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## AMOS OZ'S *A TALE OF LOVE AND DARKNESS* WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF IMMIGRATION NARRATIVES IN MODERN HEBREW LITERATURE

*Jewish immigration to Eretz Israel is one of the constitutive narratives of Israeli nationality. The Zionist enterprise cast immigration and assimilation in a positive light by using the Hebrew word aliyah to describe immigration to Israel, linked to the notion of people returning to their homeland. In reality, however, the immigration process was often diametrically opposed to the optimistic aliyah story. Most immigrants, once in Israel, found themselves to be outsiders, yearning for their lost homes, friends and culture, and unable to view the new land as their home.*

*Over the last few decades, Israeli scholars have begun to challenge the concepts underlying aliyah. In the wake of the ongoing debate on nationality, many prefer to replace the word aliyah with immigration, which suggests that Israel should accept a diversity of identities and cultures.*

*This article presents a new model to account for this. Following Homi Bhabha's distinction between the pedagogical and the performative and the idea of heterotopy in Foucault's writing, I demonstrate that narratives of immigration express dialectical relationships between a utopian pedagogical narrative of aliyah and a personal performative narrative of immigration. I illustrate these relationships through major narratives of modern Hebrew literature, and suggest that they are at the core of Oz's novel *A Tale of Love and Darkness*.*

### 1. *Aliyah versus immigration*

The development of modern Hebrew literature provides a dramatic example of the production of national imagination, whose construction, according to Benedict Anderson<sup>1</sup> involves the writing and rewriting of historical memories and shared narratives that seek to shape the reader's understanding of the nation and its identity. Since its revival at the end of the 19th century, modern Hebrew literature has played a significant role in the consolidation of the Zionist enterprise and the formation of a new national Jewish identity in *Eretz Israel*.<sup>2</sup>

The origin of the Hebrew word *aliyah* is religious: it suggests reaching a holy place (such as Jerusalem) and attaining purity of faith. Zionist ideology, which uses symbols from the Jewish collective memory, adopted this term and gave it the new meaning of building a national home for all the Jews.

Edward Said noted that

The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future – these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative.<sup>3</sup>

The *aliyah* narrative adheres to this description. It tells the story of Jews who come to Israel out of profound ideological yearning, who are prepared to undergo a radical process of transformation that will alter their identity and create a sense of belonging to their “Alt-neu” historical homeland, as Theodor Herzl so aptly put it in 1902 [*Altneuland*: The Old New Land]. To achieve the goal of a new national community the narrative depicts a single Jewish-Israeli identity to which all should aspire. The crucible of *Eretz Israel* would thus engender a new and homogeneous race of Israeli Jews.

Criticism of the term *aliyah* and the return to the word *immigration* (*hagira*) developed from and within post-colonial discourse on Orientalism.<sup>4</sup> Although this discourse usually refers to the mechanisms of exclusion of Jews who emigrated from Arab countries,<sup>5</sup> it could easily refer to other waves of immigration from different cultural communities, such as the Jews who came as refugees from Europe after the Holocaust and who were treated with disrespect by many Israelis.<sup>6</sup>

However, the relationship between the narrative of *aliyah* and the narrative of *immigration* reveals a more abstract conceptual model. Homi Bhabha’s distinction between the pedagogical and the performative is a useful starting point:

The pedagogical founds its narrative authority on the tradition of the people [...]. The performative intervenes in the sovereignty of the nation’s *self-generation* by casting a shadow between the people as “image” and its signification as a differentiating sight of Self, distinct from the Other and its Outside.<sup>7</sup>

In terms of his distinction, the *aliyah* narrative reflects a hegemonic picture of national ideology. It forms a pedagogical narrative of Zionist thought and education that defines the enterprise of settling in Palestine and building a new society. The *immigration* narrative is a specific realisation of this general idea. It relates to individual immigration, incorporating the trauma, the struggle for identity and the failure of the attempt to impose homogenous nationality. However, the nature of these two narratives can also be understood in terms of Foucault’s early discussion on utopia and heterotopy. In the preface to his book *The Order of Things*, Foucault discusses heterotopy as follows:

*Utopias* afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold; they open up cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens, countries where life is easy [...] *Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and because they shatter to tangle common names, because they destroy the ‘syntax’ [...] this is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the *fabula*; heterotopias [...] desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar and source.<sup>8</sup>

The *aliyah* narrative is utopian. Zeli Gurevich and Gideon Aran suggest that Israel (and Jerusalem) operate as “the place”; that is, they define a location that has always been longed for and referred to from the outside.<sup>9</sup> The narrative of *aliyah* presents this longing for place but there is a missing element at its heart. *Aliyah* represents a general concept of new life, a symmetrical place located within a historical and linear story, with clear syntax and perfect fabula. Yet it exists only in words. However, as soon as *aliyah* turns from being a concept, idea or model into a reality, a tension is created between the linguistic space and the physical space. The *immigration* narrative is thus heterotopic, since it animates the tension between the language of the national collective and its understandability and expression. Its performance subverts the collective language; it attempts to imitate the utopian space but, in fact, runs counter to its syntax and fabula by telling a traumatic, fragmented, personal story. The central *aliyah* narrative is utopian in that it has no need for a real space in order to exist, and it is present only in linguistic space. However, every time utopia encounters reality there is a risk that the features of utopia may be damaged, leading to the creation of a heterotopy that reveals the disparity between the linguistic and the physical space.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, the two narratives cannot be separated. Heterotopias mirror or represent utopia but at the same time suspend, invert, contest and contradict it,<sup>11</sup> and the performative articulates the struggle over the national collective language by invoking or erasing its boundaries.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the two narratives in fact operate in a dialectical movement.

