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Constructing Space, Changing Reality of Israel through Film

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the ways in which filmmakers frame reality through cinematic space, mediating issues of conflict and reconciliation and of religion and identity(ies) within Israel. Cinematic space depicts and expresses borders through elements of film language. Through such (re)framing the film can question existing socio-political realities and their impact on the individual or whole communities. The microcosmic realities which constitute different communities within Israel's wider socio-political reality are built and confronted through the cinematic space. Thus, cinema enables existing realities to be reflected and new realities to be constructed. The article focuses on two films: West of the Jordan River (Amos Gitai, IL/FR 2017) and Geula (Redemption, Joseph Madmony / Boaz Yehonatan Yacov, IL 2018). By contrasting these two films we are able to understand how cinematic space functions as a means of negotiation: identities, religious belonging and communities correlate with the geographical space of Israel.

KEYWORDS

Cinematic Space, (Re)Framing, Reality, Israel, Religion, Identities

BIOGRAPHY

Milja Radovic is an interdisciplinary scholar and researcher. Her research covers the fields of religion, citizenship, transnational cinema and identity. Radovic is a member of Interfilm and has served in several ecumenical juries at international film festivals. She is the author of two monographs: *Transnational Cinema and Ideology: Representing Religion, Identity and Cultural Myths* (Routledge, 2014) and *Film, Religion and Activist Citizens: An Ontology of Transformative Acts* (Routledge, 2017).

INTRODUCTION

This article investigates ways in which filmmakers frame reality through cinematic space, mediating issues of conflict and reconciliation and of religion and identity(ies) within Israel. I use the term "space" to refer to cinematic space that integrates geographical space, physical space and embodied space. The

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issue of cinema as a space that integrates and represents many spaces has been at the core of film theory (and equally phenomenology) since the time of André Bazin. More contemporary scholarly research that is helpful in particular in showing how cinema functions as a space which integrates geographical and physical spaces (an idea I develop in this text) includes the more theoretical work of Jeff Hopkins on the "geography of film" and the more empirical approach of Brian Jacobson on how architecture and cities are represented by and in relation to cinema.[1] Kathrin Fahlenbrach has developed a theory of cinematic space or "film space" as an embodied space which is related to pre-metaphorical structures in the human cognitive system, enabling that space to concretize and comprehend complex meanings and particularly the representations of bodily and emotional experiences. While Fahlenbrach's discussion is useful in elucidating the ways in which viewers relate off-screen to the space represented on-screen, I employ the term "embodied space" solely to refer to the on-screen psychospiritual space of the characters and the ways in which they inhabit that inner space. The uniqueness of my approach comes from my connecting and questioning the ways in which three types of space are constituted within the cinematic to frame meaning.[2] For my examination of cinematic representations of the secular and sacred spheres in Israel and for questions of religion and film more widely, I take inspiration from the theoretical work of S. Brent Plate which considers the function of cinematic space as a "sacred space".[3]

"Geographical space" in the context of this work refers solely to *the site of Israel as a land of many communities*, in which the individual's struggle is the centre of the drama and the storyline. "Physical space" refers to *the interior and exterior environments which the characters inhabit in the films.* "Embodied space" refers to *the locale inhabited by the psychospiritual "inner life" of the characters*. This inner life is often manifested externally through physical space, breaking the borders of conventional temporality.[4] All spaces have borders, which are often invisible. Cinematic space depicts and expresses those borders through elements of film language, in the case of this article though mise-en-scène, montage and the disruption of temporal reality. By (re)framing meanings cinema questions existing socio-political realities and their impact on the individual or on whole communities. The microcosmic realities which

1 See Jacobson 2005; Hopkins 1994, 47–65. For further reading on the "geography of film" see Aitken/Zonn 1994. On the wider relationship between cinema and space see Jameson 1995.

2 See Fahlenbrach 2009, 105–121. For the conceptualization of embodied space in cinema see also Sobchack 2004, and on questions of aesthetic experience more widely see Marković 2012, 1–17.

