# Israeli Housing and Nation Building: Establishment of the State-Citizen Contract, 1948–1953

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This article examines the formation and consolidation of a housing-based social contract between state and citizens during the first years of Israeli national sovereignty. Calls for a renewal of this contract, including demands for equal access to housing, underlay the mass social unrest in the country during the summer of 2011. Initially, the creation of Israel in 1948 brought a housing "big bang" to Israel-Palestine. Mass Jewish migration both demanded vast housing solutions and brought a mass loss of housing among the Palestinian population. The year 1948 also marked a watershed in the use of housing as a nation-building strategy within the Zionist movement, transforming it from an effort based on accumulating self-governing subjects to one obliged to house newly empowered citizens within a citizen-legitimized political framework. The article shows how these conditions ultimately led to the articulation of a state-citizen contract that included a "housing regime" aimed at transforming immigrants into proper citizens. Despite the centrality of the interests of the state in these activities, however, the article also explores how housing programs were planned and produced in direct response to continuing demands by citizens. The consolidation of "regime" and "subjects" as the opposing ends of modern governance, as suggested by Foucault, was thus deeply contested. The article studies three different housing schemes developed during Israel's first five years, a period curiously little studied in architectural terms.

The mass social unrest which erupted in Israel in the summer of 2011 involved claims for a renewal of the contract between the Israeli state and its citizens. The protest focused explicitly on housing as the crux of this contract — namely, the state's responsibility to house its citizens, and the citizenry's commitment to the state via the active participation of residency. How has housing become the central and decisive component of the relationship between state and citizen in Israel, capable of drawing hundreds of thousands into the streets? By examining the three state housing policies developed during Israel's first five years and the popular response to them, this article traces the transformation of Israeli nation-building after independence from a process based on staking a claim to the land to one based on providing decent housing for new citizens.

The advent of the modern nation-state marked a shift in the basis of governance from the divinely legitimized authority of kings to the rule of institutions "in the name of the people."[1] As Michel Foucault has shown, the shift from absolutist-state to nation-state required the development of institutional frameworks for governing modern subjects.[2] Within this context, housing the common citizen became a key basis by which nation-states could legitimize their rule.[3] Indeed, in some instances today the provision of housing may be even more important than the administration of courts or parliament as a locus for nation building.[4]

My larger research, from which this article is drawn, has explored the relationship between nation, citizens and housing using a historical examination of Zionism as a regime of housing.[5] In Israel, housing has been the cornerstone of the nation-building project, based on rerooting Jews in the homeland and producing loyal citizen-subjects. Above all, Zionism's task to materialize a national home where none existed for millennia has involved connecting subjects and homeland in order to form a sovereign political entity legitimated by these people. This task has been addressed by associating national home and individual housing.[6] It has also been addressed by having the state assume a mediating role in the relationship between citizens and homeland.[7]

In historical terms, Israeli sovereignty marked the consolidation of Zionist nation building into a state housing regime that was used to manage the relationship between the young nation-state and its citizens. This article explores the initial fragility of this sovereignty and the impact of the governed — the masses of postindependence immigrants — on the actions of the state as they materialized in housing. Much has been written about the mass housing efforts and the planning project of the "long 1950s" in Israel. But little attention has been paid to the first five years of primarily temporary and ad-hoc architecture and planning, a fermenting ground for future definitions of the Israeli "good house."[8]

During its first years of independence the Israeli state faced what it perceived as three different threats to its sovereignty. It addressed these with three different housing policies over the course of five years — an exceptional number of planning schemes in such a short period. This rapid turnover attested both to the extent of the governmental crisis as well as to the perceived value of housing as a means to address it.

The first threat to Israel's sovereignty was perceived to be Israel's "enemy" citizenry, Arab-Palestinians who had not been "swept away" during the 1948 war. Israel's first housing policy, geared to this threat, included harnessing pioneer immigrants to settle vacated Arab-Palestinian houses and lands in primarily agricultural border areas. The second perceived threat was posed by the Jewish Agency (JA) and Jewish National Fund (JNF), whose continued involvement in postindependence settlement threatened to create a state within a state and subject Israel to the sovereignty of world Jewry. This threat was addressed through the *maabara* housing policy, which removed immigrants from JA-controlled reception camps and settled them on the land in temporary single-family dwellings, with the goal of cementing their allegiance to state and country. The third perceived threat was that of the immigrants themselves, who refused the state's definition of proper housing and proper citizenship, thereby rejecting the regime and threatening the very legitimacy of the state. This threat was eventually addressed by means of a plan to disperse the masses across the country and accept the immigrants' understanding of a proper housing regime as comprising permanent, well-serviced dwellings for all. It was the development of this housing-based social contract that fundamentally stabilized political order in the country through the succeeding years of nation building.

Why did the state of Israel move toward the provision of housing for all as a means to enforce its sovereignty? What and whom did those housing schemes serve? And why, despite the obvious failure of two housing policies in three years, did Israeli leaders still consider housing an effective means to address governmental crisis? This article will address these questions via study of the housing policies during Israel's first five years of independence. This study is important because it spreads the fan of this historical period to locate the step-by-step consolidation of the Israeli housing regime, which ultimately set the terms for the contract between state and citizen that prevails to this day.

## NATION BUILDING IN THE AGE OF SOVEREIGNTY: ACCESS TO LAND, CITIZENRY AND PLANNING

The Zionist nation-building project changed dramatically following the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. Most importantly, statehood removed previous restrictions on Jewish immigration and access to land. The U.N. resolution of November 29, 1947, on the partition of Palestine initially declared the division of its lands into separate Jewish and Arab-Palestinian states.[9] However, its immediate consequence

was to confer a Jewish legal right to parts of the "ancestral homeland" by virtue of the establishment of a nation. This form of landownership, through the instrument of the nation, was dramatically different from pre-statehood landownership by individual legal monetary right. By default, then, the U.N. resolution implied the creation of a housing regime dramatically different from that of pre-statehood Zionist settlement.

The attempt by the U.N. to partition Palestine to settle competing claims to it as a homeland quickly fell apart. The result was civil war in British Mandate Palestine, and eventually the 1948 war between the new state of Israel and its Arab neighbors. During this war Israel enlarged its territory at the expense of areas designated for the Arab-Palestinian state and nationalized these as parts of the Jewish homeland. Furthermore, the war forced large numbers of Arab-Palestinians from their lands and homes.[10] Access to land, a paralyzing issue for prestate Zionism, was thereby removed as a problem in the new state of Israel.

