



An Apartment in Berlin

A film by Alice Agneskirchner

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SYNOPSIS

Freedom and openness? Arts and culture? Or simply a peaceful life, studying and finding a job? Young Israelis in Berlin – more than 20,000 of them have moved here already. Most of them are enchanted by the city's cosmopolitan and international flair, its comparably low living costs or good infrastructure. It makes the cold and dismal winter a little less harsh. Berlin is also the place, from where the Nazis planned the systematic murder of the Jews. Does that fact matter to young Israelis today?



Almost 100 young Israelis were interested in a film project dealing with Jewish-German history. In order to retrace the common past, director Alice Agneskirchner researched the life of the Jewish egg seller family Adler – using both archives and the advice of historian Karolin Steinke. Over 100 years ago, in 1905, Simon and Rosa Adler came to Berlin from Polish Galicia to make a better life. The three protagonists, Eyal, Yoav and Yael, live in Berlin today and embark on a journey to the past.

The bureaucratic machinery of Nazi-Germany encompassed a wealth assessment office. Every Jew, prior to his deportation, had to fill out a 16-page long form stating all his belongings. The idea was to make a maximum profit out of the deportations. The completely preserved wealth assessment protocol of Simon and Rosa Adler from 1943 is the starting point of the investigation. Following the information given in the protocol, the three young Israelis try to refurnish the Adlers' apartment in Berlin Prenzlauer Berg the way it might have appeared when they still lived.

Each of the three Israelis has a different motivation to participate in the film project. They hope for new perspectives, a journey into the unknown, a personal challenge. However, while they study the files and historic furniture, the film takes a surprising turn.

A critical debate with the director brings out the problematic of the project: even though the young Israelis are inseparably linked to German-Jewish history, they refuse to be representatives of the past. They are unable to emotionally connect with the Holocaust victims' stories. Connecting the Adlers' family tragedy to their own lives today seems impossible to them.





They want to emancipate from their heritage and find their own identity. The central question therefor shifts: How does one remember Holocaust today? Does the perception differ from Jews to Germans? How do the different generations deal with their memory and knowledge of the Holocaust?

The director Alice Agneskirchner - today aged 47 - first heard of the Holocaust when she was twelve, provoking a deep sense of guilt that never really faded. Her history books dealt with Third Reich while leaving aside the extermination of the Jews. Even in her Bavarian hometown, nobody would ever

speak about the deportations, which happened in the small streets and squares known to everyone. In contrast to that, Eyal had already seen images of concentration camps and piles of corpses when he was ten years old. He then, as he says, managed to develop a protecting shield from these images. Growing up, he refused to deal with the Holocaust, especially since his grandfather is an Auschwitz-survivor.

Yoav gets confronted with Holocaust on a daily basis. He works as a historian and tour guide in Berlin. His approach to history is unique. To him, the attraction of Berlin doesn't consist of the victims' fates but rather of the fact that Germany's capital is home to the perpetrators, the commanders. In a discussion with the director, he analyses: "My Holocaust is not your Holocaust. Yours is the one of the victims, mine is the one of the perpetrators."

Yael's concerns are of a different nature. She was raised in a conservative orthodox family. In order to free herself from an arranged marriage and a generally restraining lifestyle, she had to brake away from her family, who refuse to speak to her ever since. She is trying to build a new and free life for herself.

The historic Adler-apartment becomes a room for encounter and discussion. Being on the move, Yael decides to move into the apartment for the time of the project. This is where the three protagonists meet headstrong Lotte, the 93-year old niece of Rosa and Simon Adler. From Israel, she travelled to Berlin to embed a commemoration stone for her murdered family members.

This film, meant as a journey to the past for the three protagonists, turns out to be a multifaceted and astonishing experience for all parties, even the director. Connected by their shared history, the director and the young Israelis develop a new understanding of each other.



ALICE AGNESKIRCHNER

Director



„If a documentary is able to detect the inner truth, the special comedy or sadness inherent to a protagonist – while conserving his likeability and dignity – the audience will emotionally connect with the story. Then, it does not matter whether the film is a documentary or a motion picture.“

Alice Agneskirchner studied political science, German, comparative ethnology and theatre studies at the University of Munich. She was Co-founder of the Munich student theatre MÜST and was working as assistant director at the theatre of Salzburg (Austria). From 1990 till 1995 she studied film directing at the popular Academy of Film and Television (HFF) Konrad Wolf in Potsdam.

Since her successful graduation of her studies she works as director for feature length and TV documentaries as well as corporate films. From 2003- 2007 she worked as guest lecturer at the Film Academy Ludwigsburg. Alice Agneskirchner could gain experience not only in Germany, but also in the USA, Canada, Singapore or Thailand. In 2010 she won the most prestigious German Grimme-Award 2011 for the film project „20x Brandenburg“.

Alice Agneskirchner is member of the German Film Academy and for her current project „An Apartment in Berlin“ she received the Gerd-Ruge scholarship for research. In 2011, she directed “Detroit – Hope for Motor City” as part of a 5-part documentary series for ZDF/arte in cooperation with Gebrüder Beetz Filmproduktion, which screened at Montreal FIFA Festival in March 2013. Her films have screened at Filmfestival Max Ophüls Preis Saarbrücken, International Documentary Filmfestival Munich, Duisburger Film Week, Leipzig Documentary Filmfestival, Chicago Filmfestival, German Filmfestival England or Cinema du Réel Paris.

Alice Agneskirchner has been awarded with many prizes such as the prize for Best Director of the Film Schools, Chicago’s Gold Hugo Prize (“Rauliens Revier”), the Silver OttoCar (2003, “Zusammen”), the Golden Bundeswirtschaftsfilmpreis (Prize of German Ministry of Economy) as well as esteemed scholarships from Munich’s Documentary Film Fest (2007, “Liebe Mama, ich kannte Dich kaum”) and Gerd Ruge of NRW Media Foundation.

She has had very positive experience filming in Israel. First with the Project “24h Israel” (Zero One Filmproduktion, ARTE) where she was selected as one of 40 directors (20 German, 20 Israeli) and later for the film shooting of “An Apartment in Berlin”.