Special Article

On Concrete and Stone: Shifts and Conflicts in Israeli Architecture

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Israel is unilaterally building a wall to separate itself from Palestine. Within its confines, its citizens have been led to believe, Israeli society can flourish without interruption. This article challenges this assumption by questioning the impact of the former — the external political border — on the latter — the cultural production of Israeli society. More specifically, it explores the formative effect of the shifting border between Israeli and Palestinian territories on the imagination and production of "authentic" Israeli architecture. In this light, architectural trends such as "Bauhaus," "regionalism," and "place," as well as building materials such as concrete and stone, have assumed political dimensions in Israeli society.

> *"I believe in the (national) Thing" is equal to "I believe that others (members of my community) believe in the Thing." The tautological character of the Thing — its semantic void, the fact that all we can say about it is that it is "the real thing" — is founded precisely in this paradoxical reflexive structure. The national Thing exists as long as members of the community believe in it; it is literally an effect of this belief in itself . . . the whole meaning of the Thing consists in the fact that "it means something" to people.*
>
> — Slavoj Zizek[1]

Over the last seven years Israeli construction crews have been erecting a meandering concrete wall along the edge of the territory Israel claims for itself. These pale gray concrete slabs are simultaneously one of the world's most literal, and symbolic, reminders of the importance of the border for a nation's sense of self. Within their confines, its citizens have been led to believe, Israeli society can flourish without interruption.

In this article, I set out to challenge this assumption. My premise is exactly the interconnectedness of the two — the external political border and the cultural production of Israeli

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society. More specifically, I explore the formative effect of the shifting border on the imagination and production of "authentic" Israeli architecture. Defining a certain body of architecture as Israeli is contingent, following Slavoj Zizek's reminder, on the communal belief that such a "Thing" as "Israeli architecture" exists. The article recounts the history of the search for such a definition, and describes the state of this effort after two Palestinian *intifadas* and Israel's unilateral "disengagement" from Gaza. It then demonstrates how the external political border continuously carves a more subtle cultural border that ridicules these efforts — or, to put it differently, threatens the cohesiveness of what Zizek calls "the national Thing."

Since the British Mandate, locating the territorial border between Jews and Arabs has been a tenuous project. Yet such a border is at the heart of the "symbolic resources" that both Israelis and Palestinians deem necessary to establish visceral ties to the land. Throughout history, one of the most explicit, and most meaningful, ways to bind people to the land, and to history, has been architecture.[2] Thus, in Israel, the building of structures and the landscaping of nature — from housing estates in East Jerusalem to national parks in the Golan Heights — has both framed the private domain of everyday life and conveyed a narrative of state power.[3] Indeed, architectural production has been of paramount importance in forging the sense of "a national home" that both Israelis and Palestinians need to secure their claims to a contested land.[4] From an Israeli perspective, therefore, the shifting border has become a site where adopted national traditions collide with those of a formative "other," a process

that constantly disturbs laborious attempts to establish the sense of a stable Israeli built tradition.

Looking back, the rapid shifting of Jewish territories in Mandate Palestine and of Israel's external border since 1948 has arguably been one of the main reasons why Zionist architectural production has experienced such great changes. In stylistic terms, these are typically depicted as a series of transitions: from early-twentieth-century romantic Orientalism to the strict white modernism of the interwar period[5]; from the bare, mass-produced buildings of early statehood to the exposed sculptural concrete of the 1960s; and from these periods of abstract formalism to the stone-clad neovernacular of the 1970s and 1980s (**figs.1–3**).[6] All of these well-meaning but schizophrenic efforts have made it enormously difficult for cultural critics, intellectuals, and even architects themselves to decide what constitutes Israeli architecture.

Habitual explanations of these shifts emphasize they are either the result of a mimicking of global architectural fashions or the product of government rulings.[7] In this article, however, I argue that they have been driven by the politicization of architecture itself.[8] The latter, like every cultural field in Israel, has been constantly defined from without by the geographies of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.[9] The article therefore investigates how the persistent efforts of Israeli culture to (re)locate the border have produced cultural codes that condition the center — the pursuit and dissemination of architectural knowledge. This process has rendered "professional" disciplinary operations — stylistic, historiographic and bureaucratic — politically contingent.

FIGURE 1. *"The Levant Fair: Census of our Growth," poster of the Seventh exhibition, April 30 to May 30, 1936. Source: The Zionist Archive.*

FIGURE 2. *Ministry of Housing,* Israel Builds, *cover image, 1958.*

FIGURE 3. *L. Gerstel, sketch for a housing project in Upper Nazareth. Source:* Israel Builds *(Israel: Ministry of Housing, 1977), p.42.*

To address this proposition, this article first explains the connections between the external, political border separating Israel and Palestine and the internal, cultural border distinguishing the Jewish nation from the Israeli state. The Jewish nation in this case is defined by ethnicity, while the Israeli nation is defined by civics. Historically, the 1960s "architecture of the place" (*makom*) — which married the modern architecture of progress and development with the vernacular architecture of history and authenticity — embodied this connection between nation and state. But building this sense of "place" — a wishful remedy to the alienating newness of the state — meant unilaterally shaping a highly contested territory.

The second part of the article then examines what happened to this unifying architectural paradigm once Palestinian uprisings (namely, the *intifadas* between 1987 and 2004) posed a competing claim to the territory. It describes the consequential retreat of the Israeli architectural imagination from the "authentic" sites of historical (yet often Palestinian) locality — the sites of stone and light — in favor of a nostalgic revival of the state's earlier, purely white and "uncontaminated" modern architecture — the simple concrete structures of the "Bauhaus Style." But, the article then asks, can the grand narrative of modern architecture maintain its unifying power in a postmodern, multicultural, settler society?

