**Trauma and Architecture**

**Slip of Pen in Architectural Embarrassment Zones**

**Abstract**

This article deals with the human attempt to erase and conceal trauma by destroying the architectural spaces in which it was manifested. We argue that historical attempts to obscure the trauma will fail, and that always, at some unexpected moment, something will emerge that will reveal what is hidden and undermine future planning aimed at sustaining a normal environment. We call these spaces “embarrassment zones.”

The article emerged from a dialogue between an architect and a psychoanalyst. Conservation architecture and psychoanalysis present an opportunity for conceptual collaboration that aims to disclose this concealment and its motivations as well as emphasize the importance of the disclosure. This is done for the sake of preserving and developing sane living environments.

The research began with an exploration of the kibbutz dining hall as a social and architectural reflection of Israeli society, and was expanded to explore other post-traumatic areas, such as the neighborhoods of Manshiya, Wadi Salib, and Talbiya—all embarrassment zones in which trauma has been repressed and untreated.

Keywords: embarrassment zone, slip of the pen, repetition compulsion, trauma, built legacy, conservation, intangible legacy, dissociation.

**Introduction**

Preservation planners often find themselves working in the city’s historic centers. The current planning discourse among preservation planners does not provide an appropriate response for the treatment of sites carrying traumatic memories. As a possible avenue toward dealing with this issue, this paper presents an initial experiment in partnership between a psychoanalyst and a preservation architect, aimed at understanding and defining historical zones in the planning stages as “embarrassment zones.” This definition will facilitate the formulation of a respectful and inclusive planning and preservation ethics for the benefit of stakeholders whose memories are engraved upon the buildings’ walls and etched in the collective consciousness.

Dialogue Between Two Languages

The architectural and psychoanalytical languages differ in many ways. The language of architecture is based on empiricism. Every idea must be supported by objective evidence, and any metaphorical representation must stem from an observation that serves as proof of the ideal or of the validity of its representation. The language of psychoanalysis, on the other hand, is entirely composed of representations and metaphors constructed upon experiences whose subjective dimension is central and often exclusive. “Learning through experience” is a fundamental principle in the psychoanalytic language.

There are also similarities between the two languages. The common point of departure for both is thoughts: the psychoanalyst transforms thoughts into words, while the architect transforms them into spaces. Another important premise is human experience. The psychological home and the architectural home are two aspects of the same basic state of being. Both are perceived as basic and vital foundations for normal human life. Architecture and psychoanalysis are both concerned with the human psyche and spirit. Both are science, and art, and craft.[[1]](#footnote-1) The attempt to connect between psychoanalysis and architecture creates a space in which it is possible to construct something that neither side can construct alone, and herein lies its uniqueness.

*Amnon*

“For the past 25 years, my professional work in planning and preservation has been combined with teaching at the David Azrieli School of Architecture at Tel Aviv University. In this framework between 2010 and 2012, I taught a preservation workshop that engaged in research and planning in the Manshiya area in Jaffa, which was partly eradicated after Jaffa’s occupation in 1948. Currently, a few structures remain, and most of the space serves as a promenade profuse in grass lawns and parking lots.

The space carries difficult memories and trauma for the population groups that were negatively affected there—the Muslims, who bear the memory of both Manshiya’s occupation in 1948 and the ethnic cleansing in Jewish Tel Aviv; and the Jews, who bear the memory of a murderous terrorist attack on high school students waiting in line to enter the Dolphinarium nightclub.

When my students and I realized the traumatic nature of the space and the fact that it harbors harsh memories, I turned to an old friend of mine, psychoanalyst Gabi Bonwitt, and asked him to join in and help us understand the psychological implications of planning in this damaged site.”

A Few Words on Trauma

Trauma is a breach in the protective shield against stimuli. It is in fact a chaotic experience in which the boundary between two realities, the internal and external, is obscured, and in which the ‘self’ ceases to exist as a separate entity. It is important to remember that trauma is related to processes of internalization, however, in the case of trauma it is an internalization process that occurred in the course of a violent act that “penetrated” the internal reality and “conquered” the consciousness from within.

A mechanism of dissociation is activated to avoid this destructive process. The mechanism represses the event, mainly its emotional significances, to the unconscious regions of the psyche. It is important to remember that not only the victim, but also the aggressor, can suffer from post-trauma. The aggressor’s display and manifestation of violent traits, which exist in every self, can activate precisely the same dissociative mechanisms that are activated in the victim.

In trauma, what replaces the memory and its processing is the repetition compulsion mechanism. The fundamental premise is that the traumatic event can be generated not only in the individual, but also in a group, community, or society, and that a group can adopt the same mechanisms as the individual in face of events that it is incapable of processing and remembering. The society or community will employ dissociation mainly at times when aspects of its identity are incompatible: past and present; ideal and reality; moral values and the collective ethics and manifestations of violence in the history of a particular group within it.

Taking into account that one cannot speak about the reconstruction of a neighborhood that has been separated from its inhabitants without addressing the processes of trauma, the linkage between architecture and psychoanalysis occurs in the space of the trauma.

The challenge we face in this work is not simple. Consciousness is the developmental engine of humankind. The basic psychoanalytical premise is that the expansion of consciousness is a vital condition for human development and creativity. However, consciousness is not only what is “seen.” There is consciousness that is higher-up and consciousness that is lower-down, in the basement so to speak—that which is thrust into dark, invisible places; there is that which is full and that which is empty; that which is built and that which is destroyed. For architecture, there is what “is,” while psychoanalysis is interested mainly in what “is not.” It is in terms of this premise that architecture—from the initial research stage, through planning, to constructing architectural spaces—must turn its attention to, or in Bion’s words, project a “beam of intense darkness” onto repressed and rejected regions. These are “embarrassment zones.”

Embarrassment Zones

An embarrassment zone is an area which, if one entered it, or more accurately, was led into it, one would be overwhelmed by a desire to escape. The experience of embarrassment most frequently entails incoherent verbal responses, which the individual, as the subject of the embarrassment, is certain is noticeable to all those surrounding them. This incoherent speech and embarrassment render the cause for the embarrassment public knowledge. The embarrassment zone is no longer something between you and yourself, but rather something that *everybody* sees and notices.