3 See Plate 2017.

4 Cinema can disrupt conventional conceptions of temporal reality as linear by seamlessly integrating realities existing on two temporal planes: the border between life and death, for instance, is broken in Geula (Joseph Madmony / Boaz Yehonatan Yacov, IL 2018), as I will discuss later in this article.

constitute communities within Israel's wider socio-political reality are built and confronted through the cinematic space. The cinema thus becomes a site in which existing realities are reflected and new realities are constructed, opening up possibilities for transformation.[5] In other words, how film frames alternate reality(ies) is related to the construction of space, as will be addressed in this article specifically in terms of how filmmakers interrogate and transform the reality of Israel on-screen and thus propose an alternative way of being and coexisting. This reality can continue off-screen, inspiring or producing change in society, but this continuation is only an aftereffect of the rupture produced on-screen.

This article focuses on two Israeli films: West of the Jordan River (Amos Gitai, IL/FR 2017) and Geula (Redemption, Joseph Madmony / Boaz Yehonatan Yacov, IL 2018). I juxtapose these two diametrically different films in order to assess the ways in which the cinematic space functions as a direct site for negotiating identities, religious belonging and communities' relation to the geographical space of Israel.[6] The political borders of the geographical space of Israel are not clearly defined, the problem upon which Amos Gitai's film focuses. While Gitai questions the conflict, reconciliation and identities of Israeli-Palestinian space, Madmony and Yacov focus on the inner struggle of a character caught in between two spaces: that of the Orthodox community and the surrounding world. The selection of these films is based on their wholly different approaches to the socio-political reality of Israel (Gitai looks largely at the implications of the secular and Madmony/Yacov at the sacred) and their differing but equally rigorous construction of space. The analysis of these two films aims to sharpen our focus on cinematic space as a continuum in which such complex realities are expressed, renegotiated and transformed.

AMOS GITAI AND JOSEPH MADMONY: RELIGION AND THE TROUBLE OF IDENTITY(IES)

Religion has been explored in Israeli cinema as related to a national-ethic identity and a sense of belonging on both a micro-level (to a certain community) and a macro-level (to the political community that is the state, or, indeed, in rejecting belonging to the state). Religion in Israel has been a matter of extensive ongo-

5 Furthermore, as I argue elsewhere, cinematic space bears the potential for transforming reality. See Radovic 2017.

6 I referred earlier in the text to Israel as "a land" because I am considering the physicality of the geographical space as depicted in the films. However, as we shall see, filmmakers further define and renegotiate the physicality of the land as the state and the cultural and political space. The changing borders and the new settlements in the West Bank indicate that geography as political space is not precisely defined.

ing debate – academic, religious, political, cultural, and public[7] – and covering all the elements of that debate lies beyond the scope of this study. Israeli cinema can be considered, however, an arena for political and cultural transformation, where Jewishness and Jewish identity have been reconstructed and renegotiated.[8] Yaron Peleg argues, particularly in relation to Israeli films such as Ha-Mashgihim (God's Neighbours, Meny Yaesh, IL 2012), that a "holistic Jewish identity" has been proposed as a means to resolve the conflictual identities of Israeli society. For Peleg this identity, a correction to historical Zionism, reconciles the opposed secular and sacred spheres[9] and has been incorporated into and reflected in cinematic space. Peleg further argues that in this process "contemporary Israeli society [is] trying to negotiate its tortured relationship with Jewishness (and not necessarily Judaism)". While also considering the discussion of cinema as a medium that reflects societal tendencies towards creating a more holistic Jewish identity, this article looks principally at the ways in which films attempt to grasp the essence of the more complex reality of Israel, which consists of multiple microcosmic realities and identities. The films I discuss do not level those realities, denying one side or resorting to a simplistic reconciliation. Madmony and Yacov's Geula engages with a personal, embodied conflict (of a religious man stuck between his Orthodox community and the outside world), whereas Gitai builds a mosaic of conflictual points of view (from across the society) by exploring geographical space in order to address the diverse realties constituting the socio-political life of Israel. The intertwined questions of religion and identity(ies) are considered to the extent they serve the cinematic narratives.

In their previous films both Gitai and Madmony were critically engaged with issues of religion and identity: Gitai through his Kadosh (Amos Gitai, IL/FR 1999) and Madmony through his Makom be-gan eden (A Place in heaven, Joseph Madmony, IL 2013). In Madmony's work, religion served as a point of reference for complex narratives on identities, divisions and communities. In A Place in Heaven Madmony creates an anti-narrative to explore the complex

7 Religion plays an increasingly important role, and whether viewed as a tool used by the far right or as an important part of the "reconciliation process" between the "secular and sacred spheres", religion remains one of the pertinent issues of Israel.