The third part of the article locates the resurrection of the modernist heritage within the current context of globalization and political occupation. It describes how politicians, historians, critics and architects have now chosen as the idiom of the state the "modern and sane" White City of Zionism and the "gray and mundane" Israeli project of early statehood. This choice, however, has political dimensions that reveal the ideological underpinnings of a seemingly neutral aesthetic and technocratic discipline. By disengaging from the "nationalist stone" of local, "authentic" architecture, in favor of the concrete of the modern state, today's advocates of this modernist heritage have weakened the nation-state that their Zionist forebears labored for decades to establish.

Central to this argument is a question: how is a nation-building project, as well as its disintegration, articulated in architecture? The architecture of the *makom* — of place and stone — embodied the nation-building project called *mamlachtiyut* (statism, or literally, "kingdomism") that began with the establishment of Israel in 1948. After 1967, the newly occupied territories helped architects decipher the "genetic code" of the place, but the nation-building project that required this code fell under polarizing forces. The ensuing "cultural war" opposed the religious, national and territorial pole of Israeli society to its secular, capitalist and democratic pole.

Anchored in the latter, architects and critics have recently articulated their position through the built landscape of Israel, its history and its preservation. In their view, the regionalism of stone is associated with "a national camp," while the modernism of concrete stands for "a peace camp," which has endorsed its properties as the indisputable

emblem of Israeliness.[10] The promotion of the "white" and "gray" architectures of the Zionist and Israeli projects thus indicates a process that ventures far beyond historiographical trends. It indicates, I argue, a growing internal border that is fabricated between the architecture of the Israeli state and that of the Jewish nation.[11]

A STATE OF CONCRETE, A NATION OF STONE

A celebrated 1950s poster helps clarify the tension between the Hebrew state and the Jewish nation **(FIG.4)**. It presents Israel to prospective tourists in a sharply dichotomized iconography. The scene on the right of the poster gives the architectural gist of a Zionist settlement: cubical white public buildings, identical horizontal windows, small white residences, red pitched roofs, and a white water tower. The complex is framed by bright green lawns with ordered cypresses in both background and foreground.

FIGURE 4. *G. Rothschild and Z. Lipman,* Israel, *1950s, lithograph, 50 x 70 cm., Ministry of Tourism advertisement. Source: the Zionist Archive, identification by Alec Mishory.*

Above is a blue sky. This view, the contours of which are intentionally faded, appears as a dream receding into the calm whiteness on which the name of the new state, Israel, is printed in bright blue Hebrew letters.

A large praying figure painted in transparent browns covers the left half of the poster, creating a background for the featured tourist sites and serving as a counterpart to the whiteness on the right. The figure is wrapped in a thin veil (presumably a *tallit* — a praying shawl), which gives it a feminine feel in spite of its engagement in the manly act of blowing the *shofar*. Halfway down the veil, the figure dissolves into a light-brown depiction of Jerusalem's walls and the Tower of David, sites symbolizing the ancient nation of Judea. The antiquated edifices form a horizontal continuum with the white buildings on the right. But this continuity is interrupted by the presence of the figure, whose body delineates a clear border between the whiteness of the Zionist *state* and the brown tonality of the Jewish *nation*. In forging this dichotomy, the poster provides a lens through which one can historically analyze the interdependence between the two divisions: an external border separating Israel and Palestine, and an internal one splitting state and nation.

A Labor Zionist seeing this poster would read the notion of "nation" and "state" progressively from left to right. The brown figure (with Latin letters spelling "Israel" down its veil), would represent the Jewish diaspora: the person blowing the *shofar* is taking part in the Jewish ritual of the high holidays, opening the heavenly gates and allowing the Jewish people to ask for forgiveness and redemption. But the "redemption" that Jews have longed for, this reading suggests, is no longer a dream; it has come true on the right side of the poster, in the form of a modernist Zionist state. Its fulfillment makes the brown diasporic figure obsolete.

This obsoleteness is part of the triple negation that underlay the cultural production of Labor Zionism.[12] First was the negation of diaspora life in favor of the construction of "a national home" (eventually in the form of a nation-state). Second was the negation of the bourgeoisie in favor of a working agrarian society. Third was the negation of the Orient (linked with an emerging Arab nationalism) in favor of a new collective image, which would generate the *"sabra"* myth — the stereotype of the Israeli-born, the native of the Land. By extension, this triple negation shaped the physical collective image of Jewish settlement in Palestine. Since the Zionist movement had emerged in Europe, remote from its realization in Palestine, the quest of Jewish people for a national identity in Mandate Palestine could not rely on an immediate past or local culture. The absence of a shared visual heritage thus allowed the region to be construed as a *tabula rasa*. This prepared the ground for the positivist Zionist project, whose visual mold was set by modern architecture, the declared epitome of universal rationality.[13]

The white village on the right of the poster, the quintessence of the Zionist project, was a spatial experiment in which architecture accelerated the historical revival of the Promised Land. Accordingly, contemporary architects claimed that "[t]he new village is built . . . on the ground of scientific suppositions, in a modern way, or more correctly, it is based on hypothesis" **(FIG.5).**[14] This scientific legacy struck a special cord in the context of the Yishuv: the stark white house was conceived as the proper traceless home for the uprooted Jew, "an apartment free from past memories" **(FIG.6).**[15]

