

CONFRONTING POLISH-JEWISH ANTAGONISM IN A POST-HOLOCAUST WORLD: Yael  
BARTANA'S FILM TRILOGY "*...AND EUROPE WILL BE STUNNED*"

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: Confronting Polish-Jewish Antagonism in A Post-Holocaust World: Yael Bartana's Film Trilogy "*...And Europe Will Be Stunned*"

At the 2011 Venice Biennale, the Israeli artist Yael Bartana represented Poland with "*...And Europe Will Be Stunned*", a film trilogy that depicts the rise and evolution of the fictional movement JRMIP - Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland. The movement calls for the return of the Jews and the restoration of the Jewish presence in Poland. Bartana's work includes photographs, films, and installations about the conflictive nature of contemporary identities and the politics of memory. Her films on the imagined return of the Jews to Poland focus on controversial themes related to Jewish and Israeli national consciousness and how the rise of a narrow-minded Polish nationalism has been stiffening anti-Semitic attitudes. This study interprets Bartana's Polish trilogy as an attempt, through visual historical and cultural references and cues, to challenge intolerance, induce people to reconsider, and foster new conversations about how Poland should relate to its Jewish and other minorities.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

At the 2011 Venice Biennial, contemporary Israeli artist Yael Bartana represented Poland with “...*And Europe Will Be Stunned*”, an installation of three films depicting the rise and evolution of the fictional movement JRMIP - Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland. In the film trilogy, the movement calls for a massive return of Jews and a strong Jewish presence in Poland. Yael Bartana is an Israeli artist who grew up as a second generation Jew after the Holocaust. She was born in 1970, studied at the Bezalel Academy in Jerusalem, and completed her graduate and postgraduate work in New York and Amsterdam. The body of her work includes photographs, films, and installations that explore collective identities shaped by nationhood, religion, gender, and political stances. Bartana is best known for her “...*And Europe Will Be Stunned*” film trilogy, which focuses on the politics of memory of Poles and Jews in the Post-Holocaust era. “...*And Europe Will Be Stunned*” capped five years of research in Poland, where she worked closely with Polish political writer and activist Slawomir Sierakowski in imagining a social movement that would unite Poles and Jews. Utilizing a faux documentary style and focusing on themes related to Israeli national consciousness, Polish nationalism, and the rise of anti-Semitic attitudes, “...*And Europe Will Be Stunned*” is a critique of conventional notions of homeland and nationhood among Jews and Poles.

In the trilogy, Yael Bartana skillfully uses the faux- documentary film art medium to create visual cues about real historical and cultural events, inviting viewers to connect the dots and get a different perspective on the seemingly intractable conflict between Poles and Jews. Each film includes references that the film trilogy viewers can identify, ranging from Nazi and Zionist propaganda films to aesthetic and architectural landmarks of three different countries, as well as political movements, artistic public monuments, and the political assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. However, it is important to note that Bartana does not use those clues—or even the film trilogy itself—to convey her own opinion on the mutual animosity of Poles and Jews, nor does she offer advice on what should be done about it. This study develops the

argument that Bartana's visual clues are intended to give agency to the viewers of the trilogy. They operate as motivational devices that allow them to see things from a different, unusual perspective and decide for themselves how to interpret the relationship between Poles and Jews. The goal of this thesis, then, is to contribute to the scholarly analysis of Bartana's "*...And Europe Will Be Stunned*" trilogy by identifying the historical, cultural, and visual references inserted by the artist and elucidating the ways in which they help viewers to revise preconceived ideas and reach a deeper understanding of the tensions between Poles and Jews. Approached in this way, the analysis of Bartana's work can cast light on the problematic nature of the relations between Poland, Israel, and the Jewish people after the Holocaust. In today's geopolitical scene, the nationalist turn in Poland has involved a reawakening of negative attitudes towards the Jews and a government-sanctioned drive to culturally erase the country's history of anti-Semitism. Artworks like Bartana's film trilogy "*...And Europe Will Be Stunned*" fulfill the important role of challenging this revisionist trend and opening the debate on anti-Semitism and the complexities of the Polish-Jewish quarrel.

By urging people to reassess historical facts and open-up to new ways of thinking and feeling about the Holocaust and its memory, Bartana's film trilogy intervenes in the debates on how should the people of Poland relate, not only to the Jews, but also towards the manifestations of "the other" in general, including the ongoing migratory movements and the formation of new minority groups in Poland and Europe at large. Over the course of the trilogy, Bartana creates an alternate universe in which Jews return to Poland and establish a unified Jewish-Polish political movement. The imagined narrative challenges Poland's nationalism, which has been historically associated with expressions of hatred, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia. The first film of the trilogy, *Mary Koszmary (Nightmares)*, shows that the absence of the Polish Jews, and the memory of what once was their presence, are crucial in constructing a cultural narrative of what Polish nationhood is considered to be today.<sup>1</sup> The second film, *Mur i Wieza*, follows the

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<sup>1</sup> Karen C. Underhill. "Next Year in Drohobych: On the Uses of Jewish Absence". *East European Politics and Societies* Vol. 25 No. 3 (August 2011), 582.

story of the Jews' return to Poland , presumably from Israel, to build a settlement modeled on the Wall and Tower blueprint of early Zionist architecture. In this film, the tension between Jews and nation-states is further highlighted by drawing a parallel between the Jews coming back to reclaim a foothold in Poland and the Zionist Jews who staked claims to Palestinian lands in order to establish the basis for the State of Israel. Bartana's second film introduces the Zionist historical conflict in order to present the idea that the relationships between a nation-state and minorities are always politicized with undercurrents of racist tension. Here the allusion marks the similarities between the negative treatment of the Palestinians by Israel (starting during the Zionist movement) and the Poland's secular anti-Semitism and hostility towards its Jewish minority. The final film in the trilogy is *Zamach (Assasination)* which, in Bartana's fictional world, focuses on a future in which the JRMIP has become an all-inclusive and powerful political force in Poland. In the film, the founder of the movement has been assassinated, and the funeral ceremony serves as a transcendental moment in which questions are raised regarding the JRMIP's success in achieving its utopian goals or its foretold failure to overcome the historical tensions between Poles and Jews. The concept of utopia is called into question, and viewers are left to ponder if Jews and Poles (and by association, Israel and Palestine) will forever remain trapped in an intractable conflict.

Overall, there is very little scholarly analysis of the historical, cultural and political references that abound in the visual aesthetics of Yael Bartana's "*...And Europe Will Be Stunned*" trilogy. Most of the existing literature on the films consists of art catalogues about Bartana or fragmentary references in books about Holocaust memory in art and contemporary politics. Articles such as Emmanuel Alloa's "*Pre-Enactment: About Mythical Time*" offer limited analyses of "*...And Europe Will Be Stunned*" in the context of the rest of Bartana's artistic career. While Alloa does mention that Bartana references Leni Riefenstahl in the first film, his focus is on the general quality of Bartana's work as a source of opportunities for viewers to see alternative arguments about political and cultural situations that seem set in stone. Other writers, such as

Volker Patenberg, make the general point that Bartana's art uses the faux-documentary format to speak to the contemporary political realities of Polish-Jewish relations. Out of all the literature about Bartana's film trilogy, only Zoltan Kekesi's book *Agents of Liberation: Holocaust Memory in Contemporary Art and Documentary Film* discusses the importance of considering Bartana's visual references as a crucial element of the artwork. Kekesi highlights that the visual references in Bartana's films often juxtapose each other around themes such as Nazi propaganda by Leni Riefenstahl and Zionist propaganda in films about the colonization of Palestine. However, Kekesi does not delve deep enough into the analysis of how exactly Bartana's aesthetic references reflect the intractability of the conflict between Poles and Jews, which is what this thesis hopes to achieve. Most importantly, Kekesi, like all the others, completely misses the correspondence of the funerals of Sierakowski and Israel Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in the film *Zamach*. In this study, content analysis of material published by *The New Yorker*, National Public Radio, and other sources is used to examine the current entanglements of the Polish government with issues related to Holocaust memory and anti-Semitism, which are dramatically calling attention to the relevance of the themes and topics in Bartana's film trilogy.

The methodology used in this thesis has been adjusted to the unconventional nature of Bartana's film trilogy "*...And Europe Will Be Stunned*" as a work of art. For the most part, the film trilogy is presented as a documentary, a strand of contemporary art that deals with a political topic via the technology of visual documentation.<sup>2</sup> However, "*...And Europe Will Be Stunned*" is not a real documentary. It is a faux documentary that uses the documentary form in order to represent a fictional reality. In addition to the obvious fact that the JRMIP is an imagined political movement, Bartana incorporates supernatural elements and visually mimics propaganda films of historically real political movements in order to subvert the documentary medium. The documentary medium is further muddled by the fact that Bartana does not use the film trilogy to propagate her

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<sup>2</sup> Stallabrass, Julian. "Introduction: Contentious Relations: Art and Documentary" in *Documentary: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Julian Stallabrass (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2013), 12.



own political preferences. Bartana's deliberate impartiality is revealed in how she includes layers of different visual, cultural, and historical references as iconography in the film trilogy in order to subvert the idea that the JRMIP could be an ideal way to solve the Polish-Jewish conflict. This work seeks to clarify the visual iconography that Bartana incorporates in the film trilogy. Since Bartana avoids taking a definite stand on the problematic relationship between Poles and Jews in the films, it is up to the viewers to make sense of the contradicting historical clues that she incorporates into her faux documentaries. A crucial implication of this artistic choice is that the viewers' interpretations will depend a great deal on their level of knowledge of the relevant historical facts and their previous exposure to artistic representations of the kinds that were involved, for example, in the aesthetics of the Nazi or Zionist propaganda documentary films. As an iconographical analysis of Bartana's film trilogy, this study provides information, points to references, and reveals connections. These contributions can enrich the experience of the viewers and their understanding of the complexity and multilayered nature of Bartana's work.

## II. MARY KOSZMARY: HISTORY AND THE MEMORY OF POLAND'S JEWS

*Mary Koszmary (Nightmares)*, the first film in Bartana's "...And Europe Will Be Stunned" trilogy, runs for 11 minutes and was produced in 2007. It opens with the camera trained on the face of a man with thick black-rimmed glasses and a small chin staring out into the distance (Figure 1). His mouth is pursed in a thin line in silence and his short hair blows in the wind. The actor is Slawomir Sierakowski, who plays a fictionalized version of himself in Bartana's trilogy. The character becomes a major figure in the films as the founder of JRMIP, the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland. The first film, *Mary Koszmary (Nightmares)*, deals with the beginning of the movement. This chapter focuses on the ways in which Bartana's *Mary Koszmary* depicts Poland's troubled relationship with the Jewish people by integrating loaded historical references to stadium architecture, youth activist uniforms, and Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi propaganda film *Triumph of the Will*.



Figure 1. Yael Bartana (*Mary Koszmary*). Close-up of Slawomir Sierakowski, 2007.

In the real world, Slawomir Sierkowski is a Polish left-wing sociologist, journalist, and political activist.<sup>3</sup> He is internationally well known for his articles on Poland's relationship with Russia and its present-day leader Vladimir Putin. These articles include content that arguably inspires some elements of the JRMIP of Bartana's fictional world. In one particular article, "Putin's Cold New World," Sierkowski writes about Poland's relationship to Putin's Russia, where Poland is caught in tension between a traditionalist past influenced by the Soviet Union and the contemporary modern nation-state based on Western ideals.<sup>4</sup> As a result of the tension created by Poland's former existence as a political kin of the Soviet Union, the current independent Polish nation tends to have a reserved nature in the contemporary political field.<sup>5</sup> Sierkowski notes that, in its current actions, Poland is forced to constantly look at the nation's past:

This tradition (of Poland's relationship with other nations) requires that we hide our sabers and work consistently towards a strong domestic economy, keeping an eye on history to make sure that it does not sour relations with our neighbors, respecting the current borders, national identity, and sovereignty of each of our partners.<sup>6</sup>

Here, Sierkowski focuses on the relationship between Poland and Russia in the context of the past when the Polish People's Republic was reestablished under Soviet hegemony. The Polish tradition of "hiding our sabers" refers to a conscious effort to cull Poland's interaction with other countries or groups of people. In short, today's Poland does not want to sour its relationship with countries such as Russia and Germany. In addition to that, an overwhelming theme of Poland's right-wing politics is the desire to bolster the country's national identity in order to be in the same league of the other European countries. However, this nationalist drive has had a negative effect on how Poland teaches and views its own history—especially in matters about Jews. In February 2018, the Polish government passed a bill that made it illegal (and punishable

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<sup>3</sup> Zoltan Kekesi, *Agents of Liberation: Holocaust Memory in Contemporary Art and Documentary Film* (Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, 2015), 170.

<sup>4</sup> Slawomir Sierkowski, "Putin's Cold New World." *Dissent* 61 No. 3 (2014), 79.

<sup>5</sup> Sierkowski, "Putin's Cold New World", 79.

<sup>6</sup> Sierkowski, "Putin's Cold New World", 79.

with up to three years in prison) to make public statements about Poland's complicity in the Nazi atrocities in Poland during the Holocaust.<sup>7</sup> The original intent of the bill was to control the semantics of the concentration camps in Poland; the idea was to put an end to the use of the phrase "Polish death camps", which was perceived as associating the Polish people with Nazism in the eyes of the rest of the world.<sup>8</sup> It soon became evident that the original intentions of the law backfired, since Poland was once again associated with anti-Semitism when its right-wing politicians cast their Polish nationalism as something that was opposed to history, collective memory, and trauma.<sup>9</sup> Right-wing nationalists in contemporary Poland want to erase the memory of the nation's role in the Holocaust. With this new law, the Polish government flatly denies that Poles may have acted in questionable ways during the Holocaust and that Poland has a long history of anti-Semitism. The official emphasis on Polish cultural hegemony and the erasure of the memory of violence towards minorities in Poland amounts to a rewriting of the country's history from the standpoint of the contemporary lens of right-wing politics.

Aggravating the political decision to vindicate Polish nationalism in the face of the country's traumatic history, there is a conviction among many right-wing Poles that they have been the true victims of modern history, including the Second World War.<sup>10</sup> This extremist perspective on Polish history is perpetuated by those who do not acknowledge that underground Polish movements such as the Home Army actively tried to help Jews during the German occupation.<sup>11</sup> The primary focus of the right-wing narrative is the subjugation of the nation's Catholic Polish majority, first by Nazi Germany during the war and then by Soviet hegemony. But the fact that the Polish people also experienced trauma under the Germans during the Second World War does

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<sup>7</sup> Colin Dwyer, "International: Poland Passes Bill Criminalizing Claims of Its Complicity in the Holocaust". NPR (National Public Radio) (2018), <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/02/01/581896647/poland-passes-bill-criminalizing-claims-of-its-complicity-in-the-holocaust>.

