

“The Dreamers of Lost Dreams”

- • • *The Oslo Accords and the Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin on Screen (1994–2015)*

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ABSTRACT: In this article, I discuss how several documentaries and films by Amos Gitai provide primary oral and written sources to write a history from below of the Oslo Accords and of their demise. In the first part of the article, I discuss sources from a set of interconnected documentaries (*Give Peace a Chance* and *Arena of Murder*) filmed between 1994 and 1996; in the second, I focus on the movie *Rabin, The Last Day* (2015), and I explore sources from the so-called Gitai-Rabin archive deposited at the Bibliothèque National de France. Overall, this material brings us the voices of various groups within Israeli society and among Palestinians, revealing the complexity of the issues on the negotiating table, and the cultural, social, and political questions that the peace process unleashed.

KEYWORDS: archive, cinema, Gitai Amos, memory, oral history, Oslo Accords

There is nothing on earth more sacred than blood, my son.
This is why our land is called the Holy Land.

—Emil Habibi¹

Two Times Apart: 1993 and 1996

Writing in 1994, Efratia Gitai explained to her son Amos why she was not ready to relocate to Paris where he and his wife Rivka had settled a decade before, or anywhere else, for that matter: among the reasons, she mentioned her memories of the past, the beautiful sites that anchored



those memories, the cultural life that she cultivated in Haifa, and her unfamiliarity with French. She added:

Memories were made here, and they can't be uprooted. I take short visits to distant places, and then I come back. We might not have another place, but anxiety is setting in. What will become of you, the youngsters, our flesh and blood, dreamers of the lost dreams?²

Moving from the private (and intimate) to the public sphere, and over from one generation to the next, only two years after Efratia's letter to her son, rock singer Aviv Gefen captured the mood of an even younger generation, summarizing its sense of loss and collective trauma just before the national elections of 1996. Their memories, cultural life, and dreams had also been "made here," and their dreams were also lost, though in a different way from those of Efratia's. Performing "It's Cloudy Now" (*Achshav Me'unan*) at Yarkon Park in Tel Aviv in 1996 in front of a large crowd, Gefen gave voice to a "generation that was screwed," who "wanted change" and "to leave this place."³

Efratia Gitai and Aviv Gefen belonged to different generations, had unique styles of dress and makeup, and conveyed their messages in distinct tones. But at the time they shared a similar concern about themselves, their children, and the future of their country. Their words were spoken within two years of each other—in 1994 and 1996, respectively—even though they seem to belong to two different historical eras: Efratia Gitai penned her words as the peace process was being negotiated, while Aviv Gefen cried out amid its sudden collapse in 1995–96, which led to a renewed feeling of lost dreams.

In this article, I juxtapose these two historical moments as they have been represented in some works by Amos Gitai. I explore the first period by looking at four documentaries on the peace process-in-the-making, collected in one set box entitled *Give Peace a Chance*, and at *The Arena of Murder* (1996), a fifth documentary that resulted from a tour of the country that the director undertook after the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. I will look at the second historical moment through the film *Rabin, The Last Day* (2015), which covers the period from 4 November 1995 and March 1996, when the Shamgar Commission of inquiry on the assassination of the Prime Minister submitted its report, just two months before the general elections that brought Benjamin Netanyahu to power.

These films bring to light original sources that add complexity and diversity to existing representations of these two historical moments, in a manner altogether more inclusive than accounts based on memoirs, diplomatic sources (Neria 2022), or on international law (Watson 2000). The films of Gitai are built on a corpus of primary (written and oral) sources

that present testimonies from below, allowing us to hear the individual and collective voices of workers, women, writers, artists, (some) politicians, and members of an organized right-wing civil society that Israel's liberal and labor political elite did not see coming.

Extracting oral testimonies from narrative continua comprised of (inter alia) sights, sounds, lighting, visual frames, camera movements, and editing, in addition to words, cannot convey the complexity of these works to the reader, made as they were for viewing and not for reading. However, these very same features make these works more interesting for the historian in that they convey words in conjunction with distinct tones, atmospheres, facial expressions, and so on. If this is true for documentaries, it is even more true for narrative films where historical sources speak through plausible recreations.