But once Israel was established, another way to read the poster emerged — one in which "nation" and "state" could be apprehended simultaneously. In this view, the brown-clad figure with the *shofar* and the brightly colored Zionist settlement are both inseparably located in "the land of Israel." This was the position of the ideology of *mamlachtiyut* — literally, "kingdomhood." Significantly, however, the symbols of the ancient *nation* did not quite manage to fuse with those of the modernist *state*. The nation, as an ethnically defined entity, was based on primordial sentiments; and to root their national
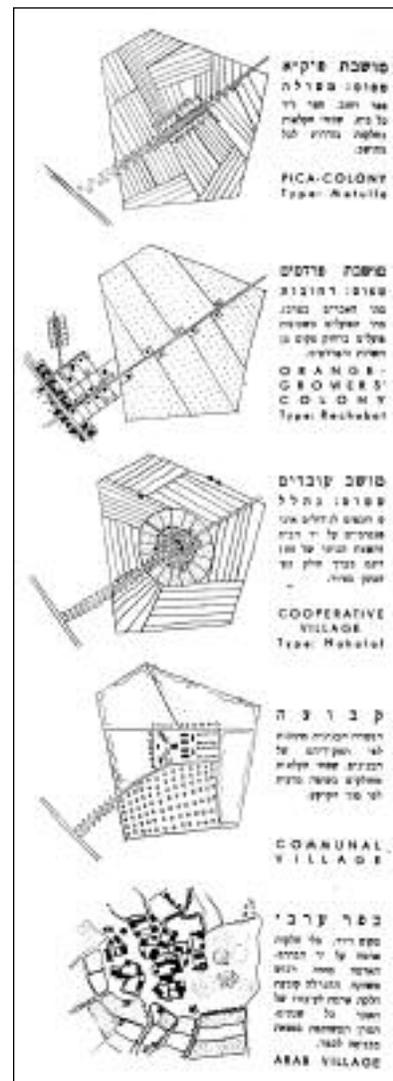
FIGURE 5.
J. Posener, "Villages in Palestine," Habinyan *3 (1938), p.3.*

FIGURE 6.
D. Karmi, apartment building. Photo: Y. Kalter.

FIGURE 7. *Y. Segal, "The Arab Village in the Galilee," cover image,* Tvai *1, 1966.*

community, Israelis turned to the ancient monuments and archeological findings that would prove their historical claim to the land. By contrast, the state, as a political-territorial enti-ty, was based on sovereign rule and civic sentiments; and to foster a view of the state as part of the developed world, Israeli officials enacted a modernization project that emphasized for-ward-looking infrastructure, housing and industry. It is no wonder, then, that the symbols of the nation (the Jewish fig-ure and the Old City of Jerusalem) could not easily mesh with the symbols of the state (the modernist settlement that con-quered the arid landscape of Palestine).

The dichotomy within the poster thus came to nourish the impasse of a country trapped, as Adriana Kemp elegantly put it, by "the incongruity between the political space of the sovereign state and the cultural space of the nation."[16] The architecture of *mamlachtiyut* was an effort to conceal this rift: it aimed to be modern and progressive, but also local, authentic and timeless. It sought to cross the white/brown boundary — a divide that was not only conceptual, but also political and territorial.

These efforts to localize Israeli architecture were launched in the late 1950s by a group of architects born or raised in Israel. This generation saw in the newly acquired Israeli terri-tories (including the shores of the Mediterranean, the hills of Judea, the Galilee, and the Negev) a real homeland — unlike the abstract, literary one nurtured by the founders of Labor Zionism. Labor Zionists had chosen modern architecture as their emblem, with its connotations of a new beginning — a departure from the bourgeois (or Oriental) life in the diaspo-ra, which, it was now believed, had previously contaminated Jewish life. This younger *sabra* generation criticized the mod-ern, stripped architecture of the nascent Israeli state for disre-garding the Zionist promise of a national home.[17]

Addressing the notion of place (*makom* in Hebrew), the younger architects claimed that Zionist modernism had failed to create a place to which the new immigrant could belong, and with which she could identify. Nor did it fulfill

the desire to "naturalize" Israelis in this ancient region — to devise an architecture "of the place," a place to which they wanted to belong, as well as possess.[18] The alternative was found in the Palestinian vernacular, which came to typify not only an ideal communal built environment, but more impor-tantly, a natural, harmonious and uncontrived extension "of the place." It provided for Israelis a formal archive of indige-nous culture and a type of structure that they believed bore the "genetic code" of the land itself (**FIG.7**). This archive grew in 1967 when Israel expanded its territory during six days of military combat, by the end of which it imposed new borders on neighboring Arab countries. Shortly after, Israeli architects started transforming the newly occupied territories — Jerusalem, in particular — into a testing ground for inter-action with authentic vernacular architecture and timeless historical landscapes (**FIG.8**).

FIGURE 8. *M. Safdie, Block 38, infill, the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. Completed in 1979. Source: Moshe Safdie Archive.*

In the years that followed, it seemed as if the architecture of *mamalachtiyut* was being realized. Architects who identified themselves as modernists created buildings for a centralized state market that were mass produced and thoroughly modern, yet were designed with forms and materials that evoked the Palestinian vernacular and the imagined serenity of biblical Palestine. East Jerusalem, in particular, was covered with concrete structures clad with stone — emulating traditional masonry volumes, spans, arches and terraces. Inspiration also came from an international discourse criticizing the Modern Movement, in search for a lost authenticity, for architecture as it has always been. By adhering to this discourse, Israelis succeeded in locating themselves on the cutting edge of both professional and national demands.

The nation and state were to celebrate their ultimate symbolic union in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. In 1948, after a long siege, the latter had fallen into Jordanian hands. Yet, Israelis saw in the 1967 reconquest of the Quarter and the return to the Western Wall — the holiest site for Jews worldwide — not only historical repair, but more significantly, a messianic redemption uniting the people of Israel with their glorious biblical past. The immediate overwhelming euphoria that swept almost all Israeli Jews indicated the extent by which the national narrative of the *mamlachtiyut* project — the return of Jews to their biblical land — was successfully rooted in the minds and hearts of Israel's Jewish citizens.

The prime location for articulating such a unitary vision of nation and state was the site of the Hurva synagogue, a slot of land already dedicated by the Ottomans to Jewish ritual in the sixteenth century. The large Ashkenazi synagogue built there three centuries later was the most symbolic building of the Jewish population in the Old City. It was therefore also a desired target for Jordanians, who tore it down as soon as they seized the Quarter in 1948. Israeli architects conceded the task of rebuilding the Hurva to Louis Kahn, who was known in Jerusalem as "the king of American architects."[19] With

this choice they hoped for no less than a world architectural paragon, a symbol of the validity of their national project.

