The Bereaved Daughter

• • • *Traces of Military Orphanhood in the Artwork of Israeli Women Artists*

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ABSTRACT: This article deals with the intersection between bereavement, gender, and art in the context of the cult of the fallen in Israel, focusing on the life story and artwork of two women artists, Asnat Austerlitz (b. 1969) and Michal Shachnai Yaakobi (b. 1967) who experienced orphanhood in a military context. Adopting the two-track model of bereavement suggested by Simon Rubin in 1981, the article offers an analytical, interdisciplinary examination of their artworks as adult women artists who are aware of the fragility of life and its finite character but also understand the importance and significance of continuing emotional bonds after death. Both have developed in diverse medium gender-based artistic creations related to the cult of the fallen creating models of alternative and counter-hegemonic memory that are manifested through personal languages full of irony, fantasy, and pain.

KEYWORDS: counter memory, cult of fallen, gender, Israel Art, melancholy objects, military orphanhood, post-traumatic growth, two-track model of bereavement

Despite the centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the unending chain of loss and bereavement from its ongoing trauma, the field of Israeli art and, particularly, its central institutions have done little to tackle questions of mourning, bereavement, and orphanhood under military circumstances. Exhibitions and studies dealing with military grief and bereavement in art are scarcer than those dealing with the persona of the soldier, the terror of war, the cult of the fallen,[1] and the weight of militarism in Israeli culture.[2] Outside the art scene's mainstream, a small number of solo and group exhibitions have explicitly spoken to military

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orphanhood experienced in the first-person, co-opting artists who had lost parents, offspring, siblings, or spouses.

This article focuses on the works of Asnat Austerlitz (b. 1969 in Kiryat Tivon) and Michal Shachnai Yaakobi (b. 1967 in Kibbutz Yifat). Both are multidisciplinary artists who lost their fathers under military circumstances in their childhood. Austerlitz was nine years old when she was lost her father, and Shachnai Yaakobi was only one year old. The experience generated, personally and emotionally, different life-stories. The sudden loss of a parent who had been present in their lives is markedly different from an upbringing with a father who fulfills fatherly functions. The artists' stories are personal-private and national-public-genderic all at once. Growing up as bereaved daughters meant they were raised on the concepts of sacrifice, victimhood, and heroism imprinted into the cult of the fallen. It also meant they visited their fathers' graves and took part in annual memorial ceremonies. Both artists began to ask questions about the role that had been imposed on them. As time went on, the more questions they had. The artists turned their art into a playing field on which they could repudiate the commandments of the 'national religion' which elevates the military-related dead to the ranks of 'martyrs.' Their martyrdom was made akin to those who die for the glory of God but assigned families a role to play in the secular national cast. While the concept of 'national religion,' aka 'secular religion' or 'civil-national religion,' is familiar to the literature on romantic national patriotism since the late nineteenth century (Almog 1996: 315),[3] the Jewish-Israeli-Zionist case is more complex. This is due to the blending of religion, nation, and ethnicity by which the modern Israeli-Jewish nation is defined. In view of all these elements, the two artists have managed lengthy artistic careers that reflect varying degrees of attention to father-orphanhood, objects of memory, the bereavement industry, the national religion, and their struggle with commemoration in its overt and allusive forms.

Theoretical Context

Between Private Mourning and National Bereavement

In Israel, the Jewish culture of memory (Yerushalmi 1988), symbolized by the command "You shall tell your child," is steadily transforming into a culture of bereavement. The public status of this national bereavement is a mechanism of physicality and consciousness. It has established a strong and conspicuous presence in the landscape and cycle of cultural life by populating the public sphere with monuments, annual memorial

ceremonies, and commemorative projects. Memorial booklets, films, and poems about the fallen are central in structuring collective memory and educating posterity (Ben-Amos and Bar-Tal 2004; Lomsky-Feder 2003). In this 'perforated' and policed space, it is hard for personal mourning and even harder for personal, private orphanhood to exist. In Israel's first years, the national overlay played a comforting role. Since the crisis of national consensus that followed the 1973 Yom Kippur War however, the tension between personal mourning and its shaping as a collective asset has grown considerably (Katz 2007; Guilat and Waksman 2012; Rubin et al. 2016). As criticism of the military and political leadership took shape, a model of 'political bereavement' formed in which many bereaved families disavowed their obligation to the 'right' discourse and public behavior in bereavement (Doron and Lebel 2004; Lebel 2011; Rosenthal 2001). Udi Lebel and Yona Rochlin (2010) note that while the families' heroic role has not changed, the role of the victim has superseded that of the hero. This has enabled the politicization of bereavement and, in an evolutionary move, its 'privatization' (Feige 2010; Glasner-Heled 2018). The various demarches and stages of this public struggle reflect a particular facet of the tension between the personal and the national. They do not, however, mirror aspects of personal affect and are not attentive to or representative of the voices arising from the gender discourse as it was manifest—for example, through the controversies related to the role of the parents, especially the mothers as 'memory entrepreneurs,' deeply involved in designing the Helicopter Disaster memorial (Feige 2010). These processes also correspond to the concept of 'counter memory,' which refers to the outgrowth of a confrontation with collective memory that banishes or represses memory that is personal or does not square with that of the hegemonic groups. This works to challenge the legitimacy of the historical narrative produced by collective memory, while also seeking symbolic representation in history (Foucault 1980). James Young (1992) unpacks the concept of commemoration and discusses the structural failure that has occurred in using the monumental signifier (statue, mural, monument) to signify what is absent. Challenging this paradox, Young coined the term 'counter memorial.'

In psychological terms, 'counter memory' also refers to what Kenneth Doka (1989) defined as 'disenfranchised grief' that results when a person's grief from significant loss is not openly acknowledged, socially validated, or publicly mourned. In the context of Israeli national bereavement, following Doka, Lebel (2013a) coined the concept of "counter-hegemonic bereavement." It characterizes groups or individuals seeking to reframe the discussion around what deserves honoring and memorialization, beyond mere recognition of their personal loss and trauma in national terms.

