Vocal Projections

Voices in Documentary

Edited by

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Sounds of Disillusionment and Discord: When Pasolini and Sontag Visited Israel

Ohad Landesman

When he was brought to the Jordan River during a trip to Israel in 1970, US Senator Henry Jackson became convinced he was the victim of a hoax. After being assured that it was no joke and that the river was real, Jackson supposedly said that the river's universal distinction, derived directly from its significance to both Judaism and Christianity, 'was an act of public genius'. At another time, with a different distinguished visitor at the same location, Henry Kissinger's immediate impression was that the Jordan River had 'more reputation than water' (Siegel 2015: 222). Whether fictitious or real, such comments made by or attributed to the senator and the secretary of state not only reflect a discrepancy between the imagined shape of Israel's internationally famous river and its disappointingly real proportions, but also attest to how Israel as a place has been perceived and imagined differently by international visitors.

In this chapter I consider two documentaries, made by renowned non-Israeli artists, which chronicle visits to Israel in its early years of existence: Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Scouting for Locations in Palestine* (*Sopralluoghi in Palestina*) (1963) and Susan Sontag's *Promised Lands* (1974). Both of these films, each with a different documentary strategy, offer a retelling of the Zionist dream and represent its unavoidable collapse within a particular historical moment. By exploring the gaps between what Pasolini and Sontag had hoped to see in Israel and the sights and sounds they actually encountered, one can expose not only the tension between expectations and reality, but also the value of an outsider's perspective in revealing the cracks in a monolithic historical discourse. While the films discussed will not be specifically referred to here as 'travelogues' or 'tourist films', as their function is not to simply depict an appealing landscape

that entices the audience, it will be shown that they often utilize travelogue elements. They embrace a personal or an essayistic rhetoric that constructs an outsider-looking-in perspective, a position that self-consciously acknowledges the filmmakers' inability to fully and accurately capture the cultures and peoples they are representing. Unlike the tourist film, which often presents a complete alignment between expectations and findings, the films discussed here dramatize the discrepancy between imagining a place and visiting it in reality.

To this end, I will focus in particular on the use of human voice within the sonic landscape of each film. The essential plethora of human voices in both films, I will show, together with the manner in which the voices often ruminate critically on the images they accompany, create and perform a strategic position of outsiderness and provide unique impressions of a place the filmmakers are visiting for the first time. I hope to move beyond Bill Nichols's well-known and important suggestion that the voice in documentary conveys mostly 'a sense of a text's social point of view' (1983: 18) and therefore functions as merely a vocal metaphor to speak about authorship and to reaffirm the filmmaker's point of view. One of the main problems with Nichols's argument, as Trish FitzSimons notes, is that 'it assumes that the voice of the film-maker should *always* be privileged over that of other inputs' (2009: 133, emphasis in original). By showing how the human voice in the films under discussion serves different purposes simultaneously, including an evidentiary function, a practice of the filmmaker's subjectivity and a performance of scepticism, I will side with FitzSimons when she refers to the voice not as a unitary entity but as 'braided', a form of 'stranded singularity' in which 'coming to voice' typically includes the input of many individuals and institutions (FitzSimons 2009: 131). As I will show, Pasolini performs a vocal fluidity, elevating his voice of disillusionment and allowing the sights he encounters in his visit to take precedence over his preliminary fantasies. Sontag, on the other hand, creates a dialectical structure of several voices in order to resolve the problem in documenting a place she simply does not know enough about and uncovers its cultural and historical strata. In *Promised Lands*, the plurality of voices works on several sonic dimensions: opposing two narrators with different points of view, exposing a nationalistic discourse through non-diegetic group singing or directly recording the immediate outbursts of agony from post-traumatic bodies. Sontag also owns up to her intellectual needs by keeping her position removed and non-interventionist, directly observing and listening to a nation in a state of panic and despair. While using FitzSimons's understanding of a 'braided voice' to explain the vocal plurality embedded in

the sonic landscape in both films, my discussion will also move beyond the idea of documentary voice as merely a metaphor for a specific point of view. I will simultaneously point to how different material properties in the voices heard (such as changes in tone or volume) move beyond the linguistic meaning of words themselves.