8 For the historical context of Israeli cinema and representations of the Israeli-Palestinian relationship see Shohat 2010 and Shohat 2017. For further examination of the ways in which Jewishness and Jewish identity have been reconstructed and renegotiated through media beyond film, particularly television, see Talmon 2013.

9 As Peleg argues, "this is a historical corrective to the national engineering of Zionism earlier on [...] and a fundamental paradox at the base of Zionism: the tension between religion and state. This tension has been unravelling since the 1980s and Jewish religious elements, which were excluded under labor Zionism, are being gradually incorporated into the national mix", Yaron Peleg, interview with the author, 01.08.2018. Also see Peleg 2016, and for further information Yadgar 2017.

relationship between fathers and sons and between the secular and the sacred: parallels with the Bible are turned upside down to revise the relationship between war and peace, Zionism and religion, and understandings of meta-narratives for the land and its people. While it could be viewed as an attempt to make Zionism "more Jewish" through its engagement of a religious narrative, Madmony's film rather reflects the confusion in separating the religious and secular.

A Place in Heaven reinforces at first the biblical narrative of the land: cinematic space frames the land as site on which the main character works, to gain the woman of his life, to win her father's trust, to enable new growth from the soil. However, the biblical narrative is inverted when he gains his wife, for the land they inhabit (the flat they buy) is Palestinian. They become occupiers of geographical space: the edges of the filmic frame are constantly filled – deserts and woodland landscapes are there "to be conquered", as the main character puts it. The film reinforces geographical space as a problematic site on which personal and political relationships are (re)negotiated.

Enclosed physical spaces enveloped with dark foggy lights make up the mise-en-scène of A Place in Heaven, where father and son interrogate one another, where the notion of sharing a place (a life, a relationship, a physical boundary such as a flat) becomes essentially impossible (for the son). Space is marked by the sins of the fathers and the rebellious relationship of the sons. Through the union of temporal and extra-temporal via physical space, A Place in Heaven indicates that heaven and earth, and likewise good and evil, are intertwined and cannot easily be separated.[10] Finally, by connecting the temporal and extra-temporal Madmony explores the possibility of forgiveness: the son holds a Kaddish for his deceased father and the father can be seen at the end wandering through an open field with the rabbi who bought his place in heaven. The uncertainty of the film lies in the uncertainty of salvation for both fathers and sons. Madmony does not reconcile the secular and sacred spheres. The cinematic space is used to confront them, leaving the resolution to the audience.

Gitai takes a more critical view of religion in his Kadosh, where he explores the life and troubled position of women within the Orthodox community Mea Shearim. Gitai is aware of the complexity of the question of what defines a Jew, a product of "the coherence, in Judaism, between an ethnic, even national, identity and a religious conception"[11] and of the variety of standpoints even within the religious (Orthodox) communities, from those who "oppose the

10 Madmony refers to the belief that sometimes something good can come even out of evil circumstances. Joseph Madmony, Personal Interview, 30.07.2018.

11 Amos Gitai, Interview by Marie-Jose Sanselme: Kadosh (Amos Gitai, IL/FR, 1999) British DVD Release, Planet, 2002.

state of Israel" to those who are "nationalists, and even pacifists", as well as those tied to the notion of land.[12] Gitai's exploration of life in Mea Shearim is an exploration of the community's relation to space. Gitai creates an "eclectic visual environment"[13] to show that such a community has no interest in the physical space they inhabit, with the scriptures instead determining the lives of everyone involved in Mea Shearim. To describe the inner struggle and exile of the female leads within the community "he [Gitai] moves objects as well as the camera, and two geometries are created, where one is used to describe the other".[14] The inner exile thus is reflected in a physical space that becomes both austere and eclectic. The notion of exile remains dominant in Gitai's later work. In Ana Arabia (Amos Gitai, IL/FR 2013) the "exile" of the mixed community of Arabs and Jews is expressed through the cinematic space. Gitai shot this film in a single take to reflect the "unbroken links" between the two peoples.[15] He juxtaposes the political reality with the reality of the community, and through the "unbroken space – time"[16] he offers an alternative reality as the solution to the exclusion that surrounds it. Religion in Ana Arabia seems to be related only to ethnic/national identity, a divisive point. However, religion is present through the space – that is the space of a garden tended by one of the characters that serves as a metaphor for God's garden, for the land that belongs to no one, only to God, and that is to be shared between Israelis and Palestinians. In that respect Ana Arabia serves as a reference for a different kind of identity: it confronts the identitarian politics of power with the identity of a community that thrives in togetherness in the heart of Israel. Gitai erases borders by not making cuts, by not using montage.[17]