Other film directors have engaged with the Oslo Accords and the assassination of Rabin. Among them, Erez Laufer (*Rabin in His Own Words*, 2015), Mor Loushy (*The Oslo Diaries*, 2018) and Bartlett Sher (*Oslo*, 2021). The first is a nostalgic documentary that combines archival and private footage with personal letters and voice recordings of Rabin himself. The second retraces the steps of the negotiations using a combination of video footage and theatrical reconstruction. The third is a TV adaptation of the play *Oslo* by American playwright J.T. Rogers (2017). For reasons of space, I cannot include them in this analysis. Moreover, Gitai's *Rabin* surpasses these works in various ways: the use of primary sources is more sophisticated, the creative process more successful, and the integration between the two better articulated. As such, *Rabin* also offers a more comprehensive picture of the political shifts of the mid-1990s and how they affected the course of politics in Israel (Bendelac 2022; Del Sarto 2017; Simoni 2018).

Voices from Below: 1993–1996

In the first part of this article, I reflect on the representation of the brief and condensed historical period between 1993 and 1996 in five documentaries that, as mentioned above, were filmed as the Oslo Accords were being negotiated and after Rabin's assassination. Together, they represent an intimate and powerful collective portrait of two peoples eagerly awaiting a peace that had never appeared so close at hand, and who were then overwhelmed by its vanishing in violence. Divided into four interconnected parts, *Give Peace a Chance* "has the ambition of creating an archive" (Sanselme 2021: 83) by collecting and storing on film numerous contemporary testimonies from diverse political perspectives, geographical locations, and work places. Undistorted by the rhetoric that inevitably accompanied public discussions of the Oslo Accords, this corpus of

unstructured interviews with (mainly) Israeli and Palestinian men of various ages represents an original, vibrant, and living portrait of what some Israelis and Palestinians from both the center and the peripheries understood as crucial to the success of the peace process. Many interviewees spoke of imminent peace with optimism, best summarized by Amos Oz in a “simple phrase”: “Stop dying; start living.”⁴ And although the many articulations of such optimism appear in retrospect to have been, as journalist Gideon Levy wrote, “a scam and a deceit,” even Levy himself had been optimistic at the time. In the same essay, he later wrote:

[T]he element that worked the spell on me and many other Israelis was the completely new spirit that took hold, from Gaza to Jenin, and among huge portions of the Israeli public . . . We believed it was only the beginning, when it was actually the end; the end of hope, the end of illusions (Levy 2017: 165).

I have chosen four of the major themes that emerged from the unfiltered voices that Gitai collected in the orange groves of Kibbutz Yad Mordechai, the markets of Jerusalem and Gaza City, the homes of Israeli and Palestinian writers, the theaters in Jerusalem and Jenin, the diplomatic conventions in Jerusalem, Cairo, and Washington, and the political offices of politicians: peace as economic improvement, the distance between high politics and everyday life, peace as a transformational event, and the risks along the way.

Peace as Jobs

Already in 1995, Sara Roy had delineated a very precise picture of the economic collapse of the Gaza Strip, the desperate living conditions and low morale of its inhabitants, and the political causes that brought it all about (Roy 1995: 73–77). Between December 1987 and April 1995, the number of Palestinians from Gaza working in Israel had declined by 90 percent, from 80,000 to 8,000 at its lowest point. Since the first border closure in 1993, 20,000 jobs in Israel had been lost, and the economy of Gaza had been losing \$1 million per day.

Sometime in the spring of 1994, a news bulletin played on the radio as Gitai was driving toward Kibbutz Yad Mordechai. It announced the government’s intention to outlaw the Kach Party, reported on settlers from Na’ama who had set up roadblocks along the main road to Jerusalem, and described meetings between the Israeli and PLO delegations in Tunis aimed at relaunching the peace process.⁵ These soundbites provide the narrative frame for most of the testimonies (about twenty) that Gitai would collect in Yad Mordechai, Gaza, and downtown West Jerusalem, and which appear in *In the Land of Oranges: Conflict and Reconciliation* (1994).

Many Palestinians interviewed in workplaces or on the streets conceptualized peace as the end of unemployment, the possibility of obtaining work permits in Israel, and the ability to support one's family. One of them summarized:

Nobody has a normal life [in Gaza]; there are problems all the time. If there is peace, we will be able to cross the border, to come to work, and then it will be fine; now there are curfews, raids, and problems. People don't know how they will survive. How many can enter into Israel to work now? Five percent. And whoever succeeds at entering Israel has ten children at home. We are all in the same situation. Those who do not have a permit to work cross the border without one. If they are caught, they are imprisoned or killed.⁶

Other Palestinians at the border between Israel and Gaza appeared somewhat optimistic that peace would lead to a Palestinian state whose infrastructure would allow everyone to have a job, whether in road building or trade. Voices from Gaza City itself conveyed a darker message, articulated in terms of local politics and political allegiances. They also made clear how distant those sitting around the negotiating table appeared to them. To varying degrees, they all shared the view that "the peace process [was] not really tangible" in Gaza—that it was mainly "political talk."⁷ In this context, Arafat did not seem credible even to supporters of the PLO, not to mention to those of Hamas. As one stated:

Nobody believes in Arafat . . . and no detainee has been freed despite the promises that he made . . . He gave up armed struggle, and Israel does what it likes imposing its rules . . . No one has hope for the peace process, and all those who do are deluded . . . Israel will continue to control the borders and we will only have symbolic positions. It is just a façade.⁸

The connection between the number of men in jail, the deterioration of the economy, and the generalized sense of despair was articulated more clearly by a woman from the neighborhood of Shejaiya.