Counter-hegemonic bereavement includes various positions in Israeli bereavement discourse: families of terror attacks victims that protest their 'second class status' in the national bereavement hierarchy, Holocaust survivors with traumatic disorders who did not fit the heroic military Israeli bereavement regime;, the Parents Circle-Families Forum (PCFF), an Israeli-Palestinian organization that works to prevent bereavement and promote dialogue, tolerance, reconciliation and peace. Counter-hegemonic bereavement offers the opportunity to deal with a complex and ambiguous stance: a desire to belong to the bereavement community, to expand and diversify its discourse without necessarily accepting the principles of the collective ethos, and even deeply criticizing and undermining that ethos.

In the tension between the private and the public also stands the 'memory and commemoration industry.' The notion of a memory industry related to the production of Israeli remembrance and commemoration culture was inspired by the Frankfurt School's 'culture industry' (Zuckerman 2009). The term referred to the mass commercialization of cultural outcomes in the twentieth century. More specifically, the products of the memory-industry culture are manufactured on a national assembly line that creates uniformity. Like the products of consumption culture, these products generate demand for themselves. The result is the creation of a false consciousness that allows consumers to collaborate and produce ideologies that 'justify' their domination and make the situation permanent.

The memory industry shuttles between secular and religious planes and creates rituals and objects in their light. These are invented objects that bear no resemblance to the objects of memory that personal mourning work puts to use. Vamik Volkan (1979) describes the roles and meanings of memory objects in working through grief. He also illustrates the religious-mystical role of relics and the magical role of the fetish. Volkan (1989) even identified these 'linking objects' as foreshadowers of two-track mourning, part of a lengthy process of separation that takes place during one's lifetime.

Military Orphanhood and Prolonged Grief

An understanding of the construction of the 'proper bereaved military orphan' requires a discussion of orphanhood (Shalev 2014) and with the singularity of military orphanhood in Israel. Rubin (1981) was among the first to give attention to the psychological schism created by the hegemonic model of bereavement. Military bereavement in Israel created a model of 'prolonged grief' that is far from the pathological perception of melancholia (Freud [1917] 2002). In his years of work with bereaved parents

and families, Rubin (1981) developed the Two-Track Model of Bereavement, comprising overt (outer) and psychological (inner) elements of individual coping with mourning and loss. The model gradually grew to gain acceptance by experts in the field (Rubin et al. 1993, 2016).

The Two-Track Model conceptualizes the process of working through loss on two separate but interrelated tracks. The first track refers to the individual's personality changes and biopsychosocial functioning in the initial stages after loss. This includes anxiety, depression, and somatic complaints. It can also include rebuilding family relationships, and generally wholly participating in day-to-day tasks. Expressed in popular terms, 'success' on this track includes closure and getting back to everyday life. The second track relates to mourners' emotional connection and prolonged relationship with the deceased or in military cases, the fallen. It includes imagining and remembering, emotional distancing, positive or negative affect vis-à-vis the deceased, lifelong occupation with loss and the deceased, idealization, and conflict.

The two-track model of the prolonged mourner can help us understand the role orphanhood plays on the mourner in the course of their life. Phyllis Silverman and J. William Worden (1992) investigate child behaviors and responses to the loss of a parent. They find that most children think about and are reminded of the deceased parent, dream about them, and speak to themselves about them several times per week. According to Yonat Aviad (2001), the connection with the remaining parent or another significant person may entrench patterns of stress and guilt in the child when the sense of the deceased's 'presence' in the child's inner world triggers a response of fear or discomfort in adults. In contrast, when the child remembers the deceased in the context of play and their (imagined) presence is accompanied by a sense of confidence, emotions of warmth, affection, and acceptance are triggered in adults. Children find comfort in having a relationship with the deceased after the latter's death; from their perspective, they do not live in the past. The sense of protectedness provided by the clashing emotions of the surroundings help post-trauma growth (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004).

The two-track model seems well suited to understanding child bereavement processes in conjunction with the emphasis on having a relationship with the remaining parent (Aviad 2001). In military orphanhood, the role of the state is added as the state maintains a 'co-parenting' relationship with the remaining parent. Military orphans are tasked not only with communicating with their personal parent but also with bringing the fallen father back to being their personal father. And since the surviving parent in military orphanhood in Israel is the mother, a gender variable enters the equation. This is because only the maternal model of communication

(Bowlby [1988] 2016) continues, and it exerts a definitive influence on both genders. Either way, gender issues relating to the future role of children in the family and society arise. In her seminal work on the reproduction of mothering, Nancy Chodorow ([1978] 1999) shows that the mother plays a central role in constructing the matrix of identities between sex and gender through the division of household roles. In the bereaved home, female orphans 'practice' gender roles as prescribed by the national order, which has permeated the private space. By invoking the two-track model, we can access the works of women artists who experienced orphanhood in childhood as aesthetic reflections of a formative experience and relate to them as complex testimonies that stride between two tracks: Sisyphean attempts to communicate with the elusive father-figure on the one hand, and responses if not resistance to the structuring of these women as 'bereaved daughters' according to the desired models of the cult of the fallen as well as the artists' place in it as women, on the other.

Methodology

The article sets out from the women artists' studios and tracks their life-stories and art. Instead of reviewing any individual work, it tracks longer-term processes, sometimes years long, of contemplation and shared discourse.

