

## CHAPTER NINE

# MEMORY ACTIVISM: RECLAIMING SPATIAL HISTORIES IN ISRAEL

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The interrelations between memory (in its various forms) and the production of geographical space have created a noteworthy corpus that moves across disciplinary boundaries, historical periods and a variety of case studies. It is thus quite surprising that this paper stems from a void: the scarcity of research into the relation between memory and spatial formations in the specific context of Israel and Palestine. This scarcity becomes even more apparent when considering the centrality of the territorial dimension and the crucial role played by the narration of history in the formation of the Zionist national collective in Israel. Zionist historiography has been the subject of critical interrogation since the 1980s, with the growing influence of (mainly French) post-structuralist theory; this tendency, which encouraged the rise of critical historians in the late 1980s (famously Benny Morris and Ilan Pappé), who intended to

point out the shortcomings of Zionism and Israel, the injustice inflicted on others, and the historical alternatives whose realization may have been thwarted by the actualisation of Zionism (Shapira 1996, 11).

The critical reconsideration of the Zionist project as one which had profound implications for the social construction of Israel led intellectual historians, anthropologists, and sociologists to question the core paradigms of Israeli social memory, namely the centrality of the Holocaust (Zertal 2002), the negation of Jewish diasporic history (Raz-Krakotzkin 2005), and the Israeli-Arab conflict (Shenhav 2003). However, it is surprising to discover that there was almost no local interrogation of the role of the Zionist space—its territory, landscapes and spatial formations—as a paradigmatic element, which plays an essential role in the production of Israeli collective, social and cultural memory.<sup>1</sup>

Despite this analytical void, a few scholars have examined instances where the Zionist project incorporated specific sites for the execution of its ideological programme: Yael Zerubavel's work for example interrogates the manner by which carefully chosen sites were made to represent the "Zionist periodisation of Jewish history and its portrayal of symbolic continuities and discontinuities," which, in turn, "were designed to enhance its vision of a new national age" (1995, xviii). However, work of this sort concentrates more on the socio-ideological construction of national-symbolic sites (Masada for example) that encapsulate the founding myths around which the nation-state is organised. In this chapter I would like to focus on those places, which have so far remained outside the national corpus of *Lieux de mémoire*, sites that retain the Palestinian history of Israel, a recent and still openly conflicted one. My task here will be to interrogate the way in which these places stand in relation to the Zionist-produced landscape, how they relate to the production of Israeli cultural memory and how they facilitate an active attempt to challenge the dominant narratives of history and memory in Israel.

The first part of this chapter considers several mechanisms and discursive practices that feature in the construction of the Israeli landscape, specifically at the symbolic level, through the establishment of toponyms, map drawing, and the active material operations that shaped and formed the landscapes of Israel as we know them today. As will become apparent, these actions were closely tied to the ideological and political agenda of the Zionist leadership and its attempt to prevent the emergence of any sign of contestation or dispute.

In the second part of the discussion I will present the work of Zochrot, a group comprised of Palestinians and Israelis (Jews, Muslims and Christians) that has been attempting to challenge the monolithic façade of this hegemonic memory-landscape through a thought-provoking set of actions and projects. I will focus on one dimension of their work, namely the project of signposting demolished Palestinian villages, neighbourhoods, and towns within Israel. This endeavour constitutes a convergence of the political, aesthetic, and ethical questions generated by the forced proximity of Israelis and Palestinians within a single territory. The possibility of conflicting memories being acknowledged within a single space has posed a challenge to activists and researchers for over a decade, and is the central concern shared by the women and men of Zochrot. Although this question remains central throughout this discussion, the chapter aims to interrogate the dichotomies that are often found in different forms of activism in general and in actions that aspire to

contest prevalent regimes of memory, the Zionist memory regime in this particular case.

### **The creation of a spatial-memory regime in Israel**

In order to delineate the complex process through which memory and space came together to form a powerful ideological structure, it is useful to start with the metaphor of the archive, a space that selectively collects and organises its artefacts through a conjunction of the topological and the nomological (Derrida 1996, 3). The Zionist ideologists invested their efforts to design the national space as an undisturbed unity through vigorous consignation (as in *con-signatio*, the gathering together of signs):

The archontic power, which also gathers the functions of unification, of identification, of classification, must be paired with what we will call the power of consignation. ... Consignation aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony, in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration. In an archive, there should not be any absolute dissociation, a heterogeneity or secret which could separate (*secernere*), or partition, in an absolute manner. (Derrida 1996, 3)

From its very early days, the Israeli-Zionist project strived to form an “ethnocratic” spatial regime, a system of spatial division and distribution based upon ethnic pertinence over civil partnership (Yiftachel and Keidar 2000).<sup>2</sup> This system facilitated the expansion of the Jewish ethno-national community in a multi-ethnic, disputed territory, while simultaneously employing state apparatuses for the exclusion of minority groups (Yiftachel and Keidar 2000, 69). The democratic pretensions of the ethnocratic regime and its relative political tolerance is untrustworthy, however, because of its preference for “ethnos” over “demos,” an inherent characteristic that becomes significant when scrutinising the construction of cultural memory in these ethnocratic landscapes.