Kahn suggested erecting a stone building that would enwrap a concrete structure and bring the connection between the two — stone and concrete — into poetic harmony.[20] Architect Ram Karmi, who brought Kahn to Jerusalem, later explained that the formal clarity of the proposal emanated from Kahn's respect for materials and his firm decision to "never use [a material] contrary to the material's merits and its 'will'."[21] Because of his famous respect for what the brick, stone or concrete "wants to be," Karmi explained, Kahn's stone walls had firm wide bases and narrowed as they rose; meanwhile, the concrete structure started narrow and gradually widened, eventually hovering over the synagogue and becoming the roof of the entire space (**FIGS.9–11**).

Karmi further described the slit Kahn proposed between the interior concrete pillars and roof and the tapered stone walls of the exterior, a slit wide enough to let the Jerusalem sunbeams penetrate, to light and animate the space of this bold twelve-meter-high structure. Kahn was famed for his ingenious use of light, and according to Karmi, it was this intangible building material that could weld oppositions between real physical elements. As he explained:

> *The yellow Jerusalem stone would bounce the sunbeams and cast a golden shade of light, while the gray concrete structure would bounce the light in silver shade. This would create in the building an impressive and fascinating play of light in gold and silver colors, which would thus enable the expression of stone and of concrete.[22]*

Khan's intention was thus not to mesh stone and concrete, but rather to keep their material integrity. The focus was on the human experience of this space, which was not necessarily tangible but certainly transcendental. The sublimity of refracting light, Karmi deduced, would have transformed the two materials into one — a symbol of the compatible unity and interdependency of nation and state.

FIGURE 9. *L. Kahn, the Hurva Synagogue, 1968 proposal, plans and section. Left: women's gallery. Right: synagogue hall. Source: D. Cassuto, ed.,* The Hurva Rebuilt: Proposals and Criticism of the Rehabilitation of the Hurva of Rabbi Yehuda the Hasid Synagogue, *1970.*
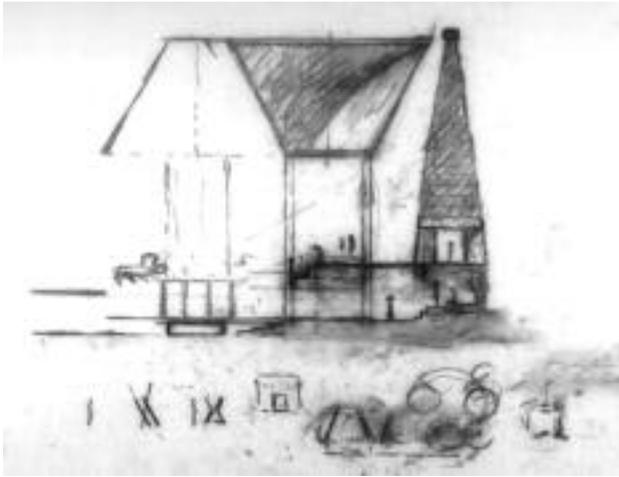
FIGURE 10. *L. Kahn, Hurvah Synagogue, section through the external tapered stone wall and the interior concrete structure with its hovering inverted pyramid, pencil drawing. Source: Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission*
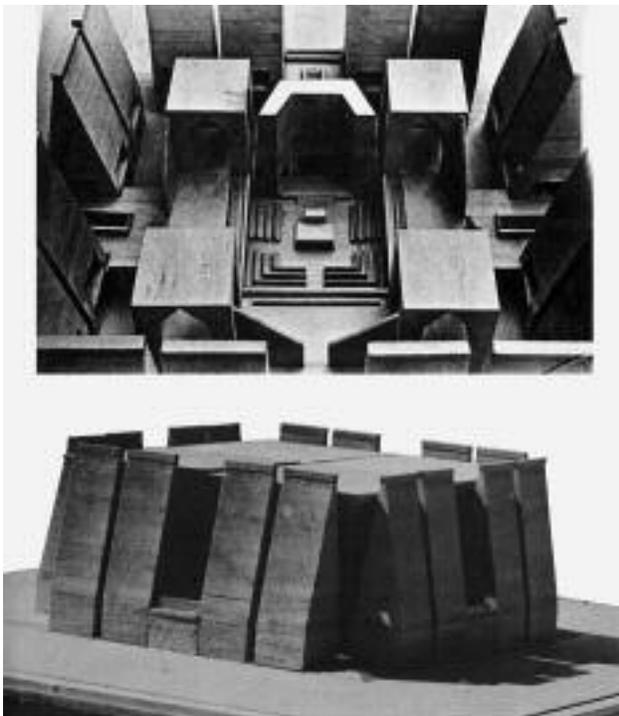

FIGURE 11. *L. Kahn, the Hurva Synagogue, 1968 proposal, images of model. Source: D. Cassuto, ed.,* The Hurva Rebuilt: Proposals and Criticism of the Rehabilitation of the Hurva of Rabbi Yehuda the Hasid Synagogue, *1970.*

The inability to erect a new Hurva, however, eventually confirmed the impasse impeding the "architecture of place," the hallmark of the *mamlachtiyut* project. And during the decade between 1967 and 1977 the initial widespread support

for this movement lost ground.[23] One reason was that it was becoming apparent to a growing number of Israelis that their nation-building project was not only a national enterprise, but also a colonialist one. Hence, the success of the national campaign to consolidate the spaces of the state and the nation met its colonial complement, the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Thus began the erosion of Israel's apparent national unity.

During the 1980s the seam between nation and state that so much attention had been given to mending in the 1960s and 1970s gradually unraveled. If the Left and Right of Israeli politics during early statehood had been split between the social and economic creeds of the socialists and liberals, the so-called Six Day War of 1967 focused the Left/Right rift on the occupied territories. New and powerful civic movements took opposite poles: "Peace Now" advocated a Palestinian state within the confines of the Green Line, while "the Block of the Faithful" insisted on Greater Israel as the historical and sanctified biblical inheritance of Jews.[24] Ironically, it was the removal of the external border between Israel and Jordan that paved the way for the emergence of an "inner" border between these two camps — one side advocating two states (Israel and Palestine) on either side of the Green Line, the other advocating an inclusive Jewish nation redeeming its "land" from Arab possession.