How is this embarrassment zone created and what is the dynamic that affects the embarrassed individual in a way that causes them to assume that everybody notices their embarrassment? At the basis of embarrassment is the human illusion that memory is erasable. Disillusionment can be likened to a scorpion who suddenly emerges from his hiding place beneath the rock of consciousness to assault the individual, threatening to harm and triumph over them from within. This is Freud’s repetition of the repressed.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Embarrassment zones are created in a reality that, at a certain moment in time, is not only contentious and irresolvable, but that also produces a mental state of distress intermingled with pain and a sense of a “dead end”—a type of mental labyrinth. The human reaction is dissociation, in which the psyche ignores the labyrinth by way of its imagined or realistic destruction. This type of solution produces an imagined reality in which the labyrinth does not exist, a solution akin to the omnipotent position of the infant who constructs, destroys, or conceals at will. This is the illusory basis of denial, dissociation, and concealment.

Opposite dissociation as a means of processing embarrassment are memory and consciousness, which do not enable actual erasure. In fact, while wandering in physical embarrassment zones, one notices spatial “slips of the pen” (such as remnants of structures or Arabic names of streets or neighborhoods which, although replaced by Hebrew names, are still commonly used by the public), which poke or shoot out amid the efforts to erase and call attention to what is buried beneath them, thereby revealing the blatant embarrassment.

What are the emotional states that constitute the foundation for denial and dissociation? What is the emotional fuel that sets concealment and negation in motion? To answer these questions, we first need to address the concept of embarrassment.

Embarrassment is the combination of guilt and shame. Embarrassment is visible in a person’s face at the moment that whatever is hidden becomes disclosed, when the ruse is revealed, and the embarrassed subject’s only wish is to escape the situation. When the secret, which, as mentioned, is not only that which one keeps from themselves but also from others, becomes known, everything stops, the person’s face turns red and burns with embarrassment, as if the buried secret has turn into fire brushing against it.

A point of reference to embarrassment zones is by way of Bion’s term “attacks on linking.”[[3]](#footnote-3) In his attempt to describe thinking and learning processes, Bion speaks of creating links between spaces of thought in the psyche. These links, which are characteristically associative, enable the metaphorization and mentalization of the thought and the creation of more and more spaces that will belong to the “self.”This is a necessary condition for growth and development.

But what happens if there is an area in the mind that endangers and threatens to deconstruct it? The subject detests these parts of the psyche and will maintain them as areas forbidden from mental transformation. Bion refers to them as psychotic areas mainly because they were not subject to processes of symbolization, abstraction, and mentalization. Such, for example, would be areas of a traumatic nature. Disintegration anxiety and the detestation of these traumatic materials causes the psyche to detach the links with those experiences and by doing so prevent them from becoming part of the “self.” In such instances, the self requires another subject to assist them in creating new links to the same rejected and banished spaces. This second subject will use the function of containment to help the self process the threatening materials and transform them into part of it.

Is it possible for the banished subject—external or internal—to be capable of fulfilling the same function? To be the banished subject? Is it possible to employ the same processes when considering social and cultural spaces? In our opinion, the answer is yes.

Social and cultural integration are processes that involves connections between contradictory and paradoxical elements; therefore, any attempt to create homogeneous historical and architectural spaces with a single common narrative is destined to fail. How then, can new connections be formed that will render traumatic spaces part of the collective consciousness?

This is where architecture, or more precisely, preservation architecture, re-enters the picture. Can an architect create new links through planning and building?

*Major Characteristics of the Embarrassment Zone*

1. Even prior to arriving at the site, one has partial knowledge of it as part of their cultural charge.

2. One is in the densely built heart of a city (historical or ancient) with definitive architectural characteristics, which are easily understood, while the embarrassment zone lacks these features and is distinct from all other areas in the city. You notice a later architecture, which is completely different in style and scale from the remnants of structures and ruins or bare and neglected spaces.

3. The emptied spaces left behind from the destruction are often covered by thickets or well-kept or partly abandoned urban parks.

4. One notices a mixture of extant cultural legacies, some of which are partially destroyed, and intangiblecultural legacies, of which the latter did not entirely disappear along with the vast majority of the community.

5. What one sees and feels at the site leaves one lacking a sense of historical and urban orientation as well as an understanding of the “spirit of the place.”

Instead of complete and conscious comprehension, the effect is one of inexplicable mental discomfort—embarrassment.

Why is it important to identify and try to comprehend embarrassment zones? These problematic areas in the heart of the city are a consequence of local urban policy. They always pique the interest of developers as land for accelerated real estate development, development that completely ignores the past. We have already learned from many cases that the more memories of the past are infused with severe traumas suffered by disadvantaged population groups, the more the deliberate neglect increases and thereby contributes significantly to a decrease in the value of the land. This in turn, intensifies the developers’ pressure to “rescue” it by way of new development upon the ostensibly “empty” and neglected space. Thus, the need for accelerated development will usually outweigh the opportunity to cope with the past and render it present in the space.

To deal adequately with these trends in development without losing sight of memories of the traumatic past, we propose combining the psychoanalytical toolbox with the disciplines of planning and preservation. By employing urban planning tools and psychoanalysis, one can attempt to treat post-traumatic spaces in which adequate living conditions will become feasible in the future by way of coping with the values of past cultures.

A common human solution is the attempt to completely erase the rejected past legacy by way of altering consciousness through physical changes. A city burdened by traumatic memories, but which aspires to develop for the sake of its residents’ welfare and present and future quality of life, must address and prioritize its repressed past. This can also be viewed as an opportunity to treat and cope with the traumas by way of judicious urban and architectural planning.

The planning architect plays a special role in embarrassment zones. In addition to their work in urban and architectural planning and design, they are entrusted with a particular responsibly: first, responsibility for identifying the area as a damaged post-traumatic site that harnesses past values entwined with difficult memories. Once identifying the zone, they determine the planning apparatus most sensitive to and respectful of all of the site’s cultural legacies. Before physically attending to the wounds (exposed and hidden) in the damaged urban tapestry, they must first familiarize themselves with its inhabitants and their cultures, both past and present, and with the past traumatic events that its inhabitants endured and which completely changed its many historical values.

Engaging with and understanding both the tangible and intangible legacy of the site and its residents will facilitate an understanding of its entire corpus of past values and its integration in future planning. In so doing, it will attempt to escape from the embarrassment zone.