Postcards from the edge: Fantasy and reality in Pasolini's location hunting trip to Israel

In the early summer of 1963, Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini embarked on a trip to search for film locations in Israel that would end in utter disappointment. Accompanied by a newsreel photographer and a local Catholic priest named Don Andrea, Pasolini retraced the itinerary of Christ along the border of Israel and Jordan. His travel to a geographic region that he referred to with no specific or relevant political meaning as 'Palestine' was part of a plan to scout locations for *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964), a film Pasolini was hoping to shoot in historical locations from the Bible, such as Nazareth, Jerusalem and Bethlehem. In *Sopralluoghi*, a sketchy, messy and personal unmaking-of documentary that chronicles the director's failed attempts to find appropriate locations in Israel and Jordan, Pasolini reflects on his gradual but growing distress at the unsuitable scenery and the ensuing act of transposition: the impressions he gathered from Palestine would substantiate his later decision to film *The Gospel* in the wild Italian scenery of Calabria instead.

Pasolini's expedition to Israel is characterized by an inevitable intersection between fantasy and reality, romantic expectations and practical findings. Interested in locating archaic forms that remain intact within contemporary surroundings and in identifying grandeur in a 'ruinous landscape of contemporary poverty' (Steimatsky 2003: 240), Pasolini was thwarted. While he was able to locate traces of the poetic and archaic in the fifteen-year-old state of Israel, he also noticed very quickly that filming there would be unsatisfactory due to the modern invasion that had completely altered the biblical settings. Pasolini was searching for leftovers of revolutionary energy from the past, a biblical world that would be preserved and unspoiled, but found out that capitalism had refurnished these locations with new signs and meanings. The modern, industrial scenery he discovered in Israel was, for Pasolini, 'a practical disappointment'. The same place that three years earlier held for Chris Marker a

failed promise of social utopia would eventually prevent Pasolini from fulfilling his dream of archaic authenticity.[1]

In *Sopralluoghi* Pasolini and his crew drive across the country to all the major promising locations: Mount Tabor, Christian sites around the Sea of Galilee, a Druze village, an Israeli Kibbutz and finally the Dead Sea, before crossing the border to Jordan. The trip, however, forms for them nothing short of a continuous narrative of disillusionment or, as Ella Shohat describes it, a 'crushing disenchantment with the holy land scenery' (Shohat 2010: 292). Breathtaking images of pre-occupation Israel are juxtaposed with a rapid, semi-improvised commentary that never ceases to directly address the viewer with scepticism. At one point, shortly before Pasolini arrives in Nazareth, he foreshadows what we are about to see next: 'In fact, in a few minutes, as you follow our Fiat's route as it took us towards Nazareth, towards the heart of Galilee, towards Lake Tiberias, you'll see a landscape contaminated by the present.' A few minutes later Pasolini flags the site as a source of dissatisfaction. 'Here it is,' he addresses the viewer; 'no further comment is needed to explain why it is totally unusable for our film.' While images of the ancient city do not reveal any visible signs to justify this disenchantment, Pasolini's voice, with its sour tone and downcast quality, shows signs of exhaustion and leads us to the deficiencies of the place by stating that it either has 'too much poverty' or is simply 'excessively modern'. The presence of this disillusioned voice on top of postcard-like images sets up both a 'hierarchy of perception', as Michel Chion refers to it, in which the human voice is accorded privilege over any other sonic elements in the scenery, and a recourse towards an expository mode, in which the meaning inferred by the words spoken overrides any other possible readings that could be suggested by the images (Chion 1999: 6).

The Italian filmmaker, playfully teasing the viewer with his commentary, often talks like a disenchanted tourist, both eager and disappointed to find easy comparisons with sites and sounds from home, between the geography he visits and the more modernized locations in Italy: 'Here we could very well be in Puglia, or in Calabria or Sicily,' he admits. Palestinian towns and villages seem to be wretched, the Jordan River feels like a 'poor, humble, desperate little green river' and the whole territory as imagined by Pasolini is said to be slowly eradicated by sprawling Israeli settlements and industrial plants. On the uniform houses of the Israeli settlers Pasolini utters in dismay: 'You could easily find [them] in the Roman countryside, or in Switzerland.' Such a grim outlook on the sites is embraced right from the beginning of the film, when Pasolini's voice-

