



Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi,
The Journal of Social Sciences Institute
Sayı/Issue:35 – Sayfa / Page: 35
ISSN: 1302-6879 VAN/TURKEY

Makale Bilgisi / Article Info
Geliş/Received:18.06.2017 Kabul/Accepted:05.08.2017

IDA: YAHUDİ SOY KIRIMININ İKİ KADIN KURBANI

IDA: TWO WOMEN VICTIMS OF JEWISH HOLOCAUST

Öğrt. Gör. Leyla ADIGÜZEL
Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi
Edebiyat Fakültesi
İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü

Yrd. Doç. Dr. Aydın GÖRMEZ
Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi
Edebiyat Fakültesi
İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü
aydingormez@hotmail.com

Öz

Polonya, 1939-1945 yılları arasında üç milyonu Yahudi olmak üzere nüfusunun beşte birini kaybetmiş ve Nazilere direnen birçok Polonyalı haksız ithamlarla suçlanmış ve özgürlük için direnenler bu süre zarfında vurularak ya da asılarak öldürülmüşlerdir. Adolf Hitler bu katliamın baş sorumlusu ve fikir babası olarak kabul edilir. Pawel Pawlikowski ve Rebecca Lenkiewicz tarafından yazılan *Ida* filmi insanlığın bu karanlık geçmişini, iki ana kadın karakteri Wanda ve Ida'nın soykırım sonrası hayatla verdikleri mücadeleyi konu edinerek, yıllar sonra tekrar okuyucu ve izleyicinin gözleri önüne sermektedir. Başarılı bir öykü olarak kabul edilen film, Yahudi Soykırımı'nın bu sıradan iki kadının hayatını nasıl mahvettiğini ve onları parçaladığını son derece dokunaklı bir atmosferde seyirciye sunmaktadır. Film çağdaş liderler ve gelecek kuşaklar için bir ders niteliğindedir. Bu makale Pawlikowski ve Lenkiewicz'in, *Ida* filmi aracılığıyla, seyirciye ulaştırmaya çalıştıkları mesajları analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Pawel Pawlikowski, Rebecca Lenkiewicz, YahudiSoykırımı, *Ida*

Abstract

Poland lost fifth of its population, including three million Jews, between 1939 and 1945; and many Poles resisting the Nazis were accused of false accusations and were shot or hanged during this period. Adolf Hitler is regarded as the major actor and mastermind of this massacre. The film *Ida*, co-written by Pawel Pawlikowski and Rebecca Lenkiewicz, explores this dark history of mankind long afterwards through two main female characters Wanda and *Ida's* struggle after the holocaust. The film, considered a successful story, illustrates how the Jewish holocaust ruined the lives of these two ordinary women and torn them apart in an extremely poignant atmosphere. The film is a kind of moral lesson for contemporary leaders and the future generations. This article aims to analyse the messages that Pawlikowski and Lenkiewicz seem to relay to the audience through the film *Ida*.

Keywords: Pawel Pawlikowski, Rebecca Lenkiewicz, the Jewish holocaust, *Ida*

INTRODUCTION

Adolf Hitler (1889-1945), called as Führer by the Germans, one of the World War II architects, is stated to be responsible for the massacre of nearly 6 million Jews during the war. Hitler gives his reasons, among other issues, for this massacre and the holocaust in his own book *Mein Kampf* (1939). Hitler puts blame on the Jews for the economic collapse in Germany and even for losing the war. Most of the weapons factories were in the hands of the Jews during the war, and the workers were Jews. These factories went on strike when they were most needed. And this caused Germans to experience ammunition trouble on the battle fields. Hitler mentions in his book that he can never forgive this betrayal suggesting that the German soul must be purified from the dirty Jewish blood and expressing his hatred for Jews:

