

**A MEMORY SYNDROME:  
Selfhood and Otherness at the Wailing Wall**

by

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## **Abstract**

Few groups in the world have as long-standing a claim to "peoplehood" as do Jews. Despite the longevity of that claim, however, the problem of instability inherent in objectifying a collective identity has not yet been resolved. The existence and salience of a collective self is assumed at the same time that statements and actions within the group suggest that individuals are not sure of either the group's boundaries or its cultural content. The relationship between "Israeli society" and "the Jewish people" in Israel is loaded with tension, though there is little question in Israel or elsewhere that it is the "fact" of the latter that is responsible for the "fact" of the former.

What about the conceptualization of the collective self in terms of a conceptualization of the collective "other"? The Israeli-Arab conflict is not a typical struggle between oppressor and oppressed, but is rather a struggle between stereotypes. When someone tells us who we are and has the power to impose their version of who we are on us -- according us certain rights and duties and denying us others by virtue of their representation of us -- we readily see it as an act of manipulation of the "facts" and the exercise of political power whose relation to reality we may question, even challenge.

This analytical work is an attempt at examining some of the controversies generated by the dynamics and politics of manipulation as they structure in Israeli media in general. Architecture will be examined as a special representational medium that deals with signals of high symbolic values. In this endeavor, a recent Israeli project will be employed as an indicator of how architecture can become a viable channel of communication, where opposing groups can talk to each other, using this representational arena as a testing ground for new tendencies.

**Thesis supervisor: Professor David Friedman.**  
**Title: Associate Professor of the History of Architecture.**

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## Table of Contents

TITLE	PAGE NO.
Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
<i>Introduction</i>	
Selfhood and Otherness	5
Research Outline	8
<i>Chapter one</i>	
<b>Israeli Pluralism: Structure and Dilemmas</b>	
Conceptual Approach	10
Dimensions of Differentiation	11
Group Identity	11
Power and Conflict	12
Consensus and Diversity: Conditions for Stability	14
Pluralism in Israel	16
Ethnicity	16
Religion	21
Arab-Jewish: Introduction	25
The Dual Basis of the Nation State	26
Israel and its Arab Minority	27
Interaction Among the Three Dimensions of Israeli Pluralism	32
Conclusion	35
<i>Chapter two</i>	
<b>Selfhood and Otherness: Palestine and Israel in Israeli Media</b>	
<b>A Case Study of Recent Hebrew Literature</b>	38
The Background of History	39
The 'Cosmetic' Alternative	43
Synthesizing the Nation	48
Palestine -- the 'Other' Defining Zionist Self-Image	51
The Identity Crisis	58
<i>Conclusion</i>	
Reflections on Architecture	68
Bibliography	90
Illustration Credits	92



## Introduction

### *Selfhood and Otherness*

Always productive are works that cut across disciplines -- combining economics, politics, sociology, history and art. Each discipline has its own traditional perspective, which means that observers from various disciplines view the same "real world" somewhat differently. Original insights are often possible when knowledge-seekers risk crossing disciplinary lines. Knowledge changes by changing the distance from which facts are observed and thereby changing the scale of what falls within the purview.

This analytical work straddles different disciplines, for it aims at establishing a dialogue between the built form and the social and cultural aspects of its context. One of the most crucial elements that constitutes such a contextual dialogue pertains to the expression of collective identity in the societal realm.

Peoplehood is not a simple fact but rather a sociohistorically constructed object always in need of nurturing. In this work we will be looking at the collective selves as instances of the power and processes of objectification -- of how human beings, especially through dialogue and public discourse, create, use, perpetuate, and struggle over the objects we see in the world. Israel is a prime example of the paradoxes of peoplehood, wherein the existence and salience of a collective self is assumed at the same time that statements and actions within the group suggest that individuals are not sure of either the group's boundaries or its cultural content. That a people with so long a history continues to be created, legitimized, and in need of nurturing implies that the act of objectifying people into a collectivity is part of an ongoing process, not the product of a completed action.

For the Israeli society's very possibility and legitimacy, the struggle with the concept and "fact" of peoplehood is indispensable. The legitimizing "fact" is very problematic, since it is based on the incarnation of a past

“memory”, a dream that is nourished by a sacred text. When collective identities are crucial to us, we not only treat them as givens, but we also continue to do all in our power to create the boundaries and the content to justify our beliefs about the “people’s” “natural” existence.

People react differently to being in power, much as they do to being out of power. Otherness may be seen as a threat, as a justification for holding power, as a mirror through whose presence ourselves are recognized as a collectivity, or even as a “fact” irrelevant to our sense of self. But what is this “thing” we treat as a collective self and casually refer to as “our people”? It seems that collective identities are conceptual representations disguised as objects, and they are in perpetual need of nurturing. It is paradoxical then that so much power struggle should focus on the rights of peoples -- not just individuals -- and so little attention be paid explicitly to the semiotic contradictions of peoplehood. For what are the rights of the collectivities that see themselves as peoples? For over a century, nationalists have invoked peoplehood as the fundamental justification and rationale for their demand for political independence. But what is peoplehood? When there are competing claims to land, to resources, to positions of power and influence, or to a sense of respectability, one group of people may emphasize its sense of peoplehood while simultaneously questioning the peoplehood of its rivals.]

Our conceptualization, representation and objectification of ourselves matter, not just because they are interesting examples of the relationship between being, consciousness, knowledge, reference and social action, but at least as much because they are a statement about power. Social representations are dually constituted. They are simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive, presupposing and creative. They both describe a particular state of affairs and index the hopes, goals, wishes, and beliefs of the people generating the representation. Without live people to care about them, representations -- whether in discourse, in nonverbal acts of communication, or in audiovisual form -- play little role in social life. With live people to care about them, they frequently become both the idiom in which genuine conflict and competition get expressed and the focus of that conflict and competition.

Few groups of people in the world have as long-standing and continuous a claim to peoplehood as do Jews. Yet the fact and longevity of that claim does not seem to resolve the problem of instability inherent in objectifying a collective identity. What is the significant collective self in Israel? The relationship between "Israeli society" and "the Jewish people" in Israel is loaded with tension, though there is little question in Israel or elsewhere that it is the "fact" of the latter that is responsible for the "fact" of the former.

And what about the conceptualization of the collective self in terms of a conceptualization of the collective other? It is clear that a great deal of energy has been expended in Israel in creating an Israeli society out of deeply disparate populations of Jewish immigrants. Phrases such as *kibbutz galuyot* ("the ingathering of the exiles"), *mizug galuyot* ("the blending or integration of the exiles"), and *klitat olim* ("the absorption of immigrants") capture the perception of purpose and representation of goal long dominant in Israeli public discourse<sup>1</sup>. Tolerance for the presence and citizenship of non-Jews has long existed in most quarters of Israeli Jewish society, but we should not over-estimate this tolerance and ignore the intended Jewishness of Israeli society. In presenting immigration and integration as central to Israeli society, public discourse points to a concept of the relevant and significant collective self as in need of reconstitution, not in need of creation. A focus on the collective self frequently makes Israeli Jews appear self-absorbed and insensitive to the parallel, if not identical, forms of self-representation found among Arabs who live, or at least work, in their midst.

We like to think of how we are based on something given, something "natural." When someone else tells us who we are and has the power to impose their version of who we are on us -- according us certain rights and duties and denying us others by virtue of their representation of us -- we readily see it as an act of manipulation of "the facts" and the exercise of political power whose relation to "reality" we may question, even challenge. Likewise, we are uncomfortable seeing our sense of self as constituted by our

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<sup>1</sup>Dominguez, V.R.: *People as Subject, People as Object*, Madison, Wisconsin, 1989, p.191.

constitution of other people's otherness. Something about that perception smacks of fabrication and manipulation -- this time on our part -- and not of "naturalness." If we see something as being what it is because of how it is represented -- i.e., constituted by its representation -- we have no way to avoid seeing it as constituted by human agents and their actions. To see ourselves as constituting others is to acknowledge our having more power than we may wish to have or be comfortable having. To see ourselves as constituting others is to leave the door open for calling into question some of the arguments we ourselves frequently use for claiming the "fact" and, thus, legitimacy of our collective identity.

### *Research Outline*

But how does architecture, a representational medium, address this "memory" syndrome? To respond to this inquiry one must probe into the problematics of the object of representation, namely the construction of "memory" and its realization in a "collective self".

What different patterns constitute this self and its contrast or "other"? What are the boundaries and content of this self and of its "other"? What is the nature of the coexistence of these patterns? These questions will be addressed through an analysis of the nature of Israeli pluralism, its dimensions of differentiation, and the interaction among these dimensions.

Second, I will examine the politics involved in the representation of these patterns in Israeli public discourse. Hebrew literature, a public arena that has always been used as a testing ground for new tendencies in Israeli society, will be employed as an indicator of the historical development of the Israeli notion of the native 'other'. In this part, it will be shown that the Israeli-Arab conflict is not a typical struggle between an oppressor and an oppressed, but is rather a struggle between stereotypes, a struggle where the portrayed image of the conquered symbols connotes cultural remoteness and contrast, thus emphasizing the outlines of the conquering self.

Finally, a reassessment of the role of architecture as a manipulative representational medium will be made through investigating a contemporary Israeli project whose symbolic aspects generate controversy central to the question of Israeli identity .

## Chapter One

### Israeli Pluralism<sup>1</sup>: Structure and Dilemmas

#### *Conceptual Approach* <sup>2</sup>

A pluralistic society may be defined as one in which there is a coexistence of several groups characterized by differing past and contemporary cultural patterns. These patterns comprise of elements from the full range of cultural diversity, such as differing norms, values, languages, styles of everyday life, leisure pursuits, religious observance, food patterns, styles of socialization, or any other component of a cultural context. The notion of co-existence in the context of a democratic society varies from society to society. As a minimum definition, pluralism implies that co-existence is legitimized, either formally or informally, so that groups with variant cultural forms are generally accepted and are able to maintain their unique cultural patterns.

The accommodation of such groups in an ongoing social system dictates the existence of a consensual cultural component that is common to the above groups and that provides them with cross-cutting sets of norms and values. The nature of the ongoing relationship between this common cultural component and the several idiosyncratic cultural contexts determines the dynamics and quality of social processes in a pluralistic society.

Considering this general definition in greater detail, several structural features of pluralistic societies may be distinguished.

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<sup>1</sup>The term pluralism has been used freely by various authors with different meanings suggesting ideological, political, cultural or structural designations (Gordon, 1964; Kuper and Smith, 1969; Schermerhorn, 1970; Van den Berghe, 1973), also see Shuval, J.: *Israeli Pluralism*, New York, 1989.

<sup>2</sup>In this section some general definitions of pluralism in a democratic society will be formulated. See Shuval, J.: *Israeli Pluralism*, New York, 1989.

## Dimensions of Differentiation

There are different dimensions for differentiating between societies. Among the more familiar examples are: tribal or ethnic traditions based on the recent or distant past, religious traditions, national origins, and racial characteristics. But these are not the only possible dimensions of differentiation. Each dimension includes two or more categories which define specific groups. Dimensions may, in some cases, be related to each other -- as in the case of ethnic groups having a religious tradition in common.

## Group Identity

A pluralistic structure may be institutionalized or informal. In the former case, separation of groups is unambiguously defined and legitimized. It involves institutionalized mechanisms designed to deal with specific life spheres in which the groups are believed to have differing needs and desires, e.g. schools, religious facilities, formally structured representation in the political system.

In the case of informal structuring, group identity is dependent on patterns of solidarity among group members and on identification and categorization of that group by others. However, separateness is not formally recognized. While informal patterns are likely to accompany an institutionalized structure of pluralism, an informal type of pluralism may occur with no formal structure.

In addition to the difference between institutionalized and informal separateness, we may distinguish the subjective from the objective category

of identification<sup>1</sup>. The first refers to feelings of identity, solidarity and separateness felt by members of the group themselves. How conscious are they of their group identity? How do they view this identity in qualitative terms -- in positive, neutral or negative terms? To what extent do they express such feelings?

The objective category of identification concerns the visibility of the group to other members of the society and its categorization by others: its recognition as a relevant collectivity in the overall social system, the categorization of its members in terms of their group membership, and, in a complementary sense to the qualitative element noted, the label ascribed by others to the group -- positive, neutral or negative. The interaction of subjective and objective identification determines the overall salience of a given group in a society. Clearly, such salience differs among groups and generally changes over time.<sup>2</sup>

One correlate of both subjective and objective identification is the concentration of a group in a specific geographical or social position in the society. Regional concentration of group members or their location in a specific socioeconomic position, facilitates interaction among them with a concomitant sense of identity. Furthermore, it enhances the group's visibility for others.

## Power and Conflict

Ranking in terms of status and power among groups defined by any dimension of pluralism is inevitable. This ranking is expressed, at least partially, by the distribution of group members on the socioeconomic scale or

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<sup>1</sup>Ben Rafael, E.: *The Mergence of Ethnicity: Cultural Groups and Social Conflict in Israel*, 1982.

<sup>2</sup> One may recall the change in the meaning of ethnic membership over time in the U.S. as described by Glazer and Moynihan (1970): Immigrant groups shifted from collectiveness with distinguishing cultural characteristics into ethnically structured interest groups concerned principally with political and economic issues. Glazer, N., and Moynihan, D.P.: *Beyond the Melting Pot*, 1970.



in space, which always carries symbolic significance. Whatever the reasons for this distribution -- deliberate planning, historic factors, traditions, self choice, prejudice, discrimination, skills and aptitudes of group members -- groups differ in terms of their access to rewards and power. But the extent of homogeneity and segregation in this regard vary within and between societies.

Ranking connotes that conflict is a potential in pluralistic societies . If social stability is to be maintained, mechanisms must be introduced to control any possible conflict. Groups are identified by competing interests and generally vary with respect to status, power and accessibility to decision makers. Thus conflict, either overt or covert, may focus on access to various forms of resources and rewards.

Seeking domination is an inevitable inclination for the stronger group or groups. Pluralistic societies in the democratic tradition strive to introduce mechanisms to control this process with varying degrees of success. In the extreme case, when such mechanisms fail, full domination by one group may be viewed as a negation of democratic pluralism .

○ If a variety of groups is to enjoy a viable existence and access to power and resources, the control mechanisms guaranteeing these conditions need to be political, representational, and deep-rooted in binding legal formulas, e.g. a constitution and a bill of rights, or their equivalent. But an additional and important mechanism of control is the consensual legitimation for the existence of different groups. The value reflecting such consensus is tolerance, i.e. the general acceptance of alternative forms of cultural expression by such groups. Such consensus does not prevent conflict but it can control the degree of domination by a given group or groups. It also makes possible the establishment or entry of new groups into a pluralistic social structure, that is a new group of immigrants, a new religious sect. But consensus can hardly be effective without legal and political mechanisms to support it.

## Consensus and Diversity

### *Conditions for Stability*

As mentioned above, a pluralistic society is one in which the overall cultural context includes a) a common component, and b) several idiosyncratic components. The dynamic relationship between these two sets of components determines the extent of conflict or stability in a pluralistic society.

By definition, the common component includes norms and values on which there is general consensus, shared by different groups; the span and content of these values and their prominence to all is directly proportional to the overall solidarity of the society. And, conversely, if these consensual values and norms are few, or are marginal in their importance, the overall cohesiveness of the society is likely to be weak. Indeed, it would seem indispensable for any social system to have consensus on certain central and fundamental values.

However, this consensual component may take a variety of forms, which structure in terms of the strength of adherence to the values and norms included. Thus, it may include a large number of norms and values which are weakly adhered to but which form a thin, broad basis for consensus. Or, it may focus on few values to which adherence is tenacious. Apart from catering for different types of consensus at times of social crisis and stability, these patterns also bring about different potentials for social change.

When we speak of general consensus on the common cultural component, some specific groups in the society may not be included. If these are small or seen as temporary, they may not have a serious bearing on the overall social system, but in general, rejection of important elements of the consensual component may be regarded as a potential source of social change or conflict.

The balance of common and idiosyncratic values and norms is dynamic in nature; those which have been idiosyncratic for a given period may be transposed to the consensual area if they come to be recognized by all. On the other hand, values on which there has been general agreement may, at some point in time, be interpreted and conceived differently by specific groups in such a way as to move them out of the consensual area into a specific cultural context. Alternative interpretations of a jointly held central value by specific groups -- even if the remaining groups continue to hold it in common -- can stir up conflict and instability, depending on the size and importance of this specific group in the society.

In a democratic, pluralistic society as defined here, one element of the consensual cultural component is the legitimation of specific alternative subcultures. An important condition of that legitimation is the compatibility of the values of the sub-groups with the commonly held ones. There can be an acceptable range of variation in the interpretation of a consensual value, but if that variation becomes too broad, the value loses its consensual quality and moves to the idiosyncratic context.

The choice of values that are central and need to be defined as part of the consensual component is often an issue of controversy among groups. As long as the idiosyncratic deals mainly with non-threatening subjects such as culinary tastes, second languages, folklore, or holidays and religious rituals, there would appear to be a basis for peaceful coexistence. But some of the above, when linked to other economic and social issues, have in certain societies become rallying grounds to challenge central values.

A strong motivation for instability is, of course, the dominance of one group which inflicts its unique values on the consensual component and demands general conformity. While some inequality in power and access to rewards is probably inevitable in a pluralistic society, the application of power to inflict an idiosyncratic value that belongs to a specific group on the consensual component is problematic, since conformity then becomes compelling for many. It is especially disruptive when other less powerful groups adhere strongly to different values. Such a process infringes one of the conditions for pluralistic stability noted above.