<sup>8</sup> Elisabeth Zerofsky, "Memory Politics: Does Poland's Government Want to Rewrite the Country's Past?", *The New Yorker*, July 30, 2018, 18.

<sup>9</sup> Elisabeth Zerofsky, 18.

<sup>10</sup> Elisabeth Zerofsky, 24.

<sup>11</sup> Elisabeth Zerofsky, 19.

not justify the refusal to acknowledge Poland's history of anti-Semitism before and after the Holocaust. Sierakowski's critique of how contemporary Poland interacts with other nations and its own minorities is echoed in his fictional persona's descriptions of Poland in Bartana's *Mary Koszmary*.

The argument that Poland should be self-aware of its past in order to advance and change its present and future relationship with the Jews and other minorities is a key theme in *Mary Koszmary* and one of the most complex historical topics in Bartana's film trilogy. She imbeds the films with audiovisual references to the troubled history of the relationship in order to make it clear that a movement like the JRMIP is unrealistic given the current state of Polish-Jewish relations. In *Mary Koszmary*, the political demonstration of Sierakowski and the young JRMIP activists takes place in the ruins of Warsaw's *Stadion Dziesięciolecia*, more commonly known as the *Tenth Anniversary Stadium*. This location offers subtle historical clues that resonate in contemporary Poland. The stadium was built in 1955 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Polish People's Republic (Figure 2). Used for political rallies during the period of Soviet hegemony over Poland, the stadium was built over the course of eleven months from



Figure 2. Unknown artist. Warsaw's Tenth Anniversary Stadium, 1955.

bricks and debris of WWII, including the bombed out remains of Warsaw.<sup>12</sup> However, the stadium fell into disuse during the 1980s and became the site of an infamous illegal market.<sup>13</sup> By the time Bartana filmed *Mary Koszmary* in 2007, the dilapidated stadium had trees and tall weeds growing out of the stands (Figure 3). Today the stadium and bazaar no longer exist. They have been replaced by a new sports stadium.<sup>14</sup> Bartana's



Figure 3. Yael Bartana (*Mary Koszmary*). Stadium stands filled with grass and trees, 2007.

use of the original ruined stadium in Warsaw as the setting of the first film in the trilogy already sets the tone of visually teasing out multiple historical references. The use of a decaying stadium immediately calls out Poland's past incarnations as a nation conquered by Nazi Germany and a Polish People's Republic under Soviet hegemony.

Stadiums in general also marked a staple of Nazi architecture with varying uses and applications that ranged from a place for rallies and political speeches to public

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<sup>12</sup> Magdalena Goralska, Helena Patzer, and Malgorzata Winkowska. "The Stadium as Witness: A Story of a Changing Monument". *Widok: Teorie I Praktyki Kultury Wizualnej (Theories of Practical and Visual Culture)* No. 9 (2015), <http://pismowidok.org/index.php/one/article/view/271/542>.

<sup>13</sup> Kekesi, 171.

<sup>14</sup> Goralska, Patzer, and Winkowska, "The Stadium as Witness, A Story of a Changing Monument".

sports events such as the *Berlin Olympic Stadium* (Figure 4). Nazi Germany had a strict architectural format that tied to its political and fascist rhetoric. Overall, the ‘style’ of Nazi Germany’s architecture and culture followed the aesthetic regimen of its leader Adolf Hitler and his chief architect Albert Speer. Hitler appropriated the aesthetics of the Roman Empire as the chief feature of Nazi visual rhetoric. By incorporating Neoclassical architecture, he sought to associate the Third Reich with the image of an imposing ancient power.<sup>15</sup> For Hitler, architecture would serve as metaphor for the



Figure 4. US Holocaust Museum Archive. Berlin’s Nazi Olympic Stadium, c. 1955.

power of Nazi Germany, with everything built on a massive scale and in Neoclassical style. Architecture would be used to express German pride, with its tie to Classicism indicating German racial superiority.<sup>16</sup> The *Berlin Olympic Stadium* was a place large enough for masses to gather. The colossal Nazi stadium would be the display site for the ideal German nation and would obviously exclude anything that was foreign or ‘other’

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<sup>15</sup> Charlotte Stuart, “Architecture in Nazi Germany: A Rhetorical Perspective”, *Western Speech*, vol. 37 (Fall 1973): 258.

<sup>16</sup> Stuart, “Architecture in Nazi Germany,” 171.

than German.<sup>17</sup> And the epitome of the 'other' for Nazi Germany was the Jewish people.

*Warsaw's Tenth Anniversary Stadium* did not necessarily denote a purist ideology or nationalistic fervor, but instead brandished Communist ideals in tandem with the Polish People's Republic. The stadium was intended to be an arena for political rallies and cultural events pertaining to Communism. Its entrance was slightly raised and the interior was an open air field with stands built into the ground like an ancient Greek amphitheater. The fact that the political use of the structure ended after less than thirty years and the stadium became a dilapidated ruin shows that there was no desire on the part of the Poles to propagate the values of the cultural hegemony of the Soviet Union. With the end of the Communist era in 1990, Poland veered towards celebrating and promoting its national identity. The country became part of the European Union in 2004, which has given the nation security vis-a-vis neighboring powers such as Germany or the Russian Federation.<sup>18</sup>

While anti-Semitism has always been a factor in Poland's history, it reached an apex in the years before the Second World, when Polish nationalist politicians actively tried to emulate Nazi Germany's anti-Jewish policies such as the curtailment of the Jews' citizen rights and the boycott of business owned by Jews (with acts of aggression by paramilitary groups included). Anti-Semitism continued to be alive in Poland after the end of the Second World War, with tragic pogroms when Jewish survivors of the Holocaust tried to return to their homes and neighborhoods in 1946 and 1947. The next wave of anti-Semitic fervor, including purges of Jewish politicians, public employees and intellectuals came in 1967-1968, leading to the flight of most of the remaining Polish Jews to Israel.<sup>19</sup> With the rebuilding of Poland's national identity following the collapse of the Polish People's Republic, erasing the memory of the Polish Jews became a well-

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<sup>17</sup> Kekesi, 171.

<sup>18</sup> Kristin Kopp and Joanna Nizynska. *Germany, Poland, and Postmemorial Relations: In Search of a Livable Past*. (New York, Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2012), 2.

<sup>19</sup> Kekesi, 170.



entrenched, “normal” cultural practice.<sup>20</sup> In this respect, the approval of the 2018 law that criminalizes statements that depict Poland or Poles as complicit in Nazi crimes during the war marks an escalation of the drive towards historical and cultural erasure.

Ironically, the realities of Poland’s right-wing bias contrast with the goals of contemporary scholarship in and on Poland, the Polish Jews, and the Holocaust. One of the most important concepts developed in recent years is “Postmemory”. Coined by the feminist scholar Marianne Hirsch, who specializes in memory studies and the psychological analysis of literature through a feminist lens, Postmemory emphasizes the ways in which second-generation Holocaust Jews (whose parents were victims and survivors of the Holocaust) relate to that horrifying historical event.<sup>21</sup> As scholars Joanna Nizynska and Kristin Kopp point out, Postmemory is not about the memory of a personal experience of the Holocaust, but rather how the memories of the trauma have been transmitted between generations, from the Holocaust survivors to their children and from the latter to the survivors’ grandchildren.<sup>22</sup> In short, Postmemory is a trace of Holocaust trauma that transmits into the following generations, who cannot avoid the implication that it is necessary to keep the traumatic history in mind as one relates to current events.<sup>23</sup> While the temporal distance from the Holocaust grows, the memory of the trauma is still relevant and undeniable.

Thus, it is important to confront Poles with the consequences of trying to erase and deny their country’s history of anti-Semitism. Poland has to become self-aware of its past in order to actively change its present and future relationship with minorities. And that recognition appears as a key theme in Sierakowski’s speech in *Mary Kozsmary*. Sierakowski addresses the three million Polish Jews who died in the Holocaust as if they were present and listening to him. The only visual allusion to the presence of the lost Jews is provided by the trees that sprout in the empty stadium stands, with the camera

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<sup>20</sup> Kekesi, 172.

<sup>21</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2012), 5.

<sup>22</sup> Kopp and Nizynska, 9-10.

<sup>23</sup> Hirsch, 6-8.

constantly panning over the trees to create the eerie sense of a palpable unseen presence (Figure 5). Sierakowski's speech acknowledges Polish anti-Semitism and reaffirms the killed and missing Polish Jews as an integral part of Polish society, stating:

When you left, we were secretly happy. We kept saying, 'At last we're home by ourselves'. The Polish Pole in Poland, with no one disturbing him. And because we still weren't happy, from time to time we found a Jew and told him to leave Poland. Even when it was clear that none of you were left, there were still those who kept telling you to go. And what?

Today we are fed up looking at our similar faces. On the streets of our great cities, we are on the lookout for strangers and listening intently when they speak. Yes! Today we know that we cannot live alone. We need the other, and there's no closer other for us than you! Come! The same but changed. Let us live together. Let us be different, but let one not harm the other. We will be us at last, and you will be you. We will become you, and you will become us.<sup>24</sup>



Figure 5. Yael Bartana (*Mary Koszmary*). The dilapidated stadium's empty stands, 2007.

When considered with the visuals of the camera panning over the empty dilapidated *Tenth Anniversary Stadium* and the young activists printing stenciled slogans

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<sup>24</sup> Yael Bartana, *And Europe Will Be Stunned: The Polish Trilogy*. (Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv), (2012), 120.

on the grass asking three million Jews to come back to Poland (Figure 6), Sierakowski's speech implies that the ideals of the past have failed. The ruined stadium is a visual metaphor, a testament to the defeat of negative past values such as Nazism, anti-Semitism, and even the collapse of the Polish People's Republic. Sierakowski's words reflect the consequences of the rise of Polish nationalism and the cultural erasure of Polish Jewish history. It is not possible for a nation to exist without minorities or other marginalized groups. He calls for the return of three million Jews to Poland, an open invitation to Jews of Polish heritage and a challenge to Poland's history of anti-Semitism and xenophobia.<sup>25</sup> Here, the questions of 'return' and whether Poland is truly a homeland for the Jews begin to challenge the viewer. As stated in the introduction, this is the main goal of the film trilogy: to make people reconsider history and to foster new conversations about post-Holocaust history, the present, and how the 'other' should be treated.



Figure 6. Yael Bartana (*Mary Koszmary*). JRMIP youngsters stenciling the word "Jews", 2007.

For *Mary Koszmary* to work, it was important for Bartana that it should be a young Polish political activist, and not a Jewish character, that gives the speech. It is

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<sup>25</sup> Yael Bartana, *Yael Bartana*, (Lausanne: JRP Ringier and Musee cantonal de Beaux Arts, Lausanne), 2017, 100.

crucial for the film to depict a Polish man recognizing the failures of Poland's past and of the current attempts to guarantee that Polish society is culturally homogenous.<sup>26</sup> With a Pole invoking the Jewish victims of the Holocaust and inviting three million Jews to come back to Poland, the fictional Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland can be born and, with it, a real chance to come to terms with history and include the marginalized 'other'. Karen Underhill, professor of Slavic and Baltic languages, literature, and culture at the University of Illinois at Chicago, notes in an article that the absent Jews—the void created by the Holocaust—create a space that can potentially alter the core notions of what makes someone Polish.<sup>27</sup> The very act of acknowledging the Jews and inviting them to come back gives diversity and inclusion a chance to play a role in the definition of the Polish nation.

Beyond the Polish stadium, many other visual cues in *Mary Koszmary* refer to the complicated historical past that haunts and propels Bartana's films. Throughout the trilogy, Bartana visually references different histories and historical movements by using the techniques of faux documentary films. As faux documentaries, the films mimic the 'truth telling' format of documentary films, but they actually subvert the contents and legacies of famous historical documentaries. Bartana uses these references in order to overturn the nationalist, totalizing aims of the previous films and subtly satirize them. In *Mary Koszmary*, exaggerated documentary tactics are deployed in the filming and framing of Sierakowski while he makes his speech. Bartana's use of low-angle shots and scenes that zoom in and out of the landscape for dramatic moments is a clear aesthetic reference to the strategies of famous Nazi filmmaker and propaganda icon Leni Riefenstahl.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Kekesi, 170.

<sup>27</sup> Underhill, *Next Year in Drohobych*, 582. Underhill's article offers an alternative attitude about the current Polish-Jewish relationship than what has been historically noted in the first chapter. She notes how there is a small but growing community effort in Poland where they host events, concerts, and cultural activities where Poles learn about Jewish culture. It has gotten to the point where the majority of people who go to Jewish cultural events in Poland are Poles with no ties to Judaism.

<sup>28</sup> Emmanuel Alloa, "Pre-Enactment: About Mythical Time", in *Yael Bartana* (Lausanne, JRP/Ringier Musee Catonal des Beaux-Arts/Lausanne, 2017), 75.

Leni Riefenstahl is best known as the director of *The Triumph of the Will*, the quintessential 1935 Nazi propaganda film that depicts the festivities and political speeches of the 1934 Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg in an idealized and artistic manner. While the *Triumph of the Will* does record the political event, Riefenstahl's use of camera work, low-angles, and space in ratio to human scale created a film that chronicles the unnerving mass following of an extremist political hegemony. Contemporary reviewers note that Riefenstahl's film did not really succeed as a work of propaganda but as an example of mass hysteria and support for a radical and violent political group.<sup>29</sup> Thus, Riefenstahl's film is a reservoir of historical examples of Nazism that Bartana can subvert in her film trilogy.<sup>30</sup> In the image of Sierakowski's face before the beginning of his speech (Figure 1), one can see a play on Riefenstahl's style of showing the faces of political leaders, such as Hitler, from a close-up angle prior to giving a speech (Figure 7). Both images depict the faces of the political leaders looking to the left of the screen, silent and almost contemplative as the wind blows through their short hair. Hitler's face shows a brusque severity in his furrowed eyebrows and clenched jaw while Sierakowski's face (Figure 1) is more reserved with no physical tells of power in his expression. This particular shot of Hitler appears in the middle of *Triumph of the Will* and is one of the dramatic moments that emphasized the leader's status as an almost god-like political figure, signifying his status as the Führer.

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<sup>29</sup> Brian Winston, "Triumph of the Will", *History Today* Vol. 47, issue 1 (January 1997): 24.

<sup>30</sup> There are aspects to *Triumph of the Will* that also appear in Bartana's third and final film in the trilogy, *Zamach (Assasination)*. Of course, it is important to clarify that Riefenstahl's clips are of real speeches being made at the 1934 Nazi Party Congress while Bartana uses political leaders, artists, and leftwing activists to play characters giving a speech for the funeral of the leader of the JRMIP in the fictional alternative future.