Bear in mind the fact that this poisonous contamination can be eliminated from the national body only after centuries, or perhaps never. Think further of how the process of racial decomposition is debasing and in some cases even destroying the fundamental Aryan qualities of our German people, so that our cultural creativeness as a nation is gradually becoming impotent and we are running the danger.... This pestilential adulteration of the blood, of which hundreds of thousands of our people take no account, is being systematically practiced by the Jew to-day. Systematically these negroid parasites in our national body corrupt our innocent fair-haired girls

and thus destroy something which can no longer be replaced in this world. (Hitler, 457)

Hugh Baillie, an American journalist who personally interviewed some of European leaders including Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, and Neville Chamberlain, makes a quote from one of his interviews with Hitler. Baillie describes one of the reasons of Hitler for Jewish holocaust:

...To eliminate Communists, we must eliminate the Jews...After the war, thousands of officers, educated men, had to take work as chauffeurs, motormen and street cleaners because the Jews had usurped their positions....The destructive influence on intellectual Jewry in Germany has made itself felt everywhere. For this reason it is necessary to put a stop to this destructiveness and to establish a clear and clean division between the two races... (Baillie, 85)

Hitler takes this issue of securing a pure and perfect race a step further saying "It must see to it that only those who are healthy shall beget children; that there is only one infamy, namely, for parents that are ill or show hereditary defects to bring children into the world and that in such cases it is a high honor to refrain from doing so" (Hitler, 333). For him no man or girl should leave the school without a clear idea of the meaning of racial purity and the unprotected prevalence of racial blood. With these in mind, Hitler paves the way for Jewish holocaust and execution of thousands of Jews. Those people have to survive displacement by being removed from their roots. One of the unbelievable persecutions is Nazi doctors waiting for Jews to die in the snow to see how long people could endure in such a cold condition. Without anaesthetizing the limbs of the Jews, gypsies and prisoners were cut off. Various brutal experiments resulted in death such tests as injecting twin children's blood into one another. Many brutal experiments have been conducted to see if the color of the eye will change. Ink injection into eyes is the most familiar. Children were injected with various lethal microbes and tested for their ability to withstand. Countless Jews, gypsies and war prisoners were killed by being shot; in some cases a single bullet was used for two Jews in order not to waste more bullets. For mass and costless slaughter, people were being filled in gas chambers with bathroom provisions and being massively killed with toxic gases. The most terrible one burning people in ovens. Edward R. Murrow, another American journalist and news reporter of World War II describes what he saw in Buchenwald, one of the Nazi prisoners' camps:

We went to the hospital. It was full. The doctor told me that 200 had died the day before. I asked the cause of death. He shrugged and said, "Tuberculosis, starvation, fatigue, and there are many who have no desire to live. It is very difficult." Dr. Heller pulled back the blanket from a man's feet to show me how swollen they were. The man was dead. (*Reader's Digest Illustrated Story of World War 2*, 430)

The episode of the pits in which the masses are laid collectively is indeed unbearable. The impression of the journalist is as follows:

We proceeded to the small courtyard. The wall was about eight feet high. It adjoined what had been a stable or garage...There were two rows of bodies stacked up like cordwood. They were thin and very white. Some of the bodies were terribly bruised, though there seemed to be little flesh to bruise. Some had been shot through the head, but they bled but little. Only two were naked. I tried to count them as best I could and arrived at the conclusion that all that was mortal of more than 500 men and boys lay there in two piles. (*Reader's Digest Illustrated Story of World War 2*, 430)

The director and one of the co-writers of the film *Ida* Pawel Pawlikowski was born in 1957 in Warsaw, Poland and began his art career as a documentary filmmaker on British televisions. In fact, Pawlikowski is a graduate of literature and philosophy, who received extensive postgraduate studies in German literature at Oxford. In 2004, he became a Creative Arts Fellow at Oxford Brookes University receiving a major donation from the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Pawlikowski studied the realistic genres of contemporary filmmaking in England. He remained in university for three years, interacting with staff and students on the new degrees at the University's Cinema Studies. There he met his professor's wife Wolinska-Brus, who would be used as a prototype for the Bloody Wanda character in his film *Ida* (2013) since she had become a brutal Stalinist prosecutor who punished many innocent people with death penalty after the war. *Dostoevsky's Travels* (1992), *The Stringer* (1998), *Last Resort* (2000) are among his major films.

