Post-traumatic urbanism: Repressing Manshiya and Wadi Salib

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ABSTRACT

Trauma is defined as a wound or an injury caused by an act of violence on one’s body, or as a severe anxiety caused by an unpleasant experience. The victims of traumatic events may develop psychological stress disorder, which is manifested in several symptoms: post-traumatic stress disorder. The 1948 Arab-Israeli had caused both physical and psychological trauma. The symptoms of this trauma are still visible today in various Israeli cities. As a result of the war, Israeli cities had annexed formerly owned Palestinian villages and neighborhoods. Along the years, these vacated Palestinian houses were settled by Jewish immigrants, turned to slums and became the target of several urban renewal projects. These renewal projects mainly asked to erase all traces of the neighborhood’s Arab past, and to introduce a new urban order. This research focuses on Al Manshiya in Tel Aviv-Jaffa and Wadi Salib in Haifa, two former Palestinian neighborhoods, which were vacated from their original inhabitants. This research surveys the re-planning process of both neighborhoods, its implementation and its current status. Asking whether one can depict symptoms of post-trauma in the urban scheme and in the buildings’ architecture. Al Manshiya was torn down completely in the 1970’s, in order to make place for Tel Aviv’s new central business district. This project was never fully completed, as the symptoms of the post-trauma are manifested in the disconnected grand office buildings, the urban void and the parking lots surrounding them. The majority of Wadi Salib was torn down as well, as several decaying buildings are still standing in the cleared and empty neighborhood. The emptiness, neglect and oblivion emphasize the post-traumatic experience. In the recent years however, several projects asked to deal with the neighborhoods’ past and heritage. Even then, the references remained superficial leaving the trauma unattended and not curing the neighborhoods’ from their post-trauma symptoms.

1. Introduction

“…The old world we shall destroy to the ground (olam yashan ‘adey hayosd nachriva)
From a bended back we will relieve the burden (migav kafuf nifroq ha’ol)
Then we will construct our world (et ‘olameinu az naqqima)
Nothing from yesterday (lo-khlum mitmol)
Tomorrow is everything (mahar hakol)…””
(L’Internationale, Hebrew version by Avraham Shlonsky, 1945)

These were the words chosen by Avraham Shlonsky while translating Eugène Pottier’s L’Internationale. Shlonsky’s version was adopted by several movements and organizations like Hashomer Hatzair, Hapoel Hatzair and Mapai, which led the formation of the Zionist Ideology in the 20th century, and played a crucial role in forming the hegemonic class in the first decades of the state of Israel (Oz, 1992).

Shlonsky’s words corresponded with the ruling Zionist agenda, which asked to promote the rebirth of the Jewish nation in its historic homeland, upon the ruins of the old diasporal Jewish lifestyle, while the primal landscape of Palestine was seen as the ideal platform for this renaissance. Therefore, the local landscape had to be perceived as pristine, as if it waited for 2000 years until the Jewish nation’s return home. Consequently, the Israeli government’s agenda in the 1950s and 1960s, was to ignore and disregard all indications to the Arab/Palestinian past of the local landscape. In line with this agenda, as illustrated by Walid El-Khalidi and Meron Benvenisti, places were renamed, people were resettled and the Arab history of towns and villages was repudiated (Benvenisti, 2002, 2012; Khalidi, 1992; Bar Or, 2012).

The 1948 war, aka “War of Independence” by Israelis, or “Alnakba” (the catastrophe) by Arabs, began as civil war between local Jewish and Arab militias in British mandatory Palestine, and expanded into a full-scale war between Israel and its Arab neighbors. This war led to the birth of the state of Israel, but also to the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem, as described by Benny Morris (Morris, 2004).

Arab neighborhoods in Jewish cities, which were abandoned by
their original inhabitants during the 1948 war, formed a burden for Israeli planners and city officials, who had difficulties in adopting the inherited Arab houses and streets. As shown by Sharon Rotbard and Amnon Bar Or, in most cases, these neighborhoods were re-planned with the intent to revoke their Arab heritage, turned into a clean slate while promoting the formation of a new urban order upon the ruins of the old one, compatible with the hegemonic Israeli agenda (Bar Or, 2012, 2013; Rotbard, 2005). In line with these claims, the Palestinian-American scholar Saree Makdisi states that “the attempt to secure a sense of Jewish national homeliness involves an endless process of covering over, removing, or managing a stubbornly persistent Palestinian presence” (Makdisi, 2008).

The construction of Al Manshiya neighborhood began in the 1870s, as a northern suburb to the developing port city of Jaffa. The majority of its inhabitants were Arab Muslims, though it also had Christian and Jewish minorities (Rotbard, 2005). Al Manshiya was constructed as a modern and planned neighborhood, with two-story residential houses, commercial streets and recreational facilities on its seashore (Aleksandrowicz, 2013a).

During its railway station, orchards, German Colonies and Jewish neighborhoods on its east, Al Manshiya's further development happened mostly towards north. The growing neighboring city of Tel Aviv halted Al Manshiya's development as it surrounded the neighborhood from its west and north (Rotbard, 2005; Kark, 1990).

Being on the front line between the Arab Jaffa and the Jewish Tel Aviv, Al Manshiya was the host of many ethnic clashes. However, this also allowed it to develop a thriving economy. In its height, the 1940s, Al Manshiya was home to almost 15,000 inhabitants, a quarter of Jaffa's population. It managed to become a large residential neighborhood with a thriving commercial economy (Aleksandrowicz, 2013a).

As part of Arab Jaffa, Al Manshiya was designated, by the United Nations' partition plan of 1947, to become a part of the future Arab state. The municipal border between Jaffa and Tel Aviv that stretched on the eastern and northern outskirts of Al Manshiya was therefore to become an International one (Aleksandrowicz, 2013b).

In April 1948, however, Al Manshiya was occupied by the Jewish Irgun militia, which led to the surrender of entire Jaffa to the Haganah Jewish forces in the beginning of May that year (Aleksandrowicz, 2013b).

The 1948 war had left the city of Jaffa in general, and Al Manshiya in particular in ruins (see Figs. 1 and 2). Most of the city's Arab population had fled during the war, and later was unable and prevented to return (Morris, 2004). The houses of the exiled Arab refugees were declared as absentees' property, and were confiscated according to the Absentees' Property Law 5710 of 1950 (Berger, 1998). The shortage of dwelling units in Jewish cities, due to the influx of Jewish refugees from Europe and from Islamic countries, had led several refugees to settle in absentee's houses in Jaffa (Aleksandrowicz, 2013b; Marom, 2009), as well as in other vacant Arab villages and quarters in the new state of Israel.

At the same time, a debate had developed in the 1950s regarding the treatment of vacated Arab houses in Israel. While most planners and officials called for their immediate demolition due to so called sanitary and structural issues (Paz, 1998; Gluckstein, 1961), others, like the
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