In my visits to the studios of Austerlitz and Shachnai Yaakobi, I was exposed to artmaking in mid-process and/or after the art was displayed, in which the burden of bereavement was a motive, an anchor, a weight, a roadside charge, and also a craving and a yearning. When a work in progress is revealed, a shared place for dialogue between the researcher and the artist comes about, yielding a broader understanding as well as mutual insights that are applied in both my research and in their artmaking. Silenced content and enunciated content intersect in the artmaking and the research, as do the gaps between the spoken language and my artistic experience as an observer and interpreter via metaphor, material, medium, and other manners of exhibiting.

In this article, I use a mixed method of visual analysis and qualitative research. By contemplating and analyzing the two artists' works and basing myself on my transcribed and coded dialogue with the artists, I draw lines along which one may understand the burden of orphanhood in their work as adult women artists—in particular, their attitude toward given objects of memory and metaphors of bereavement. Finally, I reflect their relationship to gender, specifically to the artists as bereaved daughters.

Applying narrative interpretive research from a gender perspective to deal with both the voices and the representation of bereaved women in Israel and in its culture (Cohen-Fried 2019; Masarwa 2015; Olmert 2018; Shapira 2019), I ask whether and how one can extricate a silenced discourse associated with the feminine discourse. Not enough research attention has been given to perspectives grounded in bereavement, orphanhood, and gender. That is particularly the case for works created over years that reflect a life-journey within and are opposed to the hegemonic perception of bereavement. In this article, I ask how the gap or schism between the personal and the public as a shared characteristic of military orphanhood finds expression in artists' works. I also ask whether, and in what ways, unique characteristics of women's expression exist in their works and in the context of gender discourse.

The two artists' student careers followed different paths despite their commonalities in photographing, collecting, and editing representations of the culture. Shachnai Yaakobi, a multidisciplinary artist and curator, studied art and education, photography and video in Israel. Currently, she is a curator of the Gallery of Israeli Art at the commemoration center in Kiryat Tivon while maintaining an active studio life. In her own words: "I'm a woman, a mother, an artist, and a curator. When I curate and when I edit films, I edit meanings . . . connect different elements and create new meaning. . . . [Then she reemphasizes], I *edit meaning*" (Shachnai Yaakobi 2020, emphasis added).

Austerlitz studied photography in Israel and at the International Center of Photography in New York. She also studied art at the Slade School of Fine Art in London. She is a multidisciplinary artist and a picture-taker by training who does not take pictures, does not produce documentation, and does not pursue her objects. She gleans them ready-made. She calls herself "a collector of images" (Austerlitz 2017).

Discussion

I found three main themes that denote poetic contents and media that coalesce into a distinct statement. By investigating them, I aim to determine how life and art created spiral tracks that resemble the two-track perception of mourning, as well as how core topics continued to resurface and received artistic treatment and sundry poetic expressions. The three themes demarcate an arena where the private and the public, memory of the past and concern for the future, are worked through. The first theme represents the daughter's stance and the continuity of relations with the private father as present/absentee. The second theme questions and

challenges patterns of memory at home and in the family. It proposes alternative methods of commemoration and examines the role of objects of memory. The third theme emerges from the personal circle and projects onto the cultural and artistic field in Israel. It mobilizes irony, humor, and ways of expressing temptation and disingenuity. In all three themes, the roles of the bereaved daughter (and her own role as a mother) are continually translocated from the personal-emotional plane to the public-political and the artists propose a rephrasing of given gender stances in the arena of bereavement.

The Private Father as Present/Absentee

> Today my father is relatively present in [my] life. There's always room for improvement but there's something missing, it's an emotional pit that I try to fill by means of art but don't always succeed. (Shachnai Yaakobi 2020)

Shachnai Yaakobi lost her father before she could develop memories and language. In her prolonged journey to him, and her quest for the meaning of his absence, she wishes to build an inner witness to the trauma and the image of the private father she experiences as a photograph on the wall and as a grave that is out of the ordinary. In her film *My Prince on a White Horse* (2007),[4] she describes her and her sister's journey in the footsteps of the persona of their father, Oded. In the opening scene, the two standing at their father's grave, dressed in white blouses. Michal's sister Idit speaks first:

> Just a second. You mustn't smile. You have to cover your eyes with sunglasses because then someone might think you're crying and that's the thing that's worth the most. . . . I'd stand here and then the pressure starts right off—I have to think about something sad, [then, as if commanding herself:] Think about something sad . . . and I had nothing to think about . . . and all the little kids stand here on the side and stare at me.

In 2016, after producing works dealing with her identity as a young mother in a patriarchal and militaristic milieu, Shachnai Yaakobi returned to the daughter's position. Seeking an act of visual art that would respond to the annual condolence letters that the Ministry of Defense sends bereaved families (Smalheiser and Shamir 1999), she began to produce engraved postcards that she would (metaphorically) 'return' to the sender, who does not expect a reply. To the images on the cards—originating in objects such as a weight, a crown, a cluster of sharp peppers, a stuffed deer, and others—she added words that she harvested from the ministry's bereavement lexicon, 're-editing' their meanings, as she put

it. Amid this operation, which she based on public images outside her private emotional world, the one and only picture of her on her father's shoulders, taken from behind, sneaks in. The original photo now appears in rotogravure form, a blurry echo of a bodily sensation that becomes elusive as the years pass, about which it is said, "And they became one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).[5]

In this work, the father's hands, serving as a stable prop for the little girl perched on his shoulders, and his sturdy back create a pyramid in which her tiny face turns back. It is revealed to us, and to herself, while the father remains faceless. The choice of the passage from Genesis 2:24, without the Hebrew vowel diacritics, is an attempt to create distance from the original context of couplehood and sex and also to illuminate the girl's ineradicable bond with her father, years after his death. In her personal-private physical embodiment, the artist responds to the rhetoric of national bereavement by reappropriating what had been taken from her, her private father, when he became a military casualty. It seems, however, that she uses the image as an internal witness that pursues her and is erased with the passage of years (Glasner-Heled 2018).