Another significant consequence of Israeli independence was control over state borders and the ability to take in immigrants without international restrictions.[11] Masses of Jewish immigrants flocked to the country following independence, doubling Israel's population in three years (1948–1951).[12] Israeli leaders, especially Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, identified these new immigrants as citizens: both a legitimating factor for Israel's sovereignty and a source of manpower for nation-building. This relationship between immigration, citizenship, and nation-building had already been tested in the pre-independence controversy surrounding Jewish immigration — for example, through the capture of the ship *Jewish State*, carrying 2,664 illegal immigrants, by the British in 1947.[13]

Facing the burden of caring for so many homeless new citizens, some called for restrictions on immigration. However, early national leaders such as Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir insisted that Israel should admit every Jew willing to immigrate, since housing the Jewish people was the state's raison d'être.[14] Israel's Declaration of Independence thus tied political independence to immigration and housing. The connection was inscribed in a formal law, the Law of Return, enacted in July 1950, which acknowledged the right of every Jew to immigrate and become an Israeli citizen.[15]

Statehood, by necessity, introduced comprehensive planning to Zionist efforts to house immigrant Jews. Planning had first been conducted for the JA and JNF during the British Mandate, primarily by the architect Richard Kauffmann. But these early efforts had not included a national or even regional component, being limited to the realm of the settlement (as evident in the *kibbutz* movement).[16] According to Rachel Kallus and Hubert Law-Yone, "While Zionism aspired to produce a new space fit for a new society — a new environment for the 'new Jew' — the shape of this environment or the model by which it would be designed were never given any thought."[17]

Within the new Israeli state, the Governmental Planning Administration, which operated under the Ministry of Labor, was initially formed in March 1949 and put in charge of master planning, general planning, and housing.[18] The architect Arieh Sharon, a *kibbutz* member, Bauhaus graduate, and designer of David Gen-Gurion's house in Tel Aviv, was appointed head of the department.[19] The very idea of planning at the time required facing the challenges posed by mass immigration and the need to assert control over state lands. Initially, it thus required housing incoming citizens while staking a claim to land and securing national borders; however, as this article will show, these goals changed rapidly as perceptions changed with regard to the most pressing threats to national sovereignty.

## FIRST HOUSING POLICY: AGRICULTURAL-BORDER SETTLEMENT

The first Israeli housing policy, enacted during the year-long 1948 war, was directed primarily at staking a claim to land. It identified the state-citizen contract as based on access to the homeland, the same principle that had guided nation building prior to statehood.[20] During and immediately after the 1948 war, the main threat to this contract was perceived to be the same as before statehood: Palestinian claims to the same homeland. Therefore, the same policies were proposed to address it — namely, a regime posited on claiming land through rural settlement and agricultural cultivation. As during the early years of Zionist settlement, immigrants, as future citizens, were expected to settle along the borders as pioneers and contribute to this goal.[21] The only physical, economic and cultural planning for the absorption of immigrants therefore took place in the context of securing the nation's borders.[22]

In July 1949 Prime Minister Ben-Gurion outlined the government's course of action toward agricultural settlement in the four upcoming years. Planning guidelines included settling 150,000 immigrants in 500 new settlements, forming a "belt" of border settlements that would play a key role in border defense and help safeguard state sovereignty over territory.[23] Government guidelines also specified that these settlements would engage in intensive agricultural production to supply food to a growing population.[24] The "Plan for Rural Settlement" of March 1949 additionally stated that the government would act to direct immigration to villages and rural settlements.[25] The first round of national planning thus aimed to continue the framework of pioneer Zionist rural settlement. As such, it reflected an ethos of rooting oneself in the homeland via toil on the land, and it maintained the Zionist tradition of using settlements to establish political borders.[26]

After the war, this policy was further directed at Palestinians who had not been "swept away," and who remained

within Israel's borders as potentially hostile citizens. While most of Israel's Jewish population was located at the center of the country, most of its Arab-Palestinian population was located at its periphery. This postwar condition was enforced by a military regime that restricted movement by the remaining Arab-Palestinian population.[27] As a result of the war, some 400 Arab-Palestinian agricultural villages had also been emptied of their inhabitants, as had numerous Arab-Palestinian houses in the country's main cities.[28] Settlement on the country's periphery among the "enemy" Arab-Palestinian population as well as in vacated Arab-Palestinian housing was therefore defined as part of the pioneer enterprise.

As part of this initial planning effort, housing was provided to immigrants based on the principle of self-help, a core principle of Jewish nationalism premised on the idea of self-governance. Self-housing and settlement based on limited, provisional support by the settling agencies had been employed by Zionist pioneers since the 1910s. This continued to be the main housing policy after independence, posited on the above-mentioned definition of immigrants as pioneer citizens. The self-help housing options available to immigrants upon arrival in Israel included housing vacated by Palestinians and core housing provided by the state. The latter often took the form of building materials (primarily timber and concrete blocks) for autoconstruction of basic dwellings which might later be expanded through the initiative of the immigrants themselves.

## THE PIVOTAL CASE OF THE RAMLA DISTRICT

Ramla was a pivotal case of Israel's first housing policy, which has now pretty much been forgotten by scholars.[29] Ramla was a border district not only because it adjoined the Jordanian-held West Bank, but because its two main population hubs, Ramla and Lydda, were important Arab-Palestinian cities until 1948. The Ramla area had been designated in the U.N. partition plan as part of the Palestinian state, and its conquest by Israeli forces was a major event of the 1948 war.[30] However, after the war, the area still contained a significant Arab population, composed both of remaining residents and internal refugees, and it was considered an internal border zone. While located at the geographical center of the country, the Ramla district was thus allocated a significant number of "pioneer" settlements and new residents. The state housing regime combined all three initial strategies to curb the Arab-Palestinian threat in the Ramla district: settlement in vacated housing, border *moshav* settlements, and urban subsistence farms.