Men have no jobs, and this is bad for the economy and the morale. We are all tired . . . God willing, peace will make things easier. But where is peace? Let them free detainees first [so] that we see them in front of our eyes. This will be the real peace. All my brothers are in jail.⁹

This collective frustration resonated with clergymen in Gaza. It was echoed by owners of orange groves, who lamented the reduced flow of water that had dried up their oranges,¹⁰ with fishermen at the port of Gaza, who voiced anger at a sea that seemed to be shrinking before their eyes,

limiting their ability to catch and sell fish; and with cultivators of flowers whose product could no longer reach its intended markets.

Between the EU and Singapore?

This picture contrasts with the vision of economic development that the World Bank and Western diplomats had imagined Oslo would bring to Gaza (Fischer, Schelling et al. 1994; Fischer, Alonso-Gamo et al. 2001; Roy 1998). Clearly, one of the prerequisites for economic development in Gaza was the Palestinian Authority's control over the territory. As Nabil Shaath, chief Palestinian negotiator, commented, this would lead to the release of "a thousand prisoners . . . And at least a few hundred Palestinian policemen will go in. About one hundred deportees will be allowed to return, and Palestinians will see that things are going to change."

To confront the general skepticism emerging from Gaza, Shaath indicated three immediate measures: setting up an "administration that brings confidence," a police force that protects the population and allows it to demonstrate without fear of violence, and an economic policy that creates jobs without corruption.¹¹

Shaath and Shimon Peres had both placed their bets on the idea that a rising standard of living in Gaza and the rest of the Middle East, including Israel, was key to deconstructing mutual hatreds—an argument popularized worldwide by Peres's book *The New Middle East* (1993). The two economic and political models on which this optimistic vision was based were the European common market and Singapore. Gaza, according to Peres, would become

an important trading center with a developed fishing industry, manufacturing sector, [and] tourism. Gaza need not remain an outcry of poverty, despair, and overcrowding. It is certainly capable of changing and becoming prosperous, just as long as there aren't any neighborly disputes.

Shaath echoed these words, wishing for a "Southeast Asian model, but adjusted [to] our culture, with more democracy, with more care for the environment, the rights of women," all aimed at attracting and harnessing "the contribution, participation, and commitment" of Palestinian returnees.¹² The motor for this economic transformation would be investors, donors, private enterprise, businessmen, and international support. Interviewed in Cairo, Shaath continued:

I would like to see the world community start funding the peace, in construction, [which] we need most. It would be most helpful to re-employ all the workers that Israel had stopped from going inside the Green Line as a

result of the security situation . . . And I think this alone, together with the return, the setup of the police and its proper running, will create a new atmosphere.¹³

This rhetoric appears in retrospect as either a tragic fantasy or a cynical sales pitch for the Oslo Accords (Haddad 2019). At the time, it appeared unrealistic even to Rabin, who spoke pessimistically at the same meeting:

What will happen in Gaza, with its three-quarters of a million Palestinians struggling for a living? How [will they] found a system that will maintain law and public order, that will assume responsibility for the region's security, that will start gearing itself up for its own development, [and] which [will] take over the management of [Gaza] from us?¹⁴

Peace as Inherent Transformation

Other voices—especially writers and artists—represented peace-in-the-making as the ultimate transformative event for Israelis and Palestinians at both the individual and collective levels, both internally and in their mutual relations with one another. Among them, Amos Oz embraced the Accords as a step that reflected a profound change that had already taken place within Israeli society and, at the same time, as an instrument of progress for his own and future generations. He had seen the State of Israel change “from a camp of refugees and uprooted people into a Mediterranean society,” a “materialistic, food-lover, fun-seeker” people, “secular to the bone,” that had become “like Barcelona.” In that context, there was “hardly an Israeli today that denie[d] that Palestinians are here to stay, nor a Palestinian who doesn’t see that Israelis are also here to stay.”¹⁵ Emil Habibi too considered Palestinians “the most prepared among Arab societies to cooperate [with], understand, and recognize the existence of Israel.”¹⁶ Oz continued:

