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Jewish Film & New Media: An International Journal, Volume 9, Number 1,
Spring 2021, pp. 3-27 (Article)

Published by Wayne State University Press



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Exploring the Etiology of a Jewish Homeland

When Claude Lanzmann Visited Israel

Ohad Landesman

ABSTRACT

This essay focuses on *Pourquoi Israel* (1973) and *Tsahal* (1994), two films from Claude Lanzmann's trilogy about contemporary Jewish history that were shot entirely in Israel. It argues that these films maintain a delicate balance between insider and outsider perspectives. On one hand, they are personal works of a filmmaker struggling to defend his views on Israel as a Jewish intellectual living abroad, thus maintaining an empathetic rhetoric that often prevents him from expressing reservations. On the other hand, they flag and make use of Lanzmann's unique outlook as a foreigner as a filmic strategy meant to understand whether the search for normal existence in Israel is a viable option and whether normality in a place like Israel, or even Jewish existence itself, is a kind of anomaly. When his personal investment does not obfuscate his ability to observe reality from an outsider-looking-in perspective, a situation that occurs more in *Pourquoi Israel* than in *Tsahal*, Lanzmann is able to foreshadow and reveal concerns, conflicts, and problems that the local perspective in those early years was unable to fully tackle or comprehend.

A watershed moment anticipating Claude Lanzmann's impressive cinematic oeuvre came in 1952, when *Le Monde* commissioned him to write a series of articles on the fledgling state of Israel. After a long trip to the region, Lanzmann decided that neither journalism nor literature were the correct formats for

sufficiently exploring such a topic, particularly as it carried personal resonances for him as a Jew living in France. Following a visit to the Suez Canal in the late 1960s, Lanzmann realized he wanted to become a filmmaker, and in 1972, shortly before the Yom Kippur War, he made a third excursion to the region where he shot the footage for his film debut, *Pourquoi Israel* (1973). In a little over 180 minutes, Lanzmann bridged his work as a journalist to a career in filmmaking and produced an essayistic work that explores the changes that Israel went through since his first visit in 1952. In fact, the title of the film, *Pourquoi Israel*—in English, “Israel, Why” and not, “Why Israel?,” as many mistakenly call it—is not phrased as a question, therefore suggesting that the film forms a cinematic explanation, a provocative and well-argued statement of defense for Israel’s legitimacy, composed of several converging points of view.¹

Lanzmann’s decision to visit Israel in 1972 and film the first part of what later became his cinematic trilogy about Jewish history and identity—together with *Shoah* (1985) and *Tsahal* (1994)—was motivated by his desire to respond to accusations leveled against him as an avid supporter of Israel after the 1967 occupation. His colleagues, who held anticolonialist views, could not understand why a man who supported Algeria’s independence would be so eager to advocate for a country making its first stages of occupation. Lanzmann’s continuous efforts to dwell on the complex question of “Who is a Jew?” and tie it inextricably to the visible scars of the Holocaust—the manifestations of which he was documenting throughout the country—express his admiration toward Israel’s existence and provide reasons to legitimize it. By wandering around the country, documenting typical quotidian moments, and spending time with the newly arrived immigrants, dock workers, or prison inmates, Lanzmann essays how Israel looks at itself twenty-five years after its creation and questions the political, cultural, and religious foundations it is based on. I argue that Lanzmann’s unique position—detached as a tourist visiting for only a short while but wishing to observe, and invested emotionally as a Jewish intellectual who cares for the country and is worried about its future—reveals aspects of reality that the local perspective in those early years was unable to fully tackle or comprehend.

Tsahal, a film that Lanzmann completed twenty-one years after *Pourquoi Israel*, and whose title stands as the Hebrew acronym for Israeli Defense Forces, evolves around the Israeli army’s ethos and its technological means. It completes the trilogy that began with *Pourquoi Israel* and continued with *Shoah*,

which follows Israel's long march to recognition through its major military struggles, from the War of Independence in 1948 to the War in Lebanon in 1982. Lanzmann refers to the three films as a trilogy and suggests that "what the completed trilogy finally makes evident is the recurrence of the themes beyond the autonomy of the individual works."² Without any explicit images of war or action sequences,³ and consisting mostly of interviews laid on top of scenery, in *Tsahal* Lanzmann wishes to explore how military service and the Jewish religion become elements of unity and cohesion around which life in Israel needs to be understood.

Kozlovsky Golan, in her important overview of the trilogy, views Lanzmann's work as "a kaleidoscopic prism that helps us understand the meaning and impact of the Holocaust" and sees all three films as one unified project that is concerned with antisemitism.⁴ She writes, "*Shoah, Israel, Why* and *Tsahal* are bound together to form a linear trilogy from the Holocaust to the revival and defense of the *She'arit Hapleta* (Surviving Remnant)—the formative ethos of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), the force and power of Israel and the Jews."⁵ Although not dismissing Kozlovsky Golan's attention to Lanzmann's oeuvre as a response to antisemitism and a defense of Zionism as a solution to the survival of the Jewish people, I focus here on *Pourquoi Israel* and *Tsahal*, the two films that Lanzmann shot entirely in Israel, and I argue that they maintain a delicate balance between insider and outsider perspectives. On one hand, the films are personal works in which their director struggles to defend his views on Israel as a Jewish intellectual living abroad, thus maintaining an empathetic rhetoric that often prevents him from expressing his reservations. On the other hand, Lanzmann flags and makes use of his unique outlook as a foreigner as a filmic strategy meant to understand whether the search for normal existence in Israel is a viable option, and whether normality in a place like Israel, or even Jewish existence itself, is a kind of anomaly. When his personal investment does not obfuscate his ability to observe reality from an outsider-looking-in perspective, a situation that occurs more in *Pourquoi Israel* than in *Tsahal*, Lanzmann can foreshadow concerns, conflicts, and problems that Israel only dealt with much later on as a country.

Pourquoi Israel: An Outsider Looking In (with Empathy)

The starting point for *Pourquoi Israel* is the Jewish Holocaust. From the opening titles that appear over a yellow Star of David, Lanzmann cuts to a shot of Karl Liebnecht, a German Jew playing the accordion and singing a cabaret-like anthem about the Soviet Union armies who fought Germany. We then move to Yad Vashem, a special museum in Jerusalem that preserves the memory of the Holocaust. Lanzmann observes a class of students who discuss the manifestations of antisemitism through a series of clichés delivered by a noncharismatic instructor. From the get-go, Lanzmann makes clear that he wants to explore what it means to be Jewish in Israel after the Holocaust and question whether the gathering of the exiles during the years of the state's existence established in Israel a new identity. Lanzmann brings us back to the same place toward the end of the film. Physically present at the site, and standing with one of the officials of Yad Vashem, Lanzmann is seen searching for personal files that would allow him to trace all of the Lanzmanns who died in the Holocaust. Thus, the opening and ending sequences provide two bookends that clearly frame how Lanzmann understands the foundation of Israel as a form of resurrection from the Holocaust.