Most scholarly attention to the mass housing of immigrants has focused on the northern and southern districts of the country.[31] But data presented by Haim Darin-Drabkin has indicated that the population growth in the Ramla district by 1955 exceeded all other areas of Israel. Indeed, it amounted to 2,143.5 percent, significantly surpassing any other part of the country as a site of immigrant settlement (**FIG.1**). Comparatively, the population of the Jezreel district
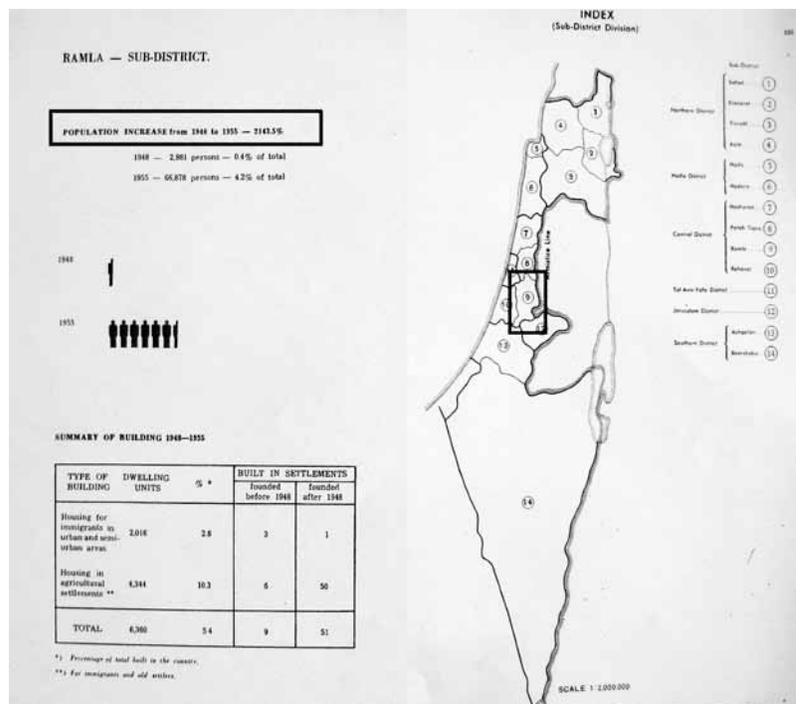


**FIGURE 1.** *Data concerning population growth and the number and type of new settlements formed in the Ramla district, 1948–1955. Highlight boxes by author. Source: H. Darin-Drabkin,* Housing in Israel: Economic & Sociological Aspects *(Tel Aviv: Gadish Books, 1957) pp.224-52.*

**FIGURE 2.** *New immigrants from Bulgaria living in a room in a vacated house in Jaffa.  Photograph by Fritz Cohen.  Source: NPC, reprinted by permission.*



**FIGURE 3.** *New immigrants from Yemen moving into vacated houses at Aqir, 1949.  Photograph by Hugo Mendelson.  Source: NPC, reprinted by permission.*

grew by 181 percent, that of the Beer-Sheba district grew by 1,779 percent, and that of the Tel Aviv district grew by 87.2 percent.[32]  The Ramla district can therefore be identified as the most significant area for immigrant settlement during the early years of Israeli sovereignty.  Moreover, the majority of the new settlements there were based on agriculture, the activity best suited to forming new citizens and protecting the nation's borders, as defined by state leaders.[33]

Immigrants were settled in the Ramla district in one of two areas: the internal urban border with Israel's Arab citizenry and the external rural border with Jordan.  In pursuit of these goals, the state housing regime initially directed immigrants to reinhabit vacated houses in the old city of Ramla.  Some 6,000 Jewish immigrants eventually moved into this area, often dividing up houses between several families.  Thereafter, the Ramla district was settled using two other dwelling types: subsistence farms right outside the old city and agricultural immigrant *moshav* settlements.[34]

*Vacated Housing.*  Some 600,000 Palestinians were displaced from homes and settlements during the war, and these vacated properties became a significant resource to house Jewish immigrants.[35]  The state housing regime encouraged immigrants to install themselves in these properties, and some 124,000 immigrants employed this strategy between May 1948 and December 1949.[36]  However, the reuse of vacated housing initially came as a result of actions taken by the immigrants themselves, prior to the institution of state control.  It was thus largely unplanned, as can be seen by the initial demolition of some properties by the authorities to prevent Arab-Palestinians from returning to them.[37]

Since vacated housing was essentially up for grabs, immigrants who arrived in the first few months after independence found better quality, or at least intact, properties to occupy.  Immigrants arriving shortly thereafter found houses of lesser quality or houses that had been partially destroyed dur-

ing the war.  Moreover, the pace of immigration and the extent of housing need soon led to the subdividing of houses to serve several families, each occupying a room (**FIGS. 2, 3**).[38]

The legal status of vacated property was first addressed by the Deserted Areas Order issued by the interim government on May 16, 1948.[39]  The order declared all property left by its owners as state property.  Vacated housing was thereafter managed by the Amidar governmental company, which charged rent to immigrants who settled in it.[40]  However, by December 1949, vacated Arab housing was no longer available, and the state housing regime was forced to develop other solutions to house the continuing flood of immigrants.

*Immigrant Moshav Settlements.*  In February 1949 a special meeting of the *moshav* movement was convened in Ramla to propose the absorption of immigrants in *moshav* settlements under the slogan "from the camps to the village."[41]  Later known as the Ramla Convention, the meeting included the Israeli leaders David Ben-Gurion and Levi Eshkol, who accepted the call of the *moshavim* enthusiastically.[42]  The *moshav* framework was a cooperative model for family-based agricultural farms which seemed more appropriate than the *kibbutz* for immigrants who were Zionists but not necessarily Communists.[43]  *Moshav* settlements were to circle the towns of Ramla and Lydda and protect the area from infiltration across the Jordanian border.

One such *moshav* was Tirat Yehuda, founded in 1949 on lands of the former Palestinian village of Al-Tira.  Al-Tira lands had been nationalized by the state, and in order to ensure that Arab refugees would not be able to return and claim the village, the state sold them (along with other lands) to the JNF, whose founding edicts determined that all lands under its control be used for Jewish settlement.[44]

Tirat Yehuda's plan, prepared by the Settlement Department of the JA, included 35 agricultural farms and 22 subsistence farms (**FIG. 4**).  The plan followed design principles

**FIGURE 4.** *Tirat Yehuda plan, 1951–1954. Remains of the village of Al-Tira at the top right-hand corner of area scheme. Source: ILA, reprinted by permission.*
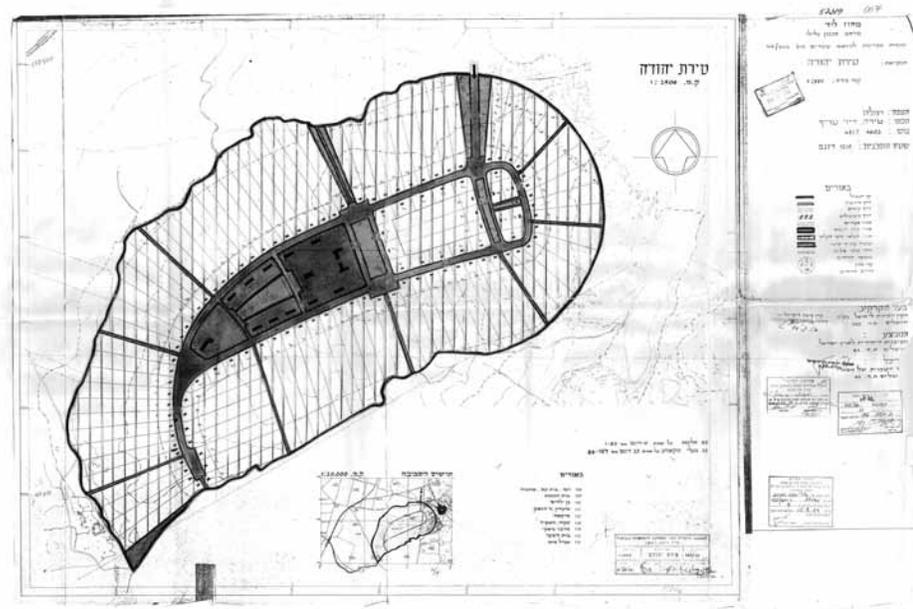
formulated for the JA by the architect Richard Kauffman, developed as part of the JA's involvement in the planning of agricultural *kibbutz* and *moshav* settlements in the 1920s. Tirat Yehuda was thus organized around a core of public services (school, clinic, meeting hall), surrounded by houses and farms. Behind each member-family's house lay its agricultural fields, with the plots and houses in the inner core, east of the public buildings, being designated as subsistence farms for professionals living in the *moshav* — such as the doctor, the teacher, and the agronomist. The Tirat Yehuda plan was submitted in 1951 and approved in 1954, after all its houses were already standing and its fields cultivated.[45]

