

***My Australia* - Mutual Reflections of Personal and National Identities in Ami Drozd's Auto-biographical Film.**

Professor Aner Preminger

Introduction

Ella Shohat (1989), one of the pioneers of Israeli Cinema scholarship, deploys postcolonial theory¹ to explore the ways in which Jewish-Israeli cinema that was created in Palestine and then in Israel, from the beginning of the 20th century through 1986, ignored the Arabs living in the country. Though she does not say so explicitly, Shohat appears to be leaning on Siegfried Kracauer's theoretical approach, according to which a national cinema expresses, whether consciously or not, the deep undercurrents of a nation's soul (Kracauer, 1947). The obvious link between Kracauer's theory and later postcolonial theories is a natural one to draw on, as Shohat does. Following Shohat and Kracauer, many scholars explored in depth the concept of "The Other" in Israeli Cinema, e.g.: (Gertz, 1998; Lubin, 1998; Naaman, 1998; Preminger, 2012; Shemer, 2013) But in all the studies concerned with the complicated issue of the representation of the Other in Israeli Cinema, the Other always was the Palestinian, or Oriental Jew, (the Sephardim) – the Arabian Jew in Shoat's idiom – and later the Homosexual (Yosef, 1998), Woman (Lubin, 1998) or the Holocaust Survivor (Gertz, 2004, Preminger, 2012). The White Western Heterosexual Male has always been conceived in Israeli Cinema research, as well as in all postcolonial theories, as the one representing power and hegemony.

This chapter, however, will explore Ami Drozd's Auto-biographical film *My Australia* (2011) as a case study for an original approach to the issue of migration and its implications for personal identity as well as national and Jewish identity. In the light of *My Australia*, the concept of the "Other" attains new meaning in the context of Israeli society. It is one of the few Israeli films in which the "Other" is not the Palestinian or the Sephardic Eastern Jew, but a Polish immigrant, who has experienced the trauma of belatedly discovering that he is Jewish, after having been

¹Mainly: Lucien Goldmann, Fredric Jameson, Ismail Xavier (pp. 7-11); Edward Said (pp. 2).

raised as a Christian, and even participating in the persecution of Jews, and now in Israel he becomes an "Other" to his peers, who perceive him as a "Polish Goy". The issue of the "Other" has been dealt with frequently in Israeli culture and Cinema, as well as in the political and cultural discourse. *My Australia* brings a fresh perspective to this highly charged topic and also to the universal problems of migration and identity.

Back from Golgotha – The Via Dolorosa of Descending from the Cross in *My Australia*

The way to Golgotha – Jesus' walk of suffering carrying his cross on the way to his crucifixion – is inscribed in collective memory as the ultimate journey of pain, after which there can be, if anything, only spiritual redemption. But isn't it also possible to imagine a journey in the opposite direction, a descent from the cross, not on the way to heaven, but as the beginning of a terrestrial journey back from Golgotha to Jerusalem? Would such a journey be as excruciating as the one Jesus suffered? Ami Drozd's unique film *My Australia* affords us a cinematic experience suggesting a possible journey from the cross back to life. Although the descent from the cross towards a rebirth is the metaphorical meaning of this film, in fact the film takes us on a concrete voyage from Christianity to Judaism, which begins with a death-experience (the pogrom) and ends in rebirth.

The movie begins in Wroclav, Poland, with an exposition presenting the core of the film. 11 year old Tadek (Jakub Wróblewski) is pulling, out of a private hiding place in an attic, a miniature maquette with tiny animals - his secret friends. This is "His Australia", his heaven on earth, his dream. Here his life's troubles are resolved, his loneliness allayed, and his conflicted soul seeks its voice and self-definition. Tadek speaks for the animals and to them. They are the only ones he can hold a real heart-to-heart with. The animals are rejects or deformed, but he loves them, perhaps precisely because of their anomaly. He says to one of the animals he has created: "look this is my Australia, don't be afraid. Meet new friends". Tadek, who is actually talking about his own predicament, unaware that he will soon find himself in a similar situation, is dealing with the anxiety of alienation in a new and unfamiliar world. He goes on: "They are also from Australia. I'm sure you are going to like them. This is Piglet." Emblematically, she is the filthy and greedy animal that, to the viewer,