Figure 7. Leni Riefenstahl (*The Triumph of the Will*). Close-up of Adolf Hitler's face from a low angle, 1935.

Bartana similarly begins her short film with the close-up shot of Sierakowski's face. Sierakowski maintains a severe but neutral expression and he takes up less of the screen than Hitler does in Riefenstahl's shot. He wears a plain white shirt with a red tie to symbolize Poland's national colors and a semi-formal jacket. Sierakowski does not wear any visual emblems of the JRMIP and does not present himself as a leader, even though he will become the symbolic figurehead of the movement in the other two films. It is also important to note that the emblem and name of JRMIP is concretely developed in Bartana's second film *Mur i Weiza*. As such, the fictional character of Sierakowski does not have a high political position and does not posture himself as a leader in the first film. However, Sierakowski is still the center of *Mary Koszmary*, but not due to his iconic status or political power: it is his words, his call for the Jews to return to Poland that hold value. In this sense, Sierakowski works as a human conduit whose presence exists to say words and ideas that have more importance than his personal political status.

Another reference to the Riefenstahl film can be seen in the costumes of the young JRMIP activists. Their costume (Figure 6) is made up of khaki shirts and shorts with accentuated red scarves, which is surprisingly similar to the colors of the Hitler

Youth uniforms in Figure 8. The main difference between the two uniforms is that the Hitler Youth scarf is black while the scarves of the JRMIP activists are red to symbolize the nation of Poland. Noticeably, the Hitler Youth uniform had armbands with the swastika symbol of Nazi Germany while the JRMIP activists do not have an armband. This could be due to the fact that the JRMIP emblem does not appear until the end of the second film in Bartana's trilogy. In Riefenstahl's film, we see young male soldiers of the Nazi party wearing uniforms like the one featured in Figure 9 writing a letter in his tent. While this young man is older than the youngsters in Bartana's film, he wears the Hitler Youth uniform: the khaki shirt



Figure 8. Unknown artist. Hitler Youth uniform in glass casing, 1930s.



Figure 9. Leni Riefenstahl (*The Triumph of the Will*). Member of Hitler Youth writing a letter, 1935.

with two pockets on his breast, the black tie, and the leather strap across his chest that attaches to his belt are the most visible features in the shot. Riefenstahl devotes a large portion of *The Triumph of the Will* to the idealized athletic bodies of young adults: the soldiers are shown doing athletic stunts, as in Figure 10. Riefenstahl emphasizes the youngsters to symbolize and visualize the Nazi ideal of the Aryan man—the idealized German who is youthful and athletic and was considered by the Nazi party to have superior genes. This concept was perpetuated by Nazi scholars who used Social Darwinism to state that the Nordic and Aryan races (who make up the hegemonic, white German population) had evolved to be superior to other humans because they had survived the harsh climate conditions of Northern and Central Europe during the Ice Age.<sup>31</sup> As such, the inclusion of the physically fit adults in Riefenstahl’s film plays into how she focuses on filming the masses of people who symbolize and represent the Nazi party by their own social standards. In comparison, the JRMIP youngsters only fulfill the role of showing that the values and ideas of previous generations are being changed by Poland’s youth. In *Mary Koszmary*, the JRMIP youth activists symbolize the Polish

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<sup>31</sup> Richard Weikart, “The Role of Darwinism in Nazi Racial Thought,” *German Studies Review* Vol. 36, no 3 (October 2013): 538.



opening to inclusivity and diversity. They are the opposite of the Hitler Youth in ideology and visual interpretation.



Figure 10. Leni Riefenstahl (*The Triumph of the Will*). Hitler Youth performing athletic stunts, 1935.

Perhaps the most noticeable visual difference between *The Triumph of the Will* and *Mary Koszmary* lies in the ways in which the two directors filmed people. In Riefenstahl's film, there is an enormous emphasis on the masses of people attending, participating in, and listening to the Nazi conference. Space is used to be filled; the Nazis take up the space, conquering it but at the same time the people end up looking like sardines in a can as there is little spare room or personal space. In Riefenstahl's film there are large auditoriums packed with people (Figure 11), to the point where the masses become visually overwhelming and the viewer cannot make sense of the crowd



Figure 11. Leni Riefenstahl (*The Triumph of the Will*). The massive audience of the Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg, 1935.

other than the blurred white faces and almost hysterical voices supporting the Nazi party. The exact opposite happens in Bartana's film: the only people present are Sierakowski and the few Polish JRMIP youth activists. However, we must not forget the 'presence' of the ghosts of the Polish Jews who died in the Holocaust. In his speech, Sierakowski references the Jewish Pole with a metaphor:

You think the old woman who still sleeps under Rifke's quilt doesn't want to see you? Has forgotten about you? You're wrong. She dreams about you every night. Dreams and trembles with fear. Since the night you were gone and her mother reached for your quilt, she has had nightmares.<sup>32</sup>

In this quote, Sierakowski describes the Polish nation as a mother, an 'old woman' who sleeps in a blanket made by Rifke (who symbolizes the Jewish minority of Poland).<sup>33</sup> Sierakowski's narrative shows that Poland has suffered historically and culturally because Rifke/the Jewish minority has vanished. In the speech, the Jews are

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<sup>32</sup> Bartana, "...And Europe Will Be Stunned: *The Polish Trilogy*", 120.

<sup>33</sup> The symbolic persona of Rifke will actually appear as a character in *Zamach*, Bartana's third film in the trilogy. In the film, Rifke serves as a representative voice of the Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust and observes and comments about what happens in the film.

represented as Rifke but, in the film, Bartana visually uses the empty stadium filled with trees to represent the absent Jewish audience. The result is that the empty stadiums become oppressive, the masses of the dead an eerie juxtaposition to Riefenstahl's film where the multitude of Nazis show their support for the extremist political party. *The Triumph of the Will* stands as an extreme representation of Nazi Germany by emphasizing the horde of Nazi supporters and aesthetically glorifying the bodies of the athletic Hitler Youth who represent the superiority of the Aryan race. The propaganda film creates a heroic and idealized view of Nazism, a perspective that is biased and fails as an objective, neutral documentary. In contrast, *Mary Koszmary* utilizes Riefenstahl's documentary aesthetic to subvert *The Triumph of the Will's* theme of hero-worshipping Nazism. Bartana's choice to parallel Riefenstahl makes her film a faux documentary that turns the fervor of Nazism on its head and emphasizes the aftermath of the genocide perpetrated by Nazi Germany in the Holocaust. It is important to note how one film shows the glory of the Nazi movement while the other shows the historical consequences and void that exists due to the atrocities of the Nazis towards the Jewish people. In *The Triumph of the Will*, there is the heroic, propagandistic portrayal of the Nazis. *Mary Koszmary* shows an attempt to recognize the downsides of nationalistic fervor with the Polish speaker Sierakowski asking for Jews to come back to Poland after a history of anti-Semitism and genocide.<sup>34</sup> Bartana references the Nazi propaganda film in order to contrast the Nazi aesthetic and fascist political values with the traumatic reality they created with the Holocaust. Bartana looks to the past to highlight the current void caused by the absence and extermination of the Jews in Poland by Nazi Germany.

The inclusion of parallels and techniques that riff on Riefenstahl's film help Bartana's film trilogy to function as a pseudo-documentary that shows an alternative universe and a future that may never be possible or realistic. *Mary Koszmary* is a work

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<sup>34</sup> The personal background of the two filmmakers also add to the thematic content of their films: Riefenstahl was a German actress who supported the Nazi cause while Bartana is a Jewish Israeli artist who grew up as the second generation of Jews in Israel after the Holocaust.

that plays and references many historical events that are juxtaposed with fiction in a way that directly challenges the biased views of the history of Poland and the refusal to acknowledge the significance of the Jews for the definition of the nation. Bartana's historical references and visual hints show the current state of Poland by proposing a fictionalized, but impossible approach to how things could change. While the JRMIP and Sierakowski's speech exist only as fantasy, Bartana nevertheless actively challenges the void in Polish culture that was created by xenophobia and anti-Semitism. That is the real effect of advancing the utopian notion that the Jews should return to Poland or—as Sierakowski's character would say—the 'true' homeland of the Jewish people.

### III. *MUR I WEIZA*: CHALLENGING THE RIGHT TO RETURN

The second film in Bartana's trilogy focuses on the consequences of the Jewish diaspora and how the state of Israel factors into it. *Mur i Wieza* (which translates as *Wall and Tower*) was filmed in 2009 and documents the fictional realization of Sierakowski's speech: in the 15-minute film, Jewish pioneers return to Poland to erect a Wall and Tower settlement in a place that used to be the most dense Jewish residential area of Warsaw.<sup>35</sup> *Mur i Wieza* begins optimistically with the Jewish pioneers marching together and carrying tools for construction and digging (Figure 12). As they build the settlement, Bartana changes the tone of the film using sound effects. A dark undertone arises, exemplified by scenes where the Jewish pioneers lie together in a pile that hauntingly evokes the mass graves of murdered Jews in the Holocaust (Figure 13). However, the film ends on a concrete and positive note, as the JRMIP movement comes into fruition and the pioneers introduce the new political movement's symbol: a combination of the Jewish Star of David and the eagle representing the nation of Poland (Figure 14). The character Sierakowski makes a cameo appearance in the film, visiting



Figure 12. Yael Bartana (*Mur i Wieza*). Jewish pioneers bring supplies to Warsaw's park, 2009.

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<sup>35</sup> Yael, *Yael Bartana* 104

the completed Wall and Tower structure and bestowing the Jewish settlers a red flag with the new JRMIP logo on it (Figure 15). The flag is raised on the tower as the Israeli national anthem is played backwards, functioning as a symbolic reversal of Zionism.<sup>36</sup>



Figure 13. Yael Bartana. Jewish pioneers laying together in a pile at rest. *Mur i Wieza*, 2009.



Figure 14. Yael Bartana (*Mur i Wieza*).  
The JRMIP logo, 2009.



Figure 15. Yael Bartana (*Mur i Wieza*).  
Jewish pioneers receive JRMIP flag, 2009.

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<sup>36</sup> Kekesi, 180.

This film in particular subtly evokes tension between anti-Semitism in Poland, the Jewish diaspora after the Holocaust, and the Israeli 'right to return' claim in Palestine by incorporating more layered historical references and the use of costumes, props, and sound editing. Most of the visual references in *Mur i Wieza* evoke early Zionist propaganda films, introducing a new layer of historical tension to Bartana's film series. Since the establishment of the Jewish state after the Holocaust led to the displacement of many of the Palestinians who lived on the land, the relationship between the Israeli nation and Palestine becomes another facet that parallels the tension generated by the Jews' return to Poland in Bartana's trilogy.

As in the case of *Mary Koszmary*, the location of *Mur i Wieza* marks an important historical reference that sets the tone of the film. The Warsaw park where the Jewish pioneers erect their settlement used to be at the center of the pre-war Jewish residential area in Warsaw. The Germans enclosed that area to confine the Warsaw Jews in the city's ghetto during the war.<sup>37</sup> The Warsaw Ghetto was next to the train station where the Jews would be massively deported to work in concentration camps of to be gassed at the Treblinka extermination facility. The entire area was subsequently destroyed during the Ghetto Uprising in 1943 and the methodical Soviet bombardment of Warsaw in 1944.<sup>38</sup> The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising is known as the most prominent resistance attempt by Jews against the Nazis. With some help from Polish socialists and underground movements, several Jewish youth groups in the Warsaw Ghetto formed the ZOB (Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa), the Jewish Combat Organization, and fought for their lives when the Nazis moved into the Ghetto to liquidate the remaining Jews in the Ghetto during the Passover holiday in 1943.<sup>39</sup> Eventually, the uprising was

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<sup>37</sup> Yael, *Yael Bartana* 104.

<sup>38</sup> Michal Bilewicz, Maria Lewika, and Adrian Wojcik, "Living on the Ashes: Collective-Representations of Polish Jewish History among People Living in the Former Warsaw Ghetto Area". *Cities* 27, no. 4 (August 2010): 196.

<sup>39</sup> Havi Dreifuss, Itamar Haritan, "The Leadership in the Jewish Combat Organization during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising: A Reassessment", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 27.

ruthlessly suppressed with the deaths of ZOB leader Mordechai Anielewicz and virtually all of the resistance fighters. The remainder of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto were sent to Treblinka and , as stated above, the entire area was flattened.<sup>40</sup>

There are no visual traces of the Jewish quarter today: no houses or remnants of buildings remain in the park. Up until 2013, the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* (Figure 16) installed in front of the park stood as the only evidence that this area used to be the Jewish district of Warsaw.<sup>41</sup> The imposing monument by Jewish sculptor Nathan Rapoport sits in a plaza across the street where the main entrance to the Ghetto would



Figure 16. Nathan Rappoport (*Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*). Monument view from the Western side showing menorahs flanked by lions, 1948.

have been. Shallow steps lead to the plaza, which is dominated by the monument's large vertical concrete wall. The wall visually echoes the Western Wall in Jerusalem (Figure 17), the most iconic monument in Jewish history as a last standing remnant of the walls of the Second Temple, when the Jews still had their own national home in the

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<sup>40</sup> Yisrael Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939-1943: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), xiii.

<sup>41</sup> In 2013, the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews opened right in front of the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*. This was four years after *Mur i Wieża* debuted as a film, and as such was not part of the narrative of Bartana's film trilogy. The importance of this museum and how it adds a new facet to Poland's relationship with Jews and anti-Semitism will be mentioned later in the chapter.



land of Israel in the times of the Roman Empire. The famous Western Wall is made up of colossal limestones exposed to the elements at nineteen meters tall.<sup>42</sup> The wall of the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* simulates the fragment of the ancient wall with grey concrete made to look like stones set in place, marking a connection between the Jews of Poland who endured living in the Warsaw Ghetto until their extermination and the Jews from times of old who lost their homeland and were forced into the Jewish Diaspora after the destruction of Jerusalem's Second Temple. In addition to the visual reference of the Western Wall, the edges of the steps on the first level leading to the monument have bronze sculptures of giant menorahs flanked by two lions. Alluding to ancient Jewish religious iconography, the menorahs and the lions endow a sacred quality to the space and the monument.



Figure 17. Unknown artist. The Western Wall in Jerusalem, c. 2015.