## Pluralism in Israel

What are the central dimensions of pluralism in Israeli society? How do they structure? What processes of change are taking place in this country? What can be said with regard to the stability of the pluralistic structure?<sup>1</sup> This section spells out some answers to these questions, in the context of a society characterized by basic democratic traditions.

There are three principal dimensions of differentiation which define Israel's pluralistic structure: ethnicity, defined in the Israeli population in terms of country of origin of an individual or his forebearers; religion; and the Arab-Jewish dimension. Each of these structures the society differently but they share in common their differentiating role of separating the society into coexisting subgroups with specific cultural traditions. In some cases these categories overlap.

### Ethnicity

The notion of Israeli pluralism in has in many cases been interpreted in terms of ethnic diversity. In this study, ethnicity will be considered in terms of the more general issues of pluralism suggested above. Reference will be made to gross categorization of the Jewish population into Asian-African and European-American segments; these categories have been used widely because they are clearly defined in the publications of the Central Bureau of Statistics<sup>2</sup>. Within each of these general categories, more specific groups will be referred to. In some cases reference will be made to Sephardim and Ashkenazim, which refer to more loosely defined social groups, equivalent to Jews of Oriental and Occidental origin, respectively.

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<sup>1</sup>Smootha, S.: *Israel: Pluralism and Conflict*, London, 1978

<sup>2</sup>Shuval, J.: *Israeli Pluralism*, New York, 1989, p. 221.

It has been noted that ethnic subcultures imported from a wide variety of countries were generally not perceived by the respective immigrant groups as legacies worthy of preservation in the new society. This applies to both Asian-African and European groups. Traditional religious rituals, food patterns, and family structure were maintained more out of custom, habit and familiarity, than out of a conscious desire to preserve these unique patterns -- generally by older persons in the ethnic groups. Indeed, most immigrants strived to become Israelis and to shed their ethnic label. The new society did not always make it easy to drop such labels, and in many cases these carried invidious stereotypes and acquired status-linked images<sup>1</sup>. On the whole, the diverse ethnic groups themselves made little conscious effort to retain traditional aspects of their ethnic culture.

The consensual component inherited from the pre-state period was realized in terms of the historic Zionist ideology. It provided the diverse new immigrant groups with such value-oriented concepts as Jewish nation building, in-gathering of the exiles, democratic socialist values, and the realization of a religious or tradition-based aspiration to return to the perceived ancient homeland. Western-based values concerning achievement, social mobility, careerism, and material goals, were incorporated into the consensual component, and increasingly became part of the Israeli lifestyle.<sup>2</sup>

Ethnic groups differed somewhat in interpreting these values, but major elements were nevertheless widely accepted from 1948 and on; they served as major unifying factors in the development of the society. The principal means to communicate and foster the consensual component were a common language, the schools, universal military service, and the media. The common enemy, intermittent war and threats of terrorism, provided reinforcement for a general sense of identification with the society. Those who adopted Western-based values were perceived as significant models of prosperity.

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<sup>1</sup>For further illustration see Dominguez, V.R.: "On the Construction of Culture", *People as Subject, People as Object*, Madison, Wisconsin, 1989, pp. 96-123.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

It may be inferred from today's perspective, that the consensual component presented to the culturally heterogeneous population from the very establishment of the State -- and probably before that as well -- was culturally biased by specific East European cultural traditions. The nature of the leadership and its assumptions concerning its own cultural superiority resulted in an ethnocentric style of becoming "Israeli." A deliberate, exploitive conspiracy was behind this so-called process of "Ashkenazation", viewed by all -- including the Asian-African themselves -- as the legitimate mechanism that would promote the acceptance of ethnic groups by the society<sup>1</sup>. This process was accompanied by stereotyping and prejudice, and by an unfortunate self-rejection by some Asian-Africans. Traditional cultures were belittled by many, with offensive and discriminatory repercussions in school curricula, textbooks<sup>2</sup> and media.<sup>3</sup>

Anthropological research demonstrates that several groups have shown viability of their idiosyncratic cultural traditions but have modified them functionally over time to changing needs<sup>4</sup>. There is little evidence for the presentation of norms or values that provide real competition or direct conflict with consensual ones. Traditional, idiosyncratic cultures have continued to focus on ritual, folklore, leisure activities, culinary patterns, music preferences, and styles of entertainment<sup>5</sup>.

All immigrant groups, regardless of ethnic background, accepted the process of 'Ashkenazation' as the legitimate phase of becoming Israeli. While there has been disapproval of low status and implied "primitiveness", there has been little effort since the 1950s and 1960s to retain ethnic traditions in a manner that would offer a real alternative to the "European" offering of Israeli culture. Over the years "Ashkenazation" has become synonymous

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<sup>1</sup> Shuval, J.: "Patterns of Intergroup Tension and Affinity", *UNESCO International Social Science Bulletin*, 8, 1956, pp. 75-123.

<sup>2</sup> Dominguez, V.R.: "On the Construction of Culture", *People as Subject, People as Object*, Madison, Wisconsin, 1989, pp. 96-123.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Deshen, S.: "The Judaism of Middle-Eastern Immigrants", *The Jewish Quarterly* 13, 1979, pp. 98-119.

<sup>5</sup> Shuval, J.: *Israeli Pluralism*, New York, 1989, p. 223.

with modernization. Inter-marriage between persons of differing ethnic backgrounds has increased, reaching about 20% in the late 1970s, and consumption patterns have tended to become more and more homogeneous among the various ethnic groups<sup>1</sup>.

The association of ethnicity with socio-economic status, determined by background and experience in the country of origin, resulted in a rank ordering of ethnic groups in the society. This persists with invidious results to this day. The concentration of Asian-African immigrants in peripheral development towns has reinforced the stereotyping process. Attempts to upgrade the educational level of youngsters from deprived Asian-African families have been only partially successful<sup>2</sup>.

Despite the position of persons of Asian-African origin at the lower range of the socioeconomic scale, and their relatively high concentration in deprived residential areas, there has been no ethnic political party in Israel (with the exception of Tami, a small party founded in 1981), and the Asian-African vote has shifted over the years in terms of real interest and felt need to protest<sup>3</sup>. This is partly ascribed to appropriation of ethnic leadership into the existing party structures, which have carefully allotted slots to ethnic representatives, probably as an attempt to obstruct independent ethnic activity. Such groups as the Black Panthers and Ohalim (deprived neighborhood protest movements) have not swept major segments of Asian-African support. While the Likud party has wide support among Asian-African voters, it is still unclear how persistent this phenomenon will be in the long run.

Nevertheless, excessive "Ashkenazation" has left remarkable indignation and alienation among segments of the Asian-African population. Due to their concentration in vulnerable, lower socioeconomic strata and in development towns, economic cutbacks and growing

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<sup>1</sup>For further reading see: Peres, Y., and Schrift, R.: "Intermarriage and Interethnic Relations: A Comparative Study", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 1, 1978, pp. 428-451.

<sup>2</sup>Spilerman, S., and Habib, Jr.: "Development Towns in Israel: The Role of Community in Creating Ethnic Disparities in Labor Force Characteristics", *American Journal of Sociology*, 81(4), 1976, pp. 781-812.

<sup>3</sup>Shuval, J.: *Israeli Pluralism*, New York, 1989, p. 224.

unemployment in the 1980s' have been felt disproportionately by such groups. The accumulated sense of deprivation and alienation has been channelled into the political realm. A look at the political scene in the late 1970s and 1980s reveals an increasingly homogeneous ethnic composition of existing political parties on both the local and national levels, an expression of dissent by major segments of the Asian-African population and an effort to attain access to power and resources through political channels. While there are still no influential political parties constituted on a formal ethnic basis, voters are inclined to express their ethnic identification in the domain of political power.<sup>1</sup>

Considered with regard to the pluralistic structure defined above, it may be inferred that the ethnic groups, and particularly the Asian-Africans among them, have concentrated their efforts on bread-and-butter issues of power and resource allocation rather than on issues of retaining their traditional cultural patterns. The latter are seen as marginal and decorative while the substantial issues are unemployment, deprivation, equal opportunity for jobs and leadership, and full participation in the power game. This trend has been exploited by political interest groups in order to generate voter support.

This transformation may be considered, to certain degree, as a consequence of mistakes made over the past 40 years, which stirred up indignation and a sense of deprivation. Ethnic issues were perceived more in decorative, folkloric terms than in terms of economic opportunity and full participation in the critical decision-making processes. Whether these mistakes were made deliberately or out of ignorance and lack of experience does not seem to be of central relevance today.

The political emphasis of recent years increases the visibility of ethnicity but is not a serious menace to the democratic society. At the same time, it is important to affirm that a major concern for the society is to detach ethnicity from its socioeconomic correlate. Despite progress in this area, this goal has not yet been accomplished.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, pp. 224-225.



## Religion

Religion differentiates subgroups within the Jewish community, and also categorizes the total Israeli population into a variety of Jewish and non-Jewish groups. The discussion here deals with the Jewish segment of the population.

As with the ethnic dimension of pluralism, within the religious dimensions the level of generality or specificity of categorization must be considered, since both have social meaning. The religious dimension may be analyzed in terms of a dichotomous division (secular-observant), but each of these two broad categories includes both institutionalized and non-institutionalized varieties of sub-groups.<sup>1</sup> Some of the latter are not easily recognized due to the diversity of religious self-definitions in Israel. As in the ethnic case, the level of particularity of a definition employed needs to be modified for the issue under discussion, and no one system of categorization is inherently good or bad.

Less research has focused on the religious than on the ethnic dimension of pluralism in Israeli society<sup>2</sup>. Religion varies from the ethnic dimensions in its institutionalization of separatism, e.g. schools, courts. Moreover, important segments of Kibbutz and moshav settlements as well as urban residential areas are populated according to religious-secular categories. Among the former there are further separatist distinctions by type of orthodoxy.

Apart from its institutionalized structure, the religious dimension of pluralism is defined by two further variations from the ethnic dimension: its strong and obvious association with the political structure, and its own preference -- in some cases insistence -- upon separatism.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 226.

<sup>2</sup>Smootha, S.: *Israel: Pluralism and Conflict* , London, 1978.

Religious-political parties are an old tradition in Israel, pre-dating the State by many years. This is not the place to analyze the history of the phenomenon, but simply to point out that in a democratic context, formal political structures legitimize bargaining in the attainment of special interests. The fact that they have always been demanded as part of a viable government coalition has strengthened the bargaining potential of the religious political parties out of all proportion to the size of their voting constituencies. However, stability in this area was achieved in the early period of statehood by means of the religious "status quo" which was dominant during the first thirty years and was generally recognized by most Israelis, secular as well as religious, as part of the consensual component of the culture. While some complained about restrictions of transportation on the Sabbath and rabbinical control of marriage, divorce and burial, others argued for more orthodoxy. However, the religious dimension of pluralism acquired a certain stability over the years and was characterized by predominant approval by broad segments of the population.<sup>1</sup>

After 1977 it became clear that the religious status quo was in fact flexible, and that the coalition partners would pay handsomely for support. As a result, the religious parties, especially small extremist groups, used their bargaining power to gain religious concessions from their would-be partners. In the early 1980s, the tenuous coalition structure has increased the power of small religious extremists to attain goals they have long sought but have been unable to achieve: abolishing football on the Sabbath, closing streets, preventing or delaying summer-time hours, changing the Law of Return, etc<sup>2</sup>.

Religious expansionism beyond the status quo is considered threatening by many Israelis who are reluctant to see an increase in the scope of religious control over their lives. Such expansionism may be regarded as a weakening of the consensual component with restraining conformity to religious regulations proclaimed by small, sub-groups of the population.

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<sup>1</sup>Shuval, J.: *Israeli Pluralism*, New York, 1989, p. 226.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 227.

Although demands for expansion arise from orthodox extremist groups, the more moderate among these have been hesitant to act and have let themselves be influenced by the extremists. Paradoxically, many secular segments of the population are hesitant to oppose religious expansion out of nostalgic sympathies for orthodoxy. On the other hand, there appears to be increasing anti-religious prejudice and growing rejection among secular Israelis to accommodate what is perceived as expansionism of the orthodox<sup>1</sup>.

Separatism in schools and in residential areas is favoured by many in the orthodox segment of society and is insisted upon by significant groups. This preference for separatism is shared by many secular persons as well. In this respect, the variation from the ethnic dimension of pluralism is dramatic. In fact some ethnic groups live in homogeneous residential areas because of early settlement policies or due to internal migration patterns. But, in general, there is little preference or demand for such separatism. De facto separatism in the schools is rejected by the education authorities and by most persons of Asian-African origin, even though some middle-class Europeans desire it<sup>2</sup>.

Many religious groups feel uncomfortable and even unable to carry out their religious-cultural traditions in mixed (religious-secular) social situations. The more extreme groups denounce and prohibit contact of adults or children with secular Israelis. An orthodox settler on the West Bank formulated this feeling dramatically: "looking out of the window of my home with a telescope I do not want to see violations of the Sabbath." Such preferred separatism is accomplished by segregated housing in religious neighborhoods and by obstruction of entry or harassment of secular residents. The unique cultural component of various religious groups as well as of the secular population is reinforced by such physical and social separation. Many people, especially children, have virtually no contact or acquaintance with persons of different religious views<sup>3</sup>. Extremist religious

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Spilerman, S. and Habib, Jr.: "Development Towns in Israel: The Role of Community in Creating Ethnic Disparities in Labor Force Characteristics", *American Journal of Sociology*, 81(4), 1976, pp. 781-812.

<sup>3</sup>Shuval, J.: *Israeli Pluralism*, New York, 1989, p. 228.

groups also reject military service. This non-participation emphasizes the individualism of these groups<sup>1</sup>.

A serious menace to the stability of pluralism is created when the consensual component rejects norms that offer legitimation for specific cultural alternatives along a given dimension. In other words, such a threat occurs when a particular group with a given cultural tradition assumes exclusivity or dominance -- thus de-legitimizing alternative groups. Although general agreement with respect to the legitimacy of a gross orthodox-secular dichotomy has been established, the former group does not recognize other forms of Jewish religious expression as legitimate alternatives. Their position of power and monopoly has enabled them to prevent equal status for the Conservative and Reform branches of Judaism, despite the claims of these groups for equality. A recent formulation by an orthodox extremist stated the case in no uncertain terms: "There are only two existing positions -- the *correct* orthodox one and all others which are wrong"(Ma'ariv, May 25th, 1986, p.17). In fact, major steps have been taken by orthodox groups to de-legitimize these alternative groups. The most recent examples of this approach are the recurring attempts to amend the Law of Return. As defined here, such examples can be viewed as the antithesis of pluralism. The paradox referred to above, in which many non-orthodox segments of the society adhere to non-practising nostalgic orthodoxy, provides silent support for this de-legitimizing process<sup>2</sup>.

The mode the religious dimension of pluralism has recently assumed now infringes certain basic premises of a pluralistic society; this is discerned in increasing individualism through separatism that weakens the consensual component and in growing desires for dominance and control by one group so as to de-legitimize others.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

## Arab-Jewish

### *Introduction*

The third dimension of pluralism is structured in terms of the Arab-Jewish dichotomy. Separation is institutionalized in several areas, making informal contact between groups rare. The Arab-Israeli conflict and intermittent guerrilla warfare provides the background for this dimension of pluralism, and creates suspicion and anxiety on both sides.

In the past there has been predominant consensus for the coexistence of the two communities, and acceptance -- even if reluctant in some cases -- of the need for such co-existence. Physical and social separatism have made this ideal untenable. Civil rights of the Arab community in Israel are recognized although not always observed. While a general undercurrent of hostility pervades both communities, it is intermittently overt and covert with varying degrees of intensity in response to specific events. Periodic acts of "terrorism" fan the underlying feeling and reinforce expressions of hostility. Deliberate prohibition by extremist leaders of informal contact between Jewish and Arab youngsters in school might result in a growth in mutual hostility.

The rise of Kahanism and religious expansionism with their overt rejection of the above values is a direct challenge to the consensus for coexistence. While the groups holding such views are small and are viewed by some as marginal, surveys in the secondary schools and in other parts of the population suggest that the views expressed by these groups are more widely held and could be increasing, especially in the wake of the 1988 West Bank disturbances.

The 1988 civil revolts on the West Bank and among Israeli Arabs have dramatized this issue and clarified the inherent connection of the internal Arab-Jewish dimension of pluralism in the broader political context. Failure to address the Palestinian issue makes extremely difficult a viable *modus vivendi* between Jews and Arabs within Israel.

## *The Dual Basis of the Nation State*

In the modern nation state, the adherence of the individual to the community is determined by two principles: citizenship in the state and membership of the nation. The former determines the criteria of formal participation in the political community: the state, being based on universalistic laws and democratic institutions, guarantees all its citizens formal political equality. The latter determines the criteria of substantive participation in the political community: Insofar as the principal symbols of this community are national, this participation will be particularistic -- limited to the members of the national majority, or to those members of the minority who seek to join that majority, thus giving up their national identity. Minorities who strive to maintain their ethnic identities are in an unstable position in such a nation state; they are summoned to perform their civil obligations and exercise their civil rights and to show allegiance to the state, but in the nature of the case they remain marginal to the political community and their allegiance remains questionable.

This state of affairs introduces a fundamental instability into the nation state. As an attempt to resolve such instability, the central polity may pursue a wide variety of strategies, ranging from the extermination of the minority to its complete assimilation. In-between these extremes are found the different compromising attempts to accommodate the minority without assimilating it completely. In such cases, the polity may seek to increase the emphasis, in the symbolization of the state, upon the universalistic principle of citizenship as a denominator, at the expense of particularistic national symbols. This effort may eventuate in the emergence of a "civil religion"<sup>1</sup> under whose auspices a nation of civilians would eventually emerge, obliterating, in the political sphere, the differences between primordial national entities.