represents all that is contrary to Judaism. But Tadek loves her: "...One can always count on her, a real pal. Here is your new friend. ...He is too black for a kangaroo". The icon of his Australian dream – albeit outsider, outcast, "black". At this stage of the film Tadek doesn't like "Blacks" - "...I don't like him. He's dumb too. (Impersonating the other animals) "Maybe we should give him a kick? After the kick he will start speaking". Indeed Tadek will be suffering many a "kick" before he finds his voice and emerges from the prison of his muteness. Tadek declares that he doesn't like the "black" but still identifies with the black kangaroo through which he articulates his cry, which resounds all through the film: "...If anybody comes near me I'll smash his face to bits, so even his mother won't recognize him". Little Tadek's experience of life so far has taught him that in his world it is only force that protects him, and he will continue to need it until he completes the voyage of his maturation. This poetic exposition encapsulates both the film's essential diegetic gesture and young Tadek's mental journey. It also defines the film's style: the movement back and forth within the interval of the tension between the realistic and the fantastic-mysterious: The realistic design of the attic, the pigeons on the red roof tiles seen through the small window, and the low key yet forceful acting of Jakub Wróblewski vis-à-vis the miniature world of fantasy reflecting Tadek's inner world; the warm high-contrast lighting and his realistic concrete speech to the animals - the creatures of his imagination. The "theatrical" act performed by little Tadek in the miniature world reflexively corresponds to the cinematic act of mature Tadek (Ami Drozd's Polish name), the film's director. The conversation Tadek holds, puppet show style, between the mute animals mirrors the dialogue Drozd is having with the spectators, and also had with the actors and the crew in order to make this film and to thereby redefine his identity through cinema. For just as Tadek's existence is projected onto the piglet, the black kangaroo and the rest of the animals created by him, so the film's director's existence is projected onto the various characters, conspicuously on Tadek himself, but also on Andrzej (Łukasz Sikora) his 14 year old brother, and on his mother, Halina (Aleksandra Popławska). The kid striving to control his fate, and seeking refuge in his imaginary Australia, corresponds to the mature director, who never really found his yearned-for "Australia" even in Israel – as is implied by the ambivalent conclusion of the film - and now finds it only through the cinema.

Tadek's play-acting is cut short by a sudden whistle, summoning him to carry out a "smashing of the face" act, of the kind promised by the black kangaroo to all

who threatened his identity. Tadek leaves his imaginary friends and hurriedly joins Andrzej, his brother. It is at this moment that his smallness and innocence are conspicuous, compared with his brother and the band of Neo-Nazi hooligans, on their way to performing a violent pogrom, an act that appears quite routine. The dissonance between the fantasy, the childish innocence and the magic of the attic scene, and on the other hand, the harsh violence in the following scene, is amplified by Drozd's cinematic choices: the rhythm of the editing sharply changes from slow and quiet to fast cuts and loud music. The static photography abruptly changes into quick camera movements; the high contrast mysterious lighting of the dark attic is now replaced by the cold white light of the outdoors. When the fearsome gang leader slightly addresses Tadek: "Little-one, what are you doing here?" Drozd focuses on Tadek's face; he is looking from below upwards to the big ones, with admiration and envy, while they are dealing out especially hurtful clubs and spiked knuckles. The cries of battle are heard as the camera rests on the pure face that is momentarily screened by the black rubber clubs passing through the frame and representing the thoughts rushing through the mind of an entranced Tadek.

The casting of Jakub Wróblewski in the difficult role of Tadek, along with Drozd's skillful work with the kid, place the film in a small group of movies in which children carry a large portion of the burden (Chaplin's *The Kid*, De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*, Truffaut's *400 Blows*). Already at the preparation for battle scene, Wróblewski dominates the screen with extraordinary force. Casting specifically him, with his innocent look, for the role clashes with the stereotype of the rough street thug, who abuses innocent people - a clash that runs all through the movie, lending it much power.

On their way to the Jewish school to beat their victims to a pulp, the camera fastens on Tadek, who is trying to keep up with his brother and his big comrades, making an evident effort to emulate them and prove his worthiness. Thus, when the older ones club down an accidental passerby, Tadek stops to kick the fallen victim and then catches up with them.

