

The Testimonies of the Land: Amos Oz's and Amos Gitai's Journeys in the Land of Israel

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ABSTRACT: This article discusses and compares Amos Oz's *Po va-sham be-eretz Israel* (*In the Land of Israel*) and Amos Gitai's *Yoman sade* (*Field Diary*), which bring an extensive exploration of the Land of Israel just before and during the initial phases of the First Lebanon war in 1982. As a major author of Israeli literature and as a talented "auteur" in Israeli cinema, Amos Oz and Amos Gitai listened to and observed Israelis, settlers, and Palestinians and filed their reports with their audiences. This article highlights their similarities as authors, as well as their differences in perspectives on the Israeli space and nationality, the notions of house, home, and homeland.

IN THE CHAPTER ENTITLED "The Finger of God" in Amos Oz's *Po va-sham be-eretz Israel* (*In the Land of Israel*), he goes to Tekoa, a settlement located seven kilometers south of Bethlehem, close to the Biblical site of Tekoa, the birthplace of the prophet Amos. Oz quotes Amos's famous prophecy:

For three transgressions of Judah, and for four I will not turn away my punishment thereof [...] but I will send a fire upon Judah and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem [...] and he shall bring down thy strength from thee [...] and the horns of the altar shall be cut off, and fall to the ground [...] ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them.¹

¹ Amos Oz, *Po va-sham be-eretz Israel* (Tel Aviv: Am-Oved, 1983), published in the United States as *In the Land of Israel*, trans. Maurie Goldberg-Bartura (New York: Harvest, 1993), 51. Subsequent references to the English-language edition are in parentheses in the text. The quotations from the Book of Amos: 2:4-5; 3:11, 3:14, 5:11, King James Translation

“There are no houses of hewn [stone] in the community of Tekoa,” retorts Oz, but acknowledges the violence inherent to the spatial location of the settlement:

In the midst of this bastion of stillness an army outpost was established in 1970: wooden huts and tents, blockhouses, a barbed-wire fence, a graveled square, and a flag at the top of a pole. [...] The prefab construction insults the stones of this place, rejects them, and gives the community the Israeli character typical of the coastal plain: the hackneyed combination of concrete, bare or plastered, aluminum, glass and plastic [...] The rocks, the desert, and the stone-built Arab villages emphasize how alien these constructions are (51–52).

Oz’s juxtaposition of the description in the Book of Amos and the army outpost is emblematic of Oz’s criticism of the settlements in general. In Oz’s journey through the land of Israel, he observes and depicts the violence and its impact on the land, while expressing his distaste for the misguided direction Zionism has taken and warns of its consequences.

Similarly, as a filmmaker and an artist, Amos Gitai abhors the spatial violence in the territories. Amos Oz’s *Po va-sham be-eretz Israel* (*In the Land of Israel*) and Amos Gitai’s *Yoman sade* (*Field Diary*) both describe extensive explorations of the Land of Israel just before and during the initial phases of the First Lebanon War in 1982. This war cast considerable doubt on Israel’s military power and led to the first organized anti-draft movement, *Yesh Gvul* (“There is a limit”), which later prompted virulent objections to the occupation and encouraged soldiers to refuse to serve during the first and second intifadas.² As a major author of Israeli literature and as a talented “auteur” in Israeli cinema, Amos Oz and Amos Gitai listened to and observed Israelis, settlers, and Palestinians and filed their reports with their audiences. This article highlights their similarities as authors, as well as their differences in perspectives on the Israeli space, the notions of house, home and homeland, and nationality.

LITERARY AND CINEMATIC EXPERIMENTS

Amos Oz’s book *In the Land of Israel* is made up of ten chapters and an epilogue written between November 1982 and the winter of 1983. It was originally published in installments in the *Davar* newspaper. Oz describes his travels through Israel and the West Bank and his encounters with orthodox Jews, settlers, Mizrahim, Palestinians, and aging pioneers. Gitai’s *Field Diary* was filmed and distributed at the same time and deals primarily with the occupied territories. It is part of the trilogy that began with *Bait* (House, 1980), followed by *Vadi* (Wadi, 1981), which also had branching trilogies: *House, Batin be’yrishalayim* (A House in Jerusalem, 1998), *Hadashot me’ha’beyit* (News from the Home/House, 2005), *Wadi, Vadi 1981–1991* (Wadi Ten Years After, 1991), and *Vadi grand kanyon* (Wadi Grand Canyon, 2001). These vertical and horizontal trilogies are considered to have revealed the full mastery of his art,³ and they underscore Gitai’s prominence in documenting Israeli society.⁴

² See the following website: <http://www.yesh-gvul.org.il/>.

³ Amos Gitai in conversation with Hagi Can’an, “Panim, mabat ve-safa: Ha-tzura ha-etit ba-kolnoa shel Amos Gitai” [Face, gaze and language: The ethical form in Amos Gitai’s films], in *Transition, Crossing, Border: A Series of Talks with Film Director Amos Gitai*, Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, December 12, 2021.