It becomes too easy, though, to read the ending sequence as a personal bridge between *Pourquoi Israel* and Lanzmann's next film, his magnum opus, *Shoah*, and to think of the two as tightly related projects. Such a comparison is productive if we think of how the films share a location and several characters and even explore a similar underlying question. Admittedly, few scenes in *Shoah* were filmed in Israel, such as the conversation with Abraham Bomba in a barbershop in Holon, or the discussion with Itzhak Zuckerman (Antek) in a kibbutz. Also, toward the ending of *Pourquoi Israel*, Lanzmann films a group of middle-aged Holocaust survivors who converse very passionately about restitution and reparation money (one of them describes the decision to take money from the Germans as "a crisis of consciousness"). Such a gathering foreshadows future meetings with several of those survivors in *Shoah*, meetings that evolved into more extensive and fully fledged documentary encounters. Watching the two films together, it becomes clear that they are made about resistance and essay how the victimized Jewish people took their fate in their own hands to become active, whether by fighting back or establishing their homeland.

Lanzmann was exposed to the horrors of the Holocaust at home. His mother was imprisoned by the Gestapo, and his father served in an active role in

the French underground. While taking this personal background into account, including the similarities between the two films, it is nonetheless important to remember that Lanzmann never really thought about dealing with the Holocaust head-on, and the idea of making *Shoah* thirteen years after *Pourquoi Israel* was not even his. Alouph Hareven, who was working at the Israeli foreign affairs office, approached him shortly after he had watched his debut film and commissioned Lanzmann to make the film: “There is no film about the Shoah,” he told him; “no film that takes in what happened in all its magnitude, no film that shows it from our point of view, the viewpoint of the Jews. It’s not a matter of making a film *about* the Shoah, but a film that *is* the Shoah. We believe that you are the only person who can make this film.”⁶ Lanzmann started his research for filming *Shoah* by the beginning of 1974, shortly after the premiere of *Pourquoi Israel*. Therefore, some of the aesthetic choices and documentary strategies made in the former constituted the distinct film language of the latter: avoiding voice-over, obtaining documentary knowledge mostly from interviews and testimonies in the present, or refusing to use archival material and reenactments.

The traumatic effect of the Holocaust on the collective psyche of Israel as a nation is articulated as a central theme in *Pourquoi Israel*, through which Lanzmann wishes to better understand his own identity. What is at stake for him is not simply an attempt to come to terms with his national identity as a Jew living in Europe but an effort to find his place as a French intellectual supporting the state of Israel. In that sense, *Pourquoi Israel* is perhaps Lanzmann’s most personal film as an intellectual, in which he grapples to find backup and support for his pro-Israeli line of defense and to craft arguments made to legitimize the state of Israel and its right to exist in the face of those who object it.

As Ran Halévi explains, the French left at the time was far from being uniquely critical about Israel. However, the historical experience and political culture of the French left hardly prepared it to conceive of the uniqueness of Jewish history in general and the Israeli nation-state in particular. “Anti-Capitalism, anti-Imperialism, or Third Worldism,” Halévi argues, “offer no valiant key to understanding political Zionism, a late national movement, produced not from a ‘sense of history,’ but from the pure will of men and women who are inseparably united at the cradle of a nascent Jewish state, religion, socialism and the spirit of sacrifice.”⁷ In other words, one could argue that *Pourquoi Israel* is a response to the narrow-minded position of the French left, according to which supporting Israel and criticizing the French presence in Algeria cannot go

together ideologically. Are those two modes of identification necessarily creating a paradoxical double allegiance?

Following the Six-Day War, Lanzmann repeatedly proclaimed that Israel is a young country living under a continuous siege, in constant threat of destruction and imminent catastrophe. He was involved intellectually with the political situation in Israel, and he coordinated the publication of a series of essays in a special issue of *Les Temps modernes* in 1967 (a journal for which he was chief editor from 2016), focusing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. During the process of editing this volume, which lasted around two years, Lanzmann managed to reach an intentionally biased mix, in which “apart from Rodinson’s contribution, the Arabic articles—Palestinian, Egyptian, Moroccan, Algerian—were much shorter than those of the Israelis.”⁸ The volume—more than a thousand pages bringing together Arab and Israeli writers for the first time—was published on June 5, 1967, the first day of the Six-Day War, and became a unique success. It sold more than 50,000 copies and was a definitive reference work for years.

Lanzmann, who gained privileged access to the left-wing intelligentsia in France as Jean-Paul Sartre’s secretary, found that his views on Israel were taking him further away from his colleagues, and he severed his connections with French radical groups after they increased their anti-Israeli onslaughts.⁹ *Pourquoi Israel* should also be evaluated as an essayistic response to *Anti-Semite and Jews* (1946),¹⁰ a book written by his close friend Sartre. In it, Sartre identifies a vicious circle whereby the Jewish people have had to react and adjust to various forms of antisemitism throughout history, while these behavioral adaptations were fueling more antisemitism in return. As Halévi explains, Sartre brilliantly reverses the equation of antisemitism: the problem is not the Jew but the antisemite; one is, so to speak, simply the fabrication of the other, living in the anguish of resembling the stereotypes that his slayers tend to him.¹¹

While Sartre was quickly and widely criticized for his stereotypical portrayal of the Jewish people, Lanzmann’s opposing viewpoint mattered to him the most as his friend and colleague. Sartre encouraged Lanzmann to write a response to his book, and although the hundred pages that Lanzmann wrote for this purpose were never really published (and were subsequently lost), Lanzmann believes that the ideas written were filtered into *Pourquoi Israel*. In that manner, the film focuses on the achievements of Zionism as a proclamation that Jews living in Israel created an identity for themselves despite antisemitism and not

because of it. Lanzmann devotes a lengthy description in his biography for the ongoing disagreement he had with Sartre during their trip to Israel. Sartre furiously refused to meet soldiers or anyone wearing official uniforms in Israel and had no interest, according to Lanzmann, in seriously understanding the place, let alone the specific unifying role that IDF serves in it (an issue Lanzmann then set to study in *Tsahal*).¹²