These two initial scenes lay down the film's basic premise: Tadek's being torn between, on the one hand, the world of the imagination, a world of purity and hope and also one of violent fantasies that are projected on to the animals, and on the other hand, the tough and frightfully realistic world of the street thugs. At this stage, the senseless and arbitrary violence of the youngsters could have any of several

explanations: Anti-Semitism, Neo-Nazism, emptiness and cruelty, or maybe hatred of the different, the alien, the exception – as suggested by the attic scene, and also the individual's need to define his separate identity vis-à-vis his supposed enemies. These motifs crystalize, as the film unfolds, into a complex identity issue, where the tension between Judaism and Christianity is among the dominant factors. The cross, swastika and Star of David icons are dwelled on several times in the film, in order to concretize this motif specifically by visual means. At the police station, when the mother comes to release the boys from jail, she conspicuously exposes the cross on her chest, subtly flirting with the police investigator. The cross, drawn out from her breasts and laid over her dress, is seen in close-up through the big eyes of Tadek, who is peeping through the door, and is possibly admiring his mother's manipulative playacting, or maybe deriving a subliminal thrill from her insinuated eroticism. Much of the fashioning of his Christian identity – before discovering its "falsity" - is projected onto the cross. It appears that the mother, just like little Tadek and the grown up director, makes up stories and is able to tell them with the precision needed in order to manipulate her audience and achieve her purpose. Later, in their apartment, the cross image is substituted by a swastika that the mother finds among the kids' things, and finding it makes her realize the full price that is being paid for concealing their Jewishness. Later, on the ship, the illusion that they are on the way to Australia begins to dissipate when Tadek discerns a Star of David hanging on the neck of a boy on deck. The Star of David image returns to plague him when it is seen hovering above his head in the photo taken on their embarkation. A powerful moment is achieved, poignant as well as funny, when on leaving the police station the mother inquires: "Did you go to beat up the Jews?" Tadek, counter to expectations, does not apologize or seem ashamed of his deed. He nods vigorously, barely hiding a smile, as if it was quite the right thing to do that is sure to make his mother happy. But this comic moment actually vividly dramatizes the contradictory existence of the Jewish mother, the survivor of the Holocaust and of Polish Anti-Semitism, with her children, who believe they are Christians, having been protectively brought up that way, and are seen to join the persecutors. It is this survival choice of hers that has the extreme implication of causing Tadek's dramatic identity confusion.

The cross motif, as an important ingredient in the representation of Tadek's Christian identity, is developed in the church scene. Andrzej, in a white choir robe, is accompanying the choir on the organ. Tadek, who is waiting for him, kneels and

crosses himself, intently contemplating and admiring the hypnotizing pictures of Crucified Jesus. Drozd emphasizes these cinematic moments by choosing to place the camera at Tadek's eye level, and so shoot the Crucified Jesus at a particularly low angle. Crucified Jesus is thus amplified to unrealistic dimensions, the camera focusing mainly on the wounds in His hands and feet, evidently strongly impressing the boy. The importance of the Church and the deep Christian aspect of the identities of Tadek and Andrzej, receives further emphasis in this scene. Moreover, if in the attic scene a parallel is suggested between Tadek and both the piglet and the black kangaroo, in the church scene a parallel is drawn between Tadek and Crucified Jesus. At the literal level this correspondence serves to reinforce Tadek's image as sufferer. Allegorically, this is an anticipatory allusion to the reverse Via Dolorosa movement of Tadek in the film, on his way back from Christianity to Judaism. Moreover, the Crucified Jesus is not only a functional metaphor for the process Tadek is undergoing. He sincerely identifies himself with Jesus. What begins in the church with admiration and being hypnotized by the Crucified is developed later in the film into a strong sense of a common fate with Him. An ironic effect is created, which is part of the implied ideology of the film: Jesus is deprived of the status of "exclusive absolute" victim, and "victimhood" is granted to every "Other" as such. The film thereby gains universal validity.

Andrzej, the church organist, seems fully integrated in it. Tadek is entranced by the music and the pictures of the saints. The juxtaposition of this scene with the previous pogrom scene, especially Andrzej's being so active in both, not only emphasizes the depth of the Christianity in their identity, but also suggests the connection between the previous scene's violent brutality and the ethos surrounding the Crucifixion. One cannot avoid recalling the deep historical connection between seeing the wounds, as Drozd skillfully shows them through Tadek's eyes, and incitement to slaughter. The particular case of Tadek and Andrzej lends this context an ironic and subversive twist. For later in the film, in Israel, both will become the "Others", the oppressed ones, for being "Polish Goyim". The irony, which fully surfaces only much later, is anticipated here when Andrzej discards his choir robe and replies laconically to Tadek's inquiry why, that he has no further use for it. Andrzej is thus demonstratively shedding the first layer of his old identity.