⁴ See Gitai’s explanation of the horizontal and vertical trilogy: Amos Gitai in conversation with Eva Illouz, “Bait: Bein mehav le-she’ela existentialistit—hitbonenut be-trilogiat ha-bait” [House: Between space and existential question: A study of the “House” trilogy], in *Transition, Crossing, Border*, December 26, 2021.

In the Land of Israel also has a distinctive quality and has exercised a lasting impact on Israeli literature and culture. It provides a stark confirmation of what Baruch Kimmerling famously called “the end of Ashkenazi hegemony”⁵ and predicted major societal upheavals in Israeli society that remain visible today, almost four decades after it was published. However, the power of the book resides not only in the fact that it pinpointed these new fractures, but that it also made a brave attempt to probe their sources by asking tough questions about Zionism, its mission and fulfillment.

Oz is crafting a new literary genre of essays in which the writer purposely steps out of his comfort zone to engage with others through a process that involves contemplating Israel as a nation and as a culture. While there were Yiddish and Hebrew authors who went on journeys around Jewish provinces and described what they saw, these texts do not resemble Oz’s text. Isaac Leib Peretz, for example, was sent by the Polish administrators on an expedition to check the condition of the Jews in small towns of southeastern Poland. He then wrote *Bilder fun a provints-rayze* (Scenes from a journey through the provinces, 1891), where he describes the harsh conditions and the poverty. Peretz’s text can be read in the context of other writing, of authors such as Peretz Smolenskin, Hayim Nahman Bialik, and even Shmuel Yosef Agnon (in *Oreakh natah lalun* [A guest for the night]), who explored cities and people after pogroms and wars in order to provide poetic testimonies of the destruction. Oz’s poetic endeavor is different from those examples that wished to picture the Jewish lives and to mourn their destruction. He took it upon himself to focus on a certain time in the existence of Israel: a time when the state is a clear fact that apparently enables people to live a peaceful day-to-day life, while locating the violence that bubbles up beneath the surface. Throughout the book, Oz takes on the literary role of “Ha-tzofe le-beit Israel” (the watchman of the house of Israel).⁶ However, he is also clearly aware, and often uses his persona, both as an author and as a particular person with his specific biography, his political visions, and the power of his rhetoric. Thus, in the meetings he conducted he brings himself not only as a representative who seeks to give a neutral report, but as a person who is involved in a conversation and holds private history and ideas.

Menachem Brinker, in his essay on the place of the author in society, maintained that Oz’s essays expressed “what was stirring in our hearts, and even when they enraged us with one statement or the other, they challenged us.”⁷ Eli Amir describes Oz’s “writing of a social-political essay in a literary style that captivates the mind and heart, which nowadays is popular here and abroad.”⁸ In 2002, to celebrate twenty years since its first printing, Alon Hadar went to the city of Bet Shemesh to analyze the changes since Oz’s visit, which was published in *Kol ha-ir Jerusalem* magazine.⁹ In 2009, twenty-seven years after its publication, and timed to coincide with the sixth edition of the book, Uri Misgav repeated Oz’s trip to meet the people (or their children) with whom Oz dialogued in 1982 and painted an insightful picture of their changing lives and

⁵ Baruch Kimmerling, *Ketz shilton ha-ahusalim* [The end of Ashkenazi hegemony] (Jerusalem: Keter, 2001). See also, Baruch Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

⁶ Ezek. 3:16.

⁷ Menachem Brinker, “Noche’ hut ha-sofer ba-hevra” [The author’s presence in society], in *Sovev Sifrut: Ma’amarim al gvul ha-philosophia ve-torat ha-sifrut* [About literature: Essays on the borderline of philosophy of art and literary theory] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2000), 321.

⁸ Eli Amir, “11 Shanim aharei: Amos Oz, po va-sham be-eretz Israel be-stav ‘82” [11 years later: Amos Oz here and there in the land of Israel], *Yediot Aharonot* weekend supplement, September 3, 1993, 35.

⁹ Alon Hadar, “Esrime Shana le-’Po va-sham be-eretz Israel’-Bikur be-veit Shemesh” [Twenty years to *In the Land of Israel*—A visit to Bet Shemesh], *Kol ha-ir Jerusalem*, October 18, 2002.

communities.¹⁰ *In the Land of Israel* directly inspired David Grossman's *Ha-zman ha-tzahov* (*The Yellow Wind*, 1987) and *Nokhehim nifkadim* (*Sleeping on a Wire*, 1992).¹¹ Nir Baram's *Ha-aretz she-me'ever la-harim* (*A Land without Borders*, 2016) should also be read in terms of the impact of Oz's book.¹²

Just as Oz formulated a new genre in Hebrew literature, Gitai also provides a unique take on documentary films. In a conversation with Hagi Can'an, the latter argued that Gitai is an example of an "auteur," a complete creator, whose films reflect his creative vision. Given Gitai's training as an architect, his work can be seen as what Jill Stoner refers to as "minor architecture" (as in Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "minor literatures")¹³ since it looks closely at the ways which individuals and communities build their homes. His 1980 documentary film, *House*, begins with a particular living environment and examines the ways it interacts with its surroundings. This film articulates the relationships between home, place, and nature, between an anonymous space and a personal place, and between different life forms, communities, religions, and histories. Gitai sees and hears individual voices, actual people, and their specific homes.