## 2. Narratives of immigration in Hebrew literature

Immigration narratives in Hebrew literature provide good illustrations of this dialectical movement of the pedagogical-utopian and the performative-heterotopic. Although this dialectical relationship exists in every text that describes a story of immigration, other texts present different types of dialogues, debates, arguments and syntheses. Below I will discuss a few examples to illustrate the model, and then explore Amos Oz's *Sippur al ahavah vehoshekh*, 2002 (*A Tale of Love and Darkness*, 2005) in greater detail, arguing that the power of this text derives from the nature of these dialectical relationships.

S. Y. Agnon's 1945 novel *Temol shilshom* (*Only Yesterday*)<sup>13</sup> serves as a good starting point for examining the relationship between the pedagogical-utopian and the performative-heterotopic. *Only Yesterday* is a *Bildungsroman*. The protagonist, Isaac Kumer, is a Zionist pilgrim making his way from his home in Galicia to Ottoman Palestine. Seduced by Zionist slogans, young Kumer imagines *Eretz Israel* to be filled with the financial, social and erotic opportunities that were denied to him, the son of an impoverished shopkeeper in Poland. The *Bildungsroman* structure meshes well with the self-improvement characteristics of the *aliyah* story. There are many other examples of poor young men from Eastern Europe who go to Palestine and manage to recreate themselves, integrate and lead a successful life.

Isaac leaves his family with great expectations of becoming someone else, but events do not go according to plan. He dreams of working on the land but ends up instead as a house painter living in a town. He settles in Jaffa, a secular city, and ceases his religious observance but is later drawn to live among Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem. He believes that all who immigrate to Israel are brothers bound by a common purpose, only to

discover how easy it is to be cheated and snubbed. He continues to dream of a country flowing with milk and honey, a utopian place, but finds an inhospitable land that bakes him in the blazing sun and poses the threat of disease at every turn.

Gradually Isaac superficially adapts to his new life. He becomes financially stable and finds love. But towards the end of the novel he is destroyed: a surrealist, Kafkaesque dimension becomes dominant in the novel and Isaac is led to catastrophe. He paints “mad dog” on the back of a stray dog. Causing panic wherever he roams, the dog, named Balak, takes the story over and eventually mauls Isaac to death.<sup>14</sup>

Agnon uses an ironic tone to convey the disparity between the pedagogical *aliyah* story and the *immigration* narrative. The novel is narrated in the third person. At times the author is faithful to Isaac’s perception and even employs collective Zionist language, using “us” to describe *aliyah* (and thus adopting the pedagogical *aliyah* narrative) while, at other times, he takes a step backwards to interpret the event, exposing Isaac’s misunderstanding, naivety and stupidity (thus activating a performative aspect of the *immigration* narrative).

Painting walls assumes a symbolic meaning in the novel. The Zionist narrative in the text appears to produce a fake pedagogic illusion. Isaac prefers not to know, or refuses to see, what is counterfeit in his life. Being a house painter allegorises this fact—he is covering things up. The radical of the Hebrew word for “hypocrisy”, *ts-v-’a* is also that of “painter”, *tsab’a* and “paint” *tsev’a*, as though a hypocrite is someone who is covered (or covers himself) with paint. Kumer paints everything; he is able to make it all look attractive, but he eventually fails. The dog, Balak, cannot stand the fake, and destroys the illusion.

Thus Agnon’s novel, as a novel of immigration, reflects the multifaceted relationships between the pedagogical-utopian *aliyah* story and the personal-performative *immigration* narrative that describes a heterotopian existence.

Hanoch Bartov’s 1954 novel *Shesh kenafayim le’ehad* (*Each has Six Wings*)<sup>15</sup> paints a panoramic, multi-character picture of groups of Holocaust survivors who have immigrated to Israel and moved to Jerusalem to live in a neighbourhood abandoned by Arabs fleeing during the 1948 war. Earlier, in the transit camp, the immigrants have been told that arrangements had been made for every family to be assigned an apartment in a stone building. The new immigrants have painful experiences with bureaucracy. The veterans treat them as people who are unable to work or take care of themselves. However, the story demonstrates their ability to rebuild their lives and struggle with the authorities to obtain the minimum needed to live a decent life. Eventually they succeed, showing that they are, as they say, no different from “everyone else”.