over addresses the viewer to explain in retrospect why his search in the Middle East ended up being misguided, and why the modern industrial aspect of Israel formed a 'practical disappointment' and a good enough reason to film his Gospel elsewhere. This expedition to the Holy Land is documented and reconstructed like a voyage where the sound humiliates the image, but not in an overtly assertive manner. Pasolini's narration, delivered in a definitive but somehow also embarrassed tone, belittles the impressive settings the images show us so that the visible contradicts the audial, and the real is shamefully obfuscated by the imagined. The land, in his words, forms 'an incredible impression of smallness' and teaches him 'a great lesson in humility'. The Dead Sea is the only location in Israel that makes an impression of grandeur on Pasolini: 'an immense lunar landscape', as he calls it. The rest is simply disappointing in its humbleness and smallness, the unassuming remnants of a once majestic land, so much so that by the end of his quest, Pasolini laments: 'Yes, the biblical world appears, but it resurfaces like wreckage.'

All of Pasolini's encounters with the locals, including his philosophical musings with Don Andrea, are made in the form of cinéma vérité interviews: shot with 16mm equipment, recorded with a Nagra tape and edited mostly in camera. Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch's seminal *Chronique d'un été* (Chronicle of a Summer) (1961), which pioneered this approach, had been released only two years earlier. In the Galilee area Pasolini meets the Druzes, 'Arabs who remained in Israeli territory' and recognizes that they are the only thing in Israel that remained archaic, while the rest of Israeli society has turned quite modern. He hardly speaks to the Druzes, instead layering his contemplative voice-over on top of images of their 'pagan, indifferent, happy and savage' faces. Such presumed authenticity seems far closer, perhaps, to the archaic Gospel characters he is looking for than the new inhabitants of the modern settlements and colonies in Israel. When Pasolini later meets the Bedouin people in the desert their astounding appearance forces him to be explicitly reluctant about using them for his film. 'Their faces are gentle, beautiful, happy', he sadly admits, yet 'a bit sombre'. After all, he reminds the viewer, they are 'pre-Christian'. Admittedly, there is a colonial scent to this location hunting trip, one that Pasolini seems to be very much aware of, but barely able to resist by using his judgemental voice-over to emphasize his authorial control.

The only part in the film where Pasolini speaks extensively and at eye level with local inhabitants occurs when he stops at a kibbutz on the border with Jordan, the same place where 'Christ retreated in meditation'. He interviews an

Israeli family, talking with them about the possibility of fulfilling maternal love in a collectivist structure, and about the unique organization of the kibbutz and its spiritual essence. Interestingly, the conversations are conducted in Italian, not Hebrew, a linguistic strategy that eradicates the local dialect and authenticity of the kibbutz members. It is strikingly also the only part in the film where Pasolini seems at ease and able to create an intimate bond with his interviewees, sitting comfortably on the grass and passing the Nagra microphone between them. The idea of speaking with local inhabitants in his own language about such a nationally specific concept exemplifies Pasolini's position as an outsider, on the one hand, and his wish to avoid the trap of objectifying or misrepresenting his subjects, on the other.

Strangely enough, while this fifty-five-minute film is made in the spirit of cinéma vérité, it can hardly be said to observe and capture life as it is. Pasolini's omnipresent narration is played out serenely and with a tranquillity that the musical score projects as well. Even when Pasolini is directly addressing his subjects on location, his voice is always delivered in a clear and stable intonation that overrides other sonic elements, and few diegetic noises enter the soundtrack. The soothing classical music that accompanies the conclusive tone of narration, arranged almost entirely from Johannes Brahms's compositions, is reminiscent of the dramatic and triumphant score that Luis Buñuel lays over his sarcastic voice-over in *Las Hurdes* (1933). Pasolini, however, is not interested in creating a provocative montage that exploits the tension between a condescending soundtrack and images of misery, like Buñuel is, but, rather, in building a conflict between fantasy and reality, the imagined and the real.

On a practical level, Pasolini becomes utterly disappointed by the end of this trip. 'I found nothing I can use in the film,' he remarks sweepingly, and his ambivalent position towards modernity leads him to ostensibly reject the sites he visits. Don Andrea, on the other hand, understands that the actual and the phantasmatic can also intersect, and therefore do not necessarily need to neutralize each other. Pasolini, so he believes, needs to experience the actual places he visits in order to adapt them elsewhere. The elegant conflict between the two is carefully staged as a discussion between a spiritual mentor (Don Andrea) and a rebellious student (Pasolini). Don Andrea tells him: 'As you walk here you must think, reflect, meditate, to absorb the spirit. Only then can you reinvent it in another place … and then it will become something new.' His reassuring voice often attempts to alleviate Pasolini's overly decisive tone of disappointment, and the pairing creates a tension between an embrace