Gitai considered documentary cinema to be like an archeological dig where the buried layers must be uncovered with care since a bulldozer will destroy everything. The filmmaker thus needs to film the spaces and the situations and to respect the characters. As Milja Radovic noted:

In Gitai's case, these micro-cosmic realities are represented as a mosaic via capsulated narrative segments that bring out the voices of diverse individuals and communities that exist within the land. [...] In capturing fragments of the geographical space that exists beyond the frame (the land), the camera depicts specific physical spaces, and the inner embodied realities of characters tied to those spaces are made manifest.¹⁴

Editing is a compression of time, but Gitai tends to restore rhythms through changes in pace, sculptural techniques, slow and continuous moments, silences, images of lands, and noises. The film is made up of fifty sequence shots, designed as independent sections, most of which were shot from a car.¹⁵ Eti Marom, the cinematographer of the film, described her fascination with Gitai's cinematic orientation: "I do not know any documentary that is entirely made up of such long shots. Amos took it to the extreme, I would never have imagined that he would do it this way. He kept all the shots from beginning to end."¹⁶ The monologues are not interrupted, and thematic units with a single sequence are shot to maintain the continuity of time and space. This slowness disrupts the narrative and undermines the coherence while making the viewers conscious

¹⁰ Uri Misgav, "Hiluch hozer" [Replay], *Yediot Aharonot* weekend supplement, July 8, 2009, 1, 12–7.

¹¹ David Grossman, *The Yellow Wind*, trans. Haim Watzman (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1988), first published in Hebrew, *Hazman ha'tzahov* (Ha-kibutz ha-meuhad, 1987); David Grossman, *Sleeping on a Wire*, trans. Haim Watzman (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1993), first published in Hebrew, *Nokhehim nifkadin* (Ha-kibutz ha-meuhad, 1992).

¹² Nir Baram, *A Land without Borders: My Journey Around East Jerusalem and the West Bank*, trans. Jessica Cohen (Melbourne, Australia: Text Publishing, 2017), first published in Hebrew, *Ha-heretz she-me'ever le-harim* (Tel Aviv: Am-Oved, 2016).

¹³ Jill Stoner, *Toward a Minor Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).

¹⁴ Milja Radovic, "Constructing Space, Changing Reality of Israel through Film," *JRFM Journal for Religion, Film and Media* 5, no. 1 (2019): 121.

¹⁵ Yan Lardo, "Ha-musar ha-galum be-tnuat ha-matzlema ha-okevet" [The hidden moral in the movement of the following camera], *Cinematheque* 124 (2003), 11.

¹⁶ Eti Marom, "Re'ayon im Nurit Aviv" [An interview with Nurit Aviv], *Takriv* 20 (2020).

of the documentary strategy.¹⁷ However, it also juxtaposes spaces, people, images, and sounds that form a singular point of view that produces an implied vision through cinematic devices. This is Gitai's version of what John Grierson called the "creative treatment of actuality": a way to endow a documentary with commitment and authority.¹⁸

The first difference between Oz and Gitai has to do with their titles. Unlike Oz's *In the Land of Israel*, Gitai called his film a "field diary," a term used to describe observations in the field in sociology or anthropology that involve a detailed analysis. In the film, "field" takes on the concrete meaning of "land" in terms of who is nurturing it, who is violating it, who is controlling and setting borders, who is building a house and who is demolishing it, and in what sense people belong to their lands. The difference between the two titles emphasizes Gitai's documentary perspective, which is always minor and does not aim to provide a blanket interpretation.

STRIATED SPACES

Oz gives voice to the people he meets on his journey and respects them, even when he does not agree with their vision. Three chapters in the book are nevertheless dedicated to the enormous disparity between Oz's views and those of the settlers. Oz does not hide his convictions or convey empathy. His purpose is to hear their views and to familiarize himself with them. He meets fire-brand ideologists, individualists calling for a return to nature, and others who simply consider living in the territories as an economic opportunity. He hears from Harriet, who sees the situation as a holy war: "a war against all of Islam. And against the Goyim" (60), who is willing to hire Arabs as "hewers of wood and carriers of water" (71) as long as they understand who is the boss. He meets Danny, who, after visiting the Cave of Chariton (the Tekoa gorge), "was enchanted by the place and decided to stay" (60) and listens to Menachem's more pragmatic financial considerations that prompted him to invest in the area and set up factories (55–56).

