

# A Voice for Moderation

## Chart's Israel's Barriers

### THE SLOPES OF LEBANON

By Amos Oz, translated by Maurice Goldberg-Bartura  
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich/Helen and Kurt Wolff, 240 pages, \$18.95

REVIEWED BY RON H. FELDMAN

**A**mos Oz is probably Israel's best-known man of letters. While his international reputation rests on such novels as "Black Box" and "Elsewhere, Perhaps," in his homeland he is equally well-known as a supporter of left-wing political causes.

His topical essays are among the best in Israel's highly politicized culture. The American public saw this facet of Oz's work at its finest with "In the Land of Israel," a collection of essays written after the 1982 Lebanon war.

"The Slopes of Lebanon" is a new collection of essays, similar in form to "In the Land of Israel." While the earlier volume was a cohesive collection of portraits that captured Israeli society at a moment in time, his new collection lacks the same focus and power. Written over the last eight years, these essays are mostly unrelated. Some are very short; others are long. Some, written in response to the Lebanon war, seem very dated.

It is especially disappointing that only two of the essays were written after the start of the Palestinian uprising — the Intifada — which has changed the terms of the conflict in the Middle East. Perhaps it is too difficult for books to keep up with the rate of change endemic to the region.

Most of the essays concern Is-

rael's conflict with its neighbors, particularly the war in Lebanon, its aftermath and the continuing confrontation with the Palestinians. One section that does not concern the Middle East is an extended review of Claude Lanzmann's 10-hour documentary film about the Holocaust, "Shoah," which Oz calls "the most powerful film I have ever seen."

While Oz's dovish view that the Palestinians must have a state of their own in the West Bank and

sic, overriding question is: How shall we live and not die? How can we save Israel from the threat of physical destruction and at the same time from the danger of moral and spiritual disintegration? ... If we can compromise, we will live, but if we behave like fanatics, we will die. All the rest is commentary."

The victory of the 1967 Six Day War, writes Oz, was "followed by the fall of the State of Israel and its replacement by 'The land of

**Amos Oz fears that Israelis are changing from egalitarianism and liberal democracy to racism and chauvinism**

Gaza comes through clearly, it is also apparent that he doesn't care much for the Palestinians except as an enemy with whom peace must be made for Israel's own good. Oz's main interest is with the character of Israeli society.

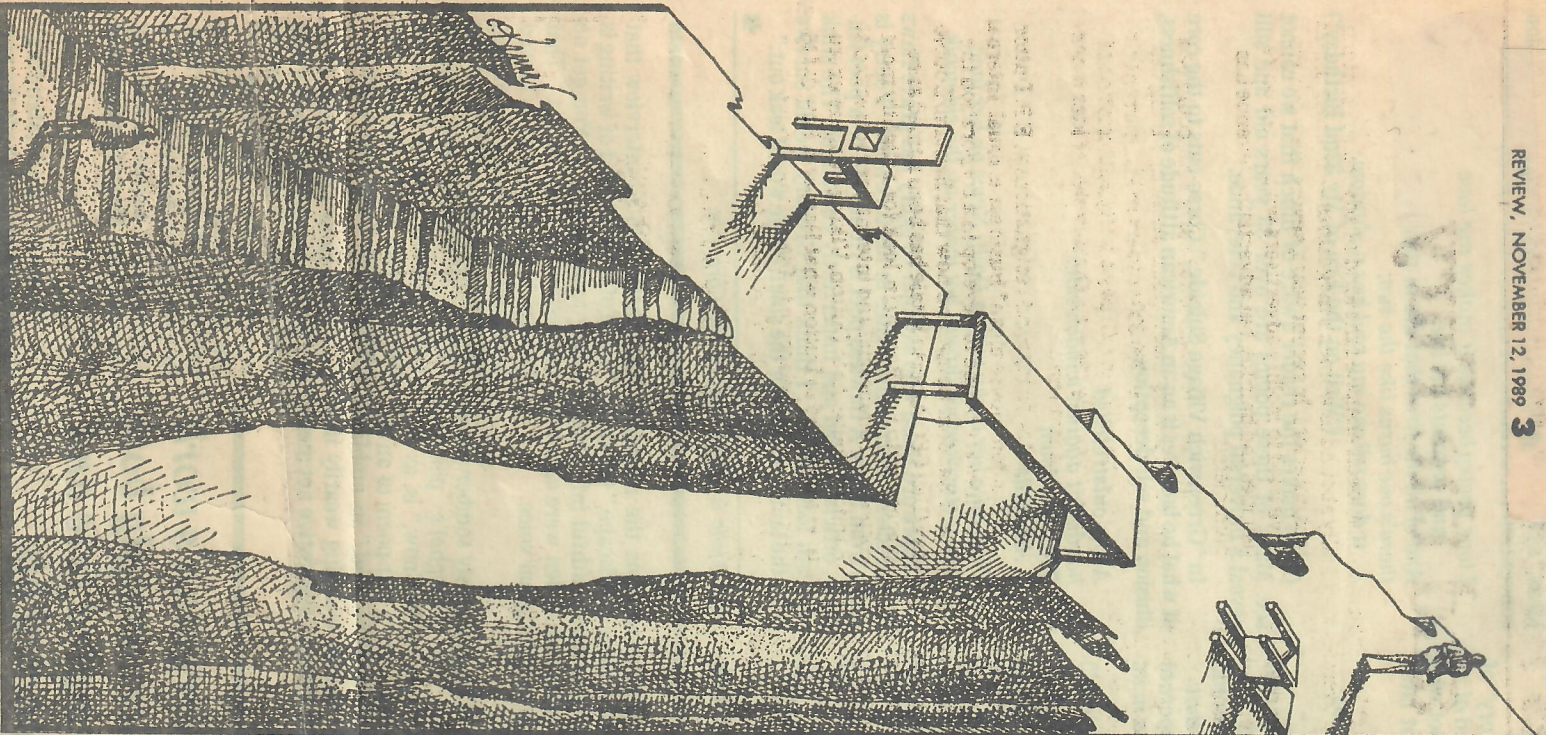
He is extremely concerned about the change of Israeli morals from those of egalitarianism and liberal democracy to racism and chauvinism. After relating the case of a Jewish settler sentenced only to "community service" for the killing of a Palestinian child, Oz writes:

"The question is not how we compare, morally, to many individuals and nations who preach morality to Israel. The primary, ba-

Israel." Now he feels "like an exile in my own land," a place pervaded by a "winning self-righteousness, which maintains that, because they were victims in the past, the Jews are morally entitled to turn others into victims today."

While the essays in "The Slopes of Lebanon" do not form a cohesive whole, this is a valuable collection. Oz's voice is a rarity these days, a passionate voice for moderation. One wonders whether it will be heard amid the cacophony of Mideast extremism. ■

Sequel critic Ron H. Feldman edited and introduced "The Jew as Parish," a collection of essays by Hannah Arendt.



BY CATHERINE KANNER/LOS ANGELES TIMES