Both Amos Gitai and Joseph Madmony approach religious communities as complex microcosms within contemporary Israel. Both directors see religion as a burning issue for Israel. Madmony identifies two prevailing problems when it comes to religion: first, that it can be extreme (in the service of ultra-nationalism), and second, that it is bound to the institution, which complicates it.[18] For Gitai, the problem seems to be institutional and ideological (which often overlap) and although he "casts no judgement on religious communities … he does

12 Amos Gitai, Interview by Marie-Jose Sanselme: Kadosh (Amos Gitai, IL/FR, 1999) British DVD Release, Planet, 2002.

13 Amos Gitai, Interview by Marie-Jose Sanselme: Kadosh (Amos Gitai, IL/FR, 1999) British DVD Release, Planet, 2002.

14 Amos Gitai, Interview by Marie-Jose Sanselme: Kadosh (Amos Gitai, IL/FR, 1999) British DVD Release, Planet, 2002.

15 Radovic 2017, 70–84.

16 Radovic 2017, 70–84.

17 For my consideration of montage and the implications of the absence of cutting in Gitai's Ana Arabia (Amos Gitai, IL/FR, 2013), see Radovic 2017, 70–83.

18 Joseph Madmony, Personal Interview, 30.07.2018.

not accept their authoritarian solution".[19] Religion is intertwined with conflictual identities, and in neither KADOSH nor A PLACE IN HEAVEN is it a solution. Rather, troubled and multiple identities are diffracted in the religious. In ANA ARABIA, however, Gitai constructs the space of "God's garden", in which the mixed community thrives despite poverty and exclusion; the conflictual identities that surround the community (political divisions in society) do not penetrate their shared space. By contrast WEST OF THE JORDAN RIVER represents a shared space into which political divisions inevitably enter.

WEST OF THE JORDAN RIVER

The documentary film WEST OF THE JORDAN RIVER is divided into 19 sections. The film opens with Gitai interviewing Yitzhak Rabin. Before we are introduced into the story, we see a shot of paintings and photographs being replaced on a wall, indicating the change of scenery that is to take place. The children in the gallery, which serves as a space of historical memory for the turbulent history of Israel, observe the images that will be replaced. The title of the film appears and around it rotate the titles of the 19 sections of the film. Their circling around the main title indicates the issues that surround the physical space west of the river Jordan. The director speaks of this film as created in "capsules" that break and connect space and time.[20] Images of Yasser Arafat and people killed in attacks are followed by Rabin's commentary on extremism and right-wing demonstrations against the peace negotiations.

CAPSULATED STORY – OCCUPIED SPACE

The first section focuses on the "1994 Erez Checkpoint Israel/Gaza and closed check-points", and from here Gitai takes us on a cinematic journey. The following sections include interviews with Yitzhak Rabin, members of the Knesset, Tzipi Hotovely (the deputy minister of foreign affairs), NGOs and other organizations (Breaking the Silence; Parents Circle; B'tselem), journalists, activists and individuals (Ari Shavit, Ben-Dror Yemini, Aluf Benn, Gideon Levy and Tamar Zandberg), members of communities (a Palestinian boy, Ali from Hebron, wants to be a martyr), individuals gathered for the preservation of the Bedouin school

19 Gitai understands personal faith and the complexities associated with it, but he find institutionalized religion or religion as a cultural-national ideology problematic as a solution. In his own words, "one needs to define their point of view on the world and take a specific position, especially in the world today with the rise of nationalism and religious extremism"; see Amos Gitai, Interview by Marie-Jose Sanselme: KADOSH (Amos Gitai, IL/FR, 1999) British DVD Release, Planet, 2002. Both Gitai and Madmony hold the perspective that the land should be shared between Jews and Palestinians. Amos Gitai, Personal Interview, 30.07.2018; Joseph Madmony, Personal Interview, 30.07.2018.

20 Amos Gitai, Interview by Marie-Jose Sanselme: KADOSH (Amos Gitai, IL/FR, 1999) British DVD Release, Planet, 2002.

Fig. 1: Bedouin School. Film still, West of the Jordan River (Amos Gitai, IL/FR 2017), 01:07:54.

(fig. 1), and a settler, a woman from an Israeli settlement in the West Bank who has been the victim of an attack.

The stories, experiences and parallel realities of each section are connected to one another and they often contradict or subvert one another.[21] Gitai's capsulated narrative reveals the space of different and parallel realities. Here his style is different from that of Ana Arabia, filmed in one continuous shot to create the space of togetherness. All the conversations with communities and people are filmed in open space or move through space. Furthermore, Gitai's shot of the land makes space central also as a geographical and cultural-political space (fig. 2).

Gitai takes the film back to where he started it – he brings us back to Yitzhak Rabin and the year 1994 (Part 18: "Yitzhak Rabin 1994"). The interview continues: "I would like to see a reality less violent", states Rabin, warning that two obstacles must be removed – hatred of Israel and economic and social distress. For Rabin the main idea is "to strive for peace" and "avoid creating a reality which serves as fertile ground for the extremists to flourish". For Rabin peaceful coexistence is possible, and the main principle of Rabin's political programme is "to create a new environment – a new reality". This part finishes with a fade out and the sound of gun shots – the assassination of Rabin. In the very last part of the film (Part 19: "Backgammon Tournament") Gitai brings us

21 "Judaism's greatness is shown in justice and law. But here, as Isaiah said, a great injustice has been committed", West of the Jordan River (Amos Gitai, IL/FR, 2017), 01:09:56–01:10:07.

Fig. 2: Landscape. Film still, West of the Jordan River (Amos Gitai, IL/FR 2017), 00:20:25.

to a festive celebration in Jerusalem and a backgammon tournament between Israelis and Palestinians. The sequence starts with an image of a revolving carousel and then moves on to the mixed peoples, who are enjoying the evening with its festive music. The event as described by one of the participants is about "Middle Eastern culture that serves as a gateway between 'us' and Arabs … we can live in peace by sharing our culture and music". The last shot (like the opening) stays on the carousel. The fade-out in this scene is not complete, and a dim image of the carousel remains as the credits roll.

Each capsulated narrative becomes part of an encapsulated story about the unresolved socio-political space that includes the many different realities and spaces (geographical and socio-political) of Israel. By encapsulating all these diverse spaces and realities, Gitai continues Rabin's work in the cinematic sense: he acknowledges differences, social stratification, absence of trust, misuse of religion and even contradictions that divide the sides deeply. However, he frames all these realities within an ultimate dialogue, as a "programme of striving for peace" and "transforming the circumstances" of Israel.[22]

FRAMING PEACE: CONTEMPORARY PROPHETS?

"The thing I can adhere to most in the Jewish heritage is that it's a great critical school of thought. Even the Old Testament is a very critical text."[23] Amos Gitai

22 See Yitzhak Rabin interview in West of the Jordan River (Amos Gitai, IL/FR, 2017).

23 Amos Gitai, Personal Interview, 30.07.2018. Also see Romney 2000.

Fig. 3: Checkpoint. Film still, West of the Jordan River (Amos Gitai, IL/FR 2017), 00:08:01.

returns with his critical voice on the Israeli-Palestinian space with his West of the Jordan River. In searching for how the conflict might be resolved, Gitai deconstructs hierarchical authoritarianism and extremism by framing the film within the idea of peace, as embodied by the political figure of Yitzhak Rabin, with whom the film starts and finishes. In framing West of the Jordan River with the "peace narrative", Gitai raises a variety of political issues within the cinematic space.

Gitai's critical approach is by no means limited to Israelis' views on the state and politics of identity. He also investigates the living experience of war, peace and religious extremism in all strands of society, including amongst Palestinians. West of the Jordan River contains both a balance and a contradiction between characters and environment. The balance stems from the director's equal division between segments that navigate across Israel's geography and segments that contain interviews with people of different ethnic, religious and socio-political backgrounds. The contradictions are captured by the camera when people and images emerge in physical spaces where they are not expected or where the personal story interrupts the peaceful geographical scenery where it is told: the first such example is the "1994 Erez Checkpoint" section, which shows closed checkpoints, armed soldiers and diverted traffic and a boy wandering with a bowl of strawberries (fig. 3); the second is "A Boy on a Terrace" (fig. 4), where the peaceful imagery of a sunny terrace in Hebron is distorted by the story of a boy who wants to become a martyr (in both cases, innocence is interrupted by socio-political reality and conflictual circumstances).