From its emergence at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Zionist project<sup>3</sup> was constantly at work to link its national aspirations with Israel-Palestine as a rightfully Jewish owned space. Until the 1948 war,<sup>4</sup> different Jewish-Zionist apparatuses were employed to extend Jewish control of growing portions of the land, in the form of physical-military, financial, and educational projects. These efforts were often inconsistent and were not rigidly coordinated: some were initiated by formal institutions and officially supported by government funding and legislation, while some were the result of personal initiative of private entrepreneurs who purchased and took over lands, driven by ideological enthusiasm or hopes

of financial profit. However, the most substantial geographic and demographic shifts in Israel-Palestine followed the 1948 and the 1967 wars, which provided an opportunity—perhaps an alibi—for extensive occupation of Palestinian-owned land and large-scale expulsion of the Palestinian population from those territories (Morris 1987). Of a population of 800 thousand people, living in about 360 villages and towns<sup>5</sup> prior to the UN approval of the partition of Mandatory Palestine into two states—Jewish and Arab—on 29 November 1947, only 160 thousand Palestinians remained under Israeli sovereign control and received Israeli citizenship.<sup>6</sup> Most of the Palestinian villages, towns, and neighbourhoods were demolished or appropriated for inhabitation by the Jewish population. Though it is not apparent whether the Zionist leadership intended to bring about the aforesaid destruction and expulsion, it is quite clear that what is usually dubbed the “Hebrew Space” project was a key ideological effort (Benvenisti 1997) that engaged decision makers and activists before and after the foundation of the State of Israel.

Once the outcome of the 1948 wars became clear and the establishment of the State of Israel a forgone conclusion, vast resources were invested in the physical and symbolic transformation of the territory to fit a precise set of political, ideological and aesthetical ideals. As Jonathan Boyarin notes, this is by no means a Zionist invention, as

statist ideologies involve a particularly potent manipulation of the dimensionalities of space and time, invoking rhetorically fixed national identities to legitimate their monopoly on administrative space (Boyarin 1994, 15-16).

In the Israeli case, the Hebrew Space project was not only intended to block the return of Palestinian refugees or to provide an aesthetic echo to the Eurocentric Zionist perceptions of landscapes, but also to use the land as a “script of position” (Noyes 1992, 243): manipulating the Israeli landscape meant that it would provide a material and physical reflection of the Zionist entitlement to temporal priority, mainly over the Palestinian claim. Jonathan Boyarin notes that although assertions of temporal priority and hence rights over specific territory are closely connected with pre-existing power relations, “they also have the function of convincing the dominant group of its own legitimacy and collective identity” (Boyarin 1994, 17). The Hebrew Space underscored the Zionist claim of autochthony through the interplay of space and time, through landscapes and memory.

The “Hebrew Space” project was thus invested in the manipulative reconstruction of the Israeli landscape according to the ideological

“requirements” of the Zionist leadership, and aimed, de-facto, at preventing the emergence of any contesting spatial narrative in what was intended to be a unified and harmonious space, materially and spatially manifesting the Zionist ideals. At times this project was implemented with the bluntest of methods: hundreds of villages were demolished during the battles or razed in the following years, making space for new Jewish communities, for agricultural cultivation, or to be covered by intentionally planted forests. The main incentive for these actions was to prevent Palestinian refugees from returning to their homes and to refute any claim of contesting ownership. The material loss was immense and remains to this day at the core of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The material aspects of the Palestinian loss have been the focus of numerous historical, geographical, sociological, and political accounts (Hadawi 1988; al-Khalidi 1992; Falah 1996). However, it is also interesting to highlight the symbolic dimensions of the “Hebrew space” project. Two important arenas for the construction of mental and physical landscapes were the reproduction of Hebrew maps and the toponymic focus on renaming Palestinian villages with new Hebrew, or Hebrew-sounding, names.

The naming and renaming project is rooted in the long history of pilgrims, travellers, and researchers since the Middle Ages who have attempted to recover and identify the map of the holy land, drawing mainly on local traditions, oral legends and folklore tales. As Meron Benvenisti notes, the American researcher Edward Robinson was likely the first to

apply some order to the ancient history of the land of Israel [while suggesting that special] 'concern be given to the preservation of names used by the simple people' (Robinson 1860 quoted in Benvenisti 1997, 17).

This effort is also evident in the great cartographical and toponymical research endeavours undertaken by British authorities between the mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century and the end of the British Mandate in Palestine. The British invested the combined efforts of the different colonial forces (military, bureaucratic, and scientific), under the heading of the “British Company of Palestine;” this establishment concentrated mainly on cartography from 1872 to 1878 but also worked to collect about 9000 toponyms (Benvenisti 1997, 16). This colonial heritage taught the Zionist institution that naming or renaming is not merely a technical procedure, but “an act of ownership ... the inscription of a Jewish possession bill upon the land of Israel” (Benvenisti 1997, 8).