of splendour and the recourse to humility. While Don Andrea's rhetoric is an effort to imagine the decontextualization of a place, Pasolini's is a disillusioned rejection of this romanticism. Pasolini's decision to film *The Gospel* in Italy and not in Israel, a realization that may have occurred long before the end of this trip, is translated in *Sopralluoghi* as not only the culmination of an ongoing vocal struggle between Pasolini and Don Andrea's intellectual positions, but also as the inevitable and practical resolution to a trip that fell short of expectations.

Recording the pain of others: Political dissonance and experimental sound in *Promised Lands*

Promised Lands (1974), Sontag's third film and only documentary, is a small-scale production that took her to Israel during the immediate aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, a decade after Pasolini's visit. Given the filming's proximity to the war and the psychic devastation of its events on the Israeli public, Sontag strolled the streets of Jerusalem and crossed the deserts of Sinai at a challenging time: her visit took place twenty days after fighting began and the conflict was still ongoing. For seven weeks of shooting, with a small crew and marked bravery, Sontag documented a young militarist country confronted by an unexpected crisis and guided by paranoia and fear. She entered the fresh battlefields and drove around the state to closely examine the ways in which Israeli citizens responded to the war. Sontag captured harrowing images of burned tanks and corpses of soldiers surrounded by dried blood and swarming flies in the desert. She also listened carefully to the personal cries of agony and horror, the immediate audial traces of post-trauma.

Sontag uses two different strategies of sonic representations throughout *Promised Lands*: diegetic sound that provides evidence and an essayistic voice-over that opens her film to a rhetoric of questioning and contemplation. She aims at once, as Paul Arthur once phrased it, 'outward to concrete facts and inward to a realm of mercurial reflection', where an 'argument must proceed from one person's set of assumptions, a particular framework of consciousness, rather than from a transparent, collective "We"' (Arthur 2003: 60). Sontag's understanding of film sound as providing indexical evidence correlates with her understanding of photographs as not merely statements about the world but pieces of it, 'miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire' (Sontag

1977: 4). Accordingly, Sontag builds a sonic landscape that is composed of unrelated vocal and audial elements recorded on location (prayers, running footsteps, radar beeps, machine-gun fire or radio broadcasts) and edited in rhythmic juxtaposition with abstract images of deserted battlefields, graveyards and supermarkets, open landscapes and clichéd icons of Israeli folklore. The soundtrack is restless and projects anxiety: radio broadcasts are heard on top of interviews, explosions and gunshots intrude upon mourning ceremonies, Arab singing is contrasted with Western pop music, and Muslim and Jewish prayers are heard simultaneously. She records the social fracture of a country confronted by its most dreadful nightmare – forces that work towards its destruction. The sonic topography Sontag captures is composed of a matrix of different categories of voice that not only does not accumulate into one coherent statement or point of view, but also requires careful listening to a diversity of vocal properties whose meaning is derived beyond the words themselves. Sontag forces us to listen to everything that the unsolvable political conflict constitutes in Israel and creates a synthesis that digs further and deeper; she accumulates audial traces, scars of the painful daily reality after the war: the rituals of mourning, the physical pain of wounded soldiers and the mental trauma of Israeli citizens.

At the same time, exploiting the film camera's revelatory powers was not the only function of documentary Sontag had in mind. 'To interpret is to impoverish,' Sontag writes in her 1966 essay 'Against Interpretation', 'to deplete the world – in order to set up a shadow world of meanings. It is to turn *the* world into *this* world. ("This world"! This world, as if there were any other)' (Sontag 1966: 7, emphasis in original). She was reluctant to embrace the conventional form of documentary and this took her to the meditative essay film, where she could engage in open ruminations instead of clear interpretations. Sontag's strategy clearly contrasts with Pasolini's interpretive voice-over that insinuates, in a rather openly declarative personal tone, a certain way to deplete a geography of its archaic values. *Promised Lands* expands on Sontag's reluctance towards didacticism and eschews the use of an expository narration that makes her voice explicit. Since Sontag did not know much about the complex ethnic texture of the young state of Israel and was not familiar with the subtle differences between economic classes, cultural dialects and political groups in the country, the film plays with her inevitable perspective of being an outsider. As an American Jew visiting Israel, Sontag 'comes across not so much as a director, but as a tourist in her own subject' (Hoare 2015), someone who has a vested interest in the place she visits from afar. While she excludes any explicit reference to her own voice in