They also know how it will end: this land will be divided between two nations. Like it or not, they all know it now. The question is when and how, and above all, how much more blood will be spilled? But comparing where we and the Arabs were five, ten, thirty, or fifty years ago—and even now—this is the most promising moment in the whole history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, because now it is just a disagreement over real estate matters—who gets what, and not who will be kicked out.¹⁷

More perceptive was his insight of the risks that Israelis’ and Palestinians’ self-understanding as the ultimate victims of the conflict posed to the peace-building process. As he explained: “The last thing that people

will give up, even more than the territories, more even than the sites in Jerusalem, will be the self-image of 'I, the Victim.'"¹⁸ Other voices pointed at social structures that resisted transformation: gender relations, for example, and the relations between Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel.

Looking at women in Palestinian society, Iman Aoun, from the Eshet Afrat All Women Theatre Group in Jerusalem, explained to Gitai that change for women would come at a very slow pace, that "progress will be individual, not general" and that the general tendency in Palestinian society was to return "to more traditional social values, which do not favor women's rights . . . [but] that encourage men to hide women at home not just physically but also mentally and psychologically." In this context, a transformation could happen

Mostly in terms of morale and for women who have already embarked in the struggle for self-liberation and social revolution in the sense of social change toward women's rights and toward the improvement of women's position in society, so that they can really gain self-expression and liberation.¹⁹

These would be women who had mobilized before or during the First Intifada, for example, even though, as much literature has shown, optimism that the intifada would pose a radical challenge to patriarchy already appeared misplaced shortly after it began (see Hiltermann 1991).

In a reading of his work featured in *Writers Speak*, A. B. Yehoshua represented a second set of unequal relationships resistant to the transformative power of peace-making: those between Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel. In *The Lover* (1977), Yehoshua's character Na'im, a young Palestinian-Israeli mechanic, delivers a monologue that captures these relations:

Above all, [one must] know where the boundaries are . . . We, being close to them all day long, must be cautious. No, they don't hate us. Anyone who thinks they hate us is quite wrong. We are beyond hate. We're phantoms for them . . . But when they're being killed, they're worn out, sluggish, vague. They have sudden fits of temper before or after the news. News that we can't quite hear. We hear some murmur, but vaguely. We hear the words but refuse to understand. It's not lies, but it's not the truth either, just like the Damascus, Amman, or Cairo stations. Half-truth, half-lie, and a lot of hot air.²⁰

Risks on the Road to Peace

As Gitai was driving back from Gaza and Yad Mordechai, the three o'clock news announced that a suicide bombing had taken place at the central bus station in Hedera that morning.²¹ The attack was later claimed by Hamas

as revenge for the massacre at the Cave of Patriarchs in Hebron (25 February 1994). In this context of renewed violence, the voices of the Israeli passersby that Gitai collected revealed an increased collective anxiety. From the streets of Jerusalem, a lady shouted "this is not peace! . . . Rabin lost his mind!"²² Her words were echoed by two Orthodox Jews who only wanted "the killing to stop" while "halakhah (religious law) would decide on the territories."²³ A Jewish man of Arab heritage characterized the Oslo Accords "a time bomb."²⁴

Among the voices Gitai had recorded, many had warned of dangers. Amos Oz identified "religious fanatics, especially in Jerusalem and east of it" as the greatest obstacle on the road to peace—those who were "determined to turn the conflict into a religious war, because that will be a hopeless war."²⁵ Emil Habibi, too, shared this view: "Each side has a duty to restrain the extremists in their own camp."²⁶ For Nabil Shaath, political dangers lurked on all sides: from within, Palestinians risked "not being able to rise to the moment, not being able to put in a good government quickly"; from without, the Israelis could make it "very difficult for us to breathe that breath of freedom, taking the pretext of security every turn of the corner." There was also the risk of neighboring states "involving us in their problems," and the rest of the world "turning apathetic and . . . insensitive to our needs."²⁷ Shimon Peres believed that risks of attacks from extremists could be mitigated by delaying a final agreement and "letting time heal the wounds." Unable to agree on a partition map, the parties instead "decided to agree on a timetable."²⁸

While right-wing politics are represented in this collection of voices by interviews with representatives of the Likud—with Yitzhak Shamir for example—absent are the voices of those who, with the Oslo Accords, began to feel like "fish in a shrinking pond," to use a well-known expression by the late Michael Feige (2009: 248–249, 253). These were, first and foremost, religious settlers and a whole range of right-wing, violent, nationalist, often ultra-orthodox Israeli citizens. While Rabin, Peres, Shaath, and Abu 'Ala were trying to buy time, the far right was using that time to push back and reorient the course of events. The poetry of Nathan Zach, read by Efratia Gitai in *The Arena of Murder*, captured this moment:

Must the crisis come?
That's the troublesome question now in the semi-darkness.
What didn't we do right to prevent the crisis from coming?
What else can be done to keep it from coming?²⁹

It is to the voices that announced this crisis, and to its representation, that I now turn.

