station Treblinka* and *Because* that are confined to the autonomous Holocaust sphere. These two songs, which are not melodic and address directly 'difficult' issues through their texts, are aired if at all only on Israel's Holocaust Memorial Day. In a sense these songs are the current equivalents of traditional Holocaust related songs such as *The Partisans' Anthem*, which are perceived as distinct signifiers of the event and its commemoration.

The second group includes two songs, *A Window to the Mediterranean* and *A Song After the Rain*. These two songs are aired both on Holocaust Memorial Day and on other days, and in fact in most years the two songs were aired most frequently on dates that are unrelated to either remembrance days or current tragedies. That is, the public use of those songs, as shown through their airing pattern, enables them to function as signifiers of both the sacred national realm (remembrance days and terror attacks) and the secular private realm such as climatic changes.

The third group includes only one song, *Ashes and Dust*. This song has become in many ways an emblem of current Israeli Holocaust memory, since it manages to encapsulate many current themes concerning Israelis in their dealing with the issue, such as the relations between survivors and their children, ritualistic pilgrimages to concentration camps in Poland and more. But the public use of the song *Ashes and Dust* is also highly revealing on another level: the song is frequently aired on Holocaust Memorial Day, Fallen Soldiers' Memorial day and commemoration of other tragic events, but it is seldom heard on regular occasions. That is, the public use of the song bestows upon current Israeli tragedies the sacredness of Holocaust memory, and in turn it marks the Holocaust as another Israeli tragedy. The airing of *Ashes and Dust* on Israeli radio signals to local listeners that it is time for them to focus their attention. Such an airing is a signal that marks the boundaries of a concrete national group in terms of time and space, but at the same time it constructs a mythical continuum from the past into the present, from 'there' to 'here', incorporating people who are living and dead.

More generally, the existence of the last two groups of songs clearly demonstrates the implications of the representation of the Holocaust

through popular culture. Although all of the songs were related via Ya'akov Gilad and Yehuda Poliker to the sacred sphere of Holocaust remembrance, the 'friendly' melodies, implicit texts and the nature of popular culture industry have secularized some of the songs' interpretations. As demonstrated in other cases, the representation of the Holocaust through popular culture means that there is always a potential for a blurring of the borders between the Holocaust and day to day life. Hence, we discover again that the inherent traits of popular culture production, such as standardization, commercialization and the preservation of an inoffensive flow, conflicts with the unique conventions of Holocaust representation.

Conclusions

This article has examined the album *Ashes and Dust* as a cultural phenomenon that reflects both current changes in the Israeli public memory of the Holocaust and the characteristics of popular culture representations of the Holocaust. The findings suggest that *Ashes and Dust* reflects several shifts in the way Israeli society addresses the Holocaust. The Holocaust story as told through *Ashes and Dust* emphasizes individual aspects of the Holocaust experience rather than collective lessons, and it does not need to glorify active resistance in order to justify the need to remember. There is a growing sensitivity to the issue of memory preservation as a challenge, and so *Ashes and Dust* reflects a Holocaust discourse that is highly self-reflective. Moreover, *Ashes and Dust* highlights the notion that the survivors' children are now the bearers of Holocaust memory, and that it is through them that the Holocaust becomes, to some degree, an Israeli story about the present, rather than only a diaspora story about the past.

All of these tendencies are amplified by the fact that *Ashes and Dust* is a popular culture product that was created and consumed in a commercial environment. As demonstrated here, the public use of the songs through radio broadcasting has in many cases assimilated them into the mainstream flow and in some ways blurred their initial identification as markers of a singular event, the Holocaust. In other cases, where the references of the songs to the Holocaust are 'too direct', such as in the mention of the word Treblinka, the song is only aired on the official Holocaust Memorial Day. This suggests that popular culture faces inherent obstacles when it has to deal with representations of the Holocaust that go beyond the boundaries of its own conventions, and thus it is not able to use them on a day to day basis. Also, it is worth noting that the blurring effect of *Ashes and Dust* begins with the album itself, in which only eight songs deal with Holocaust related themes while the other four songs address issues such as love, betrayal and nostalgia.

In the larger Israeli context, *Ashes and Dust* is a highly visible representative of several tendencies. The most recognizable of them is the gradual erosion of the authority of official meta-narratives interpreting the Israeli experience through a predominately Zionist-Ashkenazic-secular perspective (Bresheeth, 1997). After the gradual inclusion in the memory discourse of survivors who did not fight in the Holocaust, the turn of their children has come. Later, representatives of sectors of society that were marginalized in Israel's early years or were not personally affected by the Holocaust, were also included (Loshitzky, 2000). In this context the fact that Gilad and Poliker are sons of survivors, but at the same time also strongly identified with the local rock-and-roll scene, enables them to bridge the void between Holocaust memory and younger audiences. Also the fact that some of the album's songs incorporate instruments and rhythms borrowed from Greek music relates it to the highly popular, and once highly marginalized (Regev, 1997), Israeli Middle Eastern music.

Finally, the unique cultural role of *Ashes and Dust* raises some challenging questions regarding the ongoing relations between different agents of memory and cultural influences. As explained here, the over-reaching decline in the authority of Israeli official narratives has opened the doors of cultural discourse to numerous personal narratives. But it is important to note again that although *Ashes and Dust* is a representative of the new memory discourse, it is still a commercial product. And while the album is the brainchild of Gilad and Poliker, it was created, distributed and promoted as a mass production commodity. So, as in many other spheres, the privatization of Israeli Holocaust memory does not necessarily create a new egalitarian discourse. The relative vacuum created by the weakening of official voices has instead become dominated by commercial ones.

Notes

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1. For example, an observer who joined a school trip of Israeli students and teachers to ghettos and concentration camps in Poland, noted that before the students entered the Treblinka extermination camp, they listened several times to the song *The Small Station Treblinka* (from the album *Ashes and Dust*), while chanting the words in a ritualistic manner (Segev, 1991: 461).

2. All of the quoted songs were written by Ya'akov Gilad and composed by Yehuda Poliker.

3. For example, *The Chamber Quintet*, a satirical TV show, has addressed the question of institutional Holocaust commemoration several times.

4. The data was supplied by *Akum*, the Israeli organization in charge of the distribution of royalties to Israeli musicians. *Akum* was not able to supply data that was gathered prior to 1993.

5. The first authorized Israeli commercial radio stations began to operate in the mid-1990s. *Akum* was not able to supply data regarding the airings of the songs on commercial radio. Also it is important to note that although all three investigated radio stations are publicly owned, they all air commercials and/or PSAs, and compete for higher ratings.

6. Israeli remembrance days are scheduled according to the Hebrew calendar while the airings data was gathered according to the general calendar. In 1997 Israel's Holocaust Memorial Day was marked in May, while it was marked in April in the other six years. The airing pattern reflected in this table during April was followed in 1997 during May.

7. No data was available regarding the airings of *Because* in 1995, 1997, 1998 and 1999.

8. Verified through weather reports of the relevant months.

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Oren Meyers is a Doctoral student at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania. His research is concerned with journalistic practices and collective memory.

Address: The Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, USA. [email: omeyers@asc.upenn.edu]

Eyal Zandberg is a Doctoral student at the Department of Communication and Journalism, the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. His research is concerned with the shaping of Israeli Holocaust memory through popular culture.

Address: Department of Communication and Journalism, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem. [email: