

What's it all about

Gila Almagor

Gila Almagor, the actress, author of the original novel and producer of the film, was born to immigrant parents in 1939 in pre-state Israel, and is today considered a pillar of Israeli culture (author, television and theater actress, and dubbed "the queen of Israeli cinema"). Winner of the Israel Prize in Film (the highest honor offered by the State), she has appeared in nearly 50 films. This film, which is based on the autobiographical story of her childhood, won many international prizes and prompted a sequel: Under the Domim Tree (1994).

Almagor's childhood was difficult for two reasons: her mother suffered from a serious mental illness, and her father, who was a British Mandate police officer, was murdered by a sniper in Haifa four months before she was born. At age 13 her mother remarried, and she was sent to boarding school, but after two years decided to become independent and moved to Tel Aviv, near the Habima national theater, as she already desired to pursue a future in acting. Her first appearance on the stage was at age 17, her film debut was in 1960 and in 1963 she went to study acting at the Lee Strasberg Institute of Theatre and Film in New York. During her time in New York she also studied modern dance. When she returned to Israel in 1965, Almagor appeared in theatrical productions all over the country as an independent actress.

Almagor is known as a very diverse actress, and has convincingly played the roles of a prostitute, a social worker, a mentally disabled mother, and a tough bar owner. Almagor has also won international fame with Best Actress awards from film festivals in Chicago, Atlanta and San Francisco and a Silver Bear award from the Berlin International Film Festival. She also appeared in Steven Spielberg's film Munich.

In her 2004 Israel Prize acceptance speech she said: "I never knew my father. He was assassinated four months before I was born by an Arab sniper. Has never held my hand and said, 'my girl'. I raised myself without hate and or desire for revenge. I always thought that children should not lose a father because of hatred and war. I grew up in a modest household and tried very hard, I learned right from wrong, I learned to struggle and fail and sometimes win. This occasion is a victory".

In her personal life, Almagor invests a lot in community, and is especially active helping children with cancer.

The Period of Austerity (Tzena)

The film takes place in the early days of Israel called "the period of austerity" which existed between 1949 and 1959. In these years a rationing policy was put in place, primarily for the purchase of food and other consumer goods. The purpose of this economic policy was to stabilize the new state's economy. Citizens were assigned a local grocery store where they received basic food products according to a fixed allowance, with a personal ledger to track their points. The decision to introduce this rationing policy was made by the government in its very first session and a special government ministry was established for the purpose – The Office of Supply and Rationing.

The primary reason for the establishment of austerity measures were large waves of immigration to Israel. Immediately upon its establishment an unprecedented number of new immigrants arrived, often penniless, whether from DP camps in Europe after the Holocaust, or as refugees from Arab regimes who would not allow the sale or export of property. Rationing was adjusted to the age and personal status of each citizen. For example, pregnant women and babies received additional rations. Many foods were replaced by substitutes, often powders, such as powdered milk and powdered eggs. During those years the War of Independence was still being fought, further depleting the young state's finances. As a just-born state, Israel had not prepared for this situation and did not have foreign currency reserves. It was feared that if rationing was not introduced, the price of food and other commodities would inflate, and those who could not afford food would go hungry. The fear of a food shortage was very real in those years, due to World War II which had ended only a few years earlier. In addition, the implementation of austerity had an ideological element to it. Israel's Socialist-Left government believed in equality between all citizens, and was concerned about the creation of substantial socioeconomic gaps in the early years of the State. At first, public support for rationing was a unifying factor, and it seemed that they perceived it a necessary mechanism for coping with waves of immigration and the war. With time, public opposition to the plan increased and a policy of enforcement was adopted, including audit checkpoints, searches of cars and on public busses, etc. For two years the public cooperated with the enforcement policy, but this slowly waned and the public began to protect offenders who were improving quality of life.

Israel's austerity policies of that era were deemed a failure in public consciousness, and are remembered as a time of hunger and crisis. The crude intervention in civil life, as well as many other negative effects, also contributed to this perception. However, the underlying necessity of austerity measures was supplying food for the entire population, which it did accomplish. Today, economists attribute austerity as one of the greatest achievements of the early years of the state – years of massive immigration. The end of the Period of Austerity was finally made possible by the receipt of reparations from Germany in the late fifties, which stabilized the Israeli economy.