The other co-author of *Ida*, the feminist writer Rebecca Dorothy Monica Lenkiewicz was born in Plymouth Devon in 1968. She continued to University of Kent from 1985 to 1989 in Film and English, and Acting Course at the Central School of Speech and

Drama from 1996 to 1999. At first she was active as an on-screen character at the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Royal National Theatre, particularly in Sir Peter Hall's generation of *The Bacchae*. Then she carried on her career at the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Royal National Theatre. A couple of months working as a table dancer in the early 1990s enabled Rebecca to draft a short play called *Soho: A Tale of Table Dancers*, inspired by her own life and other table dancers' life experiences. Among her most notable works is her play *Her Naked Skin* (2005), describing the struggles faced by two suffragettes immediately prior to the World War One and premiered on the Olivier stage in 2008. Expressing herself as a feminist writer, the playwright also makes it clear what her purpose in writing: "I write about love and the human condition and hope to explore these themes and the idea of freedom." And she adds: "I'd like to be remembered as a strong voice." (Lenkiewicz, pers. comm. 2016)

***Ida*, a Silent Scream**

The film *Ida* is the first Polish film to win the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film. It has also won the Bafta and the Spirit awards for the same category and the Best Film awards at both The London Film Festival and the Warsaw Film Festival in 2013. And finally it has been translated into all languages of the European Union thanks to the Best European Film and the European Parliament Lux Prize.

The co-written concise masterpiece *Ida* holds reckonings of two women characters – a reckoning that blends rage and mourning together. The screenplay tells the story of an orphaned young girl Anna who is a novice in a splendid convent. She is called by her Mother Superior to visit her aunt in Lodz before she takes vows. This eighteen-year-old beautiful girl with a tranquil and pious manner has never gone beyond the boundaries of the convent and she knows nothing about her family. Wearing her religious garment Anna steps in the apartment of a woman in her forties who is smoking a cigarette and waiting for the guy to leave whom she spent the night before. The confrontation of Anna with her aunt enlightens the dark and pathetic past of the young girl and opens a door to an extraordinary life that she has never experienced before. Aunt Wanda Gruz - a judge and Communist Party member tells her that the young girl's real name is Ida Lebenstein, she's Jewish, and her mother was Wanda's beloved sister. Finally they two make a decision to go to the village where Wanda grew up and Ida's parents were protected by Christians but later betrayed.

Ida is one of the few movies in which so many things are discussed in a calm atmosphere. The struggles of two different female characters with their destiny are portrayed together with their psychological insight. One of these characters is Ida - a young innocent, ignorant girl and lover of Christ. The other is Wanda - a communist, though political intellectual and hater of the Polish past. They will shape their fates when they are exposed to both new lives and consequences of painful past. One is avid with the excitement of the opportunity to experience a life that has never been thought before while the other is sickened with the facts of life as her own buried sorrows come back to life. Yet the two heartbroken women are equal in their isolation and it is the query of identity that pulls them together. Nevertheless, Wanda cannot help ridiculing Ida's strangeness to sex at first. She also cannot understand her piety. She teases her perspective of religion and the village that Ida lives, from time to time, and she asks: "What if you go there and discover that there is no God" (*Ida*, 2013). The contradiction between these two odd women characters and the relationship between them reminds us Lenkiewicz' two marginal women characters in *Her Naked Skin* (2013): Celia and Eve. These two are also in a search of identity and do not want to accept the rules exposed to them by the community and religion. They prefer to query their life instead. In the film atrocities in history are told through these two women victims of fate. Although the film takes its name from the protagonist of the play called *Ida*, nonetheless, puzzled and alcoholic Wanda attracts the audience as one of the great movie characters in recent years. She is a Stalinist state prosecutor who punishes enemies with the death penalty for the good of the revolution. And in her heydays she had been nicknamed as "Red Wanda". She is a Jewish avenger and has to bear her own guilt as well. Ida is never able to understand Wanda although she tries to tell her past briefly. But it is not hard to create a past for this woman character. As a member of the Young Communist League in her thirties, she escapes from the Nazis, leaves her small child to her sister and goes underground and fights. Then she emerges in 1947 as a true believer of the case. Wanda is seen to be more intelligent than many others at first, but she loses her faith by 1961. The life style and fashionably dressing adds to her marginality. She has an air of charm that makes the audience think she might be an artist. But we soon learn her real occupation.