The pioneer-settlers of Tirat Yehuda initially occupied the vacated stone and earth houses of Al-Tira **(FIG.5)**. They were employed by the JA in road construction until new houses and fields were laid out. Then, in 1950, the JA supplied them

with concrete blocks for autoconstruction of permanent housing. Core houses were 4 by 8 meters with a roof of concrete tiles, but additions were soon made to them from scrap materials to provide spaces for storage, kitchens, and workshops.

The border location of Tirat Yehuda meant an everyday reality of attacks by infiltrators across the Jordanian border. These attacks generally amounted to sabotage and the theft of crops. The most lethal attack on Tirat Yehuda, in June 1953, included shooting and throwing a grenade into one of the houses, resulting in the death of one resident **(FIG.6)**.[46] In the eyes of the state, the activities of the Tirat Yehuda immigrants — building their own homes, securing the border, and cultivating the homeland — marked them as well-formed citizens.



**FIGURE 5.** *Moshav Tirat Yehuda, 1949. Photograph by Zoltan Kluger. Source: NPC, reprinted by permission.*



**FIGURE 6.** *Tirat Yehuda house after the attack. Photograph by Brauner Teddy, June 10, 1953. Source: NPC, reprinted by permission.*
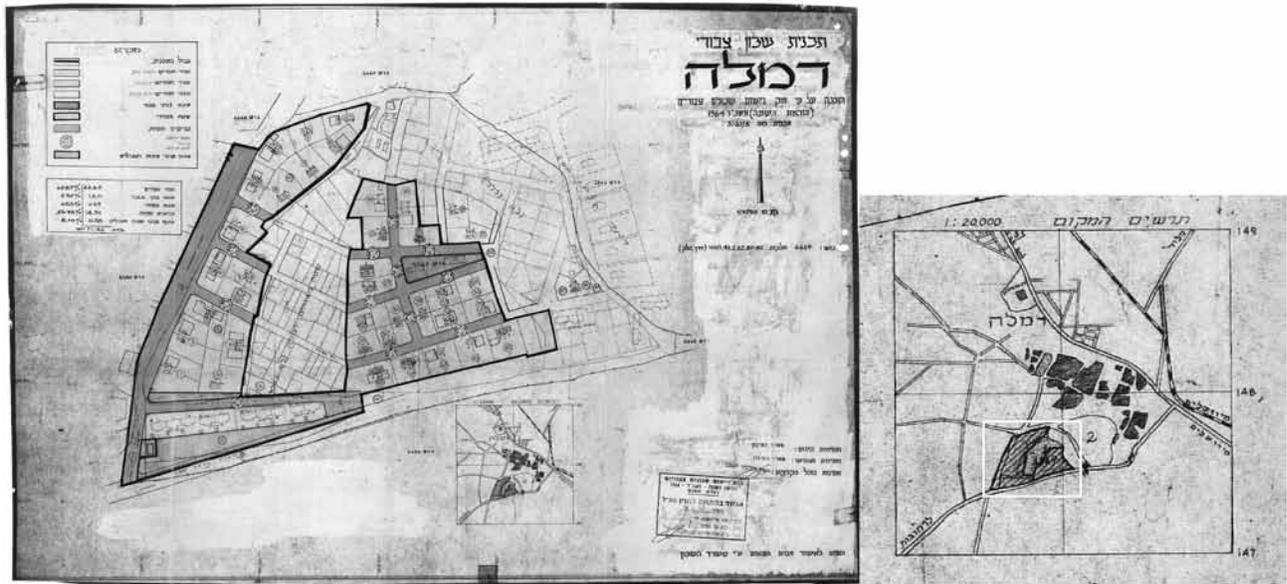
**FIGURE 7.** *Ramla public housing plan 3/57/5 of 1967, prepared to meet the 1964 law of public housing registration.  The plan regulates the 1964 condition of original shacks (in right plan) and new structures (in contour).  It is important to note that the plan was outlined long after the neighborhood had been populated, for the purpose of registration.  The housing preceded the planning by some fifteen years.  Highlight box by author.  Source: ILA.*

*Urban Subsistence Farms.*  The internal border of the Ramla district — namely, the Arab city of Ramla itself — was addressed by planning several new Jewish neighborhoods to surround and contain it.  The first of these (and a laboratory for the Ramla urban plan) was the Amidar Shacks neighborhood, erected right outside the Arab city in early 1950.  It combined urban housing and land cultivation in the form of self-help subsistence farms (**FIG.7**).  The neighborhood included some fifty wooden shacks, each serving two families.  Accordiong to this plan, each family was allocated a living space of 8 by 4.2 meters (34 square meters) and a plot of land 18 by 40 meters (0.07 hectares).  The half-shack was considered core housing, and included two rooms and a water tap.  Since the neighborhood was not connected to a sewage system, toilets were located at the far side of the plots, served by septic tanks (**FIG.8**).  The shacks were assembled on site from timber purchased from Finland.[47]

The small plots represented the fulfillment of the Zionist dream.  They provided each immigrant family with a subsistence farm and a main source of livelihood during the decade-long austerity period instated by the Israeli government from 1949 to 1959.[48]  People who had access to land



**FIGURE 8.** *One of the shacks still standing at Massada Street, no. 35.  Note the small structure serving as toilet at the very back of the plot.  Photo collage by author.*

and to some agricultural skill could support themselves by growing vegetables and raising livestock. Soon families also began to expand their living space on these plots by means of autoconstruction, adding structures to accommodate additional family members, married children, and small production workshops.

By means of core housing and access to land the Israeli housing regime offered the new citizens the prospect of becoming pioneers and "good subjects." However, in exchange they were required to contribute to the national goal of border defense.