And indeed, the Jewish National Fund (JNF) appointed a committee that has acted since 1925 to name and rename settlements and

geographical landmarks with new Jewish, or Jewish sounding, names, thereby keeping step with the ethnocratic regime described above. The geo-political situation that ensued after the 1948 war and the mass departure of large portions of the Palestinian population made it possible for the committee to freely pursue the renaming of the landscape, without being restricted to those areas that were Jewish-owned. The will to authenticate the re-produced landscape fuelled this endeavour (Benvenisti 1997, 19).<sup>7</sup> As a result of this extensive project, thousands of names were altered and a whole geo-cultural world faced the threat of erasure. Maps became a key instrument used to “concretize national interests upon landscape” (Anderson 1991, 173-174). Benedict Anderson writes that contrary to the assumption that a map is a scientific abstraction of something that objectively exists “there,” in history—and colonial history in particular—the ontological relations described in the map are reversed.

The map anticipated spatial reality, not vice versa. In other words, the map is a model for, rather than a model of, what it purported to represent ... It had become a real instrument to concretize projections on the earth's surface (Anderson 1991, 173-174).

The political struggle was hence manifest in cartography, and the map became one of the “most powerful intellectual weapons by which power can be gained and managed, legitimacy obtained and legal grounding acquired” (Kadmon 1992). The map is a cartographical inscription of narratives, and the Zionist attempt to suppress the Palestinian existence was later countered with similar attempts by Arab researchers and scholars, who produced maps that conveyed the geo-cultural narrative of Palestinian existence. This symbolic enactment of ownership through toponymical and cartographical projects became the political-ideological battlefield that Benvenisti describes in the paraphrase: “I will destroy your map as you've destroyed mine.” This violent struggle emerging from the maps and toponyms<sup>8</sup> is one of several expressions of the ongoing struggle over the process of geo-cultural memory construction.

Despite the great efforts devoted to the creation of a spatial Zionist version of what Walter Benjamin (1969, 261) called the “empty homogeneous time” of the nation, the extensive ideological effort toward Palestinian geo-cultural annihilation was never fulfilled; the Israeli landscape and contemporary maps are populated by Palestinian names and geo-cultural structures that survived, having resisted the compulsory “Hebraicizing” process. A striking example, though not unique, is the Jerusalem neighbourhood of Malha. This residential area in the south of

the western city was a Palestinian village until its inhabitants fled the advancing Israeli military during the battles of 1948. The houses and the village mosque remained intact and unharmed and were inhabited by a Jewish population after the occupation of west Jerusalem was completed. Though the village's name was altered to a more "appropriate"—Jewish sounding—name, "Manhat," the new name was never publicly accepted. Despite the fact that over time the village was surrounded by newly constructed neighbourhoods that presented a completely alien aesthetics to that of the traditional Palestinian architecture, the village preserves its distinct topographical, architectural and structural features. This conflicting Palestinian geo-cultural formation at the heart of "the Jewish Capital" seems enigmatic: can this paradoxical material and spatial resilience undermine the validity of the ethnocentric model of the Israeli spatial regime and challenge its attempts to construct a stable hegemonic landscape?<sup>9</sup>

I propose considering this question in terms of Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony and how it is interwoven with practices of violence and oppression. According to Gramsci, hegemony "means the consensual basis of an existing political system within civil society" (Adamson 1980, 170). This "consensual basis" contrasts with the concept of "domination" as the "state's monopoly on the means of violence and its consequent role as the final arbiter of all disputes" (Adamson 1980, 170). The state, as a powerful structure, is rarely obliged to use violence; the control over its subjects is maintained through hegemony, a premeditated socio-cultural consensus. Moreover, this hegemony is willingly (though oftentimes unconsciously), adopted by the different social groups in a society. If hegemonic control over a given space is maintained and its conflictual potential defused, it should not be difficult to mobilize this space for didactic purposes as demonstrated for example by Yael Zerubavel (1995) in the case of Masada, or otherwise merge it into the capitalist real-estate market (Meskell 2002, 558). The latter was the case with many Palestinian spaces. The houses of Malha/Manhat are now sold for substantial amounts of money and the neighbourhood has become a real-estate goldmine, while the former Palestinian geo-cultural existence has been erased from the collective Jewish-Israeli memory. To put it perhaps more bluntly, when enjoying the fruits of a fig tree planted by the Palestinian residents of Malha prior to 1948, the current inhabitants are not prompted to recall the life and the fate of the refugees.

This last point brings to the fore one of the theoretical foundations upon which this paper rests: research into memory and landscape is deeply engaged with understanding the socio-ideological forces at work;

intervening, and constructing mnemonic spatial devices, if not memory “itself.”<sup>10</sup> Halbwachs (1980, 1992) suggests that spaces of memory are formed by a social collective, and as such, they are offered to individuals as potential places where personal memory can be located. These spaces are manifested in both mental and physical loci, which serve to inhabit and facilitate the collective identity; the two forms exist in constant dialogue and help to sustain each other. Through their consistent nature, these spaces create a feeling of present-past: the revelation of the past in present spaces. The Israeli-Zionist hegemonic landscape thus rests on an interplay of selective and manipulative spatial production on the one hand, and the construction of a collective historical conscience; the Zionist leadership in Israel thus strived to transform the landscapes of Israel into what Zerubavel (1995, xix) describes as “commemorative loci.”