In architectural terms, this meant that just when architects got the opportunity to interact with the tangible place for which they longed — complete with the history, authenticity, landscapes, and built materials of this ancient land — the legitimacy of the combined national-colonial project that had triggered this architecture started to fade. During the 1970s and 1980s architects continued to build in the localist paradigm, despite their discomfort with its slightly too nationalist "Jerusalemism."[25] But severe cracks in this architectural program appeared once the hyphen between "nation" and "state," the space within which this architecture was carefully located, began to weaken. The cracks became most visible with the onset of the Palestinian *intifadas* of 1987–1993 and 2000–2004.

ORDINARY CONCRETE VS. SPIRITUAL STONE

The two *intifadas* had the effect of politically charging the places from which the architects of the 1960s and 1970s derived their inspiration for local architecture. Already during the first *intifada*, it had become difficult to regard Arab villages as mere landscapes of stone and light, of picturesque Mediterranean alleys and squares. They ceased to serve as architectural precedents for biblical localness. And as a result of the armed conflict, Israelis could no longer regard Palestinians as generic "Arabs" living in the typical vernacular "of the place."[26] Rather, local Arabs became fierce competitors for the authentic territories of Judea and Samaria. The very

stones of the hitherto desired "place" were now thrown at Israeli soldiers by Palestinian youth. The conflict spread to Jerusalem and the West Bank — the characteristic sites of authentic localness — and made it difficult to find in their vicinity the consensus necessary for casting a national heritage.

Consider, for example, the following impasse. "Encounters: The Vernacular Paradox in Israeli Architecture," the official exhibition prepared on the occasion of Israel's Jubilee in 1998, aimed to cement Israeli architecture into "a permanent dialogue between Arabic architecture and her Israeli cousin: the first — rooted in the vernacular, ancient, and formed by native skills passed from father to son; the second — rich with knowledge and technology, but struggling to find its connection to the place."[27] Accordingly, its curator Ami Ran (also the editor of Israel's most popular architectural periodical, *Architecture of Israel*), displayed examples in the exhibition of contextual architecture, "of the place" — which he claimed Israeli architects had finally found. Of course, such a "dialogue" never existed on equal ground; it was clearly a product of modernist utopian presumptions.

A couple of years later, in the midst of the second *intifada*, and immediately after Palestinians ruined the Tomb of Joseph in Nablus, the false promise of Ran's Arab-Israeli dialogue was revealed. And in an editorial, "On Neighbors and Brutalism," Ran wrote about the destroyed Tomb of Joseph: "It is hard to believe that stone, a traditional building material in this part of the world, has become a weapon [used to destroy] peace. The sudden transformation right before our eyes of skilled craftsmen (casting, plaster and tile artists) into lynch mobs was shocking."[28] Here Ran painfully exposed the collective blindness of the architectural profession, which wanted to appropriate Palestinian material culture and crack its secret code for local connectedness, but which also assumed that this could be done through a peaceful exchange. That longing for traces of nativeness in the built environment was, however, not limited to Israelis. It was a pervasive post-World War II phenomenon, with various manifestations in late-modernist schemes around the world.[29] But in Israel this precarious desire was thoroughly enmeshed in the hard, cruel world of politics.

In light of this escalating conflict (and concurrent ambivalence about the proper role of Jerusalem in the Israeli state), Tel Aviv — the first city built by Jews, and a purely "modern" city devoid of both Palestinians and reminders of the Orient — came to epitomize for Israelis a site of calm and nostalgic recollection.[30] The modern age, ironically, has during the last two decades become the "good old days"; and this, in turn, has meant that the "history of modernism" is itself not without historiographic ambivalence.[31] Indeed, it has become a curious, and urgently embraced, heritage, one which allows embattled Israelis to dispense with the menacing immediacy of contemporary life in Israel (**FIG.12**). On the occasion of the "Bauhaus in Tel Aviv" national celebration in 1994, for example, Michael Levin wrote in the city's local newspaper:

FIGURE 12. *"Bauhaus in Tel Aviv," advertisement for the 1994 events.*

The agreement between the aesthetics and vision of the new society and the society's spiritual rebirth was almost complete. In the realm of architecture, Le Corbusier proclaimed this as the birth of a new architecture, which was more or less creating something out of nothing. In the realm of society, politics and even personal life, the leaders of the Zionist movement and the Jewish yishuv proclaimed this moment the birth of a new society and a new man. This too was the creation of something out of nothing.[32]

Tel Aviv, the "first Hebrew city," which mythically "grew out of the sands," through this discourse became a prototypical Zionist settlement. The "nothingness" on which Tel Aviv was founded undergirded the ultimate white utopia: it was a city with no prehistory — and therefore indisputably and authentically Zionist. Paradoxically, in the search to redefine a secure Israeli past, it was the modernist channel, ahistorical by definition, on which the longing for the architectural roots of Israeliness was focused.[33]

More importantly, however, this discourse established the foundation of a modernist architectural frontier that has become a vital part of the so-called "First Israel's" sense of

self.[34] In the context of growing multiculturalism, of escalating political conflict, and of a political Right imbued with a sense of messianic religiosity, the old elite — Israeli-born of European descent — had to secure its own cultural codes and social status. The modern frontier, which is celebrated most spectacularly in Tel Aviv, has separated the secular Israeli elite from both the Palestinian Other and Jewish nationalism. In this vision, Palestinians and settlers could contend with each other, while Tel Aviv is dressed in white for the various celebrations of its historical newness.