As for the monument itself, there are bronze reliefs embedded on both sides of the wall that depict two different scenes. The vertical sculpture on the west side (Figure 18) is a high relief frieze that depicts the Jewish insurgents (men, women, and children)

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<sup>42</sup> Archaeologists have done digs and discovered that the wall continues underground the current Old City of Jerusalem with even larger limestones serving as its foundation.

armed with weapons surrounding the central figure of Mordechai Anielewicz—the leader of the ZOB. While the bodies of the rebels are depicted as malnourished with gaunt cheekbones, ribs sticking out, and their clothes in tatters, Rapoport still manages to idealize them by incorporating muscles and large body types. Some of the figures, like the woman leaning above Anielewicz’s head, are nude—a small allusion to the Classical Western archetype of the heroic nude. Anielewicz seems to prop himself on



Figure 18. Nathan Rappoport (*Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*).  
Close-up of the bronze relief on the Western side of the monument, 1948.

the corpse of a fallen Jew, his clothes in tatters and his forehead and arm bandaged. He holds a Molotov cocktail, the home-made weapon of choice of fighters that have little or no access to conventional weapons. The eastern side of the wall (Figure 19) has a low relief frieze that depicts the Nazi persecution of the Jews. The figures shown are Jewish men, women, and children who wear cloaks and rags and walk in a single file. They are not depicted realistically: the figures in the foreground resemble caricatures and figures in the background merely fade into the wall due to the low relief of the carving. The foreground figures somberly carry a Torah (the Jewish Bible) and bags that most likely contain all of their belongings. The scene evokes a visual allusion to the Jewish Diaspora

during the Roman Era, when the Jews were forced to abandon their homeland to live in dispersion all over the world until the founding of the State of Israel in 1948. While the relief carving is an image that depicts the Jewish suffering and trauma during the Holocaust, there are no traces or visual portrayals of the Nazi German perpetrators. Perhaps Rapoport wished to imply that violence towards the Jewish people has been a constant phenomenon throughout history.



Figure 19. Nathan Rapoport (*Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*). Image of the Eastern side of the monument with bronze relief and concrete wall, 1948.

The *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* depicts the plight of the Jews during the Holocaust and the Jewish heroic figures who fought to resist the extermination of their people. But the monument's meaning was lost during the Cold War. Instead of serving as a monument for the ghetto heroes or the Jews of Poland, the Polish People's Republic claimed that the monument was a historical depiction of how the Polish Communist party helped the ZOB. Thus, and despite the fact that Poles do not appear in the monument (and did not participate in the Ghetto Uprising), the monument became, in the eyes of the Poles, a symbol for the victory of socialism over fascism.<sup>43</sup> Instead of acknowledging Rapoport's visual imagery of the martyred Jews, the Polish

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<sup>43</sup> Bilewicz, Lewika, and Wojcik. "Living on the Ashes", 198.

government insisted that the monument was a reminder of how Socialists, Communists, and other left-wing Polish political groups contributed weapons and ‘support’ to the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto.<sup>44</sup> In other words, the Polish government approved the erection of the monument but it did not do it with the intention of commemorating the Jewish fighters or the Jewish people, something that was in blatant contradiction with the explicit motivations of the artist who designed it and the Jewish organizations that funded it.<sup>45</sup> In addition to this, the People’s Republic of Poland intentionally excluded the Jewish neighborhood from the plans to rebuild areas of central Warsaw on their pre-war image.<sup>46</sup> Thus, when Bartana filmed *Mur i Wieza* in 2009, the neighborhood had become a park and the monument on the grassy field was the only evidence that there had once been a Jewish community living in Warsaw.

At this point, it is important to bring into the picture the POLIN Museum of the History of the Polish Jews, which was built on the park and opened its doors in 2013, two years after Bartana’s radical faux documentary series was completed.<sup>47</sup> The very existence of this museum at the heart of the former Jewish neighborhood and in front of the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* (Figure 20) casts a positive light on how Poland commemorates its Jewish minority. The concept of establishing a museum on the Polish Jews began to be discussed in 1993, shortly after the demise of the Soviet Union and its pull on the Polish nation.<sup>48</sup> The Association of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland, a private group run by Jews, negotiated the opening of a public museum about the history of the country’s Jews with the Polish government.<sup>49</sup> Today, the museum functions as a

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<sup>44</sup> Bilewicz, Lewika, and Wojcik. “Living on the Ashes”, 196. It is important to note that there were no Poles involved in the actual Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The Left-Wing Polish socialist groups only provided some ammunitions that were used in the Uprising.

<sup>45</sup> Bilewicz, Lewika, and Wojcik. “Living on the Ashes”, 196.

<sup>46</sup> Bilewicz, Lewika, and Wojcik. “Living on the Ashes”, 197.

<sup>47</sup> A brief analysis of the POLIN Museum is necessary for the purposes of the paper’s argument as it helps expand the reader’s understanding of the current relationship between Poles and Jews. The conflicting responses to the museum’s existence reflect how culturally entrenched the intractable conflict between both groups is. By including information about the POLIN Museum, one can see that the subject of Bartana’s film trilogy is still largely relevant in the nation of Poland.

<sup>48</sup> Barbara Krishenblatt-Gimblett, “Inside the Museum: Curating Between Hope and Despair: POLIN Museum of the History of the Polish Jews”, *East European Jewish Affairs* 45, no. 2-3 (2015):215.

<sup>49</sup> Krishenblatt-Gimblett, 216.

multimedia narrative with a core exhibition that guides the public through rooms that tell the story and history of the Jewish people in Poland from their early settling in the land hundreds of years ago to the Holocaust and the contemporary era.<sup>50</sup>



Figure 20. Unknown artist. The POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews facing the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes, c. 2015.

The issue of how the POLIN Museum represents the Holocaust and the history of anti-Semitism in Poland has been a subject of lively debate in the European world of museums and curatorship. For some critics, there is not enough emphasis on the Polish anti-Semitic attitudes and the role of Poles during the Holocaust and the pogroms that followed.<sup>51</sup> In general, there were complications that made it impossible to create a Holocaust-themed museum in Poland. On the one hand, the Nazi concentration and extermination camps in Poland can be considered as already-existing Holocaust museums. On the other hand, scholars have suggested that there should be museums that specifically deal with the relationship between Poles and Jews during the Holocaust, showing how some Poles risked their lives to help Jews escape the Nazis

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<sup>50</sup> The museum has little to no artifacts that belong Jewish Poles since much was destroyed during the Holocaust and bombings of Poland during World War II.

<sup>51</sup> Krishenblatt-Gimblett, 223.

while other Poles deliberately turned in their Jewish neighbors.<sup>52</sup> There are also some critics who claim the opposite: that the POLIN Museum overhypes Polish mistreatment of Jews. The main shortcoming of the museum is its failure to hold the hegemonic Polish society accountable for its still troubled relationship with the Jewish minority<sup>53</sup>. One potential concern is that the museum may be playing into the hands of the right-wing politicians that take initiatives such as the legislation (discussed in Chapter I) criminalizing statements about Poland or Poles as complicit in Nazi crimes. For such politicians, the museum may serve as ‘proof’ that the Poles were not anti-Semitic or involved in the Holocaust, and that these claims amount to defamation of the Polish people. As explained earlier, it is important to emphasize that the Polish people were also victimized by the Nazis, but the existence, and long history of Polish anti-Semitism is undeniable. The fact that the initiative for the POLIN Museum came from Jews, and that there was a twenty-year tussling with the government for the museum to exist, is in itself indicative of the Polish-Jewish tension that continues to exist today. Furthermore, there is the ongoing push to demonstrate that Poles abundantly helped the Jews during the Second World War. The vindication of the Polish Righteous who helped the Jews rather than conspiring against them is a recent development that started after the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>54</sup> The concept of the Polish Righteous seeks to counteract other nations’ negative opinions of Poles and create positive Polish-nationalistic sentiments. In reality, the Poles who did help their Jewish neighbors during the war never celebrated or even acknowledged their part to save the Jews after the war out of fear that the rest of the Polish population would ostracize them.<sup>55</sup>

Despite of all these differing opinions on the relationship between Poles and Jews, the founders of the POLIN Museum wanted to focus on the positive interactions between the two groups. The POLIN Museum makes a point of presenting itself as a museum of history, not a Holocaust museum, and it emphasizes that it hopes to prove

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<sup>52</sup> Krishenblatt-Gimblett, 233.

<sup>53</sup> Krishenblatt-Gimblett, 223.

<sup>54</sup> Krishenblatt-Gimblett, 224.

<sup>55</sup> Krishenblatt-Gimblett, 224.

that the Holocaust was a negative stain on the long and largely positive history of Judaism and the Jewish people in Poland.<sup>56</sup> Museum related scholars such as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett state that, after all, the Polish Jews were the largest Jewish population in Europe for hundreds of years, something that would have been impossible if Poland had been a purely anti-Semitic country.<sup>57</sup> Thus, while the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* has a conflicting history in regards to honoring the Jews of Poland, the POLIN Museum that sits in front of it across the plaza (Figure 20) was conceived by Jews in order to honor and teach the history of the Jewish people in Poland. As a result, the location of Bartana's second film has now a stronger positive connotation regarding the relationship between Poles and Jews.

Before the POLIN Museum's existence, Bartana was already aware that the location where *Mur i Wieza* was filmed was especially appropriate for challenging anti-Semitism as a source of tensions between Poles and Jews. The *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* had been a site of conflicting values: while the Poles have considered it a nationalist and socialist symbol against fascism, the Jews have viewed it as a symbol of the Jewish victims and fighters of the Holocaust and as a visual example of why Poland is not a homeland for the Jews.<sup>58</sup> While most of Bartana's *Mur i Wieza* takes place in the park where the Jewish quarter used to be, there is a pivotal moment in the film when a Jewish settler (who is ironically portrayed by Polish painter Wilhelm Sasnal) stands in front of the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* (Figure 21).<sup>59</sup> There is no dialogue during this scene, nor is there an attempt to honor the fallen Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto.<sup>60</sup> Rather, the focus is on the sculpted face of the Polish Jew Mordechai

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<sup>56</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 225.

<sup>57</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 225.

<sup>58</sup> Kekesi, 173.

<sup>59</sup> Kekesi, 173. It is interesting to note here Bartana's choice to have a Polish artist take on the role of a Jewish settler in the film. While the implication of this decision has not been discussed in scholarship, it can be interpreted to be a symbol of the JRMIP's core ideology that Poles and Polish Jews are one unified people.

<sup>60</sup> In *Mur i Weiza*, the only moment of dialogue comes when the Jewish pioneers are preparing to set up the Wall ad Tower kibbutz in the park. The leader of the group speaks in Hebrew to the settlers that they have twenty-four hours to build a Jewish settlement in Poland. The audio for rest of his speech is cut off

Anielewicz, whose relief, bathed in light coming from the Wall and Tower settlement (Figure 22), suggests a new future for the Jews in Poland.<sup>61</sup> Bartana's film documents a fictional, 'new' kind of Jew—a Polish Jew who reclaims Polish land and has strong



Figure 21. Yael Bartana (*Mur i Wieza*). Jewish pioneer standing near the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes, 2009.



Figure 22. Yael Bartana (*Mur i Wieza*). Anielewicz' relief in the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes, lit from the Wall and Tower structure at night, 2009.

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and the film continues without dialogue from the characters. Analysis on the two songs played in the film will come later in this chapter.

<sup>61</sup> Kekesi, 174.



nationalistic ties to Poland. The whole proposition, however, is clearly unrealistic, not only because of Poland's history of anti-Semitism, but also because of the simple fact that there would be complaints from the native Poles if Jews came to their country to illegally set up a settlement and claim the land of a public park. What we see in *Mur i Wieza* is a reinvention and reversal of the early Zionist movement that eventually led to the creation of the Israeli state. It is necessary, then, to consider the consequences of establishing settlements and claiming lands that belong to others. And this is the point where Zionism and its related conflicts begin to play in Bartana's film trilogy.

The modern Zionist movement began in the late 19th century with the idea that the Jews should go back to the land of their ancestors and re-establish a Jewish autonomous home that would protect Jews and put an end to their long history of suffering, persecutions, and anti-Semitism around the world. The goal of Zionism was the return of the Jews to their ancestral land of Israel. The Jewish National Fund was founded in 1901 to buy land in Ottoman Palestine, a territory that after the First World War would be included in the British Mandate for Palestine and, following the Israeli-Arab war of 1948, would be divided between Israel and the Palestinians. The land purchases of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century opened the way to the establishment of settlements that would eventually serve as the basis for an independent Jewish State.<sup>62</sup> In that context, architecture became a crucial element for the Zionist movement, since any building or fortification constructed in the land of Israel was a physical realization of the ultimate goal. During the 1930s, a new architectural blueprint became particularly successful in helping to quickly establish Zionist settlements throughout the land: the model that became known as 'Wall and Tower' (the Hebrew words for 'Wall and Tower' are *Homa U'Migdal*, חומה ומגדל). The Wall and Tower settlements of the 1930s are considered to be the first type of 'native Israeli' architecture, even though they were

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<sup>62</sup> Sharon Rotbard, "Wall and Tower: The Mold of Israeli Adrikhault", in *City and Collision: Jerusalem and the Principles of Conflict Urbanism*, ed. Philipp Misselwitz (Boston: Birkhauser, 2006), 102.

created and built without supervision of professional architects.<sup>63</sup> It is important to note that, while they are known as ‘native Israeli’ architecture, all of the Wall and Tower settlements were constructed before the State of Israel was officially sanctioned by the United Nations in 1948. Today most Wall and Tower structures no longer exist, for they were meant to be temporary territorial landmarks that would be later taken down and replaced by the permanent buildings of the new settlements (Israeli socialist kibbutz communes and farms). A few Wall and Tower settlements have been reconstructed for educational purposes, such as the one built in kibbutz Negba that only includes one hut and has no practical use (Figure 23). The typical format for Wall and Tower settlements included four wooden huts that were surrounded by a wall that included an observation tower and a light projector.<sup>64</sup> Figure 24 is an example of a rare photograph of the Wall and Tower settlement Nir David, where the huts are visible behind the wall which has barbed wire on top of it. There are fences leaving the right side of the Wall and Tower construction, indicating that the Zionist settlers were beginning to farm and expand the settlement.



Figure 23. Unknown artist. Wall and Tower reconstruction Kibbutz Negba, c. 2015.

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<sup>63</sup> Rotbard, “Wall and Tower”, 103.

<sup>64</sup> Rotbard, “Wall and Tower”, 104-105.



Figure 24. Unknown artist. Nir David's Wall and Tower structure, c. 1936.

