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Between Canaanism and Brutalism: Architecture, *the Orient* and Identity Construction in Israel

Key words: Islamic, Jewish, Ottoman, vernacular, Romanticism, Orientalism, arts & crafts, Modernism, functionalism, symbolism, expressionism, regionalism, post-Modernism, visual arts

INTRODUCTION

Any contemporary discussion of *the Orient* must acknowledge *Orientalism*¹, and be based upon opposites such as European–non-European, colonizer–colonized, modernity–traditionalism, and the like. However, the sweeping dualism thereby implied does not suffice to describe and analyze the unique position of Israel and Zionism, which is more complex and should be positioned within the context of the tripartite colonialism–post-colonialism–anti-colonialism in the Middle East². Themes such as Jews as the Orientals of Europe; the tradition of anti-Semitism; two thousand years of religious and national yearning for Jerusalem; Zionism as a European liberation movement; Zionist agricultural settlement; the British Mandate in Palestine; the massive immigration of North African and Middle-Eastern Jews in the 1950s; the violent Israeli-Arab conflict throughout the twentieth century; and social, political, and economic metamorphoses from pre-industrial to post-industrial nation all combine to form a very rich fabric, not merely black and white, but full of gray shades and contradictions. Against this background, the relationship of the prominent Israeli-Zionist culture with the Orient has been discussed in terms of three interrelated categories: (a) the struggle for self-determination and identity; (b) the attitude towards Oriental Jewry; and (c) the relationship with the Arab world, in general, and Palestinians, in particular. Recent decades have witnessed intense discussions of these

categories in political, social and cultural contexts, but no inclusive attempt to describe the relationship between Israeli architecture and the Orient has appeared to date. Discussion of Israeli architecture and its relationship with the Orient is intertwined with the other three aspects, and spans from poetical-spiritual-historical turns to concrete facts and practical deeds of economic, political, and social consequence. It is grounded in a continuum, which includes intentions, interpretation, and discourse, as well as design, production of objects, demarcation of spaces, and shaping of the everyday lives of individuals and communities. A variety of fields of knowledge, using a wealth of notions and concepts, form the context of our discussion. An exhaustive study lies far beyond the present limits, but it is important at least to list the *dimensions* of this context and their major *keywords* (Table 1). Some of them are considered in this essay, while the inclusion of others in the list signifies acknowledgment of their relevance.

The table suggests a matrix of perspectives for discussion of *Israeli architecture and its relationship to the Orient*. First, and most obvious perspective, is that of architecture as art, including style, form, materials, and production. The second perspective, which sees architecture as a generator of culture, has been critically discussed only in recent years. The third one views architecture as a means for policy implementation in politics, economy, and society. All perspectives have their decisive share

Table 1: Dimensions and key words. These and perhaps other dimensions may appear in any architectural context, while the key words are more specific to place and time, and are sometimes defined by dichotomies. Dimensions overlap, as do key words.

| Dimension | Key words |
|---------------------|---|
| Geography | Climate, topography, coast, desert |
| Ecology | Environment, pollution |
| Culture | Judaism, the history of "Sephardim"/"Ashkenazim", Diaspora, anti-Semitism, emancipation, religious/secular, Yiddish/Hebrew, tradition/Modernity, Arab, Moslem, nationality, archaeology, Orientalism, paternalism, local/global, particular/universal, elitism, center/periphery, image, science, art, psychological interpretation |
| Ideology/narrative | Enlightenment, progress, colonialism, Modernism, Zionism, pioneering, socialism |
| Society/power | Traditional orders and institutions, paternalism, agrarian/urban/social reform, community and/vs. state, "Sephardim"/"Ashkenazim", Holocaust, refugees, the melting pot, center/periphery |
| Sociology | Structuralism, post-structuralism |
| Politics/Power | Colonialism, anti-colonialism, post-colonialism, Leftist/Rightist, democracy, elite/s, conflict |
| Law and legislation | |
| Economy | Agriculture, land ownership, industry, post-industrial, centralist, socialist, private/public sectors, globalization, intervention, laissez-faire, development, communication |
| Technology | Tradition/Modernity, low tech/high tech |
| Art | Islamic, Jewish, Ottoman, Mediterranean, vernacular, Romanticism, Orientalism, arts & crafts, Modernism, functionalism, "style", symbolism, expressionism, originality, identity, regionalism, post-Modernism, visual arts, literature, poetry, theater, film, dance |

in the production of Israeli identity. The artistic perspective, as approached in this paper, concerns mainly inner, architectural-professional discourse. The cultural view refers to the conflict between the Zionist-Israeli-Ashkenazi elite and the Sephardic Jewry which immigrated in the 1950s. The third perspective may be defined as instrumentalist and is deeply connected to both, Sephardic-Ashkenazi and the Zionist-Palestinian conflict. All three perspectives have their "writers" and "readers", included and excluded players and an important function in the definition of Israeli identity. Obviously, the three are deeply intertwined, although they will be discussed in sequence.

The paper concentrates on the period starting in 1948, with the foundation of the state of Israel, thus interpreting "Israeli" as a political, internationally acknowledged historical fact. Otherwise, it might begin 2000 years ago, with Judea under Roman rule; in the nineteenth century, with the beginnings of Zionism; or during the British Mandate in Palestine, after the First World War. Each such interpretation would have a cultural, political, religious or historiographical basis, as will be shown below.

1 BACKGROUND: HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The Middle East commenced the 20th century as a part of the Ottoman Empire, with European powers competing for influence over the regions ranging from Anatolia to Egypt and from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. Their interests formed the bases for divisions of the area, mainly between France and Britain, after the fall of the Central Powers (Germany, Turkey, and Austro-Hungary) in the Second World War. In 1917, Lord Allenby triumphantly marched into Jerusalem, and in 1922, the League of Nations officially approved the British Mandate over Palestine. Beyond serving British interests, such as building the Haifa port and refineries for oil exportation from Iraq, and beyond safeguarding the Holy Places, British policy had to balance between conflicting objectives set by the mandate: establishment of a national home for the Jewish people (following the 1917 Balfour Declaration and re-asserted by the League of Nations), and improvement, development, and stabilization of the area to the satisfaction of the Arab population.



Fig. 1: Bezalel (the Biblical builder of the Tabernacle), by Shmuel Ben-David, 1910⁴.



Fig. 2: Herzlia Gymnasium by A. Barsky, 1909. Similar to the Biblical altar, the central towers and the fence elements were crowned each by four horns⁵.



Fig. 3: Technion Institute, Haifa, by Alexander Baerwald, 1913. (Technion catalog, 1994).