SHOWBILL



AVIYA'S SUMMER

הקיץ של אביה

A film by ELI COHEN

The war is over - but the pain never ends

Aviya's Summer is a film based on the autobiography of famous Israeli theater actress Gila Almagor. Set in the newly founded, Post-Holocaust, State of Israel, the film recounts the story of 10-year-old Aviya and her independent and tortured mother Henya, who is played by Almagor. Once a beautiful freedom fighter, Henya suffers from the psychological damage of surviving the Holocaust and losing her husband in the war. While her mother is wavering between sanity and madness, Aviya is a smart, creative girl with an elaborate imagination. Aviya conjures up scenarios where she would find her father, fix her shattered mother and repair the wholeness of her broken family.

Aviya's Summer is a portrayal of the challenges of Holocaust survivors and their families in the new state of Israel, as well as a look inside the intimate life of two generations of women trying to make it work as best as they can.



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For further review

Search Bureau for Missing Relatives:

The Bureau for Missing Relatives is mentioned a number of times throughout the film. The Bureau for Missing relatives was set up by the Jewish Agency in 1945 to assist survivors of the Holocaust and to help reunite families. Over the years it logged over one million queries (transferred in the 1990s to the computerized database of the Zionist Archive). The Bureau's scope eventually expanded to include not only Holocaust survivors, and during the 1990s was utilized to assist families from the Former Soviet Union. The bureau was officially closed in 2002, but still functions as part of a daily public radio show, which receives about 150 queries every day from people searching for relatives spanning from the Holocaust, through Israel's wars, and members the general public seeking long lost friends.

Gertrude Kraus:

Maya Abrahamson (the ballet teacher) shares her dream of moving to Tel Aviv and studying ballet with Gertrude Kraus with Aviya. Gertrude Kraus was a pioneer of modern dance in Israel. Kraus choreographed and taught dance in Austria and Germany until making Aliyah in 1935. In Israel she continued her work and was instrumental in founding modern dance in Israel. In 1968 she won the Israel Prize for Dance, as an acknowledgement of her artistic work. Kraus fostered generations of dancers, until her death in 1977.

Sapiches:

On her way to distribute laundry from her mother, the neighborhood children pick on Aviya and make fun of her cropped haircut and yell "sapiches". This term is used in Israel to congratulate someone on a new haircut, and is often accompanied by a playful slap on the neck. The phrase gained much popularity after the release of an Israeli film of the same name.

Moshava:

Our film's story takes place in the setting of the "Moshava", a form of communal village living, developed in the days of the First Aliyah. Moshavot (communal villages) in their early days were based on private ownership of land, homes, and commerce. The first Moshava, Petah Tikva, founded in 1878, is considered the "Mother" of the Moshavot. A number of large Israeli cities, such as Rishon Letzion, Zichron Yaakov, Rehovot, Rosh Pina, etc. began as Moshavot.

Trivia

- ~ During the Abrahamson's ball Aviya and her mother dance a fast-paced dance which causes the mother to break down emotionally. What dance was it?
- ~ In Aviya's first encounter with Maya Abrahamson, Maya spoke about and played a famous ballet. What was the piece?
- ~ Throughout the film, everyone assumes that Max (the new neighbor) works at the bank, though we find out that that isn't truly the case. What is Max's real job?

A) The Waltz. B) Swan Lake.
C) Feather pucker at a chicken slaughterhouse.

Food for thought

Feminine Bravery:

Henya the Partisan was a hero who fought Nazis in the forest during World War II. Henya, Aviya's mother, suffers from emotional distress, poverty, and loneliness. However, despite this, she still works hard, raises her daughter, and maintains her dignity in the light of all the societal hardships surrounding her. *Do you think that Henya was also a heroine in the second part of her life? If so, is it the same kind of bravery/heroism, or something different?*

Hebrew Work:

In the film we see how Max is ashamed of his real job and represents himself as a banker. In contrast to him, Henya, Aviya's mother, isn't ashamed at all at being a clothing laundress. *What do you think about this? Is a person's level of respect based on his/her job? On one hand a person shouldn't be ashamed of his/her job, but on the other we can see the societal price Aviya pays for being the daughter of a clothing launderer.*

Melting Pot:

A film like this paints us a vibrant picture of Israeli society in the early years of the state and gives us a unique look at the ethnic tensions between various immigrant groups and the native "sabaras." Ben Gurion's official policy at the time was to create a "melting pot" and from that a single society would form. For example, Max's wife changes her name from "Helena" to a more Israeli "Esther." *What do you think about this policy? Was it proper for the early days of a young country struggling to create a single society from many diverse backgrounds or was it a way to create hegemony and get rid of individual identities/cultures?*