

Original Paper

“Maqom Sameach”: Trauma TV, Midlife Crisis and the Gendered Family in Israeli Public-Service Drama

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Abstract

Maqom Sameach (Happy Place), a highly successful Israeli drama on the public channel Kan 11, offers a case for understanding how contemporary “trauma TV” translates national catastrophe into a gendered midlife crisis within the middleclass family. Using qualitative content analysis of all first-season episodes, the article examines how narratives, humor, affect and power relations converge around midlife crisis and the “good life”, mother-daughter relations, existential despair and black humor, wornout couplehood, trauma, Holocaust memory and Israeli civilian posttrauma, and spirituality, therapy and selfhelp. Drawing on theories of cultural trauma, postmemory, therapeutic melodrama, emotional capitalism and feminist work on emotional labor, the analysis shows how Maqom Sameach reframes chronic civilian threat and multigenerational Holocaust memory as an everyday burden carried by a middleaged woman who serves as her family’s emotional hub, foregrounding therapy, confession and spiritual “selfwork”, yet exposing the limits of individual healing under ongoing collective emergency.

Keywords

israeli television drama, trauma TV, cultural trauma, midlife crisis, holocaust memory, therapeutic melodrama

1. Introduction

Israeli society is widely described as living in a state of ongoing civilian posttrauma, in which repeated wars, the 7 October massacres, the continued presence of captives and hostages, and roundtheclock media coverage generate a collective experience of chronic anxiety and existential instability. At the same time, a therapeutic vocabulary of “trauma”, “overwhelm”, “boundaries”, “triggers” and “selfwork” has become central to public discourse, positioning television drama as a key arena for

processing both social and private pain.

Maqom Sameach (“Happy Place”) exemplifies this contemporary Israeli “trauma TV”, relocating national catastrophe and chronic civilian posttrauma into the intimate space of the middleclass family and reframing collective violence as a gendered midlife crisis of care and meaning. Focusing on this highly successful Kan 11 drama, the article examines how values, family, midlife crisis, mother–daughter relations, collective trauma and therapeutic–spiritual discourse are represented through the story of Vered, a speech therapist in her forties whose seemingly “normal” life—marriage, motherhood, work—collapses into emotional overload when her aging mother asks to die. Against the backdrop of war, hostages and ongoing security tension, the series interweaves Holocaust memories and contemporary emergencies to construct a domestic world organized around midlife crisis, aging and death, black humor, wornout couplehood and fantasies of repair, and the gendered labor of holding together a family in an era of prolonged uncertainty.

To situate *Maqom Sameach* within broader debates in television studies, the article brings together work on cultural trauma and postmemory, television melodrama and quality TV, emotional capitalism and therapeutic culture, and feminist scholarship on emotional labor. It asks how a publicservice drama mobilizes familiar conventions of family melodrama and therapeutic storytelling to render visible the emotional costs of national resilience, and what this Israeli case adds to transnational discussions of “trauma TV” and the figure of the traumatized family as a key narrative form in latemodern television.

1.1 Literature Review

Research on cultural trauma, postmemory, television melodrama, emotional capitalism and therapeutic culture, and feminist analyses of emotional labor provides the conceptual framework for this article. Rather than treating these strands separately, the review highlights how they converge around questions of how families, and especially women, mediate collective trauma and emotional burden in contemporary television drama.

1.1.1 Cultural Trauma and Postmemory

Work on cultural trauma and postmemory conceptualizes how collectivities define certain events as wounds to their shared identity and how these wounds are transmitted across generations through stories, images and affective atmospheres (Alexander, 2004; Hirsch, 1997, 2012; Zerubavel, 1995). Hirsch’s notion of “postmemory” is particularly important here, as it captures how children of survivors come to inhabit vivid, affectladen memories of events they did not directly experience, through family stories and visual culture. Rather than treating trauma as a singular, past event, this literature insists on its ongoing, everyday circulation in intimate settings—family conversations, bodily habits, small ritualised gestures—where historical catastrophe is woven into the fabric of ordinary life. Studies of Holocaust memory, in particular, show how experiences of war and genocide become embedded in domestic narratives and intergenerational relationships, often resurfacing in seemingly mundane scenes

around the kitchen table or during family trips (Loshitzky, 2001; Zerubavel, 1995).