Initially it is stated that the film may be regarded as a small story of two particular women searching for their identity, nonetheless Wanda should be put on a particular place as she illustrates the Polish

history. This character is considered to be inspired by Helena Wolinska – Brus as mentioned at the beginning of the article though; the life and the fate of the film character are significantly different from the real life of Brus. She is a Jewish Pole, a military prosecutor in post-war who is involved in Stalinist regime show trials in the 1950s. The director and co-writer of *Ida*, Pawel Pawlikowski explains how he has been affected by her with these words in an article published in *The Guardian* in 2014:

“I couldn’t square the warm, ironic woman I knew with the ruthless fanatic and Stalinist hangman. This paradox has haunted me for years. I even tried to write a film about her, but couldn’t get my head around or into someone so contradictory “And he adds: “Some characters are easy to write. I know them: they are some aspects of myself or like people I have known. Wanda was one of those” (Levine, 2015).

Despite her success, cuteness and beauty, Wanda is still world weary. Probably these are the reasons for her exhaustion. She also feels weakened and suffering in a shameful world after the war. Now, Wanda has been betrayed by the massacre of the Jews and Polish anti-Semitism and by Stalinism. The betrayal deteriorates her psychology. She has a simple life. And she maintains a meager life. She lives in an apartment, has some of her vital needs and makes fun of life. Now her life merely consists of Mozart’s Jupiter Symphony, drinking alcohol, and sexual hunger. When Wanda’s search for the past with Ida is over, she again finds herself in a routine life. The most striking scene of the film is probably when she follows the morning ritual after one-night stand: she takes a long bath that she thinks never cleaning enough; she opens the window and jumps out of it. Now years of fatigue and regrets have become unbearable and she chooses death as a permanent solution.

Ida on the other hand is not an interesting character at first glance. She is opaque and indecisive to some extent. When it is revealed that she is Jewish, she stares back without responding. She has nothing in her mind and heart that is connected to Wanda’s revealing the fact about her since she looks at the world through a flat perspective without emotion for a long time. Her shiny hair is covered and face framed by a veil. Pawlikowski tells about his feelings while writing this character in an article:

(...) others are much more elusive and difficult to capture on paper, though I know they exist. Ida belonged to the latter category. We gave her some temporary dialogue in

the script, to have something down on the paper, but I knew that it wouldn't be until cast the right actress that the character would thicken out and ring true (The Guardian, 2014).

These statements show how careful he was while creating the character Ida. She becomes acquainted with the desperation of rural Poland in one hand, and on the other hand she is instinctively unable to deter herself from aspiring Wanda's luxurious life. It is the first time for her to feel melancholy and wiggling of something strange in her breast when she recognizes the young saxophonist playing his instrument in the bar of the hotel. Although she struggles not to be overpowered by these evil emotions, she finds herself practicing them one by one through the end of the movie. The investigation of her past and family turns to an investigation of a new world that has not been experienced previously: sexuality, smoking, drinking and wearing unusual clothes, to put it short, laying conventional nun habits aside for a while for the sake of new experiences. David Denby regards Ida as a difficult character to understand and comments on of both the film and the character:

Ida is certainly a story of identity; it's certainly a spiritual journey, too. (...) *Ida* keeps the audience working hard, gathering clues, trying not to come to conclusions too quickly. (...) Without giving up judgment, the filmmakers establish that during the war, everyone in Poland was in trouble. Acknowledgment, not revenge, is the movie's driving force (Denby, 2014).

