**“How Do You Feel the Holocaust?”
About Holocaust Films and Constructing the Emotional Experience on Trips to Poland**

**Abstract**

Educational trips to Poland figure importantly in constructing the memory of the Holocaust and shaping the Zionist and Israeli consciousness. Many adolescents consider these trips a milestone in building their national identity; members of the police, army officers, and high-ranking civil servants also embark on them as part of their professional training. This article discusses the role and meaning of the emotional experience that the participants undergo as they visit Poland. There is no doubt that the direct encounter with the places where the Holocaust happened may trigger powerful emotional responses. Sometimes, however, the expectations of the participants—particularly adolescents—of having a tempestuous emotional experience is far from what actually occurs. Perhaps for this reason, some guides tend to amplify these emotions and invoke a highly experiential guiding style as a factor in constructing the experiences of the trip at large. To discuss these aspects and the emotional space that the trip occupies, the current article migrates into the domain of visual media and uses thematic analysis to investigate the ways the Holocaust is represented in motion pictures. In this context, I present the simmering tension that exists between two possible poles of representation: the cinematic attempt to reconstruct the past as realistically and dramatically as possible, as in Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List,* and the choice of concealing, representing allusively, or focusing on survivors’ testimonies, as in Claude Lanzmann’s monumental film *Shoah.* In this article, I claim that this tension is not only an aesthetic matter of one genre or another but also a question of choosing the way the artistic and ethical calling of the historical film is perceived and, in particular, the desired way to construct the memory of the Holocaust. By applying the categories of “reenactment” versus “testimony” to the field of the trips to Poland, I discuss the possible place of the emotional experience in this journey and shed light on the manner in which the participants may be prepared for and guided in their emotional voyage.

**Keywords:** educational trips to Poland; Holocaust films; historical memory; Holocaust education and remembrance; the emotional experience in education