In many ways, the story presents the pedagogical utopian *aliyah* narrative, with the performative aspect hidden. It is true that the characters have to fight to reconstruct their lives from the ruins, but this struggle is depicted in terms akin to the story of the pioneers who arrived in Israel in the first decades of the 20th century and had to build their homes, fight their enemies and create a new society. *Each Had Six Wings* also emphasizes the connection between immigrants and veteran Israelis. There are only minimal descriptions of the survivors’ memories and nightmares, memories that exist as a secret that surfaces from time to time but is not acknowledged. Thus the past loses its particularity (and therefore its performative power) because it operates, as Nurit Gertz claims, as a collective memory whose source is in Europe and which does not point specifically to individual tragedy, hence disguising the trauma.<sup>16</sup>

Another example is Aharon Appelfeld's *Mikhvat ha'or* (1980) (*The Searing Light*) which tells the story of a group of young Holocaust survivors who reach Israel from a displaced persons camp in Italy. The boys are transferred to a farm, where they are expected to learn to be men (according to the new Israeli myth) through physical work.

Appelfeld is interested in the symbolic aspect of the story; the text does not specify precise times or places. Space, however, has major importance as it represents success or failure in the process of immigration. Boys who work outside in the fields, groves and gardens are willing to change their identity and become Israelis. The others, who work in closed spaces, in the laundry room, for example, are those who cannot forget their memories and start a new life.<sup>17</sup> The memories are located in closed spaces, with little light, and are associated with the character of Dwarf, who "is not sick, he is only short",<sup>18</sup> and whose grotesque appearance is suggestive of someone who cannot outgrow his past.

Unlike Bartov's book, this novel unambiguously presents the split between the narrative of *aliyah* and the narrative of *immigration*. The boys come to Israel "with the terrible feeling that we came here by accident".<sup>19</sup> In contrast to the optimistic idea of saving the survivors and giving them a home, the story presents the experience of the boys as one of exclusion. In fact, the *immigration* narrative undermines the *aliyah* narrative. This is first reflected in descriptions of the boys as uneasy and unable to fulfil the new norms. Their experiences have taught them not to trust anybody, they often misbehave, they are lazy, they steal and bribe to get what they want, and they are haunted by memories. In Bartov's novel, the terrible memories are hidden or expressed through a collective perspective. In Appelfeld's story, the veterans demand that "the young people who witnessed the Holocaust be diligent, fond of labour, clean minded."<sup>20</sup> Instead, memories often control their lives. They even use their nightmarish imagination "taken from the world of the transports, concentration camps, and crematoria to describe their experience," as Avner Holtzman has pointed out:<sup>21</sup> for example, when they arrive in Israel men and women are separated and moved from place to place, between "camps". The impact of this use of Holocaust memories to describe Israeli reality is powerful because of the contradiction between the safety of Israel and the boys' wartime experiences. Yet treating the immigration experience with Holocaust vocabulary starkly reveals the trauma and blurs the differences between the two places, thus undoing the utopian *aliyah* narrative.

Texts describing the immigration of Jews from Arab countries (*mizrahim*) provide further examples. Sami Michael's *Shavim veshavim yoter* (1974) (*Equal and More Equal*) deals with Iraqi immigrants in a transit camp. David Asher, the young hero, has immigrated to Israel from Iraq with his family. The novel has two narrative levels: the first focuses on David's family, who are sent to a transit camp and encounter difficulties there. The second describes his experience in the Six Day War (1967). Like many of the texts that address immigration, this is also a *Bildungsroman*. David describes a process of becoming an adult in Israel in which he sees himself as one of the "blacks", the *mizrahim*. His family is described as warm and the father is presented as the head of the household. When they reach Israel, they nurture aspirations: "We were thinking [...] this is homecoming. Jews among Jews. One people. But it is not so. Someone divides everyone into two peoples."<sup>22</sup> This division undermines cultural family patterns, specifically the place and dignity of the father in *mizrahi* communities.

Three elements operate in the novel to describe the process of becoming an Israeli. David falls in love with an Ashkenazi girl, Margalit; he decides to become educated; he

joins the army and later fights in the war. David and Margalit's love story contains aspects of *Romeo and Juliet*<sup>23</sup> and it is unsuccessful. Although David marries Margalit and they have a son, her mother does her best to break up the marriage and find her daughter a "suitable" husband. Second, after the death of his parents, David's older brother (and mentor) encourages him to study, believing that this could change their status. David studies and finds a job, but is still perceived as inferior to his peers with different ethnic backgrounds. The third element that elevates his status is his service in the war. At the end of the novel he receives a medal for bravery that indirectly confirms this: "I received a document that states and proves that I am an Israeli citizen".<sup>24</sup>

It appears that by the end of the story David has succeeded in shaping his identity and becoming an Israeli. Thus, the *aliyah* narrative is generally fulfilled in the text. However, Hannan Hever suggests that "the combination of the national story of the war with the personal immigration story creates a false impression that the two are mutually supportive."<sup>25</sup> Actually David does not go to the war out of a deep urge to fight for Israel but to escape his life, to distance himself from his wife: "Margalit—she was my homeland. I lost the battle for my homeland."<sup>26</sup> He goes to battle knowing that nobody is waiting for him; his demonstration of bravery is, therefore, meaningless.