In the cultural realm, the British, as the Western world in general, conceived Palestine as the romantic place of Lawrence from Arabia and the “noble savages” of the desert on the one hand, and

the landscape of the Bible, where Jesus Christ walked and lived among people much like Arab natives, shepherds, or *falah'im* (farmers), on the other hand. This Orientalist view was partially shared by the Zionists, but there were also profound differences: first, there were the Jewish roots and the hope to return to the homeland in the Orient, expressed in everyday life by religion, tradition, poetry, pilgrimage, etc.; second, there was the European anti-Semitic tradition and the consideration of Jews as Orientals. Zionists, at the beginning of the twentieth century, were mainly Central and Eastern European Jews who, inspired by liberation movements of the nineteenth century and the Czarist persecution of Russian and Polish Jewry, emigrated to Eretz *Israel* (the land of Israel, Hebrew) to recreate the Jewish nation. While two thousand years of longing for Zion (another name for Jerusalem and Israel) by Orthodox Jewry was to be fulfilled in Messianic times, the Zionist movement set out to realize the dream. “The Orient was not only a safe shelter but a source of values, power and moral renewal for the people”³. Zionist art (and craft) had its first and utopian phase in the Bezalel Academy of Jerusalem (1906–1929), which embraced an eclectic orientalism, blended with Jewish symbols, such as the *magen david* (six point star), *menora* (seven-branched candlestick), the tablets of the Covenant, etc. (Fig. 1).

Boris Schatz, the Bezalel founder, advised in the design of Herzlia Gymnasium, the first public building erected in the first Israeli new town, Tel-Aviv (Fig. 2).

The leading architectural figure, however, was Alexander Baerwald, who combined forms from various Islamic sources with local stone masonry and neoclassical organization of the plan at the Technion Institute, Haifa. (Fig. 3).

For Zionists, Palestine/Israel offered not so much a gaze at “the other” but the preferred self-image in the mirror. Upon the return to the Land of the Forefathers, the New Jews, seeking a non-Diasporic identity, adopted the figure of the native Arab as their model: healthy, close to nature, corporeal and productive (as opposed to the weak, spiritual, and unproductive Jew of the Diaspora) (Fig. 4).

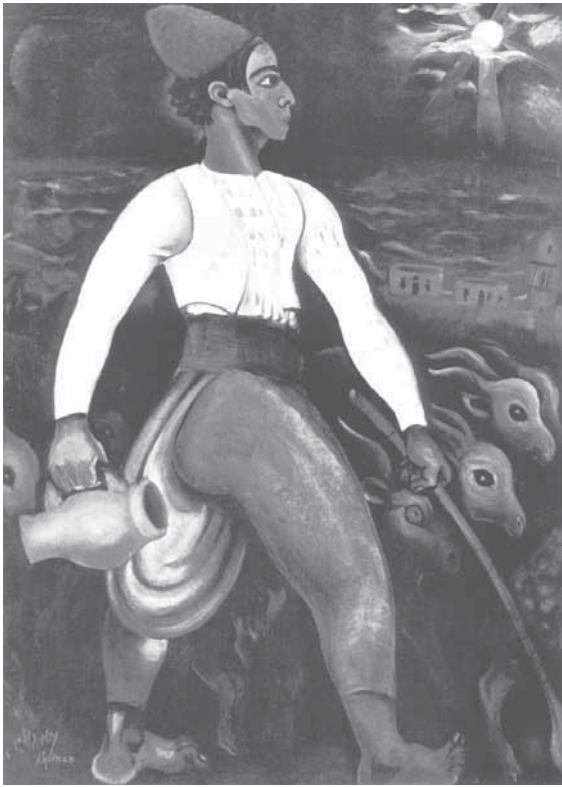


Fig. 4: Nahum Gutman, *The Goatherd*, 1927.⁶

“The desire to merge into and become an authentic part of the East was the intellectual order of the day”⁷.

The sense of a fresh start in architecture and the

visual arts brought about a predilection for a naive mode of creation. In architecture, “biblical” inventions of Bezalel spirit and neoclassicist blending with Islam were abandoned in favor of the search for authentic local architecture (Fig. 5).

Experimentation was aimed at bringing local climate, topography, and material together, unifying them with the place. Formal modernist vocabulary, although acknowledged, did not enjoy consensus until the early 1930s. 1929 witnessed riots of the Arab nationalist movement against the Jews, and the emergence of a bitter feeling of disillusion: even the longed-for Oriental Motherland rejected Jewry. Nevertheless, movements such as “*Brit Shalom*” (“peace treaty” in Hebrew), which sought creation of a world cultural center in Israel, in a binational state, continued to act. In the late 1920s, young artists and architects returned from the studies in Europe, bringing *Bauhaus* and *Le Corbusier* legacies to the center of the professional scene in the early 1930s.

They founded an influential Architectural Circle (“*hug*” in Hebrew) led by Arieh Sharon, Zé'ev Rechter, and Joseph Neufeld, and were soon joined by many other Tel Aviv-based offices. At the same time, Jewish immigrants fleeing the Nazi regime in Germany invigorated financial activities and capital



Fig. 5: Yohanan Ratner: *Competition winning Jewish Agency Building, Jerusalem*, 1927⁸.

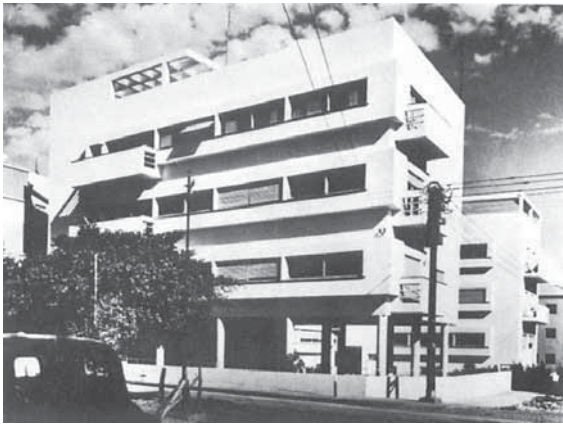


Fig. 6: Zeev Rechter: *Angel House, Tel Aviv, 1933*¹⁰.

investments. In architecture, as in the blossoming urban culture of Tel Aviv, modernization replaced localism as the order of the day, including first and foremost identity construction itself. Architecture, not unlike the Zionist project in general, sought cultural, social, and economic progress. “The impact of the new architectural circle was felt immediately.... The avant-garde architects of the thirties were closely identified with the character of their times; ... design fitted the social pattern of the period like a glove fits a hand”⁹.

Being in the Middle East transformed from an ideal to a simple fact. Typically, Arie Sharon wrote at the time about “Tel Aviv on the Mediterranean – A Town on Pilotis”, not a Mediterranean town, but a town simply in a geographical given (Fig. 6).