If we follow this line of thought to its extreme, we might recall Foucault’s famous formulation that: “Since memory is actually a very important factor in struggle ... if one controls people’s memory, one controls their dynamism” (Foucault 1977). The following will try to question whether this is indeed the case, and to what extent the hegemony of the modern nation-state holds a paralysing grip over the interplay of space and history, of landscape and memory.

### **Zochrot: towards a minor praxis of memory**

A group of Israeli and Palestinian women and men, calling themselves Zochrot, set themselves the task of inserting the Palestinian disaster, also known as *al-Nakba*,<sup>11</sup> into the Israeli public debate, or, as they state—“bringing the Nakba into Hebrew.”<sup>12</sup> The name chosen by the group, Zochrot, is the Hebrew verb for remembering; however, unlike the basic form of the Hebrew verb, which is used in the masculine singular—Zachar (זָכַר)—the group chose the feminine plural form. This simple transformation of symbolic conventions and the estrangement it generates epitomises the work Zochrot conduct. It presents an innovative and thought-provoking challenge to prevailing spatial concepts as well as to the formation of social and cultural memory in Israel.

Among their various projects and activities, Zochrot founded an information centre that collects and provides data regarding different aspects of Palestinian life before and after the foundation of the State of Israel; they facilitate meetings, lectures, and workshops on the relations between Palestinian life and Israeli history; and they carry out educational activities in schools that expose students to an otherwise muted chapter in

the history of Israel. Although each aspect has been conducted independently by other academic institutions, or activist groups,<sup>13</sup> Zochrot incorporate them into a larger attempt to insert the Palestinian history—or more precisely, the Palestinian Nakba—into the publicly acknowledged history of Israel.

However, in this chapter I would like to focus on one specific dimension of Zochrot's work, which receives a significant amount of attention due to its high-profile public nature: the demarcation and the signposting of the sites of demolished Palestinian villages and towns within Israel. This act allows the reappearance of Palestinian existence within the landscapes of Israeli memory through a present material and spatial expression: the Palestinian name reappears on a signpost, accompanied in many instances by a placard describing the Palestinian history of the place, thus bearing witness to what was and is no longer, and to the process of its eradication.<sup>14</sup> Unlike other aspects of Zochrot's work, the signposting events emerge as unique attempts to "infiltrate" the Zionist core and use its spatial and symbolic conventions to challenge its own logic.

The signposting act is always performed as part of larger event, which brings Jews and Palestinians together to tour sites where demolished villages, former Palestinian neighbourhoods, or towns once stood. During these events, the participants study the history of the place through historical accounts and personal testimony from Palestinians (for the most part) who lived through the events. The tours often include ceremonies offering stories of the Palestinian life of the location and the events that led to their disappearance, first and foremost as a result of the 1948 war. As part of these ceremonies, signposts carrying the previous Arab-Palestinian toponyms are placed, along with signs commemorating the Palestinian history of the place and its obliteration after the Palestinian *Nakba* and the establishment of the State of Israel.

The tour and signposting activity held by Zochrot at the demolished village of Lifta at the outskirts of Jerusalem gives a clearer illustration of the group's work. The tour to the village on 25 February 2005 hosted 200 Zochrot activists together with refugees of Lifta and their offspring. The participants visited the village "to hear stories, to learn, and to post signs designating the history of the village and some of its sites: The mosque, the olive oil press, and the cemetery"<sup>15</sup> (Fig. 9-1). As the group gathered at 'ein-Lifta (the spring of Lifta), the geographical and the historically cultural core of the village (Fig. 9-2), two of the former Palestinian residents of the village, Yakub Odeh and Fatima Akel, shared their memories of village life and of its occupation at the 1948 war. Odeh told

of his childhood memories of growing up in the village and of the events that led to his family's flight to the West Bank.



Fig. 9-1 The sign posted by Zochrot demarking the Lifta Cemetery in Arabic and Hebrew

Like many other Palestinian villages, Lifta has been turned into a national park, and during weekends it provides a pastoral recreation site for the residents of the surrounding Jewish neighbourhoods.<sup>16</sup> The incorporation of Palestinian landscape, a supposedly alien object to the homogeneous national space, is a fascinating and complex process that deserves a wider discussion. However, the village of Lifta is a stark example of the way Palestinian spatial objects are neutralised: their Palestinian identification is eradicated through their incorporation into a fantastic image of the oriental landscape. A recent real-estate scheme threatens to turn the remains of the village, a few dozen houses featuring compelling characteristics of Palestinian architecture, into a luxury housing project. The process that began with the initial expulsion of the Palestinian population during the 1948 wars, and later continued with the slow eradication of the Palestinian sign and its legitimacy as a mnemonic site, now threatens to be completed through Lifta's incorporation into the logic of the capitalist "nostalgia industry" (Hewison, 1987).



Fig. 9-2 The Zochrot gathering at 'ein-Lifta and the remains of one of Lifta's houses.