*Tarnegol kapparot* (1983)<sup>27</sup> (*Scapegoat*) by Eli Amir presents Nuri, a young Jewish-Iraqi boy who is sent from a transit camp to a kibbutz. At first he feels impoverished and frustrated by the fact that his parents have sent him away to a hostile environment. He wants to feel at home, but still dreams of Baghdad. The novel illustrates life in the kibbutz: the physical work, the children's house, the identical clothes and equal status of girls and boys, and the large common dining room. The new culture is a one of songs and dances that glorify Israel and that often use Russian melodies. Nuri decides to become "one of them," but the cultural gaps dominate.

The novel elaborates on the conflict between the religious values of the immigrant Iraqi boy and the secular tenets of the kibbutz members. Nuri is embarrassed to say that he is religious (he admits that only his father is but this lie haunts him).<sup>28</sup> He succeeds in acquiring a new identity, and so the novel, as a *Bildungsroman*, supports the *aliyah* narrative. Yet the title of the book, *Scapegoat*, hints at the other narrative: that of immigration. His love of Israel is bound up with alienation from his parents. *Kapparot* refers to the ritual of Yom Kippur eve when a live chicken is circled above one's head three times, symbolically transferring one's sins to the chicken which is then slaughtered and donated to the poor. At the end of the story, Nuri brings his parents a chicken for *kapparot* in order to provide them with meat since they still live in poverty in the transit camp. However, his parents reject this gift since the chicken has not been slaughtered according to religious rites. This vignette illustrates Nuri's split between his new identity and his parents. He understands that he cannot be Israeli without losing his family. Thus, *Scapegoat* also symbolises Nuri himself as an immigrant who suffers for the sins of the Israeli establishment in its treatment of the immigrants, and sacrifices himself for the sake of a general homogeneous ideology.

### 3. A Tale of Love and Darkness

Amoz Oz's 2002 novel portrays the nature of the dialectical relationship between the two narratives. In this autobiographical narrative that describes his parents' lives, his

attempts to understand his mother's suicide and his examination of his personal struggle for identity, the pedagogical-utopian narrative and the performative-heterotopian narrative coexist. This creates a sense of unease for the reader, as neither narrative dominates. It also may explain why scholars have not agreed on interpretations of the novel. However, by viewing these multifaceted relationships as a kind of synthesis between the two narratives, they reflect a process that exists within the struggle for identity. Oz's identity in the novel provides a limited and fragile opportunity for harmony between the two.

In many ways the text deliberately undermines the utopian-pedagogical narrative and presents the performative-immigration narrative. Oz's objection to the pedagogical narrative is expressed in the way he tells his own story.<sup>29</sup> Cornell West claims that:

Distinctive features of the new cultural politics of difference are to trash the monolithic and homogeneous in the name of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general and universal in light of the concrete, specific and particular; and to historicise, contextualise and pluralise by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing.<sup>30</sup>

Oz's work breaks the linear, causal, mono-dimensional fabula by expressing a pluralised and provisional narrative.

Michael Feige argues that the hegemony of the national context is presented in a frame where it is understood as "objective history". Personal experiences are attributed national significance related to *aliyah*, sacrifice and death.<sup>31</sup> However, Oz does not follow this particular line and describes his experiences in general, and his mother's suicide and its implications without giving them a nationalistic tonality. Iris Milner has pointed out that Oz does not imbue these experiences with the *sabra* ethos that championed the nullification of individual family membership. Thus he "transforms the public-social network into a network of interpersonal familial relations which are experienced as more authentic and take place in private space [...] the structure of the scenery of the homeland lies far away from the objective intended by the formulators of the Zionist ethos".<sup>32</sup>

Oz expropriates the spaces from their national role and emphasises their personal importance.<sup>33</sup> For example, when describing his aunt Haya's two-roomed apartment in Tel Aviv, he mentions that one room had been sublet to some senior army commanders, but he ends the paragraph with the following statement: "Three years later, in the same room, my mother took her own life." (169)<sup>34</sup>

The novel breaks down times and spaces to create a multi-vocal experience:

From her stuffy, gloomy, clean and tidy, over-furnished, always shuttered two-room flat in Wessely Street in Tel Aviv [...] Aunt Sonia takes me to visit the mansion in the Wolija quarter in the north-west of Rovno. (150)

Place and time, as demonstrated by Ronit Matalon, are immanent features of identity, immigration and memory.<sup>35</sup> The identity of the immigrant is composed of memories constructed over a continuum of time. The destruction of identity often finds its expression in the transformation of place. Oz's descriptions of time and place are eloquent expressions of identity. The text begins in a little flat in Jerusalem, in a narrow

and defined spatial framework, but in what follows he depicts his family life in Israel, as well as in Eastern Europe, in Vilna and Rovno. He sees the space of his distant forefathers as no less influential than spaces closer by. This flexibility of time, space and voices creates a mode of fluidity. Unlike the *aliyah* narrative, which separates the old identity and the new,<sup>36</sup> here Oz makes the past part of the present, and Rovno part of Tel Aviv.