Eagerness for modernism however, was not the only option. Between 1934 and 1942, Erich Mendelsohn opened his office in Jerusalem. In comparison with his expressionist period in Germany, his work in *Eretz Israel* “is distinguished in its simplicity. ...The porches, inner courts, vaulted ceilings and relatively small windows. – all prove how much he was concerned with the Mediterranean landscape and the climate. His use of stone as building material also refers to his response to the special local conditions”¹¹. Mendelsohn wrote: “I try to achieve combination and blending between Prussian culture and the life cycle of the Muezzin, between the opposed to nature and the harmony with it.”¹² (Fig. 7).

Mendelsohn did not become a part of the *Hug* or Tel Avivian discourse, but associated with the British administration, which, in Palestine, not unlike other parts of the Empire, was very cautious with modernization, preferring to let the local people follow their own slow path of development, rather than face the danger of too rapid economic and cultural changes. Sometimes this was termed the tendency of “development of underdevelopment”¹⁴.

British architects of the Mandate usually favored conservatism over reform and tradition over modernization. This included keen fascination with the vernacular in the spirit of the “arts and crafts” movement, resulting, among other things, in promotion of regionalist architecture by the D.P.W. (Department of Public Works). (Fig. 8).



Fig. 7: Erich Mendelsohn: *Salman Schocken House, Jerusalem 1936*¹³.



Fig. 8: *Rockefeller Museum, Jerusalem. Architect: Austen Harrison.*

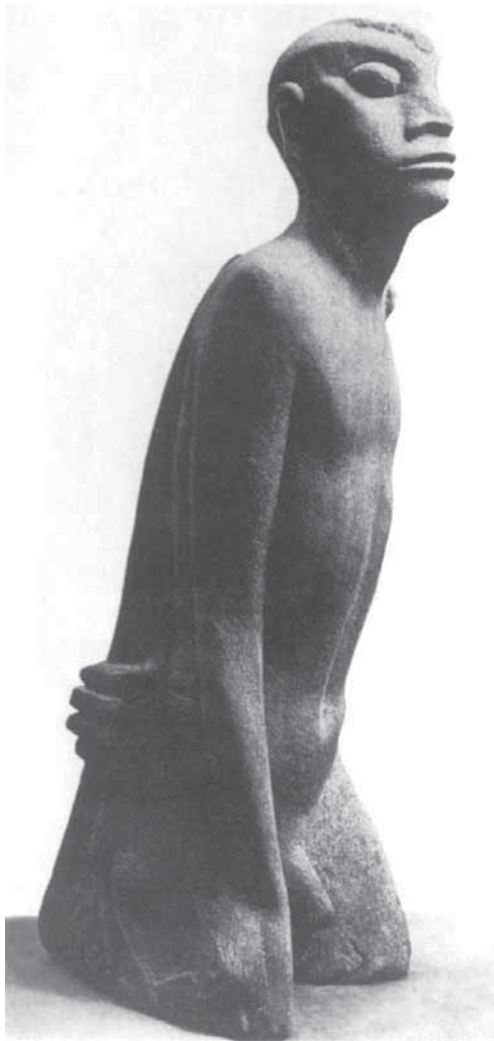


Fig. 9: Yitzhak Danziger, *Nimrod – the canonized Canaanite image*, 1939¹⁵.

The 1930s, however, signified not only modernization, but also fierce and continuous clashes between the Arab and Jewish populations (the Arab uprising, 1936–1939), and with the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, the beginning of the Jewish Holocaust in Europe. This twofold break initiated search in the arts for an indigenous Hebrew identity, related to neither European heritage (associated with anti-Semitism and Nazism) nor local Arabs. The search was answered by the Canaanite group, which turned to the ancient Semitic people, and for the first time, raised archaeology as a major source for Israeli culture, regardless of political leftist or rightist inclinations. (Fig. 9).

Canaanism had virtually no impact on architectu-

re in the 1940s, perhaps because these years were marked by wars. Building activity slowed down, and architects were preoccupied with service in the British Brigade in the Second World War and in the Israel's war of independence, 1947–1948.

2 THREE DIMENSIONS OF CONSIDERATION OF THE ORIENT

From the three perspectives of discussion of Israeli architecture and its relationship to the Orient – artistic, cultural, and instrumentalist – it is the last that overshadowed the others in the first years of the state's independence. Identity forging was implicit in practical endeavor.

2.1 ARCHITECTURE AS A MEANS FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The government's explicit mobilization of architectural activity for the expression and implementation of policy was evident just a few weeks after Israel's declaration of statehood. The chosen leader was an architect Arie Sharon, who recruited a staff of 170 professionals, mainly architects and engineers. "Work began immediately, despite the war... in the spring of 1949... the importance of national planning was acknowledged by attaching our department to the Prime Minister's Office. ...[The National Plan] to balance the distribution of population over the entire country was recognized as an ideal solution by the Prime Minister"¹⁶. The Israel National Plan by Arie Sharon aimed to disperse the Jewish population by directing new immigrants to 20 new towns built in different parts of the country, with housing and adjacent industrial zones (Fig. 10).

"The Minister of Finance, Eliezer Kaplan ... said bluntly: '...it is not your [i.e. Sharon's] job, but the Government's to decide on the location, size and ultimate goals of the new towns. ...[but].... You know very well that the Government will never have the time and patience, especially with the war going on, to concentrate on these matters. Once the plans are drawn, the development, if any, will follow your suggestions.' He was right."¹⁸ Thus architecture was a major agent in the creation of the very identity of the newly born state. The dominant model du-