Such intellectual quarrel between Lanzmann and Sartre over the question of Zionism during their visit is all the more puzzling, considering that Sartre himself proclaimed a more equivocal position. “I am all the more pro-Israeli that I am pro-Palestinian, and reciprocally,” he stated three years later.¹³ Edward Said, describing a meeting that took place in 1979 with Sartre, Simon de Beauvoir, Michel Foucault, and himself, refers to Sartre’s views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as reactionary and recalls his intervention in the debate as innocuous. “I cannot recall that many words were said about the Palestinians or about territory, or about the tragic past,” he reminisces. “Certainly no reference was made to Israeli settler-colonialism, similar in many ways to French practice in Algeria.”¹⁴ Said clearly states that Sartre’s position has remained constant over the years in his “fundamental pro-Zionism”¹⁵ and remained “a bitter disappointment to every (non-Algerian) Arab who admired him.”¹⁶ In Sartre’s biography, however, Israel is hardly mentioned throughout, and Sartre’s position on the conflict is described in more ambiguous terms. He admits that he feels “being torn between two friends, two loyalties in conflict with each other,” between “his admiration for Israel’s struggle against England, and his solidarity with the Arab world’s quest for sovereignty and humanity.”¹⁷ Although Lanzmann’s support of Israel’s side in the conflict may have taken him further away from his colleagues in France, his standpoint was certainly very close to Sartre’s after all.

Lanzmann speaks in Hegelian rhetoric about *Pourquoi Israel*, establishing new meaning by the interplay of ideas contradictory to one another: “The film is the first totally objective film on Israel precisely because it is a personal, subjective film,” he says in an interview from 1975; or: “by not hesitating to film negative elements, the result is a positive document”; or even: “the film is a masterpiece of pro-Israel propaganda, because it is not Israeli propaganda.”¹⁸ These aphoristic statements are telling because they mark the duality Lanzmann was after in establishing his unique role of being a foreign witness to what he was documenting: placing himself both inside the situation he wants to stir and outside of it as a distant observer. In his memoir, Lanzmann describes this

dialectical position quite tellingly: “One thing is certain, the role of the witness, which became mine on my first visit to Israel and has constantly grown and reconfirmed itself with time and time each film, required me to be both within and without, as though I had been assigned a precise position.”¹⁹

In the beginning of the film, Lanzmann is embracing an ironically detached, even humorous, stance toward what he sees and documents. He is filming American tourists who express their excitement about gefilte fish packages at the supermarket, or simply “stuff that you cannot get in America,” as they enthusiastically call it. The images documented are humorous and grotesque, taken by a distant observer who relates to Israel differently than the subjects he films: “I wanted to see where my money is going through donations,” one of the tourists tells Lanzmann, after the latter asks him what the reasons for his visit are. The sequence shows how the infiltration of American capitalism at this early stage of its widespread development in Israel is still not eliminating entirely the traces of socialism, but mostly creating a bond between nations, a faked sign of normalcy for existence in an abnormal reality. “Israel has become a stable factor in Jewish existence,” explains Avraham Schenker, a Zionist writer, during an interview with Lanzmann in the next scene.

Such detached observation does not characterize Lanzmann’s dominant strategy of documentation throughout the film. Gradually he becomes more emotionally involved in what he is documenting, to a point that he is often willing to enter the frame and take part in the scene. His position toward the subjects with whom he is conversing is almost always empathetic, expressing an implied gesture of sharing a common destiny with them. Halévi characterizes this position as a combination of observation and spontaneous benevolence.²⁰ Lanzmann often appears on-camera, talking while walking with his interviewees, loosely holding a half-burned cigarette bud between his fingers. Several of his interviewees are well-known political and cultural figures in Israel, like former Chief of Staff Yigal Yadin, left-wing politician Ran Cohen, or former IDF general Avraham Yoffe. Their voices are present in the film as talking heads with an expository rhetoric to whom Lanzmann hardly responds. Other subjects remain anonymous faces, such as kibbutz members, dock workers, new immigrants that have just arrived to Israel, Mizrachi Jews, or members of the Israeli Black Panther movement. Lanzmann interacts with all of them at eye level, remaining friendly and interested, and nodding his head with patience as a sign of empathy to whatever his subjects tell him.

Since the first Russian immigration wave was at its peak during the making of the film, Lanzmann decided to position his camera at the Ben Gurion Airport, waiting for newcomers as they made their first steps out of the plane. In one particularly emotional scene, he locates a man who had been separated from his brother thirty-two years ago and is about to meet him again. Lanzmann finds the brother, brings the two together, and the sequence culminates with tears as the siblings fall into each other's arms. Lanzmann orchestrates the reunion between the brothers, and Colin Mounier, his cinematographer, does not miss a second of this genuinely exciting drama.

Lanzmann dwells on the story of Dimona, one of the most striking episodes of Zionist success ever captured on cinema. This part of the film emphasizes Lanzmann's talent in interacting with people, personally participating in the events, and stimulating his subjects to talk (many immigrants from Tunisia and Morocco speak fluent French, which makes the conversation with Lanzmann run smoothly). Léon Roisch, the curator of Dimona's museum, tells Lanzmann that his family invites him every year to live with them in Monaco, but he keeps coming back to Dimona, proud of his homeland and city. When they observe the thriving little town from uphill, Roisch reminisces about the history of Dimona: "The city was built on the challenge of those first families who came, of those men who back there [in exile] had been barbers, cobblers or merchants, and who here learned to be workers; suffered to learn that they could build, could create, therefore go beyond themselves." He continues to talk about personal hardships, and his "Sabra" daughter, who was born after many years in which he and his wife had difficulties conceiving. Suddenly Roisch starts trembling, his eyes turn all wet underneath the dark glasses. Lanzmann approaches him, enters the frame with empathy, and hugs his shoulder affectionately. This is a spontaneous gesture of compassion that undermines the correctness of observation or the structured talking heads rhetoric, otherwise embraced quite dominantly in the film. The gesture attests to how *Pourquoi Israel* is a personal document of a filmmaker who is emotionally involved in what he sees or hears and has a personal interest in making this film.

Admittedly, Lanzmann never resorts to faked sentimentality, and while he is constantly looking to capture the wonder and beauty encapsulated in the arrival of new immigrants to the country, his film never shies away from exposing the inevitable disenchantment with the promised land. He embarks on a continuous search for capturing the early signs of frustration, bitterness, and

disappointment the immigrants felt while trying to adjust to their new home. In what is probably the most heart-breaking narrative thread in the film, we watch a young couple of Russian immigrants twice—once when they arrive in Israel, full of hopes and motivation, and then again months after, when all their illusions have already been shattered by bitter reality. In the first sequence, Lanzmann joins them on a car ride to their new home in Arad, a small city in the desert part of the country. Lanzmann is interested in their personal story, so the young man confesses to him that they had been repeatedly reproached as Jews in the Soviet Union. As the car makes its way through desert landscapes near Arad, Lanzmann freezes the frame on their happy faces, only seconds after the woman says, “we never thought it is going to be that beautiful.”