Further work on cultural trauma emphasises the narrative and performative dimensions of such processes. Eyerman (2001), for example, conceptualises cultural trauma as a process by which groups actively construct and rearticulate painful pasts through stories, commemorations and media representations, thereby reshaping collective identities. This approach resonates with scholarship that highlights the role of popular culture and television in mediating national trauma, turning abstract histories into concrete, emotionally charged scenarios of family conflict, care and breakdown. Recent memory studies (Hirsch, 1997, 2012; Loshitzky, 2001; Zerubavel, 1995) also stress the multiplicity and contestation of traumatic memories: different groups within the same society may remember the same event differently, and these differences often play out within families, between generations and along gendered lines. For this article, such work is crucial because it shifts the analytical focus from official commemorative spaces to the home and to everyday media consumption, providing a lens for reading television drama that relocates national catastrophe into the middleclass family. *Maqom Sameach* draws precisely on this domesticated trauma: it stages Holocaust memory and chronic civilian threat not as distant historical referents but as affective backdrops to midlife crisis, caregiving and mother-daughter negotiations over life, death and the limits of endurance.

1.1.2 Television Melodrama and Quality TV

Scholarship on quality television has long argued that contemporary drama reworks classical melodramatic conventions—heightened emotion, moral polarisation, and a focus on family and intimate life—into more ambiguous, psychologically inflected storytelling structured by selfanalysis, confession and therapy (Brooks, 1976; McCabe & Akass, 2007; Mittell, 2015; Williams, 2012). Within this strand, the notion of “therapeutic melodrama” captures how serial narratives mobilise therapy scenes, confessional dialogues and emotionally charged family plots as key devices for articulating crisis and the search for meaning. Rather than simply offering excess emotion, these dramas stage characters who continually talk about their feelings, examine their past and measure their lives against shifting ideals of authenticity, fulfilment and healing.

Work on melodrama and “complex TV” further points to the way contemporary series blend seriality, character depth and moral ambiguity to explore longterm psychological and relational crises. Mittell (2015) describes how complex television uses extended story arcs and dense character networks to render visible slowburn transformations in family dynamics, intimacy and selfunderstanding, while Williams (2012) highlights “megamelodrama” as a mode that suspends characters between vertical moments of crisis and horizontal everyday routines. Studies of series such as *In Treatment* or *Six Feet Under* have shown how therapeutic and confessional scenes become privileged sites for negotiating not only personal trauma but also broader cultural anxieties about history, memory and care. This framework is particularly useful for reading *Maqom Sameach* as a publicservice drama that combines

family melodrama with therapeutic discourse, organising its narrative around midlife crisis, couple therapy and confessional mother–daughter conversations that expose the emotional costs of “good life” scripts in contemporary Israel, while situating them within wider regimes of trauma and resilience.

1.1.3 Israeli Family Drama as National Arena

Scholarship on contemporary Israeli television drama converges on the claim that the family has become a privileged site for staging social conflict, identity negotiation and shifting power relations. Recent series relocate the “national drama” from army bases, parliament and security institutions into the middleclass home, where tensions between collectivism and individualism, religiosity and secularism, and centre and periphery are played out through intimate conflicts over care, loyalty and belonging (Meyers et al., 2014; Shohat, 2010). At the same time, critics have traced a transformation in the ethnic and class coding of the “typical Israeli” on screen, with Mizrahi characters increasingly positioned as central figures of mainstream national identity rather than marginal others (Karniel & Lavie-Dinur, 2016). Within this framework, the domestic space is no longer a safe refuge from the public sphere but a volatile arena in which broader political, economic and cultural transformations are condensed into everyday quarrels between spouses, parents and children (Loshitzky, 2001). This body of work provides a key backdrop for analysing *Maqom Sameach*, which situates national anxiety, Holocaust memory and economic pressure within a seemingly ordinary middleclass family, using domestic conflicts over care, autonomy and aging to think through the costs of living under chronic emergency.

1.1.4 Holocaust Memory and the Domestication of Trauma

A substantial body of work examines how Holocaust memory has shifted from heroic-national frames toward more intimate, selfreflexive and everyday modes of representation in Israeli visual culture (Hirsch, 2012; Loshitzky, 2001; Shohat, 2010; Zerubavel, 1995). Early Zionist cinema and television tended to oppose the “weak” diasporic Jew to the strong sabra, relegating Holocaust victimhood to a prestate past supposedly overcome by national revival. From the 1980s onward, scholars chart a move toward domestication: trauma is increasingly woven into everyday narrative structures—family gatherings, romantic plots, midlife crises—rather than confined to exceptional commemorative genres. This domestication often involves black humour, irony and ambivalent identifications with both victims and survivors, blurring boundaries between past and present, public and private suffering (Loshitzky, 2001). Such insights are central for this article, which reads *Maqom Sameach* as part of this trajectory: the series embeds Holocaust memory in routine family conversations, jokes and multigenerational interactions, treating it as a living emotional grammar that shapes how characters understand aging, burden and the decision to go on living.