Sources and Voices from *Rabin, The Last Day*: 2010–2021

In *Rabin, The Last Day* (2015), Gitai made the argument that Rabin's murder had been a coup d'état whose political effects would reverberate for decades to come. Eight years after its release, it remains the clearest statement on the cultural dynamics and political actors responsible for the assassination of Rabin. Presenting the movie at the 72nd Venice International Film festival in 2015, Gitai summarized:

This film is structured around the triangle of forces that led to the killing of Rabin: lunatic rabbis using all sort of witchcraft, extreme right-wing settlers who were against the withdrawal from Israeli territory on religious grounds, and the parliamentary right, which wasn't really active in the killing of Rabin, but was happy to see him being demolished and discredited. (Kamin 2015: 4)

Elsewhere, I have analyzed cinematic representations of law and sedition in the State of Israel in the mid-1990s (Simoni 2018). I take a different approach here, looking at how the primary sources used in *Rabin* both represent historical testimonies and have been transformed for the broader public. Rather than comparing the primary sources to the film script, I limit my analysis to providing an overview of the sources that found their way into the movie and to their historical significance both individually and as a part of an archive (Frodon 2021).

Sources

Most of the primary sources in the so-called Gitai-Rabin Archives date to the mid-1990s but were assembled into a coherent corpus starting in 2010. This is a large and complex collection that consists of various types of material, including video sources (TV footage and screenshots);³⁰ hundreds of newspaper articles from the general, right-wing, and settler press from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s; hundreds of leaflets of numerous political committees calling for rallies, sit-ins, and meetings against the Oslo Accords;³¹ scholarly articles and books on religious and political fanaticism in general and specifically in Israel;³² legal material, and in particular the records of the interrogation of Yigal Amir,³³ those of the Shamgar Commission;³⁴ and a long interview with Leah Rabin.³⁵ The archive does not include the only existing amateur video of the demonstration on 4 November 1995, recorded by Roni Kempler from the terrace overlooking the site of the assassination,³⁶ which was key (together the transcript of Kempler's testimony to the Shamgar Commission) to constructing the rhythm and narrative of the film.

Such a broad collection of voices, images, and other materials enables the creation of a collective portrait of Israeli society in the mid-1990s, including voices from below. It does not reveal a society eagerly awaiting a peace that seemed just within reach. Rather, the voices of this archive tell the story of a divided and disheartened country torn by political, institutional, and cultural crises, starting with the security services. The Shamgar Commission's mandate was technical and not political, which led it to constitute its "investigation within the realm of the legal, managerial and rational discourse, redefining these conflicts as functional problems, requiring technical solutions" (Shenhav and Gabay 2001: 125). For example, the commission's final report framed the lack of intelligence warnings "about the presence of a Jewish lone attacker" at the rally as a technical and not a political failure.³⁷ The same went for the lack of coordination between the police force and the security team assigned to Rabin's personal protection,³⁸ and between his security team and Ichilov Hospital where he was rushed.³⁹

Other voices emerge from the transcriptions of the trial of Yigal Amir. They depict the climate of sedition in which he moved: his grassroots contacts with members of right-wing political movements on the one hand, and with the Shin Bet (Avishai Raviv, agent Champagne) on the other, his family background, psychology, and personal admiration for Baruch Goldstein; and the extent to which messages about the urgency of killing Rabin had echoed throughout the networks in which he moved.⁴⁰ Many of these sources were included in the film's script, sometimes verbatim, resulting in a "movie that continuously oscillates between authenticity and plausibility" (de Baecque 2021: 37).