The development of a "civil religion," however, may be constrained by the nature of the symbols by which the "nation" is represented. Insofar as

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<sup>1</sup>Rousseau, J.J.: *The Social Contract*, New York, 1947.

these symbols have a marked transcendent, especially religious character, these constraints can become extremely severe. In this case, a "civic" rather than a civil religion will tend to emerge, one in which the political realm, though distinct from the religious, is permeated by specific religious symbols and concepts. A complete differentiation of political (civil) and national-religious roles will not take place in such a state, and the civic role will contain national-religious attributes. Such nation states will face a chronic problem in the political incorporation of their minorities<sup>1</sup>.

### *Israel and its Arab Minority*

The Zionist movement, which created Israel, has struggled to resolve the problem of Jewish collective existence and identity in the modern era -- the era in which the traditional view of Jews as a religious minority to a Christian world proved inadequate. The emergent nation states offered only an individual solution -- the acceptance of Jews as citizens -- but not a collective one, namely of Jews as a group with separate historical identities<sup>2</sup>. Zionism was basically a secular political movement, seeking the realization of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel, which according to the prevalent orthodox religious view could be achieved only by divine redemption. Zionism thus "secularized" traditional Jewish aspirations, and in the process strove to forge a Jewish nation from members of the Jewish religion. Zionism also inherited from Judaism a basic structural contradiction, which decisively influenced the nature of the Israeli State, its "universalistic particularism:" The conception that the Jews are the chosen (i.e. set apart) people, but their chosenness is, in a sense, unnecessary: they announced to the world, through their prophets, the universalistic ethic, which became the kernel of the ethic of modernity. When, ironically, in the name of that ethic, Diasporic Jews were given equal civil rights as *individuals*, they found themselves in a quandary: the Jewish "ordeal of civility" was engendered by

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<sup>1</sup>For further reading on this section, see: Cohen, E.: *Citizenship, Nationality and Religion*, 1989, pp. 66-68.

<sup>2</sup>Avineri, Sh.: *The making of Modern Zionism*, London, 1981, pp. 8-13.

the inability of the Jews to preserve their *collective* separateness, once they were fully integrated as citizens in the modern civil state<sup>1</sup>. Zionism sought to overcome this dilemma by creating a Jewish state which would endow its citizens with both individual civil rights and national sovereignty. The pioneering-socialist version of Zionism which was dominant at the time the State of Israel was founded was indeed committed to both civil universalism and national particularism, without sensing their inherent contradiction: Israel was to be first and foremost a *Jewish* state. The basic symbols of the state, its name, flag, anthem and political rituals were all emphatically Jewish; some of these, such as the national emblem depicting the Menorah (the seven-armed candlestick), were borrowed from Jewish religion, but have become "secularized" and used as historic symbols of the continuity of the Israeli state with Jewish history. But the state was simultaneously committed to the ideals of civility and democracy and to the creation of enlightened, liberal and democratic political institutions<sup>2</sup>. These political principles were enshrined in Israel's Declaration of Independence, although the actual practice of the polity, especially during the period of early statehood, was often at extreme variance with them regarding their Arab minority.

Israel was to be based, as a modern state, on civil, legal-rational principles of legitimation; but these provided primarily the formal foundation of the state. Of greater importance was the right of the Jewish people to national sovereignty in their own land. This link was based on history and religion, but perceived as crucial for the justification of the state in nationalist Zionist ideology. It is indeed in the link between the Jews and their land that secular Zionist and orthodox religious aspirations overlap, creating the basis for a neo-traditional, religious reinterpretation of Zionism<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>Cohen, E.: *Citizen, Nationality and Religion*, New York, 1989, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup>Shapira, A.: "Socialist Means and Nationalist Aims", *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 38, 1986, pp. 14-27.

<sup>3</sup>Kimmerling, B.: *Between the Primordial and the Civil Definition of the Collective Identity: Eretz Israel or the State of Israel*, Boulder, Colorado, 1985, pp. 262-283.



Neither did the legal institutions of the new state bear out the universalistic principles of citizenship. Although the Law of Return endowed all Jews with the right to immigrate to Israel; this right was denied to others, in particular to the Palestinian refugees who left the country in 1948 and who have never been permitted to return<sup>1</sup>.

It is in the realm of religion that the greatest institutional inroads on universalistic civility are found. Though Israel was to be a secular state, it incorporated many elements of Jewish religious tradition in its legal and institutional make-up. In particular, Jewish oral law (Halacha) was applied, through legislation, to diverse areas of life of the Jewish population, such as matrimony, inheritance, diet and the keeping of the Sabbath rest-day. This legislation, applied only to the Jewish population, however, and did not on the whole, affect the other religious communities, whose affairs are conducted according to their own religious laws<sup>2</sup>.

The political history of Israel from its beginning to the present can be seen as the progressive emergence of the contradiction between the universalistic and particularistic principles on which the state was originally based, between citizenship of the state and membership in the nation. This growing cleft especially between the judiciary, which supported, within limits, the exercise of civil rights for all citizens, and the trend within the Jewish community towards a particularistic emphasis on membership in the Jewish nation as the basis for membership in the political community. This trend moves away from secular Zionism towards a neo-traditionalist Jewish nationalism which reinforces the primordial links among Jews within Israel and the diaspora, and de-emphasizes the modern, civil character of the state<sup>3</sup>. There are four primary sources of this trend in Israeli society: (1) The gradual "post-revolutionary" disenchantment of members of central strata in Israeli society, including much of the second generation, with the pioneering-socialist ideology of the founders; (2) The re-assertion by the

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<sup>1</sup>Lustick, I.: *Arabs in the Jewish State*, Austin: Texas Univ Press, 1980, pp. 274-275.

<sup>2</sup>Cohen, E.: *Citizen, Nationality and Religion*, New York, 1989, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup>Cohen, E.: "Ethnicity and Legitimation in Contemporary Israel", *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 28, 1983, pp. 111-124.

oriental immigrants and their progeny of their traditional Jewish world-view, after the partial failure of the Israeli establishment to "modernize" and "secularize" them; (3) The Six-Day War of 1967, which on the one hand reinforced traditional and messianic conceptions of Israel, and on the other, brought under Israeli domination almost a million Arabs, who are not citizens of the state; and, finally, (4) The October War of 1973, which damaged the prestige of the old-timer leadership and shook the confidence of the wider public in the ideological and political premises which it represented<sup>1</sup>.

The reinterpretation of the nature of the state in neo-traditionalist nationalist terms by broad strata of Israeli Jews has potentially important effects on the standing of the Arabs in the Jewish state.

Immediately following the establishment of the State of Israel, the few shocked, demoralized and leaderless Arabs who had stayed within its boundaries were in no position to exercise their civil rights which the new state promised them. The remnants of the Arab population were at first treated as a vanquished enemy population rather than as bona fide citizens of the new state. As the Ministry for Minority Affairs complained in a document of 1949: "Despite the announcement that the Arabs of the state who had surrendered were recognized as citizens . . . the . . . hatred and vengeance towards them continue. The wide public, whose wounds [from the 'War of Independence'] have not yet healed, has not yet adopted a democratic-humanistic way of thinking . . . ."2. Though granted formal citizenship and the vote, the Arabs were placed under military restrictions which limited their movements and their civil rights; Arab lands were expropriated, and Arabs were denied participation in, economic, educational and military roles. Restrictions on Arabs remained until the complete abolition of the Military Government in 1966, long after the security reasons for its establishment had ceased to exist. Some restrictions on Arab participation continue even today. Arabs have been, however, granted a degree of cultural autonomy: Arabic was recognized as one of the two official

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<sup>1</sup>Cohen, E.: *Citizen, Nationality and Religion*, New York, 1989, p. 71.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 72.

languages, and a separate curriculum was evolved for an Arabic school system (into which, however, many Jewish themes were introduced)<sup>1</sup>.

The Arabs at first rather complied with the demands of the authorities to pay lip service, homage, to the new state, but gradually their resentment built up. This resentment did not take the form of direct confrontations or active resistance to the authorities; rather, it was expressed in growing support for the Communist party, which, in the absence of an Arab nationalist party, became the framework for the expression of their collective aspirations; the resentment was expressed also in a growing demand for the full realization of the formal civil rights of Arabs, as promised by its Declaration of Independence<sup>2</sup>.

The response of the Israeli authorities gradually crystallized around the apparently demographic, but actually political, concept of an "Israeli-Arab minority." It was recognized that Arab citizens found it difficult, if not impossible, to identify with the Jewish symbols of statehood, and pressure on them to do so was therefore reduced. The Arabs were increasingly permitted to exercise their civil rights and to share in the educational and economic opportunities of the wider society; any expression of their national aspirations, however, was continually denied. Meanwhile, the national identity of Arabs in neighboring countries, and in particular the Palestinians, began to emerge<sup>3</sup>.

This softened policy, only partially resolved the problems of the Arab minority. Discriminated against Arabs continued in governmental services and appropriations. Their economic integration turned into a dependence on the Jewish sector, with Arabs working mainly in Jewish enterprises, or as independent entrepreneurs subservient to the Jewish community. The problem of the Arab collective identity remained unresolved and aggravated as the younger generation gained self-confidence and learned to avail itself of the opportunities provided by the civil, democratic nature of the state. An intensified era of Arab cohesiveness followed the 1967 Six-Day War, when

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<sup>1</sup>Lustick, I.: *Arabs in the Jewish State*, Austin: Texas Univ Press, 1980, pp. 274-275.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Cohen, E.: *Citizenship, Nationality and Religion*, New York, 1989, p. 73.

the Israeli Arabs encountered their co-nationals on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip from whom they had been separated since 1948. This was for many a crucial, though ambiguous, experience. On the one hand, the Arabs understood the socioeconomic gap which had emerged between them and the Palestinians of the newly occupied territories over the years of separation; on the other hand, however, the contact focussed the crisis of the collective identity of the Israeli Arabs, primarily since the inhabitants of the occupied territories tended to view them as traitors to the Palestinian cause. Following the Six-Day War there was a gradual radicalization of Israeli Arabs and a growing identification with the Palestinians. These trends found expression in radical protest activities, like the Day of the Land (Yom Ha-Adama)<sup>1</sup>, first observed in 1976, but they did not lead to widespread active resistance or armed struggle. Even though Palestinian resistance has somewhat increased in recent years in Israeli, it remains remarkably low. Israeli Arabs, though often in radical political opposition to government, are on the whole not involved in the Palestinian resistance movement. Only few Israeli Arabs, however, identify fully with the state. The more moderate aspire to strengthen the civil as against the Jewish national character of the state, aiming thereby to enhance the realization of their civil rights, and to increase their opportunities of identification with the state. The more radical ones seek to use the democratic rules for the expression of Arab national aspirations, aiming to transform the nature of the Jewish state itself, within the law.

### **Interaction Among the Three Dimensions of Israeli Pluralism**

For analytic purposes the three dimensions of Israeli pluralism have been discussed separately. There is some artificiality in such a separation, and their joint relationship must be considered. These dimensions interact with each other in a manner that frequently sharpens the problematic

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 74.

situations described. Some examples of this interaction will be considered below.

The religious and Arab-Jewish dimensions interact through certain religious values and ideological principles which focus hostility of Jews on Arabs. Religious legitimation has been used to justify aggression and violence toward the Arab population; labeling by groups of Jewish Orthodox nationalists of Arabs as "Amalek" (an ancient people viewed by certain groups of the orthodox as traditional, eternal enemies of the Jewish people)<sup>1</sup>, provides unconditional legitimation for violence against them. This labeling, makes hatred of Arabs and hostility against them acceptable, even desirable, for those who accept such definitions. However small the latter group, it has significant impact in terms of the normative climate of the society.

Another example of interaction between the same two dimensions of pluralism may be seen in the religious-historic legitimation of Jewish rights to settlement in all parts of the so-called "Land of Israel," a claim which has contributed to ongoing hostility between Jews and Arabs. The semi-mystical, ideological legitimation for such settlement is based less on political-strategic notions than on religious-historical values which have been used by these groups to justify the location of Jewish settlements and the activation of religious sites in areas populated historically by Arabs.

An additional example points up the interaction between the ethnic and Arab-Jewish dimensions of Israeli pluralism. Those segments of the Jewish population which originated in a variety of Arab countries frequently harbor hostility toward Arabs which has its origins in bitter experience. In many cases these feelings and attitudes have been transmitted to their Israeli-born children. Broad segments of the Jewish Asian-African populations are thus characterized by deep fears and latent aggression toward Arabs which, while restrained in the large part, tend to become manifest in response to periodic acts of Arab armed struggle, and to emerge in the form of violence<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>Shuval, J.: *Israeli Pluralism*, New York, 1989, p. 230.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, pp. 231-232.

A striking case of the interaction between the ethnic and religious dimensions of pluralism occurred in the fall of 1986, when the orthodox, Sephardi rabbi of Baaka, a neighborhood of Jerusalem, led a group of his followers into a newly established Reform synagogue during a holiday service in an attempt to disrupt the ritual and forcibly remove the Torah scroll on the grounds that the ritual was improper and, more specifically, that "inappropriately" dressed women were participating. On the level described, this is only an additional incident exemplifying the problems of religious pluralism discussed earlier in this chapter. The dramatic nature of the case is reflected in the subsequent comment on it by the Chief Sephardi rabbi who stated on the radio (October 26th, 1986) that "there is no freedom of worship for Jews in Israel since only the orthodox form of religion is legitimate."<sup>1</sup> But several observers have noted the fact that the Sephardi rabbi was the initiator of the incident links it to the ethnic dimension of pluralism, especially since the Sephardim have generally not identified with extremist groups among the orthodox. This observation is based on the social and demographic changes that have occurred in Baaka in recent years. A process of "gentrification" has been taking place with the influx of noticeable numbers of relatively affluent persons, largely of European origin, who have invested considerable sums in modernizing and beautifying run-down homes in the area. This new middle-class, generally professional group contrasts with the less affluent veteran population, largely of Sephardi origin, who have lived in Baaka since the early 1950s. The reform congregation is composed almost entirely of relatively recent immigrants from English-speaking countries who symbolize the affluence (although many are young and far from well-to-do) and strangeness of the newcomers to the community. Viewed from this point of view, the religious incident carries a covert implication of ethnic and class conflict that go beyond the issue of religious pluralism.

The above are only some examples of the inter-relationships among the different dimensions of pluralism. The goal is not to catalogue them but rather to indicate that the three dimensions do not function in isolation from each other.

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Shuval, J.: *Israeli Pluralism*, New York, 1989, p. 231.

## Conclusion

Pluralism in a democratic society has been considered in terms of two types of cultural components: consensual and specific. The nature of a pluralistic society is a function of the dynamic relation between the two. Some definitions and the principal factors conditioning the nature of this relationship have been suggested: consensual adherence to a broadly based set of central values over and above particularistic ones; prevention of dominance by one group by means of political-representational or constitutional, legally-based mechanisms; consensual legitimation for the existence of specific groups; consensus on life areas in which alternative cultural forms are acceptable; non-inclusion in specific cultures of values in direct conflict with the consensual values. Without these conditions stability in a democratic, pluralistic society is problematic, and disruptive conflict of an overt sort is likely.

In the Israeli case, three dimensions of differentiation are salient. Israeli pluralism structures in terms of ethnicity, religion, and the Arab-Jewish dichotomy.

The ethnic dimension of pluralism, which initially was structured in terms of the cultural diversity of immigrant groups, has focused relatively little on the preservation of these cultural traditions, principally because most immigrants have been less interested in such preservation than in attaining an Israeli identity without an ethnic label. The historic reality, however, has been that such labels were not always removable and in fact were retained, in some cases with invidious implications. Ethnic origin has continued to be linked with social and socioeconomic status. Although there has been important change over time in virtually all measures of achievement in education and in the economic sphere, persons of Asian-African background are still more deprived than are persons of European-American origins. Evidence of prejudiced attitudes among the latter and self-rejection among the former indicate that ethnicity remains even though differences between ethnic groups are diminishing through intermarriage

and growing homogenization. Geographical concentrations of Asian-Africans in development towns where unemployment is relatively high, as well as a general sense of relative deprivation among segments of this population, have kept the ethnic dimension of pluralism salient despite efforts to reduce the social gap.

In recent years, especially since 1977, there has been increased ethnic differentiation expressed in the political sphere. Election patterns indicate ethnic concentrations of voters in support of specific existing political parties, e.g. voters of Asian-African origin heavily support the Likud. Ethnic identity is thus expressed to some extent through the polls. This process is recognized and reinforced by the parties themselves which seek to attract the ethnic vote by highlighting appropriate themes and electoral promises.

If there should be economic recession and unemployment, it is possible that conflict could erupt along ethnic lines. However, such phenomena would be ineffective since the consensual component generally cuts across ethnic lines and alienation in deprived sub-groups is generally not that extreme.

The present crisis in Israeli pluralism focuses on the religious and Arab-Jewish dimensions. We have pointed to challenges from specific groups to the consensual component and to violations in certain of the basic conditions noted for democratic pluralism.

With regard to the religious dimension: there is an attenuation of the consensual component with growing particularistic separatism. Specific groups have adopted values in direct conflict with consensual values; there is a de-legitimation of the existence of specific groups defined by these dimensions of pluralism and an absence of legal guarantees for the existence of certain sub-groups. Conflict has already erupted in terms of these dimensions and it would seem that there is very real potential for additional future conflict.