Finally, the immigration story in this novel is a story of death and mourning. Death, as hinted at in the title, is related to immigration, and immigration is presented as a kind of death. First and foremost, the story deals with Oz's mother's suicide, but it also describes other losses in life, including those of his mother's friends, his colourful grandmother, who was disgusted with the weather and the germs in Israel and died after insisting on taking two hot baths a day, trying helplessly to be clean, or his father, who was an excellent scholar and dreamed of becoming a senior professor but had to work in a library, which "was like a running sore in my father's soul". (123)

*A Tale of Love and Darkness*, then, presents many facets of the marginal immigration narrative. It reveals the trauma of immigration, exposing alienation, death and the failure of his parents' generation to blend in. It describes the violence inherent in the Zionist project that undermines the hegemonic ideology. The style of the book serves this purpose as well: history is not portrayed as a single dimensional narrative. Rather, it breaks syntax and fabula by integrating different material such as testimonies, documents, postcards, poems, notes, literary criticism, memoirs written by members of the family, old newspapers and stories, all of which deviate from one clear voice, to create a chorus.

Oz's text is constructed from a collection of episodes. He ruptures the boundaries of territory and creates temporal disturbances. The question of belonging and identity, which is central to the narrative, does not receive a single answer. Rather, a dialogue is created. Even though the book is autobiographical, it deliberately blurs the distinction between facts and historical truth and the fictional, which alone can perhaps express the unconscious forces underlying the disparity.<sup>37</sup> His mother's stories and the spaces they suggest penetrate Oz's story as well, and impede the act of reconstruction.

However, certain elements in the book, those that deal with the national ethos, work to form an *aliyah* narrative. Oz describes a personal immigration story but tries to link this experience to national history. This is reflected in his description of his father, which is always analogous to the story of the cousin who chose to remain in Europe. His father's feelings of disappointment and frustration are constantly paralleled with his uncle's destiny in Europe. Unlike his father, the uncle achieved academic recognition and fulfilled his goals, only to lose everything in the Holocaust. Oz never met his cousin, who was a little older than he and was murdered by the Nazis together with his family.<sup>38</sup>

The intensive involvement with the Holocaust and with those branches of his family who were killed in the Holocaust, the constant drawing of parallels between his father and his uncle and between himself and the cousin he never met, justify the process of immigration as an *aliyah* story, and weigh it down with a nationalistic burden. The description of his mother's death is also anchored in the Holocaust experience.<sup>39</sup>

The justification of, and reconciliation with, *aliyah* are also portrayed through an extremely close involvement with the United Nations' 1947 resolution and a description of the War of Independence. Oz's father finds a single opportunity to whisper words to his son in a moment of intimacy that had never before occurred. Out of his distress and pain about his life in Israel, Oz's father feels the establishment of Jewish



state to be completely justified given the anti-Semitism he experienced in Europe. He comments, or perhaps demands:

Just you look, my boy, take a very good look, son, take it all in, because you won't forget this night to your dying day and you'll tell your children, your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren about this night when we're long gone. (345)

Certain parts of the book that have a nationalistic tonality appear to comply with this wish. Oz says that he is not only relating his own story but is, rather, trying to understand "who brought us here. Why we came here. What would have happened if we had not come here."<sup>40</sup>

The nationalism emerging from the text is also obvious in the sections where Oz deals with the Jewish-Arab conflict. As a child he wanted to become closer to anyone who seemed to belong to the country. An Arab discovers him hiding in a clothing store and becomes almost like a father to him. The Silwani family home that Oz visits in his youth is spacious and splendid, and the Arab family itself is defined as a "respected European family." This family represents the longed-for combination of Israeli authenticity and European education and manners. Oz the child is described as wanting to be closer to them, and he tries to prove to the Arab children that he is not part of a "pitiful nation, a nation of crouched scholars, weak moths flying from every shadow" (372). But his act of heroism is revealed to be foolish and harmful, as the iron ball he throws in an act of bravery and arrogance crushes the foot of the family's son.

As a member of the peace movement, Oz tries to apologise for this hard-hearted action but explains it rationally. In the book, he attempts to investigate the Jewish-Arab conflict and to present his interpretation of it, proposing a psychological explanation for the relationship. According to Oz, both the Jews and the Arabs suffered Europe-based oppression that caused trauma on both sides. The comparison between Jewish and Arab suffering and the suggestion that this joint suffering is the result of joint traumas enhances the feeling of reconciliation with the situation. Now, instead of Jews and Arabs uniting and amassing a common strength, they fight each other:

The Europe that abused, humiliated and oppressed the Arab by means of imperialism, colonialism, exploitation and repression is the same Europe that oppressed and persecuted the Jews [...] But when the Arabs look at us they see not a bunch of half-hysterical survivors but a new offshoot of Europe, with its colonialism, technical sophistication and exploitation, that had 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 the fellow victims either, brothers in adversity, but somehow we see pogrom-making Cossacks, bloodthirsty anti-Semites, Nazis in disguise (330)