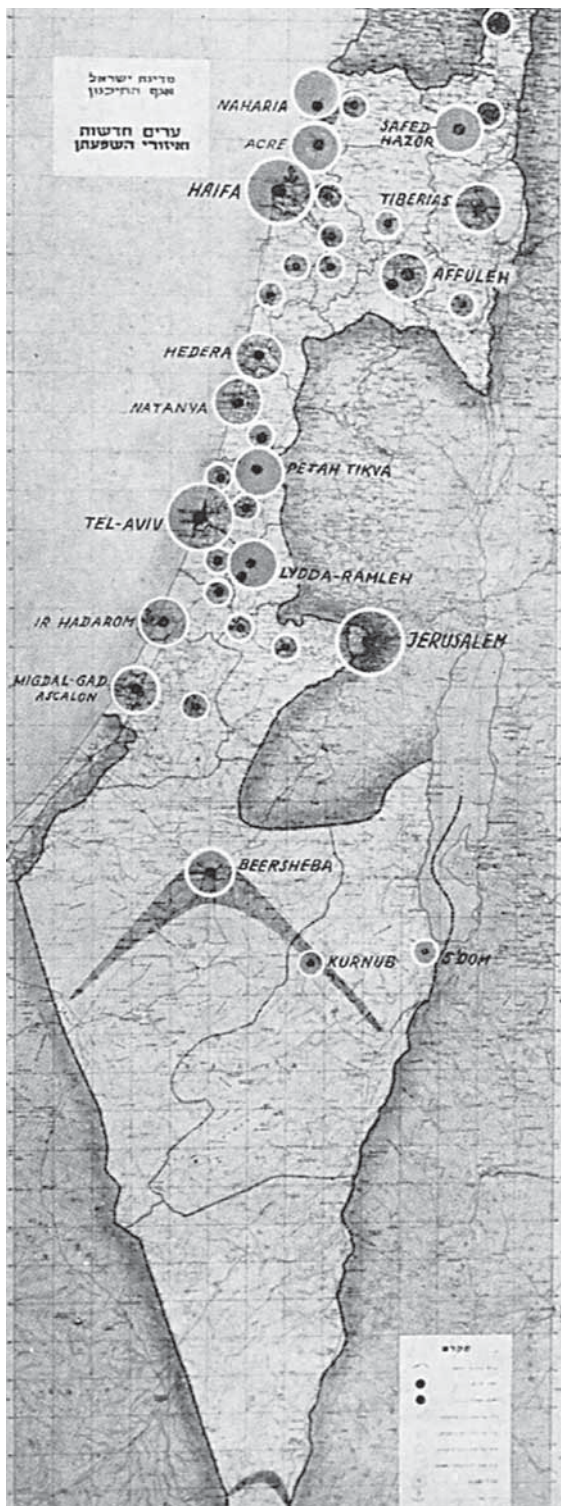


Fig. 10: Israel National Plan by Arieh Sharon, 1950: Dispersion of population in new and existing towns¹⁷.

ring the 1950s was the garden city, composed of neighborhood units. Immigrants, Holocaust refugees from Europe and North African and Middle Eastern Jews who fled the Arab countries, arrived at a pace of 1000 per day. They were settled, so-

metimes for many months, in provisional refugee camps – ma'abarot – and later directed to minimal housing projects. (Fig. 11).

The presupposition was that in the new-towns, modeled on European precedents, the Oriental Jews will be “Modernized”. At the same time, and in stark contrast to low-cost housing, public institutions enjoyed generous budgets. This may be interpreted as an act of consolidation of the ruling socialist- a-traditional – centralist hegemony. (Fig. 12).

The attitude towards the orient or the local was not so much theorized as practiced in settling the land and transforming the landscape and as a result, so it was assumed, – the people’s identity too. The decision makers drew legitimacy not from the oriental principles but from the leading Western/ universalist approach of the day: “To promote our ideas about planning, we invited Sir Patrick Abercrombie... [who] warmly praised our approach and mentioned the similarity to the Greater London Plan.”²¹ From 1948 to the end of the century, all Israeli governments, whether Mapay-HaAvoda or Likud (Labor or rightist coalitions) have charged the Ministry of Housing with the task of settling people, mostly on state-owned land. However, there has also been confiscation of land from the Palestinian population in areas which were considered strategic. Although usually followed by compensation of the owners, this raised protest, sometimes violent. Land occupation has always been at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Such was the establishment of new Jewish neighborhoods all around Jerusalem after the Six-Day War. The government regarded this as the ultimate means for consolidating the city’s union, Israeli Identity and avoiding its division in the future. The relationship between politics and building was never more clear-cut than after the 1969 declaration of US Secretary of State Rogers, that “the United States expected re-establishment of certain Jordanian presence in the unified city”²². Building was immediately accelerated, as was further land confiscation. In the words of Jehuda Drexler, the chief architect of the Ministry of Housing: “With the unification of Jerusalem, following the Six-

Day War, the Ministry of Housing was faced with a challenge... Jerusalem became again the capital of our nation... after hundreds of years of twilight, the time has come to express these aspirations for development.in the light of the goal to reach, in 1984, a Jewish population of about 400,000 in the town, the Ministry of Housing joined the task of populating Jerusalem"²³. (Map 1).

All settlement and building of roads, housing, industrial areas and the like in the West Bank since 1967 has been regarded as a means to safeguard Israeli domination. Conversely, after the peace treaty with Egypt in 1979, Israel demolished the new town Yamit, previously erected on the Sinai coast. Thus, from the instrumental perspective, the architectural style applied makes very little difference, but identity of the land and of its people was constructed through the settlement mechanism.



Fig. 11: A neighborhood unit in the new town of Yokne'am, being constructed by the immigrants who lived in provisional shacks along the road¹⁹.

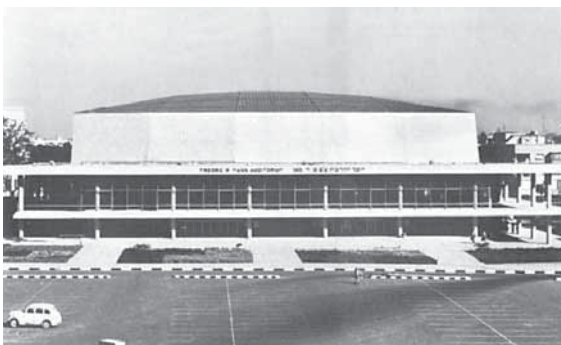
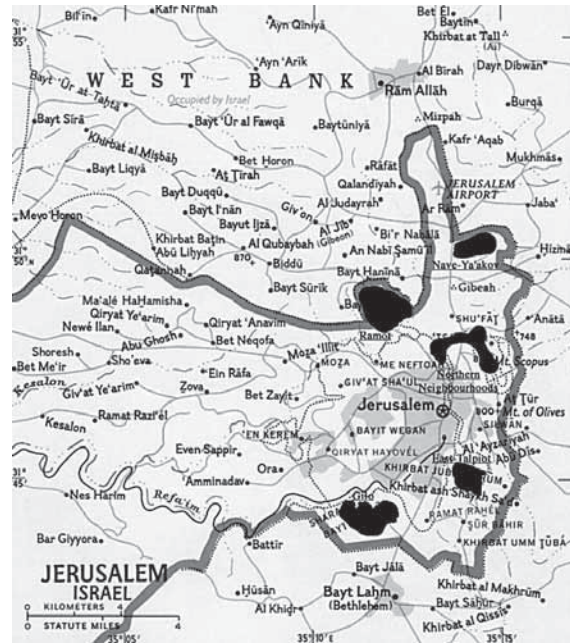


Fig. 12: Ze'ev Rechter: Mann Auditorium, late 1950s, Tel Aviv²⁰.



Map 1: Jerusalem and surrounding Jewish neighborhoods after the Six-Day War²⁴.