Months later, Lanzmann revisits the Russian couple in their new home. The man is now bitter and disillusioned, feeling betrayed and frustrated for being picked on repeatedly as “Russian.” “I thought this was a country for Jews,” he complains to Lanzmann, “but everyone keeps calling me ‘Rusky’, ‘Rusky’, ‘Rusky’” [Russian]. It is not only the racism that bothers him but also the false promises made by the government at the beginning of his journey. “I was told that Arad was next to Eilat, because I had asked to go to Eilat,” he exclaims. “And when I got there I realized it wasn’t 6 miles like I’ve been told; it was 200 miles, and that was the first lie ... I idealized this country too much.” The man tells Lanzmann that he is now willing to pack his belongings and leave for the United States. “Won’t you find it more difficult in capitalist America?” Lanzmann asks, making things difficult for him, as if embracing momentarily the position of the Jewish Agency for Israel. “You don’t understand,” Lanzmann remarks judgmentally before they depart, “people like you will be miserable everywhere.” The interaction between Lanzmann and the Russian couple is a situated act of provocation in the parameters of *cinéma vérité*, a psychological catalyst in the midst of an unfolding situation where the camera and the documentarist’s presence are repeatedly acknowledged. Lanzmann voices his opinion not because he sides with the Jewish Agency for Israel (on the contrary, one of his goals in the movie is to expose its lies), but because he is looking for answers to a bigger question: why are new immigrants still coming to Israel, and later decide to stay there, given that normal existence becomes almost impossible for them? As Kozlovsky Golan puts it, *Pourquoi Israel* makes an effort to document “the abnormality of the formation of the Jewish state and the difficulty in maintaining it as a cohesive and coherent society.”²¹

Pourquoi Israel is not infected with any propagandistic tones, nor does it function as a pamphlet for a political standpoint. Since Lanzmann oscillates between the different viewpoints of people he meets, his position is never predetermined. In most scenes it appears that he is not entirely sure to which direction the situation is about to unfold. Central and particularly interesting is the position of the outsider Lanzmann embraces (that is, when he is not too busy hugging his subjects). He admitted that he would never have made *Pourquoi Israel* or *Tsahal* had he chosen to live in Israel, just as he could never have devoted twelve years of his life to *Shoah* had he been sent to a concentration camp in his life.²² That unique perspective of the foreigner as a tourist is what other prominent filmmakers who visited Israel for a short time embraced as well—whether it was Chris Marker with *Description of a Struggle* (1961), a film that meditates on the circumstances leading to the establishment of Israel and the different paradoxes that define the state’s existence; Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Seeking Locations in Palestine* (1963), a non-making-of documentary that chronicles a search for film locations in Israel that ended in utter disappointment; or Susan Sontag’s *Promised Lands* (1974), a small-scale production that took Sontag to Israel during the immediate aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, only one year after Lanzmann’s visit. In all of these and in Lanzmann’s film, the goal was not to simply make a tourist film, which depicts an appealing landscape to entice the audience, but to use strategically travelogue elements in a notebook project, where the camera records impressions of places and landscapes. On the inseparable ties between note-taking and essaying, Laura Rascaroli writes, “Because it records the process of thinking, and reflects thought *in fieri*, it [the notebook film] is self-reflexive and essayistic.”²³

The travelogues made in Israel embrace a personal or an essayistic rhetoric that constructs an outsider-looking-in perspective, a position that self-consciously acknowledges a filmmaker’s inability to fully and accurately capture the cultures and peoples they are documenting. Unlike the tourist film, which often presents complete alignment between expectations and findings, documentary visits to Israel—like those of Marker, Pasolini, Sontag, or Lanzmann—dramatize the discrepancy between imagining a place and visiting it in reality. While shooting the film in Israel, Lanzmann considered himself a visitor, and his documentary stance a witness. Thus, his questions often indicate that he does not pretend to understand Israel completely, even though he is deeply interested in the nature of local institutions. Lanzmann offers a dialectical voice, a distanced gaze of an

outsider that is still very much infused by his personal stakes in the location he visits.²⁴ This is not a tourist film made by a person with no stakes in the matter, nor is it a propaganda film made on behalf of any Jewish or Zionist institution, a practice by which many of the local films in Israel were still produced back in the 1970s. In terms of a documentary voice, the essayistic provides Lanzmann with the perfect inquisitive mode that is nonetheless marked by his own subjectivity.

At one time Lanzmann visits a prison in the south and inquires about the prisoners' crimes. "How does it feel being a prisoner in a Jewish prison in Israel?" he asks one of them and then asks an even more puzzling question: "Do you think there should be prisons in a Jewish state?" For Lanzmann, the existence of prisons in a Jewish state is part of a process he is interested in, which can be described in Hegelian terms as normalizing an abnormal situation. The inmates, however, move the discussion into more realistic parameters and explain that the majority of people behind bars in Israel are Mizrahi Jews who were rejected from the army. Lanzmann plays the role of a naïve and silly outsider again when he is presenting a policeman, who is also a Holocaust survivor, with a puzzling question: "Doesn't it seem strange to you that the people you arrest are Jews?" The policeman, who is not entirely sure he understands the nature of the question, replies appropriately with irony: "Should we import policemen from other countries?" In another scene, taking place in the port city Ashdod, Lanzmann interviews employees at the harbor and tries to persuade them with guiding and manipulative questions that they work too hard, are not granted the rights they deserve, and are not paid enough. "Don't you care that you belong to one of the poorest sectors in Israel?" he asks, maneuvering the conversation toward what he regards as unfair distribution of wealth, and wins their anticipated approval. Watching this scene in the present, almost five decades after it was shot, may suggest that Lanzmann have been slightly off base here. Port workers in the 1970s earned relatively high salaries in Israel and were surely not part of a deprived sector in the labor market. Since Lanzmann was not familiar with the subtle differences between economic classes and political groups in the country, he may have overplayed his strategic outsider perspective.