*Kibbutz Dining Halls*

Gaby:

“In my childhood, I would travel to visit my family on kibbutz Mizra. For me, the dining hall was a kind of secular temple to which the sons of the gods came to have their meals. They were all tall and strong, fearlessly walking barefoot on the rugged earth. I remember the ascent to the dining hall by way of paths traversing the wide lawn at its base; the soda tap at the entrance, which always fascinated and excited me, a city boy, particularly given that I could drink as much soda as I wanted for free; I remember sitting around the long tables with the tall, strong farmers; cutting salad and mixing it with white cheese to me was like the sacred work of the temple priests.

Therefore, when the slits in kibbutz life deepened, my reaction was ambivalent: on the one hand, I gloated at the downfall of the sons of gods, and their metamorphosis into fragile and vulnerable human beings; and on the other hand, I felt gravely alarmed when the first signs began to appear of the destruction of the national-secular temple.”

The denial of traumatic history increases the danger of repeating the trauma consistently in terms of Freud’s repetition compulsion. It is our assumption that it is possible to glimpse hints of the repressed trauma in architectural spaces. In an attempt to examine this hypothesis, we initially chose to explore the kibbutz in Israel, its population, and in particular, its dining hall. The kibbutz dining hall is a pivotal construct that reflects processes of the kibbutz’s development—from its establishment to its dismantling and current privatization.

The Israeli kibbutz, a globally unique phenomenon, was founded on the socialist principle of “from each according to his ability and to each according to his needs.” Cooperation was the key value of kibbutz life. Accordingly, the dining hall constituted the center of communal life, in geographical and social terms, in the kibbutz. It functioned as a place of physical nourishment and social interaction, and as such, it embodied the many transformations in the kibbutz and its society over time.

As the heart of life on the kibbutz, the dining hall was built at its center on elevated ground. Over the years it transformed into a problematic, abandoned, and often vacant, structure—a white elephant that could neither be utilized nor destroyed. It constitutes a sad and bleak mirror image of a social, political, and cultural ideal, which at its peak swept multitudes and represented a standard and compass for an entire society that had faith in kibbutz life—as a manifestation of this ideal; based on this faith, it enabled its followers to lead and manage the kibbutzim.

The kibbutz dining hall can be considered a monument to the kibbutz concept. The dining hall, as a monument, empowers and emboldens the collective in a manner that is appropriate to the very utopian and romantic kibbutz ideal. In architectural terms, a monument, in its very essence as an attempt to deny death, can constitute, in turn, a social space for unprocessed traumatic elements.

In this social space, which involves all aspects of communal life, while enabling each individual to maintain their individuality, everybody participates fully under the common recognition of the elected authority of power and wisdom. In using the dining hall, individuals are obligated to take care with their steps, to pay close attention to their surroundings, to the teeming sound in the space; they must smell the smells of cooking and food and delve into this unique world of the cooperative. They are manifesting an ideology; they perform a ritual constituted in loading their tray with flatware, main course, side dishes, dessert, and soft drink. They engage in an attempt to discover and decode the people and symbols surrounding them in the space. Through their physical bodies and perception, they experience a totality of existence within a total space.

Over the years, the kibbutz dining hall expanded, and transitioned from a shack to a concrete structure, which is often displayed as an acropolis, something between a fortress and a synagogue or temple. The dining hall was located on a hill, usually at the highest point in the kibbutz, and ascending it involved crossing the “big lawn,” upon which most major kibbutz ceremonies took place.

In a documentary series about the kibbutz, series creator Modi Baron says: “In the sixties and seventies most kibbutzim rebuilt their dining halls, only this time, they built them as fortresses, lacking intimacy. They constructed their fears, because they understood that the ideal was falling apart.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Doubtless, their need to represent something and impress Israel’s social and cultural environment is conspicuous; however, in terms of narcissistic behavior, the large and grand structures and their elevated location concealed the sense of defectiveness, shame, and exclusion experienced by kibbutz members, as well as their fear that these undercurrents would be exposed.

The traumatic abandonment motif is a key link that is repeated and reconstructed in the settlement and development processes of kibbutzim in Israel. Following are examples of the many manifestations of abandonment in the history of the kibbutz. First, the abandonment by the founders of the kibbutzim of their European culture, families, and pre-WWII Jewish bourgeois society. Second, the abandonment involved in the fact that a significant percentage of the kibbutzim were built on Arab land whose residents were expelled or were forced to abandon without the ability to return after the 1948 War, while in many cases, there was a deliberate attempt to blur any trace of the Palestinian settlement (although a keen eye can still identify agricultural terraces, fruit trees, and sometimes, ruins of buildings that belonged to the Arab villages). Third, the abandonment of children by their parents under the principle of communal lodging. Fourth, the abandonment by a significant part of the younger generation of kibbutz members during the major kibbutzim crisis of in the 1980s; and finally, the abandonment of the dining halls during the privatization process. Today, most kibbutz dining halls stand empty; some are rented out as workspace or serve various other purposes.

For this paper we chose as case studies the dining halls in Sha’ar Hagolan and Yad Mordechai. Both kibbutzim were abandoned by their members in 1948, when Sha’ar Hagolan in northern Israel was occupied by the Syrian army and Yad Mordechai in southern Israel was occupied by the Egyptian army. We aim to argue that the planning and construction of the dining halls in these kibbutzim embodied traumatic characteristics associated with abandonment.

*Sha’ar Hagolan*

The northern kibbutz, Sha’ar Hagolan, was founded on March 21, 1937 as a “Tower and Stockade” settlement. The planner of the permanent settlement was Richard Kauffmann—the modernist architect of the rural settlement in Jewish pre-state Israel.

Until 1948, the dining hall was a wooden shack with a brick base and corrugated tin roof. It was destroyed in 1948 when the kibbutz was conquered by the Syrian army, or what the kibbutz members refer to as the “big fire,” a term for the four-day abandonment (which is reminiscent of the pogroms and *Kristallnacht*).

In 1952, the corner stone was laid for the new dining room, designed by architect Shmuel Mestechkin. The plan was a “trousers” plan—two functional wings with an open-air entrance plaza; and the connecting area serving as the kitchen. The new dining hall was inaugurated in 1956. In 1966 the old dining hall was demolished. Throughout the following years, the structure changed repeatedly. Each new wing that was built added a unique expression to the entire complex; and each time the dining hall was expanded, its facade faced a different direction.