this film, her poetically insinuated critical outlook, expressed through the prism of a visitor, becomes the existing testament by which her carefully reserved view of Israel can be judged. Sontag wishes not to surrender to an Orientalist impulse and simply enforce a foreigner's viewpoint on Israel, but to own up to the fluidity of perspective of a visitor who nevertheless has a vested interest in 'knowing' the place she visits, and consequently has to negotiate the actual and supposed gaps between foreignness and indigeneity.

Accordingly, such personal confusion is performed through the film's main strategy of sound dialectics, where Sontag's point of view is obfuscated but still elegantly coded into the contrast between two distinct male points of view that ruminate thoughtfully from both sides of the political arc: Yuval Ne'eman, an internationally renowned nuclear physicist, speaks about the roots of anti-Semitism and Arab hatred towards the Jewish people, while Yoram Kaniuk, a well-known writer, liberally pontificates about Palestinian rights and the country's dangerous shift from its socialist roots to an American-style commercial culture.[2] The deliberations of these two men run intermittently through the course of the film, both as disembodied voice-overs and on-screen personas, underscoring the 'deepening divisions within Jewish thought over the very question of Palestinian sovereignty'.[3] Sontag, who was influenced by the ideas of Marxist dialectics, surrenders completely to this Hegelian structure of reasoning and produces a rhetorical drama around these two opposing voices, each representing a partial truth. The cinematic drama she constructs aligns with what Bill Nichols identifies as documentaries with 'a more sophisticated grasp of the historical realm', films that 'establish a preferred reading by a textual system that asserts its own voice in contrast to the voices it represents or observes' (Nichols 1983: 648). The recruited voices of Ne'eman and Kaniuk work together with the surrounding diegetic sounds Sontag records and accumulate into a braided and multi-faceted authorial voice that is not singular, but is made of several individuals. In other words, and following Nichols's understanding of voice as a metaphorical sign of authorship, the weight of authority is divided equally between the dual narration and the input of various diegetic voices so that the film 'operates as an autonomous whole, as we do. It is greater than its parts and orchestrates them' (Nichols 1983: 648). The vocal interrelationships in Sontag's work (2003) are a particularly interesting illustration of the 'choric voice', proposed by Trish FitzSimons. Several individual voices provide different inputs and 'aid[s] consideration of documentary voice not as an expression of any single individual, but rather as a collection of braids, albeit often and

arguably ideally with a director's perspective forming the main channel at the centre of the braid' (138).

The pairing of two narrating voices exposes the patriarchal underbelly of *Promised Lands*, as its mode of argumentation remains 'trapped' within a Jewish male perspective. Not only are there no interviews with women, no actual presence of the female auteur, and only a few women appear in the film; this elision resonates with Sontag's subsequent claims, made in 2003, that 'war is a man's game' and the 'killing machine has a gender, and it is male' (6). Also missing from Sontag's film are nuanced representations and recordings of Palestinians, rhyming perhaps with Pasolini's decision not to grant Arabs a concrete voice. Excluding one individual shot, where Palestinians are shown crossing the Allenby intersection through Jordan, and not counting Kaniuk's vocal explanation of their suffering, their existence in the film remains 'shadowy and abstract' (Sayre 1974: 44). *Promised Lands* features only Jewish speakers while Arabs remain silent, deprived of a coherent voice and reduced to either exotic scenery (Bedouin herders who become part of a decorative landscape) or nameless bodies torn apart by the atrocities of war.

Where such elements testify to conservativeness, the film's radicalism is felt more strenuously in scenes that deal forthrightly with Zionist ideology. On one occasion, when she visits the wax museum in Tel Aviv, Sontag puts together a montage ofbizarre images from the museum that illustrates the Jewish victimhood discourse. On the visual side, she patiently and rhythmically oscillates between various rooms, in which establishing moments in Israeli history are represented in wax – the heroic death of famed soldier Yosef Trumpeldor, the Declaration of Independence, the Eichmann trial or the liberation of the Wailing Wall. As if such pictorial didacticism is not enough, the artificially crafted audio track further points to the specific ideological narrative the museum adheres to. A group singing of 'Shma Israel' (Listen Israel), a prayer that serves as a centrepiece of the morning and evening Jewish prayer services, accompanies the succession of images. It is then followed by another group singing of 'Jerusalem of Gold' (Yerushalayim Shel Zahav), an Israeli song written by Naomi Shemer that is often considered the unofficial anthem of Israel, describing the Jewish people's 2,000-years longing to return to Israel. The synthesis here between image and sound is so blunt and direct that it could only be interpreted ironically. Sontag crafts an implied criticism of the official Zionist discourse in Israel and its limitations. What constitutes collective memory is, for her, an artificially restraining narrative that stipulates dogmatically what is important and what is