2.2 THE ROLE OF ARCHITECTURE IN THE "MELTING-POT" CULTURE

Many of the "developmental new-towns" founded in the 1950s as a part of the population-dispersal policy encountered severe economic and social problems. These, as well as new immigrant neighborhoods in the major towns, became fertile ground for cultural conflict between the Ashkenazi (European) hegemony and the Sephardim – North African and the Middle Eastern immigrants. The hegemony was basically secular, socialist, and modernist, and practiced democratic politics. Many of the immigrants were orthodox, traditional, organized in communities, and usually unacquainted with the political and administrative "game." The identity of the Israeli elite was embodied in the *kibbutz* and the *sabra* was its mythological image. (Fig. 13).

Sabra – a sweet fruit of cactus, with its prickly skin, evolved from a term of abuse to the ultimate image of the indigenous young, healthy and straightforward Israeli.

With the "ingathering of the exiles", from late 1948 to the mid-1960s, the hegemony met the enormous identity challenge with the concept of the "melting-



Fig. 13: Nahum Guttman, *I picked a Sabra* (Donner, 1989).

pot”: the rejection of orthodoxy, traditions, and parallel histories of Jews from various countries in favor of a new, unifying symbolism based on historical intertwining of the old, biblical nation and the newly created state, connecting ancient past directly to the present. Jewish traditional culture from Asia and North Africa was overshadowed by the official narrative and relegated to the sidelines as mere folklore.

Architecture had its material and symbolic function in the production of this melting-pot identity.

There was Modernist standardized, low-cost and equalized housing (Fig. 14) in neighborhoods conceived according to zoning principles.

Paradoxically, the orthogonal, repetitive and extensive patterns thus produced did not do justice to urbanite immigrants for lack of intensive traditional public places, nor to immigrants from rural regions, who were used to living outside on the land.

The second generation which took over the lea-

ding architectural offices in the sixties (e.g. Sharon, Rechter, Carmi), rejected the flat slabs of the fifties in favor of evolving Israeli Brutalism: exposed concrete and elaborated polyhedra geometry with canonized examples in public institutions. (Fig. 15).

“Brutalism” as Israeli architecture replaced the former “White Modernism”, another phase in formal identity construction, still adhering to the same socio-political ideals of the early years. As one of the second-generation leaders asserted: “The Brutalist architecture of 1950–1970 was the type of the “sabra” the child of sands, with blue eyes and bright hair and the *tembel* [Israeli typical] hat, the generation of realization”²⁷. Thus, in Sharon Zukin’s terms²⁸, the symbolic economy of architecture did not include representations of Asian and North African Jewish cultures. These did not play their potential role in either the negotiation of cultural meaning in the built form, or in the architectural contribution to the construction of socio-cultural identity in the constitutive decades of 1950–1970.²⁹

The counterpart of the modernist progress in the melting-pot identity construction was the ancient past. Architecture helped consolidating direct affi-



RESIDENTIAL AREA-FIRST STAGE
LAYOUT



Architects: H. Mertens, Sh. Horwitz, A. Glikson, Ch. Sharon — Tel Aviv

Fig. 14: Mertens, Horwitz, Glikson, Sharon: *Housing in Carmiel new town, 1965*²⁵. Similar ‘types’ were built all over Israel.

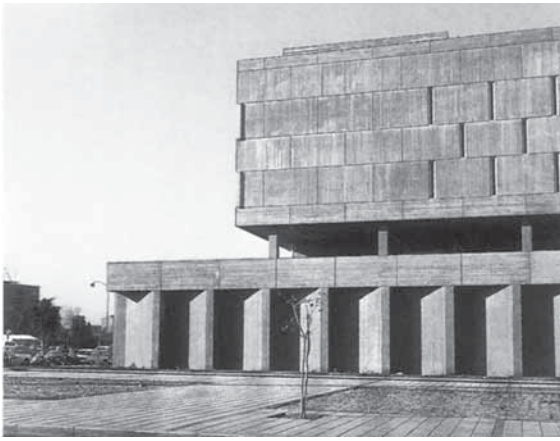


Fig. 15: Rechter Z. & Y., Zarhi :Low court, Tel Aviv, 1972²⁶.



Fig. 16: Peter Bogod and Ester Niv-Krendel: *The Cardo*, 1983.



Fig. 17: 1965 Dimona “model neighborhood” (Frenkel and Shershevsky, 1970) Program and discussion mention local attributes such as orientation, topography, radiation, ventilation, intimate public spaces. Formal “oriental” associations come “naturally”. Style is not discussed.

nity between the present and the ancient history, as well as reference to Zionist legacy from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Eretz Israel. Leading projects included integrating archaeological findings with rehabilitation of Jerusalem’s old city, generally, and the Jewish quarter, in particular, to emphasize ancient Israeli roots in Jerusalem. For example, careful combination of Crusader vaults with archaeological findings from the Second Temple period and contemporary commercial activities³⁰. (Fig. 16).

The mid-1970s witnessed the overthrow of HaAvoda Party (for the first time since the statehood), and opening of the political scene to traditionalist and Oriental Jewry. Feelings of discrimination were legitimized, examined and expressed in the humanities and the arts. In architecture, neighborhood renewal projects, again coordinated by the Ministry of Housing, were the most immediate contribution. Thus the formation of an Israeli monolithic melting-pot culture was based on the paradox of dissociation from the Diaspora and Jewish traditional culture, and, at the same time, – an existential quest for the roots and a sense of belonging. The overthrow of Socialist-Ashkenazi hegemony in the 1970s was the political expression of recognition of voices of North African and Asian Jews. Besides deconstruction of the sabra narrative, it began to generate a richer and more pluralistic Israeli identity, which accepts synthesis between the East and the West, incorporating both Jewish and Israeli history. In popular culture, pop music and culinary taste, grass-root “localism” gradually came to dominate the scene.

2.3 ARCHITECTURAL-PROFESSIONAL DISCOURSE: STYLES, AFFINITIES AND “THE LOCAL”

Whatever quest preceded or followed – whether affinity to the Orient or the West was sought – Brutalism was the unquestionable architectural edict, the natural language of the indigenous Israeli. Indeed, the 1950–1970 period may be regarded as the heyday of realization of the Zionist dream: the new Jewish nation in its land. Architecture focused on production, not on reflection, because ends,

means and meanings were unified in one narrative. There was no search for local or Oriental architecture because “Israeli” was the “local”, and the buildings produced were perceived as the appropriate architecture (Fig. 17).

Obviously, Brutalism was not invented in Israel, but embraced from the post-Second World War vogue, not unlike white architecture (Bauhaus) (Fig. 18) in the 1930s or high tech in the 1990s (Fig. 19).