In the final stage, a wing with a row of expressive arches, designed by Mestechkin in collaboration with the artist and kibbutz member Haim Bargal, was built. This wing was meant to face the “big lawn,” but in fact it was surrounded by an expansive cement plaza and a row of trees and shrubbery that separated the building from the lawn. Ostensibly, the facade was intended to symbolize a sense of elevation in face of not only the constraints of everyday life, but also the tangible memories of the battle that had taken place there and the festering wounds still imprinted on the collective memory.

The repetitious shifting of the facade’s location evokes an image of the dining hall rotating around itself, in a constant search for both a landscape to turn to, literally and metaphorically, and an ideal to empower it. This was not feasible on this kibbutz—the shame of abandonment inherent in the very existence of a kibbutz that took pride in its “Tower and Stockade” foundations, was assimilated in the planning of its dining hall.

The abandonment narrative, as mentioned, was not unique to Sha’ar Hagolan. A similar narrative existed in many kibbutzim, including in Yad Mordechai in the south.

*Yad Mordechai*

In 1943, the founding charter of kibbutz Yad Mordechai was interred in the foundations of its dining hall, which was designed by Shmuel Mestechkin, and which at the time was located at the center of the kibbutz. A ceremony plaza was built nearby the dining hall at the foot of a hill at the top of which is the bullet-scarred water tower and a statue of Mordechai Anielewicz. The entire water tower area and the battlefield site behind it embody the collective trauma at the foundation of the kibbutz experience.

The new dining hall was built for returning members like in Sha’ar Hagolan. It too features large arched openings facing the “big lawn.” On its sides, a small turret-like element was built, in which there are windows flanked by cement wings that block the sideway views—most significantly, the view toward the bullet-scarred water tower and the cemetery where the fallen soldiers from the 1948 battle for Yad Mordechai are buried. Thus, a cement wall of denial was constructed.

Kibbutz dining halls were built out of reinforced concrete, sometimes in an expressionist mode, a mode evocative of places of worship rather than functional structures designed to provide nourishment to kibbutz members. Later, fortified structures were built without any expressionist characteristics, “concrete domes.” The “fortress atop the hill” was strong, but its foundations were weak—below ground is drama, an untold and unmentionable story. However, through the many transformations in the structuring of kibbutz dining halls, the suppressed traumas gradually became apparent. Thus, the compulsion to add more and more wings, which lasted seventy years, can be viewed as self-therapeutic, an attempt to treat the symptoms by adding multiple layers that conceal the cause of the trauma.

Markers of trauma are identifiable in the various processes involved in the planning, construction and reconstruction of kibbutz dining halls. In Sha’ar Hagolan and Yad Mordechai there is a variety of expressions of trauma that mirror those of dining halls in many Israeli kibbutzim in Israel. The exterior is not indicative of the interior space, which although often full of life, in many cases, is unexceptional and disappointing. The exterior arouses expectations, but these are met with disillusion. The trauma is not addressed; there is no longer a sense of the dining hall as a pilgrimage site; there is no therapeutic process on the way to food; there is no sense of satiation.

Moreover, within the context of the contemporary crisis, which is characterized by ambivalent approaches toward the kibbutz ideal, destabilization of the kibbutz status, and fundamental changes in its society, the dining hall changed from a structure whose purpose was to connect and unify, a popular destination and pilgrimage site, into a structure that embodies the crisis. The dividing wall—between the dining hall and the kibbutz, between the kibbutz and its surroundings, and between the kibbutz and its past, also constitutes a symbolic wall between inner social spaces, a wall that does not enable processing and integration. This indeed is an *en* *masse* utilization of social dissociation.

While our research on kibbutz dining halls was restricted to these particular structures, it led us to think about the extent of the phenomenon of embarrassment zones. We chose, therefore, to explore unique areas in the three largest mixed cities in Israel—Tel Aviv-Jaffa, Jerusalem, and Haifa. In each of these cities we located a neighborhood in which one could identify an embarrassment zone. This connection of three neighborhoods who carry both similar and distinctive markers of embarrassment indicates a phenomenon of “coping” by erasing of various types of layers and rewriting of Israel’s spatial narative from its founding to today.

*Tel Aviv-Jaffa: Manshiya*

Manshiya (in Arabic (منشيّةor El-Manshiya ((المنشيّةis a common name for a number of villages and settlements in Palestine. The origin of the name is the Arabic verb *ansha* which means “built” or “founded.” *Manshiya* means “structure” or “housing.” This name was given to villages or neighborhoods close to cities.[[5]](#footnote-5)

El-Manshiya was an Arabic and mixed neighborhood that occupied 460 dunam north of Jaffa on the seacoast.[[6]](#footnote-6) The neighborhood was partly destroyed during Israel’s War of Independence, and was systematically and almost completely erased between the end of the war to the 1970s.

Today, the space reflects both the physical and planning history of the neighborhood. Despite grandiose plans made over the years, the ruinous area consistently failed to be filled and it currently serves as a promenade with lawns and parking lots. Until recently, at the center of the area, two monumental structures stood facing each other—Hassan Bek mosque, which was saved from the total destruction of the neighborhood and remained a place of worship for a non-existent community, and the Dolphinarium, which was built at the end of the 1960s on a strip of dried out beach adjacent to the ruins of Manshiya, and which was completely demolished only recently.

In 1831, the Ottoman viceroy of Egypt announced his autonomous rule and sent an army to occupy Palestine and Syria. Ibrahim Pasha occupied Jaffa without a battle. The development of the city was not affected; on the contrary, it was accelerated, and Jaffa soon became a hub for Pasha’s armies, a place to aggregate taxes, and a connecting port with Egypt. In the orchards surrounding Jaffa, a number of Muslim Arab neighborhoods—*sachnot*—materialized in which Egyptian farmers who had come along with Pasha’s army, settled. These included Sachnat Sheik Ibrahim (Ajami), Sachnat Abu Kabir, and Sachnat El Mutzariya.

Manshiya was founded in the late eighteen-seventies, on the coast between the future railway from the beach to Jerusalem, alongside the fishing village Irshid. In time it was called Neve Shalom by Hebrew speakers, while Arab speakers continued to refer to it as Manshiya.6

The determination of the boundary between Tel Aviv and Jaffa in 1921 was a turning point in the perception of the space, a shift whose consequences are visible till today. Already from the mid-1930s, the new spatial distinction between the “Arab” neighborhood of Manshiya, and Tel Aviv’s Hebrew neighborhoods of was entrenched.6 The separate territorial definition of Tel Aviv and Jaffa was a crucial element in the cultural realization of the “Hebrew city,” a model exemplar of modernist and nationalist urbanization. The urban nature of Tel Aviv was intertwined in the Zionist ethos of building and development.7 This ideal could not have existed without the boundary separating “us” from “them.”