the ideologically dominant version of Israel's history. Such a critical treatment of national history through group singing is also strikingly different from the individual voices of prayer, mourning and agonizing that Sontag accumulates throughout the rest of the film. The group singing here also functions as a literal demonstration of the choric voice strategy, as described earlier, where a mix of different voices becomes a Greek chorus that comments on reality as one collective voice.

At other times, Sontag carefully expresses her reservations through an edited contrast of individual voices and visual observations. She repeatedly attends funerals and memorial services held only a few days after the war, when the wound is still open and bleeding. The mourning rituals she is filming are forming historical continuity. They are bookended by the opening shots of the film, which show tombstones and funerals of victims from the First World War, and its last sequence, where tanks are making their way to the next conflict. War begets war, Sontag insinuates, and there is no end in sight to this bludgeoned struggle. More specifically, Sontag contrasts in the opening shot a BBC radio broadcast with images from a military funeral of British soldiers. The tombstones, which mostly state 1917 as the year of death, along with the sudden and forceful interruption of the daily broadcast, make an insinuated reference to the Balfour declaration of the same year, a historical mark of colonization and promised British support for a Jewish home in Palestine. A few minutes later, the Syrian minister of Education is heard speaking of the indoctrination of Arab students, reading verses of anti-Semitic hatred from high school books. Such a mediated vocalization of propaganda is accompanied by extremely disturbing images of burned corpses in fresh battlefields. At other moments in the film, such edited vocal associations are only traceable if we listen carefully to the soundtrack; the high-pitched voices of women crying in local funerals are followed by amplified voices of other women praying at the Wailing Wall, thus suggesting an inseparable link between a religious feeling of entitlement and the human price attached to it.

The most memorable, and also most troubling, scene in the film is its penultimate sequence, in which Sontag observes and listens to an experimental treatment for shell-shocked war veterans. In a post-combat rehabilitation clinic, we watch a doctor and a male nurse recreating battle noises of shooting and bombing for a drug-induced patient who seems to be in a state of trance. Banging drawers, slamming beds and shouting orders, they attempt to heal a soldier who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) using a terrifying

treatment of sound re-enactment. Sontag, who patiently observes the situation with penetrating and unflinching direct cinema methods, called the psychiatrist in charge of these therapies (which now seem more torture than therapy) Dr Strangelove. The scene, which certainly belongs to a very specific time period and to treatment principles that may now be totally obsolete, functions as a terrifying cinematic allegory of a haunted society and embodies the feeling of claustrophobia a nation experiences in a tragic moment. As viewers, trapped in Sontag's silent and merciless gaze on this patient twisting in pain and covering his face with a pillow, we are left with nothing else to do but to look at his suffering and listen to both the sounds that generate it and his own indistinct murmuring. The patient, who seems to be in a state of trance from the over-stimulation of sounds, can barely speak and only whimpers occasionally. The artificial sonic landscape created for him, composed of a tape-recorder playing back horrific elements from the battlefield and diegetic sound effects performed by the staff, merges seamlessly with the multi-layered sonic composition Sontag uses throughout the rest of the film. Regarding the pain of others, as Sontag would later title her last published book on war photography, means not only watching it in photographs, but also listening to it on film.