The official public sign, in its various forms, holds great significance in the construction of the Israeli hegemonic collective memory. Signposting is a practical tool used to write on—and about—the landscape. As a discursive practice, the sign acts to construct the body of knowledge that is accessible to the inhabitants of a specific landscape, controls, and measures the exposure to it, and blocks out unwanted or competitive knowledge. The state issues the authoritative apparatuses with the right to plant signs as a means of establishing presence and control over a given space and its inhabitants. In order to understand how the signposting executed by Zochrot challenges Israeli landscape hegemony and the processes through which it was produced, it is useful to apply the concept of “Minor Praxis” from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1986). This enables me to trace the relationship between Zochrot and the major forces in the construction and reconstruction of the landscapes of Israeli cultural memory.

Deleuze and Guattari outline three characteristics of a minor act. First, the unique use of language: within the boundaries of major language, the minor text creates a deterritorialization of language and has a destabilizing effect, by which it points to possible fields of political action (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 16). Similarly, Zochrot’s signposting project employs the major practice of signposting, but creates a dual aspect thereof by adding a

known signifier (the signpost), which has a signified (the presence of Palestinian existence in Israeli Landscape) that is strange, alien, and at times even threatening to those encountering it. The sequential effect happens almost simultaneously as the material and mnemonic landscape is reterritorialized: Zochrot's new signposts do not simply restore the Palestinian geo-cultural signified as part of the Israeli landscape. Many times they are stolen, vandalised or removed shortly after they are posted. However, the process of reterritorialization stems out of the accumulative effect the signposting action has on its surroundings, both human and spatial.

The second characteristic described by Deleuze and Guattari is the political immediacy present in the text. The minor act, literary or other, is obliged to operate in provisional spaces, constantly under the pressures of major forces; the "cramped space" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 17) of Kafka's stories, serves as an example of this political density. Much like Kafka's minor literature, the signposting ceremonies conducted by Zochrot accentuate the personal stories of Palestinians while emphasizing the political aspects they reflect: in the action Zochrot held in Lifta, Yaccub Odeh's story emphasises his experiences as a Palestinian boy and his family's expulsion from Lifta; at the same time this story charges the natural and neutral space of the Israeli landscape with the political weight of its production. In this manner, the story is not limited to the private sphere, but becomes a representation of the political, public sphere of landscape and collective memory. The signposting practice is aimed at countering the hegemonic effort to empty landscape of its political content: it is an estrangement of space and a deautomatization of the process of reading landscape. The automatization effected by what Irit Rogoff (1998) calls, "the illusion of transparent space," is challenged by the signposting project, which aims to "repopulate space with all the obstacles and all the unknown images, which the illusion of transparency evacuated from it" (Rogoff 1998, 35).

Lastly, this project challenges the hegemonic collective conscience in Israel through the third characteristic of the minor praxis, namely its collective nature, which undermines the authority upon which the national knowledge economy and its spatial manifestations are based. Jeffrey Olick and Joyce Robbins (1996) elucidate this when they note that

the dominance of national memory over other memories thus not only excludes other contestants for control over national identity but maintains the primacy of national over other kinds of identity for primacy allegiance (Olick and Robbins 1996, 127).

The act of writing/signing has a deep—though at times exasperating—effect on the spatial perception of subjects in that space. As was noted earlier, most of the signs posted by Zochrot have either been removed or vandalised. Deleuze and Guattari recognise the potential of minor literature to enable a single marginal or even external writer “to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility” (Deleuze and Guattari 1989, 17). I suggest that the Zochrot project be read as a counter-hegemonic endeavour that brings forward the horizon of a new cultural and political memory community through the implementation of the same potential held in the minor act.

The minor work of signposting demolished Palestinian villages undermines the founding pillars on which the Zionist spatial memory structures lie: it questions the de-politicizing imperative of the hegemonic landscape, and it cracks the illusion of the transparent landscape by placing strange objects within it in the form of signposts that “re-member” the excluded and repressed Palestinian geo-cultural existence.

The signposting act, which reinstates the Palestinian narrative of destruction—the *Nakba*—by placing a sign as a physical monument in space, holds future significance for the co-existence of two conflicting memories forced to share the same space. The historical context lost in the production of the so called natural “Hebrew space” as a physical blueprint of the Zionist ideology—a process I term the selective de-contextualization of space—is returned and represented, bringing with it the story of the unspoken repressive actions performed over the signified landscape—the violent and oppressive process of deletion. This creates what Foucault described as a “heterogeneous space,” (Foucault 2003, 10) a multi-layered space that does not comply with the levelling forces that originate in the de-contextualization process forced upon it.

This is the most substantial challenge posed by Zochrot to Jewish-Zionist spatial hegemony: through the adoption of hegemonic practices and instruments such as signposts, Zochrot release the Israeli landscape from its historical one-dimensionality, its apolitical, institutionalised illusion of transparency. The conflicting existence in the Israeli landscape receives a new appearance—polyphonic, multi-dimensional and multilayered. It is an act that merges the political, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions of space, and acknowledges the violent complexity of life “inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another” (Foucault 2003, 10), to borrow Foucault’s words. The significance and distinctiveness of the act lies in the attempt to broach a complex reading of space, a

reading paved with obstacles and alienation, which undermines the narrative and physical stability of national space.