1.1.5 Youth “Trauma TV” and Emotionalized Screen Culture

Parallel work has examined what might be termed “youth trauma TV” and the increasing emotionalization of Israeli screen culture. Scholars analyzing recent youth-oriented dramas and the Israeli adaptation of *Euphoria* argue that serial television has become a central platform for rendering visible experiences of violence, marginalization, addiction and psychological distress among young people (Lemish, 2007). These series blend melodramatic excess with realist and sometimes documentary aesthetics to depict trauma not as a singular event but as a chronic condition of late-modern subjectivity. Lemish (2007) shows how young characters are encouraged to speak the language of feelings, therapy and vulnerability on screen, while adult institutions—schools, parents, the state—often appear overwhelmed or unable to provide stable protection. This work underscores that Israeli television has already framed trauma as a diffuse, ongoing atmosphere rather than a single crisis, a move that forms an important backdrop for understanding *Maqom Sameach*’s focus on chronic anxiety and emotional overload in midlife.

1.1.6 Emotional Capitalism, Therapeutic Culture and Gendered Emotional Labour

Building on Eva Illouz’s notion of emotional capitalism, scholars have shown how psychological discourse and ideals of authenticity, selfrealisation and healing reshape intimacy and citizenship in latemodern societies (Illouz, 2008, 2012). Illouz argues that markets and psychology become deeply intertwined, so that feelings, romantic relationships and even suffering are organised through therapeutic and consumerist logics, rather than standing outside them. In the Israeli context, studies of popular media and reality television demonstrate how therapeutic language of “healing”, “truth”, “selfwork” and “personal transformation” has become a powerful cultural code across genres, from makeover formats to confessional talk shows (Grosalik, 2017).

In parallel, feminist research on emotional labour and care work argues that women disproportionately absorb and regulate collective distress, often paying a high personal price for holding families and communities together (Herzog, 1999; Lahad, 2017). Mothers and daughters in Israeli television drama are frequently depicted as responsible for maintaining familial cohesion and translating public crises (war, terrorism, economic instability) into manageable domestic narratives, even as texts increasingly foreground the exhaustion and breakdown that accompany these expectations. This strand of work informs our reading of *Maqom Sameach* as a drama that centres a middleaged woman who functions as her family’s emotional hub, while simultaneously exposing the psychic costs of performing ceaseless therapeutic, spiritual and relational labour under conditions of ongoing collective emergency.

1.1.7 Transnational Traumatized Family Narratives

Comparative work on U.S. and European television situates the Israeli case within a broader transformation of family drama and therapeutic storytelling. Scholars of American “quality TV” have analysed series such as *In Treatment* (adapted from the Israeli *BeTipul*), *Six Feet Under* and *The*

Sopranos as emblematic of a turn toward introspective, psychologically inflected narratives in which therapy, confession and selfanalysis structure both plot and characterisation (McCabe & Akass, 2007; Mittell, 2015). In *Six Feet Under*, for instance, the family funeral home becomes a space where unresolved grief, repressed histories and everyday dysfunction intersect, while *In Treatment* organises entire seasons around intimate therapeutic conversations that expose intergenerational wounds. In these dramas, the family home functions as a key site where unresolved historical trauma, intergenerational conflict and care burdens are worked through, often via protagonists in midlife crisis who struggle to sustain both kinship obligations and a coherent sense of self. This literature identifies the “traumatized family” as a central narrative form through which contemporary television grapples with questions of history, memory and emotional survival. Positioning *Maqom Sameach* within this transnational template highlights how the series both adopts and reworks the traumatized family narrative to address specifically Israeli constellations of Holocaust memory, ongoing civilian threat and gendered care work in a public service context.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design and Corpus

This study focuses on the Israeli drama series *Maqom Sameach* (“Happy Place”), broadcast on the public, state-owned channel Kan 11. Industry monitoring data indicate that the series achieved unusually high visibility: a Buzzilla social-listening report recorded approximately 21,600 online conversations and 7,300 social media interactions related to the series, while Kan 11 reported roughly 6.1 million digital views across the corporation’s platforms—exceptional figures for an Israeli public-broadcast drama in a country of around 10 million residents (Buzzilla, 2025; Kan 11, 2025). Methodologically, the analysis employs qualitative content analysis to examine how *Maqom Sameach* represents midlife crisis, familial relations, trauma and therapeutic discourse within contemporary Israeli society. In line with established work on qualitative content analysis and thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Mayring, 2000), the analysis focuses on both what is said and how it is said—narrative structures, visual and auditory choices, humor, silences and recurrent affective registers.