The Arab-Jewish dimension of pluralism structures against a background of broader political conflict. The civil rebellion on the West Bank and Gaza Strip have dramatized this problem and have made clear



once again that a resolution of the Palestinian problem is indispensable for an acceptable way of living between Jews and Arabs inside Israel. However within Israeli society, the structure of co-existence is also a function of the inherent social context reflecting values and norms of the society. Expressions of hostility and intolerance, even if voiced by small groups, may be viewed as violations of the premises of democratic pluralism, the danger of which lies in their spreading and gaining increased acceptance.

Part of the crisis in Israeli pluralism stems from a gap in the overall consensual component regarding tolerance as a social value. However interpreted or expressed, a minimal definition of tolerance involves acceptance of alternative groups and cultural contexts as legitimate. This value has not been emphasized in Israeli culture. In the past it has had little expression in the schools, in most homes or in everyday life. Its general absence is a threat to pluralism with regard to any of its dimensions since its converse, intolerance, denies the legitimacy of cultural alternatives.

The religious issue as discussed here focuses internally on the society and is subject to considerable control by political and legal measures, however complicated that may be. In this regard it may be said that the religious dimension is more controllable than is the Arab-Jewish dimension of pluralism which reflects a variety of decisions and events that are determined only partly by decisions taken within the Israel context.

## Chapter Two

### Selfhood and Otherness : Palestine and Israel in Israeli Media

#### *A Case Study of Recent Hebrew Literature*

In this chapter, some recent trends in Hebrew literature will be evaluated to examine the inclinations represented by a group of writers of the left flank of Zionism when dealing with both Zionist and Palestinian identity<sup>1</sup>. This group has been recently chosen for different studies because of its high profile abroad and within Israel, as well as because its writings seem to be a strong and true representative of the current cultural and political crisis of Zionism. It would be easy to quote at length from fanatic, right-wing and racist publications by Gush Emunim or similar organizations. However, for my political and cultural investigation I have chosen to refer to those writers belonging to left-Zionism, due to their progressive approaches. It can be safely assumed that any racism and nationalism detected within this group will be even more evident within the Zionist mainstream. Moreover, it is indispensable to analyze the positions that this progressive group represents since any shift in Zionist policy towards the Palestinians may emerge from there.

Literature plays a central political and ideological role in Israel similar to that played by the electronic media in Western Europe. Literature is utilized here as a detector of recent shifts in Zionist conceptions, and any results which may be derived from this analysis are not medium-specific.

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<sup>1</sup>When using terms like 'left-Zionism' or 'right-wing Zionism' one should always be aware that these carry different meanings from the ones assumed in Europe. As Zionism is based, in the main, on the need to expunge class struggle within it, to form a unity which is supposedly beyond class barriers, the terms 'left' and 'right' are approximations of 'liberal' and 'humanist' on the one hand, and 'conservative' on the other. These terms do not apply to social terms within Israeli society but rather to the different modes of looking at the Palestinian entity. Hence, it is usual to find extreme right tendencies within the Labor Alliance. Conversely, the right-wing party Herut has been reacting to the anger of the majority of Oriental Jews directed against their oppression by successive Labor governments. (See: Shalev, M.: *State/Society Relations in Israel*, New York, 1989, pp. 93-109.)

## The Background of History

The particular intensity with which Hebrew and Arabic literature and poetry have taken up the conflict as their central theme brings to mind other recent periods of great social and political tension in which literature played a similar role. An obvious example is that of pre-revolutionary Russia, the vast social landscape of which was painted with passionate detail by Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov and Gorky. Russian literature of the 19th century and since has had a significant influence on Hebrew literature. Many writers in pre-mandate Palestine came from Russia and wrote in Russian before writing in Hebrew. They had brought with them not only the rhythms of the motherland but a range of attitudes, subjects and themes specific to 19th century Russian literature<sup>1</sup>. In that sense, Hebrew literature in Palestine was always of a polemic cast, a phenomenon not restricted to pre-revolutionary Russia but evident in many societies undergoing violent change, such as Weimar Germany or the USA during the Depression.

Not only are novels, poems and plays used as platforms for political argumentation as part of the political arsenal that reaches a wide and crucial audience, but writers consistently participate in the endless and constant public debate on the nature of the Zionist project. The ideological battle fought over the direction to be taken by Zionism has been dominated from the start by literary figures in an abundance not seen elsewhere.

The obvious place to start is with Herzl, a journalist, mediocre playwright and novelist who attained fame through his books --*Altneuland* and *Der Judenstaat* -- which describe the realization of Zionist aspirations. The ideas expressed in these books had already been put forward a few years earlier, specifically by Leo Pinsker's book *Auto-emancipation*. Books discussing the options facing the Jews of Europe were not unusual; since Jewish communities spanned the globe, literature had been the supreme

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<sup>1</sup>For a full account on this, see: Hertzberg, A.: *The Zionist idea*, New York, 1959, pp. 166-198.

vehicle of dialogue within world Jewry<sup>1</sup>. The debate fired by Herzl was joined by Jewish writers from various countries. Polemicists such as Achad Ha'am and Borochoy and poets like Bialik joined the movement and the debate was brought to the public through newspapers, novels, pamphlets and poems. This was a formative period of the Zionist discourse, one in which politicians as such were missing, and was in effect a political debate held in the cultural arena<sup>2</sup>. For a people who had survived longer than most and who cherished the *Bible* as a powerful combination of history, religion, culture, and a political programme for the future (not to mention a land-registry document), the choice of literary polemics to execute this crucial discourse on the movement's future directions was obvious.

Literature is the stage on which power struggles take shape in Israel, where opposing groupings within Zionism talk to each other, using the public arena as a testing ground for new tendencies. The Zionist right has never been short of literary proponents -- from the poets Greenberg and Alterman, to novelists such as Agnon and Shamir. But amongst the voices of nationalism and neocolonial celebration at the start of colonization were voices of dissent and discord. After Achad Ha'am<sup>3</sup> and his scruples came Brenner who raised political and personal doubts about the direction of the Zionist project. These two were followed in the 1920s by a group of intellectuals led by Martin Buber, called *Birth Shalom* (Peace Pact)<sup>4</sup>. The group tried to set up a united front for peace in Palestine, but was less than successful in persuading substantial numbers of Jews or Arabs to join. This was a period of gains for the Zionist right, with Jabotinsky, the leader of the Revisionist Zionist Federation, attracting many young Zionists in Europe and Palestine. Jabotinsky, another Zionist writer-turned-politician, had been influenced by Mussolini during the early 1920s. Though he later disagreed bitterly with fascism and was one of its strongest opponents within Zionism, his organization's youth movement resembled the *Hitler Jugend* and the armed processions of supporters clearly drew inspiration from the *Sturn*

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<sup>1</sup>Avineri, S.: *The Making of Zionism*, London, 1981, pp. 73-83.

<sup>2</sup>Hertzberg, A.: *The Zionist Idea*, New York, 1959, pp. 278-281.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, pp. 261-270.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, pp. 450-463.

*Abteilung* in Germany. This accusation was hurled at them by their opponents on the left flank of Zionism<sup>1</sup>.

The concept of state power (with its crucial role within the future Zionist state), was developed by Jabotinsky in the historical novel *Samson*. The final message his Samson sends back to the Israelites consists of two words: 'Iron' and 'King'. (These two they are told to strive for, at any cost, so that they can become the lords of Canaan)<sup>2</sup>. His is a cry for 'normalcy', in a world where the norm has become the rule of naked power, racism and oppression. In this light, the liberation of the Jew is seen not as a freedom won from the society of *goyim* but as freedom from the 'misguided' humanism preached and practiced by so many Jewish intellectuals in the diaspora. It is the rich tradition of Jewish radicalism, of the important role played by many Jews within the socialist and communist movements, which is being countered here. That tradition was the dominant voice of politicized Jews in East Europe before the holocaust, through organizations like the Bund, and various socialist and communist organizations<sup>3</sup>.

The retreat from 19th-century radical and liberal traditions to a pre-historic, mythical and glorious past, had been the hallmark of fascist tendencies elsewhere -- providing an ideological justification for demands to establish new empires and a battle cry for the masses to follow. It continues to supply ammunition and argumentation for the current generation of fascists and racists in Israel who are closer in their thinking, political style and lexicon to Jabotinsky than to the labor movement.

Thus, the struggle for political control within Zionism in Palestine was not limited to brute force and armed provocation in the style developed in central Europe; like left-Zionism with its publication houses, the right enjoyed the full backing of the Revisionist publication machinery which included a journal called *Diary of a Jewish Fascist*, edited by another writer, Aba Achimeir. In the context of fascist victories in Europe, this group of ultra-right extremists was indicative of the general direction taken by

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<sup>1</sup>Avineri, S.: *The Making of Modern Zionism*, London, 1981, pp. 159-165.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, pp. 173-174.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, pp. 177-186.

Zionists during this period. It was inconceivable for *Birth Shalom* to succeed in such an atmosphere dominated by nationalist and neo-colonial sentiments. The decline of left-of-center ideas and influence during the 1930s in Palestine has resurfaced in the 1980s with the coming to power of the right-wing block, and the formation of even more extreme, fascist parliamentary and extra-parliamentary blocks and parties which enjoyed popular support, particularly amongst the Jewish youth<sup>1</sup>.

A look at historical and political parallels, such as the rise of fascism in Europe, may provide conceptual keys to a number of ideological closed doors behind which the harmful creations of this violent period are still intact. It was during this period that terms as *cruel Zionism* were invented to describe a dominant tendency within Zionism led by the undisputed strong-man of the Zionist institution, Ben Gurion<sup>2</sup>. The term evolved out of the priorities of building Zionism and its empire-in-the-making rather than paying attention to the millions of Jews living in Europe under the impending threat of extinction. It is especially illuminating to look at the 'poetic' terminology used by some 'liberal' Zionist leaders, such as Weizmann, to see how deep fascist ideology had struck. As early as 1937, Weizmann was using poignant language to describe the Jews of Europe and their projected future:

*The old ones will pass; they will bear their fate, or they will not. They were dust, economic and moral dust in a cruel world . . . Two millions, and perhaps less -- She'erit Hapleta -- only a branch will survive. They have to accept it. The rest must leave the future -- to their youth.*

The reference to millions of human beings as 'human dust' cannot have been conceived in isolation from the literary campaign by the Zionist right, politically and historically synchronized and related to the rise of European fascism. The ascendancy of militant, empire-seeking nationalism has had a decisive dehumanizing effect on Zionism, through a complex system of links with the cultural centers around which this new growth has flourished. Not recognizing these links is equivalent to accepting the central

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, pp. 180-186.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, pp. 198-204.

Zionist myth of the uniqueness of Zionism, a movement that not only denies the historical developments, but reverses some of them as well<sup>1</sup>.

### The 'Cosmetic' Alternative

The debate around the central features of the Zionist utopia was held, from the start, between two unequal groups. The first included those who, following Herzl's notions of the colonisation process in Palestine and its links with and dependence on the empire of the day, set about achieving their goals in the shortest possible period. Despite important differences between right and left-wing Zionism about priorities and methods, both wings of mainstream Zionism form part of this first grouping and were in accord over the main principles of political Zionism.

The second grouping was heterogenous -- liberals, socialists, communists -- who found their way to Palestine as a result of European anti-semitism rather than as a result of Zionism<sup>2</sup>. This was not a struggle between the dominant and an alternative -- the alternative had by definition to exist outside Zionism and to offer not just an opposition to it -- but was an alternative programme altogether. Such a group did not exist within the Jewish community in Palestine, at least not a group with any real cultural and political influence. Hence the debate was held between dominant, aggressive forms of Zionism and critics of such a tendency who, rather than disassociating themselves from it and fighting it outright, were reformers and not radicals or revolutionaries. Such criticism may be called 'cosmetic' as it is a disagreement about ways and means, not about goals.

An unusually clear and frank account of the relationship between the dominant tendency and its critics appears in Amos Oz's book, *Be'or Hacheleth He'aza* (Under This Blazing Light). Amos Oz is one of the few Israeli writers who are relatively well known abroad -- his books have been

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<sup>1</sup>Hertzberg, A.: *The Zionist Idea*, New York, 1959, pp. 578-583.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, pp. 181-198.

translated into many languages and he is thought of as a left-wing activist and a supporter of Palestinian rights. In Israel he has been attacked by the right-wing groups numerous times, classified as an *ashafist* (Israeli jargon for PLO supporters from the Hebrew acronym *ashaf* for the PLO)<sup>1</sup>. His book is a collection of articles and public talks written during the 1970s. In it He says:

*Where the followers of the trendy school of thought are talking about "territories", the Greater Israel Movement is saying quite openly --"Eretz Israel". Where some smart Alecs are preaching: let's try to grab as much as the Goyish nations will allow, the Greater Israel people are saying: All is ours, the whole country and it should not be redivided. Where the nod and wink rule and where everyone uses synonyms in order to cover up, they are saying: colonize, Judaize, inherit.*

*These are necessary words. There is in them, amongst other things, a measure of neatness and trust. This movement was not born out of inferior elements; it comes out of the noble heritage of Jewry. I see it as a live branch, totally necessary to the main Zionist tree trunk. If we forget for a moment some specks of ugliness that have attached themselves to the movement (and which movement is clear of those?) then the movement of Greater Israel is founded on love, trust and visionary insight. I belong to a different and remote branch of the same tree, but even from a distance I can recognize the temperament, suffering, anger, heart-rendering wishes. Both them and me are partners of a kind, sharing a hostility towards those waiting to see which way the wind blows. . . . 2*

To fully appreciate those words, it may be useful to translate them into other political realities. Would similar expressions be possible from a liberal or left-wing activist to describe links and connections to a tradition held in common with the extreme right? Brecht speaking about Nazism? Gramsci speaking about Fascism? Jackson praising the Klu Klux Klan? A unique situation, indeed, for anyone claiming to be active on the left. But in the case of Oz and others like him in left-Zionist groups from the Labour party to

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<sup>1</sup>Bresheeth, H.: *Self and other in Zionism*, London, 1989, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



Peace Now, sentiments connecting them to the extreme Jewish right are apparently firmer than any positive leanings they may have towards Palestinians, even those on the left of the political spectrum. This sense of belonging not to an internationalist left movement, but to a tradition created by reactionary forces and now dominated by the extreme right, may explain the images of Palestine and Palestinians they create. This innate racism is why the struggle of 'cosmetic reformers' of Zionism, while being the more sympathetic and acceptable aspect of a repressive system, can offer neither a real alternative nor an enduring resistance to the dominant.

The wavering of this tendency on central issues, like the self-determination of the Palestinians or the colonial nature of the Zionist enterprise, limits their actions and proclamations to a corrective type, a rear-guard cultural activity. Such a position, by supplying a more acceptable and appealing face for both internal and external consumption, serves as an effective apologist for the excesses of Zionism. It also highlights the extent of the crisis in which Zionism has found itself 20 years after the 'miracle' of 1967.

The continued support of such writers for Zionism seems to emerge from a disregard for any political choices that might require a rethinking of communal and national identity rather than on an evaluation of existing options. Such dissent as they voice arises out of a disenchantment with what their society has become, not from a political analysis. Concern for the lost dream of Zionist Utopia, to find out 'where it all went wrong', assumes a pure and innocent dream that somehow became corrupt. This romanticism has fired many Zionists whose need to see Palestine filled with Jews has made them blind to the existence of another nation there prior to their arrival. It is not the dream which is to blame, they argue, but only its realization which did not measure up to the promised paradise<sup>1</sup>. But the dream did not become corrupt at all; rather, it had in it a fatal fault, built into the very fibre of its being -- the denial of the other. This denial operates on all levels -- the ideological negation of a Palestinian people underlines and justifies the very material forms of denial developed by Israeli society.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 127.

When the existence of the other becomes visible and no longer possible to deny, further means have to be put forward. Immediately after the occupation in 1967, R. Weitz, a prominent member of the establishment and former head of the Colonization Department of the Jewish Agency, revealed that in his diary of 1947 he had written the following:

*Between ourselves it must be clear that there is no room for both people together in this country. . . We shall not achieve our goal of being an independent people, with the Arabs in this small country. The only solution is a Palestine, at least Western Palestine (West of the Jordan river) without Arabs. . . And there is no other way than to transfer the Arabs from here into the neighboring countries, to transfer all of them: Not one village, not one tribe, should be left. . . . Only after this transfer will the country be able to absorb the millions of our brethren. There is no other way out.*<sup>1</sup>

But it was Herzl, not Weitz, who invented the idea of a total transfer. His may be the first written reference to the idea of mass transfer as a political solution in Palestine:

*When we occupy the land, we shall bring immediate benefits to the state that receives us. We must expropriate gently the private property on the estates assigned to us.*

*We shall try to spirit the pennyless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it any employment in our own country.*

*The property-owners will come to our side. Both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly.*

*Let the owners of immovable property believe that they are cheating us, selling us things for more than they are worth.*

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<sup>1</sup>KHAMSIN: *Profile of an occupation*, London, 1989, p. 128.

*But we are not going to sell them anything back.* <sup>1</sup>

Interestingly, later the same day (12th June 1895), Herzl notes a task to be performed by the indigenous population before it is transferred to the 'transit countries':

*If we move into a region where there are wild animals to which the Jews are not accustomed -- big snakes, etc. -- I shall use the natives, prior to giving them employment in the transit countries, for the extermination of these animals. High premium for snake skins, etc., as well as their spawn.*<sup>2</sup>

That such thoughts were carefully edited from published works and speeches, points to a systematic denial and rewriting of history, a reworking of the Zionist self. Herzl himself was meticulous in removing references to the indigenous population from his published material. Indeed, the silence on this point rings loudly in his other books. This effort still continues and signifies a censoring of political consciousness, forcing underground any evidence of embarrassing traits of Zionism during its formative years.