Voices from the Right-Wing Grassroots

The voices that Gitai collected on the streets and featured in *Give Peace a Chance* did not include anyone belonging to grassroots right-wing groups. Among the interviewees, only Amos Oz spoke about them, describing them as "a fortress of religious fanatics." On the basis of this limited evidence, one might infer that the liberal left-leaning cultural (and political) elite, including Gitai, had severely underestimated the subversive potential of these groups to the extent of ignoring them. Yigal Amir explained how the lack of media coverage (and thus acknowledgment) of his ideological camp prompted feelings of despair "that instructed him to take action." In his words, "if the protest activities [against Oslo] would have been covered by the media then, probably, [I] would not have killed Rabin." He certainly did not portray himself as the lone attacker described by the police, security agencies, and the Shamgar Commission. On the contrary, Amir felt

supported by “a number of rabbis” and “would not have acted . . . if [he] did not have many other people standing behind [him].”⁴¹

Such a void in the representation of right-wing groups during Oslo, was certainly filled by the preliminary research for *Rabin, The Last Day*. The voices, images, testimonies and narratives of the grassroots right overflow from the archival folders, sounding themes that are by now well known and have been the subject of much scholarly research: Rabin and Peres as criminals, traitors, and alcoholics; Jerusalem as indivisible; the Golan Heights as nonnegotiable; Rabin as Assad’s man in the Golan; Palestinian autonomy as equaling terrorism; the repeated use of false historical analogies, an appropriation of the Holocaust and its memory for contemporary political use, including the choice of Vichy as the point of comparison for Rabin’s purported national betrayal (interestingly, to the exclusion of other collaborationist governments), a comparison that remained unchallenged in the media and in popular culture.⁴² Even more than their content, the most striking aspect of these primary sources is their sheer quantity, reflecting both the extent of the mobilization that amplified these voices and the resulting volume.⁴³

A map of the fluid horizontal networks that tied together political parties, youth movements, grassroots local and national committees, and other organizations in the protest against Oslo could be easily reconstructed from the hundreds of pamphlets calling for local and national protests, marches, and sit-ins between 1993 and 1995. Equally instructive would be the hundreds of articles that appeared during this period in the general and settler press, as well as the political ephemera (for example, derisory caricatures and political stickers) that had been circulating among members of these groups for several years prior to 1995.⁴⁴ There were also television campaigns that projected the opposition of party leaders to the negotiations: Ariel Sharon, for example, stated that Rabin and Peres should be brought to justice, while Netanyahu promised “to do anything in his power to choose the road of halakhah.”⁴⁵ Parties like Tehiya, Mafdal, Moledet, and Kach, meanwhile, occupied a political space even further to the right.⁴⁶

In between these known and recognizable parties and movements, a whole galaxy of local and national committees of various sizes was propelling the protest forward, both in the West Bank and in Israel proper. The National Jewish Resistance Movement could be reached at “1-800-Jewish-Army . . . in order to ensure Jewish sovereignty over all liberated territories in general, and the eventual liberation of the Temple Mount in particular.” Am Kedoshim was based in Jerusalem, the Youth of Kfar Tapuach in the eponymous settlement. Some groups, such as Headquarters of the Golan and the Headquarters in Hebron, were local, while the

General Headquarters against Rabin and the Headquarters of the People's Unity had a national base. Some engaged with the media, like The People with Channel Seven, and some promoted gender activism, like Women in Green, while others supported Jewish Autonomy in Yesha or the creation of militias like the Yehuda Police and Iron Strength.⁴⁷ The Headquarters for the Fight to Give Up the Autonomy Plan compared "the national solution" to the "final solution," campaigned against the division of Jerusalem, and offered practical and legal advice to protesters.⁴⁸ Finally, there was Victims of Arab Terror International Inc. (NETA), established by Shifra Hoffman (with donations that were tax deductible in both Israel and the United States) "to publicize the issue of the forgotten Jewish victims in the Middle East conflict."⁴⁹

Conclusions

Literature, poetry, film, and music participate in (and often anticipate) the work of historians. These media capture the mood of a given moment, encourage emotional identification, and visually render the otherwise hidden subtleties of the past. At the same time, each of these disciplines has its own methodology, grammar, and discursive mode. Among the arts, film is a particular narrative and visual structure that can at the same time "testify to History and . . . reveal it" (Alyada 2021: 51). In the words of Amos Gitai:

We are rational beings who need to process these events. A film allows you to articulate this. There is this horizontal frame through which all events pass; they enter on one side and pass through or just stand there. And that frame, which is laconic, [which] has no volition of its own, gives you a space to express these thoughts.⁵⁰

For reasons of space, I could not delve into the theoretical debates about the intimate relationship between history, cinema, and narrative(s) (see Ferro 1988), between film and historical archives (Frodon 2021), and between primary sources and scripted material, nor could I discuss the crucial role of plausibility in the construction of films with a political agenda (Auguscik et al. 2021: 102). These are relevant concerns, as each of the films analyzed in this article brings to viewers contemporaneous voices that had not been heard at the time, or that have been forgotten, and that today represent testimonies otherwise lost, hardly retrievable from the past otherwise.