Indeed, one can use Foucault's notion of heterotopia to iterate the contribution that this project has had in exposing the multilayered condition of the Israeli landscape. Foucault theorises heterotopia as a different space "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault 2003, 15). Instead of a one-dimensional stability established by the hegemonic, authoritative national narrative, the new sign exposes a "heterotopia integrated with heterochronia" (Foucault 2003, 16): a multitude of spaces intertwined with the fracturing of the linear progression of time in space. The signpost becomes a "present-past" in which the hegemonic spatial orders are challenged and a different order is brought to bear. It is a polyphonic and disharmonic alternative, containing several narratives that were, and still are, perceived by Israelis and Palestinians as diametrically opposed.

### **Subversion or collaboration: From landscape to community**

Whether in Foucault's examples of the graveyard, the train and the steamboat, or in the examples brought forward in this essay of the post signing ceremonies conducted by Zochrot, heterotopias are limited in their spatial and temporal dimensions: they are allowed to exist in a clearly given space, and last for a specified period of time. This bounded character is the protecting and sheltering instrument in and by which the challenge of the counter-hegemonic act might stem from. However, it is this exact bordered nature that limits the political influence and mass effect that Zochrot's signposting project might have on the Israeli consensus.

Furthermore, the adoption of the tools of the Zionist hegemonic epistemology of memory—signposts, ceremonies, witness stories are all used in official acts of commemoration—holds great promise as shown above. All the same, we must not ignore the curbing effect this epistemology holds on those using it, whether for the establishing of hegemonic landscapes of memory or for the construction of counter-hegemonic ones. This last notion warrants clarification: I began this article by showing the close relation that the construction of mnemonic landscapes had with the wider *national* Zionist project. As suggested very eloquently by Partha Chatterjee,

every part of the nationalist doctrine [...] can be taken apart and shown to have been derived from some species of European thought. [...] For the non-European world, in short, *nationalist thought does not constitute an autonomous discourse* (Chatterjee, 1986, 6, my emphasis).

The history of “counter” struggles, and the history of anti-colonial struggles in particular, has made us aware of cases where counter-movements adopted and duplicated the European epistemology of power, thus preserving a set of assumptions against which they directed their struggle in the first place. Chatterjee’s position reiterates the necessity of considering whether it is actually possible to construct counter-spaces that would pose an alternative to the oppressive national spaces of memory while confining one’s actions to the epistemological boundaries set by the national discourse. The political strategy aimed at undermining the repressive and usurping nature of the Zionist hegemonic landscape might inadvertently be made into a duplicating mechanism that reproduces the fundamental nationalistic epistemology of memory, and consequently cooperates in its reassertion.

Once again, reiterating the dynamic nature of hegemonic power might resolve some of this tension: instead of a monolithic power structure, hegemonic power must be seen as a “moving equilibrium” (Clark et. al., 1981) that is formed and maintained, and therefore must be accounted for, as a continuous process of negotiation in the social and political landscape, where cultural meaning is produced, altered or rejected. In this light we must think of the construction of hegemony as

a process of struggle, a permanent striving, a ceaseless endeavour to maintain the control over the ‘hearts and minds’ of subordinate classes. The work of hegemony [...] is never done (Miliband 1982, 76).

In the same way, Israeli hegemony is maintained through implicit and explicit negotiations of both its policies of spatial control and its domination over histories that are allowed to legitimately appear in the social, political and cultural spheres, or otherwise excluded from them. Several efforts in recent years have shown that the landscapes of Israeli memory can be altered, and previously excluded narratives and histories were acknowledged as legitimate components in the bricolage of Israeli spatial memory. This was the case, for example, with the appearance in Israel of a growing number of holy sites for worship, cherished largely but not exclusively by the Jewish-Moroccan community in Israel (Bilu 2005).

It is within these cracks and splits that Zochrot’s signposting project exists; these women and men constitute a new “Community of Memory”

(Ballah et. al 1985, 153), a community comprised of Arabs and Jews that defies the Israeli ethnocratic logic. Within it, new spaces are formed where memory, notes Yehuda Shenhav,

[e]volves constantly, is produced and challenged, open to a constant dialectic of remembrance and forgetfulness. Memory in the community is fed from many different sources, more or less vague, connected to each other or torn apart, private or symbolic [...] it is a comfortable arena to review and dispute memory, challenge its components and origins and undermine them. In a community of memory, memory can be restored, lived again in history (Shenhav 2003, 157-158).

This notion of a “community of memory” is a conceptual shift from the priority of territory as the constructor of communal memory to the prioritisation of social mechanisms in the absorption of memory into the landscape. This is a shift that prioritises the hermeneutic process created as part of the social construction of communal memory, and it brings forward a political accentuation of new social formations that can create new social—and consequently, physical—spaces in which non-hegemonic memory might arise. These formations can become, in turn, a socio-political platform for the creation of a new epistemology that is derived from the integration of Palestinian and Jewish members of the community, an integration that is needed if one is to face one of the problematic aspects in the work Zochrot have been conducting, namely, the dilemma of representation.