The revelation to the lads of their Jewish origin turns out to be unexpectedly complicated. Unable to maturely confront Tadek's emotions surrounding his Christian

identity, the mother uses the mediation of Andrzej whose age is between childhood and adulthood. The dramatic unfolding of Tadek's finding out the shocking truth, which is intensified by the fact that Andrzej already knows the secret, is the drama of the film. The spectator experiences the discovery along with Tadek and exclusively from his point of view. In that way Drozd doubles the tension surrounding the multi-stage discovery. At the beginning of the film the secret exists as a "skeleton in the closet". In the sequel, Andrzej already shares the secret that is unspoken, though insinuated by cinematic devices, by the mother's reactions and the mounting tension between the brothers. Finally, the moment of truth arrives, and the secret is revealed to Tadek. This precise build up lends greater credibility and force to his inability to cope and hence to his outburst. The disclosure of their identity-secret is metaphorically the narrative counterpart of the suffering Jesus undergoes on his way to Golgotha.

The piecemeal disclosure of the secret begins after they emerge from the church, as they are sitting on a wall in a deserted courtyard. Andrzej starts:

A: Listen, do you remember Uncle Felix?²

T: I remember. Did something happen to him?

A: No, only that...you know...how shall I say...he is Jewish.

T: How can that be? ...how did it happen to him?

A: It didn't happen to him, he always was a Jew.

T: Really? Fuck. He was such a nice guy.

A: And this aunt of ours who used to send us presents from Australia...

T: She's also-...A bloody Jew?

A: Don't shout!...

T: How did all those Jews get into our family?

A: Mother is too.

T: She too? You aren't lying? Our mother?

Tadek is overwhelmed, unable to deal with the information that has hit him suddenly. This moment is accentuated by his jumping off the wall just when Andrzej mentions that their mother is also Jewish. The camera and the mise-en-scene both emphasize Tadek's being below, while Andrzej, who accepts the reality, remains on the wall higher than Tadek. Tadek inquires, raising his head up to his brother:

² The original dialogue of the film is Polish. The translation here, as well as in the rest of this essay was made with the help of both the English and the Hebrew manuscripts supplied by Ami Drozd.

T: What about our Father?

A: No, Father isn't.

T: You see? So we also aren't. It's not about us.

His enormous relief, that he can count on his father's not being Jewish, makes him hop back onto the wall and join his brother. At that moment there appears a group of workers. Of all of them, it is the dwarf, the exceptional one, who addresses him. A secret pact is thus formed between the dwarf and Tadek, who has just discovered his "defectiveness", which is entailed by his Jewish flaw.

While the boys are venting their anger and frustration by smashing glass bottles against the wall, Gypsy-circus music emerges in the soundtrack, stressing the otherness and anomaly motif, yet bestowing on the occasion a Felliniesque air of fantasy. In a sharp transition from the camera being directed to the sky – metaphorically suggesting Jesus' Ascension – the camera turns back downwards to the sea and reveals a ship on its way to the Land of Israel. The film's second act, the sea voyage to Israel, is a sequence in which Tadek mourns his Christian identity so violently torn away from him. The ship in the middle of the sea is like a womb where everything begins; the water is the water Jesus walked on; a Jungian liminal space between one continent and the other. The Christian has died - at least formally; the Jew is beginning to grow in torment. At sea there is an inverted Baptism, a ritual of exiting from Christianity. It is also a visual allusion to Moses in the basket. The Jew who was hidden in the Nile, and was raised as an Egyptian by Pharaoh's daughter, is now in a large "basket" on the way back to his Jewishness. The sequence activates a wealth of highly significant associations and allusions that hint at possible explanations of Tadek's previous false identity, and relates the story to Jewish mythical traditions, without detracting from the story's total concreteness and relevance to our times.

The breach between the dream of traveling to Australia and the actuality of sailing to Israel is first disclosed through an encounter on deck with a Jewish boy. Not having a common language, the two communicate by gesture, sounds and visual images – essentially all the means of cinematic expression used by Drozd the filmmaker in communicating to his audience. Tadek is trying to convey to his new friend that he is going to Australia, by imitating a kangaroo. The friend understands him to be talking about a sheep. An ironic dissonance is thus generated between the image that is evocative of the expanses of Australia and the sense of freedom

suggested by the hopping of the kangaroo, and the sheep, the creature of the flock, an iconic traditional representation the Levant, to which they are headed. The kangaroo also echoes the opening of the film. All of a sudden the "Black kangaroo" acquires the additional connotation of "black sheep", referring to Tadek's oddness and "trouble making" nature. Moreover, in the new context it acquires the sense of the kangaroo's being a pouch animal, carrying its young close to the womb. This image emphasizes the mother's mal-functioning, and conveys that during Tadek's journey from his childhood in Poland towards what will supposedly be his new home, he is in effect displaced, homeless, and in desperate need of a mother who would carry him in her pocket like a kangaroo.