The many primary sources that did not find a space in these films appeared in yet other works. Like "a movie that never ends"⁵¹ reflection on the political causes and consequences of Rabin's assassination—the

interlocking of religious fundamentalism, cult of territory, grassroots mobilization, identity politics and supremacy assigned to religious law—continued through other means of expression. Of these, the theater piece *La guerre des fils de la lumière contre le fils des ténèbres* (1992) [The war of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness] deserves particular attention. An adaptation of Flavius Josephus's *Jewish War*, it places the blame for the loss of Jewish sovereignty and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans on the divisive fanaticism of the zealots, representing a warning for times to come.⁵²

The Oslo process unleashed forces that halted the peace-making that the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority had set in motion. Both the process itself and its violent end left a long trail of consequences that retroactively impacted the representation of this brief period. The photographic exhibit on Rabin unveiled at Ben-Gurion Airport in 2023, from which the Oslo Accords are conspicuously absent (Benn 2023), is a case in point.

In 1996, Benjamin Netanyahu won the country's first direct election for prime minister on a Likud-Gesher-Tzomet ticket supported by the National Religious Party, Yisrael B'Alyiah, United Torah Judaism, and The Third Way. Under this leadership, Israel embraced a neoliberal socio-economic and political road, and a foreign policy and a security doctrine that, at the turn of the century, developed within a neo-conservative political framework (Ben-Porat 2005; Flic 2009). Both from a political and a cultural point of view, this represented the beginning of a new phase in which the so-called single thought started to dominate. Originally termed *pensée unique*—it has been defined by journalist Ignacio Ramonet as a “vicious doctrine that, imperceptibly envelopes, inhibits, paralyzes, and eventually suffocates all rebel reasoning” (Simoni 2013: xii–xiii). Gitai's thirty-year-long reflection on the Oslo Accords and the assassination of Rabin demonstrates that cinema (and the arts) can challenge such political and social conformism and empower alternative political narratives. As Gitai himself stated: “cinema cannot be left to a revisionist reading . . . and I am the witness.”⁵³ Through all this material, Yitzhak Rabin himself passes like a ghost—the preferred analogy is usually Hamlet—lingering in Israeli collective memory and political consciousness as the only political opposition that remains in the country, powerful and elusive at the same time, because it comes from a dead man.

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NOTES

1. Amos Gitai, *Give Peace a Chance: Writers Speak* (1994), min. 31:23.
2. Amos Gitai, *Carmel* (2009). Letter from Efratia Gitai to Amos Gitai, Haifa, 11 October 1994 (R. Gitai 2019: 396–398).
3. The song was released in 1993 on the album *HaTayuiot* (Mistakes). Three songs from this rock concert appear in Gitai's *Arena of Murder* (1996) at min. 18:54–19:39; 43:53–48:05; and 1:00:00–1:01:47
4. *Writers Speak*, min. 08:53–08:58.
5. Amos Gitai, *Give Peace a Chance: In the Land of Oranges: Conflict and Reconciliation* (1994), min. 00:50; 02:16–02:50.
6. *Ibid.*, min. 17:03–18:01.
7. *Ibid.*, min. 58:44 and 01:02:12.
8. *Ibid.*, min. 58:46–01:00:12.
9. *Ibid.*, min. 01:06:28–01:07:16.
10. *Ibid.*, min. 54:32–54:39.
11. Amos Gitai, *Give Peace a Chance: Political Route* (1994), min. 45:14–46:48.
12. *Ibid.*, Peres at min. 39:05–39:18; Shaath at min. 50:48–51:01.
13. *Ibid.*, min. 49:11–49:46.
14. *Ibid.*, min. 15:38–16:07.
15. *Writers Speak*, min. 6:39–6:49; 32:05–33:09.
16. *Ibid.*, min. 11:29–11:31.
17. *Ibid.*, min. 06:52–07:30.
18. *Ibid.*, min. 08:26–08:38.
19. Amos Gitai, *Give Peace a Chance: Theater for Life* (1994), min. 31:07–31:43.
20. *Writers Speak*, min. 09:32–10:18. In 2009, Gitai transformed Na'im's monologue from *The Lover* into a scene in his movie *Carmel*, in which a much older Na'im still works as a mechanic at a petrol station.
21. *In the Land of Oranges*, min. 01:18:22–01:19:14.
22. *Ibid.*, min. 01:21:30–01:21:45.
23. *Ibid.*, min. 01:25:08–01:25:11.
24. *Ibid.*, min 01:25:31.