Unlike Shachnai Yaakobi, who owns one picture that shows her with her father—the girl perched on his shoulders—Austerlitz at age nine had a father-figure who became a present-absentee. Her father's death, a sudden accidental event that added him to the national pantheon of the fallen, was for her an existential crisis that painted her life in the shadow of life's fragility (Aviad 2001). "My father's death was *the greatest crisis of my life.* It's from there that I head out to my works. Whether I like it or not, whether it's how things look or about their essence—it's there. . . . *Later on, much later, I realized that, yes, there's also an ongoing biographical thing*" (Austerlitz 2015, emphasis added).

The fragility of life and the need for paternal clinging find expression in Austerlitz's works precisely because the artist had had a father-figure, a full family life, and memories embodied in his objects, records, and photographs. As a girl, Austerlitz clung to objects because this was how she could retain and maintain, as noted in studies on child mourning (Aviad 2001). In her works as an adult artist, she re-addresses her need to cling and her wish to re-encounter her father. In two very brief (a minute or less) videos, she describes two situations of wish and disappointment.

In *Feather* (2005, 1:05),[6] a feather appears against an airy green background, crosses the frame, and disappears. In the other video, *Punchbag 1* (2002, 0:45), a female boxer stands motionless, waiting, and at the last moment hugs her punching bag. These reflect the waiting and embracing of an orphan (figure 1). Whereas the first work is delicate, fragile, and sad, the second deals the viewer something like a body blow.

FIGURE 1. Asnat Austerlitz, *Punchbag 1* (2002, video, 00:45), https://vimeo.com/user5540106

> The fragility of life is always there, in the infrastructure of the works. Not in simple visibility. . . . The whole, the accumulation, creates a stratification of pain. The words don't preach; they're not unequivocal preachy political works. They gaze at reality and reflect it. (Austerlitz 2014)

In her recent work, Austerlitz continues to deal with the gradual disappearance of the image as a metaphoric move toward a missing paternal representation. In her *Monotypes* series (2017–2019), she cleans a metal plate on which nothing has been drawn. The plate is scrubbed but scratches remain and the wound that refuses to heal makes its presence. Austerlitz's choice of the monotype and the large slab (80 x 60 cm) puts her to strenuous physical labor. Her entire body has to stand over the slab, hoist it, and carry its weight to the press. Each time, she wishes that the 'nothing' that carries some kind of 'something' will be revealed. In our conversations, Austerlitz spoke of the monotype technique as a co-author of sorts, an additional entity or force that joins her in the act of artmaking (Austerlitz 2019). She spreads the paint with pieces of gauze, Scotch-Brite, and a gauze-wrapped comb. She does not create any image deliberately, as one would with a paintbrush or a camera. The result is a shadow-image, a residue-image. Powered by physical or mechanical actions, the slab 'produces' an image by the pressure of the press of the body that's doing the cleaning, raising the image from the dead. In contrast to the two short videos above that have a beginning and an end, the series of monotypes generates a repetitive weekly journey composed of an accumulation of experiences that have a conciliatory quality. The underlying trauma seems to give way to coping with the void. And as Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun (2004) note in reference to post-traumatic growing up, the sense of being protected returns.

Two tasks were created each week during the weeks-long project. One is cleaning and printing; the other is an act of printing in which 'cleaning' is a picturesque act—a literal eruption of creativity and investigation. Contemplating the slab and the prints, which look like byproducts of a 'weekly visit' to a workshop, I associatively related them to weekly visits to the cemetery and the acts of cleaning and maintaining the tombstones. When I mentioned this, Austerlitz said that the first printing sometimes looked like a shroud, adding: "At first, I clean and clean, and then I place my marks and my body on the slab. But the more I clean, the more I disappear and the more the slab emerges. When the slab comes into view, it reveals its marks, the marks that I had not created, that I'd accepted. The feeling is that the work is created from what's received" (Austerlitz 2019).

In the first theme, one may identify the daughter's stance and the experience of orphanhood as a seal imprinted directly or indirectly onto their works. They articulate the wish and the need to prolong the connection with the private father as present/absentee in their lives. The works may be seen as representations of a testimony that attests to the trauma and the post-traumatic growth that receive further expression in the second theme, which tracks change with respect to the question of family memory and commemoration.

Family, Objects of Memory, and Alternative Commemoration

Occupation with memory and death underlies and overlays Austerlitz's works. Her choice of photography, long defined as a 'the return of the dead' (Barthes 1980: 9), is not different. Nor is her interest in collecting. The way she deals with photographs—by collecting, sorting, masking, and mediating, whether the representations come from the media or from the nuclear and extended family—is manifest in an attempt to use past objects to construct representations of continuity and venues of reminiscence, places where the present continues with her arduous personal care.

When she learned of her father's death, Austerlitz collected personal objects that had belonged to him and has kept them to this day. In her works, she evidently uses memory objects for prolonged mourning work (Rubin 1995). As Vamik Volkan (1979), Deborah Lutz (2011), and others have argued, memory objects play a cultural role of personal and social symbolic meaning. Both the nexus of image and object in contexts of memory, as well as the revival and reinterpretation of objects in photography appear in Austerlitz' works as a melancholy aesthetic that fits the definition of objects of memory as objects of melancholy.

In the 1990s, Austerlitz created two series deriving from objects of family memory. The photo series *Mnemonic* (1999) was produced from 8 mm

movies taken by her father and in which the artist, her mother, and her sister appear. After converting the images to video, she saved a sample to her computer with a little retouching. Originally in color, the film was converted to black-and-white, and Austerlitz produced it as an ordinary home movie that she developed and printed in a darkroom. The printed photo—the old-new object—projects the gaze of the father and his daughter. The bereaved daughter appropriates her dead father's gaze. Intimate moments are separated from the continuum and confronted with moments of collective representation: a girl running by the sea, and nearby a girl standing at a state ceremony. Each have the same delicate, whispering elegy. The political and the sensory-emotional intersect and do not cancel each other out.