Oz travels from Tekoa to Ofra, where he spends the whole weekend, and takes up Israel Harel's invitation to give a long speech on his worldview. In Ofra, the center of Gush Emunim,¹⁹ he meets Pinchas Wallerstein, who was the chairman of the Mateh Binyamin Regional Council at the time and one of Gush Emunim's most prominent leaders. His visit took place shortly after the massacre of Sabra and Shatila in Lebanon and after Ofra publicly announced its support for the government; in the view of settlement officials, the massacre showed the extent to which Arabs can hate and kill one another. As settler Sarah Harel grimly observed (without acknowledging Israel's own culpability in the atrocity), "If the Arabs are capable of doing something like that to other Arabs, what awaits us if we are trapped in a moment of weakness?" (119). Although he documents these views, Oz never wavers from his deep-seated rejection of the settlers and their ideology. However, his disappointment does not only apply to individual settlers, but rather reflects his realization that the root of their ideology derives from their interpretation of Zionism. Oz comments that the settlers actually "operated by classical Zionist techniques: another stake, another goat, another acre. [...] the story of Ofra begins in 1975, with a handful of folks who settled it as a work camp in the abandoned Jordanian garrison" (111).

¹⁷ Erez Dvora, "Paradox Gitai," *Cinematheque* 124 (2003), 5.

¹⁸ See Louise Spencer, "Working-Class Hero: Michael Moore's Authorial Voice and Persona," *Journal of Popular Culture* 43, no. 2 (2010): 368; Desmond Bell, "Documentary Film and the Poetics of History," *Journal of Media Practice* 12, no. 1 (2011): 8.

¹⁹ Founded in 1974, Gush Emunim is an Israeli Orthodox Jewish right-wing activist movement committed to establishing Jewish settlements in the occupied territories.

Zealots do not only live in the settlements. Oz was fascinated by people who go to extremes and saw them as the seeds of moral corruption.²⁰ When Oz meets Z., a farmer, he is shocked to hear a monologue full of hatred and violence. Z. is disturbed by any outward manifestation of what he regards as the weaknesses of the Jewish people. To abolish the *Zhid*, the prototype of the weak Jew, he is willing to embrace the identity of a “Judeo-Nazi” (94), the terminology Yeshayahu Leibowitz used to bitterly condemn the cruelty of Israeli soldiers toward the Palestinians. Z. vows to fight like hell against anyone, to be mad and violent as dictated by the situation, so the Other will “realize that we’re a wild country, deadly and dangerous to everyone around, awful, crazy, capable of suddenly going nuts because they murdered one of our kids—even one!” (89–90).

Z. has no moral quandaries with the war in Lebanon. As a matter of fact, he makes it clear that if he were in charge, it could all have been taken care of in 1948. He also declares he is willing to take illegal steps for the cause and perceives any restraint as weakness. His attitude toward Oz’s values is summarized as follows: “As soon as we finish this phase, the violence phase, step right up, it’ll be your turn to play your role. You can make us a civilization with humanistic values here” (93).

Oz is aware of the spatial violence and describes it at length, but he does not depict violent behavior on the part of Israelis, settlers, or Palestinians. Rather, his respondents sit down with him and explain their views. This is understandable but misleading, since it can conceal the violence incorporated into the space itself. There are no soldiers in Oz’s book, no borders, checkpoints, or other signs of territorial conflict. Oz goes to Tekoa, Ramallah, Ofra, and East Jerusalem, as though there were freedom of movement for all. In the context of deterritorialization, Deleuze and Guattari made a distinction between “striated spaces”—i.e., arranged, divided, classifiable spaces, spaces of supervision, territorial borders that are dictated by ideology—and “smooth spaces” that have no markers of transition or borders.²¹ It is striking that Oz’s journey appears to evolve through “smooth spaces,” whereas the reality is completely different.

The absence of a military presence in the book constitutes the second difference between Oz and Gitai. Yan Lardo commented that *Field Diary* emphasizes the role of the camera as a moral gaze from the beginning to the end of the film. The film starts with the camera panning soldiers in a square in the West Bank.²² Later it films in front of the house of the mayor of Nablus, who was injured in an attack and lost both legs. While the mayor’s wife describes the hardships of the military surveillance of their home, an officer places his hand over the lens, but Eti Marom continues to film.²³ The camera continues to film when it is covered, when the soldiers ask the crew to provide their credentials or threaten them with arrest, and when they are finally escorted out. The camera continues to hover over mountains and cities, similar to a patrol controlling the residents, farmers, mountains, destroyed houses in south Lebanon, and temporary shelters for families whose homes were bombed during the war. Unlike Oz’s reflections about the war in Lebanon, Gitai’s camera simply documents what the area looks like after the Israeli invasion. In the last sequence of the film, the camera tails three soldiers who are made to feel uncomfortable. They ask

²⁰ Oz dedicated a book to essays to investigate these extremist currents: Amos Oz, *Dear Zealots: Letters from a Divided Land*, transl. Jessica Cohen (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), first published in Hebrew as *Shalom la-ka’naim* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2017).

²¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 488, first published in French, *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1980); Mark Bonita and John Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy* (Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 154.

²² Lardo, “Ha-musar ha-galumi,” 11.

²³ See also, Marom, “Re’ayon im Nurit Aviv.”

the camera crew to leave, but finally move on elsewhere. Just like the soldiers on patrol who see everything inside the Palestinians' homes, the camera does the same with the soldiers by trying to view every movement they make. In the last sequence, the soldiers do not block the camera but make it clear that they behave differently when the camera is filming; one comments, "You see that I didn't do anything to this boy." When they move to another spot, the camera continues trailing them in triumph. Violence toward the camera can be interpreted as a manifestation of the violence in the land. It illustrates the "striated spaces" of the occupied territory, the fact that no one can move freely, and the extreme power and insensitivity of the army.

Soldiers are all over the place in Gitai's film, and military existence is depicted in almost every sequence, as well as through the soundtrack, which is composed of a mixture of Arabic music and news bulletins on riots, tear gas, and curfews. At one point, the soundtrack overlays Menachem Begin's 1982 speech during a ceremony for the burial of the remains of twenty-five soldiers dating to the Bar Kokhba revolt of 132–36 CE whose bones were found by Israel Defense Forces soldiers in Nahal Hever. The ceremony emphasizes the bonds of blood between these ancient warriors and the contemporary Israeli army. It implies that the history of Bar Kokhba and the revolt of the Jews of the Roman province of Judea against the Roman Empire constitute a legacy for the new generations of Jews who returned to the land of Israel.²⁴ The voiceover then cites soldiers' violence in Bethlehem in an incident when they wounded Palestinian students and destroyed their homes. In the settlement of Ariel, a soldier says that "you have to mow down the Arabs at the root" and "Israel should have had a strong hand a long time ago, before they started to consolidate." One sequence shows off-duty soldiers simply touring the occupied territories to take pictures and enjoy themselves. Their freedom of movement is contrasted with the lack of freedom of movement of the Palestinians. Even in the Barkan settlement, when Gitai meets a father of three children who chose to move there because it is cheap, housing plots are large, and the landscape is inspiring, the camera makes it hard to miss the barking dogs and the little boy with a toy gun in his hands, as though to define his future role. Thus, even when no soldiers are being filmed, military power and its violence can be sensed.

In a collective volume entitled *Theorizing Documentary*, editor Michael Renov describes the cinematic devices documentaries can implement, such as musical accompaniment, dramatic arcs, camera angles, close-ups, etc.²⁵ Alongside these techniques which emphasize the army's control, Gitai's film implements a cyclic structure that involves returning to the same location or repeating the same spatial component. This is done in two scenes near the house of the mayor of Bethlehem when the camera focuses on the uprooting of Palestinian olive trees by first filming a group of women and then talking to the owner of the olive grove, who describes his family's holding of the land from generation to generation. The issue of working in Israel, whether in agriculture or in construction, also recurs in the film. This cyclic editing suggests a deadlock where there is no possibility for change for the Palestinians.

In comparison to Gitai, Oz's neutral and sterile description of free movement in a space with no army provides his readers with a soothing tale that passes easily. It meshes well with Oz's status as a popular author and public figure aligned with the Zionist left. This leads to two

²⁴ Yaron Silverstein, "Sanctification and 'Sacred Sites' in a Jewish Democratic State," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 31, no. 3/4, 2021, <https://jcpa.org/article/sanctification-and-sacred-sites-in-a-jewish-democratic-state/>.

²⁵ Michael Renov, "Introduction: The Truth About Non-Fiction," in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York: Routledge, 1993), 2–3.

of the most important ideological differences between Oz and Gitai. The first involves seeing the Palestinians' plight as analogous to Jewish suffering, whereas the second is the identification of 1967 as the breaking point.

PEACE NOW OR LATER?

The conversations in Oz's *In the Land of Israel* took place more than a decade after the 1967 War and the Occupation of the West Bank, when the Occupation had already become a fact on the ground that involved both economic collaboration with Israel and internal national Palestinian discord. For Oz, who voiced his objections to the Occupation soon after the 1967 war, the 1982 visit to Ramallah was an opportunity to see what had happened to these territories years after the war.