The analogy between the family members in Europe and the family in Israel creates a different perspective on the immigrants' suffering and thus justifies the Zionist process of *aliyah*. The comparison between Jews and Arab suffering and the suggestion that this joint suffering is the result of joint traumas enhances the feeling of reconciliation with the situation. Thus, Oz apparently accepts the hegemonic *aliyah* view of the past and present, and criticises it only obliquely and constrainedly. He may feel an obligation in

this book to present a moderate and balanced view that adheres to the centrist political stream and is thus in line with the pedagogical narrative. He chooses to introduce the book within the context of the national narrative<sup>41</sup> and views his autobiographical story as a representation of what Anita Shapira described as “a remnant of the great drama of Jewish destiny in the 20th century. Enormous and arbitrary powers shook people like puppets, disrupted the course of their lives, and set them on a totally different path from the one they had foreseen.”<sup>42</sup>

#### 4. Between the pedagogical and the performative

“How do we plot the narrative of the nation that must mediate between the teleology of progress tipping over into the ‘timeless’ discourse of irrationality?” asks Bhabha.<sup>43</sup> Oz’s book attempts to integrate the two, combining the teleological *aliyah* story with the private and painful journey of immigration.

The book reveals the trauma of an entire generation whose lives were so often uprooted. Oz reflects on the figures of his ancestors and the irrevocable damage that was caused at the time of immigration, culminating in his mother’s suicide when he was a child. The Zionist establishment demanded that the immigrants cut themselves off from their diaspora home and forget their previous identities, language, memories and culture.<sup>44</sup> In reality, however, the situation was different, and Oz portrays this bluntly, demonstrating, in Sarah Chinsky’s terminology, how the Israeli-western hegemony imposed upon itself the forgetfulness of its diaspora past.<sup>45</sup> In revealing this trauma, Oz creates a dialogue between the pedagogic and the performative, as we see by examining the struggle for identity in the novel. Oz’s parents lived in two worlds of time and place. They lived in Israel but thought about, and longed for, Europe:

Europe for them was a forbidden promised land, a yearned-for landscape of belfries and squares paved with ancient flagstones, of trams and bridges and church spires, remote village, spa towns, forests and snow-covered meadows.

Words like “cottage”, “meadow”, or “goose-girl”, excited and seduced me all through my childhood. They has a sensual aroma of a genuine, cosy world, far from the dusty tin roofs, the urban wasteland of the scrap iron thistles, the parched hillsides of our Jerusalem, suffocating under the weight of white-hot summer. (2)

Their identity is split between what they used to be and “what they have become”.<sup>46</sup> Stuart Hall describes the concept of identity as “a state of becoming.” Cultural identity is not fixed but directed toward the future as toward the past. This is clearly evident in the description of Oz’s parents, divided between what they were, what they expected to be, and what they became. Yet in what sense can we talk about their past identity? The family’s story and the stories of the mother refer to different worlds: fairies, witches, the farmer’s wife and the miller’s daughter, remote huts deep in the forest (181–182) exist alongside the reality of a Jewish minority who suffer from repression and exclusion. This mixture of fairytales and descriptions of life in Europe constrains any possible meaning of “genuine identity”. It again combines a utopian picture with a heterotopian one.

This hybridity exists not only with regard to the nature of their past identity. The family came to Israel filled with dreams and hopes, quoting the song “all our hopes will be fulfilled./ There to live in liberty, there to flourish, pure and free” (242).<sup>47</sup> The Klausner family was part of the Russian middle-class intelligentsia that moved to Odessa and in 1933 immigrated to Israel. Oz’s mother’s family belonged to the same class. She left for Israel in 1934, following her parents and sister. Apparently, as Anita Shapira claims, the two families’ moves to Palestine should not have been traumatic; both families were Zionists, they had learned Hebrew in Europe and they went to Israel with their family members before the Holocaust.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless their new lives in Israel illustrated the gap between the Zionist pedagogical story and their everyday life. The neighbourhood of Kerem Abraham “suited neither of them” (288–289). They suffered from poverty, worked in jobs ill-suited to their abilities, and did not adapt to the local culture and weather.

Oz himself is not immune to this identity struggle. He describes his own life as Amos Klausner, explains his decision to become Amos Oz, to Hebraicise his name, to move to a kibbutz and, in fact, to estrange himself from his past in an effort to assimilate into the new Israeli culture. Oz the child is described in the book as lonely.<sup>49</sup> As an only child he feels that the entire burden of his parents is upon him: “everything they did not achieve in life, everything which was not given to them was loaded onto my shoulders by my parents” (307). Oz is in the focal point of a search for mother and father figures. He sees his teacher, Zelda, as a substitute mother, and is prepared to view the Arab who discovered his hiding place in a clothing store as an alternative father: “Since this morning I’ve had another father apart from him: an Arab father” (224). His search reflects his desire to find parents with a stake in the country—parents who do not bear a burden of disappointments and memories of other places.