In the second series, *Memory Object* (1995), Austerlitz photographed quotidian objects of women members of her family who have died. Personal or family objects are captured in a large format (1m x 1m) against a white background. In the center of the frame, each object projects a delicate, almost invisible shadow. The soft lighting gives the photographed objects a regal touch. Feminine objects—a white kerchief with initials, a pink ribbon used to tie starched napkins together, a wedding ring, a hairbrush, and a bowtie—as photographic metaphors become venues of remindedness in which the family is represented not as portraits of paterfamilias-figures but via objects harvested from the world of women. In these series, the daughter carves out a personal place among family memories and avails herself of the female dynasty. In other words, as she designed her version of the *Pietà*—Kindness and Mercy (based on Michelangelo's 1498 work), the original mother and son are replaced by daughter and father (figure 2). Lacking a personal identity, the daughter-figure is symbolized by red and black, the colors of pain and grief. The daughter clutches her dead, faceless, beheaded father. He may be seen as an anguished and unendurable representation of the absent. He even seems like he is about to slide off her lap. In this image, from her book *Dictionary* (2016), an additional switching or inversion takes place: the feminine elegy is not military. It may originate in Christian tradition, as if the artist wishes to transfer the national onto a personal-emotional track. It works to elicit a universal emotion: a mother's anguish for her son and a daughter's grief for her father. The family, the primordial connection, is the venue of memory.

Shachnai Yaakobi nominates the family as an alternative venue of memory and its inverse, commemoration. In contrast to public mourning patterns that until recently typified the public sphere, defined by researchers as mono-genderic or plainly biased toward the male habitus (Cohen-Fried 2019; Rubin et al. 2016; Shapira 2019), Shachnai Yaakobi and other women artists propose a critical contemplation of the cultural mechanisms that shaped them and the national memory industry.[7]

FIGURE 2. Asnat Austerlitz, *Untitled (Pietà)* (2010–2014), published in *Dictionary* (2016)

In her "Dear Families" project (2016), which includes, inter alia, the video works *The Letter* (2015, 4:05)[8] and *Sign Language* (2016, 3:15),[9] Shachnai Yaakobi co-opts her daughters and for the first time, their father.[10] Here she manages to speak to the question of public bereavement inside the home. She also manages to place the private sphere in front of and in juxtaposition to the hollow molds of the institutionalized public sphere (Lebel 2013b). A kind of cottage industry of counter memory (Young 1992) set out from the 'user's experience'—more specifically, as the daughter of a bereaved family who receives a 'personal' letter from the Ministry of Defense, signed by the Minister and a 'personal' facilitator. The verbal and visual texts produced by the state, or under the state's patronage, martyr both spaces and bereaved families. The bereaved parents are described, quoting David Ben-Gurion, 'like wondrous lions of Israel' (letter 1956, in Smolheiser and Shamir 1999).

The images, expressions, and rhetoric in the letters have received treatment from a variety of artists and contexts. In her description of the video work *The Letter,* Shachnai Yaakobi (2017,19) writes:

> I invite my daughters and their father to create a ceremony in which they'll read out a letter that I composed out of those [letters] that we, like the other bereaved families, receive year after year. By isolating the sentences and expressions in the original letters and reconnecting [them], the state rhetoric is revealed. It's a ceremony in an impromptu at-home format that represents the spillover of the national contents and rituals into the familial and intimate domestic sphere. My daughters were privileged to know their grandfather as a grave on Memorial Day. From an early age, they have been used to lowering their gaze into the grave of the grandfather whom they had not known, to hold back from laughing with embarrassment, and to behave in accordance with the rules of protocol that society dictated to them as the second generation of a bereaved family. At the photographed ceremony, they stepped into the role with no problem whatsoever, having been well schooled in the sundry Memorial Day ceremonies. In most cases, families are invited to watch ceremonies, but in this case the family itself produces the ceremony and it's not clear for whom.

In the 'new' text that Shachai Yaakobi composed in the form of a collage of platitudes, sentences or concepts appear that attempt to formulate the handsome image of the bereaved families as the state perceives it: "proud and erect in your restrained and exalted comportment." The transition to the family is a retreat from the public sphere to the private. It creates a place where the present copes with the past. It also creates paths for the active involvement of household members while also repelling the representational, passive place that is reserved for the bereaved family. In the family bosom, children practice role-switching, reject the invasive meaningfulness of public discourse. In doing so, they re-edit and re-appropriate the rules of protocol, resist state rhetoric, and offer an alternative that blends humor with powerful emotion. This piece can be understood as an expression of counter-hegemonic bereavement (Lebel 2013a). This is because the private family ceremony contests the hegemonic repertoire and publicly resists the hegemonic regime as an artwork. At the same time, it reframes the role of the bereaved daughter and the granddaughters and includes them in intergenerational transmission.

"It's Not a Kids' Game; It's Resistance"

The first two themes concern the past and the absent and offer the family sphere as a present that works through the past. The third theme

meanwhile subjects language and the public sphere, the ethos of war and sacrifice, and the mechanisms that maintain them, to critical and demonstrative treatment. It reflects concern for the future. Its most salient characteristic is the poetic expressiveness artists share. Artists make use of distancing, estranging irony, ridicule, minimization and put on a camouflage of childhood sweetness. They draw the viewer inward by 'mobilizing' a childish innocence that mixes high and low, the sacred and the mundane, play and fantasy. Thus, the artists create an externalized anti-pathos that 'attacks' the viewer. The viewer experiences it as strident objection to the appropriation of grief and as a refusal to be included in the mechanism that replicates the sacrificial martial ethos. Thus, the objects or images that originate in the national language are emptied of this language but retain their outer shell. In this manner, they emphasize their hollowness and are re-stocked with new contents originating in the everyday.