On November 29, 1947, the Partition Plan, in which Jaffa was annexed to the Arab state as an enclave, was approved at the UN. At the same time, most Jewish residents left the neighborhood and it became a battle zone. The fighting reached its peak in April 1948 when Etzel forces occupied it.8 During the fighting, many houses and most of the neighborhood’s infrastructures were destroyed. The remaining homes of Arab refugees were either declared absentee properties or were confiscated.

Part of Manshiya’s Arab residents escaped to Jordan, while others were expelled to Gaza and Egypt by way of the sea. Few remained in Jaffa and later lived in the Ajami ghetto together with the refugees from Jaffa and from the neighboring villages.9

With the end of the fighting, the Tel Aviv Municipality sought to destroy most of the neighborhood, including the remaining houses, to its foundations. Already during the Independence War, new immigrants, soldiers’ families, civil servants, and refugees from Tel Aviv whose homes had been damaged in the war8 were relocated there, and it became a densely populated poor neighborhood. The fact that hundreds of Jewish families lived in the remaining houses presented a significant obstacle to implementing the plan to completely demolish Manshiya.

Since the 1950s and 60s, the Tel Aviv Municipality has made ambitious, and sometimes destructive, plans for this site, most of which advanced a new municipal agenda aligned with the hegemonic Israeli policy that involved invalidating any Arab-Palestinian legacy in the area—as Ben Gurion stated to the Names Committee: “To distance the Arabic names for political reasons: just like we do not recognize the Arab’s political claim over the country, so we do not recognize their intellectual property and names.”10 One of the most outstanding plans was the “City” program. According to this plan, the modern city’s new urban center was intended to be built on the site. This center was meant to connect between Jaffa and Tel Aviv, while forming a connection to the old business center in the Ahuzat Bayit area. The program included the construction of high-rise office buildings, interchanges, and wide roads. To manage the project, the government-municipal company Ahuzat Hahof was established in 1963. This company was also responsible for demolishing Manshiya homes and clearing the site.

“The Manshiya area,” the planners wrote, “seems to have been intended from the very start to serve as a new center for the city.” However, several residents who were unaware of this plan found it hard to leave their small homes facing the sea. The Municipality’s decision to freeze all construction in the neighborhood and the entire area, was the beginning of the process that would end in its complete erasure—by ceasing to maintain the remaining structures, the Municipality facilitated its becoming a junk yard.9

The residents were uprooted twice over the years. In 1948—the Arab residents, and in the 1960s and 70s, the Jewish residents.

Although no concrete plan was authorized (with the exception of the 1200 Plan that froze development in the entire southern part of the city), toward the end of the 1960s, the evacuation of the Manshiya residents was completed, and the demolition of the houses began. The demolition contractors did not clear the construction waste, but rather shoveled it to the nearest possible location—the sea. Soon huge amounts of construction waste accumulated on the beach. Although the Municipality had begun to clear the waste, it soon became apparent that the cost of its removal was very high and that covering it with dirt was a far more affordable option. As a result, the local authorities decided to create a park—Park Charles Clore—including grass lawns upon the construction waste on the stretch of land that had been dried out by the ruins.

Despite the efforts to develop the city center, only a handful of new buildings were erected, and the city center remained in the vicinity of the northern section of Herzl Street until the 1990s when a new metropolitan business center was established to the east of Netivei Ayalon, in the area of the Ramat Gan diamond exchange, and other office buildings were built throughout the city.

Today, the Tel Aviv Municipality endeavors to transform the Manshiya area into a mixture of hotels and residential buildings. In the meantime, the site continues to accommodate parking lots managed by Ahuzat Hof—the same company that was established with the purpose of building the “City.”

As mentioned, the destruction of the Dolphinarium structure was completed recently. Pedestrians on the promenade who pass by the heap of its ruins, are unaware that the path they are walking upon was in fact built upon an even larger pile of ruins of an earlier urban stratum.

One can attempt to define the Manshiya neighborhood site as an embarrassment zone, whose traumas of uprooting and destruction were not attended to and were deliberately made to be forgotten. It is possible, therefore, that this lack of attention continues to prevent Manshiya’s development and reconstitution as a place in which to conduct normal urban life.

*Haifa: Wadi Salib*

Wadi Salib (ادي الصليب, in Arabic; transliteration: Wadi Eltzalib) is a neighborhood in downtown Haifa, located on the lower northeastern slope of Mount Carmel. It borders with the Hadar and Nahala neighborhoods on its south side, Hadar on the west, Arad El-Yahud on the southeast, the railway and Kiryat Hamemshala (government quarter) on the north, and Hativat Golani Street and Palim Boulevard on its northeastern side. Most of the neighborhood has not been occupied for decades, however its houses and history have been the focus and interest of researchers, artists, and planners for many years.11

Wadi Salib was built as an Arab neighborhood in downtown Haifa in the early 1920s. Over the years, the neighborhood’s inhabitants were uprooted twice, and most of its homes were destroyed or sealed.

Since its last evacuation against the background of the Wadi Salib Riots over forty years ago, the neighborhood has suffered from neglect and disregard on part of the establishment. Today, the few remaining original homes stand empty and are sealed with concrete and bricks.

Like in many historical cities, in Haifa the first neighborhoods were built outside the old city at the end of the 19th century. Most of the Wadi Salib neighborhood was built in the early 1900s parallel to the construction of the Hejaz railway station (“Valley Railroad”), which in turn, accelerated the development of Haifa’s port and industry. As a result, people responding to the growing need for laborers began flowing to the area.

The neighborhood’s main road, Omar Al-Hatab, crossed the valley, and small houses were built on both sides of the street, to which larger homes were added at a later stage. A network of staircases was built to connect the neighborhood’s upper and lower areas and to connect the neighborhood with the more elevated parts of the city. The proximity to the railway station, seaport, and new industrial zone contributed significantly to the neighborhood’s development, and in 1940 there were already 10,000 residents living there.12

Most of the neighborhood’s residents were Muslim Arabs, while Jewish communities developed in the adjacent spaces, for instance, Hadar, which is located immediately above Wadi Salib. Wadi Salib continued to expand parallel to the development of the entire city of Haifa, however, in terms of infrastructure, it was considered one of the most disadvantaged neighborhoods in the city.