Oz sees his parents, his family and his diaspora acquaintances as a group to which he does not wish to belong. His community is perceived as detached from *Eretz Israel*: a community located in Israel, but reflecting the diaspora. He assumes the negation of identity demanded by the national ideology—an act his parents could not perform—and even though this is the path he chooses, he describes it in terms of violence turned against the self:

If I were really to begin a brand new life, I must start by getting a tan within a fortnight so that I’d look just like one of them; I must stop daydreaming once and for all; I must change my surname; I must take two or three cold showers every day; I must absolutely force myself to give up doing that filthy stuff at night; I must not write any more poems; I must stop chattering; and I must not tell stories: I must appear in my new home as a silent man. (463)

He attempts to change his external appearance by sunbathing and by taking cold showers. He wants to erase his inner self as well, and so forces himself to refrain from writing and from any self-revelation. Thus the act of identity transformation and erasure is one of violence and physical and spiritual cruelty.

However, the text itself is evidence that the aspirations of the young Amos, who has chosen to separate himself from his parents and change his name, are impossible to achieve. Throughout the book it is clear that, like his parents’ identities, his identity is divided as well. “Oz had come a long way from the day he turned 14-and-a-half, the day

he decided to erase his family name, to abandon his father's house, to leave Jerusalem and uproot himself to Hulda," claims Dan Laor. Many years after he "killed" his father and Jerusalem, he is able fully and wholly to accept his origin, Jerusalem and his immigrant parents.<sup>50</sup>

This is similar to the definition offered by Stuart Hall, who discusses the notion of two vectors of identity working simultaneously:

The vector of similarity and continuity; and the vector of difference and rupture. [...]. The one gives us some grounding in, some continuity with, the past. The second reminds us that what we share is precisely the experience of the profound discontinuity<sup>51</sup>

Oz is tossed back and forth between these poles. In his youth he attempts to create a native Israeli *sabra* identity for himself; however, as in the literature of Holocaust survivors,<sup>52</sup> he does not succeed in detaching himself from the memory of his mother. This is the place where the author Amos Oz appears as Amos Klausner-Oz, as someone who is a native but who also does not attempt to discard his past, but is prepared to look directly at his family history and to recognise the traumatic process of immigration and its outcomes. The entire work therefore constitutes an exposure of the mendacity of the "cover story"—here, the *aliyah* narrative—which, according to Hall, pretends that a stable identity is possible.<sup>53</sup> Revealing the hybrid identity as a combination of the two narratives demonstrates a synthesis in the life of Amos Oz in the novel, one built on the awareness of the two narratives and the inevitable acknowledgment that they both exist in a dialectical movement.

Avirama Golan takes another view of this synthesis. For her, Oz's first choice (to detach himself from his parents and become a *sabra*) is fundamental.

And what is "his story?" Now, when the central stream to which he belonged, and of which he was the symbol, is weakened, Oz could finally have revealed that in fact he is from the margins; however—and this is a big however—immediately he wrote about the mother who committed suicide (how personal and at the same time how impersonal and symbolic), he chose to disengage from the margins and to join the centre. And here, in exposing this literary-political method, another factor is solved in the equation of the novel's success, and that is the longing for the return of the Zionist story.<sup>54</sup>

Golan sees Oz's choice to leave his diaspora family and to join a kibbutz as the juncture at which he chose to belong to the centre and, in fact, to remove himself from the margins. She considers the success of this novel to be a sort of a literary trick in which those at the margins are set within the consensus as a tool for the return of the Zionist narrative.

Golan's claim that "the power of *Love and Darkness* resides in the use it makes of the legitimacy conferred by the multicultural concept to the marginal narrative simply in order to strengthen the central (or previously central) narrative"<sup>55</sup> presents the idea that the penetration of the marginal into Oz's text is a literary manipulation designed to re-establish the central discourse of *aliyah*. Thus, by transforming the trauma of immigration from a private event into a collective trauma, he creates a counterfeit homogeneous text.

Eran Kaplan takes issue with this interpretation:

Oz certainly does not meet the conventional political definition of a post-Zionist: someone who calls for the end of Jewish nationalism and the transformation of Israel/Palestine into a unitary state. Yet, though Oz unquestionably is not a post-Zionist critic and his text does not lead to post-Zionist political positions, it could be argued that *Tale of Love and Darkness* denotes an important shift in Oz's position as a public intellectual. [...] *Tale of Love and Darkness* is arguably a product of a society that no longer accepts a single hegemonic group or set of images as the only representative of its collective identity, and where different groups and symbols compete for a place in an ever-expanding cultural market.<sup>56</sup>

Based on the theoretical model presented above, I suggest that Oz's identity reflects the relationships between the pedagogical-utopian narrative and the performative-personal narrative. Both narratives exist in the text, and each is unveiled by the other. Oz is a *sabra*, but he is also an East European immigrant. Europe is a fairytale place but it is also a place of anti-Semitism. Israel is a utopian homeland but it is also a barren desert. Family relations are a source of love and compassion but also a source of suffocation. The novel is fictional but is also autobiographical.