This dilemma can be perhaps best understood through its appearance in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's momentous and influential article “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988). Spivak's tactic of questioning the representative position of the intellectual in face of the colonial subject allows me to elaborate the highly problematic situation generated when Palestinian memories are “rescued” with the use of Zionist-hegemonic tools. In other words, what happens to “Palestinian memory”—and I am aware of the problematic use of this term as a monolithic and homogeneous one—when it is filtered through the representation of national epistemology. Can Palestinian *memories of destruction* be represented while at the same time the representatives of memory—Zochrot in this case—“represent themselves as transparent” (Spivak 1988, 275).

There is a risk that the representative act of signposting might not fulfil the two senses that

are being run together: representation as ‘speaking for’ [*Vertreten*] as in politics, and representation as ‘re-presentation’ [*Darstellen*] as in art or philosophy (Spivak 1988, 275).

Only preservation of their “identity-in-difference as the place of practice” (Spivak 1988, 277) will prevent the challenge posed by Zochrot from becoming a “deceptive [challenge] precisely because it ignores what [Edward] Said emphasizes—the critic’s institutional responsibility” (Spivak 1988, 281). The difficulty in Zochrot’s case arises when the same act enables the Palestinian loss and destruction to be remembered—as *Darstellen*—whilst leaving the tools through which memory is transmitted—the practices of *Vertreten*—unproblematised. Any state of historical oppression must be interrogated through its acknowledgment in the present, but also by questioning the discursive conditions that allowed it to arise and prevail.

It is additionally important to question the particular historical instances chosen to be remembered/represented: Zochrot aims to “speak [...] the *Nakba* in Hebrew,” and the signposting ceremonies attempt to create awareness of *Palestinian memories of destruction*. The decision to commemorate the Palestinian tragic destruction, expulsion, and loss is not an obvious one, and as one learns from Spivak’s exacting criticism, these choices must always be made while consciously questioning the role of the (transparent) activist/intellectual. What socio-political price is being exacted from Palestinians as a result of this choice—the commemoration of Palestinian defeat and disaster—when they are subjected to the problematic and controversial position of “victim,” and are perhaps locked in what Michael Dash (1995, 199-201) calls a “prison of protest”?

The use of memory as a cultural asset seems to be an inseparable part of Jewish culture and religion, which expressed memory’s important role by citing it in the third commandment: “Remember the Sabbath.” From the beginning of the Zionist territorial project, memory became a powerful political practice in the construction, legitimisation and fortification of the link between the Jewish people and the Biblical land of Israel. It also became a key instrument for the creation of the national subject (Zerubavel 1995). Over the years, the formation of a hegemonic memory structure became an essential part of the larger Zionist ethnocentric hegemony. This complex integration materialised in the active reproduction of both mental and physical landscapes that, in turn, helped to strengthen and legitimise hegemonic structures.

This process has often worked oppressively and at times even violently to establish itself, and many of those who did not comply with it found

themselves struggling to maintain their individual or collective cultural identity. Memory became a conflictual cultural arena for this effort.<sup>17</sup>

However, we must not forget Said's notion of "institutional responsibility" (Said 1983, 243) when evaluating the work of Zochrot and other organisations working to recover suppressed histories in Israel. Indeed, it stands out as perhaps the most fundamental critique of such action, yet it has too often been neglected. We are prompted to look toward the spaces in which contestation and collaboration overlap, where the memory of a victim is represented, given a communal space in which it can be publicly acknowledged; yet without understanding one's position in the wider sphere of politics, the formations of power that institutionalise inequality and exclusion and prevent the emergence of new solidarities can be left intact. By struggling for public acknowledgement of Palestinian memory and its insertion as an integral part of Israel's landscape, Zochrot are able to present a unique challenge to what has long been taken for granted by the majority of the Israeli public.

### **Conclusion: "Spatial stutter" as memory activism**

In March 2007 Zochrot celebrated five years since its establishment. During this time, the term Nakba remains—"with its strangeness, its enigmatic [nature], the living threat it carries to expose the repressed secrets and lies" (Azoullai 2007)—outside the vocabulary of most Israelis. As a result, Zochrot's activity continues to disrupt the spatial common sense of the Israeli public by claiming the *place* for what was displaced for almost six decades. At times this disruption appears explicitly, marked as an "illegal gathering" and requires police action: the signs are taken down and are put in a police car, in a prosaic attempt to "arrest" the emergence of an unwanted signified, an unwanted history. At other times, the emergence of the Nakba as a *sign* in space forms a "stutter" in the narratives Israelis tell themselves about their landscapes, through their landscapes: what has been utterly familiar, intimately known, appears to carry echoes of another history, an Other's history. The violent vandalism the signs evoke time and time again points to the uncanny fears that are embedded in the landscapes of Israel, namely, "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (Freud 2003, 124).