25. *Writers Speak*, min. 32:50–36:34.
26. *Ibid.*, min. 13:29–13:32.
27. *Political Route*, min. 51:43–52:48
28. *Ibid.*, min. 37:02–37:04.
29. *Arena of Murder*, min. 01:04:26–1:04:50.
30. “Liste de documents d’archives de la television israelienne,” APLAT-FOL-ED-85 (4), Collection Gitai (henceforth Gitai), Bibliothèque Nationale de France (henceforth BNF).
31. “Affiches, Tracts, Pamphlets (contexte general),” 4-ED-85 (3) and “Affiche, pamphlets classifiés pour parti/organization politique,” 4-ED-85 (4), Gitai, BNF.
32. “Bibliographies, Articles, Témoignage, Recherches,” 4-ED-85 (8), folders 1–4, Gitai, BNF.
33. “Retranscriptions Procès Yigal Amir,” 4-ED-85 (6), Gitai, BNF.
34. “Retranscriptions Commission Shamgar,” 4-ED-85 (5), Gitai, BNF
35. “Articles de presse,” 4-ED-85 (1); “‘Rabin the last day.’ Articles de presse (2015–2016),” APLAT-FOL-ED-85 (3), APLAT-FOL-ED-85 (4); 4-ED-85 (3); 4-ED-85 (4); 4-ED-85 (5); 4-ED-85 (6); and 4-ED-85 (8), Gitai, BNF.
36. The Kempler video is available on YouTube. “The Rabin Assassination Kempler Video,” uploaded 9 February 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJa6OykI070> (accessed 8 January 2023). See also *Arena of Murder*, min. 58:54.
37. “Shamgar Commission: Protocole Complet Anglais,” 4-ED-85 (5), Gitai, BNF: 131–132.
38. *Ibid.*: 29, 122.
39. *Ibid.*: 46.
40. “Interrogatoire Igal Amir” and “Proces Protocole Anglais,” 4-ED-85 (6), Gitai, BNF.
41. “Shamgar Commission: Protocole Complet,” 4-ED-85 (5), Gitai, BNF: 136.
42. “Articles de presse 1993,” 4-ED-85 (1); “1993–1995. Images. Captures d’écran d’archives télévisuelles,” 4-ED-85 (3); and “*Témoignage Adir Zik*,” folder 15, 4-ED-85 (8), Gitai, BNF.
43. The culmination of these voices in 1994 is represented in Yaron Zilberman’s *Incitement* (2019).
44. “1993–95 Traits de manifestation,” 4-ED-85 (3); “1994–1995 Caricatures. Dessins de presse,” 4-ED-85 (1); and “1994–95. Affiches et autocollants,” 4-ED-85 (3), Gitai, BNF.
45. “Le Likoud (part 1, Likoud; part 2, Young Likoud; part 3, Likoud Religious section),” 4-ED-85 (4), Gitai, BNF.
46. “Moledet” and “Kach,” 4-ED-85 (4), Gitai, BNF.
47. “Le quartier general Hebron,” “Hamateh Ha Meshutaf,” and “Organizations,” 4-ED-85 (4), Gitai, BNF.
48. “1994–95. Pamphlets,” 4-ED-85 (3), Gitai, BNF.
49. “Victims of Terror (NETA),” 4-ED-85, Gitai, BNF.
50. *The Arena of Murder*, min. 59:32–59:58

51. Fabio Ferzetti, *Gitai, il cielo sopra Tel Aviv*, "Il Messaggero," 7 March 2016, p. 19, "'Rabin the last day.' Articles de presse (2015–2016)," APLAT-FOL-ED-85 (3), Gitai, BNF.
52. The theater pieces *La guerre des fils de la lumière contre le fils des ténèbres* (1992) [The war of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness] and *Yitzhak Rabin: Chronique d'un assassinat* [Chronicle of an assassination] presented at the Popes Palace (Avignon) in 2016 and then in New York, Los Angeles, and Paris. The exhibition *Chronicle of an Assassination Foretold*, presented in 2016 at MAXXI (Rome), at the Centre for Fine Arts Bozar (Brussels), and at the Collection Lambert (Avignon). "Exposition Maxxi, 1.3.2016," 4-ED-85 (30), "Exposition Bozar Bruxelles," 4-ED-85 (31), and "Exposition Yvon Lamebert, Avignon," 4-ED-85 (32), Gitai, BNF.
53. "Dernier jour d'Yitzhak Rabin et débat autour de l'exposition Yitzhak Rabin/ Amos Gitai," Conference du 19 mars 2021, VNUM 37844, Gitai, BNF.

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