*A Tale of Love and Darkness* describes the tension between the narrative of *aliyah* and the narrative of *immigration*, specifically because it tries to maintain them both. As with utopia, the narrative of *aliyah* cannot find authentic expression when it attempts to be concrete. It is overshadowed by the personal traumatic voice. Oz echoes the trauma, both through his own personal experience and because he has grown up in a sociocultural climate that empowers him to describe his own intimate experience rather than adhering to the pretence of hegemony.

Even though he chooses trauma, Oz does not abandon the centralistic position and at times even grasps at it. His hold on it demonstrates the way in which the central story establishes its power and comfort in its ability to serve the Israelis and Oz himself as a shield and disguise. Although this ideology has long ceased to be authentic and its manifestations have become cynical, they still need it.<sup>57</sup>

Israeli society as seen in *A Tale of Love and Darkness* is a society where a raw trauma lies beneath the centre that enfolds and attempts to protect it. This trauma, hidden and neglected, is always personal, because it grows out of the impossible fusion with the utopian story. Shelter from trauma is may at times be necessary, because it enables the society to survive. But the void inside the ideological envelope makes itself felt. Trauma, as can be seen in this work, is always there to disturb our tranquillity.

## Notes

1. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
2. See Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport, "Homecoming, Immigration, and the National Ethos", 1–14; Zerubaval. "The "Mythological Sabra", 115–144.
3. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, XIII.
4. For example Said, Bhabha, and Hall.
5. See for example, Kimmerling, Shenhav, Shalom-Shitrit, Hever, 31–51 Matalon, 47.

6. See Gertz, *The Choir of the Others* and 'Beyond the Borders', Zerubavel.
7. Bhabha, "DissemiNation", 299.
8. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xviii.
9. Gurevitz and Aran, "On the Place", 9–44.
10. Foucault, *Heterotopia*.
11. See Johnson, "Unravelling Foucault's 'Different Spaces'", 75–90.
12. Bhabha, *op.cit.*, 300.
13. S. Y Agnon, *Only Yesterday*.
14. See also Benjamin Harshav, "The Only Yesterday of *Only Yesterday*", XIII.
15. Bartov, *Shesh kenafayim le'ehad*.
16. Gertz, "Zionism, the Kibbutz and a Small Town", 512.
17. See Schwartz, *Individual Lament and Tribal Eternity—Ahron Appelfeld: The Picture of His World*, 80–81.
18. Appelfeld, *Mikhvat ha'or*, 140.
19. *Ibid*, 27, 22–23.
20. *Ibid*, 117.
21. Holtzman, "They are Different People—Holocaust Survivors are Reflected in the Fiction of the Generation of 1948", 347.
22. Michael, *Shavim veshavim yoter*, 25.
23. Berg, "Sephardi Writing: From the Margins to the Mainstream", 116–118.
24. Michael, *Shavim veshavim yoter*. 254.
25. Hever, "We Have Not Arrived from the Sea: A Mizrahi Literary Geography", 42.
26. Michael, *Shavim veshavim yoter* 10.
27. Amir, *Tarnegol kapparot*.
28. See Cohen, *The Experience of Immigration*, 60–62.
29. See Milner, "A Family Story: The Myth of the Family in *A Tale of Love and Darkness* and in Amos Oz's Early Work", 74.
30. West, "The New Politics of Difference", 19.
31. Feige, "Introduction: Rethinking Israel Memory and Identity", VI.
32. Milner, "A Family Story: The Myth of the Family in *A Tale of Love and Darkness* and in Amos Oz's Early Work", 74.
33. See also Ben-Dov, "On Absence, Eros and Lust in Amos Oz's Work", 117–129.
34. Oz, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*. Trans. Nicholas De Lange. London: Vintage Books, 2005. Page numbers refer to this edition.
35. Matalon, *Read and Write*, 41.
36. Zerubavel, "The 'Mythological Sabra' and Jewish Past: Trauma, Memory, and Contested Identity", 118.
37. Bhabha sees the diaspora moments as between human awareness and the alienation of the unknown (see H Bhabha, "Preface," XI).
38. See also Porat, "There was Fear in Jerusalem", 143–154.
39. *Ibid*.
40. Shavit, "Interview".
41. "National narrative" according to Faige, V–XIV.
42. Shapira, "The Zionist Narrative of Amos Oz", 166.
43. Bhabha, "DissemiNation", 295.
44. Zerubavel, "The 'Mythological Sabra' and Jewish Past: Trauma, Memory, and Contested Identity", 118.
45. Hinskey, "Eyes Wide Shut", 262.
46. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", 394.

47. See <http://www.zemereshet.co.il/song.asp?id=150>
48. Shapira, "The Zionist Narrative of Amos Oz", 164.
49. See Shaked, 17.
50. Dan Laor, "On the Lands of Memories: Biography, Ideology and Story in the Writing of Amos Oz," 39–40.
51. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", 395.
52. Gertz, *The Choir of the Others*, 107–110.
53. Hall, "Ethnicity: Identity and Difference", 344.
54. Golan, "Is His Story is Our Story?" 1,12.
55. Ibid.
56. Kaplan, "Amos Oz's A Tale of Love and Darkness and the Sabra Myth", 122.
57. S Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 28–29.

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