Fig. 4: Hebron. Film still, West of the Jordan River (Amos Gitai, IL/FR 2017), 01:00:26.

Gitai's critical view of religion is socially based: the narratives on the "chosen people" and the "promised land" have less to do with faith and more to do with the transfer of historical trauma and a political agenda of territorial expansion. The desire of a Palestinian boy to be a martyr is depicted more as a consequence of isolation, violence and poverty than as a matter of faith. Gitai questions identitarian struggles, religion and tribalism and the politics of exclusivity as a (contemporary) socially engaged "prophet": social stratification is strongly connected with the hierarchical structures of oppression, and religious concepts are used for the justification of violence, both inside and outside specific communities. Gitai's voice speaks of social criticism that strives for a peaceful resolution. His understanding of criticism connected with geographical and cinematic space stems from the notion of equality. West of the Jordan River shows that the end of space (as land shared among the people, Israelis and Palestinians) means the end of democracy in Israel. Gitai's whole cinematic opus is wrought through with criticism developed around space and equality.[24] Gitai re-examines authoritarianism, oppression, war and extremism only to finally reject them in the space that he inhabits – the cinematic space. Through this space Gitai creates and offers an alternative reality, a "citizenship to come".[25] In his

24 In his discussion of the creation of cinematic space in which criticism of socio-political practices emerges, Gitai notes the importance of a synagogue as a non-hierarchical structure. From this perspective Gitai further considers issues of oppression and second-class citizens and non-citizens. See Amos Gitai Interview, Personal Interview, 30.07.2018.

25 See Isin/Nielsen 2008, 23.

approach to equality, justice, war and peace, Gitai resembles a contemporary prophet who speaks from the "deserted space of cinema", which he inhabits and in which he reconstructs humanity.

GEULA (REDEMPTION)

Geula is a film about a widowed father, Menachem, who lives within an Orthodox community with his daughter Geula. Menachem is isolated from both his religious community and the outside world; he is a loner. He was the leader of a well-known rock band before he became "religious". His conversion to religion led him to take up an ordinary job in the local shop, bringing him anonymity, far from night clubs, concerts and his friends. His realization that he cannot become "a scholar" coincides with his daughter's grave illness. When she needs additional chemotherapy that is too expensive for her father, he decides to approach his friends and reassemble the band to raise the money for his daughter's treatment. His friends accept his suggestion, play at weddings and are willing to help him, but they have an ambition to go further and recalibrate their lost fame. Menachem's world starts slowly to crumble. As his friends question his decisions, his inner strength, his relationship with his late wife, and his state, Menachem realizes that he cannot reconcile his old self with the new religious person he has become, that he does not belong to either of the two worlds and that he cannot express joy. The struggle for the life of his daughter opens old wounds and questions, reflecting another struggle – the inner struggle of a father who is wrestling with both God and the world. Going through redemption and reconciliation, Menachem eventually finds hope by the end of the film and the first clear signs of his daughter's healing. Although Geula focuses on the figure of the father, the character through whom healing is made possible is his daughter Geula, whose name means redemption.

RETHINKING RELIGION

In collaboration with Yacov, Madmony revisits questions of religion and faith with Geula. The Madmony/Yacov team tells the story of an isolated man who belongs in neither of two worlds completely: he abandons "this world" for the sake of religion, yet he is a second-class person within his religious community because he is newly converted, having been religious for only 15 years, unlike members who "were born in religious communities".[26] The father, who is unable to find himself, pulls his daughter into the world of isolation, but his daughter becomes his guide through the space confined to repetition and rituals.

26 Joseph Madmony, interview by the author, 30.07.2018.

GEULA reframes religion: rules alone are inadequate, and faith is observed as a personal struggle and experience. Similarly, no warmth of a community comforts Menachem. There is no comfort from the outside world to which he belonged in the past. In that respect GEULA is not a counter-narrative to films such as KADOSH, as it portrays not the struggle of an individual with or within a comforting community, but a person who must find within himself the means to re-establish broken links with others.