In accordance with the UN resolution of November 1947, Haifa, which at the time was a mixed city, was destined to become part of the future Jewish state. The resolution ignited a series of nationalist oriented confrontations, which intensified up to April 1948. During this time, Haifa’s Arab population decreased dramatically and many Arab neighborhoods, such as Chalisa, Abbas, and Wadi Salib, were deserted.

Wadi Salib was considered a poor neighborhood that was constructed haphazardly, without planning or program, with narrow roads, poor sanitation, and sub-human living conditions—without ventilation, and water and sewage infrastructures.13 The neighborhood was not badly affected by the 1948 War; however, as a result of the war, the condition of most of the homes deteriorated even more.

In the months following the surrender of Haifa’s Arabs, as a result of a shortage in housing for the multitudes of Jewish refugees from Europe, the neighborhood’s deserted homes were populated by Jewish immigrants, mainly from North Africa. In fact, these were immigrants who, given the lack of housing solutions upon their arrival, illegally occupied makeshift housing in “abandoned properties,”13 that is, neighborhoods, including Wadi Salib, that had been deserted by their Arab population during the bloody clashes between Arabs and Jews in 1948, including Wadi Salib. Thus, in the 1950s, when its population peaked with some 24,000 residents—refugees and destitute new immigrants—conditions in Wadi Salib continued to deteriorate.14

The physical proximity to the more established neighborhoods up the mountain, which were inhabited mainly by European Jews, exposed the residents of Wadi Salib to significant social gaps between the Arab and Jewish neighborhoods, and in turn, cultivated a growing sense of ethnical discrimination and deprivation.15 In 1959, a widespread ethnic protest, known as the “Wadi Salib riots,” was sparked when police confronted, then shot, porter Yaacov Elkarif—a Jewish immigrant from North Africa. The protest led to demonstrations of solidarity in communities of North African (Mizrahi) Jews, and became a symbol of their struggle against the discrimination and oppression of the ruling Ashkenazi establishment.

The conclusions of the government’s inquiry into the Wadi Salib uprising pointed to the inhuman living conditions in the neighborhood and thereby ruled: “This neighborhood has no right to exist in a modern city such as Haifa,” and to prevent future uprisings, it should be evacuated and demolished.13

The evacuation and destruction began in 1962, and over the next decade, most of the houses were demolished, while the few that were salvaged were sealed with cement and bricks to prevent the invasion of former residents, who in the meantime had been relocated and hoped to return to their homes in the wadi.

In the case of Wadi Salib, we once again observe the essence of repetition compulsion: what was destroyed once will be destroyed again. An unwanted memory for which every attempt at erasure has been made, will appear again and again in the form of an unexpected guest, a type of refugee of memory.

At the beginning of the 1960s, the Ministry of Housing and the Haifa Municipality decided to evacuate the city’s deprived neighborhoods. In 1962, the Shakmona company began the evacuation process—in the framework of which, over the following ten years, 1878 families were evacuated from Wadi Salib and most of the houses were destroyed, except for a handful of large houses that while rescued for their size, were sealed to prevent the invasion of North African residents who in the meantime had been relocated to housing projects and who strived to return to their homes in Wadi Salib.

Not only was this specific attempt to reduce the population’s distress unsatisfactory, it also did not present a solution to the challenging issue of the “integration of exiles” and the possibility of cultural pluralism in the Israeli society13:

As long as the Mizrachi Jews, who were directed toward or invaded the “abandoned” dwellings, served the needs of the state, they remained in place. However, settlers in the process of colonialization have stipulated and unstable rights, as long as they are needed, when the frontier is near and the natives threaten. When the frontier becomes an attractive center of the Jewish city, the honeyed trap of colonialization stops, and those who enjoyed it in its margins can be expelled. In other words, not the residents of Ramat Aviv and Talbiya, but the residents of Wadi Salib and Kfar Shalem.16

In 1968, the Ministry of Housing conducted a survey regarding the neighborhood’s future. The survey concluded, without providing explanations or proof, that the best alternative for Wadi Salib is to transform its ruins into an artist colony that would include artist residents, galleries, small shops, and cafes, which would be housed in the old surviving buildings. Most of the territory was designated to be a public park.17 This concept of transforming Arab houses and neighborhoods into picturesque artist colonies was a common solution in Israel, which at the time, was preoccupied with the frantic and undiscerning destruction and construction endeavor of the 1950s and 60s. This phenomenon occurred in places from which residents had been evacuated, such as old Jaffa, Ein Hud, and the Arab quarters in Zafed and Beer Sheva.

The plan to establish an artist colony on the Wadi Salib site was approved, and some years later, the plan for the park was approved as well. In the planning guidelines attention was paid to the neighborhood’s history, however, in the drawings one notices that the historical influence was expressed mainly in the form of imitating “local” aesthetic elements (stone walls, arches, wooden roof racks, and red roof tiles). In fact, the reconstructed legacy was manifested as orientalist ornamentation for the benefit of the imagined artists’ population.

Such neighborhoods, which were subject to “attempted conversion,” were stripped of their past legacy and authentic identity. The approach taken toward these neighborhoods, like toward Mediterranean ornaments or Ottoman villages, completely ignored their Palestinian identity and denied their original inhabitants the right to return to them. High maintenance costs, the substantial investment necessary for the park’s development and the buildings’ restoration, and the relatively low value of the land, led to the conclusion that the plan for an artist colony in Wadi Salib was financially unfeasible.18

Given that the plan was not executed, the site remained abandoned and neglected. The condition of the abandoned houses continued to deteriorate, and the neighborhood became a “black hole,” an empty area, a neglected embarrassment zone in the heart of Haifa’s urban tapestry. Moreover, the staircases, which in the past had served as a link between upper Haifa and the lower region of the city, were destroyed, and the main road that ran through the neighborhood was blocked off and never repaired. The neighborhood’s original designation as a link between the upper and lower parts of the city, was forgotten, and what was executed on the site produced the opposite—detachment between both parts of the city17 at a time when the neighborhoods surrounding it were developed at head-spinning speed. The massive construction of government institution buildings, which were built on the edges of the neighborhood, was also conducted without any affinity with the past legacy but rather with blatant disregard for the past.