Consequent to the encounter with the Jewish boy, the skull caps seen and the Benediction over the Wine at the dining room, and finally the Star of David stamped on their photo, his mother, Halina, is compelled to divulge the disheartening secret to him and admit to the worst lie:

H: We're not really traveling to Australia.

T: Where to then?

H: (showing him pictures in the Jewish Agency brochure)

Look it's so nice there...it's exactly like in Australia.

T: But where are we going?

H: There is lots of sea, beautiful beaches... Sun...

it used to be called Palestine...and now it's Israel.

But for you it's the same. It looks just like Australia.

Tadek bursts out in rage, smashes the framed picture and shouts:

T: Lies! It's all lies! You are lying to me all the time!

I won't go to any stinking Palestine! I don't believe you!

You are not a Jewess! I won't have anything to do with this shit!

H: Try to understand, I am Jewish! And I am in this shit!

And you are too! And your Jesus was also a Jew.

Tadek who escapes to the deck says to Andrzej:

T: Not only are we some sort of Jews, we are also going to their country!?! The parcels were also Jewish.

And Jesus was a Jew!?! It's all lies and you're lying too.

A: But Jesus was a Jew.

T: Nonsense. Jesus - a Jew? They killed him.

You're telling me they killed one of their own?

During this horrifying dialogue the realization hits him about the absurdity in which he is entrapped. Here the film begins to develop the subversive insight that the Jew's being a victim of anti-Semitism is not a unique "Jewish Problem" but a universal one, namely, an existential condition of otherness and anomaly. If Jesus was a Jew, there is no essential difference between Jew and Christian. The distinction is a mere artificial ploy for the purpose of rejecting the Other's faith. Hence follows the universal and complex conclusion of the film regarding the general deceptiveness and vagueness of identity as such, alongside the issues of xenophobia and racism. Tadek who persecuted Jews in Poland, is about to be persecuted in Israel for being a "Goy", different and other.

Simultaneously with the unsettling revelation about Jesus' Jewishness, the circus-like music heard at the beginning of the sequence recurs, and there appears the icon that embodies Zionism: the shores of Israel come into view. The moment of joy of the passengers is amplified by the soundtrack calling on them to look at the shores of the holy land. The fulfillment of the Zionist dream, viz. the arrival in the Holy Land, is also the height of Tadek's grief, the moment of the shattering of his "Australian Dream". The cinematic means of expression create irony and complexity through the sad Gypsy music that gradually turns into joyful circus and carnival music.

The mother and the two sons – a skewed allusion to the Holy Family – are born from the sea into their new identity as Jews. The reception procedure on their arrival is portrayed as an act of violence, of violating one's privacy, in anticipation of the "violent act" toward the end of the film. The Jewish Agency official registers the immigrants; the Doctor examines them for "imported" diseases, and the Rabbi peeps very casually into their underpants and witnesses their shame. At the entry test, then, the uncircumcised boys fail. This iconic scene gains, in the new context, horrifying connotations. Its place in the film, the simultaneous medical examination by a doctor together with a rabbi examining whether they are "kosher Jews", in conjunction with the Neo-Nazi tones at the beginning of the movie in Poland, suggests a distorted mirror image of the "medical" examinations the mother's family probably underwent by Dr. Mengele and his horrid crew. That was arguably the reason why the mother concealed her Jewish identity even from her children. Furthermore, the humiliating

examination first outlines the equation, central to the film, between becoming an integrated Israeli and being circumcised. However, when Tadek is finally circumcised, by Jewish tradition he enters the Covenant of Abraham and is officially received into the bosom of Judaism.

The shock of the transition from Poland to Israel receives highly expressive cinematic meaning through the changes in lighting and color, in the precise camera work of the Polish photographer, Adam Sikora, who succeeds in reflecting the gap between the opposed worlds through light and color. The colors in Poland belong to the yellow-brown family whereas the dominant white, in Israel, represents the glare that strikes you wherever you look, to the blinding point. The warm colors and soft light in Poland express their belonging to and being comfortable with Polish culture, whereas the cold colors in Israel faithfully reflect the boys' alienation and their feeling of being rejected by their new surroundings.