The construction of the Wall and Tower structures was a response to the 1936 Arab Revolt, the first instance of Palestinians fighting back against the Zionist settlers who were coming to Palestine and colonizing the land. Architecture was then used by the Zionists as a defensive-offensive strategy in retaliation, taking advantage of an old Ottoman law that was still in effect during the British Mandate period. This law stated that no illegal building may be demolished if the roof has been completed.<sup>65</sup> First designed by architect Yohanan Ratner, the idea behind the Wall and Tower was that the structures would be built in the span of one day, serve as a secure means of defense, and create multiple settlements on the ground that would irrefutably become property of the Zionist immigrants.<sup>66</sup> Eventually the Wall and Tower buildings, which served as landmarks for the first borderlines of the state of Israel, become an integral part of the Israeli "heroic foundation myth".<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Rotbard, "Wall and Tower", 103.

<sup>66</sup> Rotbard, "Wall and Tower", 103.

<sup>67</sup> Tamar Katriel, Aliza Shenhar, "Tower and Stockade: Dialogic Narration in Israeli Settlement Ethos," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* vol. 76, no. 4 (November 1990): 361.

The Wall and Tower settlements can be seen as an act of colonialism on the part of the Zionists. The ramifications of the Wall and Tower architecture are that, while it did help to finally create a Jewish state (which nations around the world deemed necessary after the trauma of the Holocaust), the Wall and Tower was also a tactical act of occupation that cemented a separation between the Zionist Jews coming to the land of Israel and the Palestinians who were already living there. Instead of promoting peace and cooperation after suffering hundreds of years of marginalization, the Jews ironically marginalized the Palestinians in the process of creating their own nation. Today the relationship between the Israeli nation and the Palestinians has become just as strained and entangled as the relationship between Poles and Jews.

It is to this parallel that Bartana calls attention in her film *Mur i Wieza*. Bartana creates a sense of discomfort for the viewers by having Israeli Jews return to Poland—the supposed homeland that the JRMIP promotes—and then build a settlement that can be historically seen as a tactic of occupation to secure their place in the land. The Wall and Tower settlement in Bartana’s film differs slightly from the original schematics of the Israeli blueprint: there are only two small buildings inside the wall and spray painted on one of those huts is the JRMIP symbol (the Star of David with the Polish Eagle, see Figure 14). Even though the historical and cultural implications are negative and tense, Bartana deals with the contradictory act of building a Wall and Tower settlement in a Warsaw park with a neutral but playful attitude. In the semi-nonsensical artbook *A Cookbook for Political Imagination* that Bartana published as supplemental material to the film trilogy, she includes a visual summary of *Mur i Wieza* film in the format of an Ikea instruction pamphlet (Figures 25 and 26). The four-page blueprint has little boxes that depict cartoon and stick figure people building the Wall and Tower settlement, adding barbed wire to the top of the wall, and finally setting up the JRMIP symbol via spray paint over a template (Figure 26).<sup>68</sup> The overall appearance of the ‘instruction manual’ is playful and, on the bottom right corner of the last box (Figure 26) there is

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<sup>68</sup> Yael Bartana, “Wall and Tower D.I.Y.” in *A Cookbook for Political Imagination*, ed. Sebastian Cichocki and Galit Eilat (Zacheta National Gallery of Art: Sternberg Press, 2011), 122-123.

text “Ruch Odrodzenia Żydowskiego w Polsce” which translates from Polish to “The Jewish Revival Movement in Poland” in English. Through this ‘instruction manual’, Bartana remains just as neutral as she is in her overall stance on the thematic content of the film trilogy: she merely *documents* the imaginary political movement and creates a whimsical archive to have people absorb thematic content that is difficult to parse.

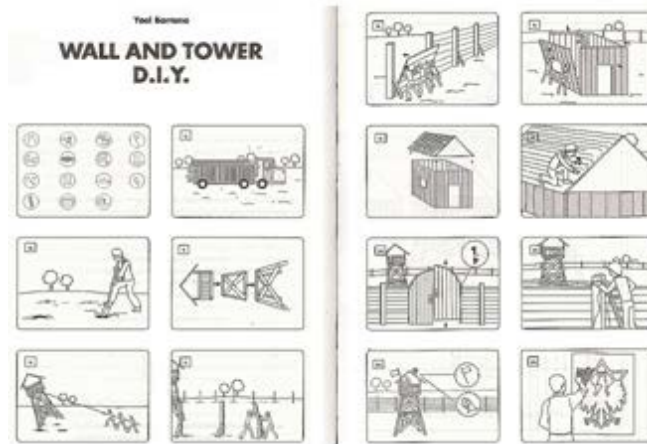


Figure 25. Yael Bartana (*Wall and Tower D.I.Y.*). Page one of parody of Ikea pamphlet for constructing a settlement, 2011.

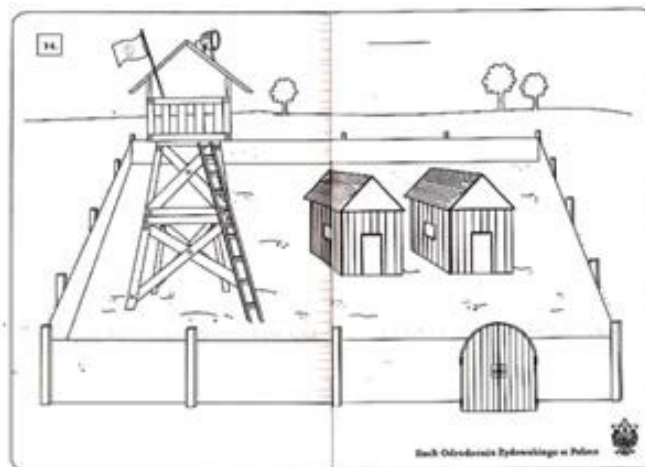


Figure 26. Yael Bartana (*Wall and Tower D.I.Y.*). Page two of parody of Ikea pamphlet for constructing a settlement, 2011.

In the setting of the Warsaw park, the Wall and Tower architecture does take on a whimsical nature, as if it were the skeletal structure for a children's playground. However, the action of having Jews install Wall and Tower architecture in the capital of Poland without the government's permission is inevitably viewed as a challenging act of occupation. The colonial implications cannot be removed from this kind of architecture and visually carries political weight. In the real world outside of Bartana's pseudo-documentary films, the building of a Wall and Tower settlement would be severely repressed with unavoidable repercussions for Jews and Poles. However, in the context of Bartana's films the negative historical connotations can be removed. Bartana uses the emotional, aesthetic and narrative power of a colonial act and turns the thematic message of colonialism on itself.<sup>69</sup> In the film, the creation of a Wall and Tower settlement in Warsaw takes on an almost inculpable, utopian quality. In *Mur i Wieza*, the act of building the settlement is simply seen as the only way in which presumably Israeli Jews know how to become part of the land. There is almost an innocent quality to the youthful Jewish pioneers who come with the intention of reintegrate themselves into Polish society. Instead of a colonial act, the JRMIP characters view the construction of the Jewish settlement as a sign of progress and union between the two social groups. In order to help cement that concept, Bartana entitled the second film of her trilogy *Mur i Wieza* (the Polish translation of the Wall and Tower words in Hebrew *Homa U'Migdal*). This detail is deliberate: Bartana could have chosen to title her three films in English as a sign of neutrality between Polish, Hebrew, and the two cultures that are supposedly being unifying by the JRMIP. But with all three film titles in Polish, Bartana emphasizes the outlandish premise of her pseudo-documentary film trilogy ; namely, that the real Jewish homeland should be Poland, and that the first language of the Polish Jews should be Polish.

As such, the beginning of *Mur i Wieza* could be seen as a work of propaganda for the JRMIP movement. It is important to keep in mind that every detail of Bartana's film

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<sup>69</sup> Kekesi, 178.

is intentional and contains a multitude of historical references. In particular, the aesthetic format of *Mur i Wieza* is different from *Mary Koszmary* in that Bartana visually references early Zionist propaganda films from the 1930s through the Jewish pioneers' clothing and props. Four Zionist propaganda films can be used for this visual comparison: *The Land of Promise* (1924) directed by Yaakov Ben-Dov; *Built in a Day* (1838) by Leo Herrmann; *The Establishment of Ein Gev* (1937) and *This is the Land* (1935), both by Baruch Agadati.<sup>70</sup> Of the four films, *The Establishment of Ein Gev* directly documents Zionist pioneers installing the Wall and Tower settlement, serving as visual proof that the Zionists are accomplishing their goals. The three other films are intentionally made to function as propaganda for European and American Jews to come to Palestine, and include text or a narrator describing the progress and the positive things that come with the Zionist Jews arriving in the land of Israel. These advertisements were essentially made for a European and American audience to encourage Jews to join the Zionist cause and create the 'real' Jewish homeland. *The Land of Promise* is the one film that does not focus solely on the construction of the Wall and Tower settlements. Through narration in English, *The Land of Promise* declares that the Zionist Jews from Europe are finally bringing Western culture and progress to the unlivable, arid landscape of the Middle East through farming and irrigation.<sup>71</sup> *The Land of Promise* utilizes the language of Orientalism to demonstrate that the Bedouin and Arab people who live there need Western culture and technology.<sup>72</sup> Thus, the propaganda serves as justification that the Zionist Jews need to come in order to redeem both the land and the Jewish nation.

Bartana's film begins with youthful Jews wearing clothing that looks like what the pioneer Jews wore in these early Zionist propaganda films (Figure 13). The pioneers wear button-up shirts and long pants in similar blue and tan colors in order to visually

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<sup>70</sup> All four films are available on YouTube through the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and are from The Spielberg Jewish Film Archive.

<sup>71</sup> Baruch Agadati's film also echoes this sentiment through the text in the film.

<sup>72</sup> Orientalism is essentially an aesthetic and language the West used to describe Asia and the Middle East. Through the language of Orientalism, these areas of the world were stereotyped in ways that made them seem inferior to Europeans. Orientalist language was a form for the West to purport colonialist ideas.

show group unity. Some women wear scarves on their heads while some of the men wear hats, and most of the people carry shovels, rakes, or tools in baskets that will be used in the construction of the Wall and Tower settlement in the Warsaw park. This particular shot in the beginning of *Mur i Wieza* directly mimics a scene from *The Land of Promise* where the youthful Zionists march from the left side of the screen in a backdrop of recently planted trees while carrying shovels, baskets, and tools to irrigate and farm in the land of Palestine (Figure 27). The Zionists that Bartana visually references wear similar styled clothing and accessories as the JRMIP Jews: the main difference is that many of the men and women wear shorts in *The Land of Promise* due to the arid and hot environment of the Middle East. There is also a similar visual parallel to this scene in *This is the Land* where the Zionist youngsters also approach the center of the screen from the left in similar clothing (Figure 28). However, the faces of the Zionists are not shown in this film and there is narrative text under their feet that is the main focus of that particular scene.



Figure 27. Yaakov Ben-Dov (*The Land of Promise*). Zionist pioneers marching with tools to construct Wall and Tower settlements, 1924.

One crucial difference to note about these visually similar scenes is the type of music used. In both of the Zionists propaganda films, the Jews are singing in Hebrew,



the ancient language that they had begun to reuse after years of speaking European languages or colloquial combinations of Hebrew and European languages such as Yiddish. For these Zionists, reviving Hebrew as the language of the new Jewish Nation was an example of accomplishing the goals of the movement. In the propaganda films, the young Zionist Jews sing proudly in Hebrew and the tone of the songs is jovial and



Figure 28. Baruch Agadati (*This is the Land*). The feet of marching Zionist pioneers with captions on the Jews' return to their homeland, 1935.

cheerful. However, in Bartana's film, the JRMIP Jews are silent and carry somber faces as they march in the Warsaw park. The music that plays in the background in the opening scene of *Mur i Wieza* is actually the Polish National Anthem *Mazurek Dąbrowskiego* (*Poland is Not Lost*). The significance of Bartana's use of the Polish National Anthem is that it audibly serves as a reversal of the values of Zionism. The Polish National Anthem blaring while the Jews march in the costume and props of Zionist pioneers is an intentionally jarring sight. The sound in the film then transitions into dark and seemingly incoherent music and then, as a poetic parallel to the use of the Polish National Anthem, Bartana incorporates the Israeli National Anthem,

*Hatikva* (which translates into English as *The Hope*) at the end of *Mur i Wieza* when the JRMIP flag is being raised. The Israeli National Anthem is played backwards as a metaphor for the themes of the JRMIP movement. For the fake JRMIP political movement, Israel is not the true homeland of the Jews: the homeland is Poland. By playing *Hatikva*

backwards in conjunction with the visuals of the JRMIP flag being raised at the end of the film, the music literally reflects the return of the Jews to Poland as much as it implies that the Jews are rejecting Israel as their homeland.

The visual comparisons of Bartana's film and the Zionist propaganda films continue in the ways in which the Jewish pioneers are depicted when the Wall and Tower settlements are installed. In *The Establishment of Ein Gev*, as many as seven people set up a hut wall inside the Wall and Tower (Figure 29). As this film is mainly a direct recording of the construction of Ein Gev settlement, there is little intentional artistic aesthetic implemented in the act of filming. The Zionists are not actors, they are people who are establishing architecture on land they will claim and live in. However, in *Mur i Wieza*, the visual shots Bartana films do have an artistic intent, such as in this shot where the camera is facing the inside of the wall that is being erected (Figure 30). The Wall and Tower settlement built in Bartana's film has no practical use and serves as a poetic reconstruction for the purposes of her film trilogy. Here the pseudo-documentary genre of Bartana's film is evident in that she uses her artistic lens to create an aesthetic: it is important to remember that the Wall and Tower in the Warsaw park is a temporary, skeletal construction that was built with the intention of being filmed for an art film. Of the five films compared, the settlement built in *Mur i Wieza* is the one that does not have a real, practical use. While all of the Wall and Tower structures in the films are temporary architectural landmarks, the ones constructed in the Zionist propaganda films served to establish Zionist settlements with people living inside them.



Figure 29. Baruch Agadati (*The Establishment of Ein Gev*). Zionist pioneers install a wall in Ein Gev's Wall and Tower structure, 1937.



Figure 30. Yael Bartana (*Mur i Wieza*). Jewish pioneers install a wall of the Wall and Tower structure in Warsaw, 2009.