The meeting with the workers in Ashdod is edited through montage with Lanzmann's visit to Gan Shmuel, a kibbutz in the northern part of Israel. He cannot hide his affection and sympathy for the idyllic kibbutz project, and regards it, as many did back then, as the embodiment of Zionist utopianism. He talks to the young Ran Cohen (a future member of the left-wing Israeli political party

Meretz) about the great promises the kibbutz offers for the country's future and cross-cuts this conversation with the exchanges with the Ashdod port workers. The prevailing feeling is that Lanzmann sees the kibbutz as a cure for the malaise of capitalism, which remained at a relatively early stage of its development in Israel. Other foreign documentarists that had visited Israel before Lanzmann also placed socialist utopia next to capitalist development. Chris Marker was fascinated by the kibbutz as a collective enterprise that offers an alternative to capitalist economics and devoted a lengthy sequence in *Description of a Struggle* for observing the members of Manara, another kibbutz in northern Israel, as they gather for collective decision making. Rachel Rabin, sister of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, is shown leading a voting process where all decisions are taken by common consent. Marker's empathetic observation at what his narrator regards as "an absolute form of democracy" is simultaneously worrisome: "Isolated in their own country, isolated from the social states," Marker's narrator asks, "how long will their purity last?" The kibbutz encapsulates for Marker, and later for Lanzmann, an essential paradox in the existence of Israel that they can point to as visitors from outside: can its socialist ideals face the inevitable reality of the ever-growing capitalist influence?

Lanzmann feels quite at ease with this naïve perspective of the foreigner, a contemplative rhetoric with which he can uncover aspects of reality that the local point of view in those early years was unable to fully comprehend. Back in Dimona, he conducts a tour of the area with the mayor and interviews locals who have been living there for a long time. When they arrived in Israel, they tell him, they actually wanted to live in Haifa, but the only option they were given by the Jewish Agency was Dimona. "They assured us that Dimona was only a distance of fifteen minutes from Haifa," they say. "We left Haifa at 8:00 a.m. and arrived in Dimona at 5:00 p.m." "Those people expected to find a city but found a desert instead," the Dimona museum's manager explains to Lanzmann: "They expected to find a house but found a hut, were looking for a bed, but got a straw mattress instead." "Was it necessary to lie to these people?," Lanzmann asks and gets the reply he was apparently after: "We had to lie to people in order to get them to build our country. This was 1955, and the country was in danger." Such a confession, made here on film as early as 1973, is a rare acknowledgment in retrospect of the ethnic-based population dispersal policies conducted in the first two decades of Israel's independence as a state. It was only systematically examined on film forty-five years later in David Deri's *The Ancestral Sin* (2017).

The power of such a scene may lie in the renewed perspective it provides a viewer watching it in the present. Nowadays, when Israeli society is more familiar with the central place that lies and false promises had in exploiting the delicate ethnic fabric of immigrants arriving to build the new nation, Lanzmann's concerns seem to be ahead of their time.

Pourquoi Israel as seen by viewers who grew up and lived in Israel during the early 1970s could certainly yield nostalgic pleasure, but its importance seems much bigger than a simple sentimental recourse to the past. On repeated viewings it would be hard to ignore the film's prophetic quality. It offers criticism from a foreign visitor and is focused on the outburst of some major problems and issues that later stayed in Israeli society and last up until today. Lanzmann's long and contemplative gaze on the present in 1972 expresses an honest and genuine unease about the future, a voice from outside that exposes cracks in the Zionist dream shortly before the traumatic outbreak of the Yom Kippur War. Although Lanzmann admires some of the biggest successes of the young nation (a strong army, scientific innovation achieved by brilliant local minds, and the utopian project of the kibbutz), he cannot avoid showing concomitantly his worries about the dangers at the door: the infiltration of American capitalism, the growing class division and social-ethnic struggle, the fast spread of settlements, the mistreatment of new immigrants, or the exclusion of Arabs from full-rights citizenship.

Even though *Pourquoi Israel* was completed in 1972, the film was released to theaters only after the Yom Kippur War, partly because its US premiere at the New York Film Festival was set for October 1973. Gershom Scholem rose from his seat in a New York film theater after a three-hour screening of the film and cried out loud: "We have never seen such a thing!"²⁵ Such collegial show of support, however, was not characteristic of the generally chilled response the movie acquired from film critics in the United States upon its release and after. Writing for the *New Yorker*, Richard Brody claims that "the terrible paradox at the core of Lanzmann's work is that the two films about Israel—*Israel, Why* and *Tsahal*—that he made before and after *Shoah* are much less accomplished works of art."²⁶ About *Pourquoi Israel* in particular, Brody recognizes that the film "doesn't have a significant component of form and style."²⁷ Expectedly, Israeli film critics were much more generous, regarding the film as one of the best documentaries ever made about Israel.²⁸ Following this initial line of favorable reception, the critical response in Israel has chilled over the years. In fact,

the film was almost ignored, both critically and scholarly, while hardly the same could be said about Lanzmann's work in general. This can partly be explained by the changes in the political climate, but still leaves question marks about the lack of any signs of interest to correct such dismissal.

Pourquoi Israel, shot years before Lanzmann's more complex works, may not be a particularly striking film documentary-wise. It has no coherent structural form or any distinctive style, its scope is too wide, and it lacks a dialectical structure of opposing points of view regarding its overarching question "who is a Jew?" (dialectics that Sontag embraced a year later as the main strategy in her film). It is also not bothered by the most important political query that was beginning to take shape in the early 1970s: according to what mandate is Israel keeping its occupied territories from the Six-Day War? *Pourquoi Israel* is still one of the most earnest and comprehensive films ever made about Israel, an early and challenging effort to dramatize the complex and often turbulent relations between utopia and dystopia, vision and reality. Lanzmann's inquisitive mode, marked by his subjectivity and guided by his curiosity and vested interest in Israel as a French Jew and established intellectual, never obfuscates his attempt to observe, listen carefully, and present the viewer with a braided voice that becomes more than the sum of its parts.

***Tsahal*: Less an Investigation than an Illustration**

In a similar manner to how Alouph Hareven approached Lanzmann and asked him to make *Shoah*, the third film in the trilogy, *Tsahal*, was born out of another official invitation. Yitzhak Rabin, Israel's prime minister and the minister of defense in 1987, admired *Shoah* so much that he asked Lanzmann if he might consider making a film about the War of Independence in 1948. Lanzmann refused, but for a reason that is quite telling. He writes in his memoir: "There are two possible accounts of that war: the Israeli and the Arab. What is at issue here is not truth, it is the fact that neither account can disregard the other and it is impossible to explore the motives of both camps simultaneously, at least not without making a very bad film, something a number of people have since done on the subject."²⁹ Admittedly, Lanzmann acknowledged that for recounting the Israeli and the Palestinian narratives of the war (or the "Nakba," disaster in Arabic, as Palestinians call it), he would have needed to make a more ideologically nuanced, or even balanced, film. This would directly affect the

rhetoric of *Tsahal*, the film he decided to make instead. Lanzmann clarifies he had no intention of creating a complex picture of the IDF, an army that had in fact never really been filmed before,³⁰ but to focus on how it allows for the “reappropriation of force and violence by Israeli Jews.”³¹ He writes, “I would like to illuminate this transition to violence and the ability to kill from all sides. Thanks to the existence of Israel, thanks to the army ... the Jews today have the instruments and means of institutionalized power.”³² Since the army, according to Lanzmann, paved the path for the Jewish people to overcome defenselessness, its use of weapons and modern technologies becomes a source of fascination for him. He interviews soldiers studying in the prestigious Israeli Air Force Flight Academy, joins parachuters just moments before they jump from the plane, and devotes a lengthy sequence that demonstrates his fetishistic obsession with the Israeli Merkava tank. This military vehicle, built in “absolutely impossible conditions,”³³ becomes for Lanzmann a “privileged instrument of Israel’s ‘reappropriation of violence,’”³⁴ as it not only allows them “to keep the war out of urban centers due to the spatial restrictions of the country”³⁵ but also facilitates the rebirth of the new Jew as a powerful Israeli soldier.