The solutions outlined above were necessary not because of shortage of space in Palestine, but because of a more crucial factor -- the imagined nature and identity of the Jewish/Israeli self in Palestine.

Thus, while it is possible for left-Zionist writers to be critical of Zionism in practice, it seems more difficult, almost impossible, to question the theoretical and ideological basis of the whole enterprise. Criticising a mode of practice does not necessarily invalidate the theory behind it; finding basic faults with the theory invalidates the whole enterprise.

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<sup>1</sup>Bresheeth, H.: *Palestine and Israel in Hebrew Literature*, London, 1989, p. 128.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

## Synthesizing the Nation

As a result of external and internal pressures during the 1930s, the fragile cultural and political dominance of left-Zionism comes to an early end. The new cultural activists of the ascending right are quick to pinpoint the internal contradictions permeating left-Zionism. To them, concepts such as social justice, class struggle and world revolution are simply anachronisms, symptoms of the 'diaspora mentality' and 'Jewish cosmopolitanism' which they wish to wipe out. The founders of this tendency were Jabotinsky and Ben Gurion. Though belonging to opposite poles within Zionism, they both understood their task as a cultural regenerative project aimed at synthesizing a new nation out of the broken bits of history, cultural tradition, geography, myth and religion of the Jewish diaspora<sup>1</sup>. One of the best descriptions of this perspective comes from Oz, when talking about the pioneering period in one of his public talks:

*A world which is new fences, new saplings, a new and a bit artificial language when coming from the lips of the Shtetl people (until now we cry, laugh, count and have a bloody row in Yiddish) new buildings, new grass, a new syllabus, fresh paint everywhere. Even new lullabies and new "ancient legends" which were synthesized by eager writers from the Jewish National Fund for the new Israeli children, filling the new, experimental readers. Folk songs before the Folk existed. Folk song and dances that require the officially trained guides who, travelling up and down the country, are teaching the folk how to sing and dance properly!*<sup>2</sup>

The concept of the Zionist 'melting-pot' was to forge a manufactured identity from an unwanted one -- namely, that of the Ghetto Jew, an antisemitic stereotype embraced by Zionism and fought against until its physical extinction. The starting point for such a project was always the belief that the Jews were not a nation in the normal sense of the word. This has

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<sup>1</sup>Hertzberg, A.: *The Zionist Idea*, New York, 1959, pp. 606-611.

<sup>2</sup>Bresheeth, H.: *Palestine and Israel in Hebrew Literature*, London, 1989, p. 130.

been pointed out by the critics of the Zionist project, and even by the father of political Zionism, Theodor Herzl:

*. . . But how will this phenomenon be perceived in the middle classes, where the "Jewish Question" [Judenfrage] is residing, as the Jews are a middle class nation?*

and later, discussing the reasons for antisemitism:

*In the Ghetto we have developed, quite strangely, into a middle class nation; having left it, we acted as terrible competition for the indigenous middle classes. Thus it was, that after the Emancipation, we found ourselves in bourgeois circles, having to face the double pressures, external and internal.<sup>1</sup>*

One does not have to agree with Herzl's peculiar reading of Jewish history in order to appreciate the point. The Ghetto Jew had to be erased -- this was agreed between right and left Zionism from very early on. But what would replace it, what kind of 'New Jew' had to be constructed?

The 'New Jew' was not to be constructed in the abstract but would be forged on the battleground of Arab Palestine, a country yet to be gained. Hence, another negative determinant was added to the synthetic brew -- that of the Arab, specifically the Palestinian Arab, as the 'other'. Between these two polarities of 'otherness' a space was made for the new identity. As pointed out by Childers, Said, and others, this traditional racist function has a long history. The Arab as other has contributed to the identity forging of a number of European nations.<sup>2</sup>

The new identity had to be European-based. It is clear from Herzl's diaries that a new nation in the Middle East was to be a synthesis of the gaiety of Paris and Vienna, the efficiency of London and the military might of Berlin.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Said, E.: *Orientalism*, London, 1978.

The symbols chosen for the Zionist nation make this point clearer. All are imported from other cultures and appropriated as 'Israeli': the music of the national anthem came from the Czech nationalist musician, Smetana; most of the music used for nationalist songs came from Russian folk-songs; the term for a Palestinian-born Jew is the Arabic word *Sabar*, Hebraicised as *Sabra*, the native prickly pear grown as a hedge by Palestinian villagers. Different rationales were found to justify this project of producing a nation willy-nilly, with the help of science, technology, and not least, propaganda<sup>1</sup>.

Thus the Zionist project was originally conceived less as a national liberation movement within the context of the rise of European nationalism, and more as the manufacturing of a nation from the cultural stock of spare-parts of mainly central-European Jewry. This would be achieved by colonizing Palestine, a Third World country of great interest to Europeans. The supporting European nations were to be lured by an image of a new nation that reflected their own biases. The 'New Jew' was to be created in the image of the model of European neo-colonialism. In this context, the role of the Palestinians in the brew was that of local spice, the proof of belonging to the sun-scorched plains of the Middle East, Like the sabra plant. The very existence, history and creativity of the victim supplies ammunition to the oppressor, and Zionism can argue that, despite the mainly European components of its identity, there are sufficient 'regional' and 'Middle Eastern' features to make it a true inhabitant of the plains of Palestine.

This obsession with synthesizing a nation at all costs and in a short period of time, may be the underlining reason for the centrality of literature within the Zionist project. Much literary effort is devoted to debating aspects of Jewish, Israeli and Zionist identity. How else could that identity be defined and examined?

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<sup>1</sup>KHAMSIN: *Profile of an Occupation*, London, 1989, p. 131.

## Palestine -- the 'Other' Defining Zionist Self-Image

While differing temperamentally and emotionally from right-wing Zionists, left-Zionist writers nonetheless accept the tenets of Zionist propaganda. One is defining oneself by defining the other and otherness. Oz again:

*The Al-Fatah organization started its activities in the mid-60's because the maddest extremists amongst our enemies could not stand the relative calm during those years -- The massacre of the sportsmen in Munich was designed to drag Israel and the Arab states into a total war. . .*<sup>1</sup>

While Oz is quick to criticise this type of 'analysis' when used by others, he falls into the same trap himself. Thus the dominant organization in the PLO is a creation of the 'maddest extremists' and the massacre in Munich achieves the proportions of a potential Armageddon.

This may well be a result of the constant pressure on such writers in Israel to prove their patriotic credentials. In another book, he reaches even higher; while describing his first visit to the editorial offices of the Jerusalem Palestinian paper, *Al-Fajr*, he says:

*Behind the Dawn (Al-Fajr) stands the fortune of the mysterious Paul Ajlouni. Behind Ajlouni stands, so they say, the PLO, the mighty resources of Libya and Saudi Arabia and Iraq, the power of the Islamic bloc, the resources of the Soviet alliance, the masses of the Third World. Behind them stand the phalanxes, the mouthpieces of the simplistic New Left and of the reactionaries of the old right, as well as humanitarian do-good liberalism aching for symmetry and light.*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Oz, A.: *In the Land of Israel*, London, 1983, p. 157.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 164.

No 19th-century antisemite would fail to identify the inspiration of this description, namely, the great masterpiece of racism -- 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion'. Even the crudest propaganda coming out of Israel had never put it as clearly. This latter-day racism seems to jump out of the author despite his caution elsewhere, in the only chapter in the same book which deals with Palestinians directly. On entering the editorial office of *Al-Fajr*, Oz does not fail to note:

*The atmosphere. . . is similar, perhaps, to that in the office of a Hebrew-language journal or a Yiddish newspaper in Eastern Europe before the fall: poverty and enthusiasm, lofty rhetoric and irritating prosaic hardships, poetry and politics.*

*I count five medium-sized rooms, slightly shabby, furnished with simple wooden desks, peeling-painted chairs. . . .<sup>1</sup>*

Like the racist meeting a Jew and seeing not a human being but a representative of the plots of World Jewry, so Oz rejects all evidence of senses and logic, even evidence he himself has provided, in favor of the 'Elders of Palestine' plot. Obviously, the *Al-Fajr* offices with their shabby desks are a mere camouflage, a front for the powers of darkness of the coalition of Palestinians, Soviets, Third World, New Left, Old Right, Humanists, etc.<sup>2</sup>

This brings us back to the starting point: while writers such as Oz are critical of some government policies *vis-a-vis* the Palestinians on humanistic grounds, most accept the official version of the history of the conflict. Behind such lines is hidden not just simple racism, but a more far-reaching distortion of perceived realities. In Israel, a term has been coined for this type of experience -- *ha'olam kulo negdenu* or 'the whole world is against us'<sup>3</sup>. This 'common-sense' notion, popularized by ministers and media, is surprising when detected in left-Zionist culture. The description of the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Bresheeth, H.: *Palestine and Israel in Hebrew Literature*, London, 1989, p. 136.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



enemy as hiding behind the shabby desks of Al-Fajr and waiting to jump on poor little Zionism is absurd. Obviously absent 'friends' are the West and assorted sympathetic military dictatorships.

Many left-Zionist writers express similar views, but a difference may be drawn between those who look at Palestinians as the 'other', and writers who try to talk to and understand the 'other'. While Oz belongs to the first category, some of the new generation of writers belong to the second, more risky and daring variety. Two such writers are Sammy Michael and David Grossman, who try to understand and describe the Palestinian position as a valid one, even using it as the basis for their critique of Israeli society.

In his recent novel, Michael chose a Palestinian woman, Houda, as his protagonist; the narrative tells of her love for a Russian Jew, a new immigrant called Alex. The description of Houda's family and their afflictions is sensitive if not politically inspiring. A window is open for the Hebrew reader, through which the Palestinian is seen as a person with history, memories, wishes, fears and hopes. The people described here are full human beings; This is quite understandable -- Michael, an Iraqi Jew, was active in the communist underground movement in Iraq before fleeing the country. He speaks Arabic, knows and respects the culture and history of the Arab peoples; this gives his characters "an authentic touch, a degree of intimacy unusual in Hebrew literature when dealing with the Palestinian man or woman. Indeed, in his novel it is the Israeli and not the Palestinian who plays the role of 'other'"<sup>1</sup>.

One peculiarity of this novel is its treatment of the identity question. Houda, the young Palestinian woman, is most attracted to the poems of the famous Hebrew poet, Yehuda Amichai. For her birthday she receives a book of his poems from her Jewish office colleagues who know about her great admiration for him. Throughout the novel, she finds solace and strength by reading his poems:

*I opened Amichai's book and read several times a couple of lines:*

*And my door is ajar*

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 137.

*like a grave of the resurrected.*<sup>1</sup>

While Houda's knowledge of Amichai's poetry is not surprising in a country where Palestinians are not allowed to study their own poets at school and are taught Hebrew poetry instead, the absence of any Arab or Palestinian cultural reference weakens the character and makes it more agreeable to the taste of the Israeli reader. A Palestinian who reads and loves Amichai -- surely this must be the 'Good Arab' stereotype in operation here, as in many other instances in Hebrew literature. The Arab who knows and loves Hebrew poetry has now become almost a stock character. Another example is Nai'm, a young garage worker in Yehoshua's novel, *The Lover*. Naim brings to the garage a book of poetry by Bialik, the 'national poet'. On a number of occasions he manages to surprise Jews by his knowledge of Hebrew poetry:

*She looked at him in astonishment, whispering to me, "What's this? Can he read Hebrew or is he just pretending?"*

*He knows Hebrew very well . . . he's been to school . . . he knows poems by Bialik by heart . . .*<sup>2</sup>

This proficiency of Palestinians in Hebrew poetry while lacking knowledge or interest in Arab poetry and culture, says more about the writers than would any real character they might try to describe. The attitude is one of the 'dog-playing-piano' description.

A different Palestinian emerges from the writing of Grossman. Grossman is younger than other writers discussed, but like Michael he knows Arabic and Arab culture. In both his novel *The Goat's Smile* and his book of conversations with Palestinians and Israelis, *Yellow Wind*, he presents to the reader an unusual perspective for Hebrew literature. The old Arab woman he meets in the village reminds him of his grandmother, he realizes with a certain embarrassment; he treats all the Palestinians he meets like human beings, but not quite as equals or comrades. *"An invisible line, a line*

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

*of ideology, history, material reality, still separates him from his Palestinian subjects. Such a line does not separate him from Israeli Jews, however, even when he disagrees violently with them*".<sup>1</sup> The language he uses to describe his arrival at Ofra, a Gush-Emunim settlement, reveals a soft spot:

*For the careful outsider, coming from afar, a surprise is awaited at Ofra. On a Friday afternoon it is soft and green, fenceless and open, its people hearty, simple and kind, and quickly, very quickly, even the careful outsider is lured by the festive feeling of Sabbath here; and with surprise one discovers in oneself a soft wish to wholly integrate, to become part of this, to shed one's armour, to be worthy of the nostalgic palpitations of candlelight at the end of a rocky road between the villages Ein-Yabroad and Silouad.*<sup>2</sup>

The choice of adjectives, the elevated, almost poetic prose, is unusual in this book of harsh sentiments; it reminds one of the analogy made by Oz and quoted above -- the two different branches belonging to the same tree. One thing becomes clear from the description of Ofra's -- he considers them as equals even when disagreeing with them. He feels close to their environment, he identifies with many of their signs and signifiers. The last sentence reveals his surprise -- surprise not so much with the place and its atmosphere, but because it is located where it is -- identifying sameness in the heart of otherness or Jewish candlelight in the heart of darkness . . . .

The same cannot be said about Grossman's relationship to the Palestinians he meets. He sympathizes with them, and he feels their pain and anger which he conveys well; nonetheless, they remain forever others, foreign, different and remote.

Hence it may be seen that even for 'progressive' Hebrew writers, the Arab and specifically, the Palestinian, connotes not only 'otherness', but *represents that entity of otherness particular to Judaism, that of the goy*<sup>3</sup>. This may be one of the reasons why the term 'Arab' replaces 'Palestinian' both in daily speech and literature. The particularity of 'Palestinian' makes it

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 138.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

difficult to read it as the total 'other', a role filled very well by 'Arab', a word relating to hundreds of millions in the region<sup>1</sup>.

The writers of this left tendency sees the Palestinian as a subject, a victim, one being subjected to the Israeli rule and will, devoid of autonomy. It may be that the Palestinian for them serves at the outline to what they see as their own identity, autonomy, independence and power. To see and describe the Palestinian as a free agent, a person of complexity, coherence, internal contradictions, options, and a historical context -- this remains to be done by some future Israeli writer.

There are a few notable exceptions, a significant one of which is a novel by Hemda Alon, dealing with the relationship of a Palestinian academic and an Israeli woman student in Jerusalem of the early 1960s. It is significant that the fullest, most progressive description of a Palestinian in a Hebrew literature has been written by a woman, while all the quotes from many male writers used here connote otherness. The candid descriptions of Israeli racism are quite unusual for the period in which the novel was published. In an internal monologue, while separated from her secret lover by her family and the Jewish holidays, she muses:

*My brother Gideon, Colonel Bar-On. What common language can you find between you? For him you are the enemy. His whole life is devoted to fighting you, undoing your schemes, preparing to kill you before you manage to kill him. How can he stretch his hand out towards you, in a gesture of peace? My father. Moderate, calculating, objective. "I have many acquaintances amongst the Arabs" he tends to insert early in the conversation. "But, believe you me, with the best will in the world, it is impossible . . . ." and mother concludes the argument, cuts him short, decisively, "I hate them, I-hate them." Once, during one of the seasonal charwoman-crises, Which every working woman encounters, a friend suggested an Arab charwoman, enumerating her qualities. "No!" said mother. "I will not bring an Arab home. I hate them." That's it. This is my family. This is my world. I may not love them, but I belong to them. This*

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

*evening it was proven again. Ali, my dearest love, the distance between us is so much more than the geographical space between Jerusalem and Haifa.<sup>1</sup>*

Family, friends and the secret service all join in the effort to separate the lovers once their secret is discovered. Ronny, the young student, relents and gives in to the pressures. In a letter she receives from Ali who is writing from jail while awaiting trial for alleged security offences, she reads:

*My future is no longer in my hands. I am detained here, in Nazareth, until the trial that will take place in six months. I expect to be imprisoned; they say, at least a couple of years. After that, I obviously will not be able to continue my scientific work, the only career I can consider. It so turned out, that in my homeland there is no place for me. The only chance I may get is a permit, after some time has passed, to leave and settle abroad. It is not an ideal solution, but there is no other way.*

*In England, if I am lucky, my research may be completed. I will continue my doctorate work. In contact with one college or another, I will join the long, anonymous line of dry and lonesome dons working through fog and drizzle on worthy subjects, interesting no one but themselves. I will not bloom in England, will be neither successful nor happy. I know it well, without illusions. But there is no choice.<sup>2</sup>*

Hence, when inspecting the normative features of the Palestinian stereotype in Hebrew literature, exceptions aside, one finds self-contradictory elements. The Palestinian is seen as a mixture of similarity and difference, a conditioning presence for the Zionist onlooker. Could the dualities of 'murderer' and 'extremist' on the one hand, and a poor journalist with a shabby desk on the other, connote anything but a negative relief, outlining Israeli identity for Oz? The Israeli is someone who is not extreme, not a murderer, someone who does not reside in a shabby office where the paint peels off the walls. Once we analyze these images of the Palestinian an interesting function of Zionist literature is revealed. How clear are these

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 141.

writers about their own identity? Can they define it without the use of the Palestinian as background, as contrast?