## THE HOUSING CRISIS IN IMMIGRANT CAMPS: VIOLATION OF THE STATE-CITIZEN CONTRACT

The direction of most resources and planning efforts to "pioneer settlements" in order to stake a claim to the land and curb the perceived Palestinian threat came at the expense of providing the masses of new citizens with appropriate housing solutions.[49] It thus quickly became apparent that Israel's first planning policy was primarily designed to address yesterday's challenges — namely, the pre-statehood challenge of access and domain over land. By comparison, the plan largely ignored the new reality of nation building: the immense challenge of housing, which involved setting new terms for the state-citizen contract.

In the years immediately following independence a vast influx of immigrants quickly created a severe housing crisis, which escalated with each new immigration wave. As vacated Arab housing filled up by May 1949, border agricultural settlements became the only housing solution offered to immigrants, and many refused to settle in these "and be cannon fodder."[50] However, even had all immigrants been enthusiastic to perform their role as pioneers, the pace of border settlement formation would not have been enough to match the pace of immigration. While ten to fifteen new agricultural settlements were founded monthly, totaling 147 new immigrant *moshav* settlements between January 1949 and May 1952, these only housed 50,000 immigrants, a fraction of the approximately 700,000 immigrants who arrived during that time.[51]

The state and the JA subsequently sought to provide immigrants with an interim solution by converting former British Army camps to immigrant camps. Of the 100,000 immigrants who arrived in the first eight months after independence (i.e., by January 1949), about one in four (28,000 immigrants) were ultimately housed in these interim camps, while the rest managed to find permanent housing in new or existing settlements or in vacated Arab residences.[52] With the rapid influx of immigrants, however, more and more immigrants encountered difficulties finding housing. By the end of 1949 some 90,000 immigrants lived in seven camps throughout the country. Then, after all former British army camps filled, new camps had to be formed rapidly with no appropriate infrastructure in locations far from sources of employment.[53]

The camps provided a very cheap answer to the immediate housing problem: each large barrack hall could accommodate fifty immigrants. But an immigrant's living space was limited to his or her bed, with no division by family, age or gender (FIG.9A,B). The food provided was also poor, as were the sanitation facilities. Camp barracks thus came to house hundreds of thousands for several months under conditions of an "overnight shelter." But the camp existed as a territory unto itself: disconnected from the rest of the country, aimless snd unemployed immigrants frquently became frustrated and depressed. Given these miserable living conditions, it is hardly surprising that years later immigrants would still lament their time at the reception camps, recounting the extreme cold, the muddy, unpaved paths, the soup kitchens, and the crowding.[54]

At the time responsibility for the housing of immigrants was divided between the JA and the state. This seemed



**FIGURE 9A,B.** *Immigrants in the Sha'ar Aliya reception camp, 1949. Photographs by Zoltan Kluger. Source: NPC, reprinted by permission.*

logical, as it utilized the comparative advantages of the two bodies. The state's capacity to conduct planning made it responsible for developing permanent housing solutions. However, it suffered from an acute shortage of foreign currency, leading to a severe austerity regime. As a result, the JA, funded by world Jewry, assumed responsibility for the case of immigrants while they remained in the camps. This support was intended to be short-term — for the brief period until immigrants were permanently housed in agricultural settlements where they would be able to provide for themselves.

Immigrants remaining in the reception camps, however, did not accept this protracted temporariness with a pioneer spirit of endurance. Dr. Giora Yoseftal, head of the JA absorption department, described camp conditions as explosive, embodying a continuing threat of civil unrest.[55] Pinhas Lavon, head of the Histadrut workers union, described the situation as putting the young state at risk of a counter-revolution. He viewed the immigrant camp conditions as deeply wrong, robbing immigrants of their ability and right to participate in the process of nation building.[56] And Mordechai Bentov, the minister of labor and construction, worried about institutions other than the state catering to the immigrants and thereby challenging state sovereignty.[57] The housing crisis was therefore both objective (i.e., involving hundreds of thousands of homeless citizens) and ideological, reflecting on Israel's self-definition as the "home for the Jewish people."[58] Both Yoseftal and Lavon identified improper housing as actively responsible for these two threats to state sovereignty and its very raison d'être.

As the crisis of the immigrant reception camps deepened, Israeli leaders started to identify world Jewry as a threat to its independence and sovereignty. This was shocking, as the JA and JNF had until then been considered part and parcel of the drive for Israeli sovereignty. Levi Eshkol articulated the threat as follows: "Damned is this system of immigrant camps! I want to kill this system of [JA] clerical administration. . . . *Someone invented this system to destroy us.*"[59] Yet, while state leaders were fully aware of the state's failure to meet its housing responsibility for the immigrants, thereby violating the state-citizen contract, no housing action was taken. It wasn't until the JA actively attempted to assume the state's role and house immigrants on JNF lands that the state itself initiated a new housing policy.

## JNF HOUSING: THE THREAT OF A STATE WITHIN A STATE

Control of the immigrant population in the camps, as well as control of JNF lands, enabled the Jewish Agency to initiate settlements without approval or permission by the state. In response to the immigrant camp crisis, Josef Weitz, director of the JNF, initiated a new settlement type upon JNF lands, the work village.[60] Work villages, as the name suggests, were pre-

mised on supplying immigrants with work rather than charity. They also provided detached housing, thereby granting immigrants access to the status and ethos of Israeli pioneer.

The formation of work villages began in the summer of 1949. During late 1949 and the early months of 1950, 37 work villages of 120 families each were established by the JNF: fifteen in the frontier area of the Jerusalem corridor, twelve in the Arab-populated Galilee, and the rest on the Gilboa, Carmel, and Menashe mountains.[61] Housing in the villages consisted of tents and wooden shacks. But unlike the state-sanctioned immigrant-pioneer settlements, self-help housing in the JNF work camps did not come with land for subsistence cultivation; land here was to be cultivated collectively in the framework of public works (FIGS. 10, 11).





**FIGURE 10 (TOP).** *Immigrants employed in public works, Eshtaol work village, 1950. Eshtaol housing in the background. Photograph by Werner Brown. Source: JNF, reprinted by permission.*

**FIGURE 11 (BOTTOM).** *Shoeva work village, 1950. Photograph by Kurt Meirowitz. Source: JNF archive, reprinted by permission*

The work village framework thus did not count on the immigrants' ability to provide for themselves.[62]

State leaders regarded the work village as a blunt violation of sovereignty, an act of a state within a state that bypassed the proper authority of the Israeli government, rendering it irrelevant. Moreover, by offering immigrants a way out of the camps, the JNF pointed to the state as ultimately responsible for the immigrants' grim situation. It became further evident to state leaders that the consequences of civil unrest could take down the elected government, while these consequences could not touch the nonelected organizations of world Jewry.