Such fascination with war technology attests to how Lanzmann’s position toward his subject of inquiry is ideologically predisposed and emotionally biased. Rather than intending to expose the deep contradictions behind *prima facie* military attitudes, Lanzmann proclaims that “this army represents a victory of the Jewish people over themselves ... there had never been a Jewish army before. My film tells how Jews took their fate into their own hands to avoid ever become victims again.”³⁶ Lanzmann grants a privileged position to the IDF and states quite clearly in an interview the outrageous suggestion that one should “judge Israel’s army according to different criteria than other armies,” because “real lives in Israel are worth more than anywhere else.”³⁷ It is not only that the Israeli army’s actions are implicitly defended in the film by sketching a deterministic picture of being in a permanent state of war and alert, but also that the larger question hovering above, although not being stated explicitly, strikes a similar chord with *Pourquoi Israel*’s main question: what seems to be the unique nature of a Jewish army that is constantly situated in a mode of survival and a state of conflict?

Lanzmann’s wish to sacrifice complexity for the sake of building a line of defense for the IDF is clear from the outset. Whereas *Pourquoi Israel* was slated to hit Israeli cinemas exactly when the Yom Kippur War erupted, this traumatic

moment is where *Tsahal* begins as a film. Although there is hardly any usage of archival material in *Tsahal*, its opening sequence consists of audio recordings of desperate soldiers trapped in a bunker along the Suez Canal during the Yom Kippur War. We listen to the sounds of explosions and see them visualized on the recording machine's equalizer. The only real image is the listener's face, a veteran who speaks on how most of his friends in the battalion were killed during that war and contemplates the guilt and shame involved in coming back to Tel Aviv as a survivor. Avigdor Kahalani, who was a battalion commander in the Golan Heights during the war, reminisces on how he quickly lost any sense of belonging to the country in the immediate aftermath of the conflict. Lanzmann portrays right from the start a painful image of soldiers in trauma, exploiting their stories to reinforce the no-other-choice discourse and obfuscate any space for accountability.³⁸ Further emphasis on this deterministic argument, according to which war begets war in Israel and the solution is always focused on militarism, is voiced by several interviewees and depicted in the closing sequence, with a close-up of a young soldier sitting on a tank and looking away from the camera.³⁹ Several tanks are making their way in the desert toward what metaphorically is the next conflict.⁴⁰ Bookended with the opening of the film, Lanzmann suggests that there is no end in sight to this bludgeoned struggle.

There are other shortcomings and oversights, the result of constraining the film to a one-dimensional argument. *Tsahal*, for one, ignores completely the Lebanon War. Ariel Sharon plays a central role in that war, but he is only shown as a kind shepherd tending to his sheep. Lanzmann speaks with him about his heroic acts during the Yom Kippur War, but ignores everything that he has done hereafter, especially his responsibility for the Lebanon War.⁴¹ Second, the film overlooks the complex interrelationship between Israeli society and its army.⁴² As Hillel Halkin notes, Lanzmann keeps insisting that what is most unusual about the IDF is that it is a Jewish army. However, "once one gets over the shock or thrill of realizing that Jews can fight," one should be truly amazed by how it is also an army composed of citizens "and has remained so for nearly half-century since its founding."⁴³ In addition, women are regrettably absent in the film, and there are no interviews conducted with female soldiers, even though they have gained a considerably more significant role in the army since Lanzmann made the film. The only discussion of a woman fighting in the film is about a man in drag, and it appears when Ehud Barak chronicles in details how he was dressed

as a woman before entering Beirut in 1982 during Operation Fountain of Youth, one of the IDF's boldest operations.

The second part of the film carries a milder tone of admiration for the army's existence and *modus operandi* and allegedly focuses more on criticism. The critique is never too inquisitive but more placated, as the military occupation, which had already been taking place for twenty-seven years when Lanzmann made the film, is not significantly challenged. The film does not show us how the IDF aggressively fights the Palestinian resistance, and the latter have hardly any space in it. "The intifada itself is characterized,"⁴⁴ Lehrer observes, "rather than explored."⁴⁵ In one case, Lanzmann speaks to a soldier who opened fire on an innocent Palestinian and wounded him. He conducts an uncritical investigation into the details of a typical incident in the Occupied Territories, thus covering the army's tail and marking it as something that happens too often. In another case, at the Allenby Bridge Crossing, Lanzmann speaks to a young woman, who is checking the possessions of arriving Palestinians and opening a harmless bottle of perfume. "Are you obliged to check everything?" he asks her; "Yes," she replies. "And did you ever find anything?"; "No." Lanzmann then turns to a Palestinian who is passing through the crossing, and asks for his opinion about all these procedures. "It's normal," the man replies; "we are used to it." Although this sequence may help expose the absurdity in life under occupation, it also helps normalize the abnormal on screen. Toward the end of the film, even an intense conversation between Lanzmann and a settler ends in an appeasing manner and with a warm hug. Here an unresolved contradiction appears between Lanzmann's early attempts to foreshadow the immense problem of the occupation and his later efforts to not critically tackle its gradual infiltration but to represent a daily life of its normalized routine.