Madmony and Yacov depict the progress of the struggle through the pace of the film. That pacing is achieved through the movement of the camera, the framing, music, montage and the creation of a specific space-time relationship. The space is used to communicate several aspects of the narrative. First, the space is a physical space where the characters live and move (limited to few streets, shops, flats, a hospital and a concert hall), with each of these physical spaces reflecting a different reality and mood. Second, through space the film expresses the burden and the struggle of the main character (narrowed space, characters continuously framed by the doors, closed windows and blinds). Finally, the space connects memory with the present, two realities, the physical and the transcendent.

Oppressive space is created primarily by narrow framing. However, it is not religion that is oppressive here, but the character's inability to reconcile himself with his past. In rethinking and re-experiencing his faith, he is faced with many outside boundaries (such as the rules that are important to his neighbours or to the rabbi matchmaker). His rethinking religion is rethinking isolation, narrow-mindedness, self-righteousness and the inability to face his mistakes and wrong-doings; blindly following the rules turns out not to be enough.[27] However, the effect of the image is not solely of oppression, as a flickering warm light follows Menachem throughout the film, emanating both from him and from Geula, suggesting a light that comes from within and acting as a sign of hope. Moreover, while the door frames can indicate constriction, they also can offer a sense of release, for in many scenes the doors they contain are open, suggesting a way out (from isolation) is possible.

RE-CREATING SPACE

The changing movement of the camera through the immediate physical spaces that Menachem inhabits simulates his embodied psychospiritual space, from which his inner struggle is manifested externally. The camera is withdrawn, hand-held and fragmented, and the light is dark in the initial scenes inside Menachem's home. Although the home is traditionally associated with stability and

27 Menachem remains "rebellious" in both worlds, as one of his friends observes. See GEULA (Joseph Madmony / Boaz Yehonatan Yacov, IL 2018), 00:37:50.

solitude, the movement of the camera and light suggest that for Menachem home is a space of instability and isolation. By comparison, two of the wedding scenes feature lively, unpredictable camerawork, with the camera dizzyingly encircling the stage upon which Menachem and his band perform, alternating direction and constantly changing in frame focus and size. The light is also brighter, warmer and inconstant. Camerawork and light coupled with the joy Menachem expresses in the shots indicate that the wedding acts as a space of emotional release. However, the relationship between the interior and exterior physical spaces is not so simple, and it is precisely in breaking down that relationship between the home and the outside world that Madmony and Yacov convey the cinematic space as a manifestation of the inner struggle. One such moment of breakdown occurs in the third wedding scene, preceded by and intercut with Geula lying in the hospital with her health at its most critical. In the scene Menachem is on-stage singing about joy, but his eyes convey deep sorrow.[28] The camera is situated frontally and low down, engulfed in the crowd of wedding guests, characterized by an unstable drifting and intensified by clinical lighting. Together these features create a sense of uncertainty and drowning and thereby enable us to resonate with Menachem's pain but also to continue to understand the external physical space of the wedding as a site at which his inner space is renegotiated just as his pain is put into music, into art. The editing of the film serves to reconcile that inner space with time, creating a fabric in which his consciousness and personal relationships are blended into the present moment. Memory is no flashback but instead integrated into the inner reality of the character. It functions on one plane, as a united space in which Menachem can understand his past self and thereby renegotiate his relationship to the present and the future, for his daughter. A scene where Menachem's deceased wife appears to him in the kitchen, as he sits alone, is crucial: there is no obvious aesthetic break between the two figures; it appears they share a single space (figs. 5 and 6).

In preserving the unity of the two realities that the characters share – life and death – through one physical space, the film externalizes Menachem's inner reflection and reconciliation. This seamless outside-the-box perspective on space and time (as a united entity, contrary to logic) brings Madmony and Yacov's work closer to that of Andrei Tarkovsky, for example, on a humble aesthetic level.

In Geula the filmmakers shift the conflict to the personal experience of faith, rather than represent a more general(izing) and rather conventional narrative

28 The music in the film is the part of the narrative. In this particular scene Menachem's song is a call for the "joy that does not depend on anything". See Geula (Joseph Madmony / Boaz Yehonatan Yacov, IL 2018), 00:47:39–00:48:00.

Fig. 5: Gaze into a Different Reality. Film still, Geula (Joseph Madmony / Boaz Yehonatan Yacov, IL 2018), 00:56:23.