The retreat into the modernist origin of Israeliness only grew deeper as the maintenance of normal, everyday life became impossible. "The Israeli Project" exhibition, for example, opened shortly after the onset of the second, Al Aqsa, *intifada* in 2000.[35] It displayed architecture of the 1950s and 1960s that was, according to curator Zvi Efrat, "Israeli in the fullest sense of the word, even if it was not born here." This architecture's wide distribution during early statehood made it, according to Efrat, "the pattern of the landscape of the homeland."[36] Ester Zandberg, an influential architectural critic, added: "These structures shaped both the country's landscape and consciousness during a period when the 'sanctity of the people' was not embodied in ancient stone walls and the tombs of pious figures, but rather in purposeful, innovative buildings, secular to the core" (**FIG.13**).[37]

Indeed, in the present atmosphere, architecture and building materials are often charged with political and anthropomorphic rhetoric. Ran (who desires an Israeli architecture appropriate for "a society eager for both functional convenience and relevant spiritual content"[38]) has insisted that "stone has always been a friendly building material," and "[t]hat is all we've got."[39] In contrast, Efrat has firmly stated,

"the cement is no less local and no less natural than the stone. It is just less traditional, less Arab and less messianic."[40] While stone has been identified with Jerusalemite architecture at least since the British Mandate, and Tel Aviv's peeling cement has been celebrated in Israeli artwork and poetry from the 1960s on, it took the *intifada* to trigger the personification of these building materials, which architectural critics positioned at polar ends of the Israeli cultural war.[41] This split is a perfect example of how even the seemingly rarified field of architecture can be shaped by ideological battles. Even the banality of architectural materials can be enlisted to further advance positions on each side of the split in Israel between advocates of the democratic state and those of the Jewish nation.[42]

But the architects who built Jerusalem in stone, who advocated for localism during the late 1950s and 1960s, were also an integral part of the "secular to the core" socialist elite of "the first Israel." Could it be, as Efrat suggested, that these architects "changed colors" soon after the 1967 war? And if they did, how can this help locate them in this polarized battle over building materials, where democrats push for a Hebrew state against the nationalist longings of Jewish fundamentalists?

In the attempt by architectural critics of the last decade to split the architectural career of an entire generation into its concrete and stone periods, I read an effort to resurrect an Israeli identity not yet contaminated by conflicted Orientalist and religious overtones. This attempt subordinates, however, a comprehensive architectural program that preoccupied Israeli architects from the late 1950s through at least the late 1980s to the dictates of the current *intifada* era. Zandberg has identified the crux of 1960s and 1970s trends by asking, "what does this desperate desire to blend into the environment stem from?" Efrat responded by claiming that this desire is rooted in

FIGURE 13. *E. Zandberg, "The Lost Dignity of the Shutters,"* Ha'aretz Weekend Supplement, *October 27, 2000.*

. . . the diversion of practical concern with localness to an imaginary discussion taking place today about to whom history belongs and who owns this place. In the 1950s and even earlier, back in the 1930s, our foreignness in the Levant was regarded as obvious by the "Bauhaus" architects. They made an effort to develop an Israeli identity that was neither biblical nor Oriental. . . . In my opinion, concern with localness after 1967 reflects the release of dark tendencies that are fundamentalist in essence and in total contradiction to the non-tempestuous, non-Arabized, healthy logic of early statehood.[43]

This observation puts into sharp relief the question of what is "home" for Israelis, and what frontier that "home" is constructed against. Can a home be resurrected that is obviously foreign, a branch of global culture in the Levant? Can new borders be defined for a revised — global, secular, and internationally oriented — Israeliness?

JUDEA IS A NATION, TEL AVIV A STATE

A commentator recently reminded readers that three thousand years ago, after King Solomon died, there was much strife within the Israeli community. The result was the separation between Judea and Israel. Why not, asked the writer, separate Israel once more and establish a new secular state around greater Tel Aviv known as the Dan Block? Citizens of the State of Dan would enjoy complete civil freedom and no ethnic tensions. Relieved from the financial burden brought on by settlements and a huge security budget, they would enjoy economic prosperity and focus their energies on education, welfare and culture. "It may sound like a hallucination," the writer admitted. "Maybe, but what a pleasure it would be to hear the sentence, 'This is Rubi Rivlin from built and glorious Jerusalem which is bound together firmly' and know that it is some minister in a different, faraway country" **(FIG.14)**.[44]

This commentary bluntly exposes the fact that many Israelis detest the city of Jerusalem. And it begs the question: Where are the boundaries of Israeli collectivity, which are defined by the "cement" pole of the architectural map (i.e., the white utopian city and the gray Israeli project) located? Etienne Balibar has suggested that

. . . the "external frontiers" of the state have to become "internal frontiers" or — which amounts to the same thing — external frontiers have to be imagined constantly as a projection and protection of an internal collective personality, which each of us carries within ourselves and enables us to inhabit the space of the state as a place where we have always been — and always will be — "at home."[45]

FIGURE 14. *"Long Live the State of Tel Aviv," in* Ha'ir, *May 8, 2003.*

The debate indicates a problem within Israel's national program. The present external frontiers of the state of Israel — in sharp opposition to the country's besieged borders during the 1950s — can no longer be imagined as the internal frontier of a "collective personality" **(FIG.15)**. Israeli society is politically fragmented, economically privatized, and culturally diverse. From Israel's disputed position of power it is no longer possible to maintain any unified, or even desired, image of an Israeli citizen that can be a model for such a collective.

Nevertheless, the human need "to inhabit the space of the state as a place where we have always been" still allocates a privileged position to the history of architecture. And the current historiography can narrate alternative architectural roots for the state that do not necessarily intermingle with the messy vision of a self-contained nation. In like fashion, Efrat explains about the 1950s and 1960s: "As long as the Mapai [the leading Labor party] utopia survived, solidarity, whether real or imagined, was a supreme value, perhaps even more important than nationalism. It was a sort of survival instinct that forced a clear discipline on architecture as well."[46] Indeed, in the current political atmosphere, the imagined collectivity of early statehood would most likely survive better had it dispensed not only with the Orient but

FIGURE 15.
"Growth against Siege,"
poster published by
Mapai (the Land of
Israel Workers Party),
1955. Reproduced in
B. Doner, To Live with
a Dream *(Tel Aviv:*
Tel Aviv Museum,
1989), p.177.