In Ramallah, a major Palestinian city in the West Bank which today is the administrative capital of the Palestinian National Authority, he talks to Abu-Azmi, an elderly man who describes the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians as a power play, and a younger Palestinian named Naif, who presents a different version, suggesting that "the Jews and the Arabs [are] like two people standing on a roof close together: if they don't want to fall off the roof together, they have to be careful. They have no choice" (83). Naif claims that the relations between the two nations are like a seesaw: when one end goes up the other goes down. The two nations have a history of suffering when down, but when they are up they delude themselves into thinking that they are in no danger of yet another imminent tilt. Abu-Azmi stresses that the powerful side never agrees to compromise, since power intoxicates and corrupts.

Later, in Oz's conversation in East Jerusalem in the offices of the daily newspaper *Al-Fajr* (The Dawn), Oz asks himself (and his readers) whether he can compare the newspaper *Al-Fajr* to the Zionist Hebrew newspaper *Ha-shahar* (also meaning The Dawn) that was founded a hundred years earlier in Vienna by Peretz Smolenskin. The potential for comparison not only draws on the identical name, but also draws on the historical notion of shaping the identities of people who aim to build their nation.

In an exchange with Ziad, the editor of the newspaper, he argues that if Yasser Arafat had tried to offer peace and mutual recognition, it would have brought about a split and greater conflict in the Arab street since some factions would have praised Arafat and others would have said he was a traitor. Ziad funnels this question back to Oz to inquire what would occur in the Israeli society if peace and mutual recognition with the Palestinians were on the agenda, and Oz reprises Ziad's comment: "There would be a split. There would be a great conflict" (161). At that time, Oz could not have imagined that this split would lead to a horrific validation in the 1995 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.²⁶ Oz appears to hint that the two nations are not so different.

These conversations basically reflect Oz's later position, as shown in one scene from *Sipur al ahava ve-hosheh* (*A Tale of Love and Darkness*, 2002), where Oz attempts to understand the nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by proposing a highly appealing psychological explanation for the behavior of the two nations: that both the Jews and the Arabs suffered oppression whose roots are European, and that both manifest post-traumatic responses. He points out the parallels between the victims (Jews and Arabs) and between the oppressors' system of power:

²⁶ As he admitted later, "When I reread what I had written there, I found the warning that Rabin or Shamir were about to be assassinated. Thus there was something in the air, it wasn't only what I, the presumed psychopath, was saying." See Dror Eydar, "Omrim li she-ani elita. Ani lo mevin et mashmaut ha-mila ha-zot" [They tell me I'm part of the elite. I don't understand the meaning of this word], *News1*, May 14, 2017, <https://www.news1.co.il/Archive/003-D-119978-00.html>.

The Europe that abused, humiliated and oppressed the Arabs by means of imperialism, colonialism, exploitation and repression is the same Europe that oppressed and persecuted the Jews, and eventually allowed or even helped the Germans to root them out of every corner of the continent and murder almost all of them. But when the Arabs look at Jews they do not see a group of half-hysterical survivors but a new offshoot of Europe, with its colonialism, technical sophistication and exploitation that has cleverly returned to the Middle East—in Zionist guise this time—to exploit, evict and oppress all over again.

Whereas when we look at them we do not see fellow victims either, brothers in adversity, but somehow we see pogrom-making Cossacks, bloodthirsty anti-Semites, Nazis in disguise, as though our European persecutors have reappeared here in the Land of Israel, put keffiyehs on their heads and grown moustaches, but are still our old murderers interested only in slitting Jews' throats for fun.²⁷

This analogy and comparison are part of the leftist Zionist argument for reconciliation. However, this description does not acknowledge Israeli responsibility for Palestinian suffering while continuing to describe the Israelis as “a bunch of half-hysterical survivors.”²⁸

Nevertheless, Oz's belief in Zionism does not negate the Palestinians' right to independence. Rather, in the name of Zionism, he believes that the Palestinians deserve their own state.²⁹ He is astounded to see what people who are driven by Zionism are capable of thinking and doing. He voices an uncompromising critique that illustrates the chasm between the settlers of Ofra and the vision of the Peace Now movement. In his view, the settlers fuel ideological passion steeped in religious isolationism and nationalism, and they twist Zionism in the name of messianic rhetoric. “Zionism was not a matter of turning our back on the gentile world,” Oz claims. “On the contrary, it was born precisely out of the desire to return to the family of nations” (141). With arrogance and extremism, they cherish ideas that are inhumane and immoral, where everything is legitimate if it enters into the ritual of the Land of Israel. Oz argues that their orientation constitutes a negation of Jewish values. With respect to the Palestinians, he states that “he who denies the identity of others is doomed to find himself ultimately not unlike those who deny his own identity” (144). Oz's denunciation expresses his overriding fear not only of the terrible price that the people of Israel would pay on the battlefield for the messianic dream of the Greater Land of Israel but also the fear that these extreme and uncompromising ideological urges would constitute the seeds of the Jewish people's self-destruction, which would bring about another cycle of defeat and diaspora to the Jewish people.