Brutalism, however, acquired a status of transparency (the term used in Israel of the 1950s–1970s was “International Style” and not “Brutalism”). Retrospectively, its perception (as opposed to conception) as Israeli may be interpreted by one or more explanations:

- Brutalism was a straightforward analogy of architectural expression to the Sabra mythology: rough but honest, straightforward but hearty, virile and bold, despising superfluous decoration;
- It enabled self-positioning in contrast to the formal language of traditional Arab construction, while using local materials (concrete, stone);
- It was the outcome of rejection of any European classicism or vernacular, which could be associated with Nazism and anti-Semitism;
- It was an inevitable result of the separatist Israeli culture, which located itself in polar opposition to Jewish spiritual tradition in order to create “a new Jew”;
- It was an unconscious realization of the Jewish tradition of the abstract (experimentations with geometry).

In all previous periods, “local architecture” whether Jewish or British, had been the result of conceptions – conscious decisions to use, blend, or invent forms and materials which conveyed meanings of the Bible, ancient Middle-Eastern cultures, Moslem architecture, Arab-vernacular, or Modernism. For Jewish architects, pursuit of “the local” in the first half of the twentieth century always involved affinity to “others” – remote either in time (archaeology), geography (European Bauhaus) or culture (Arabic).

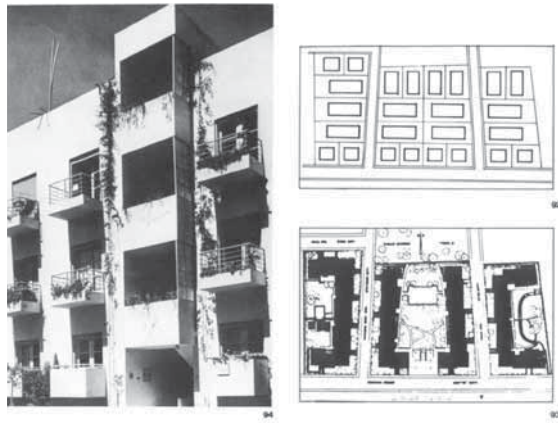


Fig. 18: *Meonot Ovdim (Workers houses)* Dalet, Hei, Vav. Arieh Sharon, 1935–37³¹.

In contrast, the language of Brutalist architecture was “naturalized” – counterpart of the leading narrative and mostly beyond question, whether manifest in housing or in public institutions. Even acknowledged endeavors for climatic solutions (Fig. 20) or building for Arab minorities (Fig. 21) were based, as a matter of course, on Brutalist style.

Towards the end of the Israeli Brutalist period, Modernism was criticized worldwide, and new sensitivity to the historical and the vernacular arose. This coincided with the Six-Day War (1967), and the pursuant exposure to Palestinian vernacular villages and, especially, the old city of Jerusalem.

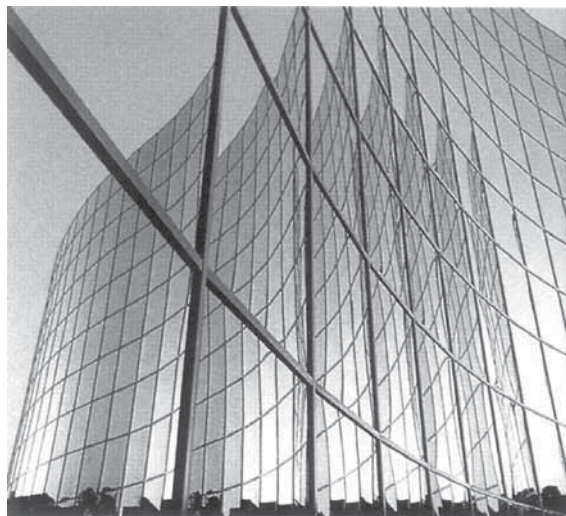


Fig. 19: *Moshe Zur: ‘Elbit’ Industry Building, Haifa*³².



Fig. 20: Havkin, Daniel: *Carpet development – model housing, Beer-Sheba, 1960*³³.

The concept of “the local” was placed on architectural agenda again, clinging to the Palestinian vernacular, but at the same time interpreting it as Mediterranean, with patios, plazas, and pedestrian alleys. Modernist universality was replaced with acknowledgment of historical stratification, but in “Mediterranean” a similarly eternal-universal self-assurance was sought. The tone was largely set by the Chief Architect in the Ministry of Housing, which still played the major role in architectural activity of the 1970s: “We shall therefore do well to look around us at the traditional Mediterranean architecture and examine the basic, timeless values that it has established for itself, so that we can learn what it has to teach us for the stratum of contemporary architecture”³⁵. In the same article, the Chief Architect bitterly criticizes the architecture



Fig. 21: Feldman, M.: *Orphanage, Acco, 1959*³⁴.

of the preceding 25 years: “...we can draw the sad conclusion that with our system of ‘building’ we have not succeeded in creating ‘place’ anywhere – and that goes not only for housing projects, but also for public buildings”³⁶. He then defines the components of Mediterranean architecture and presents their application in Jerusalem’s new neighborhoods (Fig. 22).

The illustrations in the article suggest sources of inspiration: first and foremost Greek (and Italian) islands and Old Jerusalem, then the ancient city of Safed (in Galilee), Bauhaus workers’ housing in 1930s Tel Aviv, as well as the Brutalist Le Corbusier Visual Arts Center, Cambridge MA and Safdie’s Habitat in Montreal. This list is interesting for its inclusions (especially Tel Aviv’s White Architecture and Corbusian Brutalism), for its exclusions (e.g. North African Kasbahs), and for the abstraction of forms and distancing of meaning. Political turns and re-turns since the 1970s and continuous clashes between Israel and the Palestinians contributed to deconstruction of the hegemonic narrative. In the collective subconscious, the close affinity to Palestinian vernacular as the image for Israeli indigenous architecture created uneasiness. The 1984 exhibition “White City – International Style Architecture in Israel”³⁸ rediscovered Tel Aviv’s White Architecture from the 1930s. In the professional discourse, it was declared as the genuine Israeli vernacular, inseparable from the Zionist ideology³⁹. Le-Corbusier inspiration from Greece provided its legitimacy as “Mediterranean”. The embrace of White Architecture may be compared to the 1986 *Want of Matter* exhibition⁴⁰, which reflected similar longing for the then-doubted Israeli image at the core of Tel Aviv art (painting and sculpture). In arts, as in politics, the old elite (Ashkenazi, male, Sabra) sought return to the equitable, the modest, the basic, the ordered, and the uncontaminated. Attribution of prestige to the White Architecture was followed by rather costly restorations of buildings, financed by commercial firms and affluent private purchasers. Conveniently, White Architecture is located in Tel Aviv’s center, on plots of high real-estate value. Restoration of an International Style 2–3 story building at the front is



Fig. 22: Salo Hershman: Housing in Gilo neighborhood, Jerusalem, 1970s³⁷.

often combined with a new high-rise office building in the rear of the plot. The whole phenomenon may therefore also be interpreted in terms of urban core crisis and post-industrial renewal, typical to post-industrial economy, almost “White Architecture as a Theme Park”.