These questions are central in determining the potential of future developments. If, as seems to be the case, the main fountainhead of Zionist identity is the difference it marks from the Palestinian Arab, the conflict supplies the main reservoir of meaning for Israeli existence. As long as identity is defined by the racist distance from 'otherness', no political settlement can take place or have any serious chance for success, as it would by definition mean the loss of (hard-earned) identity.

## The Identity Crisis

A crisis of identity is not new in Israel, yet the current one is quantitatively different from any previous. In a country that refused for years to play soccer in the Asian League, claiming itself part of Europe, the concept of European identity is an explosive political issue.

That Zionist identity is not a resolved matter as expressed by Amos Oz in a talk to settlers at Ofra, a right-wing settlement:

*I have stated many times that Zionism is not a first name but a surname, a family name, and this family is divided, feuding over the question of a "master plan" for the enterprise: How shall we live here? Shall we aspire to build the Kingdom of David and Solomon? Shall we construct a Marxist paradise here? A Western society, a social-democratic welfare state? Or shall we create a model of the petit bourgeoisie diluted with a little yiddishkeit ?*<sup>1</sup>

This debate within Zionism is as old as the movement itself. In it a number of models compete for dominance. The basic one was developed by Herzl himself -- the 'colonial dependency' model. While Herzl fancied himself as a Jewish emperor with a court filled with the new nobility, in his

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<sup>1</sup>Oz, A.: *In the Land of Israel*, London, 1983, p. 128.

actions he was much more realistic. His *modus operandi* for Zionism involved getting the whole territory from the imperial power under a 'charter', thus enjoying that power's protection. His many pilgrimages to as many rulers in Europe and Turkey were planned to yield the charter over Palestine and win it in one swoop. But the more meaningful part of this strategy was rooted in mid-European identity. Reading his diaries and books, one is struck by this utopian obsession with building a model European society outside Europe -- a bizarre mixture of some of the most reactionary and the most progressive elements of European history. By definition, it constituted a totally dismissive, ill-informed and racist position relative to the indigenous population, which if portrayed at all is busy being thankful to its European saviours for bringing the delights of the Vienna comic-opera to the Middle East. Total dependency on the host empire is a requirement pivotal to the plot. The role portrayed is obviously that of a client-state, an agency and a branch of 'civilization'. One of the clearest descriptions of it is by Herzl's deputy, Nordau:

*Our aspirations point to Palestine as a compass points to the north. Therefore we must orient ourselves towards those powers under whose influence it happens to be.*<sup>1</sup>

Herzl himself describes it graphically in *Der Judenstaat* :

*If His Majesty the Sultan were to give us Palestine, we could in return undertake the complete management of the finances of Turkey. We would form there a part of a wall of defence of Europe in Asia, an outpost of civilization against barbarism. We would, as a neutral state, remain in contact with all Europe, which would have to guarantee our existence.*<sup>2</sup>

While this description sounds like a caricature, it is in fact an accurate description of Herzl's strategy and an influential and dominant trend within recent Zionism. The shift of allegiances from Britain to France, then to the USA, followed the global power shifts in the Middle East, and resembles Herzl running between Bismarck and Abdul Hamid, to Plehve, then back to

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<sup>1</sup>Bresheeth, H.: *Palestine and Israel in Hebrew Literature*, London, 1989, p. 142.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

the Kaiser again. Behind the rationale is hidden a simple formula -- Zionism is able to control Palestine only under the aegis of an imperial/neocolonial power; it will support and seek the support of the dominant power, according to changing situations. Though many Zionists have criticized Herzl for holding this position, some notable critics did not hesitate to apply the same policy.

*But such a policy is problematic, even when it yields the hoped-for results. Being the agents of a foreign power raises certain problems not only with the indigenous population, but with the client-state itself. It is likely to hit the population exactly where it hurts -- its identity. Hence, though the political model of action has been accepted and applied by Zionism, it fell short on the need to supply a coherent identity structure.<sup>1</sup>*

The second model on which identity was constructed within Zionism, is the 'utopian autonomy' model, based on mixing Jewish heritage with Western humanism. Its adherents preferred to leave politics out of the discussion altogether, concentrating on ideology/culture. Achad Ha'am is followed by Borochoy in suggesting some Jewish autonomy in Palestine, which somehow does not infringe on the Palestinians, mainly by not discussing them and their rights as problematic<sup>2</sup>. Having thus solved the problem of the Palestinians by elimination, they are then able to concentrate on the makings of the Jewish identity in Palestine -- a subject dear to their hearts. The writers quoted belong to that tendency. Amos Oz again, in his talk at Ofra:

*In any event, we have no intention of breaking up this "marriage" between the Jewish heritage and the European humanist experience for the sake of some "purist" return to the sources . . . Most of those who have experienced this humanism will not abandon it -- Nobody will force us to choose -- because we will refuse to make such a choice -- between our Judaism and our humanism. For us they are one and the same . . . We have*

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Hertzberg, A.: *The Zionist Idea*, New York, 1959, pp. 352-360.



*assimilated that meeting, internalized it to such a degree . . . that my identity has already become a combination of the Jewish and humanist elements.*<sup>1</sup>

If for Herzl identity is seen as simple, not so for the writers of 'utopian autonomy'. What will be the materials from which this Jewishness is to be built? Whose Jewishness will win?

When it comes to Jewishness, there are, of course, other contenders for the identity project -- the clergy. *"It may be true to say that there were two elements affecting the lack of development in Judaism throughout the centuries -- the Jewish religious establishment and anti-semitism. Between them, these two have managed to contain Europe's Jewry as an (almost) unchanging entity"*.<sup>2</sup>

With the clergy as an undeniable partner to the forging of this new identity, the atheistic tendency within Zionism lost the battle even before it started. 'Who is a Jew?' is an inquiry that could not arise in a similar form in most other countries but only in theocratic states in the region. Yet this question has been central to Zionist debates for decades, obscuring the important links between Israelis and Palestinians. As Israel is actually called a 'Jewish state' in its declaration of independence, it is hardly surprising that this concept will give rise to heated controversy.

This brings us to the third and last main model of identity construction, rather more simple than the first two. It is a combination of the ultra-religious and ultra-nationalistic, the perspective of Gush Emunim and related organizations. This model is the most recent of the three, an ascending force that has emerged in the last decade like a phoenix from the ashes, boosted by the rise of the right to power and dominance. Like its counterparts, this form of Jewish religious fundamentalism is introspective and self-sufficient; it is a root-seeking formula. So, part of the new identity is a rejection of universally heralded values as 'unJewish'. Because the Torah does not mention democracy, it must be a goyish invention. Amos Oz

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<sup>1</sup>Oz, A.: *In the Land of Israel*, London, 1983, p. 138.

<sup>2</sup>Bresheeth, H.: *Palestine and Israel in Hebrew Literature*, London, 1989, p. 143.

reports one of the women settlers in Tekoa, an ultra-right settlement south of Bethlehem, as saying:

*Weapons aren't what win a war! Men win wars! Faith wins! God almighty wins! The world has to realize that. In the Six-Day War, and the Yom-Kippur War, too, we should never have stopped. We should have gone on, brought them to total surrender! Smashed their capital cities! Who cares what the goyim were yelling?*<sup>1</sup>

When Oz asks about the Palestinians (the 'Arabs'), "should they live under our sovereignty and do the dirty work for us?" the same woman (Harriet, from Queens, New York), says:

*Why not? . . . Isn't that the way it is in the Bible? Weren't there hewers of wood and carriers of water? For murderers that's a very light punishment! It's mercy!*<sup>2</sup>

And is there no way to compromise?

*With the goyim? Whenever we gave in to them we had troubles. That's the way it was in the Bible. King Saul lost his whole kingdom because he took pity on Amalek. The goyim are bound to be against us. It's their nature. Sometimes it's because of their religion, sometimes it's out of ideology, sometimes out of anti-semitism, but actually it's all God's will. God hardens Pharaoh's heart and then He destroys him. It's them or us.*<sup>3</sup>

And another man, Amiel, explains:

*Wondrous are the ways of the Lord. Slowly but surely those who oppose us will understand their errors. Western culture is not for us, even though there is a lot we should adopt from it. The only path for the people of Israel is the path of the Bible . . .*

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<sup>1</sup>Oz, A.: *In the Land of Israel*, London, 1983, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 61.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

. . . *It's all American import, from Vietnam, all this left-wing stuff. It's a fashion. It's passe in America -- pretty soon it'll be passe here, too. It's all imitation, alien to the Jewish spirit.*<sup>1</sup>

From this cursory description, it can be seen that the conceptual location of left-Zionist writers, somewhere between neocolonials and Jewish Ayatollahs, is not an enviable one -- to criticize and be criticized but without being able to offer a fresh and alternative identity. The complexity of their offering, a product of enlightenment, is difficult to market in contemporary Israeli society.<sup>2</sup>

None of the tendencies described ever rules without opposition. The development is a movement from one specific mix of these tendencies towards another, due to a complex tendency struggle. Needless to say, a large degree of superimposition exists between the tendencies, thus the recent move towards the stronger position of the religious right-wing has not reduced dependency on the USA, for example.

An important additional factor related to the 'identity models' is the struggle of the Oriental Jewish community to reestablish its own identity. This was repressed by the European majority in Israel during the 50s when large numbers of Jews from the Maghreb countries began arriving in Israel. This struggle for identity cuts across the other Zionist trends developed and dominated by intellectuals of European origin. A recent novel devoted to the early days of this specific struggle is Yehoshua Kenaz's *Heart Murmur*. It tells the story of a group of army trainees during their basic training in 1955. The group is made up of European (Ashkenazi) and Oriental Jews, the latter being mostly recent arrivals. To the Ashkenazis, the arrival of the newcomers is a catastrophe, a disaster for Zionism. The 'proper' Israelis, the Kibbuznik Alon, describe them:

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup>Bresheeth, *Palestine and Israel in Hebrew Literature*, London, 1989, p. 145.

*"The army" said Alon, "that's our only hope. Only in the army can they be educated, converted into proper Israelis, until they become like us. They do not know any part of this country outside their transit camps, know nothing of its history, its beauty, its culture. When they are brought to the new settlements in Lachish, they refuse to get off the lorries. They are not ready for this life of work and fields and agriculture. So how can they like our songs? The army has to reeducate them into it. At least the youth, as the old ones are hopeless, nothing will ever come out of them; The Desert Generation."*<sup>1</sup>

And later in the same novel, Alon proposes the 'new life' to one of his colleagues:

*. . . there are now places in the Negev, in Lachish, all sorts of places, there are new immigrants' settlements. That is where you should have gone. There you can start to live a healthy, new life, not the way you lived abroad.*

*"Life abroad was great" said Rachamin, "it was excellent! You know nothing about it. You Sabras think that here in Israel it is the best."*<sup>2</sup>

But the clearest expression of this position is provided by Alon towards the end of the novel, shortly before the character commits suicide:

*"It all goes wrong here," said Alon, "everything we had in this country. What a great people lived here before. And the things they did. Now it is all reversing. Soon nothing will remain of it. Even our Hebrew will not survive. In a few years children will not understand the Hebrew of the Bible. People will not be able to read Alterman and Yizhar. They will speak a new, ugly language. And the Arabs are already preparing for the next round; huge arsenals are hoarded. Who is going to stand up and be counted? The underworld? All that was built, all the blood shed here, the suffering and the diseases and the hunger, so that a new people can be built, a new land, all this for nothing? This madness, egoism and the underworld will*

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 146.

*pulverise it all? Why are the Arabs collecting all these arms? Their work will be done by these . . .*

*. . . the whole Arab society is shot through because of these drugs. Everyone know that. Now they bring it here. And the country is full of new, weak and desperate people that cannot adopt our way of life -- of labour and fighting. . . I don't mind their laughter; I say what I believe in, what frightens me, what is important to me. Weeds have to be pulled out, everywhere you see them. Otherwise they take over, strangling everything. Our heroes shed their blood in covert operations, they want to turn this into a new diaspora. We should not let them! Can't you see."*<sup>1</sup>

This monologue is complementary to another monologue of Oz:

*"My parents came from North Africa; all right -- from Morocco. So what? They had their dignity, didn't they? Their own values? Their faith? Me, I am not a religious man. I travel on the Sabbath. But my parents -- why did you make fun of their beliefs? Why did they have to be disinfected with Lysol at the Haifa port? . . . The Mapainiks just wiped out everything that was imprinted on a person. As if it was all nonsense. And then they put what they wanted into him. From that ideology of theirs. Human dust, supposedly. Ben Gurion himself called us 'human dust'"*<sup>2</sup>

This struggle is just beginning, the struggle between the colonizing fathers and their labor, imported because the indigenous population could not be used for this purpose -- it had to be expelled and dispossessed, unhinged off the land. That the imported labor consisted of people from the Arab countries is a bitter twist of irony in Zionist history. *"their 'Arabness' had to be erased, they had to be cleansed of it, to be 'Israelized' (Europeanized). In order to fit into the dream, they had to change their identity, lose their culture, their language and oral traditions - their history. History is written by the winners"*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup>Oz, A.: *In the Land of Israel*, London, 1983, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup>Bresheeth, H.: *Palestine and Israel in Hebrew Literature*, London, 1989, p. 147.

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The Zionist self is now being defined by the Palestinian 'other' like a contour defining the form; hence no sympathy and closeness is possible between the Zionist writers of right and left alike, the Palestinian either as person, as culture, language, national aspirations, class or gender -- the Palestinian is, and continues to be, the great 'other'. When one realizes how deep this gap now is, even deeper than it was in 1948, when S. Yizhar was writing, it becomes clear how little the Israeli consensus has moved in forty years towards an accommodation. Accommodation must start with acceptance of the enemy as human, similar to oneself, and the state of conflict as a temporary deviation from the order of things.

But the central methodological problem with temporizing Zionism and Israeli society to allow for coexistenc, is the absence of Israel's understanding of the identity crisis. As this identity is so pivotal to Israeli existence, as so much of it revolves closely around the difference and struggle with the great 'other' -- how can any change be tackled, before the eradication of the Zionist self? As the military, economical, cultural and class struggle against the Palestinians is filling the Israeli image with its meaning -- how can it be abandoned? What is there to replace it? This is not a national struggle between oppressor and oppressed, it is a struggle between opposing stereotypes, a struggle to the bitter end. Since the beginning of the intifada, the transfer of the Palestinians has been openly discussed as a viable political option for the near future. One example of this latter-day Zionism (which is difficult to differentiate from Herzl's ideas) is a quote from a report about General Ze'evi, a former arms dealer now heading the Tel Aviv Museum:

*Ze'evi brushes off such accusations angrily. Removing Arabs from Eretz-Yisrael (greater Israel), he argues, is part of the ideological basis of Zionism. He opposes forced expulsions, but believes instead in creating what he calls a "negative magnet" that will induce Palestinians to pack their bags and leave.*

*"If the transfer idea is immoral," Ze'evi said recently, "then Zionism itself is immoral. All the settlement that has been carried out in the last 100 years was based on the transfer of Arabs."*

*. . . Ze'evi represents what seems to be a powerful new force in Israeli politics. According to a recent poll, 49 per cent of the Jewish adults believe that the "transfer" of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza "would allow the democratic and Jewish nature of Israeli society to be maintained."*

*. . . "A transfer will take place in Eretz-Yisrael," he predicts, "because two peoples cannot live in one country. The question is, who will be transferred, the Jews or the Arabs?"*<sup>1</sup>

Here, the right states openly that because of national identity it will be necessary to rid the country of its indigenous population. In comparison with such clarity, the left-Zionist arguments seem disorganized and ever hypocritical.

The failure of left-Zionist writers is one of not noting their own position, of accepting their vantage point as transparent and constant. Though they disagree in many cases with the oppression, the only Palestinian they describe is oppressed, dependent, and lacking action.

The most that is offered by the new generation and its writers is a painful recognition that the Palestinian refuses to satisfy the Zionist dream and vanish. In these circumstances, they agree to talk, to negotiate, even to argue on-behalf-of, charity-fashion. What they are not prepared for, at least not yet, is to drop the mask of otherness and exchange their colonizer-oppressor identity -- a total transformation of the self. This metamorphosis, without which no real change is possible, is emphatically denied. Life side-by-side, maybe; human and national rights, maybe; togetherness, solidarity, brotherhood -- No! At least, not yet.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 149, quoted from: Black, Ian: in the *Guardian*, 6th September, 1988, London.

## Conclusion

### *Reflections on Architecture*

The medium of Hebrew literature was examined in the previous chapter as one of the major battlefields on which the identity struggle is taking place. Three models of identity that are competing for dominance in both formal and informal cultural institutions were clearly identified. It was presumed that the results derived from that analysis were not medium-specific. However, the signaling of identity takes different forms that are determined by the tools and means of representation pertaining to the medium. Moreover, the signaling process differs from one medium to another depending on the nature of the audience the medium is targeting. In this last chapter, we will be looking at a different pattern of signaling that functions in another Israeli medium, namely architecture. Indeed, the role of architecture in promoting political shifts and in asserting power and dominance in Palestine has been unparalleled throughout the ages.

I have selected a relatively recent project in the Old City of Jerusalem due to the unique dialogue that it stimulates with respect to selfhood and otherness in Israeli society. The architect falls into the broad category of the Israeli Left and his work is a progressive and daring attempt at 'deconstructing otherness' in Israeli architecture. Therefore, this object of analysis generally identifies with the second model of identity, the one pertaining to the Israeli Left, to a certain degree.

The project is the second "Yeshivat Porat Yosef" at the Wailing Wall in the Jewish Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem. The first yeshiva, a symmetrical building of two wings flanking a central domed structure, was blown up by the Arab Legion in 1948 (fig. 1). In 1967, immediately after the Six-Day War, the bulldozers cleared out the houses that had once separated the yeshiva from the Wall. Thus, the site of the second Yeshivat Porat Yosef gained an importance it had never before enjoyed (fig. 2).



