

## Foreword

### Leora Bilsky

The “Tent Protest” that erupted in the summer of 2011 quickly stirred up a fierce debate about the meaning of Israeli identity and the transmutation of the collective identity of Israeli society in recent decades. As a retort to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, whose political agenda revolves around the demand for recognition of Israel as a “Jewish state,” with Jerusalem as the “bedrock of its existence,” the young protesters chose to pitch their tents in urban boulevards and plazas and to demonstrate against the high cost of living and unaffordability of housing. They pushed to open up the debate about Israeli identity, not by a return to an imaginary past or by contrast with the Other, but through a discussion of social welfare issues that in recent years have been relegated to the sidelines of Israeli politics.

The protests of Summer 2011 will no doubt be a subject of academic research in years to come. Scholars will scrutinize the gender aspects of the protest, along with its social and class facets, the generation gap it exposed, the interesting link-ups forged during its course, and the habitual disagreements that were shunted aside. Because the present issue of *Theory and Criticism* (38–39) was closed before the protests began, its contents do not relate to them or their significance. This is precisely why I decided that here I would write about an unexpected point of tangency between these articles and the social protest — the link between place, home and Israeli identity.

In *Theory and Criticism* 16 (Spring 2000), whose theme was “Space, Land, Home,” Yehouda Shenhav, the then-editor, wrote about the rise in Israel of a “new discourse” related to land and space, which had replaced the overtly Zionist and ideological “old discourse,” which had relied on catch-phrases such as “redemption of the land,” “Judaization of the Galilee” and “fortification of the borders.” The new discourse was civic in nature, with its focus on concepts such as private property rights, and its bearers were real-estate agents and land brokers. In the new discourse, the national and ideological facet had been submerged; as a result, there was a need for critical intervention to bring it back to the surface.

In recent years, we have witnessed the return of the overtly ideological discourse to the public arena, even though the alternative discourse that places property rights at the center has not disappeared. On the contrary, the State continues to employ those rights, along with economic mechanisms that are compatible with the language of the new discourse, to impose measures whose goal is justified in the terms of the ideological discourse. An example of this is the Admission Committees in Communal Settlements Law enacted by the Knesset in March 2011, which overrides the High Court's ruling, in the *Kaadan* case, that struck down the longstanding policy of discrimination against Arab citizens with regard to where they could live. The new law renders the discrimination invisible, by privatizing it and decentralizing it among the individual admissions committees of dozens of community settlements in the Galilee and Negev which, in the sacred name of private property rights, are now permitted to reject applicants who do not suit the community's "basic outlook" or social fabric. Another expression of the process can be found in the successive drafts of what came to be known as the "Nakba Law." The original bill would have shaped the collective memory by applying the traditional means employed by the State: criminalization. By contrast, the law as ultimately passed employs economic disincentives and reassigns the task of shaping the collective memory to the State Budget Law. Something similar occurred with the Anti-Boycott Law: Instead of criminalizing calls for a boycott of settlements, the legislature decided to impose individual torts liability on those who promote one. In Israel 2011, the State has not withdrawn from shaping public memory and the public space, but it has chosen to relocate its sphere of activity from overt and blatant intervention by means of criminal law to the arena of civil legislation, where it employs an economic discourse that places private property rights at the center.

From this perspective, we can understand the watershed represented by the tent protest of Summer 2011, which subverted the discourse of real-estate and property rights. By setting the right to housing at its center, the protest challenges the real-estate discourse and lays bare the political interests hiding behind the babble of the economic experts. This change is summed up in what Dafne Leef said at the demonstration held two weeks into the protest: "You're talking about real estate. We're talking about a home."

Leef elected to pitch her tent on Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv. This street, a key element of the national collective memory because it is where the State of Israel was proclaimed in 1948, has become the ultimate symbol of capitalism in the current collective imagination. Alongside historic buildings that have been preserved

and restored, the new edifices that have sprung up over the last 15 years — luxury apartment blocks and office towers for financial service corporations, law firms, and other businesses — symbolize, more than anything else, the arrival in Israel of globalization processes and neoliberal economics. The choice to locate the protest encampment on Rothschild Boulevard, whether it was random or a deliberate attempt to highlight, by geographical proximity, exactly what the protesters were targeting, afforded us an opportunity to observe the transformation of this representative site. Not only does the protest correspond with the revolutions taking place all over the Middle East (“Rothschild corner of *al-Tahrir*”); it is also linked — by means of the tent, which has become its emblem — with the ancient myth of the wandering Jew. As such, the tent binds the geopolitical space in which Israel is located to the Jewish collective memory and past. The protesters wanted to build themselves a residence, both a real home and a symbolic home. They wanted to feel at home in the State of Israel. This is why they rejected the two extremes that the state has offered them in recent decades: sacred soil and the global economy. The road to change, as sketched out in the many discussions that took place in and around the tent encampments, requires a refashioning of the link between place and Israeli identity, by exploiting the public space as a tool for the establishment of a community based on participatory democracy.