This leads to one of the biggest differences between Bartana's film and the Zionist films. The Zionist propaganda films include and emphasize scenes that implicate militaristic involvement. In *Built in a Day*, there is the appearance of military vehicles (Figure 31) that drive through the desert and around the land that will be occupied with a Wall and Tower settlement. In *The Establishment of Ein Gev*, the camera pans over Zionist Jews on horseback who carry rifles on a patrol (Figure 32). *Built in a Day* also includes narration that justifies the militaristic presence. In the beginning of the film, the camera pans over text that states that the Zionist Jews have to build the Wall and Tower settlement in one day as a precaution and method of defending themselves from

the Bedouins and Arabs who resist their presence (Figure 33). The military presences in these propaganda films implicate the colonial subtext of Wall and Tower architecture. This is interesting to note because *Mur i Wieza* has no military visuals and there is no indication that they are building the Wall and Tower for defense. The strobe light on the tower is turned on in the end of the film, but it serves more as proof that the Warsaw Wall and Tower settlement is completed. The omission of military elements is crucial in order to understand the spirit of the JRMIP. The fake political movement intends to unify Jews and Poles and reincorporate the Jews into Polish culture, while the Zionist films purposefully segregate the Jews from the Arab population that already occupies the land. As previously mentioned, this is because the Zionist propaganda



Figure 31. Leo Herrmann (*Built in a Day*). Zionist pioneers on a military truck, 1938.



Figure 32. Baruch Agadati. Zionist pioneers on horseback with rifles. *The Establishment of Ein Gev*, 1937.

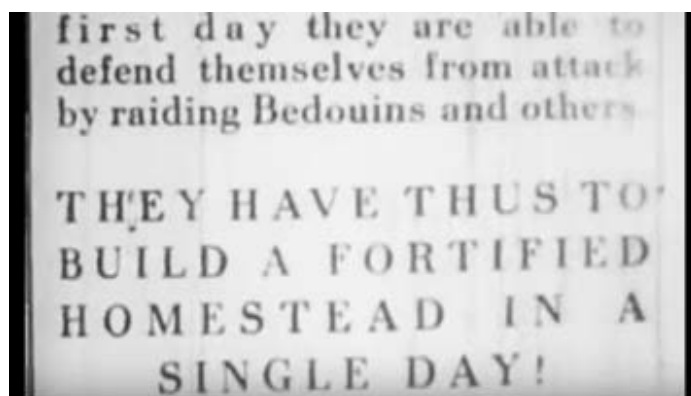


Figure 33. Leo Herrmann (*Built in a Day*). Film's narrative explains the need for Wall and Tower fortifications to protect settlers from Beduins, 1938.

films make the distinction between the traditional, backward Arabs and the modern Jews from the West. This is basically the language used in *The Land of Promise*, where the English narrator states that those who lived in the Middle East had allowed the degradation of the land, and that the arrival of the Zionist Jews was necessary to bring progress.<sup>73</sup> As a result, Bartana's omission serves the thematic goal of the JRMIP, which is to unify Poles and Jews and not belittle a culture or claim that one's group is superior. However, it is important to repeat that Bartana is not a supporter of the JRMIP. As previously mentioned, her films incorporate a multitude of historical contradictions and references to spur discussion on the relationship between Jews and Poles. One example is the ominous scene in *Mur i Wieza* where the pioneering Jews take a break from work and lie in a pile (Figure 13) that evokes imagery of the stacked corpses of Polish Jews murdered by the Nazis and thrown into ditches. Despite the playful, positive attitudes of the pioneers in the film, this scene seems to suggest the inevitability of a horrific conclusion of the Jews' re-integration into Poland. Bartana purposefully avoids making clear her own stance because she wants the viewers of her films to make these

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<sup>73</sup> "Ben-Dov, Yaakov. "The Spielberg Jewish Film Archive: The Land of Promise," filmed in 1924 by Yaakov Ben-Dov. Uploaded to YouTube by The Spielberg Jewish Film Archive. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDoD6W2z01s&list=PLATmkJR6n\\_nWAFJdM7BK48QV07vafKwPi&index=6](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDoD6W2z01s&list=PLATmkJR6n_nWAFJdM7BK48QV07vafKwPi&index=6)

historical connections and decide for themselves how to interpret the vicissitudes of the Polish-Jewish cultural relationship.

#### IV. ZAMACH: THE IMPLICATIONS OF ASSASSINATION IN A FICTIONAL, YET FUNCTIONAL UTOPIA

*Zamach (Assassination)*, the final film of Bartana's "...And Europe Will Be Stunned" trilogy, centers on the funeral of Slawomir Sierakowski's fictional persona, who has been assassinated for his ideals and leadership role in the JRMIP. Longer than the other two films, the 35-minute video is a pseudo-documentary about an imagined future in which the JRMIP movement has succeeded in becoming a powerful force in Polish culture and politics. The fictional plot begins with an unnamed assassin murdering Sierakowski's character as he stands in front of a painting by Bruno Schulz in Warsaw's Zacheta National Art Gallery.<sup>74</sup> No information is offered on the particular painting that Sierakowski was contemplating, but the identification of the artist is compelling: Bruno Schulz, a Modernist Polish Jewish writer and visual artist, was murdered in 1942 by a Nazi officer while walking home with a loaf of bread in Drohobycz Ghetto.<sup>75</sup> In Bartana's *Zamach*, Sierakowski's imposing funeral procession and ceremony tells viewers that the JRMIP has become a multicultural movement, as masses of people of different races and ethnicities are in attendance with signs, clothing, and banners that suggest the existence of widespread solidarity and of a united political front (Figure 34 and 35). *Zamach* deals with the aftermath of the assassination, raising questions about its possible impact on the future of the JRMIP. As in the previous two films, Bartana offers a conglomeration of historical and artistic references that viewers can use to reach their own conclusions on the issues raised by the film trilogy. Most of Bartana's references in *Zamach* are inspired by the actual funeral ceremonies of well-known political leaders assassinated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This chapter juxtaposes Sierakowski's funeral with the funeral of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who was assassinated in 1995.

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<sup>74</sup> Kekesi, 182.

<sup>75</sup> Carol Zemel, *Looking Jewish: Visual Culture and Modern Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 2015: 53.



Figure 34. Yael Bartana (*Zamach*). JRMIP followers resembling protesters at Sierakowski's funeral, 2011.



Figure 35. Yael Bartana (*Zamach*). Close-up of a black JRMIP follower at Sierakowski's funeral, 2011.

There is a powerful correspondence between the fictional martyrdom of Sierakowski and the death of Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli chief of state who actively sought to achieve peace with the Palestinians by recognizing their national and territorial rights. Rabin's assassination must have had a profound effect on Bartana. At the time, she had recently finished her mandatory military service in the Israeli army and was a student at the Bezalel Academy of Arts in Jerusalem.<sup>76</sup> A central component of Bartana's pseudo-

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<sup>76</sup> In Israeli culture, it is mandatory for every citizen to be conscripted in the Israeli Military at the age of eighteen (with exceptions of physical and mental disabilities). It is a three-year conscription for men and



documentary *Zamach* is the succession of speeches from real and fictional people in Sierakowski's funeral ceremony. The reference to the speeches in Rabin's funeral is unmistakable, and the speeches are also reminiscent of some scenes in Leni Riefenstahl's *The Triumph of the Will*. From the point of view of content, however, there is a key difference between the speeches in Sierakowski's funeral and those delivered at Rabin's funeral and Riefenstahl's Nazi rallies. In the latter, there is a clear unanimity in the content of the speeches, but in Bartana's *Zamach* the speeches reveal contradicting perspectives about Sierakowski and the ideals of the JRMIP. The final part of this chapter analyzes the way in which Bartana chooses to break the spell of the JRMIP's utopia and reveal the nature of the trilogy as a set of faux documentaries. For that, she introduces Rifke, a ghost mentioned in *Mary Koszmary* who now returns as the personification of the Jews who died in the Holocaust to contemplate the JRMIP among the crowd of the living and question its utopia. Overall, the analysis of the fictional JRMIP is punctuated by the contextual examination of specific elements in the history of the tensions between Poles and Jews.

Bartana's *Zamach* opens with Sierakowski lying in state inside the Palace of Science and Culture in Warsaw (Figure 36). The Palace of Science and Culture is one of the most important buildings in Poland's capital because it houses the offices of important public and government institutions and serves as a center for exhibitions, concerts and cultural events.<sup>77</sup> In *Zamach*, mourners line up in the central aisle of the Palace's indoor auditorium to view the dead Sierakowski and place white flowers in and around his casket (Figure 37). The decoration and backdrop of the otherwise empty auditorium overtly references monumental Soviet and Nazi visual aesthetics. Behind Sierakowski's casket there is a giant red banner with the JRMIP symbol, which strikingly recalls Soviet aesthetics (Figure 38). While the color red is associated with Communism, the JRMIP's use of red also symbolizes the national colors of Poland. Bartana noted in

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two-year conscription for women. As well as being the Israeli Prime Minister, Rabin was also a famous military hero in Israel.

<sup>77</sup> Kekesi, 182-183.



Figure 36. Unknown artist. Warsaw's Palace of Culture and Science, c. 2010.

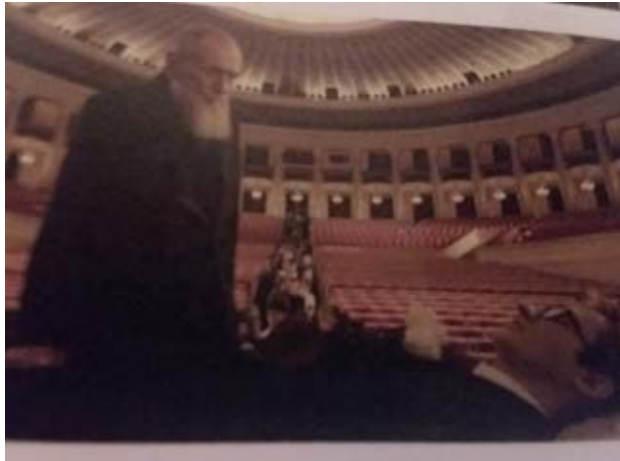


Figure 37. Yael Bartana (*Zamach*). Funeral attendees paying respects to Sierakowski, 2011.



Figure 38. Yael Bartana (*Zamach*). Sierakowski lying in state in front of a giant JRMIP banner, 2011.

an interview that, among Russian viewers, the visual aesthetics of *Zamach* tend to elicit disgust and aversion because the monumental scale and the red color remind them of Stalinism and Communism.<sup>78</sup> Placed in front of Sierakowski's casket is a red-and-white floral arrangement of the eagle and Star of David symbol of the JRMIP. In addition to the banner and flowers, a colossal sculptural bust of Sierakowski stands outside the Palace of Science and Culture (Figure 39). The sculpture implicates the gigantic scale and political influence of the JRMIP. Ironically, these decorations also reflect the visual



Figure 39. Yael Bartana (*Zamach*). Colossal Sierakowski bust displayed at the funeral ceremony, 2011.

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<sup>78</sup> Louisiana Channel, "Yael Bartana Interview: Returning 3,3 Million Jews to Poland", YouTube Video, 12:57, February 17th, 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bO9IHA7K4IU&index=2&list=PLATmkJR6n\\_nWAFJdM7BK48QV07vafKwPi&t=1061s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bO9IHA7K4IU&index=2&list=PLATmkJR6n_nWAFJdM7BK48QV07vafKwPi&t=1061s).

culture of Nazism, which used aggrandizing aesthetics as a metaphor for power.<sup>79</sup> The red-and-white color scheme, Sierakowski's funeral decorations, and the mourners' clothing all serve to establish the nature of JRMIP as a Polish political party. The deployment of aggrandizing aesthetics indicates the success of the movement as a fully realized utopia.

The rest of the film takes place in the public square in front of the Palace of Science and Culture where the grieving crowds flood the area with pickets and signs showing their support to the JRMIP (see Figure 34). The JRMIP members wear clothing with red scarves and armbands that signal Polish nationality, but also serve as ironic echoes of Nazi armbands worn on the uniforms of party members and the youth groups. Depicted on the armbands is the JRMIP emblem of the Polish eagle and Star of David, an antonym to the infamous swastika symbol appropriated by the German Nazis.<sup>80</sup> Many of the uniform-like shirts worn by young people in the crowd display either the JRMIP symbol or the quote "We shall be strong in our weakness." This proclamation becomes the equivalent of a campaign slogan. Two youngsters repeat the phrase near the end of the last speech at Sierakowski's funeral ceremony.

Among the mass of people attending the public funeral there are varying ages, ethnicities, and religions, implying that the JRMIP ideology has successfully become accepted and everyone (not just Jews) from any minority background can now join the movement. In this imagined future, the JRMIP has become a widespread and prominent

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<sup>79</sup> One can compare the colossal bust of Sierakowski to the Nazi ideals of visually having their art and architecture tie them to the glory of the Roman Empire. As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, Hitler and his main architect and political subordinate Albert Speer sought to rebuild Berlin and German visual culture to an extremist form of Neoclassicism, which proved to them that the Nazi Party was the political and spiritual successor of the Roman Empire. While the bust of Sierakowski can be compared to that of the late Roman sculpture of the *Colossus of Constantine* (Figure 42: a giant full-body sculpture built in 312-315 B.C.E. that had fallen apart and where the famous remaining piece is the giant head of Constantine), it is important to note that the JRMIP does not interpret the bust as a symbol of power. If anything, the bust of Sierakowski is a pastiche the Bartana included as a form of irony to juxtapose the growing JRMIP to the visual culture of Nazism.

<sup>80</sup> It is curious to note that both the symbols of the JRMIP and Nazi regime were appropriated symbols. The JRMIP combines the Star of David—the emblematic image of Judaism and the Jewish people—and the crowned eagle that symbolizes the nation of Poland. The swastika originally was a Hindu symbol of prosperity that the Nazis appropriated as the symbol of their regime and of the Aryan race.

political force. The signs carried by people display various images and text, ranging from portraits of Sierakowski to texts written in Polish, Hebrew, and English (Figures 34 and 40). However, it is clear that the people in the crowd are represented more like protesters rather than members of a unified group. The most striking protest imagery



Figure 40. Yael Bartana (*Zamach*). Another image of JRMIP followers resembling protesters at Sierakowski's funeral, 2011.

comes from those in the crowd who carry signs while wearing blank, emotionless grey and white masks (Figure 41). These masks do not appear in the previous two films and their origin or purpose is not mentioned in any of the Bartana interviews or the rest of the literature about the film trilogy. In the context of this particular film, which serves as the finale of the trilogy about the JRMIP, the presence of the masks marks a social commentary about the nature of protests happening today. Mask-wearing political protests have become common since the 2000s. Wearing masks unifies people and creates a third-person subjective criticism of the hegemonic social and political norms.<sup>81</sup> By wearing the mask and obscuring their identity, protesters reject personal

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<sup>81</sup> Lone Riisgaard and Bjorn Thomassen. "Powers of the Mask: Political Subjugation and Rites of Participation in Local-Global Protest," *Theory, Culture and Society* Vol. 33, No. 6, 2016: 86. The third person subjective criticism occurs when the multitude of people wearing masks reject referring to themselves in terms of first person experience. Wearing the same mask makes a group form a collective "we" persona that creates a universal unity in the act of protesting.

representation in favor of universal unity in their ideas and political position.<sup>82</sup> While Sierakowski's funeral is not exactly a political protest, Bartana uses the blank masks and protest imagery in juxtaposition to the utopianism of the JRMIP. Does the imagery represent an attempt to promote the JRMIP via protest, or does it function as another tool to challenge the JRMIP's utopian concept (by questioning the validity of protests in the ideal world of an utopian future)?<sup>83</sup> Bartana successfully raises these issues simply by incorporating the masks as part of the costumes worn by the crowds in *Zamach*.