The work village thus brought the tension between the Israeli state and the JA to overt confrontation over the issue of state dependence on, or independence from, world Jewry. This conflict of sovereignty and dependency had originated in the pre-Zionist *haluka* system and extended into the present.[63] World Zionist organizations, primarily the WZO and its Eretz Israeli Office, had led the settlement mechanisms of nation building prior to national independence.[64] They were now asked to step back and let the state apparatus assume its governmental mandate over national territory and citizenry.

The WZO, however, had no intention to transfer its property and institutions to state control; rather, it insisted on maintaining control over JNF lands and over settling institutions like the JA.[65] By 1950, therefore, Israel's housing policy was forced to divert itself from the Arab-Palestinian threat to addressing world Jewry's involvement in immigrant housing and citizen/subject formation.[66] Who was responsible for the immigrants, and when were they transformed from members of the Jewish people to Israeli nationals?

Israeli sovereignty and independence from the institutions of world Jewry would eventually be negotiated via housing of immigrants as citizens.

SECOND STATE HOUSING POLICY: *MAABARA* TEMPORARY HOUSING

The state responded to the challenge posed by the JNF by initiating a new policy that would replace both the immigrant camps and the JNF work villages: the *maabara*. The goal of the *maabara* program (Hebrew for "transitory"; plural, *maabarot*) was to offer new immigrants temporary, single-family detached housing in the place of the barrack halls, and sustain them through employment rather than through charity and soup kitchens.[67]

The first *maabara* opened in Ksalon in the Jerusalem Mountains in May 1950. It was founded on the lands of the vacated Arab village of Kasla, associated with the biblical town of Ksalon. On May 23, 1950, the newspaper *Davar* reported that the temporary settlement there housed 120 families, whose breadwinners were employed in forestry and paid daily wages. However, as a temporary settlement, the report pointed out that Ksalon included no subsistence farms.[68]

By May 1952, 113 *maabarot* had been constructed across the country, housing some 250,000 immigrants.[69] While they were proclaimed to be a new housing and settlement form, they were, in effect, work villages. Indeed, there were many similarities between the two programs; the main difference, of course, involved ownership of the land on which they were built.

Despite its derivative qualities, the *maabara* did represent a revolutionary turning point in government attitudes toward the problem of absorbing the waves of new immigrants, as all researchers in the field have pointed out. However, to date scholars have largely focused their analysis on the issue of employment and on a comparison between conditions in them and in the immigrant camps.[70] By contrast, I contend that their true significance lies in the realm of housing — and particularly in relation to differences between their purpose and the purpose of *moshav* border settlements. By directly addressing the demands by immigrants for housing, the *maabara* signified a transformation in the terms of the Israeli state-citizen contract from access to land to access to housing. This transformation cemented "housing the persecuted Jewish people" and Zionist subject formation as the twin raisons d'être of Israeli sovereignty, and therefore of the state as a housing regime.[71]

The decision by the state to deal with the housing shortage in stages by forming *maabara* settlements, rather than by keeping immigrants in camps until permanent housing could be constructed, was ultimately very costly. Indeed, it doubled the state's financial investment in housing. However, the decision to invest in *maabarot* was intended to give immigrants some form of "proper" shelter to meet their demands and ensure their acquiescence to a new state-citizen contract. Between the years 1949 and 1951, 44,309 temporary dwelling units were erected — among them wooden shacks, tents, and tin huts — which came to house 25 percent of Israel's population by 1952.[72] Moreover, the *maabarot's* building block was the individual shack, which broke the masses of immigrants down into family units, an arrangement that served the interests of the immigrants and the state alike.

In hindsight, Ksalon can now be recognized as an experiment in temporary dwellings. As can be seen from photographs of the time, it included a variety of structures scattered upon the landscape: family-size tents, small tin and asbestos shacks, and several wooden shacks on poles (FIGS.12,13). The hasty formation of *maabara* settlements left little consideration for planning. Thus, while space was by no means an issue, their dwellings were frequently erected close together, generating acute problems of density in addition to poor housing conditions.

In addition, as mentioned, no land was allocated to these dwellings, as was the case with their counterparts in the immigrant *moshav* framework of the first housing policy. Nor were they framed as self-help housing. Because *maabara* dwellers were not expected to live as border-pioneers, their

**FIGURE 12.** *Ksalon: employment of dwellers in stone-clearing, 1950. Photograph by Werner Brown. Source: JNF archive, reprinted by permission.*



**FIGURE 13.** *Ksalon Maabara, December 1950. Photograph by Werner Brown. Source: JNF archive, reprinted by permission.*

temporary dwellings were located next to existing towns, villages, *moshavot, moshavim* and *kibbutzim* across the country. The aim was to employ the immigrants in the economies of these settlements — and, no less importantly, to use the interaction with veteran citizens to acculturate them to a pioneer life of self-governance and self-subsistence.[73]

## HUMANITARIAN CRISIS AND SECOND VIOLATION OF THE STATE-CITIZEN CONTRACT

As might have been expected, however, the very temporariness of *maabara* dwellings rapidly led to the deterioration of these built environments. This developed into a humanitarian crisis during the rough winter of 1950–51, during which the cheaply constructed dwellings leaked, were blown over by wind, flooded, and filled with mud. Sanitary facilities were also disgraceful and degrading, and health services were insufficient.[74] Indeed, the harsh winter placed more than 65,000 *maabara* residents in dire conditions and resulted in the evacuation of 10,000 of them to nearby settlements (**FIG.14**). There, many immigrant children first encountered "a shower with warm running water, a white private toilet right next to the housing, and electricity."[75]

Despite recognition of these conditions and persistent promises to improve them, a year later nothing had been done by state housing authorities to ensure that the winter of 1951 would be any different. As a result, *maabarot* settlements across the country fermented with unrest. In addition to inadequate facilities, *maabara* dwellers experienced constant shortages of food. They could not bypass the government's austerity measures by producing their own food, as could residents of *kibbutz* and *moshav* settlements or residents of subsistence-farm housing as in Ramla. Eventually, an alleged theft of food from *kibbutz* fields by a resident of the Emek Hefer Maabara led in November 1952 to a civil rebellion

against the police, which quickly spread across the country.[76] Protesters from dozens of *maabarot* took this as their the cue to demand that the government attend to their needs, primarily for better housing and an adequate level of services.[77]

At the time immigrants could not help but notice the stark difference between their *maabara* housing and *kibbutz* or *moshav* permanent housing. They couldn't care less that, as pioneers, those veteran citizens had once also endured harsh conditions. They did not associate their harsh living conditions with the "sacrifice of pioneer life," and they did not read the divide between them and the veterans, made explicit in housing, as one they would eventually be able to bridge. Rather, as Sephardi Jews, many immigrants viewed their housing conditions as representing deep racial discrimination, relegating them forever to the status of second-class citizens. They saw no hope of climbing the social ladder.[78]

Of course, the immigrants' perceptions had solid grounds; strong racial sentiments did exist within the veteran



**FIGURE 14.** *Rosh Ha'ayin Maabara, February 1951. Photograph by Eldan David. Source: NPC, reprinted by permission.*

public against the predominantly Sephardi immigrants.[79] Works examining Israel's first decade generally describe the state's mass housing project as directed primarily at the immigrants in an attempt to form them as proper citizen-subjects or exclude them from loci of power.  And this is today seen to have given rise to the social categories that still inform Israeli society.