Three articles in this issue deal with places that have played a central role in forging Israeli identity and memory: the Western Wall, Mount Hermon and the Mount Scopus campus of the Hebrew University — the wall, the mountain and the university. Returning to the memory sites through which the State endeavored to mold the Israeli identity, their authors investigate the meaning of the ties between space, land and home and consider locations on which the social protesters of Summer 2011 turned their backs. By redirecting our attention to planning practices, they expose the crucial role played by experts, architects who legitimized the new spaces by structuring them as reflections of clashing values.

In order to reopen the question of how identity is molded by the structuring of space, two authors chose to shift their attention from the political and ideological level to the decisions of the experts: architects and planners, who were charged with remaking the physical space and endowing it with symbolic and historical meanings. The experts’ power derives from the fact that Israeli society has always been split between contradictory aspirations and ideals — between religious and secular visions, between militaristic and civilian visions, and between a vision of seclusion and

separation versus that of integration into the region. Because neither set of ideals emerged on top, the politicians turned to the architects of space, in the hope that the experts could extricate them from this duality and inability to decide. But the experts, too, could not escape those dilemmas; the spaces they designed are the ultimate expressions of that unresolved ambiguity.

**Alona Nitzan-Shiftan** writes about the architectural remaking of the Western Wall Plaza. Following the demolition of the Mughrabi Quarter, adjacent to the Western Wall, on the last night of the 1967 war, it became necessary to enlist experts in the fields of architecture and preservation to design the newly created open space. She proposes a novel reading of the designs submitted over the years as a lens for understanding the struggle to mold the Israeli national collective. This leads her to uncover the tension and contrasts among three rival approaches to shaping memory, based respectively on “Jewish memory,” “national memory” and “scientific history.” The inability to combine these approaches or opt for one of them led to a protracted paralysis of the efforts to design the plaza. In the 1990s, that inability to decide was expressed in the parallel opening of two different sites: the Western Wall tunnels and the Davidson Center, both of them underground, each proposing an exclusionary imagined space that leaves no room for the other. **Ayala Levin** examines the design of the Mount Scopus campus after the 1967 war. Here too the architecture highlights an ideological duality, manifested in the tension between the exterior and the interior. Whereas on the outside the campus resembles a fortress, closed against the Arab city beyond it, its interior is a hypercapitalistic space, reminiscent of a shopping mall or airport. The disparity between outside and inside turns the structure into a “non-place” (in the terms of Marc Augé) for those who live in and experience it; it is a “place” only for those who see it from the outside and can link its façade to the walls of the Old City. The gulf between the fortress-like exterior and the internal capitalist space serves as the axis for a discussion of the relationship between the city and the university and of the possibility of integrating self-sequestering Jewish nationalism with the open cosmopolitanism that underlies the very notion of the university. Finally, **Moriel Ram** raises the question of the gaze — more precisely, of the dual gaze embodied by the metaphor of Mount Hermon as the “eyes of the nation” (a phrase coined by soldier Beni Masas in a television interview immediately after the reconquest of Mount Hermon in October 1973). Ram considers the Israeli identity of Mount Hermon, which he traces not to its first occupation by Israeli forces in 1967, but to

its recapture in 1973, when it became a sanctified memorial to the fallen soldiers. He shows that the incorporation of Mount Hermon into the Israeli space was fueled by a combination of military and civilian rationales, with no religious admixture. Here too we find the innate tension between the military discourse (the depiction of the Hermon as a geostrategic asset overlooking the enemy) and the civilian discourse (Mount Hermon as a tourist and recreational site). Once again, the tension between the two images has a physical correlative in the side-by-side presence of an army outpost and ski resort. Nevertheless, Ram maintains, even though the metaphor of the “gaze” helped integrate Mount Hermon into Israeli identity, it also bears within itself a critical potential for reflexive self-contemplation by the gazing subject; for example, by artist Michal Ne’eman, who mounted two signs with the caption, “Eyes of the Nation” on the Tel Aviv shore.

The other contributors to this issue also address Israeli identity. They focus on liminal identities and consider the connection between the representation of identity as a political act and the space in which it exists. **Lital Levy** proposes that we resume the discussion of the term “Arab Jew” from a new perspective. She replaces the question of the authenticity of this identity with the issue of the political and cultural role it played for Jewish intellectuals, who took it as their own at various times and in various places. As for the question, “Was it ever easy to be an Arab Jew?” Levy replies, ultimately, “No, it was never that easy, but neither was it impossible, because the Jewish identity and the Arab identity were not perceived in confrontational terms as they are today.” **Tammy Razi**, too, focuses on the “Arab Jew” identity. She offers a gender perspective as a point of intervention in the historiographical debate about the Yishuv in Palestine/Eretz Israel as a dual or mixed society. In contrast to Levy’s discourse analysis, Razi proposes a historical and sociological analysis whose test case involves the romantic, sexual or business relationships between young Jewish women whose roots were in Arab countries, and Arab men and boys in Tel Aviv and Jaffa during the British Mandate. She asserts that despite the criticism they provoked, the very existence of such relationships may indicate that “mixing between Jewish society and Arab society may have been unavoidable, at least in certain circles.” What is more, for Razi the test case exemplifies the “latent potential of a combination of the sociological discourse and the historical discourse in the treatment of Arab Jews and of Jews and Arabs.” **Yochai Oppenheimer** investigates the Mizrahi identity in Israel as reflected in literature. His reading of the works of Albert Suissa, Sami Bardugo, Yossi Avni and Dudu Bossi leads Oppenheimer to the conclusion that, unlike the hegemonic