"Critics like to overlook the fact that my film is not a documentary," Lanzmann complains in an interview from 2009; "*Tsahal* is an auteur film and I am its author."⁴⁶ Although there is hardly any doubt that Lanzmann is regarded as a documentary auteur, with a recognizable style and thematic preoccupations, I suspect that he is hesitant to label his film a "documentary" because he fears that it would impose a burden of neutrality and presumed objectivity. If so, Lanzmann is surely wrong here to assume that a film needs to carry a balanced argument to be referred to as a documentary. However, while I have repeatedly suggested that *Pourquoi Israel* is an essayistic work, I strongly doubt that *Tsahal* is a similar personal journey with a rhetoric that is more meditative than

pedagogic.⁴⁷ *Pourquoi Israel* performs its attempt to raise questions without necessarily finding any solutions or answers and enacts this voyage in full view. *Tsahal*, on the other hand, does not open the document for further contemplation and is rather closed down rhetorically by its finite arguments. Richard Brody argues in the same spirit that *Tsahal* is “a movie that’s constrained by its guiding idea: the importance of the fact that there is an Israeli army, and the impossibility of accepting the existence of Israel without embracing its military force as a bastion against the constant threat of destruction, of imminent catastrophe.”⁴⁸ Brody believes that the film supplies “an answer that locks [it] in place for the entirety of its five-hour running time,” and he concludes that *Tsahal* is “less an investigation and a discovery than an illustration.”⁴⁹

Tsahal is disguised formally as an essay film. Words and images respond to each other in it, reflect and register the arrival of a thought, while the authority of an identifiable reality is constantly troubled and intruded on by arguments that proceed from each interviewee’s set of beliefs. However, the film maintains more of a rigid than a skeptic perspective. This failure, in my opinion, is what caused critics to refer to it either as a disappointment, simply because it refuses to shatter the “myth of a humane Jewish army,”⁵⁰ or as a “meandering apologia for the Zionist dream of his [Lanzmann’s] youth.”⁵¹ One critic even called the film “a propagandistic pamphlet” because it “too much resembles the propaganda films that the State of Israel produced in its early years, even though political cinema in that country has in fact evolved considerably over the decades.”⁵²

The last line of critique is particularly puzzling because *Tsahal* is made by a foreign filmmaker who is not Israeli and whose perspective on Israel is inflected by foreign concerns that make it incompatible with Israeli national discourses prevalent at the time or in the past. It was made according to transnational aesthetic influences (such as the French essayistic tradition). What possibly prevents *Tsahal* from being a satisfying essay film is that it fails to maintain the right balance between its outsider-looking-in perspective, a position that self-consciously acknowledges Lanzmann’s inability to fully and accurately capture the culture and people he is visiting, and its auteur’s emotional and ideological investment in the material. In his groundbreaking book about the essay film, Timothy Corrigan speaks about the “excursion film,” where “even the individual subject that motivates [the] journey ... is or becomes incomplete and unstructured,” thus inviting us to examine how the excursion itself has “fundamentally altered or destabilized the traveling subject.”⁵³ One striking example

would be *Pourquoi Israel*, through which, as I have shown, Lanzmann clearly seeks to come to terms with his national (or cultural) identity as a Jew living in Europe and his place as a French intellectual supporting Israel in the 1970s. Such a destabilized traveler seems to have disappeared in *Tsahal*, because Lanzmann, as Friedman notes, is “so impregnated with love for Israel that it is impossible for him to see *Tsahal* not as it is today, but as it once was or should have been, and how one would like it to still be.”⁵⁴

Admittedly, when Lanzmann shot *Tsahal* in 1994, shortly before Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination, the IDF was perceived differently in the public opinion than it is today. It was focused primarily on defending Israel against its enemies, and the twenty-seven years of occupation preceding the film’s production have not yet turned it into an occupation army. After the retreat from Lebanon in 2000 and Benjamin Netanyahu’s rise to power, Israel’s security doctrine was fashioned primarily out of external threat assessments, and military balance considerations have changed significantly. Today, when global public opinion is harshly critical about Israel’s treatment of Palestinians and unlawful military occupation, it is apparent that in the long run, internal strength is what would determine Israel’s capacity to grapple with the actual challenges that confront it. Watching Lanzmann’s film today, we are left to wonder: did he miss the picture completely by making a valorizing portrait of the Israeli army, putting a special emphasis on its soldiers’ traumas and fostering victimhood? Why didn’t he manage to recognize the underlying currents and foresee into the future, like he did in *Pourquoi Israel*?

Conclusion

Both films that Lanzmann shot entirely in Israel, *Pourquoi Israel* and *Tsahal*, demonstrate that we should be wary of unquestioningly accepting a simple binarism between foreign and local. Considering the nature of his short visits, none of which were made with anthropological aspirations, Lanzmann may have avowedly embraced a tourist’s point of view on Israel. Yet this position was taken up in a reflexive manner, exposing the process by which one acquires knowledge of a place, as well as how a place projects a certain self-image for outsiders to know. His seeming confusion performed on screen was thus a result of negotiating the fluidity that comes to pass when categories of national knowledge are unraveled—a result of his transnational position.

The foreigner’s point of view embedded in those unique travelogues is characterized, on one hand, by leveling empathy for a country that Lanzmann was invested in both intellectually and emotionally. On the other hand, the outlook of a visitor maintains the critical distance needed to expose cracks in a monolithic discourse the country was embracing back then. Such a distance, I showed, allowed Lanzmann to expose (especially in his first film) social and political malaise in the local reality that Israeli filmmakers were still unable to point to. Lanzmann’s fluidity of perspective is channeled in both films through different vocal strategies meant to negotiate the duality between supporting Israel from afar and observing it critically from within. Such qualities mark those two films as filmic texts worthy of serious reevaluation, interesting documents of national history and personal self-discovery.

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Notes

1. There is no question mark, because there is no question at stake that Lanzmann feels he is obliged to provide an answer to. As Kent Jones explains, “arguing *for* the continued existence of Israel is as ridiculous as arguing *for* the existence of the Shoah—to do so would be to admit that a contrary is possible.” Kent Jones, “Truth Be Told: Claude Lanzmann’s Moral Precision,” *Film Comment* (March–April 2012): 78, emphasis in original.
2. Lanzmann, qtd. in Mihal Régine Friedman, “‘Du wirst nicht mehr töten’—Der erste von Claude Lanzmann für TSAHAL vorgesehene Titel” (“You will not kill anymore”—the first title Claude Lanzmann intended for TSAHAL), *Frauen und Film (Women and Film)* 61 (March 2000): 68.