In her exhibition *Zman-Mincha* [*Offering Time*] (2019), Shachnai Yaakobi took an additional step away from the industry and objects of memory. The notion of 'gift offerings' entered the lexicon of national grieving with the memorial letters. Since 1952, the state has awarded bereaved families memorial letters where they are called 'gifts of appreciation.' By dictionary definition, the term used—*minha* and in the plural *menahot*—is a ritual religious gift that believers offer to God or to saints in the expectation of a return, reconciliation, remembrance, or closure. As in: "[The king of Aram] told Hazael, 'Take a gift [*minha*] with you and go to meet the man of God'" (II Kings 8:8). The *minha* in its original sacrificial meaning (Exodus 29:41) was offered in the Jerusalem Temple at twilight (Leviticus 2:4). Accordingly, the Jewish *minha* prayer service is held from midday to sunset and even until the stars come out. The series *Miniments* (figure 3)—miniaturized monuments—was created pursuant to the offering of *menahot*. Shachnai Yaakobi's sculptural treatment of the *menahot* turns to the aesthetics of the absurd. It empowers the objectified aspect they deliver within the overall mechanism of commemoration. In the 1950s, it was postage stamps that marked Memorial Day. It later became history books until they became ornamental objects—either memory objects or sacred implements. The 'gift' (Heb.: *shai*) sent to the families also derives its meaning from Jewish religious ritual (as in candlesticks or a menorah) but converts it into the 'national religion.' Paradoxically, unlike a religious offering (*minha*), the offering in this case is not from believers but the state. And the state's wish is to continue honoring its contract with bereaved families who, like fallen soldiers, are discharged only by death. The semantic interplay of *minha* as a gift and the wording of a memorial letter sent out in 1957—"The precious gift [*matat*] that our dear ones gave to the nation and the homeland"

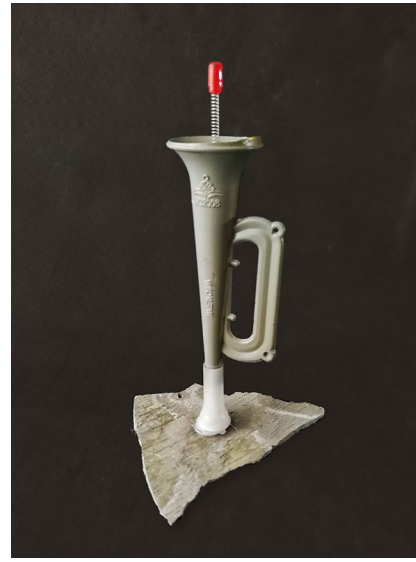

FIGURE 3. Michal Shachnai Yaakobi, *Miniments* (clockwise from top left): *Tzvika*, Ready-Made assemblage and lighting atop a Signpost, 52 x 46 cm, 2018; *Miniment 3*, mixed technique (concrete and Ready-Made), 20 x 09 cm, 2018; *Miniment 2*, mixed technique (poured concrete, snowball, and printed transparency), 23 x 10 cm, 2018. Photo: Iris Barnea.

(1957, letter from the Public Council for Commemoration of the Soldier to bereaved families, in Smolheiser and Shamir 1999)—takes on macabre meaning in the state's annual gift-giving and gift-returning project vis-à-vis the families (Burstein 2008). In regard to *menahot* too, Shachnai Yaakobi merely uses tools to shed light on something that is ready-made in the commemoration mechanism's infrastructure.

The aesthetics of sanctity disintegrate in the intersections that Shachnai Yaakobi provides the miniments she constructs in response to official gifts. It allows domains, rhetorical registers, and worlds of contents to mingle. The warning sign decorated with a deer is not simply a tray on which a stuffed animal sits. It instead dialogues cheerfully with symbols

FIGURE 4. Michal Shachnai Yaakobi (from left): "Plucking," 2020. Greenhouse: aluminum tubing and plastic sheeting, 200 x 180 x 120 cm; "Red Everlasting," sewage tubes and polystyrene balls, 78 cm height. Photo: Iris Barnea.

and emblems from orders of knights and exposes the deep structure of the male discourse of heroism. The watchtowers atop the serrated structure are hybrid objects that, like souvenirs from distant lands, sit in an artificial bubble that snowflakes embellish with a romantic blanket. Thus, far from the use of personal grief for the exigencies of justifying a higher authority's grim verdict, heroism is stripped of its pathos and presented as the personal version of an anti-pathos that concurrently expresses a personal grief that defies consolation. Perhaps this is "the emotional pit that I try to fill by means of art but don't always succeed."

In another work, *Katif* [*Plucking*] (Installation 2020) (figure 4), Shachnai Yaakobi depicts a nursery where the future products of the bereavement industry are raised. The installation has multiple components. Sprigs made of plastic tubes and red balls grow in a greenhouse. It is an 'industrial' nursery, a budding incubator of artificial Red Everlasting flowers. Outside the incubator is a pool with a fountain reminiscent of agricultural basins where harvested produce is cleaned. Red balls float in the pool; they could be poisoned apples or part of the process of manufacturing and symbols of death. The balls are irrigated by an elf who wears a Ben-Gurion mask. Across stands a horned creature with a megaphone-face, clearing its throat. Next to it, on a video screen, like a parody of a do-it-yourself film, is a Red Everlasting flower that symbolizes the blood of the heroes of Israel's wars. It is revealed as a 'craft' tasked to the artist in the guise of a

teacher who demonstrates how it should be prepared. Shachnai Yaakobi uses irony to uncover the mechanism, the 'incubator of sacrifice.' Austerlitz shares the aim to reveal the mechanism's inner workings. She does this by focusing on the language of memory and national heroism that underlies the language of bereavement and the justification of sacrifice (Azaryahu 1995).