The literature universally condemns immigrant housing in Israel in the 1950s as "bad housing."  Both the temporary *maabara* tent towns and the permanent *shikun* mass housing blocks of the 1960s are cited as material evidence of discrimination against the mostly Sephardi immigrants.[80] Both scholarly accounts and popular discourse consider immigrant housing to have been a violent act toward the new citizens, intended to keep them outside good-subject circles and centers of power.[81]  Ella Shohat's essay "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims" is particularly notable.  It invokes Edward Said's "*j'accuse*" of Zionism written a decade earlier to frame its analysis of the 1950s immigrant absorption process as colonial.[82]

Despite these critiques, it is possible to see three reasons why the *maabarot* embodied an important dwelling solution in Israel's housing history.  First, it pointed to a realization by the state that its legitimization lay in its citizenry, and that failure to care for them might lead to a loss of sovereignty. Second, it signified a realization that housing was a basic demand placed on the state by its immigrants-citizens.  Third, the temporary nature and poor dwelling conditions of the *maabara*, housing newcomers who were not considered to be founders of the state, established housing as a facet of social class.  By making visible the political and ethnic divide in Israel two decades before it emerged explicitly in the political arena, the *maabara* pointed to housing as the arena in which social phenomena were manifest, and in some cases formed.

## THIRD HOUSING POLICY: POPULATION DISPERSAL IN PERMANENT SELF-HELP HOUSING

The civil unrest unleashed by the *maabarot* policy marked it as a failure in the state's attempt to form the immigrants as pioneers, willing to endure any hardship for the goal of access to the homeland.  This social unrest also brought to the attention of the state a deep transformation in the citizenry's perception of the state-citizen contract — from one based on individual access to the homeland to one based on the provision of proper housing.  Indeed, mass demand for proper housing cemented housing as a civil right for each and every citizen and a state responsibility.  As such, it came to be perceived as the concrete materialization of the state's proclaimed raison d'être.

A new housing solution had to be formulated to address this crisis — the third in four years.  This time, the state aimed to formulate more than a temporary plan; it sought a regime that would provide immigrants with the permanent, good-quality housing that they demanded.  The attempt to transform immigrants into pioneers was also no longer part of the effort.  This new, third policy would become known primarily for producing a national master plan, known as the Sharon plan after its head planner, the architect Arieh Sharon.

The Sharon plan took time to develop and is therefore hard to date.  It is clear, however, that the process of creating it began parallel to, rather than after, the two previous policies (agricultural settlement and *maabara*).  The plan's main principle, population dispersal, was indeed embedded in border agricultural settlements as well as in the *maabarot*, which were formed adjacent to existing settlements across the country, as noted above.

The Sharon plan was first presented to the public in February 1950 in the framework of a public exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, which was aimed to make the public more "planning-minded" (**FIG.15**).[83]  The exhibition included a series of posters outlining in a popular way the challenges identified by the planners and describing their operational principles.  The plan was well underway at the time but had not yet been completed and approved by the government.  It was eventually published in Hebrew in 1951 under the title "Physical Planning in Israel 1948–1953."[84]  In that document Sharon stated that his team had "tried very hard to gain the support of public opinion for our national planning," and that the effort was "fully backed" by the powerful prime minister, Ben-Gurion.[85]  This important statement expressed the perception that the public was a sovereign force that should be convinced to approve it.



**FIGURE 15.** *Model housing exhibition, 1950s.  Note the expectancy of regular citizens to read and understand architectural plans.  Source: NPC.  Courtesy of Zvi Elhyani, Israel Architecture Archive.*

FIGURE 16. *"The problem: where to settle the immigrants?"* Houses included in the Sharon planning proposal highlighted in boxes by author. *Source: Sharon,* Physical Planning in Israel, *1948–1953.*



FIGURE 17. *The Popular Housing Enterprise, designated for "veteran" citizens, Ministry of Labor brochure, 1951. The brochure, issued by the Ministry of Labor, specifies eligibility for the "popular housing" enterprise, which included primarily veteran immigrants living in insufficient housing conditions. Source: Israeli State Archive.*

Much has been written about the Sharon master plan in terms of population dispersal and the formation of "development towns" on Israel's periphery.[86] My concern is with a little-explored dimension of it — one for which it is nonetheless greatly critiqued — housing. In particular, it should be noted that the housing solutions proposed by it were largely two-story, four-unit houses, similar to those being built at the time for nonimmigrants. This contrasts strongly with the usual association of the Sharon plan in Israeli history with the degrading new housing typology of mass housing blocks.

The Sharon team defined its challenge as follows: "1,000 immigrants arrive each day — one dwelling unit has to be erected every two minutes. Should the new houses be built in the existing, already densely populated cities — or should housing and development be directed into new towns?"[87] This question made no reference to architecture or the nature of the dwelling units themselves. Neither did it propose a new housing type for immigrants. Its focus, as scholars have noted, was on the whereabouts of housing — i.e., on population dispersal. With no proposals for a new permanent housing type or form, the Sharon plan relied instead on the available model, constructed until then for the use of veteran citizens (FIGS.16,17).

As Zvi Efrat has pointed out, "development town" planning as reflected in the Sharon plan essentially proposed

replicating *kibbutz* campus planning.[88] This can be seen in relation to the Beersheba neighborhood A, a pivotal case of development town planning, constructed between 1951 and 1953 north of Beersheba's old town (FIG.18A,B). As a reflection of this *kibbutz* model, it featured a curvilinear layout, a central open area designated for public buildings, "green wedges," and simple small houses on large parcels of land.[89]

Efrat has defined the development town as a paradoxical combination of *kibbutz* rural planning and mass housing blocks, reflecting how the continued pace of change in housing eventually led to the association of the Sharon plan with mass housing-block dwellings in popular discourse as well as

A.