A scene that is central to the identity issue and to the complicated relations between the brothers occurs on the Haifa beach. Since they are not accustomed to enjoying the beach, they go into the water in their under pants. Andrzej loses the elastic of his underpants. Tadek, who assumes the role of the grown up problem solver exchanges his good underpants for Andrzej's. Tadek puts on the huge underpants without the elastic, and with a quick improvisation ties them round his waist with a long wire that he finds in the sand. Thus, when with his enormous shorts hanging on the wire that is dangling behind him like a tail, he leaps and playfully fistfights with his brother, Tadek is acting out his maquette vision of the "black kangaroo" outsider – beating up anyone who is trying to attack him. This connotation of the Kangaroo association is borne out, of course, in their ensuing playful dialogue, when Andrzej says:

"Don't think you're Cassius Clay" Tadek replies: "I am a kangaroo. Try me again".

The exchange of shorts also echoes the swapping of roles between the two – the young one becoming the senior – and it epitomizes their identity through the piece of garment that shields the genitals, whose shape distinguishes Jew from Christian, as will soon transpire. The nostalgic intimacy between the brothers, when they do not have to hide their identity, allows them also to express their animal, vital and wild side. The two wrestle and go wild, attempting to bridge the gap between their Polish past and Israeli future. At that liberating moment Tadek allows himself to curse in

Polish, and even to emit anti-Semitic cries, which still express part of his identity.

And then he starts the following exchange with Andrzej:

T: You know what bothers me all the time?

A: The wire?

T: Yes, that too. But, also that I can't curse properly here.

Both of them begin to curse together:

T & A: Dirty Zhids! Fucking Zhids! Schmuks!

Stinking dogs! Sons of bitches!"

T: It's very weird, all the children here aren't ashamed to be Jews. They're even proud of it.

A: That's because they don't like non-Jews.

Never show your dick to anyone.

T: Why not?

A: Theirs is a little different.

T: What do you mean, different?

Andrzej makes drawings on the sand and explains:

A: Ours is like a church tower.

Theirs is like a mosque's minaret.

These two precise visual images, actually an aesthetic-architectural observation, bring to the fore, the entire historical inter-religious tension surrounding circumcision, now crucial to the boys' experience. We thereby get a humorous highlighting of the full weight of the problem laid on the boys' shoulders – a burden impossible to shirk.

In the process of their shedding their "Goyish" identity towards acquiring a Jewish-Israeli identity, the boys are taken to a kibbutz because of their mother's inability to provide for them as well as her inability to deal with their difficulties. On the kibbutz, the sincere effort made by the members that adopt them to genuinely accept the boys is vividly portrayed. Particularly conspicuous is the warmth lavished on Tadek by his adoptive mother, and the fondness shown him by his teacher. Still despite all this, the Israeli melting pot, in its kibbutz guise, is presented here as a failure; the failure of Israeli society to embrace the stranger and contain his foreignness. And perhaps at the universal level it is our failure as human beings to contain and accept the Other. Xenophobia deals Tadek severe blows. When his classmates speak behind his back, he escapes to a hiding place that he has found near the kibbutz. The role of the secret attic in Poland is now fulfilled, ironically, by an old

trench, a remnant from the war of liberation. In the Israeli trench Tadek erects a surrogate alter, with an old postcard of the Madonna and Child hanging on the bunker wall. Only there, below the ground, is he able to kneel in the way he used to in Poland. After the prayer he plays at shooting at the ruin opposite. He does not realize its significance, but it is an abandoned ruin of Palestinians who were driven away. Thus, the treatment of the issue of the native and the foreigner acquires an additional layer of complexity at the metaphorical level. On one of Tadek's flights to his hiding place, he addresses Mary and Jesus in a monologue reminiscent of the attic scene:

Holy Mother, you must help me. I am afraid they will find out the truth, and that will be the end. That's why I appeal to you, dear Jesus. You are the only one who can understand me. You too were a Jew and a Christian. I can't talk about it with my brother because he sins all the time, and doesn't want to stop sinning. I can stop sinning and be like them.