As a frightening testament to masculinity in crisis, the hospital scene was probably also the main reason behind the Israeli government's decision to ban *Promised Lands* in Israel upon its initial release, fearing it would damage the collective national morale.[4] After all, by showing a variety of unresolved complexities, this was a film that was ahead of its time. It neither imitated the nationalistic and heroic cinema made in Israel during the immediate post-Independence era, nor did it align itself with the worldwide wave of support the country was enjoying after the Six-Day War. Her conservative inclinations notwithstanding, what Sontag captured with her film camera – images of a 'beleaguered, paranoid, and terrified nation grappling with the traumas of persecution, war, pain, and death' (Toukan 2012) – was not easy to swallow. Nowadays, the film seems painfully and tragically prescient. It deals with a watershed moment of national rupture in Israeli history, rarely grappled with in either fiction or documentary Israeli cinema (Amos Gitai's *Kippur* (2000) being one striking exception), and provides rare documentation of the outcome of war from the perspective of an outsider. Sontag's film is a pioneering attempt to illustrate the severe moral crisis the country experienced following the war, and the resulting sobering-up from the euphoria of the Six-Day War. As a hybrid of sorts between news reportage and an anthropological essay film, *Promised*

Lands documents the sociopolitical catastrophe in Israel, the inevitable collapse of the Zionist dream as it is eaten away by the reality of a continued Jewish–Arab conflict. Rather than dictate a message, the film asks its audience members to experience, reminding them that 'every image', as Sontag wrote close to the end of her life, is first and foremost 'an invitation to look' (2003: 45). Taking it a formal step further with an ongoing attempt to record the vocalizations that register a traumatic moment, *Promised Lands* is an essayistic struggle that requires not only watching, but also listening to the physical and mental pain emerging from an historical moment of national rupture.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have identified the sonic techniques employed by Pasolini and Sontag in registering, responding and occasionally contributing to the sense of political unrest, scepticism and doubt that characterized their early visits to Israel. I have particularly focused on several permutations of the human voice in achieving this goal, whether as a site for communicating pain and authenticating trauma or a practice of authorial subjectivity that performs a position of foreignness. By embracing different modes of narration and employing international modes of address, especially the essayistic and observational cinema, Pasolini and Sontag offer the distanced gaze of outsiders that is nonetheless suffused with personal stakes in the location they visit. In terms of 'voice', the essayistic provides Sontag an inquisitive mode that is nonetheless marked by her own subjectivity, while the observational allows her to listen carefully to an array of vocalizations and present the viewer with a braided voice that becomes more than the sum of its parts. Pasolini, on the other hand, uses cinéma vérité to assert control with his voice-over and perform a sceptical tone that comments on a geography he had imagined otherwise. At the same time, Pasolini avoids easy didacticism by contrasting his own voice with others, thus formulating self-criticism of his own fantasy of an archaic Israel. Respectively, both Sontag and Pasolini are responding to their foreign perspective by employing different uses of the voice in documentary that testify to such outsiderness.

Furthermore, what makes these films interesting is how they nurture and complicate the gaps created between their filmmakers' initial expectations and what they actually achieved in the final projects. When listening to the vocal and

sonic landscape in these two documentary attempts, we notice how it dramatizes the complex and often turbulent relations between envisioning a place from afar and experiencing it in reality. Pasolini and Sontag came to Israel with different aspirations for observation, different legitimizations for their journeys and separate fantasies about the nature of their object of study. While Pasolini's vision of Israel as a reservoir of archaic forms was shattered by the disillusioning traces of capitalism and modernity he came across during his trip, Sontag's curiosity and vested interest in Israel as an American Jew made her practical findings even more distressing than what she had expected. Their fluidity of perspective, channelled in their films through different vocal strategies meant to negotiate their outsider point of view, marked them as foreigners in a place in which they were forced to reassess their fantasies and expectations.

Notes

1 A visit that would be documented in his essay film *Description of a Struggle* (1960). On the importance of Marker's film, along with Sontag's *Promised Lands*, to Israeli film scholarship on the basis of how both films serve as transnational extensions to the cultivation of a national Israeli cinema, see Landesman (forthcoming).

2 Remarks of this kind, it should be noted, were pretty rare at that time in Israel, when the debate about Palestinians' rights was practically non-existent within the public discourse.

3 Taken from the Fandor website's description of the film.

4 The hospital scene resonates in many ways with John Huston's *Let There Be Light* (1946), which provided an unprecedented look into the psychological wounds of the Second World War, specifically PTSD among returning soldiers. While Huston's film was produced by the US army in 1945, it was first publicly screened in December 1980, seven years after Sontag returned from Israel. As a penetrating look at a medical procedure, the hospital scene also echoes Frederick Wiseman's *Titicut Follies* (1967), the first direct and merciless documentation of the casually inhuman hospital treatment of the criminally insane.

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