Israeli literature, Mizrahi fiction offers “a unique equilibrium between a perception of intergenerational conflict and one marked by intergenerational reconciliation and cooperation in the struggle of Mizrahi Jews against the hegemonic Israeli culture.” All three articles ask whether it is possible to sequester identities in separate spaces and highlight the link between the growth of hybrid identities and the existence of shared spaces for discourse and action.

Rounding out the issue are two articles that look at Israeli and Palestinian films in their treatment of post-trauma. **Hagai Dagan** and **Gidi Dishon** propose an original reading of *Pizza in Auschwitz* as a film that investigates the nostalgic gaze at a place by posing the ultimate non-place, Auschwitz, as a locus for nostalgia. They consider the critical possibilities of this juxtaposition for the Israeli Holocaust discourse. **Raya Morag**, by contrast, uncovers the lurking dangers of a nostalgic gay perspective on the possibilities of interethnic sexual encounters, as depicted in Palestinian and Israeli cinema. She considers the imprint of the trauma of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian and Israeli movies by comparing Tawfiq Abu Wael’s *The Diary of a Male Whore* (2001) with Eytan Fox’s *The Bubble* (2006). Although both films focus on a sexual relationship between Israeli and Palestinian men during the Second Intifada, Morag finds an essential difference within the thematic similarity. Abu Wael’s short film presents the interethnic sexual encounter as a “post-traumatic ritual of memory,” in which the participants are unable to free themselves from the national trauma of the Nakba. By contrast, Fox depicts the Israelis as continuing to entertain a spatial fantasy (denial of the occupation) by means of a semicolonial act — giving shelter to a gay Palestinian and helping him come out of the closet. According to Morag, “Fox’s movie projects the repressed sin of denial of the occupation onto the closeted Palestinian gay — that is, onto the Palestinian social order, thereby exempting itself of any ideological, sexual or political commitment.” The article points out the perils of Jewish spatial closure and the powerful effect of repression on sketching the borders of Israeli identity. As such it can also help highlight one of the Achilles’ heels of the social protest of Summer 2011 — its spatial closure of Jewish social discourse.

The “Translations and Essays” section features a translation of **Pierre Bourdieu’s** classic 1985 essay, “The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups,” along with an interpretive essay by **Gadi Algazi**. Algazi traces the context in which Bourdieu wrote the piece and casts light on the contribution to the history of ideas of his interpretation of the concept of class and political action. Through the metaphor of “social space,”

which Bourdieu places at the center of his article, he reformulates the Marxist notion of class in order to correct the economic bias he sees underlying it, thereby facilitating an understanding of the importance of cultural, economic, social or symbolic capital.

The “Among Books” section offers four reviews. **Meron Benvenisti** writes on *Palestinian Walks: Forays into a Vanishing Landscape*, by author and attorney Raja Shehadeh. Shehadeh writes about Palestinian identity and its relations with the changing geographic space. Benvenisti describes, partly through Shehadeh’s eyes, the process whereby the Jews who settled in Israel seized control of the landscape, from the very start of the Zionist settlement enterprise (“we shall dress you in a robe of concrete and cement”) and continuing today in the occupied territories. In contrast to the social protest of Summer 2011, which raised the question of the interaction among space, home and identity but came to a screeching halt at the Green Line, *Palestinian Walks*, as retraced by Benvenisti, insists on the impossibility of separating those issues from the question of the Palestinians’ ever-diminishing space on the far side of the Green Line. **Ofra Amihay**, too, focuses on a travelogue (this one fictional), David Grossman’s *To the End of the Land*, which recounts the journey of a woman who runs away from the announcement of her son’s death. Amihay shows how the novel creates a version of maternal responsibility for the Binding of Isaac, which it links to the protest movement of “Four Mothers” who proposed an alternative to the hegemonic political discourse. **Amir Paz-Fuchs**, like Benvenisti, takes us on a journey over the Green Line. He surveys recent scholarly writing about the occupation, which tries to cope with the Israeli attempt to use violent means to impose separation on a reality in which the idea of separation is becoming less and less plausible. Finally, **Daniel Rosenberg** writes about several texts that he believes represent the ideological current he calls “neo-Zionism.” He asserts that this current, which has become stronger in Israel in recent years, attempts to remake the face of Zionism by emphasizing its ideological dimension, symbolic dimension and identity dimension

This volume contains two issues of *Theory and Criticism*. In addition to more general articles, we have included three articles that address the connection between memory and the public space, shedding light on it from various angles. In some of the coming issues we plan to include a forum on a particular topic, which will focus on a given issue and will include one or two articles written in response. We would be happy to receive your suggestions and ideas.