Since 1948, Wadi Salib has remained partly destroyed, while other neighborhoods and districts in the area developed at a dizzying pace. The accelerated development around Wadi Salib only emphasized its vacuity and alienation. Real estate trends, the rise in housing costs, and the swelling momentum in construction in Israel, led to a situation in which, due to their low price, neglected municipal properties like Wadi Salib became coveted real estate sites for new building initiatives. Thus, the grandiose housing projects, such as a 180-unit residential tower, that are currently in construction on the site lack any affinity with its historical context and legacy. Projects like these will neither help rehabilitate the area’s distress or rejuvenate the neighborhood, but will rather exacerbate its exclusion and isolation from the urban fabric surrounding it.17

Two traumas are associated with Wadi Salib—one from 1948 and one from 1959. Architectural plans for this contentious site aspired to “treat” its inherent traumas by way of erasing history and creating a single new urban narrative, while in fact, Wadi Salib remained in a state of neglect for many decades.

The current effort is aimed at reviving the memory of Wadi Salib as a Muslim Arab neighborhood in the mixed city of Haifa in the days of the Ottoman rule and British mandate, an existence that was almost completely disregarded in the public discourse following the riots of 1959. This “memory work” needs to therefore, to compare the historical process and slowly rewind it in order to observe the previous inhabitants who, although having disappeared as one, continue to cast a shadow on the city, which, with the blink of an eye, became a Hebrew city. This effort has a distinctive ethical dimension, and it has been the focus of a wave of research in the past years conducted by Israeli (and naturally, Palestinian) scholars who attempt to write the lost history of the natives that were largely excluded from the Zionist historiography. The illusion of the “mixed” city of the Mandate, which in fact contained a dualistic and segregationist society, points to the inherent inferiority of the Arab society and to the central role of the British in its collapse, and discloses the Jews’ initial embarrassment and shock in face of the harrowing images of escape, refugees, and looting—embarrassment and shock that were soon replaced by vigorous action taken to turn Haifa into a Jewish city based on utilitarian geo-political considerations. Weiss describes the mechanisms and practices that legitimized the dramatic change in the neighborhood’s demographics and its permanent status, while perpetuating the presence of the ghosts of former residents: “Their hidden [...] footsteps remained entrenched as absence. The term ‘absentee properties’ fossilized them and prevented their disappearance. The property of the previous residents remains ‘abandoned,’ even when it is inhabited by new residents.”19

The plan to preserve part of the neighborhood homes and turn them into an artist colony, can be seen as an attempt to cope with the traumas. It seems as if the planners were familiar with its past and legacy. However, the stakeholders behind the plan sought to improve the site’s image by burying the traumas under the renovated houses and spacious park, and by filling it with coerced content, incompatible with the artist colony context. One can say then, that in the case of Wadi Salib as well, there was no genuine attempt to deal with the trauma, and instead it was ignored.

Considering that over the years they were repudiated and concealed, the traumas of Manshiya and Wadi Salib were never treated. Consequently, although the memories were repressed, they continue to present distinctive visible traces in the field given that both Manshiya and Wadi Salib—two neighborhoods located at the heart of big developed cities—remained frozen in time as embarrassment zones, detached from the broad urban context, and perpetually saturated with sadness and shame.17 One can say, therefore, that Manshiya and Wadi Salib are post-traumatic neighborhoods—“embarrassment zones.” Any prior attempt to treat these neighborhoods failed. It is possible that defining them as embarrassment zones and treating them with psychoanalytical and conservation tools will facilitate their reinstatement as functional organic parts of the city.

*Jerusalem: Talbiya*

This neighborhood is the most complex in terms of researching the relationship between trauma and architecture, given its deceptive appearance and the social-economic status of its residents, both past and current.

Today, Talbiya is considered, as it was when it was established in the 1920s, a wealthy and exclusive neighborhood, which includes grand homes, the Jerusalem Theater, the President’s formal residence, the Van Leer Institute, The Psychoanalytical Society House, Hansen House, and many embassies and consulates.

The origin of the name Talbiya is debatable: there are those who claim that it is derived from the name of a Muslin prayer recited in Mecca, and those who believe that it is rooted in the common Arab name *Taleb*.

Most of the neighborhood was built on land owned in the past belonged by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. These lands were known as Nikoforia, after the priest Nikoforus Pataesis, who had purchased them from residents of the surrounding villages. At the end of World War I, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate encountered financial difficulties after the waves of Russian pilgrimages to the Land of Israel stopped as a result of the Russian Revolution.

In the 1930s, the Patriarchate began selling its lands in Talbiya to Christian Arabs of a high socio-economic status, officials of the British Mandate, entrepreneurs, and businessmen. The houses in the neighborhood were built in an eclectic local style featuring various architectural elements. Large gardens were planted around them, most of which still exist.20 The family homes are planned mainly according to the principle of a large central area that functions as a living room, parlor, or reception room; the bedrooms are situated on both sides of the central area; and the kitchen and bathrooms are located at the back of the house.

A few Jews lived in Talbiya, including Reuven Maas, Martin Buber, and the author Yaacov Yehoshua, who documented the neighborhood.

During the War of Independence, the neighborhood was occupied by Hagana forces. Respectable Jewish families, designated to work in government institutions in the capital of the new State of Israel, were accommodated in the houses from which the Arabs had been evacuated.

Two categories of dwellers in abandoned Palestinian properties in post-Independence War West Jerusalem’s neighborhoods materialized: new immigrants mostly from Mizrahi origin, who were housed in the abandoned Arab villages far from the city center, and the elite echelon of establishment officials, judges, politicians, and those closely associated with the government, who were given elegant homes in prestigious neighborhoods, including Talbiya. It is not surprising that only the provision of homes to the latter was conducted through legal channels and authorization, while the immigrants’ illegal invader status was maintained even decades after they received their homes them from the state.21

In the early 1960s, contractors identified the potential embodied in the neighborhood and began purchasing the rights to build on the roofs of part of the homes, and building additional floors. These additions’ incongruity are conspicuous throughout the area, and constitute a type of “slips of the pen” that both preserves and perpetuates the “enemy legacy.”

