



73rd Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Generation

DELEGATION

A FILM BY ASAF SABAN



SYNOPSIS

Three Israeli high school friends take part in a class trip visiting Holocaust sites in Poland – the last time together before going to the army. During the trip, shy boy Frisch, aspiring artist Nitzan and class heartthrob Ido deal with issues of love, friendship and politics against the backdrop of concentration camps and memorial sites. This journey will change them forever.

INTERVIEW WITH ASAF SABAN

BY MARTA BAŁAGA

I also visited Auschwitz with my school, many years ago, but what you are showing here is much more intense. These teenagers go from one concentration camp to another, watch films about the Holocaust, listen to the survivors.

Also, it's usually your very first trip abroad without your parents. I remember this excitement so well: being together with friends, in a different country. At the same time, our society views it as a pilgrimage. You really think you will come back home as a different person.

In Israel, we grow up being told that we are surrounded by “enemies” all the time, that we live on an island, basically. It's a state of mind. I wanted to show this crazy contrast between memorial sites and being with your friends on a bus or in some hotel, which turn into your new “safe zones.” Inside, they can be kids. Outside, they are told to be careful, they are warned against every possible danger, which is obviously ridiculous. I know that antisemitism is rampant, but you really start believing that the outside world is all about death.

While not exactly indifferent, your young protagonists are more focused on their own lives: unrequited crushes, jealousies and fights. But there is a pressure to feel something when visiting these camps. Did you feel it yourself?

That's what I was thinking back then: “When is it going to hit me too?”

This is part of being a teenager, the urge to go through bigger-than-life



experiences. To touch the “real thing”. It perfectly fits the expectations from such a “journey,” which is how this trip is called in Hebrew.

The truth is, I don’t remember Auschwitz or Treblinka. I remember these in-between moments, however, because when you are that young, everything seems like a big deal. A girl looks at you in a certain way, someone says something mean – it feels like the worst thing in the entire world. You are searching for your own identity, for who you are.

I wanted to stay loyal to their point of view, rather than explain too much or complain about the whole education system. The political side of it seemed like a too easy target for me.

Also, when I was 17 years old, I wasn’t politically conscious: I was more interested in girls, in my social standing. But my country has already gotten under my skin, even though I wasn’t asking for it.

Take these “memorial songs,” for example. They are emotional and very moving songs, but they have nothing to do with the Holocaust itself – they are about individual experiences, like a broken heart or the end of adolescence. Still, the kids sing them in Treblinka now. Because they are sad songs, they have been “nationalized.” When you are that young, and you are standing there, all these lines can become so blurry.

They are turning brooms into national flags, watching Holocaust movies on the way to the actual concentration camps. Were you trying to underline the absurdity of it all?

When I started to investigate this subject, I joined one of these groups again. They were watching Schindler’s List on the way to Auschwitz. They really do that! It’s crazy, in so many ways.





Irony is one of the most interesting things for me. It's also something very Jewish, or at least it used to be: a survival tool when your reality becomes unbearable. The problem is, nationalists don't have a sense of humor. This scene with a security officer, standing in a synagogue and telling them to "keep a low profile" once they go outside? I witnessed it myself. A security guard standing on the traditional stage in the synagogue, where the rabbi used to stand, and preaches. In some way, security became new religion of Israel.

Did you actually get to shoot inside of these places?

There is this ongoing battle for history, also in Poland, so no – we couldn't shoot wherever we wanted. I couldn't use fragments of Schindler's List either. It's a sacred artifact now.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum doesn't let in any fiction filmmakers – only documentary crews. I think it's mostly part of the current political power-game about who controls the narrative. It's a pity, because these locations, these unforgettable images carry so much power. When you are there, it feels like you are entering a whole new territory: you are not allowed to smoke, you have to go through strict security measures. We had many challenges regarding what we were allowed to show. I found it both fascinating and frustrating.