He has analyzed the film and thereby the protagonist Ida so well that he puts an end to his criticism with this significant query: "Ida asks the question, what you do with the past once you've re-discovered it? Does it enable you, redeem you, kill you, and leave you longing for life, longing for escape? The answers are startling" (Denby, 2014). Perhaps these are the best questions to be replied to explain the situation that Ida is in. For Ida to exit from the convent is something miraculous as exiting the womb, and every second that she lives thereafter is an important detail written in her bleated book of memory. The story of Ida begins like shell cracking and a first breathing history but then continues to picture every detail of the life processes of human by becoming the focus of the soul and faith in God. Although her story is portrayed plainly, the audience easily gets the idea that it is full of emotions, disappointments, quests, betrayals and regrets.

According to Jonathan Romney Ida's curiosity of a life beyond the walls of the convent, particularly the curiosity of sex enables us to see the case from different point of view. He argues the case by comparing it with the other similar works. And he forms his view on the film in *Film Comment* in 2014:

(...) always an erotic frisson, however subliminal. It's the promise of symbolic deflowerment, in that we always want to see the virginal heroine remove the veil and enter into an intimate relationship with the world... Anna's blank, demure surface is exploited as a consistent tease—in contrast to Wanda's soured, worldly blowsiness—and sure enough, there comes a moment when she cautiously removes her scarf and examines her hair in the mirror...virginal, silent novice, this is practically the equivalent of Natalie Wood's Louise in *Gypsy* first stepping out to sing "Let Me Entertain You" (Romney, 2014).

As soon as the aunt dies, Ida starts practicing everything that once regarded with disfavor by her. The situation is exactly as Jonathan Romney has stated. Thus, Ida has broken loose the convent, lives her first sexual experience out of its boundaries. The boundary of the convent symbolizes the virginity for Ida. However, these experiences are not satisfactory for her. The scene towards the end of the film shows her dissatisfaction.

SAXOPHONIST: Have you ever gone to sea?

IDA: I didn't go anywhere.

SAXOPHONIST: We walk on the beach...

IDA: Well...then

SAXOPHONIST: We have a dog and marry then have children...

IDA: Well...then

SAXOPHONIST: That's life... the usual problems... (*Ida*, 2013)

In the morning of that night she wears her nun's usual dress and turns back where she belongs. It's not so easy to understand why Ida goes back. Ida is sent to a convent to be raised like a Christian. She knows no other world apart from the convent, and there she is raised in a loveless way with strict rules. She is not allowed to choose her faith and lifestyle. It is likely that she is alive can be seen as a blessing to her. Living a life chosen by others, paying the punishment for their elders causes her not to get pleasure out of life and to leave her

vulnerable. In the end, she devotes herself to a religion that she does not actually belong, but feels more calm and restful.

On the other hand there is a certain truth to be accepted that those who have to do this holocaust suffers at least as much as those who are exposed to it. Or at least it is so in the film. Pawlikowski emphasizing this idea as follows:

Ida is a film about identity, family, faith, guilt, socialism and music. I wanted to make a film about history that wouldn't feel like a historical film— a film that is moral, but has no lessons to offer. I wanted to tell a story in which 'everyone has their reasons'; a story closer to poetry than plot. Most of all, I wanted to steer clear of the usual rhetoric of the Polish cinema. The Poland in "Ida" is shown by an 'outsider' with no axe to grind, filtered through personal memory and emotion, the sounds and images of childhood (qtd. in Levine, 2015).