There are various plans in Jerusalem that refer to conservation in Talbiya. However, it is necessary to address the nature of this “conservation.” Who were the “conservationists,” what did they choose to “conserve,” and more importantly, what did they choose not to conserve?

Founded in 1951, the Name Committee urged the Jerusalem Municipality to “Remove Abu-Tor! And Baka! And the German Colony (!!) and Katamon” throughout the decade. The committee rejected the Municipality’s clarification that it named streets, not neighborhoods, and that it had not yet managed to find names for all of the places requiring Hebrew names. “In my opinion, it is desirable that every generation be aware that there was a non-Jewish period in Jerusalem before and that it is their responsibility to preserve Jewish Jerusalem so that its spirit is not assimilated once again,” deputy mayor Yaakobi attempted to persuade in 1957. A year later, in the framework of the celebrations of Israel’s tenth anniversary, the neighborhoods new names were launched: Musrara became Morasha, Katamon became Gonen, Baka became Geulim, the German and Greek colonies became Emek Refaim, Abu Tor was named Givat Hananya, and Talbiya, Komemiut. The street names in Talbiya were also changed and called after Jewish historians (Zvi Gertz, Shmuel Klein) and Jewish newspapers from the 19th century (Hatzfira, Hamagid, Hamelitz). The name of the main road was changed from Haamir Abdallah to Jabotinsky Street.

Given both the growing ambition to populate Jerusalem with Jews and the increasing number of immigrants, in the 1950s and 60s, several neighborhoods were built on empty lots in Talbiya: the neighborhood for discharged soldiers on Alkalay Street, the journalists’ neighborhood on Pinsker Street, and the neighborhood for Hagana personnel on Jabotinsky Street.22 Unlike other neighborhoods in Israel, these were built to a high standard, however without any consideration of the urban, cultural, and architectural context and the architectural culture of the neighborhood’s homes.

Today, the housing projects in Talbiya are designated for destruction in the framework of an incentivized government policy and new high-rise apartment buildings are planned to be built in their place. Will the values of the neighborhood be taken into consideration by the planners?

*Talbiya: Dimitri Hanna House*

The Dimitri Hanna House was built by Dimitri Hanna, a Greek Orthodox Christian Palestinian. Hanna and his family became refugees during the 1948 War. The house’s Palestinian past was almost completely erased from the engineering records of the Jerusalem Municipality. The house was purchased by the Israel Psychoanalytical Society in the 1960s.

The Palestinian Psychoanalytical Society was founded by Max Eitingon and other analysts in 1933.

Upon entering the house today, one notices features for which time has stood still: the German Lutheran furniture, straight, ornament-free lines, armchairs that look like they were brought from the Berliner Zimmer, German books, which most probably remained unopened for decades, on bookshelves. There are rooms frozen in time, as time is often frozen in the traumatic areas of the mind. As if there, time ticks in another clock.

Based on this interior, one can assume that Eitingon and his colleagues continued to conduct their daily affairs as if they themselves were not Jewish refugees expelled from their countries. They turned Jerusalem into an extension of Berlin and Vienna, as Eran Rolnick argues in *Ossei Hanefashot*, “Turning the Jerusalem institute into an offspring of the Berlin institute was of great importance for both the therapists and the patients. They felt as if they had succeeded in creating a microcosmos of Berlin, which would ease their acclimation in the new place.”23 Did they eventually become integrated in the country and feel a part of it? Elsewhere Eran writes, “Also German-speaking analysts who immigrated to Palestine refused to consider themselves refugees.”23 Perhaps, if we may propose an assumption, the furniture and language are a representation of the trauma of the expulsion which was not spoken of and certainly not internalized, as well as representations of a continued desire to be considered Germans.

In the place where traditionally a portrait of the proprietor hung—the patriarch to whose life achievements the central space is dedicated—today there is a portrait of Freud, gazing or perhaps supervising what is going on, as a kind of testimony to the fact that the original landlord was replaced by a “new” master. This is disturbing evidence of the new and strange content poured into the very distinctive mold of the 19th century Arab bourgeoisie.

Therefore, one can assume that the Palestinian house with the unfinished ornamentation on its facade and the German furniture in the rooms are slip of the pen through which it would be appropriate to read the “textbook” of the unspoken traumas. We cannot ignore the questions that arise in face of these details: what caused the stonemason/craftsman to leave his work unfinished, particularly on the facade which is intended to impress. Did he encounter financial problems? Or perhaps political events forced him to leave?

In this way what is not remembered is reconstructed over and over again.

Perhaps the illusion which is at the foundation of the melting pot ideal, that the past can be erased is somehow manifested in the Psychoanalytical Society as a means to obscure the contradiction between two aspects of identity, two pasts: the Holocaust and the violent elements related to the War of Independence.

On February 16, 2019, a resolution was passed by the vast majority of members of the Israel Psychoanalytic Society to fix a plaque on the entrance to the house engraved with the words: This House was built by Dimitri Hanna.

In August 2019, the sign was erased by spray paint. A file was opened at the locale police station. The illusion of erasure continues.

Conclusion: Exiting the Labyrinth

Deep inside the spheres of the Israeli, and perhaps also Jewish, ethos, there is this saying: Do not wash your dirty laundry in public. The kibbutzim were frontrunners in adopting the culture of concealment. But what happens to laundry that cannot be cleaned? What happens to laundry soiled by traumatic stains? Will we hide it in the bottom of the closet? Will we wear it as if it is snow-white clean?

The interaction between architecture and psychoanalysis propagates many challenges related to different languages, methods of inquiry, and the difference between the concrete house/home (in its double meaning) and the symbolic home. However, as we attempted to demonstrate in this paper, the traumatic space is one that is not only a potential space for common research, but is also necessary for our understanding of the dynamics of trauma and its physical manifestations as illustrated in the sad stories of the kibbutz dining halls, Manshiya, Wadi Salib, and Talbiya.

Exiting the labyrinth entails an open, and sometimes painful, dialogue with those traumatic areas, in order to create a disharmonious historical continuity, and perhaps an architectural continuity as well, full of paradoxes and contradictions, as a way to enable learning and development.

Therefore, in dealing with embarrassment zones, reading the space as a traumatic space is essential; in combination with conservation tools based on the site’s historical context, values, and broad cultural significance, it is possible to try and “cure” the place, and perhaps in this way, “exit the labyrinth.”

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