Tadek genuinely wishes to change, hence the tragic complexity and emotional force of the process he undergoes. He wants to belong, but his brother clings to his alienation and keeps on stealing and clashing with the members of the kibbutz. The older Andrzej no longer helps Tadek join the grown-ups, as he used to. At this stage Andrzej appeals to Tadek for help only when it suits his purposes, but he sabotages Tadek's integration into the kibbutz when he feels threatened. Drozd weaves a complicated tale of an incessant struggle between the desire – sometimes fulfilled - to assimilate, and the barriers to integration that are almost insurmountable. At the height of the drama, when Tadek's classmates try to undress him by force to see if he is circumcised, he returns to his hideout, and to his dismay finds a huge bulldozer filling the trench with earth. The bulldozer has buried Jesus and Mary deep in the ground and with it Tadek's last sanctuary. Ironically, the Israeli bulldozer also destroys the trench, the memorial to the war of liberation. In the attempt to force conformity, according to the requirements of the melting pot, Israeliness erases our individual and collective memories, our past in the Diaspora, and the heritage of our war of independence. This connotation becomes yet richer and more complex, as the wide angle shot reveals the abandoned Palestinian ruin in the background. Thus we get, in one visual space, a presentation of a coalition of the Jewish, Christian and Moslem individuals who are downtrodden and effaced in the name of the new Israeliness and its ethos of building the country. The music in the scene is a variation

on the circus-gypsy theme that has already appeared twice in the film. The music thus connects the discovery in Poland of their Jewishness with the arrival in Israel as the fulfillment of the Jewish identity, and finally, with the burial of their Christian identity.

Tadek realizes that he must give closure to the transition by externalizing his acceptance of the new identity. His decision to be circumcised constitutes a critical stage of his maturation. For the first time in the film he actively assumes the Jewish identity without direct external coercion. This time he is the one to reveal a secret to his mother and brother and he chooses to make his announcement at an intimate moment of reconciliation between the three, after a scene of a violent outburst of his, which could still lead to his expulsion from the kibbutz. On the lawn under the trees Tadek reveals to his mother and Andrzej his determination to enter the Covenant of Abraham. To his surprised mother's question, "Are you really suffering all that much?" he replies simply: "I want to be like everybody." His determination and confidence is totally devoid of religious and national romanticism. For him it is not the Covenant of Abraham, but just a deforming excision which will enable him to assimilate. There is here an ironic suggestion that even crucial changes and decisions which are supposedly ideological or identity-shaping, do not necessarily stem from psychological or philosophical insights, but rather from sheer survival, almost animal, drives. The boy who in Poland wanted to be like everybody and therefore acted like a good Neo-Nazi hooligan, now in Israel wants to be circumcised and become a complete Israeli. What are the implications of these choices for one's national identity? Drozd leaves the answer up to the spectator. He has created a story that compels the audience to deconstruct this human complexity and lay it bare. His autobiographical story thus achieves universal subversive relevance, expressing the truth of many of us.

The film's resolution sequence opens in the hospital, with Tadek's being conveyed to his circumcision. He is wheeled in a bed to the operating room – a journey that recalls the Via Dolorosa. He is lying helplessly on the moving bed, mumbling, being present at his own metaphoric execution. The circumcision is the final act of his violent removal from the metaphoric cross. The camera does not show the cutting of his genital, or his unconscious face when he is anaesthetized, but rather focuses on the face of the rabbi, who is reciting the benedictions and conducting the religious ceremony – for him it is the covenant of Abraham. The rabbi here is

reminiscent of the rabbi peeping through his underpants on his arrival. Then the camera turns onto the Doctor, as a stream of blood is splattered on his face and gown. The photography and designing of the scene is such as to echo the sight that transported Tadek in the church, when he was watching the blood in Jesus' wounds. After the recovery from the operation, Tadek accepts his new self, with his new and "defective" genital. He addresses his new member: "you now look like a jerk", echoing his words to the ugly Piglet at the beginning. One is also reminded of Andrzej's words on the beach, "ours is like a church tower. Theirs is like a mosque Minaret". The visual reinforces this association, when at the end of the movie the children and their mother march toward the sea and pass through a domed entrance. - Like the dome of a mosque? Like the new "dome" in Tadek's genital? The shore, which on their arrival to Israel aroused ambivalent feelings, is now a "sanctuary" for the three of them, enabling reconciliation with their new-old identity. The circle of Christian images is closed; it is now interwoven with Jewish images. The sea that hitherto was an enormous womb, echoing the water Jesus walked on and the water of Baptism now reverts to its literal and direct meaning, the shore of the Land of Israel.