3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This short essay falls far short of exhausting the relationship between Israeli architecture and the *orient*, and their function in the structuring, construction and reconstruction of Israeli identity. Rather, it delineates the outline of a “space of imaging” defined by three coordinates: the instrumental-political, the cultural-representational, and the inner, or professional-discursive. Questions within such a metaphorical space promote specific inquiries connected to each coordinate, analyze interrelations among the coordinates, and examine the permeability of the research space to changing ideas in neighboring spaces.

The first coordinate – the instrumental – may be interpreted as *conditions for architectural production*. Alongside architectures which were instrumentalized, there have been others, which were realized little or not at all, architectures which did not fit into the mainstream of leading production and politics, as generally described in part 2.1. It may be interesting to discover these unaccepted-unrealized architectures, and why they were considered

unacceptable alternatives. An example might be the compact high-density city in the Negev, proposed to the Ministry of Housing by Oscar Niemeyer⁴¹. Some of these architectures necessarily included criticism of mainstream approaches and activities. Thus questions arise about the relationship between the instrumentalist coordinate and the inner discourse coordinate, which is largely autonomous: how did architectural discourse influence state policies, on the one hand (see for example, Minister Kaplan’s remarks to Arie Sharon, *ibid.*), and how did it contribute to policy criticism and setting up of alternatives, on the other hand? Examples of recent critical research in this vein are, for example, Segal & Weitzman, 2003⁴²; Yacobi⁴³.

The second research coordinate, which is connected to the instrumentalist, but requires its own notions and analyses, sheds light on the influence of architectural artifacts on the crystallizing Israeli collective identity. Wide acknowledgment and agreement prevails today over criticism of the all-embracing preference of Ashkenazi – socialist hegemony during the constitutive years (1950–1970). From consensus on the achievements of Israeli architecture, the pendulum seems to have swung to sweeping reservations about the housing and new town projects. Similar to Edward Robbins’ approach to Thamesmead planning revisited⁴⁴, the most redeeming questions and the ones that may have corrective influences in the future, are less about the architects’ explicit agendas than about their

hidden or even unacknowledged premises. In other words: What kind of self-criticism has prevailed in the architectural discourse? What has been regarded as relevant context? What has been rejected and on what grounds?

The last research coordinate concerning the relationship of Israeli architecture with the orient, the inner-professional discourse, is the most autonomous of the three. The essay described some metamorphoses of this relationship: as part of the disciplinary legitimation and justification of the practice, as search of the architects' status in the surrounding world, and as efforts to construct the image of the profession against the background of the international discourse. All these metamorphoses since the 1920s, and certainly since the establishment of the state of Israel, were not related to the *orient per se* but to the place, the locale, and the Israeli: (a) local, uncritical work (Brutalism as *Sabra* architecture); (b) local architecture as Mediterranean, with Palestinian vernacular undergoing abstraction, sublimation and, to an extent also universalization; (c) local architecture through the use of local materials (especially stone), and responsiveness to the landscape and the climate. This may be termed an a-historical approach, and some of its aspects may be scientifically evaluated; (d) local architecture as a return to Zionist precedents from the first half of the twentieth century (White Architecture, water towers, and agricultural buildings).

Although these approaches were conceived gradually, they are not mutually exclusive and their practice continued in parallel. The special questions arising from the inner discourse coordinate concern canonization of the history of Israeli architecture: who tried to write such historiographies, and why have they not been accepted yet? Who are included, who are excluded, and why?

Beyond all interpretations however, the discussion of the *orient*, the *local* or the *Israeli*, has affinity to the question of emerging collective identity. In 1925, Ben Gurion, later the first prime minister of Israel, stated: "the significance of Zionism is that we are, once again, becoming an oriental people"⁴⁵

and 75 years later "The desire to form part of the East in the deepest existential and cultural sense, or, in contrast, to detach from it – these are [and will probably remain] the two major impulses that come to bear on the evolving Israeli sense of Identity"⁴⁶.

Note

The Hebrew term for "east" is "mizrah" and there is no term for "orient".

¹ Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

² Penslar, D. Jonathan. *Zionism, Colonialism and Post-Colonialism. The Journal of Israeli History*. (Forthcoming special issue on Revisionism in Israeli Historiography), J. I. H. Vol. 20, 2001.

³ Zalmona, Yigal. *To the East? in Kadima – the East in Israeli Art*. Exhibition catalogue. Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1988, p. 47.

⁴ Ofrat, Gide'on. *One Hundred Years of Art in Israel*. Boulder, Colorado: Westvie Press, 1988, p. 26.

⁵ Shechori, Ilan. *The Dream turned to a Metropolitan*. Tel Aviv: Avivim, 1990, p. 98.

⁶ Ofrat, G., *One Hundred Years ...*, p. 48.

⁷ Zalmona, Yigal. *To the East? in Kadima – the East in Israeli Art*. Exhibition catalogue. Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1988, XI.

⁸ Elhanani, Aba. *The Israeli Architecture in the Twentieth Century*. Tel Aviv: Misrad HaBitahon, 1984, p. 26.

⁹ Sharon, Arie. *Kibbutz + Bauhaus*. Stuttgart: Karl Kramer Verlag, 1976, p. 48–49.

¹⁰ Shechori, Ran. *Ze'ev Rechter*. Jerusalem: Keter, 1987, p. 28.

¹¹ Levin, Michael (curator). *White City: International Style Architecture in Israel: A portrait of and Era. Exhibition Catalog*. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum. Sabinsky Press Ltd., 1984, p. 36.

¹² Mendelsohn, Erich. *Letters of an Architect* / Editor Oscar Beyer, 1967, p. 141. In: Levin, Michael (curator). *White City: International Style Architecture in Israel: A portrait of and Era. Exhibition Catalog*. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum. Sabinsky Press Ltd., 1984, p. 36.

¹³ Von Eckardt, Wolf. *Eric Mendelsohn*. N. Y.: Braziller, 1960, p. 52.

¹⁴ Fuchs, Ron Aaron. *Austen St. Barbe Harrison – A British Architect in the Holy Land. Doctorate research*. Technion, I. I. T. Haifa, Israel. 1992, p. 27.

¹⁵ Ofrat, G. *One Hundred Years ...*, p. 113.

¹⁶ Sharon, Arie. *Kibbutz + Bauhaus*. Stuttgart: Karl Kramer Verlag, 1976, p. 78–79.

¹⁷ Ofrat, G. *One Hundred Years ...*, p. 86.