2.2 Coding and Analysis

The empirical corpus consists of all episodes of *Maqom Sameach*’s first season. The unit of analysis is the scene, defined as a continuous segment of action unified by time and place, following television-studies research that treats the scene as the basic narrative and affective building block through which themes, character relations and ideological positions are articulated (Creeber, 2023; Nelson, 2007). Scenes were first viewed repeatedly to gain an overall sense of the series’ world, then segmented and catalogued with brief descriptive notes (character constellation, location, central conflict). On this basis, a coding scheme was developed along three analytical axes that reflect the

research questions: (1) thematic content; (2) form and tone; and (3) power relations and normative assumptions.

On the content axis, categories captured main topics in each scene (midlife crisis and meaning; mother-daughter relations, aging and death; existential despair and black humor; worn-out couplehood and fantasies of repair; Holocaust memory and Israeli post-trauma; gender and the “good woman”; spirituality, therapy and “self-work”). On the form and tone axis, coding traced emotional and stylistic framing: types of humor, prevailing affect and temporal framing, following scholarship on melodramatic/comic registers, tone and temporality (Brooks, 1976; Illouz, 2007; Williams, 2012). On the power and norms axis, the analysis examined intra-familial authority, conformity or resistance to social expectations, and explicit references to the wider Israeli context (Meyers et al., 2014). Organizing the data in this way enabled links between thematic content, emotional tone and implicit normative statements, and illuminated how *Maqom Sameach* stages midlife meaning-making as a gendered, emotional and context-bound project.

To enhance validity and reliability, coding was conducted by two independent coders, MA students in communication familiar with qualitative methods and the cultural context of Israeli television. The use of multiple coders and explicit coding rules follows best practice in qualitative content analysis, where transparency and inter-subjective agreement are key criteria of rigor (Krippendorff, 2018; Schreier, 2012). Coders received a detailed codebook with definitions and examples for each category and participated in a training session in which they jointly coded several pilot scenes until reaching shared understanding of category boundaries. After training, each coder independently coded the full sample along the three axes. Inter-coder agreement was assessed using Cohen’s kappa for the main categorical variables; an overall value above 0.80 indicated strong reliability, and disagreements were discussed until consensus was reached, producing a final agreed-upon coding for analysis (Lombard et al., 2002). The final coding table then served as the basis for identifying recurring patterns across scenes and episodes. Scenes were grouped into four thematic clusters—midlife crisis, couplehood and the “good life”; mother-daughter relations, aging and death; despair, humour and trauma; spirituality, therapy and emotional labour. By examining intersections between content, tone and power relations within and across these clusters, the analysis traces how the series shapes midlife meaning-making as an emotional, gendered and cultural project located in the Israeli domestic sphere.

2.3 Limitations

The study is limited by its focus on a single series and by its exclusive reliance on qualitative content analysis, without audience research or production-side data such as interviews or ethnography. Consequently, the article can offer claims about how *Maqom Sameach* constructs meanings around trauma, midlife and therapeutic culture, but it cannot determine how viewers interpret these representations.

3. Result

From the textual analysis of the series, four main themes emerged: (1) Midlife crisis, couplehood and the “good life”; (2) Mother-daughter relations, aging and death; (3) Despair, humour and trauma; and (4) Spirituality, therapy and emotional labour.

3.1 *Midlife Crisis, Couplehood and the “Good Life”*

Vered is in the midst of a midlife, “ageforty” crisis, caught between motherhood, marriage and therapeutic work, and repeatedly asking what counts as a “good life” and how to “bring back taste” to her days. In the opening episode she moves in a continuous loop between her clinic, the home and her husband’s restaurant, constantly caring for others, managing tasks and worrying, without a single moment for rest or selfreflection. The editing and pacing present her life as a functional circuit: a woman who holds everyone together but almost never asks what she herself wants, signalling the crisis from the very beginning. Midlife crisis in *Maqom Sameach* is articulated not only as an inner psychological turmoil but as a cultural and social condition. Vered has fulfilled the classic script of the Israeli middleclass woman—education, a caring profession, marriage, children, apartment, car and annual vacation—yet discovers that this formula provides stability while suffocating the possibility of further meaning, imagination and desire. Sequences of phone calls to clients, school errands and cooking, edited without pause and at high speed, produce a sense of a “repeating cycle” in which home, workplace and restaurant merge into a single taskspace, blurring any boundary between her roles and eroding a sense of self beyond them.