Conclusion

We have thus seen that the film *My Australia* places its protagonist in two conflicting cultural contexts that constitute mirror images of each other. In Poland Tadek is an "other" who seeks to belong, but fails because of his Jewishness that surfaces suddenly at a critical moment, precisely because his desire to belong is based on his differentiating himself from the Jewish "Other". In Israel he is an "other" because he is a Polish "Goy" who is later willing to pay a very high price in order to integrate and eradicate his otherness. But the Polish and Christian "Otherness" that he was reared on has become an integral part of his personality, and he therefore cannot shake it off. Moreover, erasing parts of one's identity is necessarily violent. The "Other" is therefore a vague and elusive concept that does not essentially depend on the individual. It is rather the society, within which one belongs to a minority, which determines one's otherness. Again, in any individual there are many sides, each one of which possibly constituting the "Other" of opposing inner ingredients. In the Israeli case, otherness does not necessarily derive from ethnic, religious, or gender origins, or from whether one is a native, old or new comer, but from the degree of one's

deviation from the new Sabra ethos, and is in inverse proportion to one's ability to conform to the spirit of the place and the times. The parallel cinematically established between the erasing of Tadek's "sanctuary" or symbolic church, in the trench near the Kibbutz, and the Arab building that became the ruin; the parallel between the erasures of these two entities, and the effacement of renewed Israel's own history, the affirmation of this parallel is essentially subversive and it raises new thoughts about the connection between personal and collective identity. This image is important because it illuminates the "grades of nativity" scale obtaining between the Arab native, relative to whom all the kibbutz members are mere immigrants from abroad, and the kibbutz members born in Israel who are the Jewish "Sabra" natives, relative to Tadek and Andrzej – the new new-comers. The film proposes a new discourse wherein there is a continuity of personal and collective identities that bridges over and connects the many identities that constitute the whole, be they individual or collective. Only an ongoing dialogue between the different and opposing components of identity could enable the structuring of a complex personal identity, alongside a multi-layered collective identity.

Work Cited:

Gertz, N., Lubin, O., Ne'eman, J., (ed.), 1998, *Fictive Looks – On Israeli Cinema*, The Open University of Israel, Tel-Aviv, Israel.

Gertz, N., 2004, *Holocaust Survivors, Aliens and Others in Israeli Cinema and Literature*, Am Oved Publishers Ltd. And The Open University of Israel, Tel-Aviv, Israel.

Kracauer, S., 1947, *From Caligari to Hitler*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Lubin, O., 1998, **Women, Nationality and Ethnicity**, in: Gertz, N., Lubin, O., Ne'eman, J., (ed.), 1998, *Fictive Looks – On Israeli Cinema*, The Open University of Israel, Tel-Aviv, Israel, PP. 120-127.

Lubin, O., 1998, **The Woman in Israeli Cinema**, in: Gertz, N., Lubin, O., Ne'eman, J., (ed.), 1998, *Fictive Looks – On Israeli Cinema*, The Open University of Israel, Tel-Aviv, Israel, PP. 223-246.

Ne'eman, J., 1995, **The Empty Tomb in the Postmodern Pyramid: Israeli Cinema in the 1980s and 1990s**, in: Berlin, C., (ed.), 1995, *Documenting Israel*, Cambridge, Massachusettes: Harvard College Library.

Ne'eman, J., 1998, **Israeli Films On The Arab-Jewish Conflict**, in: Gertz, N., Lubin, O., Ne'eman, J., (ed.), 1998, *Fictive Looks – On Israeli Cinema*, The Open University of Israel, Tel-Aviv, Israel, PP.403-425

Preminger, A., 2012, **The Arab Other in Israeli Cinema and Discourse**, *Journalism and Mass Communication*, Volume 2, Number 2, February 2012 (Serial Number 5) pp. 412-420, David Publishing Company, CA, USA.

Preminger, A., 2012, **Walking on Water or Playing God? Contemporary Israeli Filmmakers and the "Meaning" of the Holocaust**, *Slil – Online Journal for History, Film and Television*, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, pp. 59-68, <http://www.slil.huji.ac.il/?psl=about>

Shemer, Y., 2013, *Identity, Place and Subversion in Contemporary Mizrahi Cinema in Israel*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, USA.

Shohat, E., 1989, *Israeli Cinema—East/West and the politics of representation*, Austin: University of Texas Press, Texas, USA.

Yosef, R., 1998, **The Voice and The Homosexual Body in Israeli Cinema**, in: Gertz, N., Lubin, O., Ne'eman, J., (ed.), 1998, *Fictive Looks – On Israeli Cinema*, The Open University of Israel, Tel-Aviv, Israel, pp261-280.