Zochrot's signposting activities are not an attempt to resolve the fears that continue to haunt the Israeli landscape but to acknowledge their existence. Zochrot's actions and the blunt responses they evoke indicate that the vocabulary of erasure, annihilation and forgetfulness often used to

describe the production of the “Israeli Space” is perhaps inexact: the Palestinian past is still present, even if it appears in the form of partly-ruined houses on the side of the roads, as olive groves in the midst of pine forests or as empty mosques at the heart of Jewish neighbourhoods. What Zochrot propose is a new communal environment—a community of memory—that is willing to facilitate these histories despite their threatening nature. In a political climate that in principal continues to silence the Palestinian loss and prevent it from taking any material form, the momentary “spatial stutter” that occurs around the mundane sign bearing an Arabic street name or marking the site of a demolished village, should be acknowledged as a challenging intervention that questions conventions of spatial control, historical legitimacy and the authorship of cultural memories.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Work of this sort has been carried out in other cultural, historical and geographical contexts, and has received wide interest in places that share a history of colonial presence, most notably in Australia (for example, Tiffin and Lawson 1994; Carter 1987; Carter 1996), South Africa (for example, Robinson 1994; Hofmeyr 1996) and John Noyes's noteworthy research on the production of colonial space in German South-West Africa (Noyes 1992).

<sup>2</sup> All translations from Hebrew were done by the author unless specified otherwise.

<sup>3</sup> I refer here to the central aspirations of the Zionist movement, which saw Palestine as the favoured territorial solution for the fulfilment of the Zionist aspirations. However, as with any other national movement, it was never monolithic and never consisted of a single voice: Adi Ophir (1999), for example, shows how these central concerns were contested within and outside the Zionist movement.

<sup>4</sup> This refers to a series of armed conflicts and their subsequent agreements that occurred between 1947 and 1952. The term substitutes other notions used by both

Israelis (“War of Independence”) and Palestinians (“Nakba”). Later in this chapter I use the term Nakba, because of its direct relation to the work of Zochrot and its centrality in their explicitly political counter-vocabulary.

<sup>5</sup> The demographic figures have yet to be agreed upon in the many studies conducted on the issue (see for example, Al-khalidi 1992; Kimerling 1999; Kimerling 1983; Morris 1987; Morris 2004; Yiftachel 1999). This is mainly the result of uncertainties surrounding the Mandatory censuses of Palestine during the 1940s and the different categories of settlement in rural Palestine.

<sup>6</sup> The transition phase was not as “smooth” as one might imagine: in effect, the Palestinian population of Israel remained under military governance until 1966, and was subjected to a wide set of restrictions that preserved their status as second-class citizens.

<sup>7</sup> The constraints of this article’s scope prevent me from illuminating the complexities of the re-naming process, the committee’s ideological agenda and the different political forces at work. For further reading, see Benvenisti, 1997.

<sup>8</sup> The various practices used in the constitution process of Palestinian cultural memory have been extensively discussed in several important works which highlighted the emergence of these practices and their close relation to the political, demographic and geo-cultural situation since the beginning of Zionist activity at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century; see, for example, McGowan and Ellis, 1998; Parmenter, 1994; Slimovics, 1998. The complex interrelations between the two national-cultural memories are worthy of a separate extensive and thorough examination which is beyond the scope of this chapter.

<sup>9</sup> I am in debt to Adi Ophir for pointing out this paradox.

<sup>10</sup> In this conceptualization I am much indebted to Professor Susannah Radstone’s presentation at the “Politics of Cultural Memory” conference at Manchester Metropolitan University, November 2004. Also see, Radstone 1999, 11-12.

<sup>11</sup> *Nakba* or *al-Nakba* (pronounce *An-Nakba*) is a term meaning “cataclysm” or “calamity.” It is the term with which Palestinians usually refer to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.

<sup>12</sup> From the groups website: [www.nakbainhebrew.org.il](http://www.nakbainhebrew.org.il)

<sup>13</sup> Some examples include the emergence in Israel of movements such as the *Council for National Directing* during the 1950s and 60s; the formation of *Ibn el-Balad* in the 1970s; and the more recent legalistic and publicly oriented activities of *Mossawa*, The Advocacy Centre for Arab Citizens in Israel and *Adalah*, The Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel. The activities generated by these organisations form a close link between the struggle over land, this struggle’s inscription into the Israel-Palestinian collective memory and their transmission to the political arena. The events of the 1976 Land Day clashes between Israeli-Palestinian demonstrators and the Israeli military are a striking example. However, these actions preserve a fundamental binary structure that, at least formally, differs from the political and social aspirations of Zochrot.

<sup>14</sup> This act, which attempts to materially and symbolically reinstate Palestinian memory in the Israeli landscape, is unique and differs from comparable Palestinian

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attempts (see note 11) because it is an effort initiated by Israelis and is mostly directed towards the Israeli-Jewish public in Israel.

<sup>15</sup> As described in the Zochrot website

<http://www.nakbainhebrew.org/index.php?id=186>.

<sup>16</sup> This is only one aspect, the ostensible one, of the current fate of Lifta. While during the day it is mostly a recreational site only minutes walk from the centre of Jerusalem, at night the village's remaining houses are squatted by homeless and marginalised people. This duality is typical of the distance between the formal intensions of public policy makers and the variations of daily life. It is essential to consider this double, and perhaps paradoxical, nature in any attempt to counter official memory regimes.

<sup>17</sup> One can consider the struggle of Jewish immigrants from North African and Arab countries against the Eurocentric nature of the Zionist authorities as an inner-Jewish conflict that bears resemblance to the struggle I have focused on in this discussion. For a comprehensive discussion on the history of immigration of Iraqi Jews and the attempt of the Zionist authorities to negate the cultural position of "Arab-Jew", see Shenhav 2003.