Immediately after the occupation of the Old City the Israelis identified the destroyed college on which they posted a sign:

*Here on its original site, as a symbol of our return to Old Jerusalem, will be rebuilt the Yeshivat Porat Yosef, a building destroyed in 1948.* <sup>1</sup>(fig. 3)

This analytical work is an attempt at laying the groundwork for understanding the socio-political and cultural dialogue of the representational aspects that constitute this work of architecture. Therefore, I will not go through a detailed description of the building nor its functional programme since the objective is not an evaluation of the end product. Instead, this inquiry revolves around a reconstruction of the design process based on the architect's statements, followed by elaborations on some of the controversial design features that are employed to bridge the gap between the contrasts of time and space.

In his book "JERUSALEM the Future of the Past", Safdie discusses some of the design features that reconcile the Jewish spirit of the building with the Palestinian context:

*Rabbi Avraham Shrem asked: "Will you design for us a traditional building or a modern building?"*



Fig 1

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<sup>1</sup>Safdie, M.: Jerusalem: the Future of the Past, Boston, 1989, p. 38.

*It was a tough question on two accounts. First, there was the real issue of the relationship of this new building to the architectural heritage surrounding the site. The yeshiva itself had been demolished, but it was now surrounded by ancient buildings, some Ottoman, others from even earlier periods. As always the question was this: How does one relate the new to the old -- to the Wall, the mosques and domes, the arches, cliffs, courtyards -- to everything that makes the architecture of Old Jerusalem?*

*Second, two architects had already been fired: one for a modern building that did not harmonize; the other for a massive building that the Rabbis and Stephen felt was eclectic, i.e., that mimicked the shapes and forms of the surroundings in a simplistic manner. So how should I answer that question -- being interviewed as I was for a job I very much wanted?*

*I had a strong feeling that it must be a building that looked as if it had always been there. At the same time I didn't want it to be lost in the urban fabric -- I wanted it to have its own identity. I wanted it to be clearly an expression of today, yet with a quality of timelessness. Of course, I hadn't even begun to design it, so my answer had to be intuitive. I paused, and then found myself saying, "If I succeed, you won't be able to answer this question." They seemed pleased. . . .<sup>1</sup>*

*. . . I am often asked, "What are the elements of Jewish architecture?" and "Where might one look for inspiration in designing Jewish institutions that have a link to their heritage?". . . . Every time two cultures collide, something new and rich emerges, as Alexander's sojourn in Persia produced the wonderful heritage of Hellenistic culture. We think of these as rare events. But in Jerusalem there has been a constant grafting of one culture onto another, to produce this strange and magnificent organism, whose heart is the Temple Mount with the Wall forming the base around it.*

This attitude towards the existing indigenous Palestinian context is very different from the two approaches of the right-wing that were demonstrated in the previous chapter. The first, the model of "colonial dependency", constituted a totally dismissive, ill-informed and racist

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 41.

position relative to the indigenous population, which is either absent from any considerations or is busy being thankful to its European saviours for bringing the delights of Europe to the Middle East. This clearly means that any symbols of Palestinian architecture are not worth looking at since there is a total elimination of any symbols from the past that do not qualify as "European". In the second, which is a combination of ultra-religious and ultra-nationalistic views, part of the new identity is a rejection of universally heralded values as "unjewish". The Palestinian and his culture represent extreme remoteness and otherness. The fulfillment of the religious duty dictates the eradication of this "other".

But how does this new architectural trend compare to the "progressive" examples of cultural representation that we have also seen in the previous chapter?

As far as the progressive left is concerned, the models of representation fall into two categories. The first is a portrayal of Palestinians as the "other". The second tries to talk to and understand this "other".

In the former case, the Palestinian is seen as a mixture of similarity and difference, a conditioning presence for the Zionist onlooker. The Israeli identity cannot be defined without the use of the Palestinian as background, as contrast. This particular other is being used in contradictory roles -- as the all-powerful goy from the diaspora and as the stereotypical colonial native. The main component of Zionist identity is the difference it marks from the Palestinian Arab. The conflict seems to supply the main reservoir of meaning for Israeli existence, whose identity is read as the racist distance from "otherness".

It is viable to examine the new architectural approach with regard to the new dimension introduced by the second category, which involves a more risky and daring writers who belong to the new generation. Of those are Sammy Michael and David Grossman, who try to understand and describe the Palestinian position as a valid one, even using it as the basis for their critique of Israeli society. In Michael's recent novel, the Palestinian is seen as a person with history, memories, wishes, fears and hopes. His characters have an authentic touch unusual in Hebrew literature when

dealing with the Palestinians. Michael is an Iraqi Jew, speaks Arabic, and knows and respects the culture and history of the Arab peoples. Indeed, in his novel it is the Israeli and not the Palestinian who plays the role of "other". However, the absence of any Arab or Palestinian cultural reference weakens the characters and makes them more agreeable to the taste of the Israeli reader. The writers of this left tendency conceive the Palestinian as a victim, a subject deprived of autonomy. Though they disagree with the oppression in many cases, the only Palestinian they see and describe is the oppressed Palestinian, the subject dependent and lacking autonomy of action, passive. The Palestinian for them serves at the outline to what they see as their own identity, autonomy, independence and power.

Clearly this category does not promote accommodation, which must start with the recognition of the enemy as human, similar to oneself, a free agent, a person of complexity, coherence, internal contradictions, options for action from which to choose and a historical context in which to operate.

Unlike the above-mentioned groups, Safdie does not fail to recognize "sameness" in the "other":

*At Montreal airport where we cleared Canadian customs, I received a critique on the merits of Middle Eastern Architecture. Peering through the window of the case, the good natured Canadian customs official summarily pronounced the model of the Yeshiva to look like a sheik's palace and concluded that its destination was Arabia. Close to Arabia, I pointed out -- across the border in Israel. <sup>1</sup>*

As an attempt to demystify the other and his culture, Safdie closely experiences the real, "down-to-earth" life in the Palestinian quarters in the Old City:

*We reach Jerusalem just after the sun has set. We enter the city through the Jaffa Gate, at the periphery of the Armenian Quarter. And there we are, with the sounds of the new world still in our ears, circling around looking for a parking spot within the ancient city walls. . . .*

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 52.

. . . The stretch from the parking lot to the house is invariably more exhausting than the twelve-hour flight. But when we open the door and go upstairs to the living room, we see all around us the Holy Sepulchre, the Temple Mount, and the Western Wall across the Piazza. By now it is dark, so the Wall is brightly floodlit, as are the golden and silver domes of the mosques, the onion domes of the Russian Church of Mary Magdalene, the towers of the Church of the Ascension and Augusta Victoria on the Mount of Olives.

Our house is the extreme northern end of the Jewish Quarter, two buildings away from the principal east-west Arab market which runs between the Quarters along David Street and the Street of the Chains from the Temple Mount up to Jaffa Gate (fig. 4). Most Jewish Quarter residents have turned their backs on the life of the Arab markets and get their supplies from the thinly stocked grocery store in the heart of the Jewish Quarter. They do their shopping once a week on Thursdays, the day when the supermarket in downtown Jerusalem reluctantly agrees to deliver to the Jewish Quarter. However, Michal and I have discovered that we can find almost everything we need within a five minute walk to the Arab markets.

The first night we always wake up before dawn to the chant of the muezzin. By the second night we've adjusted and sleep through. At sunrise I go down to the bakery and get bagel bread sprinkled with sesame seeds, or pita, hot from the oven. The vegetable market is open early and I pick up oranges and other fruits in season.



Fig 2



Fig 3

*Not far from the vegetable sellers, under vaults which date from twelfth century Crusader times, is a little alcove in the wall where laundry and ironing are done. Just by the crossroads at the bottom of our street is the man who presses his own olives to make the most wonderful dark-green unrefined olive oil, which we consume in quantities and take back to North America.*

*A few more steps and we pass electrical shops, a hardware store, a metal workshop (where all our copper kitchenware was made), a furniture maker (who made our chairs), a butcher, and so on.*

*When I go to my office in Mamilla Street, I never take the car. I walk through the market up to Jaffa Gate just as all the shopkeepers are opening. These routine walks have made me an acquaintance, if not a friend, of many of them -- all Arabs, some Muslim, some Christian. The ones I know better I greet, shaking hands. The coffee man, carrying on his shoulder the beautiful brass pot with its internal charcoal cylinder to keep the coffee pot hot, is always there by the gate when I reach the top. I pause and sample this charcoal-tasting coffee before proceeding to the office. <sup>1</sup>*

It was seen that even for progressive Hebrew writers, the Arab and specifically, the Palestinian, connotes not only "otherness", but represents that entity of otherness particular to Judaism, that of the goy. This may be one of the reasons why the term "Arab" replaces "Palestinian" both in daily speech and literature. The particularity of "Palestinian" makes it difficult to read it as the total "other", a role filled very well by "Arab", a word relating to hundreds of millions in the region.

Again, Safdie does not fail to recognize different aspects of the indigenous culture as "Palestinian":

*Many of the shops specialize in Palestinian embroidery, dresses and weaving. My love for the craft and its traditions is closely related to my love of Persian carpets and kilims (woven rugs). Michal has a wonderful collection of dresses from Bethlehem, Gaza, Ashdod, Sinai, some even*

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 76.

*embroidered in Aleppo, the city of my father's birth. Each area has its own particular designs, and we now know the difference between the embroidery which uses natural dyed material and will never fade and dresses made recently with synthetic dyes, which are bright and harshly colored, run when washed and fade in the sun.* <sup>1</sup>

Since Safdie recognizes the existing Palestinian cultural patterns as legitimate, he is striving for cultural integration and harmony rather than imposition and dominance:

*In Jerusalem, the buildings of institutions were always under-stated; their guts were never exposed to the public, just glimpses and hints. I'll never forget my visit to the Holy Sepulchre: we walked up a narrow alley, no more than eight feet wide, to an ordinary door with a small cross carved in stone above (fig. 5). Passing through the door we found ourselves in the large courtyard of the Holy Sepulchre, looking at the great entrance arches and the three domes. That sudden, shocking transformation of walking through that door and passing from the tight scale of the alley into the grand*



Fig 4



Fig 5



Fig 6

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 76.

*institution was an experience that always stayed with me. The same transformation takes place as you enter the Temple Mount through the small wooden doors from the narrow alleyways. There, suddenly, are acres of terraced expanse, with the great golden Dome of the Rock and the ancient al-Aksa mosque.*

*That was what I wanted with the Yeshiva. From the Western Wall, one should get glimpses, but it would be wrong to reveal the entire yeshiva at once. The stone wall should be a screen with a sense of mystery, behind which unknown things happened. Then, as one entered the small main gate, the study hall, the courtyards, the synagogue, one space after another, would gradually be revealed.* <sup>1</sup>

\* \* \*

The design incorporates some very controversial features. Their controversy arises from the unique problematic nature of the cultural aspects of the context. Not only is Safdie struggling with a demanding programme for an extremely important Jewish complex, but he is challenged by extraordinary rich symbols that have long competed with each other for dominance and control. Such symbols operate in a firmly-established microcosm that is hostile to intruders and newcomers. The official policy in Israel with regard to the synthesis of culture has always advocated the fusion of "Jewishness" and "European" or "Western" cultural elements. To combine "Jewishness" with local symbols that connote stagnation and backwardness<sup>2</sup> -- not to mention otherness and hatred<sup>3</sup> -- is what makes this nature very problematic.

In trying to discover the syntax of the place Safdie examines the under-statement of the major religious institutions in the Old City.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup>See previous chapter: under "The Identity Crisis"

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



“Introversion” of institutions is represented by a duality between the inside and the outside of the structure. Despite the uniformity of architectural vocabulary of institutions in Jerusalem, the syntax of external expression differs from that employed to address the interior. Indeed, the exterior of a building identifies with the context more than it does with the spirit residing within the boundaries of the same building. In the Yeshiva, the massive stone walls are intended to engage in a dialogue with the massiveness that constitute the exterior of almost every institution in Jerusalem (fig. 6 & 7). On the other hand, the interior is what actually pertains to the characteristic nature of the building. But how is “Jewishness” interpreted and realized in the built form? The function of a synagogue does not allow a simple programmatic definition, for Jewish rituals make it more a community meeting house. Safdie conceives the synagogue as *a place for speaking to God on your own, and at the same time speaking to Him in community*. There are two principal elements to the synagogue: the Ark (Aron Kodesh) and the bimah. The Ark, where the scriptures are kept, is always located in the direction of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. The bimah, from which the scriptures are read, is in the centre of the room. The Sephardic Synagogue, unlike the Ashkenazic Synagogue, is not set up with the seats of the congregation facing the Ark but with the seating in the round focusing on the bimah. This arrangement fosters the sense of community and promotes direct communication with God without intermediaries. To enhance this centralized organizational aspect, Safdie introduces a centralized form surmounted by a translucent dome through which soft light comes down

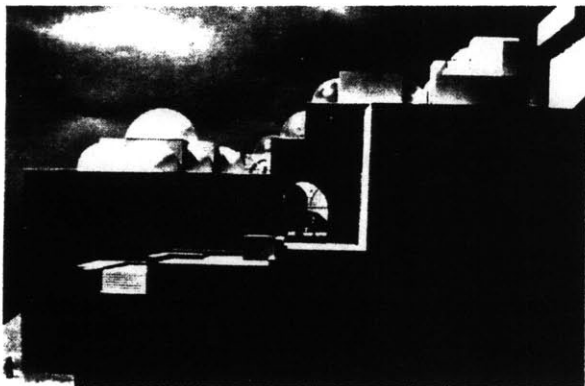


Fig 7



Fig 8

bathing the interior of the synagogue (fig. 8). To emphasize intimacy and privacy inside the synagogue, he breaks the huge space into repetitive volumetric units that create the effect of "a room within a room". As the massive walls formed the outer shell, the lacey structure of pyramiding concrete arches formed an inner container, and so, unlike most rooms, the synagogue had no precise envelope but layers of depth (fig. 9). Light comes washing down from the skylights and over the stone walls, which part along an axis to reveal the view of the Temple Mount.

In Jerusalem, religious architectural symbols are usually erected on sacred spots. However, this Jewish symbol does not establish a direct physical contact with a sacred spot. Instead, it orients itself in a manner that forms a visual link with the spot. Due to its proximity to the Wailing Wall, the most important Jewish site in the world, axially becomes a very important organizational aspect. The prayer hall is organized on a single axis on which the bimah, the Ark and the Western Wall stood in one line, bringing the Temple Mount visually into the synagogue.

The massive exterior walls are pierced with vertical slots so that from outside, one gets a hint of the lace-like arched structure behind (fig. 10). From inside, one can look out through large arched windows into a stone cove formed by the curved outer wall; light from the sky and sun would then be reflected into the room, reducing the glare and making a contrast between the sun-flooded city and darker interior spaces. At the centre of each curve,



Fig 9

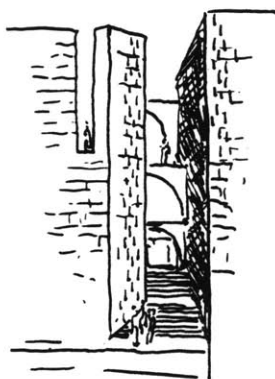


Fig 10

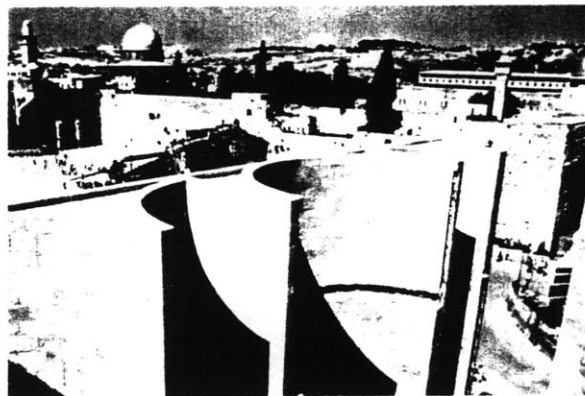


Fig 11

the walls part to make vertical slots through which glimpses of the city can be seen, giving a gradual transition from the window, through the walled exterior space, and on out towards the ancient buildings and Western Wall (fig. 11). Indeed, Safdie's architecture is regional to the degree that it emphasizes certain site-specific factors such as the play of local light across the structure. Here, light is the primary agent by which the volume and the tectonic value of the work are revealed (fig. 9).

For a deeper understanding of Safdie's "contextualism" or "regionalism" in the Yeshiva, it is viable to look at his work prior to this project, both outside and inside Israel. Is there consistency in adherence to metaphorical representations and reinterpretations of cultural symbols or does the Yeshiva represent a new shift towards contextualism?

Safdie, a devout disciple of Louis Kahn, identifies with "Late-Modernism" in his deviation from the legacy of the International Style in architecture. His Habitat Montreal demonstrates a rejection of predominant elements of Modern architecture that transcend the setting or fail to express idiosyncratic symbols. However, his enterprise is paradoxical in nature, for the prefabricated modular assembly not only accords with the values of universal civilization but also "represents" its capacity for normative application.<sup>1</sup>

Immediately after the 1967 War, Safdie began working on developing a Habitat for Israel. He gathered together a small group of five engineers and production experts; some had been involved with Habitat Montreal, others had worked on Habitat Puerto Rico and had developed a new concrete technology, expanding self-stressing concrete. Contacts were made with Israeli manufacturers who were anxious to join forces with the group and begin to work out the technical details. But where would the new Habitat be located? Much construction was going on in Tel Aviv and on the outskirts of Haifa but Safdie sensed that Jerusalem was to be the area of real growth, having just been reunited as a result of the Six Day War.