It was in late 2003 that Austerlitz launched her central project, a ten-year effort that culminated with the publication of her artist-book *Dictionary* in 2016. Unlike the works displayed in the exhibit hall, this is a book of images that originate in words; the words provide accompaniment. Written in English, the artist's principal spoken language at the beginning of the project, the book comprises fifty-six images divided into six chapters: Destruction, Dictionary, Generals, Battles, Night Vision, and Epilogue.

For Hebrew readers, *Dictionary* speaks in a language that proclaims its foreignness. So does its form: page after page of images, an interpretive article, biographical details, and a list of titles of images that in large majority are "untitled." But this is neither a book of riddles nor a visual dictionary. When Austerlitz plunged into the visual research (Sinner 2017) of Israeli daily newspapers and weekend newspapers in England, she searched for images that signified encoded images of violence. Motivated to re-use these images to say something about their meaning, she reinvented ways of expression and action strategies that would allow her to recode them. In the project, she asks: Who has the authority to invest images with baggage? Who has the right to encode them? Will the thing that the authority defines as proper (the authority being embodied in and represented by the newspaper editor) be laid bare after the aesthetic manipulations are over? Will the adoption of a sort-of game akin to a child who 'scribbles' on a printed sheet reveal constitutive cultural elements by seeing through camouflages and lowering background noise? In her slow, halting contemplation of the images, the artist builds semi-manual visual tools that demonstrate the way the social is constructed with the aesthetic by cleansing and reduction. The tools that typify the Photoshop program—filling spaces with a standard color, duplicating, producing outlines in different but predetermined thicknesses, and using functions that make details disappear—are all mobilized to amplify and exclude motifs and to decode the images' aesthetic codes and replace them with new and alluring alternatives. "I call the project *Dictionary* because I'm trying to create a visual dictionary, a different order of some kind, an anti-order of sorts in the guise of an order, so as to understand matters by the way they look, this incomprehensible thing, the atrocious situation of unfinished war that we find ourselves in" (Austerlitz 2016).

Dictionary works in deceptive modus. In the course of her lengthy project, Austerlitz created the image via the word. However, unlike an ordinary dictionary, the words were not in alphabetical order but according to the options offered by Internet search engines. That is, in line with the common use of terms that allude to violence. She made this choice in her eagerness to subvert the authority and hierarchy of the existing order that the 'standard' dictionary embodies. Austerlitz also uses soft, pleasant pastoral colors and clear lines resembling a child's drawing. This works to express resistance to militaristic values and the mechanism that structures the gender identities that serve it: the identity-less generic soldier and the individual opinion that, by reverting to the model, becomes decorative wallpaper (*Untitled* [*Uniform*]), the wailing daughter (*Pietà*—figure 2) and the powerful general who is a cardboard cutout of the regime of power, all of whom appear in the "Generals" chapter.

In the "Battle" chapter of *Dictionary,* war is described as a series of 'clean' strategic moves on generalissimos' drawing boards. In contrast, the "Destruction" chapter depicts the physical devastation of conflict: holes and pits left behind by shells, either enlarged, reduced, or by mechanical replication. They become background spots that are 'pleasing to the eye.' They also become abstract soothing pictures and backdrops on which life carries on, oblivious to its cost.

Austerlitz chose cultural code words from the Israeli lexicon and bundled them in saccharine packaging. It works to evoke the painstaking work of a student of the patriotic order who has broken the rules, toys with symbols, and discovers what lurks behind them by addressing both the atrocities of war and the military routine in a web of grace and innocence. Thus, she re-appropriates the rules of authority (the father) in what the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan calls "the name of the father" (Evans 2005).[11] The feminist theoretician Hélène Cixous regarded both spoken and written language, and visual syntax in this case, as the supreme feminist challenge. It is a challenge that would determine women's ideological, genderic, and ethical stances and messages in their confrontation with patriarchal hegemony (Cixous [1975] 2006). Therefore, setting up language as an alternative symbolic sphere is a demonstrably political act in that it equates the personal with the political and arrays the speaker's identity as a set of intersections of gender and class—in this case the bereaved-daughter class.

One may regard all these modes of action and expression as 'soft power' that hopes to disrupt, disturb, and irritate the hard power of the mechanisms at work—a pink and innocent guerrilla force. Its fantastical quality, reminiscent of a children's game, makes the artistic space into an area of passage (Winnicott 1958, 1974). By invoking fantasy, the mechanism

that allows children to believe in the present as they play, Austerlitz and Shachnai Yaakobi put together a personal language. But it is not with respect to a soldier-father, but as adult women who are aware of the fragility of life and seek to prolong life as meticulous researcher-decoders of cultural codes.

Conclusion

These two female artists propose models of alternative memory and reach out to bereavement and the bereavement industry in different ways, each unique to the artist but thematically proximate to the other. These contributions, as we have seen, are compatible with post-traumatic growth that flows from the confirmation that the two-track model of mourning gives to prolonged grief. The description and analysis of their works reflects the contents, questions, and assumptions that surface in the literature on the tension between personal memory and national bereavement, the uniqueness of the bereaved daughters' status of orphanhood, and even the weight of 'ready-made' cultural structures, be they memory objects, texts, or the language of bereavement at large. They follow an ongoing path that I find fascinating.

Austerlitz and Shachnai Yaakobi are collectors, gleaners, and hoarders of images and objects. Both base themselves on the world of cultural metaphors that the Israeli 'national religion' has invented, and the rite of which military bereavement is part. Accordingly, the loss of the personal father and, concomitantly, the transformation of his memory into a national asset as an IDF casualty has given these artists a special and obligatory status. Although they flatly reject this status, they negotiate with it incessantly. They deconstruct and reconstruct it by using commemorative objects and popular metaphors that constitute linguistic signifiers of the nationally signified that refuses to relax its grip on them. Shachnai Yaakobi's works relate directly to the commemoration industry and the centrality of the public ceremony and its messages, which replicate to exhaustion the imagined communication that takes place between the fallen and the living. An important element in this communication is the will of the fallen as expressed by the official interpreters who define and inculcate the collective legacy (Azaryahu 1995): "With their death, they will give us life."

