

Contested Landscape and the Spirit of Place, the Case of Olive Trees and Urban Neighborhood in Israel

Irit Amit-Cohen

ICOMOS Israel and Department of Geography and Environment, Bar-Ilan University, Israel, amitcoi@mail.biu.ac.il; Fax: 9723 5344430; Tel. 9728 9436375

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Abstract

Cultural Heritage and Cultural Landscape are a set of human products that reflect the society needs thoughts and memories. It represents and symbolizes the relationships of power and controls - out of which it has emerged - and the human processes that have transformed and continue to transform them. These transformations create new cultural landscapes that often hide the processes that have made them – political, social, cultural, ideological and economic. The purpose of this lecture is to analyze a contested geographical environment, where two cultures compete over land and its cultural heritage and therefore each of them has its own interpretations: the Jewish Zionist culture and the Arab Moslem culture. The aim is to define the landscape – its spirit and its representation - that emerges from these competitions and disputes; to characterize it; to analyze its symbols and its uses – mainly for the purpose of formation and construction of identities.

1. Preface

Cultural landscapes developed in a geographical area for the needs of a specific community may undergo a change and become icons. In other words, they will not only reflect customs, events and ideology of the community, but in their appearances they will represent values and messages – to the in-group as well as to others. These values and messages will thus signify belonging to a group as well testify to ownership of the territory by the group. In the words of Jean Gottmann: "The abstract strength of an existing order is rooted in the spirit of the nation and its place or of the group of nations involved and their space [...]. What it signifies here is a psychological attitude resulting from a combination of actual events with beliefs deeply rooted in the peoples' mind. [...] These symbols are many and varied. A national iconography usually stops at a boundary; the frontier line is in grave danger when such is not the case." According to Gottmann – observing the landscape is a matter of subjective reference. This reference stems from an emotional attitude that society develops towards landscapes, sites and places (Gottmann 1952).

The emotional attitude to cultural landscapes is shaped by historical events, influential figures, religious and national characteristics and fashion effects. Emotional attitudes to places and landscapes can be strengthened by education directed by the country leaders but also by interested bodies, and in as Gottmann claims – the historical factor and local iconography combined to support the establishment of political authority over a certain area (ibid).

A cultural landscape that became an icon will change its status to a symbolic landscape. As such it can be analyzed in different ways - as a text (Duncan 1990; Duncan and Duncan 1988), and according to Terkenli (2001), as a valuable text, or as an irreplaceable archive (Holdsworth, 1997; Ewald, 2001), which reflects the society and its mores at a specific time and place. The role of landscapes in helping to

coagulate community values and reconstruct social identities and local pride for certain groups, while excluding or erasing others was described by many researchers (Cosgrove 1984; Daniels 1993; Duncan 1973; Duncan & Duncan 1988; 2004; Duncan & Lamber, 2002; Lowental 1991; Rose 1995). Another possibility is to view the cultural landscape as a cultural product; a consumer product which like any other economic or industrial product, undergoes refinement and improvement. Rowntree and Conkey developed this approach and claimed in 1980 that the cultural-symbolic landscape does not reflect a social structure but is an inseparable part of society, its landscapes and products (Rowntree and Conkey 1980).

Yet another way of examining the formation process of symbolic landscapes would be to analyze the changes according to four criteria: **memory** – historical cultural and heritage research; **commemoration** - the process that transforms the cultural landscape into a symbolic landscape - involving classification and categorization of the landscapes and choosing the values and messages that the population and those representing it want to preserve; **representation and modeling** - the means chosen to represent memory and its messages; **purposes and functions**. These four components - memory, commemoration, representation and functions – occupy a significant place in the formation of the society's identity as expressed and reflected in the symbolic landscape. Choosing the commemoration, the presentation topics and how to "use" a symbolic landscape or a cultural heritage site almost always arouses broad public interest with opposing ideologies attempting to persuade each other. Perhaps more than any other cultural phenomenon, these attempts reflect the atmosphere of the era, its conflicts and sensitivities as well as the political and national interests of the various groups.

The purpose of this paper is to present the four components forming the cultural-symbolic landscape and examine their expression in a contested geographical environment. To examine this phenomenon, I have chosen **two geographical localities in Israel** containing cultural heritage sites and cultural landscapes that have become symbolic. Prominent in these environments, is an encounter between two societies: Israeli and Arab, both with a culture of memory, heritage and myths encompassing the three components: memory, commemoration and representation. The first such environment is an urban area, which contains two very dominant landscapes adjoining each other – a new commercial and business center alongside historical remnants – a mosque and an old building which became a historical museum. This area and the commercial project are known as 'Manshiya', the name of the old Arab neighborhood. The second environment is an agricultural area planted with olive trees which has a contested significance for the different cultural societies.