3. It is unclear whether combat scenes are not included in the film as an aesthetic decision or because Lanzmann did not get clearance and permission for such scenes.
4. Yvonne Kozlovsky Golan, "Through the Auteur's Eyes: An Appreciation of the Life and Cinematic Art of Claude Lanzmann, 1925–2018," *Antisemitism Studies* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 143, 145.
5. *Ibid.*, 151.
6. Claude Lanzmann, *The Patagonian Hare: A Memoir* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2009), 411, emphasis in original.
7. Ran Halévi, "Les Vivants et les Morts: Claude Lanzmann, de *Shoah* à *Pourquoi Israël*" (The Living and the Dead: Claude Lanzmann, from *Shoah* to *Why Israel*), *Le Débat* 4, no. 201 (2018): 187.
8. Lanzmann, *Patagonian Hare*, 381.
9. One striking example of this early intellectual work in France is that of Jean Genet. His writing in the 1970s was inspired by his experience in refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon and was very critical of Israel. Genet's personal fascination with the Arab world instigated his visit to refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon immediately after the Sabra and Shatila massacre in 1982 and resulted in *Prisoner of Love* (NYRB Classics, 2003).
10. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate* (New York: Schocken Books, 1948).
11. Halévi, "Les Vivants," 184.
12. See Lanzmann, *Patagonian Hare*, 386.
13. Taken from Sartre's acceptance speech at the Israeli embassy in Paris, on the occasion of the University of Jerusalem's degree of doctor honoris causa, and qtd. in Michel Rybalka, "Publication and Reception of *Anti-Semite and Jew*," *October* 87 (Winter 1999): 179.
14. Edward Said, "My Encounter with Sartre," *London Review of Books* 22, no. 11 (June 2000), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v22/n11/edward-said/diary>.
15. Because of Sartre's remarks in defense of Israel during the Six-Day War in 1967, Franz Fanon's widow forbade the publication of late editions of *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 1965) to which he wrote an introduction.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Annie Cohen-Solel, *Sartre: A Life* (London: Heinemann, 1985), 409.
18. See Simson Carlebach, "Pourquoi Israël," *Jerusalem Post*, February 21, 1975, 21.
19. Lanzmann, *Patagonian Hare*, 231.
20. Halévi, "Les Vivants," 185.

21. Kozlovsky Golan, "Through the Auteur's Eyes," 162.
22. See Lanzmann, *Patagonian Hare*, 231.
23. Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2009), 146.
24. One such example for this tension between an outsider perspective and an emotional investment is the metaphor Lanzmann uses to signify a feeling of exile in his film-making practice. Immediately following the premiere of *Pourquoi Israel* at the New York Film Festival in 1973, Lanzmann was asked by a journalist whether his homeland was France or Israel, to which he immediately replied, "Madame, my homeland is my film." See Lanzmann, *Patagonian Hare*, 231–232.
25. *Ibid.*, 410.
26. Richard Brody, "Claude Lanzmann and Israel," *New Yorker*, March 20, 2012, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/claude-lanzmann-and-israel>.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Moshe Nathan, for example, referred to the film as "the widest and most thorough cinematic panorama ever produced on Israel," and also as "an exciting love poem." See Moshe Nathan, "A Search Journey" (Ma'sa Shel Chipus), *Ma'ariv*, August 27, 1976, 22.
29. *Ibid.*, 44.
30. *Tsahal* was not sponsored by the IDF, but enjoyed its unreserved support and backup for its production. Rabin said to Lanzmann: "We don't have a single shekel to offer you, but I shall put the army at your disposal; we will hide nothing from you, you will be privy to all its secrets" (*ibid.*, 44).
31. *Ibid.*, 44.
32. Lanzmann, qtd. in Friedman, "Du wirst," 65.
33. Lanzmann, qtd. in Max Dax, "Israel Enemies Take No Prisoners: A Conversation with Claude Lanzmann," *Sign and Sight*, July 7, 2009, <http://www.signandsight.com/features/1893.html>.
34. Friedman, "Du wirst," 71.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Qtd. in Dax, "Israel Enemies."
37. *Ibid.*
38. Similar traumatic recordings are the subject of a later Israeli documentary, *Censored Voices* (Mor Lushi, 2015), about censored 1967 audiotapes chronicling the oral histories of soldiers in the weeks immediately following the Six-Day War. While in Lushi's documentary the veterans' act of listening to what they had been saying

fifty years earlier affords them a unique temporal gap from which they contemplate differently on the tragic cycle of war in Israel, there is hardly any similar opportunity in Lanzmann's film. Stripping the interviewees of their personal pain in the service of substantiating a larger claim about the suffering Israeli soldier, Lanzmann voices the familiar cry of the victimized new Jew.

39. Ehud Barak, for example, who was the IDF's chief of staff at the time of production, explains in the voice-over that "if you try to summarize the whole Israeli experience in the last forty-four years, you find an elongated struggle for independence." Matan Vilnai, the deputy chief of staff back then, argues in a similar manner that "except for the war in 1982, all of the other wars were for our lives."
40. The desert, as Friedman notes, is a location for a place where conflicts and wars take place in Israel and a biblical source of Genesis, where the Jewish people walked through on their way to freedom. Friedman, "Du wirst," 71.
41. As defense minister, Sharon initiated the Lebanon War. The Kahan Commission decided that he bore a personal responsibility for the Sabra and Shatila massacre of Palestinians by Christian Phalangists in 1982.
42. In light of this paradoxical situation, Israeli author David Grossman makes the observation that unlike citizens in other nations, Israelis feel that their rights were given to them by the state and the state can take it away from them at any time (as opposed to realizing that they were born with those rights). "This is why we go to wars that we do not necessarily agree with their justification," he says in the film; "there is something very strange with us Israelis."
43. Hillel Halkin, "Claude Lanzmann and the IDF," *Commentary* (June 1995), <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/hillel-halkin/claude-lanzmann-and-the-idf/>.
44. Lanzmann shot *Tsahal* in 1994, three years after the end of the first Intifada.
45. Natasha Lehrer, "Pourquoi Tsahal?" *Jewish Quarterly* (Spring 1995): 57, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/0449010X.1995.10706043>.
46. Dax, "Israel's Enemies."
47. The personal utterance that an essay film follows "attempts to work out some reasoned line of discourse on a problem," writes Philip Lopate, and to conform with the meaning of the French word *essai* (or *essaier*). See Philip Lopate, "In Search of the Centaur: The Essay-Film," in *Totally, Tenderly, Tragically: Essays and Criticism from a Lifelong Love Affair with the Movies* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 284. The essay film seeks to explore, question, or jiggle several arguments, always reaching a well-informed admission that the issue at stake cannot entail absolute conclusions.
48. Brody, "Claude Lanzmann and Israel."

49. Ibid.
50. See Halkin, “Claude Lanzmann and the IDF.”
51. See Lehrer, “Pourquoi Tsahal?,” 57.
52. See Amnon Kapeliouk, “When Claude Lanzmann Made Propaganda for the Israeli Army,” *Verso Blogs*, July 23, 2018 (originally published in *Le Monde diplomatique*, November 1994; translation by David Broder), <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3940-when-claude-lanzmann-made-propaganda-for-the-israeli-army>.
53. Timothy Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 112.
54. Friedman, “Du wirst,” 82.