¹⁸ Sharon, Arie. *Kibbutz + Bauhaus* p. 79.

¹⁹ Ofrat, G. *One Hundred Years ...*, p. 86.

²⁰ Shechori, Ran. *Ze'ev Rechter*. Jerusalem: Keter, 1987, p. 74.

²¹ Sharon, Arie. *Kibbutz + Bauhaus* p. 79.

- ²² Kroyanker, David. *Jerusalem – Conflicts Over the City's Physical and Visual Form*. Tel-Aviv: Zmorah Bitan, 1988, p. 63.
- ²³ Drexler, Jehuda. *Ministry of Housing projects in Jerusalem – a general review*. In: *Israel Builds*. Jerusalem: The Ministry of Housing, 1973, p. 130–165.
- ²⁴ after Kroyanker, David. *Jerusalem – Conflicts Over the City's Physical and Visual Form*. Tel-Aviv: Zmorah Bitan, 1988, p. 60.
- ²⁵ Mertens, H. *Carmiel. State of Israel*. Ministry of Housing, Planning Department, 1965, p. 6.
- ²⁶ Elhanani, Aba. *The Israeli Architecture in the Twentieth Century*. Tel Aviv: Misrad HaBitahon, 1998, p. 96.
- ²⁷ Carmi, Ram. *A sketch of her image*. In: *Alef-Alef Special Issue – The Tel Aviv House – Contemporary Directions*, 1988, p. 6.
- ²⁸ Zukin, Sharon. *Space and Symbols in an Age of Decline*. In: Anthony King (ed.). *Re-presenting the City*, London: Macmillan, 1996.
- ²⁹ See also: Efrat, Zvi. *The Israeli Project: Building and Architecture 1948–1973, Catalogue of exhibition*, Tel Aviv: Tel-Aviv Museum, 2005.
- ³⁰ Kroyanker, David. *Jerusalem – Conflicts Over the City's Physical and Visual Form*. Tel-Aviv: Zmorah Bitan, 1988, p. 28.
- ³¹ Levin, Michael (curator). *White City: International Style Architecture*. In: *Israel: A portrait of and Era. Exhibition Catalog*. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum. Sabinsky Press Ltd., Tel-Aviv, 1984, p. 31.
- ³² Elhanani, Aba. *The Israeli Architecture in the Twentieth Century*. Tel Aviv: Misrad HaBitahon, 1998, p. 231.
- ³³ Elhanani, Aba. *The Israeli Architecture in the Twentieth Century*. Tel Aviv: Misrad HaBitahon, 1998, p. 70.
- ³⁴ Elhanani, Aba. *The Israeli Architecture in the Twentieth Century*. Tel Aviv: Misrad HaBitahon, 1998, p. 79.
- ³⁵ Carmi, Ram. *Human values in urban architecture*. In: *Israel Builds*. Jerusalem: Ministry of Housing, 1977, p. 34.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- ³⁷ Elhanani, Aba. *The Israeli Architecture in the Twentieth Century*. Tel Aviv: Misrad HaBitahon, 1998, p. 165.
- ³⁸ Levin, Michael (curator). *White City: International Style Architecture*. In: *Israel: A portrait of and Era. Exhibition Catalog*. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum. Sabinsky Press Ltd., Tel-Aviv, 1984.
- ³⁹ Nitzan-Shifan, A. *Whitewashed Houses*. In: *Theory and Criticism*, no 16, 2000, p. 227–232.
- ⁴⁰ Breitberg-Semel, S. (curator). *The Want of Matter, Exhibition Catalog*, Tel Aviv Museum, Israel, 1986.
- ⁴¹ Elhayani, Zvi. *Oscar Niemeyer and the Outset of speculative Urbanism in 1960's Israel*. M.Sc. thesis, Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning, Technion, I. I. T, 2001.
- ⁴² Segal, R. and Weitzman, E. *A Civilian Occupation*. Verso and Tel-Aviv: Babel, 2003.
- ⁴³ Yacobi, H. *Architecture, Orientalism, and Identity: The Politics of the Israeli-Built Environment*. *Israel Studies* 13.1, 2008, p. 94–118.
- ⁴⁴ Robbins, Edward. *Thinking Space / Seeing Space*. *Urban design International*, 1(3), 1996, p. 283–91.
- ⁴⁵ Zalmona, Yigal. *To the East? in Kadima – the East in Israeli Art. Exhibition catalogue*. Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1988, IX.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

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Tarp Kanaanizmo ir Brutalizmo: architektūra, *orientas* ir tapatybės kūrimas Izraelyje

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Judaizmas, Sephardų–Ashkenazių istorija, holokaustas, struktūralizmas, poststruktūralizmas, kolonializmas, romantizmas, orientalizmas, modernizmas, funkcionalizmas, simbolizmas, ekspresionizmas, identitetas, regionalizmas, postmodernizmas, vizualieji menai, literatūra, poezija, teatras, kinas, šokis.

Santrauka

Straipsnyje pristatomi matmenys ir reikšminiai žodžiai, kuriais remiantis tiriamas tapatumo kūrimas, atsispindintis Izraelio architektūroje ir jo santykis su *orientu*.

Izraelio architektūros tapatumas nagrinėjamas atsižvelgiant į tris tarpusavyje susijusias perspektyvas, išskirtas straipsnyje tik dėl diskusijos. Pirmas, pusiau autonominis architektūrinis–profesinis diskursas apima stilių, formas, medžiagas ir patį kūrimą. Antra, sociokultūrinė perspektyva, iš kurios architektūra matoma kaip kultūros generatorius, daugiausiai susijusi su Sionistų–Izraeliečių–Aškenazių elito ir Sefardų, imigravusių šeštąjį dešimtmetį, konfliktu. Trečia, instrumentinė perspektyva yra glaudžiai susijusi su Aškenazių–Sefardų ir Sionistų ir palestiniečių konfliktais, o architektūra vertinama kaip politinių, ekonominių ir visuomeninių tikslų įgyvendinimo priemonė.

Kaip atskaitos taškas straipsnyje pristatomos svarbiausios dvidešimto amžiaus pirmos pusės datos. Nagrinėjamas periodas apima laikotarpį nuo 1948 m. iki devintojo dešimtmečio pradžios; nuo Izraelio valstybės įkūrimo iki gilių kultūrinių, ekonominių ir politinių pokyčių, žyminčių konsoliduotos valstybės periodo transformaciją. Kadangi dėl ribotos straipsnio apimties neįmanoma aprėpti visos Izraelio architektūros tapatumo ir jo kūrimo per *oriento* prizmę problemos, keliami tik svarbiausi klausimai, kylantys iš trijų išvardintų perspektyvų ir jų sąsajų.

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