People who are forced to oppose to a certain religion or race then feel guilty because of their behaviors. Thus, people who can actually live together in peace with different beliefs and requests are hostile to each other. The father, who betrays and kills the Jewish family in the film, expresses his regret in deathbed, when Wanda forces the old Christian to tell the location of the bones of their family. In that part of the film, the old man's son utters his grief expressing his regret. "Leave my father alone. Let go in peace" (*Ida*, 2013).

CONCLUSION

Consequently the fact that Poland lost a fifth of its population, including three million Jews between 1939 and 1945 is well known. Moreover, many Poles resisting the Nazis are accused of unreasonable crimes, and the independent-minded citizens are shot or hanged during this period. The film is highly successful in terms of focusing on telling these political facts, but without representing them explicitly. In the contrary, only a poignant atmosphere is preferred to build this fact in the film. The atmosphere is very gloomy. Thus, the country is covered with quietness of dead and ordinary conversations demonstrate only the betrayal of many who have survived. Perhaps this historic embarrassment that people cannot utter makes the movie so calm and quiet.

As a result, in this film written by Pawlikowski and Lenkiewicz, the dark history of humanity is told through the struggle of two women trying to cope with their past misery and search a new

life. This co-written film with a great talent illustrates how the Jewish holocaust has ruined the lives of these two ordinary women and torn them apart. It demonstrates the unbelievable political atrocities that separate many parents from their sons and daughters and displace many people from their families and homelands. Pawlikowski and Lenkiewicz are careful in details illustrating so latently the affront to humanity that is supposed to have happened in the past. Both writers seem to hope the film to be a lesson for contemporary leaders and future generations.

Works Cited (Kaynakça)

- Hitler, Adolf. *Mein Kampf* (James Murphy translation), (1939), London, New York, Melbourne, Hurst & Blackett.
- Reader's Digest Illustrated Story of World War 2*, (1969), The Reader's Digest Association, Inc., Pleasantville, New York.
- Lenkiewicz, Rebecca. (2013) *Rebecca Lenkiewicz: Plays*, Faber and Faber.
- Baillie, Hugh. (1959) *High Intention: Recollections of Hugh Baillie*, Harper and Brothers Publishers, New York.

Internet Resources

- Lenkiewicz, Rebecca." An Interview with Rebecca Lenkiewicz." Received by Leyla Adıgüzel, 7 May 2016.
- Levine, Sydney. (2015) "Interview: Dir. Pawel Pawlikowski on His Oscar-Shortlisted Film *Ida*". [indiewire](http://www.indiewire.com/2015/01/interview-dir-pawel-pawlikowski-on-his-oscar-shortlisted-film-ida-171689/). <http://www.indiewire.com/2015/01/interview-dir-pawel-pawlikowski-on-his-oscar-shortlisted-film-ida-171689/> (Retrieved 10 Jan. 2017)
- Pawlikowski, P. (Director) (2013). *Ida* (film). Poland: Opus Film-Lodz studio.
- Denby, David. (2014) "*Ida*: A Film Masterpiece". *The New Yorker*. <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/ida-a-film-masterpiece> (Retrieved 23 Nov. 2016)
- Romney, Jonathan. (2014) "Film of the Week: *Ida*". *Film Comment*. <http://www.filmcomment.com/blog/pawel-pawlikowski-ida-review>. (Retrieved 18 Oct. 2016)
- "Paweł Pawlikowski on *Ida*'s journey from script to film". (2014). *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/nov/21/pawel-pawlikowski-making-of-ida-polish-film> (Retrieved 25 Dec. 2016)
- Concannon, Philip. "Back in the Habit: Pawel Pawlikowski on *Ida*". (2014). *The Skinny*. <http://www.theskinny.co.uk/film/interviews/back-in-the-habit-pawel-pawlikowski-on-ida> (Retrieved 28 Dec. 2016)