B.

scholarship.[90] But the Sharon plan and Beersheba neighborhood A attest that development town housing was initially a replication of "proper" pioneer core housing. Thus, the housing in Neighborhood A actually comprised two-story buildings each containing four one-bedroom apartments of 26–32 square meters.[91] These houses were further allocated large parcels of land in anticipation of their future expansion by residents according to the principle of self-help.[92]

The permanent housing plan thus led to the gradual housing of *maabara* dwellers through the 1950s in units similar to veteran citizen housing (**FIG.19**). Social unrest was accordingly curbed. It was only later, in the mid-1960s, that the housing typology constructed to serve immigrants changed dramatically to include the distinct architecture of "Unité" mass housing blocks, termed *shikun* in Hebrew



FIGURE 19. *From* maabara *to permanent housing. David Maabara dwellers moving to permanent housing constructed for them, 1960. Photograph by Moshe Pridan. Source:* NPC, reprinted by permission.

**FIGURE 20.** *Quarter Kilometer housing block, Beer Sheba (Architects Yaski and Alexandroni, 1962). Panorama taken 2007 by Eran Tawil Tamir. Source: arsitectura.com.*

(**FIG.20**).[93] Records show the Sharon master plan initially included permanent immigrant housing identical to housing built for "veteran" citizens at the time.

The reasons for the later change in immigrant housing forms cannot be covered within the scope of this article; however, the consequences of this change should be mentioned. Mass, anonymous *shikun* housing allocated to immigrants of the 1960s in development periphery towns generated great frustration and a sense of discrimination and degradation. This type of housing demarcated immigrants from veterans, defining them as second-class citizens. As in the case of *maabarot* a decade earlier, housing, the emblem of the state-citizen contract, materialized social differences and exclusions years before these came to the surface in 1977, when a dramatic change took place in the Israeli political regime.[94]

## CONSOLIDATION OF A HOUSING-BASED STATE-CITIZEN CONTRACT

The establishment of state sovereignty opened the way for Israel to conduct national planning. However, as this article has attempted to show, it was not planning but the need to find housing solutions for the masses of new citizens that proved decisive in defining the state-citizen contract. Moreover, citizens' discontent with the housing solutions they were initially offered, as well as with the very definition of proper housing for a proper citizen, led to two dramatic changes in housing policy during Israel's first five years. The involvement of new citizens in formulating the state-citizen contract, and thus the nation-building project, was therefore far greater than has previously been theorized. When citizens did not self-govern according to the regime's standards of "proper" ideals and behavior, their "deviant" self-governance repeatedly forced the regime to change the course of its housing policies. Thus, while the regime and its bureaucrats developed and executed housing policies, these were soon challenged and revised as a consequence of popular demands.

The contribution of this article to the study of nation building in Israel and its architectural history has been three-fold. First, it has shown how housing policies were used to respond to multiple perceived threats to Israel's sovereignty. These not only included the Arab-Palestinian threat already identified in the scholarly literature but also the threats posed by the JA and the "reluctant pioneer" citizenry. Second, it has mapped out three distinct waves of housing policy in a five-year period and pointed to the central role of housing in the negotiation of power relations and sovereignty within Israel's nation-building project. Third, it has exposed pivotal cases ignored by existing scholarship, such as the housing laboratories of Ramla, the work village, and the first *maabara* of Ksalon. It has thus attempted to unsettle accepted truisms regarding housing in the much studied cases of the Sharon master plan and the Beersheba A neighborhood. In addition, the article has contributed to the study of housing policy as a force in nation building by showing how, in the case of Israel, it played an important role in legitimizing government power among the masses of new immigrants and helping form their identity as Israeli citizens.

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9. B. Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War* (Yale University Press, 2008).

10. B. Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); and B. Kimmerling, *The Israeli State and Society: Boundaries and Frontiers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

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18. The department was later broken into three: the National Planning Department which operated under the Office of the Prime Minister; the General Planning Department which operated under the Ministry of the Interior; and the Housing Department which operated under the Ministry of Labor. See Kallus and Law-Yone, "National Home/Personal Home"; H. Shadar, "The Influence of the Ministry of Construction and Housing on the Urban Development of Beer-Sheva 1948–1999," Ph.D. diss., The Technion, 2000; and I. Troen, "The Transformation of Zionist Planning Policy: From Rural Settlements to an Urban Network," *Planning Perspectives*, Vol.3 No.1 (1988).

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22. Lissak, ed., *Studies in the Social History of Israel*.

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29. Scholarship on the mass absorption of immigrants has focused primarily on the third housing policy discussed below. For more, see section 7 of Allweil, "Building a Home-Land."

30. Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War*.

31. Shadar, "The Influence of the Ministry of Construction and Housing"; Efrat, *The Israeli Project; and Darin-Drabkin, Housing in Israel*.

32. Darin-Drabkin, *Housing in Israel*, pp.224–52.

33. Y. Goldstein, *Eshkol — Biography* (Tel Aviv: Keter, 2003).

34. Greicer and Gonen, "Design of the State's Early Settlement Map."

35. Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*; and Eshkol, *The Hardships of Settlement*, pp.270–73.

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37. A. Azulai, *Civil Imagination* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2010); and D. Monteresku, "The Symbolic History of the Hyphen: Urban Alterity before Jaffa and Tel Aviv," *Zmanim*, 16 (2009).

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40. Amidar was later entrusted with the construction of new permanent housing for immigrants, a task it did not manage to perform quickly enough to meet demands. Lissak, ed., *Studies in the Social History of Israel*.

41. Ibid.

42. Goldstein, *Eshkol — Biography*. It should be noted that directing immigrants to *moshavim* rather than *kibbutzim* was also a political statement on the part of Ben-Gurion. *Kibbutzim* were supporters of the Mapam party rather than Ben-Gurion's Mapai party. Allocation of land, resources and population to undergo subject formation in the other party's stronghold had significant political implications in internal politics.

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54. See, for example, Meishar, "Leaving the Castle."

55. Jewish Agency board meeting protocols, March 29, 1949, CZA.

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60. J. Weitz, *The Struggle for the Land* (N. Taverski, 1950).

61. Lissak, ed., *Studies in the Social History of Israel*; Naor, "The Maabarot"; and Greicer and Gonen, "Design of the State's Early Settlement Map."

62. Israel State Archive, Work Village file. Very little scholarly work exists regarding the work village; it has largely been forgotten as a housing and settlement form.

63. The *haluka* was a system of financial support for Jews living in the Holy Land by diaspora Jews. It was perceived by Zionists as the exact opposite of Jewish sovereignty.

64. For a detailed account of the World Zionist Organization's settlement activities since 1908, see Allweil, "Building a Home-Land."

65. Lissak, ed., *Studies in the Social History of Israel*.

66. Greicer and Gonen, "Design of the State's Early Settlement Map."

67. Eshkol, quoted in Greicer and Gonen, "Design of the State's Early Settlement Map."

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83. Efrat, *The Israeli Project*, Sharon archive.

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