Fig. 6: Broken Boarders. Film still, Geula (Joseph Madmony / Boaz Yehonatan Yacov, IL 2018), 00:56:28.

on the conflict between the religious and the secular or between the individual and the religious community. Geula shows the diverse realities that surround an isolated person (isolated both from his religious community and the secular world). However, by portraying Menachem's struggle as burdened by the narrow-mindedness of both worlds, his religiousness as starting as "consumption" (with grandiose signs expected from God), and his self-righteousness as creating only a temporary escape (with which Menachem's journey starts), Madmony and Yacov give a certain universal appeal to the story.[29] By coming to terms

29 At the 2018 Jerusalem Film Festival Geula won the audience choice award and was recognized as the Jewish Experience of the festival. See Tobias 2018. Geula won the main prize of the Ecumenical Jury at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (2018), while the lead actor, Moshe Folkenflik, received the

Fig. 7: The Absent God? Waiting for a Sign. Film still, Geula (Joseph Madmony / Boaz Yehonatan Yacov, IL 2018), 01:23:25.

Fig. 8: God in a Lollipop. Film still, Geula (Joseph Madmony / Boaz Yehonatan Yacov, IL 2018), 00:45:21.

Fig. 9: Light Infiltrates Space. Film still, Geula (Joseph Madmony / Boaz Yehonatan Yacov, IL 2018), 01:36:03.

with his own mistakes and by overcoming pride, the character of Menachem is able to find himself and his relationship with others and consequently with God, who was hidden, as the film narrates, in the lost-and-found lollipop of his daughter Geula (figs. 7 and 8).

Small details containing innocence in an otherwise oppressed physical space change the scenery: the character can smile again as the light filters into the space through half-closed windows towards which both father and daughter are turned for the first time (fig. 9).

CONCLUSION: SPACE AND SPACES, REFRAMING REALITY

The cinematic space of Israeli films, discussed here through the works of Amos Gitai, Joseph Madmony and Boaz Yehonatan Yacov, includes a number of diverse spaces and communities. By creating the cinematic space with narratives stripped of clichés, the filmmakers create a new sense of the real and of realism, rupturing the cultural and socio-political contexts in which they were made. The films employ geographical, physical and embodied spaces to communicate the complexity of the multiple microcosmic realities within the wider socio-political reality of Israel. 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 the case of Madmony and Yacov, the focus lies on one specific microcosm, that of a man within an Orthodox community, and on his struggle with faith that gradually enables him to mend his bonds with his daughter, friends and the outside world. Geula was shot in a small number of places, and alternative spaces emerge to create layers of realities: that of the outside world, the reality of the religious community, and the inner reality of the character (past and present). In Geula the characters dominate the space, and the physical space corelates with the characters. Unlike in Kadosh and A Place in Heaven, this space is neither highly austere nor visually eclectic, but serves to communicate layers of reality with attention to small details that give further meaning to the space and the narrative. The film creates a composition of space and time through which religion and faith, isolation and community, are confronted and re-examined.

By contrast, Gitai's film is bound to the geography of the land, which frames the stories of Israeli-Palestinian realities. 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. As Gitai reminds us, just as different commu-

Best Actor Award. See News Section on Karloy Vary International Film Festival 2018, http://www.kviff.com/en/news/ [accessed 07.08.2018].

Fig. 10: Jerusalem's Carousel. Film still, West of the Jordan River (Amos Gitai, IL/FR 2017), 01:24:47.

nities have different relationships with space, they also have conflicting points of view on issues that surround them in wider society, and thus there can be no simplistic reconciliation for the land and the various peoples that inhabit that land. He reframes each piece of the (fragmented) story by contrasting one narrative with another, one geo-political understanding of the land with another one, creating a never-ending circle, as the image of the carousel in his final sequence suggests (fig. 10).

Gitai highlights the significance of specificity and inclusivism within Israel if the political tendency towards exclusivism, an ideologically-coercive mechanism that favours one group over the other, is to be avoided. The filmmakers reframe the changing socio-political reality of Israel by creating a cinematic space from which specific individuals and communities can be heard and in which they themselves can renegotiate their relationship to one another and with their wider cultural and socio-political communities. Thus the cinematic space ultimately reveals itself as a space of reconciliation (through personal redemption – Geula; and through dialogue – West of the Jordan River) and as a heterogenous space, for it involves the many spaces of different communities and their respective realities.

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