Figure 41. Yael Bartana (*Zamach*). JRMIP members wearing blank masks and carrying banners at Sierakowski's funeral, 2011.

The second half of the film is largely centered on the speeches given to honor Sierakowski and either exalt or negatively criticize the JRMIP movement. In the real world, most of these speakers are well-known art historians, writers, and journalists who perform as themselves in the film. The speakers include Polish Holocaust survivor, art historian, and curator Anda Rottenberg, Israeli writer Alona Frankel (a Holocaust survivor), and popular Israeli journalist Yaron London.<sup>84</sup> Sierakowski's real-life spouse,

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<sup>82</sup> Riisgaard and Thomassen, "Powers of the Mask," 89.

<sup>83</sup> The nature of the fictional utopia in comparison to reality outside the film trilogy will be discussed later in the chapter.

<sup>84</sup> Kekesi, 183.

who plays the role of grieving widow of the fictional JRMIP leader, wrote her own text for the eulogy.<sup>85</sup> In fact, all the speakers wrote their own speeches for the fictitious funeral.<sup>86</sup> The final speeches are given by two leaders of the JRMIP youth movement impersonated by Marek Maj and Salome Gersch. Their positions in the movement and their ethnic or religious affiliations remain ambiguous.

The first speech is given by Sierakowski's wife who, as stated above, plays herself as the leader's widow (Figure 49). She delivers her eulogy in Hebrew, saying that she left her homeland, country and family for his.<sup>87</sup> After recounting the experience of witnessing her husband being shot at the gallery and his death in the hospital, she bids him farewell and declares that she and the JRMIP will continue fulfilling his dream of a unified Poland open to minorities and marginalized people.<sup>88</sup> Importantly, the widow reads from a note received from Sierakowski moments before his death:

'But I say unto you: love your enemies, and pray for them who persecute you. There are no chosen people'.<sup>89</sup>

Sierakowski integrates a biblical quote in the first sentence, but then denies the Bible's concept of a single "chosen people." While it is more common for Jews to refer to themselves as the "chosen people", the concept also exists in Christianity and Islam. Each of the three main Western religions claims that god has chosen their religious community above all the others on earth as his favored people and are thus protected by him.<sup>90</sup> Sierakowski's rebuke of the idea that there are "chosen people" is an important personal testament to the concept behind the JRMIP. As seen in *Mary Koszmary*, Sierakowski's original goal was the return of 3.3 million Jews to Poland to fill

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<sup>85</sup> Louisiana Channel, "Yael Bartana Interview." 14:20 min.

<sup>86</sup> Louisiana Channel, "Yael Bartana Interview."

<sup>87</sup> Bartana, "And Europe Will Be Stunned...", 123. It should be noted that there is no mention in interviews or literature if Sierakowski's wife is actually Jewish or if it is part of the fiction of the faux documentary.

<sup>88</sup> Bartana, "And Europe Will Be Stunned...", 123.

<sup>89</sup> Bartana, "And Europe Will Be Stunned...", 124.

<sup>90</sup> Reuven Firestone, *Who are the Real Chosen People?: The Meaning of Chosenness in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Woodstock: Sky Paths Publishing, 2008), vii.

the cultural and historical void left after the horrors of the Holocaust. Sierakowski acknowledged Poland's history of treating its Jewish minority atrociously and violently



Figure 42. Yael Bartana (*Zamach*). Sierakowski's widow giving her funeral eulogy, 2011.

to the point that all the surviving Jews preferred to leave. The JRMIP movement began with the belief that Poland needed to acknowledge and bring back its lost minority. By the time of the imagined future in *Zamach*, the definition of Polishness has expanded beyond the simple opposition of "Poles" and "Jews" as the movement has opened itself up to all Polish minorities and marginalized groups. As such, the inclusion of all these different cultures, religions, and identities creates a world where everyone is unified and no one group is "chosen" above the others. The JRMIP becomes a symbol of inclusion standing for the creation of an utopian community.

The next eulogy is given by Anda Rottenberg (Figure 43), the Polish-Jewish art historian who currently works as a curator in the Zacheta National Art Gallery where Sierakowski's fictional assassination occurred.<sup>91</sup> Out of the three Jewish speakers, Rottenberg is the only one who still lives in Poland; the other two live in Israel. Despite her real-life connection to the imagined story of Sierakowski's assassination, Rottenberg

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<sup>91</sup> Anda Rottenberg, "Women in the Arts: Anda Rottenberg," *Frieze*, June 4, 2018, <https://frieze.com/article/women-arts-anda-rottenberg>.



does not address the events of the murder nor does she bring up Bruno Schulz, whose art was being contemplated by Sierakowski when he was murdered. Instead, she talks about the history of the famous Polish city Zamosc, a Renaissance city built in 1601 by the nobleman Jan Zamoyski.<sup>92</sup> In Rottenberg's words, the city of Zamosc was built to become a real-life utopia, where people of different cultures and religions lived in harmony and unity. However, the dream was never fulfilled because the city lost relevance and was later rebuilt under the pressure of the Soviet-hegemony during the Cold War.<sup>93</sup> Rottenberg states that the JRMIP movement marks the start of the renewal of utopia in Poland. To her, the JRMIP concept of accepting the 'other' and unifying Jews and Poles is an echo to the utopian values of Zamosc. She finishes her eulogy declaring that the JRMIP is the resurrected heir of Poland's utopian dreams and that the country will continue to work to fulfill Sierakowski's vision.<sup>94</sup> Among the eulogies, Rottenberg's speech is the one that directly addresses the utopian motif that permeates *Zamach*, supporting and promoting the notion that the JRMIP has made strides in the direction of an ideal, improved society in Poland.



Figure 43. Yael Bartana (*Zamach*). Anda Rottenberg giving her funeral eulogy, 2011.

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<sup>92</sup> Bartana, "And Europe Will Be Stunned...", 123.

<sup>93</sup> Bartana, "And Europe Will Be Stunned...", 123.

<sup>94</sup> Bartana, "And Europe Will Be Stunned...", 123.

The next speech is delivered by Holocaust survivor and Israeli author Alona Frankel (Figure 44). She is particularly known for writing children's books and an autobiographical memoir about her experience as a little girl during the Holocaust.<sup>95</sup> She begins her speech by introducing herself and her Polish heritage and offering a brief summary of her traumatic experiences during the Holocaust and the anti-Semitic persecutions that followed in Poland.<sup>96</sup> She and her family lost their Polish citizenship during the post-war years and found solace by emigrating to Israel. After that initial summary, she makes a peculiar announcement:

Give me back my citizenship, which was taken from me by force! I will not live among you. Israel is my country. And I do not wish to live in any other place in the world. But, returning my Polish citizenship to me will be an act of historical justice of vital importance to me!<sup>97</sup>

With that she thanks the audience for listening to her, wishes them the best, and concludes her speech without mentioning Sierakowski or the JRMIP. While Frankel does not openly denounce the JRMIP, the act of ignoring its existence is an implicit critique of the idea that Poles and Jews can truly accept each other.

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<sup>95</sup> Michael Handelzalts, "Alona Frankel Wins Sapir Literature Prize for 'Girl,'" *Haaretz*, June 23, 2005, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.4912888>.

<sup>96</sup> Bartana, "And Europe Will Be Stunned...", 123.

<sup>97</sup> Bartana, "And Europe Will Be Stunned...", 123-124.



Figure 44. Yael Bartana (*Zamach*). Alona Frankel giving her funeral eulogy, 2011.

The following speaker is Israeli journalist and media personality Yaron London (Figure 45). His eulogy directly addresses Sierakowski and describes him as a “dear, innocent Pole.”<sup>98</sup> While London states that he respects Sierakowski and his dreams, he is clearly against the JRMIP. After describing the hundreds of years of suffering in Poland and the culmination of that trauma with the Holocaust, London notes that there is no longer a European Jewish (or Polish Jewish) culture because Europeans got rid of their Jews: “Rifke is gone.”<sup>99</sup> London then makes the following proclamation about the importance of Israel (despite the country’s mistreatment of the Palestinian people) and his reasons for opposing the JRMIP:

Dear Slawek, Do not the Jews deserve a place under the sun? Only utter fools can yearn for a utopian world that will erase centuries of riots and hatred. Only someone who fails to realize that the State of Israel is the true Jewish homeland can devote his life to the brainless task of returning the Jews to Europe.

For us, the Jews, this is not a hopeful promise. It is a nightmare. Voices are heard today claiming that the Zionist movement was conceived in sin, that it is outdated and has no future, that it is on its deathbed. It has been said that the Holocaust took place in Europe, but the reparations for it are at the expense of the Palestinians.

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<sup>98</sup> Bartana, “And Europe Will Be Stunned”, 124.

<sup>99</sup> Bartana, “And Europe Will Be Stunned”, 124.

Dear members of the movement, for all your good will, you do not understand the simple, incontestable fact that the State of Israel and its armed forces are the only guarantee against another Holocaust.<sup>100</sup>

London's admonition to Sierakowski and the JRMIP movement reflects the typical Israeli response and attitude towards the Poland as a country. Bartana echoes this notion in a video interview about the films, wherein she states that Poland is culturally known as a 'no-no' land in Israel, where there are even colloquial sayings that one must never put a foot on Polish soil.<sup>101</sup> Bartana then notes that, ironically, Israelis actually prefer to visit Germany and have little animosity against the Germans, despite the fact that the Nazi party originated in their country.<sup>102</sup> In his eulogy, London asserts that the State of Israel is the only true homeland for Jews, that Europe can never be their home, and that the world knows that the Holocaust as concrete proof of this fact. His position reflects the militant nationalistic attitude that has come to prevail in Israel as the socialist leanings



Figure 45. Yael Bartana (*Zamach*). Yaron London prepares to give his eulogy, 2011.

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<sup>100</sup> Bartana, "And Europe Will Be Stunned", 124.

<sup>101</sup> Louisiana Channel, "Yael Bartana Interview", 3:18.

<sup>102</sup> Louisiana Channel, "Yael Bartana Interview", 3:23.

of the early decades of Zionism were left behind and right-wing politics become the norm. The militaristic stances of Israel have had the very negative consequence of promoting abuse and mistreatment against the Palestinian people. While London briefly addresses the suffering of the Palestinians his speech, he seems to hint that the survival of the State of Israel necessitates the existence of a marginalized group for 'the greater good' of the nation. Perhaps this line was London's way of suggesting that there can never be a utopian community because there will always be groups who inflict pain on other groups to ensure their own survival. Bartana would most likely want the viewers of her film to deconstruct London's stance, for it echoes the attitude that Europeans maintained against the Jews for hundreds of years. History repeats itself as one minority group comes into power and forces another marginalized group to suffer.

The final speakers in Sierakowski's funeral are the fictional JRMIP youth leaders Marek Maj and Salome Gersch (Figure 46).<sup>103</sup> They wear the new JRMIP youth uniform: white shirt, kaki-brown pants, red scarf, and black armband (to honor and mourn



Figure 46. Yael Bartana (*Zamach*). JRMIP youth leaders Marek Maj and Salome Gersch giving their eulogy, 2011.

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<sup>103</sup> The literature on the film trilogy does not indicate if Marek Maj and Salome Gersch are the names of the actors or if they are purely invented characters like the ghost Rifke.

Sierakowski) with the JRMIP symbol. As characters, they symbolize the continuity of the JRMIP. Their eulogy to Sierakowski focuses on the future of the movement and becomes a cry for the world to join the JRMIP:

Slawomir! Your heritage, which combines Judaism with universality, commands us to have ever-lasting faith. Poles and Jews together, we shall advance, shoulder to shoulder, in the name of the noble ideal of coexistence. Together we shall prevent the surges of nationalism and racism in Europe. This is the response we propose for this time of crisis, when faith has been exhausted and old utopias have failed. Optimism is dying out. The promised paradise has been privatized.  
The kibbutz apples and watermelons are no longer as ripe.  
We direct our appeal not only to Jews. We accept into our ranks all those for whom there is no place in their homeland, the expelled and persecuted. There will be no discrimination in our movement.  
We shall not ask for your life stories, we shall not check your residence cards, nor question your refugee status. We shall be strong in our weakness.  
With one religion we cannot listen.  
With one color we cannot see.  
With one culture we cannot feel.  
Without you we cannot even remember.  
Join us and Europe will be stunned.<sup>104</sup>

Their speech indicates that the JRMIP has evolved into a firm opponent to nationalism, xenophobia, and racism. By welcoming all marginalized groups (not just Poles and Jews) within their ranks, the movement clearly strives for a new utopia of coexistence and the destruction of the old philosophies that have led to nationalism and racism.

The fact that the entirety of Sierakowski's funeral parallels that of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has been completely missed by the scholarship on Bartana's work. Rabin was murdered due to his active work to secure and finalize peace between Israel and Palestine. Rabin's life, death, and funeral ceremony directly shaped Bartana's

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<sup>104</sup> Bartana, "And Europe Will Be Stunned", 125.

life and career as an Israeli contemporary artist.<sup>105</sup> At the time of his death in 1995, the Prime Minister had been working on peace treaties with the Palestinian people and neighboring Arab nations. He intended to hand over to the Palestinians most of the territories that Israel had occupied during the 1967 Six Day War, which would have eventually led to the establishment of a viable independent Palestinian state.<sup>106</sup> This was at odds with his past trajectory because Rabin, who was considered a war hero, had been the commander-in-chief of the army when those territories were conquered. However, as the country's Prime Minister, he came to understand that the status-quo of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was unacceptable for the future of both groups and opened peace negotiations with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and President Bill Clinton as mediator.<sup>107</sup> Rabin was assassinated by Yigal Amir, an Israeli nationalist-extremist.<sup>108</sup> The assassination has been called one of the "most effective" political murders in history because it led to a hardening of positions that has undermined the possibilities for peace for more than 20 years.<sup>109</sup> As an Israeli, Bartana experienced this pivotal moment in her country's history. The increasingly right-wing extremist attitudes in Israel resulted in more antagonistic and violent conflicts with the Palestinians, making peace attempts ever more challenging.