As the season progresses, the latent crisis becomes explicit in language. In coupletherapy sessions Vered says that the marriage has lost passion, that work is no longer fulfilling, and that at her age one cannot settle for merely “holding everything together” when she herself feels empty. Ben, by contrast, insists that “we have a home, children and a business, why are you looking for problems?”, sharpening the divide between a partner who experiences life as a closed circuit and a partner who clings to the appearance of normality. Her encounters with Yotam, the spiritual workshop facilitator, further crystallize the sense of “automatic pilot”: Vered describes her life as if it is “driving itself” along a preset route, without her feeling that she is the one at the wheel. The crisis is also framed as distinctly gendered. Women in Israeli midlife are measured, the series suggests, by their level of functioning in family and work rather than by fulfilment or pleasure. Dialogues between Vered and her mother Naomi about the aging body and “how I used to be” present Naomi as a future mirror: an older woman who has survived but not truly lived, and who now wishes to die. Naomi’s confession that “when I was beautiful I didn’t know it” condenses a lifetime of unrecognized desire and missed chances, and sparks in Vered an existential fear that she too is headed toward mere survival if she does not dare to change. In this way, Vered’s midlife crisis is situated at the intersection of intergenerational female scripts of sacrifice and a contemporary therapeutic language that demands “selfwork” and authenticity.

Visually and narratively, the series returns to images of driving, looping movement and liminal moments—Vered alone in the car after a difficult session, in front of the mirror before work, or awake in bed next to a sleeping Ben—to make the gap between functioning and aliveness tangible. Alongside this, the characters around her mark different versions of the “good life”: Ossi, the single friend, embodies both freedom and loneliness; Ben represents the financial and business pressures of the Israeli middle class. Through these juxtapositions, *Maqom Sameach* turns Vered’s personal crisis into a broader meditation on the contemporary “life contract”, gently but sharply questioning an Israeli happiness ideal measured by checklists and external achievements rather than by inner satisfaction and meaning.

The series links this midlife crisis directly to a sense of wornout couplehood. Vered and Ben have been married for about fifteen years, are parents to two children and run a home and a business, yet from the very beginning of the season it is emphasized that the intimacy between them has faded and physical and emotional contact has become rare and heavy. Vered experiences herself as “deadalive” inside the house, hungry for touch and closeness, while Ben appears drained, overwhelmed by financial worries and routine, creating a dynamic of a sexless marriage. The few sex scenes in the series are deliberately not romantic and not “televisual”, but awkward, brief and everyday, thereby highlighting erosion and the difficulty of truly connecting in the midst of routine. Intimacy is worn out not only in the sexual sense but also in terms of conversation: Vered tries to talk about lack, boredom and fear of an aging relationship, whereas Ben usually responds with “everything’s fine, just tired”, or withdraws into the restaurant and business concerns. The mismatch in needs—she craves closeness, he seeks quiet and mere survival—turns the home into a space where lack of synchrony is constant, and the couplehood itself is presented as an exhausted body in need of resuscitation.

A key point in this theme is their decision to go to couple therapy, which becomes a space where erosion is given words. In front of the therapist, Vered explicitly formulates that the marriage has lost desire, that closeness has become purely functional, and that there is a sense of logistical partnership instead of a “living” couplehood, while Ben presents himself as someone who is doing the best he can and does not understand why what they have is not enough. Couple therapy is not portrayed as a magic tool that restores passion, but as a setting where gaps and vulnerabilities are exposed; the series gives space to embarrassment, defensiveness and awkward silences in the therapy room, showing how even there Vered and Ben struggle to sustain intimacy. At the same time, the very decision to start therapy is already a step toward repair: they do not abandon or ignore the relationship but are willing to treat it as a project that requires work. Encounters with Yotam—on spiritual retreats, at the beach and in group sessions—create emotional and sexual attraction that further sharpens the emptiness of her marriage with Ben, forcing Vered to confront how hungry she is for closeness she has not found at home. The season’s ending, in which Vered and Ben remain together yet only partially “repaired”, underscores that

the series offers no redemptive narrative of couplehood, but a sober view of midlife marriage as a charged space of fatigue, desire, fear of change and small, tentative attempts to renegotiate the “good life”.

3.2 Mother-daughter Relations, Aging and Death

This theme centres on the Vered-Naomi axis as a dense site where mother-daughter relations, aging, illness and the will to live are negotiated. Naomi’s chronic diabetes, fatigue and fear of losing autonomy place Vered in the position of primary caregiver: she drives her to appointments, translates medical language, argues with doctors and polices diet and treatment, all while trying to sustain her own work and family life. Scenes at home and in the clinic repeatedly stage the mix of worry, anger and guilt that structures their bond: Naomi shifts responsibility onto her daughter, expecting Vered to decide and organise everything, whereas Vered oscillates between devoted care and a sense of suffocation, creating a pattern of reciprocal, guiltladen dependence. Clinical encounters crystallise questions of power and bodily sovereignty. Each doctor’s visit becomes a miniature drama in which it is unclear who truly decides about Naomi’s body and future: Naomi herself, Vered as the “responsible” daughter, or medical authority.