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<sup>1</sup>Frampton, K.: *Modern Architecture*, London, 1985, p. 314.

The group began to look for actual sites around Jerusalem. The search took Safdie from one large parcel of government-held land to another, until he arrived at Manchat just outside of Jerusalem. The Manchat hill jugged almost like a peninsula, with its elongated ridge stretching into the valleys that surrounded it. On the ridge was:

*a charming Arab village. I was at once captivated by the site and equally impressed with its fragility and sensitivity to new development.<sup>1</sup>(fig. 12)*

By choosing to build in the vicinity of a Palestinian village , the design problem acquires a new challenging aspect:

*My urge to build here would force me to relate the new to the old, to have the project coexist with the village. The risks were enormous. . . .*

*. . . When an architect choses a vacant site, he knows that anything he does will stand on its own. And he has his own criteria to evaluate what he has designed. Here, not only would my buildings be compared with the charm and beauty of the indigenous village, but the appropriateness was bound to become a public issue. <sup>2</sup>*

This approach can be traced back to the transformations Modern



Fig 12

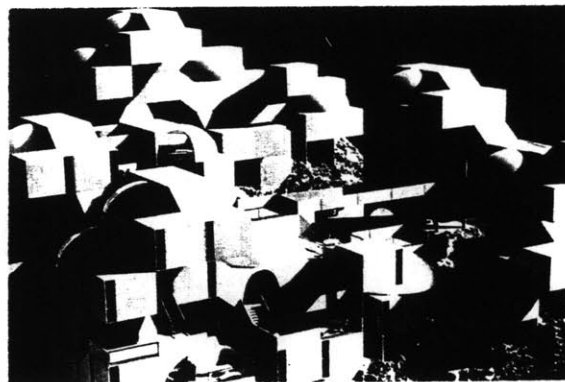


Fig 13

<sup>1</sup>Safdie, M.: *Jerusalem: the Future of the Past*, Boston, 1989, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, pp. 26-27.

architecture was undergoing in the sixties and early seventies. In his book "Modern Architecture", Kenneth Frampton elaborates on some of the features of "Critical Regionalism":

*In this regard Critical Regionalism manifests itself as a consciously bounded architecture, one which rather than emphasizing the building as a free-standing object places the stress on the territory to be established by the structure erected on the site. This 'place form' means that the architect must recognize the physical boundary of his work as a kind of temporal limit -- the point at which the present act of building stops.*<sup>1</sup>

But what does Safdie see in this indigenous village ?

*The traces of the retaining walls of the terraced agriculture of biblical times were dotted with more recent almond and olive trees. Here and there were rock outcroppings, some containing ancient burial places. To one side of the hill sat the village, its delicate structure of stone buildings, vaults and domes spiralling upwards, terrace upon terrace, to the summit where, quite appropriately, toward the east, there stood a Muslim stone mosque and minaret . . .*

It was shown in the previous chapter that Grossman, from his description of the trip to the settlement of Ofra, considered the Arab villagers as equals even when disagreeing with them. He felt close to their environment and identified with many of their signs and signifiers. However, in his last sentence:

*and with surprise one discovers in oneself a soft wish to wholly integrate, to become part of this, to shed one's armour, to be worthy of the nostalgic palpitations of candlelight at the end of a rocky road between the villages Ein-Yabroad and Silouad.*

he reveals his surprise -- surprise not so much with the place and its atmosphere, but because it is located where it is between two Arab villages --

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<sup>1</sup>Frampton, K.: *Modern Architecture*, London, 1985, p. 327.

identifying sameness in the heart of otherness or Jewish candlelight in the heart of darkness. Safdie, on the other hand, de-mystifies the darkness by illuminating the general structure of the village with its most profound symbol, *a Muslim stone mosque and minaret*. Furthermore, he seeks inspiration from the Arab environment: the village represents a way of life, a certain mode of developing the land, a way of integrating construction into the landscape, establishing the privacy of the family in the context of the village, and the identity of the village as a community.

Clearly, the challenge of matching this declaration of values in the new construction was overwhelming:

*. . . Here was a prototype, the ancient village, with which any modern development would have to coexist. Could one put a ten storey building next to it? Or one made of glass?*<sup>1</sup>

An important challenging aspect of the site is topography. Whenever there is a choice, indigenous buildings in the eastern Mediterranean are built on hills. This preserved the flat fertile land for cultivation but there were equally forcing environmental reasons. The hill was defensible, definable, and the optimal orientation could be chosen: for example the south side, which gets the most sun in winter. Moreover, if one builds two storey buildings on a hill, every unit has a view and looks out into the distance, whereas on a flat site they become internalized. The overall design of Habitat Montreal exhibited similar features except that in Habitat the hill was hollow. In this endeavor, Habitat Jerusalem is to be tied to the traditions of the surrounding village, thus topography will become a three-dimensional matrix into which the structure is fitted.

Safdie developed a plan for a community that was similar to an Arab village in the sense that it followed the hill, each unit had its roof garden, and a series of pathways followed the topography (fig. 13). However, the vernacular, haphazard clustering pattern of rural houses was transformed into an organizing grid of modular, prefabricated dwelling units that clearly

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 27.

echoes the Montreal experience, with the exception of certain modifications - - such as domes -- that gave the overall structure a regional flavor!

The tendency to build with contemporary technology is clearly evident in the Yeshiva. Safdie did not want to build a structure that would be a reproduction of the ancient structures in the Old City.<sup>1</sup>The construction industry in Jerusalem was geared to mass-construction, and therefore getting good stonemasons was not easy or feasible. (*One senses the anachronism of this approach when visiting the Holy Sepulchre, where old masons were laboriously remaking capitals, columns and cornices for the church's restoration.*)<sup>2</sup>

Related to the building technology was the issue of the spatial requirements of the Yeshiva. In Habitat, the building system consisted of identical room-size elements that could be combined in different ways to make up maybe a dozen different apartment types. But in the Yeshiva, the different intricate functions dictated a variety of spatial provisions. For example, the synagogue could be twenty metres square and five storey high, a dormitory room might be three by five metres, a dining room twenty by thirty. Could a single building element generate this variety of spaces?

Safdie rejects the mixing together of an infinite variety of modes of construction in a single building: *long steel trusses for roofs (hidden by suspended acoustic tiles), concrete walls covered by a thin stone veneer, roofs made of concrete, steel or wood -- each material manipulated to form an endless parade of shapes, totally independent of the character and nature of the materials themselves.*<sup>3</sup>

In Habitat, Safdie was searching for a method by which a single construction element ("a giant brick" the size of one or two rooms) would suffice. This time he was looking for another contemporary of the brick, an element much larger in scale, fabricated by machine, something lifted with a crane rather than by hand, which could then be assembled to form large and

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

small spaces, from small dormitory rooms to a great synagogue. Something comparable in concept to a brick on a giant scale.

Again, Safdie resorts to the technology of time, the prefabricated arch. A standard arch three metres high is introduced as a module that constitutes standard three-dimensional units. A half arch is used to form both large and small rooms. Two half-arches are connected to make one arch six metres wide -- forming a room six metres square (fig. 14). The arch form is further combined by pyramiding arches one upon the other, making a tracery of arched elements for the taller rooms (fig. 15). But, regardless of room size, the combination of the three-metre (fig. 16), abstract semicircular element is intended to preserve the basic small scale and forms of the ancient surrounding buildings.

As far as building materials and construction are concerned, Safdie selectively decides to use real stone construction for the walls that defined the boundaries of the site and the main sections then within these compounds to use prefabricated concrete for the single standardized element which is the half arch. A clear dichotomy arises from such selection; where the prefabricated modular assembly emphasizes the norms of universal civilization, the in-situ stone walls proclaims the values of idiosyncratic culture.

Safdie is also showing concern about the scale of the Yeshiva with regard to the predominant scale of the surroundings:

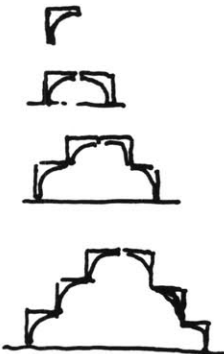


Fig 14

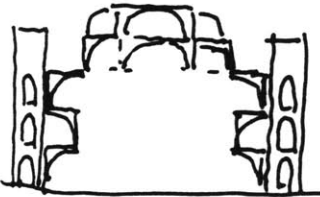


Fig 15



Fig 16



*At one of the meetings, Rabbi Avraham Shrem asked for the synagogue to be raised so as to get a better view of the Western Wall through the window behind the Ark. I had studied the sitelines carefully to make sure the people praying at the Wall would be clearly visible from the seats on the main floor of the synagogue. I knew that if it was raised, one would see less. But as I was to discover later, Rabbi Shrem always disguised his true objective. In this case, what he really wanted was to make the whole mass of the synagogue higher so that it would eclipse the Ashkenazi rabbinical college behind us. I argued that the massing was carefully placed and it would be wrong to make the synagogue any higher. Anything larger than the six storey mass would be totally out of scale with the surroundings.*<sup>1</sup>

Safdie tries to break the six storey mass into smaller units such as layers -- the pierced massive walls -- and repetitive volumetric units -- the rabbinical college and the residences of the students -- which, as he claims, identify with the domed cubical dwelling units in the Old City. As mentioned above, the clustering of these units reveals Safdie's preoccupation with the "Habitat" experience in Montreal. The systematic composition of such units renders the overall scale conflicting with that of the Old City, not to mention a certain degree of superficiality that could have been avoided by a more subtle reinterpretation of the indigenous forms (fig. 17 & 18). The evaluation of the degree of success that he attains in the end product is beyond the scope of my research at this level.

Apart from "introversion" and "scale", Safdie reinterprets individual elements of traditional architectural vocabulary in the light of Jewish teachings as well as progress and practicality. Of this attempt are the two interesting examples of skylights and domes.

In one of the meetings, a rabbi asked Safdie to use stained glass in the synagogue. Safdie was a bit indignant because he felt that stained glass had no place in a synagogue. When he told the rabbi that that Judaism forbade the making of images, the latter responded that it can be made an abstract design. This was not very convincing for Safdie, and he continued to resist,

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<sup>1</sup>Safdie, M.: *Jerusalem: The Future of the Past*, Boston, 1989, pp. 54-55.

believing the rabbi influenced by the abandoned design proposed by the American architect, a huge cube surrounded with stained glass. But behind the rabbi's request, Safdie could sense a desire for the festivity of colour. After a series of experiments, Safdie was able to discover an alternative method to achieve the required festivity: Large "prism" skylights were introduced to diffuse coloured bands of light onto the halls (fig. 19).

The second example, although does not belong to the yeshiva, reveals a genuine attempt at exploring new dimensions in the adaptability of indigenous forms to change. It comprises an experiment that Safdie carried out for the restoration of an old house which he had bought for himself in the Old City, just a few steps from the Yeshiva, and almost adjacent to Arab market. The design experiment evolved as he was trying to resolve the impracticality of the open space in the house.

To be really useful, outdoor space in Jerusalem must be seasonally convertible. In summer, it can become almost intolerably hot. When travelling through Arab district, Safdie does not fail to observe large glazed terraces facing south that are important extensions of the living room in winter -- but totally abandoned in the summer because they become hot houses then. He also notes that in the Arab houses, the family actually migrates from the inner room, which is a summer room, to the outer room, which is a winter room. Safdie is after the same concept of a convertible space, a space equipped with something that could transform his roof garden

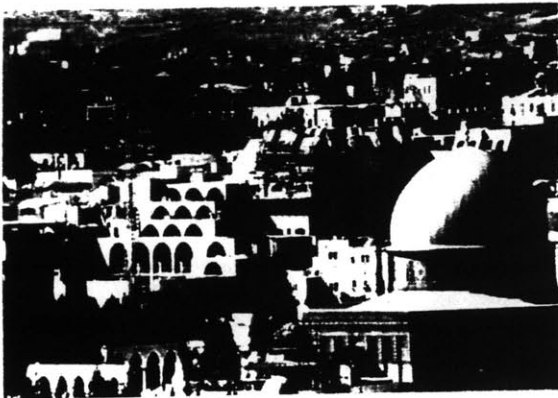


Fig 17

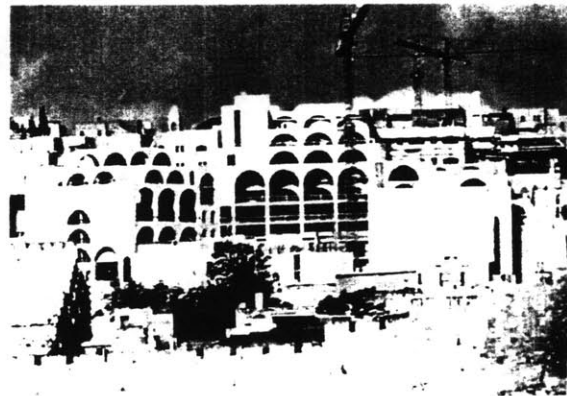


Fig 18

into a shaded terrace in the heat of the day, an enclosed terrace in the cool of the evening, and a glazed solarium in the cold and often rainy winter ( fig. 20 & 21).

Safdie believes that there is no value and truth in the expressive elements of present day architecture which transcends the setting. Could one incorporate this type of convertible terrace into one of the forms that constitute the city's traditional skyline? Safdie was thinking of using domes, but instead of solid ones, transparent ones, bubbles of warmth in the winter sun. This led to the idea of a sliding roof -- but in the form of a dome? He introduced a quarter of a sphere that was in part transparent and in part opaque. The transparent part could turn on the axis of the dome, and when the dome slid under the opaque quarter, it created a roofless terrace open to the sky. As the days grew cooler, the transparent dome could be rotated back, as if a door were being closed, thus creating a greenhouse or winter corner -- a place with lots of light and sun. This invention, while being new in answer to a specific contemporary living problem, made a formal connection to the surroundings. The skyline of the Old City demonstrates a play of old and new domes, old and new masses, of similar scale. However, the difference can be clearly seen: the old domes are stone and heavy while the new ones are half transparent and half white, light and bubbly. Safdie argues that this endeavor expresses a new element which has to do with life as it is today, since it uses modern materials, and yet it is connected with the past. He also



Fig 19

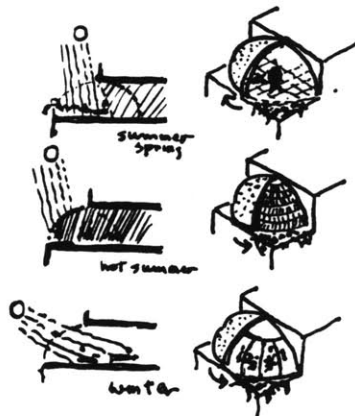


Fig 20



Fig 21

argues that it is not just taking a molding detail from the past and arbitrarily plastering it on a new building; it is not taking an architectural detail and using it indiscriminately, out of context. The new domes are counterpoints with the old, they are all in the same key, all variations on the theme of the "musical offering" that the Old City is.

Safdie belongs to a critical 'transitional' era that witnessed the eclipse of Modern architecture and the emergence of the Post-Modernist trends in the sixties. In his critical work "Modern Architecture", Kenneth Frampton refers to Safdie, among other figures like Graves, Stirling, Philip Johnson, Hans Hollein, Kevin Roche, etc., as a Late-Modernist who converted to a Post-Modernist position where the discourse of a 'dematerialized' historicism has been selfconsciously embraced and virtually mixed at random with modernist fragments. In such position the result is an inconclusive and seemingly pointless 'cacophony' in which the architect loses control of his material.<sup>1</sup> Whether one approves of the end product of Safdie's enterprise or totally disagrees with it, it can be clearly seen that such enterprise demonstrates appreciation for and recognition of an indigenous Palestinian tradition. It is a serious attempt at establishing architectural dialogues between cultural components that pertain to contrasting socio-political spheres.

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The uniqueness of this case lies in its deconstruction of the 'other'. But how is this conforming to the Zionist identity-synthesis process?

The identity issue is central to Israeli existence. So much of it revolves exactly around the difference and struggle with the great 'other'. The military, economical, cultural and class struggle against the Palestinians is filling the Israeli image with every ounce of meaning that it holds. It seems therefore that such an image can never be abandoned or the Zionist self will otherwise disintegrate. Clearly, this is not a purely national struggle between oppressor and oppressed, it is a total struggle between opposing stereotypes, a struggle to the bitter end. The oppressed Palestinian have

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<sup>1</sup>Frampton, K.: *Modern Architecture*, London, 1985, p. 308.

become the condition for the continuation of Zionism, a necessary ingredient of a complex formula, part of the heart of the matter -- of modern Zionist identity.

The new generation and its writers painfully express that the Palestinian refuses to comply with the Zionist dream and dematerialize. In these circumstances, they are willing to talk, to negotiate, even to argue on-behalf-of, charity-fashion. What they are not prepared for is to tear apart the veil of otherness and switch their colonizer-oppressor identity -- a total transformation of the self. The architecture of the yeshivat in Jerusalem reflects this metamorphosis, which is emphatically rejected elsewhere. Ironically enough, a unique gesture advocating life side-by-side, togetherness and equality appears in the architecture of the central Sephardic synagogue in Israel. The replacement of the image of the conqueror by a reconciliatory alternative that incorporates symbols from the culture conquered is a clear denial of the Zionist scheme and its hard-earned identity. Can this architectural 'gesture' contribute to the resolution of the "memory syndrome" in the fabricated Israeli society, and thus promote understanding between the opposite ends of 'otherness'? Unfortunately, the architectural signification of this religious symbol hasn't been seriously recognized by any of the confronting groups yet. Until then, no definite answer can be given!

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