Nitza Ben-Dov, who analyzed the endings of Oz's works, maintained that Oz inserts his own presence into his narratives and uses the metaphor of “the morning after” to express Oz's constant recognition of the disparity between ideologies and dreams and their realization.³⁰ Yigal Schwartz asked, “Why does Oz [...] constitute such a powerful source of attraction and

²⁷ Amos Oz, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, trans. Nicholas de Lange (Vintage Books, 2004), 330, first published in Hebrew, *Sipour Al Ahava Vehoshekh* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2002).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See also, Jonathan Freedland, “The Radical Empathy of Amos Oz,” *New York Review*, January 14, 2019, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/01/14/the-radical-empathy-of-amos-oz/>.

³⁰ Nitza Ben-Dov, “Haomnam menuha le'ahar ha-se'ara?” [Is it really resting after the flood?], in *Ve-hi tehilatecha: Iyunim biyzirot S. Y. Agnon, A. B. Yehushua ve-Amos Oz* [And that is your glory: Studies in the works of S. Y. Agnon, A. B. Yehoshua, and Amos Oz] (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 2006), 281–84.

aversion?”³¹ He claims that during the 1980s, and specifically from 1982 to 1991, Oz wrote “requiem books of eulogies for his world and his era, and prophesized [...] alternative paths for the different peoples who would be the protagonists of the coming era.”³² Ben-Dov’s “the morning after” and Schwartz’s “requiem” correspond to the reading suggested here. In the case of this book, it is the morning after 1967 that Oz mourns: the year certain Zionist movements took a wrong turn. Hence, Oz reassesses the values of Zionism and identifies its darker sides. The Zionist decapitation of the image of the diasporic Jew can degenerate into aggressive military behavior; the ideology of making the land bloom later played a major role in the Occupation and settlement culture. The concept of integration led, in fact, to segregation and outrage; the War of 1948 was driven by the urge to find a haven for the Jews after the Holocaust but turned into the Palestinian trauma; the need to build a strong army to make Israel safe morphed into the Occupation in 1967 and the Lebanon war. The multifaceted relationship between Zionism and Judaism, with a delicate balance between the definition of the state as both Jewish and democratic, is often upset. It is Oz’s strong belief in the Zionism of 1948, his interpretation of the conflict as based on analogies of suffering, and the vision of 1967 as the breaking point that may account for his continuing appeal.

Gitai’s camera movements reveal no clear breaking point. As in his film *House* (1980), he engages in the archaeology of the land and the house in a way that Barbara Mann considers to be “less linear and more devoted to history,” by attending to “both immediate and ancient past.”³³ The Zionist idea to “build and rebuild” Israel in *Field Diary* as well as in the other films in the trilogy turns into a depiction of history where people dominate the land by demolishing and by building, uprooting the former and building new memories for the future. Instead of a well-organized argument, Gitai lets the camera linger on the space, the bulldozers, the massive equipment used to demolish Palestinian fields to build new settlements, with materials that clash with the landscape. Thus, as in the later films in the trilogies of *House* and *Wadi*, building and uprooting are part of a cycle of history.

In his last lecture, delivered at Tel-Aviv University in June 2018, just before he passed away, “Kol ha-heshbon od lo nigmar” (the whole account has yet to be settled), Oz systematically expressed his political vision. When referring to the question of the return of the Palestinians to the land they left in 1948, he claimed that “what was lost in time cannot be found in space.” To a Palestinian friend in the diaspora, he said that his lost house and vineyard will not wait for him, since if all the Palestinians return, the land will look different and new towns and houses will need to be built.³⁴ Unlike Oz, Gitai in his films raises the question of return and does not negate the Palestinians’ memories. He considers that there is no place where Israelis were right or wrong, as Oz tries to suggest, but simply films the unfolding of history, with its twists and turns. Thus, this spatial violence cannot conceal the tough questions of the Palestinian return.

In this regard, Erez Dvora describes what he terms the “Gitai Paradox”: the disparity between Gitai’s hesitant acceptance in Israel and his international acclaim. Whereas he is much appreciated, both at festivals and in commercial theaters in other countries, in Israel his place in Israeli cinema

³¹ Yigal Schwartz, *Pulhan ha-sofer ve-dat ha-medina* [Cult of the author and the state religion] (Tel Aviv: Kinneret Zmora-Bitan Dvir, 2011), 21.

³² Yigal Schwartz “Ha-migdalar” [The lighthouse], *Haaretz*, December 31, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/prose/premium-1.6792030>.

³³ Barbara Mann, “House, Interrupted,” *Michigan Quarterly Review* 54, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 90.