Do you think that DELEGATION, despite its warm humor, could be viewed as controversial? In Poland, but also in Israel?

I believe that if you leave viewers enough space, they can interpret



things however they want to. I would be so happy to see two people arguing over a scene, understanding it in a completely different way.

When one of the characters, Frisch [played by Yoav Bavly], is taken to that rural synagogue, someone could claim that I am idealizing Poland. After all, everyone is so nice to him. But perhaps they don't really care about him at all? Maybe they just found a "pet" for a photo op? I was actually inspired by a scene in Claude Lanzmann's Shoah, where Holocaust survivor goes back to his old village, and he's surrounded by his former neighbors. They talk about him as an archetype, not as a person. I know it can be risky sometimes, leaving some things unsaid, but I like giving all this space and freedom. Also having it as a spectator.

When you are a teenager and you visit these sites, it serves a purpose. Afterwards, you come back to Israel, a year before you go to the army, and you understand that the whole world is against you and you need to make sure it won't happen again. As a victim, you're always righteous. Still, I wasn't interested in telling a political story with an overly clear agenda. I wanted to address certain issues in a gentle, subtle way, always putting my protagonists first.

Did you also give your performers some space? Their conversations, although not improvised, feel very natural.

More than they asked for, to be honest [laughter].

They are not exactly non-actors, but they had very little experience before making the film. The casting process took a long time, then we rehearsed a lot and I just tried to put them at ease. I wanted to create this notion of something spontaneous happening; I needed to bring life and that "Smells Like Teen Spirit" energy into the story. Which is not to



say I wanted sex, drugs and rock & roll, which you see in so many films or shows about teenagers these days.

I wanted to have simpler storylines, show ordinary kids. And then combine it all with the most dramatic historical event you can possibly imagine. It was an ethical challenge as well – I didn't want to let history, and nationalism, overshadow their individual struggles. Also, I grew up in the 1990s, and there was something almost naïve about the coming-of-age films I was watching back then. Delegation is not a period film, but I guess I wanted it to feel timeless.

It seems that people have found a way to talk about the Holocaust now. But, as someone observes in the film, it will change, and soon. Mostly because the last witnesses will be gone.

And once they are gone for good, I think it will be even easier to control the narrative.

Yosef [Ezra Dagan] is someone who has experienced it and now he is gently encouraging his grandson not to obey all these rules, and not to be like everyone else.

I think the present, and inner life of individuals, can be more powerful than history, national ideology or politics. But I live in a country where usually it's the other way around. Yosef's private memory is fragmental. The story he shares with these teenagers is constructed by little, supposedly unimportant moments. But this is life. And I wanted the tone of the film to reflect that.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When I was 17, I went to Poland with my class. The strongest impression I remember from that trip is a feeling of disappointment and indifference as I stood in front of the sites and places that were meant to shock me. My memories of this trip revolve around the random and unplanned moments that always occur between one memorial and the next.

DELEGATION is a film that combines two familiar genres - a road trip and a coming-of-age film. The combination of these two genres creates the distance that I believe is necessary to safely traverse the "minefield" of Holocaust representation in film and create a complex dialectical world that works primarily from an emotional place. These starting points allow me to approach this explosive subject with restraint and clarity.

My intention is to take the viewer on a journey of getting to know the characters gradually and without biographical introduction. The script is structured to allow a kind of zoom-in - from the collective to the personal. I try to reveal the individuals hiding behind the white sweatshirts and focus on the problems they face in their lives - especially when they are "cast out" from their natural



environment and brought into an alien one, steeped in an incomprehensible past bubbling under the surface. The script was written with the awareness that the strength of the film depends on the incidental, ordinary moments - the significant gap between the grand drama of history and the small dramas of life.