The euthanasia motif sharpens these tensions: Naomi, terrified of amputation and of becoming a burden, turns to Deborah, the partisan cousin and bearer of Holocaust experience, asking for help in ending her life behind Vered’s back. Their conversations, conducted in a dry, almost logistical tone, frame death less as a melodramatic climax and more as a practical solution to a life experienced as tasteless, raising the question of whether one may legitimately refuse to go on living at any cost and what it means for a daughter to be implicated in such a decision.

At the same time, the Vered-Naomi relationship functions as a mirror for Vered’s own midlife subjectivity. In a central conversation, Naomi describes her life as a chain of missed opportunities—an unwanted husband, an unloved job, dreams that never materialised, beauty she did not recognise in time, intellect she never used—and concludes that “nothing in my life had any value; I think I at least deserve to die the way I want”, tying biographical failure to a demand for autonomy in death. Vered listens as both a therapist and a daughter, confronted with the possibility that her mother’s story foreshadows her own if she continues to live only for others. Positioned between deep loyalty and exhaustion, between fear of losing her mother and a desire to escape the endless burden of care, she embodies the “sandwich generation” daughter who is both caregiver to the older generation and a woman struggling not to drown with it. In this way, mother-daughter relations, aging and death are not only a private family story but a key site where the series articulates questions of dignified old age, women’s emotional labour and the psychic costs of holding others’ lives in one’s hands.

3.3 *Despair, Humour and Trauma*

This theme deals with the tension between existential despair and humour, irony and the imagined promise of a “happy place”, holding together the Holocaust, illness, suicidality and everyday Israeli routine. The series refuses to offer a reassuring “happy ending” and prefers to remain in a grey zone where laughter and gloom coexist. Throughout the season, characters express existential despair: Naomi says she has no reason to get up in the morning anymore; Vered speaks of life “on automatic pilot” without taste; and existence is presented as a sequence of tasks in which physical survival does not guarantee psychic vitality. Thoughts about death and about wanting to stop living are voiced openly—for Naomi, through her appeal to Deborah “as someone who understands about death”; for Vered, through her fear that she herself will “drown” in responsibility and fatigue. Even in the final episode there is no promise that life becomes easier, only a small movement of wishing to get away from everything for a moment, a step that signals possibility but does not close down the despair.

Against this despair, *Maqom Sameach* uses black humour, cynicism and macabre jokes. Naomi softens harsh scenes with jokes about the Holocaust, the hospital or her aging body—a way to talk about death without falling apart. Vered responds with embarrassed laughter, with lines that sound like jokes but hit exactly where the pain is sharpest, so that laughter becomes both a defence mechanism and a way of acknowledging helplessness. The title *Maqom Sameach* (Happy Place) explicitly draws on therapeutic language that invites patients to imagine an inner “happy” or “safe place” in order to calm anxiety. The series mobilises this therapeutic metaphor precisely in moments when there is no safety at all—when Vered talks to a mother who wishes to die, or when her own life is collapsing into emotional overload. The notion of a safe place thus functions less as a literal term used by the characters and more as an analytical lens: the gap between the soothing vocabulary implied by the title and the characters’ actual psychic state produces a sharp, deliberate irony.

This oscillation between despair and humour is tightly interwoven with the series’ treatment of Holocaust memory and Israeli posttrauma. The theme of trauma, Holocaust memory and ongoing civilian threat in *Maqom Sameach* functions as a deep layer that seeps into almost every storyline, especially through the characters of Naomi and Deborah. The series does not treat the Holocaust as an external historical episode but as a psychological and familial structure that continues to shape emotional language, attitudes toward death and the way family members understand what counts as a bearable life in Israel. Naomi and Deborah are bearers of Holocaust memory who tell difficult stories almost daily, often at times and in contexts that do not seem appropriate to the gravity of the material, highlighting how deeply trauma is embedded in everyday life. Deborah is portrayed as a former partisan with experience in life-and-death dilemmas; this positioning allows Naomi’s wish to die to be framed not only as present-day despair but as something that passes through a family tradition of dealing with death under extreme conditions.