³⁴ Amos Oz, “Kol ha-heshbon od lo nigmar” [The whole account has yet to be settled], Tau Webcast June 3, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pqrd4c8ZT1E>.

is seen as minor, and three of his early films were never authorized for screening.³⁵ In a conversation with Eva Illouz, he commented that when Tommy Lapid rejected *House* and *Field Diary* he understood that he did not have a role to play in Israel.³⁶ He left Israel and lived for a decade in Paris. He admitted that “to present a film like *Field Diary* to a public such as you have described, during or immediately after the Lebanon war [...] that’s an extremely sensitive kind of context.” However, he said he did not regret it for a moment since he believes that “it may be the ideal situation for this presentation, for context is, after all, an integral factor in the making of works of art, of cinema, video, literature, theater, and this hostile reaction was completely understandable.”³⁷

If indeed “documentaries presuppose an implied contract of trust between the filmmaker and the audience, a contract that stipulates the accurate representation of a filmic reality,”³⁸ Gitai’s work shows the pendulum of time and its impact on the land. Unlike Amos Oz, who aims to draw conclusions, decide who is right and who is wrong, who is at fault and what could have been done to change the history of the conflict, Gitai’s vision is much more difficult to digest, since it shows the history of the land and its people in a less decisive way. Israelis and Palestinians want the same land and have cultural and spiritual inclinations to the same places. There is no certain moment in history where Israel took the wrong path; the historical processes are much more complicated.

BACK TO TEKOA

When Amos Oz visits the settlement whose residents consider it to be a realization of Amos’s prophecies of consolation, the “return of my people Israel,” Oz is afraid that other verses in Amos might also come to pass, such as the intimation that “thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword” (72). Shortly after the book was published, Ilan Sheinfeld suggested that Amos the prophet was a manifestation of Oz himself.³⁹ Uri Misgav related to this book after Oz passed away and suggested, “With an accuracy that is both depressing and admirable, Oz simply predicted contemporary Israel, which has been created in the image of Netanyahu.”⁴⁰

David Grossman, who considered this book to be a source of inspiration for his documentary works, wrote an epilogue that was published in the 2009 edition (in Hebrew). He declares:

The readers already know that several of the most extreme and preposterous inclinations expressed in these pages have become part and parcel of our everyday lives. A world view where force and paranoia and racism [...] Every page in this book is frighteningly contemporaneous, and gives the feeling that the State of Israel is not moving forward in time almost, but is rather trapped in an eternal vicious circle, in which it is doomed to repeat the same mistakes again and again, experience the same disasters again and again.⁴¹

³⁵ Dvora, “Paradox Gitai,” 5.

³⁶ Gitai with Illouz, “Bait.”

³⁷ Amos Gitai and Annette Michelson, “Filming Israel: A Conversation,” *October* 98 (2001): 47–75.

³⁸ Fiona Otway, “The Unreliable Narrator in Documentary,” *Journal of Film and Video* 67, no. 3–4 (2015): 3.

³⁹ Ilan Sheinfeld, “Tzimtei imut ba-metziut ha-Israelit” [Conflict crossroads in Israeli reality], *Migvan* 83–4 (December 1983–January 1984): 61–62.

⁴⁰ Uri Misgav, “Ziffer tzodek be-davar ehad: ‘Po va-sham be-eretz Israel’ hu achen sifro he-hashuv beyoter shel Amos Oz” [Ziffer is right about one thing: “In the Land of Israel” is Amos Oz’s most important book], *Haaretz*, December 29, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/premium-1.6788751>.

⁴¹ David Grossman, epilogue to *Po va-sham be-eretz Israel: Be-stav 1982* [Here and there in the land of Israel: In autumn 1982], by Amos Oz (Jerusalem: Keter, 2009), 193–95.

In 2017 Amos Gitai made a short movie entitled “The Book of Amos,” part of a larger project by different filmmakers around the world. Gitai made a twelve-minute movie based solely on quotations from Amos. In this intensive film, the harsh prophecies of Amos are recited by seven women and men, in Hebrew and in Arabic, while around them riots are taking place and soldiers and Palestinian protesters are fighting. The shots, the violence, the blood, the fire, all merge with the words of Amos the prophet. The film ends, as one would expect, with the words of consolation from the Book of Amos, but these words do not mark a reality of peace, just a brief hiatus in the riots. The soldiers, carrying their weapons, are simply walking down the street, not trying to arrest anyone but still controlling the territory. Seeing them and the Palestinians, it is clear that this is only a transient moment of calm, since the situation has not changed. The soldiers continue to patrol, and the Palestinians continue to live under the Occupation.

What Amos Gitai did in this short film corresponds to Oz’s question in Tekoa: it inquires whether we are living in an era of consolation or an era of sin. With no clear answer, Amos (Oz) and Amos (Gitai) provide a mirror on the Occupation, such that if the prediction of Amos the prophet comes true, we cannot claim we were unaware of what was happening in the Land of Israel. A