Rabin's funeral took place two days after his assassination in an atmosphere of shock and deep consternation. The political assassination was a collective trauma for the Israeli people, with psychological symptoms of confusion and anguish extending for

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<sup>105</sup> Bartna's earliest artworks (ranging from photographs, films, and audio installations) that brought her into the spotlight in the Contemporary art world are concerned solely on the State of Israel and what it means to be an Israeli. She critiqued her own home nation for many years before starting on international art projects with countries such as Poland, Finland, and Brazil.

<sup>106</sup> Dexter Filkins, "Shot in the Heart: When Yitzhak Rabin was Killed, Did the Prospects for Peace Perish Too?", *The New Yorker*, October 26, 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/10/26/shot-in-the-heart>.

<sup>107</sup> Filkins, "Shot in the Heart."

<sup>108</sup> Right-winged extremist Yigal Amir believed that Rabin betrayed the State of Israel when he began his work to make peace with Palestine and cede the occupied territories to the Palestinian people. He viewed Rabin to be selling out the Israeli nation, especially the settlers who had moved into the occupied territories.

<sup>109</sup> Filkins, "Shot in the Heart."

weeks after his death.<sup>110</sup> During the two days of official national mourning, Rabin's coffin was placed on the pavilion of the Knesset (Israeli Parliament), where 20% of Israel's population, about a million people, came to pay respects (Figure 47).<sup>111</sup> While the mourners comprised a diverse crowd, adolescents and young adults attracted the most attention as they ritualistically lit candles, sat on the floor, and sang songs (Figure 48).<sup>112</sup> The multitudes of Israeli youngsters who grieved Rabin are echoed in *Zamach* by the myriad young JRMIP members participating in Sierakowski's funeral. Young people mourning a leader who symbolized progressive political values amount to a striking visual signifier. Of course, the contexts vary. The Israeli youth grieved the end of peacemaking between Israel and Palestine. In the case of the JRMIP, the youngsters lamented the death of their leader, but they remained confident that the movement would live on in a new utopian Poland.



Figure 47. CNN Image. Yitzhak Rabin's coffin in the Knesset pavilion during the funeral ceremony, 1995.

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<sup>110</sup> Avigdor Klingman and Ronit Shalev, "Graffiti: Voices of Israeli Youth Following the Assassination of the Prime Minister," *Youth & Society* 32, No. 4 (June 2001): 403-404.

<sup>111</sup> Avigdor, Klingman, "Israeli Children's Reactions to the Assassination of the Prime Minister," *Death Studies* Vol. 25, Issue 1 (January 2001): 33.

<sup>112</sup> Klingman, "Israeli Children's Reactions, 33.





Figure 48. Unknown artist. Israeli youth mourning Yitzhak Rabin in the Knesset Pavilion, 1995.

While it did not happen during Rabin's funeral ceremony, there was an artistic vein in the spontaneous public mourning of the Israeli youngsters. In addition to the ritualistic candle lighting and songs in the Knesset pavilion, there was a sudden rise of street art and graffiti revolving around Rabin's assassination (Figure 49). The relationship between the Israeli youth, graffiti, and ritualistic song and candle lighting—where public mourning takes the form of artistic impulses— shares a similar parallel with the JRMIP youth's reactions to Sierakowski's death. In *Zamach*, they actively



Figure 49. Unknown artist. Close-up of graffiti about Yitzhak Rabin's death, 1995.

participate in the funeral ceremony with posters, clothing, and masks that artistically tie their activism to the mourning of Sierakowski (Figures 34, 40 and 41). Most importantly, Bartana casts a group of youngsters sitting on the floor and ritualistically lighting candles to honor Sierakowski (Figure 50) in very much the same way in which the Israeli youth gathered to light candles and mourn Rabin (Figure 48). When comparing these photographs, though, one can see interesting visual differences. The



Figure 50. Yael Bartana (*Zamach*). JRMIP youth around JRMIP logo formed with candles, 2011.

Israeli gathering was clearly spontaneous: the young adults wear no military uniform and they are not sitting in an organized manner. One of the Israeli youths holds the nation's flag on his lap. The Knesset pavilion where they stand is completely soiled with paper and trash. In contrast, the Palace of Science and Culture square where the JRMIP youth sit appears completely clean. The youngsters wear uniforms and sit in a circle in an organized manner. This visual choice may ironically reference the Nazi Youth Groups (like in *Mary Kozsmay*), as Bartana once again juxtaposes a pro-Jewish, utopian Poland with the anti-Jewish Nazi party that sought the hegemony of the Aryan race. Another striking comparison can be seen in the use of candles; the Israeli youth arranged the candles to form the Hebrew word למה (why) and the JRMIP youth form the iconic symbol of their movement. The Hebrew word for "why" symbolizes a nation reacting to a political assassination in grief, recognizing the end of a political era. The JRMIP logo, in contrast, shows a political party mourning the death of its leader but also celebrating unification, strength, and new political era. In the case of mourning Rabin, the

youngsters continued to appear in the Knesset pavilion for months following the funeral.

Rabin's funeral ceremony took place at the Mount Herzl national cemetery in the company of members of the public and international political leaders.<sup>113</sup> Rabin's status as a longtime soldier and former commander-in-chief during the Six Day War could be seen in the ceremony's officiation by a military rabbi and the strong presence of military personnel. In Sierakowski's funeral, on the other hand, there is no military presence. Soldiers carry Rabin's coffin (which, unlike Sierakowski's, is closed) from the Knesset pavilion to the Mount Herzl ceremony (Figure 51). Rabin's coffin is followed not only by Prime Minister Rabin's wife and family, but also by military officers, other political leaders, members of the Orthodox Jewish religious establishment, and a large crowd of people (Figure 52). The civilians are dressed in traditional black, while the military officers wear the white uniform of the Israeli Navy or the olive-green uniform of the regular Israeli Army (Figure 53).



Figure 51. Associated Press Archive. Israeli soldiers lift up Yitzhak Rabin's coffin at the end of the funeral ceremony, 1995.

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<sup>113</sup> Alan Cowell, "Assassination in Israel: The Funeral: Arafat Absence from Funeral Underscores a Fragile Peace," *The New York Times*, November 6, 1995, <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/11/06/world/assassination-israel-funeral-arafat-absence-funeral-underscores-fragile-peace.html>.



Figure 52. Associated Press Archive. Yitzhak Rabin's funeral procession towards Mt. Herzl, 1995.



Figure 53. Associated Press Archive. Civilians wearing black and soldiers in military uniforms at Yitzhak Rabin's funeral, 1995.

While the public's presence is notable at both funerals, in Sierakowski's funeral the crowd uniquely resembles a gathering protest. The presence of the figures in masks and people carrying signs creates tension despite the fact that the JRMIP movement is

in the process of creating a utopia. Rabin's funeral marked a symbolic end to hopes of a peaceful relationship between Israelis and Palestinians and has resulted in escalations of violence and terrorism. Despite Bartana's incorporation of protest aesthetics in her film, Sierakowski's fictional funeral marks a symbolic beginning for the JRMIP and the nation of Poland. His death amounts to martyrdom for the sake of a peaceful, unified Poland. But despite the film's hopeful end, there is no way of knowing if the utopia will be realized or the JRMIP will end up inflaming a violent conflict in Poland.<sup>114</sup> Bartana breaks with reality even further by inserting the character of Rifke, the ghost of a Jewish woman who died in the Holocaust. Rifke's presence interrupts *Zamach's* documentary aesthetics, introducing a supernatural and melancholic figure in Sierakowski's funeral ceremony (Figure 54). Rifke is not an individual based on a real person: in her speech, she speaks as a proxy for all the Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust, using "I" to mean "we". Interestingly enough, Rifke was mentioned in the first film of the trilogy, where Sierakowski anthropomorphizes Poland as an elderly woman who sleeps under



Figure 54. Yael Bartana. The ghost Rifke at Sierakowski's funeral, wearing black and carrying a suitcase, *Zamach*, 2011.

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<sup>114</sup> The only continuation of the story of the JRMIP came about in 2012, a year after *Zamach* debuted, in the form of a conference. Bartana hosted a fake conference by the JRMIP movement in Poland and documented artists, scholars, and young politicians addressing real and imaginary topics in relation to Poland, the JRMIP, and how Poland treats its minorities.

Rifke's quilt, implying that the Jewish people nurtured the Polish nation.<sup>115</sup> Rifke is the only character in *Zamach* who speaks outside of the funeral ceremony, and she speaks directly to the viewer. Her speech serves as a melancholic interjection to the JRMIP's utopian dream:

I am Rifke, who was murdered and buried anew, who was disinherited, who was moved, breathless, from the mass graves of Auschwitz, Babi-Yar, Treblinka, Majdanek, Sobibor, to the shrine of memory, to the mausoleum of architecture of the sublime in Jerusalem.

I can be found everywhere. I am the ghost of return, the return returning to herself.

Sunken in the crypt of grief that cannot be expressed in words, my dead tongue hides something that was buried alive.

I am here to reveal the destruction of the understood through the tongue.

I am here to weave the torture of identity from the threads of forgetfulness.

I am condemned to exist in the frozen crystal, saved from healing, removed from the present.<sup>116</sup>

Rifke's speech implies that the past is always present, the tragedies of the Holocaust too pervasive to simply pass them over when considering the relationship between Poles and Jews. The fictional ghost brings the viewer back to the present reality. She serves as the JRMIP's shadow—the observer of an impossible fantasy. Rifke symbolizes the intractability of the conflict between Poles and Jews, jarring the dialogue of the film series with the reality that the two groups cannot reconcile a healthy relation based on mutual respect.

Bartana makes it clear from the first film in her trilogy that the Poles and Jews are caught in an intractable conflict. Another factor that makes the relationship between the two different groups intractable is that the conflict became what it is as a result of how it was handled.<sup>117</sup> In the case of Poles and Jews, the rise of Polish right-wing nationalism in the modern and contemporary eras contributed to the current

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<sup>115</sup> Bartana, "And Europe Will Be Stunned", 120.

<sup>116</sup> Bartana, "And Europe Will Be Stunned", 122.

<sup>117</sup> Heidi Burgess and Guy M. Burgess, "What are Intractable Conflicts?", *Beyond Intractability*, accessed December 17, 2018, [https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/meaning\\_intractability](https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/meaning_intractability).

escalation of anti-Semitism. The already mentioned case of the 2018 Polish law, in which the attempt to replace the phrase “Polish death camps” with “Nazi death camps” became co-opted by right-wing nationalist politicians who used it as a way to minimize Polish complicity in anti-Semitism, is the latest expression of this conflict escalation.<sup>118</sup> The episode seems to symbolize a breaking point that reveals how Polish anti-Semitism continues to thrive even after the Holocaust. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the pogroms and xenophobic attacks and attitudes have increased in tandem with the rise of Polish nationalism. As previously mentioned, one of the ironies of this rise of nationalism is that today the Poles try to cast themselves as heroes who massively helped the Jews during the Holocaust regardless of the historical evidence. With the controversy of the 2018 law, Polish nationalists have been actively interfering with academia throughout the country: Holocaust courses have been cancelled in Polish universities and Polish academic institutes have refused institutional and financial support for publishing on Jewish history and Polish-Jewish relations.<sup>119</sup> The increase of nationalism in Poland has even began to manifest in public violence, protests, and hostile attitudes to other minorities who currently live in the nation.<sup>120</sup> In short, the conflict of Poles and Jews has become more volatile due to nationalistic fervor on part of the Poles and the absence of Jews and Jewish historical memory in the nation itself.

The effect of these ongoing political escalations in Poland is to make *Zamach* even more relevant. The imagined utopia of the JRMIP and the positive note at the end of the final film in the trilogy is an intentional strategy on the part of the artist to shock the viewers. Like the other two films of the series, *Zamach* intimates a re-evaluation of the relationship between Poles and Jews and the realities of anti-Semitism in Poland. While seemingly impossible, the JRMIP’s utopia is badly needed. Here, art becomes a tool to intervene in reality and promote dialogue, with the hope of fostering new

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<sup>118</sup> Monika Rice, “With Anti-Semitism on the Rise, Can Poland Come to Terms with Its Own Past?,” *America Magazine*, November 12, 2018, 30. The law was revised in June 2018 due to international pressure from the United States and other foreign powers. The new version of the law takes the form of a civil offense that does not result in jailtime.

<sup>119</sup> Rice, “Anti-Semitism on the Rise,” 32.

<sup>120</sup> Rice, “Anti-Semitism on the Rise,” 33.



insights that may help alleviate long-term conflicts.

## V. CONCLUSION

Bartana's film trilogy "*...And Europe Will Be Stunned*" focuses on a nation that struggles with its relationship towards its Jewish minority after the trauma suffered by both groups during the Second World War and the Holocaust. The three films are layered with historical references from various political and national origins. Often these references are ironic, such as using the film aesthetics of Nazi propaganda in a film where a Polish political advocate asks Jews to come back to Poland. Bartana also draws parallels between Israel and Poland, highlighting their shared mistreatment of minorities. All of these references and comparisons indicate the complexity of the relationship between Poles and Jews.

The three films create a fictional alternate universe in which Jews return to Poland to form JRMIP, the Jewish Renaissance Movement In Poland, which aims to repair the relationship between Poland and its lost minority. Each film focuses on an important moment in the history of that movement. In *Mary Kozmary*, the leader of the movement, Sierakowski, calls for three million Jews to come back to Poland. *Mur i Wieza* shows pioneer Jews responding to the call and returning to Poland to establish a Wall and Tower settlement at the heart of the former Jewish district of Warsaw. The final film, *Zamach*, takes place after the assassination of the JRMIP's leader as the movement succeeds in making strides towards the utopia of a unified Polish nation. Bartana utilizes her three fabricated documentaries to foster debates on Polish-Jewish antagonism. The quasi-/unfulfilled? utopian resolution intimates the audience to question history and re-evaluate the realities of intractable conflicts between Poles and Jews, Israelis and Palestinians, and various other groups. The JRMIP stands in defiance of the right-wing nationalism currently sweeping through Poland.

Bartana's trilogy removes viewers from their comfort zone, challenging them to take a look at the ways in which they perceive anti-Semitism after the Holocaust. She remains as neutral as possible, refusing to directly convey her political opinions in order

to let viewers draw their own conclusions. The JRMIP constitutes a fictional political movement and posits a post-modern reconsideration of and respect for 'the other'—minority groups mistreated by nationalist hegemony. The trilogy “documents” a utopia that defies the persistence of anti-Semitic attitudes in Poland. “...*And Europe Will Be Stunned*” is an artistic intervention in reality, imagining an alternative to the conflict between Poles and Jews (and Israelis and Palestinians), and opening possibilities for new ways of thinking that would hopefully stimulate progress towards a positive resolution.

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