There was a yearning for the country, for those who lived
in it and left in it the remains of their meager houses, the
ashes of their bonfires and their wells. The longing is
naive, it is not touched by the joy of appropriation that
took place here after 1967. The past is longing, the broken
clay pottery is connection, not a deed of property.[49]

This late reflection underscores Tzafrir's own path toward a career in biblical archeology. For him, this yearning for the country (*eretz*) and the place (*makom*) was inextricably tied to a yearning for a secure past — a longing that biblicized the country in its joint search for locality and history.

But, as David Lowenthal famously phrased it, modernity turned the past into "a foreign country," and modern nation-states found in this past fertile ground to negotiate their imagined origin.[50] Thus, Israel's nation-building project has utilized the past as a modern resource. And the scientific accuracy of archeology has helped Israelis to imagine and consequently experience their biblical past as accessible and real. The demands of nationalism, however, extend beyond heritage. Thus, Israel has had to embark on several simultaneous projects — modernizing, antiquating, and settling the same territory — in order to fulfill the national formula of people emerging together out of a collective past, sharing the same language, culture and territory, and facing the future in joined forces.

The foundation of Israel was based on this inner contradiction between the praxis of a settler society and the ideology of a people returning to the land of their biblical origin. When Zionists embarked on the colonization project that prepared the way for the foundation of Israel, they sought a new home for European Jews who had no metropole — no home-base to retreat to. The chosen "home" was therefore "the land of Israel" — the country of Jewish longings, where Jews had always lived as a minority under a series of different rulers. But the liberation of Jews and the settlement of Jewish refugees were inextricably tied to the dispossession of Palestinians and the occupation of their territories. In this context Israel as a settler society rendered the past it desired not only foreign and insecure but tenaciously hostile. It was a past that was threatened by Palestinian histories, imaginations, and interpretation of the same piece of land.

As a result of this conflict, Israelis could not sit peacefully on their thorny territory. Like nation-states worldwide, Israel has always desired to conceal the process of "traditioning" its national landscapes — in this case, presenting its antiquity as a mirror of the Jewish biblical past.[51] Tradition is at its powerful best when it is taken as nature, as ready-made, as a solid and stable reality that has always been there.[52] But the Israeli concealment of its "traditioning" has been caught in the predicament of the conflict, clashing with Palestinian traditions of the same place. It has forced Israelis to constantly negotiate and always reconquer not only the place — the physical territory — but also the past that imbued the place with its existential validity.

with the entire national project, reverting instead to a glorious socialist past of pervasive solidarity.

But this past, some would argue, was no less national or colonial than Israel after 1967. The socialist Mapai Party established the Israeli settler society. Its leaders committed themselves to the Zionist colonization of Palestine in the early twentieth century, helped found Israel in 1948, and continued to settle Jewish immigrants on the ruins of the Palestinian society until they lost political power in 1977.[47] It was Mapai that insisted on Jerusalem as Israel's capital, despite international protest. And between 1948 and 1967, when Jerusalem was divided between Israel and Palestine, its Western, Israeli part included numerous Palestinian residences that Israelis declared "deserted property" and appropriated for Jewish reuse.

The ambivalences that disturb such urban landscapes in Israel/Palestine have similarly shaken the basis on which the model of the native Jew took shape. The *sabra* youth of early statehood invested enormous efforts in becoming native — in appearance, language, social conduct, and built environment. They wished to see in their habitat a mirror of connectedness to the place. This desired connectivity, which is taken for granted by those born into it, indicated the extent to which the model of the young *sabra* was itself the result of an insecure possession of place.

Yoram Tzafrir, a member of this *sabra* elite, lucidly elaborated the trappings of his generation, which he identifies with the protagonist of S. Yizhar's novel *The Days of Tziklag*.[48] Yizhar described a group of Israeli warriors who conquered the country not only with weapons but also with a Bible and a plant guide, seeking traces of biblical sites beneath the broken clay pottery of deserted Arab villages. Touring the country with a pocket Bible was so common, Tzafrir explained, because

Until 1967 it was mostly archeology that had been entrusted with the mandate of authenticating the narrative of *mamlachtiyut* (statism/kingdomism), of meshing the Israeli state with the history of the Jewish nation.[53] In 1967, however, when Israel seized East Jerusalem and the vast territories of the West Bank, the "past" became more accessible and tangible, and the project of "traditioning" the pristine, Orientalized landscapes took a new turn. In particular, it animated an architectural program that had attempted to localize, authenticate and biblicize the modern landscape of Israel since the late 1950s.[54]

The architectural conquest of the Israeli "place" produced pervasive codes about "Israeli architecture." It had to be technologically updated yet rooted in its location; it had to be sensitive to topography, light, and building materials, and playful with simple, mostly cubical volumes; and it was geared toward communal and eventually urban life.[55] The strength of these codes for "Israeli architecture" was the consensual belief in what they communicated — a "naïve longing." Shared by the professional elite, this "yearning" and "longing" for "connection" was eventually caught in the crossfire of politics. Thus, a project of desire for an ever-evasive place was suddenly subjected to the harsh split between a Hebrew state and a Jewish nation. And the awkward search to unify these disparate ideologies was at the core of the Israeli (national) Thing — the nation-building project of *mamlachtiyut*. At present, its complementary "architecture of the place" can hardly survive the tension between the conflicting pressures brought on by nation-building, settler society, and the international ramifications of the conflict with Palestine. Subjected to a privatized market that weakens the nation-state, these forces erode the capacity of Israel to produce a unified architectural message that can mend the ruptures opening in its political body.