Around a restaurant table in Vilnius in episode 7, Naomi recounts a family story about her mother Pesia surviving the liquidation of the Vilna ghetto thanks to “big, beautiful breasts”, turning a horrifying selection scene into a bawdy anecdote that links Holocaust memory directly to her own and her daughter’s bodies. She delivers the story in a light, joking tone in front of the Lithuanian tour guide, punctuating it with a boastful reference to her breasts and to Vered’s, and then returns to eating her soup. The moment epitomises how the series weaves atrocity and everyday life together: trauma becomes a topic for family humour and casual conversation, unsettling the boundary between the sacred and the mundane while showing how deeply Holocaust memory is embedded in the characters’ ordinary interactions. The broader political context—war, hostages, security tension—means that anxiety, depression and the wish to “stop living” can be read not only as individual problems but as symptoms of an Israeli reality saturated with threat and instability. The constant encounter between Holocaust memory and contemporary emergencies creates a sense that trauma returns in different forms even today, and that the boundary between national trauma and private mental overload becomes blurred. In this way, despair, humour and trauma are shown as inseparable: black humour becomes a central coping mechanism that allows the characters to live with both historical catastrophe and chronic civilian posttrauma without collapsing, even as the series refuses to offer any simple redemption.

3.4 Spirituality, Therapy and Emotional Labour

This theme is built around two main axes: the spread of therapeutic language and the figure of Yotam, the spiritual workshop facilitator who enters Vered’s life. Through them, the series explores Israeli therapeutic and selfhelp culture—how it provides words and frameworks for pain, and how it also generates excessive promises and burdens the individual with the task of fixing their life alone. Yotam is depicted as a modern guru who appears in Vered’s life at a moment of marital and existential burnout. In the workshop scenes, Vered joins a circle where participants talk about “journey”, “process”, “touching your truth” and “listening to the inner voice”—a language that on the one hand allows her to articulate dissatisfaction with her life, and on the other distances her further from the concrete everyday of home, children and a sick mother.

From a gendered perspective, the attraction of this therapeuticspiritual world is closely tied to Vered’s exhausting emotional labour. As a midlife woman, she is responsible for holding together her marriage, children, patients and aging mother, absorbing others’ distress while suppressing her own. The workshop promises a space in which she can be “a soul”, “a process”, rather than merely a daughter, mother and partner—categories that temporarily release her from the roles that overburden her. At the same time, the series gradually reveals that Yotam himself is a broken figure with his own pains and history; the partial collapse of the guru image offers a critical reading of the entire workshop and spirituality industry as a space that does not necessarily resolve pain, but sometimes merely reshapes it in a different language.

The title *Maqom Sameach* (Happy Place) explicitly invokes therapeutic imagery of a safe inner space, yet the series' world is saturated with anxiety, Holocaust memory, illness, depression and relational crises. There is no moment in which the characters experience a truly secure "happy place"; instead, therapy, spiritual retreats and selfhelp discourse coexist with persistent exhaustion and despair. By centring a protagonist who is both a professional therapist and an overburdened caregiver, the series foregrounds the contradictions of contemporary therapeutic culture: characters are required to do neverending work on themselves in order to find happiness, while living in social conditions that continually reproduce sadness and threat. In this sense, spirituality, therapy and emotional labour form a single thematic cluster that exposes how the injunction to heal and "selfwork" falls disproportionately on women like Vered, even as the promise of a "happy place" remains fragile and ambivalent.

4. Discussion

4.1 *The Traumatized Family as National Arena*

Maqom Sameach shows how contemporary Israeli "trauma TV" relocates national catastrophe and chronic civilian posttrauma into the intimate sphere of the middleclass family. Drawing on work on cultural trauma and postmemory (Alexander, 2004; Hirsch, 1997, 2012; Zerubavel, 1995), the series suggests that collective wounds are worked through not only in public rituals but in everyday speech, family routines and domestic conflicts. Instead of army bases or parliament, its key arenas are Vered's living room, bedroom, kitchen and clinic, where security anxiety, Holocaust memory and economic pressure condense into mundane negotiations over care, loyalty and autonomy. This intensifies the tendency identified in scholarship on Israeli family drama to treat the home as a privileged stage for national tensions (Loshitzky, 2001; Meyers et al., 2014; Shohat, 1989) and shows that what appears as a private midlife crisis is also a way of living with unending collective emergency. By centering a protagonist in her forties who "breaks" in the midst of childcare, eldercare and paid carework, *Maqom Sameach* reframes collective violence as a gendered midlife crisis of meaning. The traumatized family becomes the narrative form through which the series renders visible the emotional costs of national resilience, extending the transnational "traumatized family" template described in qualityTV scholarship (McCabe & Akass, 2007; Mittell, 2015) while inflecting it with specifically Israeli histories of militarization and multigenerational Holocaust memory.