Austerlitz and Shachnai Yaakobi have an ongoing interest in resisting the engineering mechanisms of maleness and their after-products of heroism and bereavement. Their resistance allows their underlying anger over loss, which is unjustified from their personal-childlike standpoint, to fester and preserve a possible channel of communication with a father who is no

more and with the girls whom they were or could have been. They seethe over what was taken from them: a foreign body in the intimate zone that the intimate zone is expected to adopt. They rage over the dual loss that fuels an acute need to reveal linguistic manipulations structured both in the language of the ceremony and in the language of the nation-state. Given that these manipulations are experienced as symbolic violence, the counter-violent response needs sophistication and must flow from the invention of a language. Otherwise, it will be sucked back by the very same violence. Even as adult female artists, Austerlitz and Shachnai Yaakobi adopt the tactic of child's play through the graphic aesthetic of innocent coloring books. By choosing childlike play and language, and by using a 'not serious' toolkit, they embrace a strategy connected with the creation of a language apart from the patriarchal mechanism that dominates the public discourse on army and defense matters. It is a strategy that has implications for the right kind of bereavement.

The anger that one can hear in their words and see in some of their works is also the outcome of recurrent disillusionment: falsehood and disappointment as elements with which they need to cope incessantly. So, whence will consolation come, if it comes at all? One of the things Austerlitz still keeps is a phonograph record that her father bought for her mother shortly before he was killed. She notes, "I know they loved each other. I know I'm a product of love" (2017). Memory objects serve Austerlitz as the other facet of her work, which deals with memory and death but tries to distance itself from bereavement. Shachnai Yaakobi meanwhile rehabilitates the parental-family image and its place via total motherhood and the new family.

The artists operate in the complex context of Israeli counter hegemonic bereavement discourse. They aim to expand and diversify this discourse through gender-based perspectives. In doing so, they work to twice reframe their role. First as private orphan-daughters toward personal memory closure, and second as bereaved daughters in the hegemonic order. The counter-hegemonic bereavement discourse as it has been represented in Shachnai Yaakobi's and Austerlitz's artworks not only undermined the national hegemony repertoires but also reveal their failure to cover up the loss.

Could Shachnai Yaakobi's and Austerlitz's works be interpreted as an attempt to undermine the memory industry at large? However strongly affirmative the answer may be, it does not put an end to a discussion of their works. Instead, it projects onto the extent of ambivalence that Israeli society carries in its ongoing occupation with bereavement. The field of Israeli art seems to be too cautious in its attitude toward military orphanhood. It also avoids deep contemplation of complex proposals that are far

from the 'firing and crying' language of Israeli maleness. The processes of analysis, deconstruction, and reconstruction that Austerlitz, Shachnai Yaakobi, and other female artists pursue prove once again that, in the hegemonic language of bereavement and the ongoing territorial blood-conflict, the political aesthetic may yet lend itself to distribution and sharing on the basis of the paradox adroitly formulated by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière: "The purer the media of which art makes use, the more political art is, namely, the stronger its emancipatory power" (Ophir 2008: 22).

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NOTES

1. Fallen (*Hallal*) in Hebrew, as a noun, denotes both a "void" and a "space." In architecture discourse, it is a technical term. The use of the word in reference to fallen soldiers appears in the Bible, David's Lamentation over Shaul and Yonatan, 1 Samuel 17:27.
2. In fact, the only group museum exhibition that has taken up the topic was *Blood of the Maccabees: Memory and Bereavement in Israeli Art*, Negev Museum of Art, 2013–2014, curated by Miri Gal-Ezer. The exhibition dealt with memory and bereavement as a traumatic Israeli fundament.
3. The concept of a 'secular religion' was coined in the eighteenth century by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in reference to two senses at once: a nation's metaphysical existence and its systems of formational texts, symbols, and myths. The American sociologist Robert Bellah developed the concept in reference to civil religion in America (Almog 1996).
4. Michal Shachnai Yaakobi, *My Prince on a White Horse* (2007). https://youtu.be/GmxS3UOfFyw.
5. Michal Shachnai Yaakobi, *And They Became One Flesh*, from the project *Postcards*, etching, 2016, 35 x 25 cm.
6. Asnat Austerlitz, *Feather* (video, 2005, 1:05). https://vimeo.com/user5540106.
7. Noteworthy among those who experienced bereavement and responded to the commemoration industry are Tamar Paikes, Noga Etzioni Yudkovik, Merav Rahat, and Neta Bittan Kafri.

8. Michal Shachnai Yaakobi, *The Letter* (2015, 4:05). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6hnMpdjJec. Spanish version: https://youtu.be/4NUoPzmhulw.
9. Michal Shachnai Yaakobi, *Sign Language* (2016, 3:15). https://youtu.be/WD_r7QWUF9Q.
10. Additional video works that pertain to ritual: Michal Shachnai Yaakobi, *Dance Relief* (2017, 5:13). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0OVeFsSao38; and Michal Shachnai Yaakobi, *Night and Day* (2019, 10:19). https://youtu.be/stPzkM37q0U.
11. The reference is to the symbolic role that since the dawn of history has identified the father-figure with the law-figure (Evans 2005: 234), the rules of the language in this case.

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Austerlitz, Asnat: 9 September 2014, 19 January 2015, 2 July 2015, 16 May 2017, 11 September 2019
Shachnai Yaakobi, Michal: 3 January 2020

LIST OF LINKS TO VIDEO ARTWORKS

Asnat Austerlitz, *Punchbag 1* (2002, video, 00:45). https://vimeo.com/user5540106.
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