POSTSCRIPT

As I write these lines, a fence is ceaselessly being erected to separate Israel and Palestine. Its corporeal absurdity has caught the attention of numerous illustrators. In an Israeli caricature, two lively construction workers in blue overalls are lining up huge concrete slabs to build the tall, winding wall. On the left side of the wall, a mobile crane and extra slabs of concrete are depicted; on the other side, set at a distance, is a silhouette of what is clearly an Arab village — massed houses, arches, and a single minaret. In the midst of the commotion, the worker on top of the wall pauses for a second and asks: "Which side is the temporary state?" **(FIG.16)**.

This little image captures pertinent symbols: the labor heritage, its activism, and the very Israeli mix of existential insecurity and potent power that constantly and hopelessly creates new "facts on the ground." The new "fact" is the fabricated separation: concrete and activism on the Israeli side,

an authentic vernacular on the Palestinian side. Israel, in this and similar images, has happily conceded "locality" and "history" to the Palestinians. It has given up its entire architectural program of "united Jerusalem," eager to find instead a new modernist past of its own. Indeed, the new fence not only separates Israel from Palestine; it also metaphorically pushes apart the dichotomized halves of the *mamlachtiyut* poster with which this paper opened. Four decades of attempts to marry the brown figure with the *shofar* and Jerusalem's walls to the white modernist settlement and its green lawns have reached an impasse. From the point of view of current historiographical practices in Israel, which have already produced a large body of work on "white" architecture, and which is now producing extensive works on "gray" brutalism, the white Zionist settlement of the poster seems to have unilaterally divorced the Jewish brown figure — a state of cement withdrawing from a nation of stone. The state in this story is no longer interested in a history that is more than a century old.[56]

Tel Aviv perfectly suits this mandate. "Born" out of the Mediterranean sand dunes exactly one hundred years ago, it offers Israel a secular alternative to the sanctified place of Jerusalem and the occupied territories. While Tel Aviv celebrates its centennial, we are left to ponder the role of architectural history in claiming the (white) city as the alternative capital of the Israeli state, and its unilateral divorce from the Judean nation and its capital, Jerusalem of Gold(en stones.) Consider, for example, the definition of interwar modernism as a *historical* style. Until the 1980s, to be modern meant to constantly address the demands of the present. The radical new conception of modernism as a cherished past bears an important message: it provides an embattled society with a

FIGURE 16. *D. London Dekel, "The Daily Caricature,"* Haaretz, *July 17, 2002.*

reassuring heritage. It implies that the state can have a past of its own, separate from the ancient and contested past that legitimizes the nation.

This past, however, stands for a very particular set of values, those held by "the first Israel," members of the inner circle, the salt of the earth. Their émigré parents shaped the state prior to the huge immigration of European refugees and Arab Jews. The 1930s orderly landscape of white modern residences, and the 1950s landscape of development into which the population of "rooted" Israelis absorbed a population of "gathered exiles" twice its size, evoked feelings of utopia, purpose, order and modesty, a sense of control over a landscape that multiculturalism has since sabotaged.

It is useful to examine the values historians embed in the purely white, or authentically gray, architectural heritage in relation to a recent comment by Jean Louis Cohen urging architectural historians not to shy away from the political circumstances and implications of their research. History, Cohen claimed, "is always navigating between the temptation of knowledge disconnected from today's fights and the legit-imization of current practice."[57] The current position of architectural history and criticism at the two poles of the Israeli cultural war on religion and democracy, secularism and occupation, may cast a shadow on the efficacy of this navigation.

It would be naïve, as Cohen rightly commented, to assume "an autonomous research strategy . . . immune from the interiorization of politics by scholars themselves."[58] At present, however, the "fruitful anxiety" Cohen advocates — an experience enhanced in light of the constantly shifting territorial border between Israel and Palestine — contributes to a further distancing of nation and state, stone and concrete, as opposing ingredients of a dichotomized reality.[59] Instead, the current condition of shifting, nonconsensual, and constantly negotiated borders may inspire a nuanced history of interwar and early statehood modernism that is less entangled in current practice. A history that explores the space in between these poles — the fading away figures, public spaces, events and buildings that escaped official historiography — may inspire an architectural discourse that challenges the cultural war, rather then solidifying its problematic premises.

REFERENCE NOTES

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21. D. Cassuto, ed., *The Hurva Rebuilt: Proposals and Criticism of the Rehabilitation of the Hurva of Rabbi Yehuda the Hasid Synagogue* (Jerusalem: Israel Ministry of Education and Culture), p.30.

22. Ibid.

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27. A. Ran, "Encounters: The Vernacular Paradox of Israeli Architecture," *Architecture of Israel*, Vol.33 (Spring 1998), p.17, English edition. The exhibition was produced on the occasion of Israel's Jubilee in 1998 by the Public Affairs Division of the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For an online catalogue, see http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFA+Publications/Photo+exhibits/Encounters-+The+Vernacular+Paradox+of+Israeli+Arch-+Intro.htm (accessed July 11, 2009).

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32. M. Levine, "In Praise of the White City," *Ha'ir* (Tel Aviv), May 20, 1994.

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37. Ibid.

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40. Zandberg, "The Lost Dignity."

41. By opposing concrete to stone, contemporary critics are rehearsing a Mandate-period crusade to identify Zionist building with concrete construction, underlying which was a campaign against Arab predominance in the building market.

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44. E. Zvuluni, "Medinat Gush Dan" ("The State of the Dan Block"), *Ha'aretz*, June 25, 2002.

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47. See, for example, S. Binyamin, "Absent Presentees," *Theory and Criticism*, Vol.29 (Fall 2006), pp.81–101 (Hebrew). On the case of mixed cities, see O. Yiftachel and H. Yacobi, "Urban Ethnocracy: Ethnicization and the Production of Space in an Israeli Mixed City," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol.21 No.6, 2004, pp.673–93. For the case of Tel Aviv, see M. LeVine, *Overthrowing Geography: Jaffa, Tel Aviv, and the Struggle for Palestine, 1880–1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Recent scholarship has also focused on the seeming solidarity of Mapai rule that neglected to respect the multiculturalism of its immigrant society, particularly the culture of Arab Jews, see Y. Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion and Ethnicity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

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