The trip to Poland has become an almost official step in the process of Israeli citizenship, which parallels with coming of age of every young person. It culminates, not coincidentally, a year later in being drafted into the army. At the height of adolescence - with all the confusion, lack of perspective, hormonal chaos and emotional upheaval it entails - tens of thousands of young Israelis each year go abroad for the first time without their parents to experience an emotional intensity that is hard to process and understand for an adult, let alone a teenager.

The nature and structure of the trip is intended to create an emotional experience that in many ways resembles the religious experience of a pilgrimage to holy sites. The natural urge of young people to undergo shocking experiences adds another layer to their emotional expectations of this trip to Poland.



DIRECTOR

Asaf Saban is a writer and director, born in Israel in 1979, he lives and works in Tel-Aviv. He graduated with honors from the Beit-Berl College. He has received the prestigious America-Israel Cultural Foundation scholarship five times for his exceptional achievements during his studies. In the recent years he collaborated with multiple Israeli artists on audiovisual projects presented in museums around the world e.g. Tate Modern in London and Tel-Aviv Museum of Art.

His first feature *OUTDOORS* premiered in 2017. *DELEGATION* is his second feature film.

FILMOGRAPHY

DELEGATION (2022, Feature)
PARADISE (2021, Short)
BLESSED IS THE MAN (2018, Short)
OUTDOORS (2017, Feature)

CAST

YOAV BAVLY



CAST

LEIB LEV LEVIN



CAST

NEOMI HARARI



חינוך קהילתי | אשכולות

CAST

EZRA DAGAN



CAST

ALMA DISHY



PRODUCERS

KOI STUDIO

Koi Studio was established in 2012 by producer Agnieszka Dzedzic and cinematographer Jakub Burakiewicz. In Koi, we make various kinds of films, always with the audience in mind, irrespective of their genre or length. We believe in well-balanced producer-director tandems so our development work starts as soon as an idea is conceived.

GUM FILMS

Gum Films is a Tel Aviv based production company. Founders and owners, Yoav Roeh and Aurit Zamir, graduated from the prestigious Sam Spiegel Film and Television School, and have been in the art and business of making movies ever since.

IN GOOD COMPANY

In Good Company is a Leipzig and Berlin based company, founded by Roshanak Behesht Nedjad. We produce smart entertainment, from games to series, with a focus on the audience.



PREMIERE

World Premiere - Berlinale 2023 - Generation 14plus

FILM INFORMATION

Original Title: Ha'Mishlahat

International title: Delegation

Genre: Drama

Country of production: Poland, Israel, Germany

Language: Hebrew, Polish, English

Year: 2023

Duration: 99 min

Picture: 2K DCP

Aspect Ratio: 1:2.39

Sound: 5.1

Available Format: DCP

CAST

Yoav Bavly, Neomi Harari, Leib Lev Levin, Ezra Dagan, Alma Dishy

CREW

Director: Asaf Saban

Screenplay: Asaf Saban

Cinematography: Bogumił Godfrejów

Editing: Michal Oppenheim

Production Design: Ewa Mroczkowska

Costume Design: Inbal Shuki, Monika Grzeszczyk

Sound on set: Alfred Tesler, Patrick Weigel

Sound design: Avi Mizrahi

PRODUCTION COMPANIES

Koi Studio, Gum Films, In Good Company

Co-production companies: CANAL+, EC1 ŁÓDŹ – City of Culture, Krakow

Festival Office, Haka Films, YES TV

With support of

Eurimages, Israel Film Fund, The Israel Ministry Culture and Sport,

The Israel Film Council, Mifal HaPais Council for the Culture and Arts,

Medien-board Berlin-Brandenburg, Mitteldeutsche Medienförderung

MDM, DFFF / FFA, Polish-German Film Fund

Co-financed by

Polish Film Institute

PRODUCERS

Agnieszka Dziedzic, Yoav Roeh, Aurit Zamir, Roshanak Behesht Nedjad

Associate Producers

Tomasz Morawski, Linda Kirmse, Matan Gaida

PRODUCER'S CONTACT

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