4.2 *Trauma TV, Postmemory and the Limits of Healing*

The series also refines current understandings of Israeli "trauma TV" and emotionalized screen culture (Lemish, 2007) by showing how cultural trauma and postmemory are woven into the textures of midlife domesticity. Naomi's and Deborah's Holocaust stories, told at the restaurant table or during the family trip to Vilnius, exemplify the domestication of trauma: the Shoah is transmitted through jokes, bodily references and everyday anecdotes that are simultaneously banal and unbearable (Hirsch, 2012;

Loshitzky, 2001). Rather than isolating the Holocaust in commemorative scenes, *Maqom Sameach* embeds it in kitchen conversations and family quarrels, confirming that national catastrophe is relived through the emotional labor of a middleclass daughter who must absorb both historical and contemporary emergencies in her role as carer.

At the same time, the series complicates therapeuticmelodrama narratives of healing. Critics of melodrama and quality TV argue that contemporary series mobilize therapy and confession as organizing devices that promise insight and transformation (Brooks, 1976; McCabe & Akass, 2007; Mittell, 2015; Williams, 1998). In *Maqom Sameach*, therapeutic and spiritual discourses are highly visible through Vered's professional role, couple therapy and Yotam's workshops—yet consistently fail to resolve either postmemorial burdens or chronic civilian threat. The language of “process”, “journey” and “safe place” exposes the structural and emotional limits of individual healing in a context where trauma is collective, ongoing and repeatedly reinscribed in family roles, thereby challenging optimistic readings of therapeutic culture.

4.3 Gendered Midlife Crisis in a Postsecular Therapeutic Culture

The findings further suggest that *Maqom Sameach* redefines midlife crisis as a specifically gendered condition produced at the intersection of national posttrauma and therapeutic culture. Drawing on feminist work on emotional labor and care (Herzog, 2005; Lahad, 2017), Vered can be read as the emotional hub of her family: she manages the feelings of clients, children, husband and aging mother, while absorbing multigenerational trauma and maintaining the appearance of normality. Her crisis marks the moment when the demands of caring for a traumatized nation translated into endless domestic emotional labor - can no longer be contained within the figure of the “good woman”. The postsecular setting and the spread of therapeutic discourse intensify this dynamic. As Illouz argues, emotional capitalism and therapeutic culture reconfigure selfhood and intimacy around ideals of authenticity, selfrealization and healing (Illouz, 2008, 2012). Yotam's spiritual workshops offer Vered exactly such promises of transcendence and “true self”, yet the more she immerses herself in selfwork, the more visible become the structural constraints she cannot overcome: militarized insecurity, economic precarity and gendered expectations of selfsacrifice. Rather than providing a path out of crisis, postsecular therapeutic discourse in *Maqom Sameach* functions as a mirror that reflects the impossibility of separating individual healing from collective conditions; it shows that for a middleclass Israeli woman in midlife, there is no “happy place” outside the very networks of care that exhaust her.

4.4 Partial Continuity instead of Redemption

Finally, the series' refusal of redemptive closure confirms and deepens the central claim about the limits of individual healing within a traumatized family. In contrast to many qualityTV narratives that offer at least symbolic repair, *Maqom Sameach* ends without Vered's recovery, without full family

reconciliation and without the neutralization of trauma. What it offers instead are fragile, partial moments of togetherness—an intimate gesture between Vered and Ben, small instances of honesty with Naomi—that never erase exhaustion, despair or inherited catastrophe. These partial continuities resonate with culturaltrauma theorists’ emphasis on ongoing negotiation rather than definitive closure (Alexander, 2004; Eyerman, 2001) and with critiques of therapeutic culture that highlight the gap between its promises and structural realities (Illouz, 2008).

Maqom Sameach both exemplifies and challenges therapeutic melodrama: it uses confession, therapy and spiritual language to organize its narrative, yet ultimately shows that when national catastrophe is lived as a gendered midlife crisis of care, there can be no neat therapeutic ending. Instead, the traumatized middleclass family becomes the place where the limits of individual healing are exposed and where modest, contingent forms of endurance and relational responsibility are forged in the face of ongoing fracture. In doing so, the article extends recent work in television studies on trauma and quality TV by demonstrating how “trauma TV” can be organized around an exhausted, caring female protagonist whose midlife crisis condenses national catastrophe, postmemory and therapeutic culture. This case invites further comparative research on gendered emotional labor and traumatizedfamily narratives in other national television contexts, and on how publicservice drama formats mediate civilian posttrauma in latemodern media systems.

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