2. Memory, commemoration and representation – theoretical background

Heritage and memory serve two primary functions – to supply the continuity from the past to the present, to represent the culture, and thus, to create a self identity (Schwartz, 1982). At the same time, memory and heritage are not permanent; they assume different forms and are shaped according to the mood of the time. Each memory begins as an intimate historical story, but amended due to constraints of time and space, then additional layers are added, "a mosaic of personal memories that are distinct from one another" (Ohana and Wistrich 1996, 27) and it finally becomes a collective memory, part of the identity of the social group – whether small or large. To preserve its memory, the group needs to resort to commemorative activity. Such activity is vital for consolidating a social-cultural identity. Commemoration combines

social, cultural, political, ceremonial and artistic activities constituting various representative expressions. These can be an original cultural landscape, a carefully designed artificial cultural landscape with ceremonial and textual components. The choice of the landscape and its representation, the filtering and the caution exercised in their selection, are designed to guarantee the survival of the ethos within local and national memory. The representative function chosen for these means and the cultural landscapes is what transforms them into intermediaries of memory. These intermediaries include tombstones, monuments, sculptures, ceremonies, memorial days and holidays, street names and signs, and symbols, historical structures slated for preservation, gardens, as well as natural or cultural landscapes. Historical events and figures are often connected to many of these 'intermediary agents'. Over time, they were sanctified, becoming a focal point of ritual (Lissofsky 2004).

Following this approach, a research involving memory and heritage, commemoration and representation, can be divided into three discussion groups: 1. Sets of memory and the links between them which in turn form the basis for Classifying subjects worthy of commemoration. 2. The form of their representation, which presents the choice of Commemoration landscapes. 3. The cultural heritage landscapes, their purpose and function.

3. Symbolic landscapes – purpose and function

Often the functions of the cultural-symbolic landscape expand and the landscape evolves into vicinity that meets contemporary needs. Such development stems from the social-cultural potential of the cultural heritage landscape and site with their historical subject and design providing added value which contributes to the economic development of the sites and their significance. Expansion of the functions of cultural sites sometimes leads to a situation where sites adopted by the larger community change their status by being perceived in the community consciousness as active landscapes rather than just symbolic sites.

The expanded designation of cultural heritage sites and symbolic cultural landscapes can be divided into three:

- The strengthening of communal identity, both on the local and the national levels (Kamen 1977; Troyansky, 1994, Ashworth 1994).
- Economic development adjacent to the site that reinforces memory (vacation and leisure, assembly site, educational center) (Newcomb, 1979; Ashworth & Larkham, 1994).
- Advancing power and vested interests (Tudor, 1972; Cohen, 1989; Young, 1990; Zerubavel, 1994).

Since the 1948 Israeli war of independence, these three aspects have substantially affected the landscape of Israel.

4. A Contested Landscape in Israel: Authentic-Historical Remains in an Urban Area and a Landscape of Olive Trees in a Rural Area

Contested landscapes can be created in two ways:

1. A common environment for both societies within which each group has its own separate cultural-symbolic landscape. Each group thus possesses the territory of these symbolic landscapes.
2. An environment containing a joint cultural landscape for both societies, but to which each society ascribes different significance and purpose.

When an environment is contested or when there is a struggle between two groups with each group claiming ownership of the area, a struggle also ensues between the

different icons of the groups. In the event of one group taking over the contested area, the result may well be a deletion of the symbols and icons of the group evicted from the disputed territory.

The geographical area called the Land of Israel by the Jews and officially named Palestine during the British Mandate (1918-1948), was populated by two principal religious-ethnic groups: Jews and Arabs. All residents of this territory – Jews as well as Arabs - were Palestinians, i.e., residents of Palestine under the rule of the British Mandate. Each society developed its environs while shaping its unique symbols and iconography. Jewish society relied on symbols and icons about 3000 years old, some of these within the residential environment of the Arab population. Added to these were the icons of Zionist settlements, which began in the 1880s and were concentrated in the Jewish territory. The decision of the United Nations on November 29, 1947 to partition Palestine into two states – Jewish and Arab – was rejected by the Arabs who launched a war to thwart the partition. This war, which ended with ceasefire agreements signed in the summer of 1949, left some Jewish areas in the hands of the Arabs and some Arab areas in the hands of the Jews.

The Jewish areas taken over by the Arabs were emptied of all their Jewish residents – some murdered and some exiled. This happened to the residents of the Jewish Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem, residents of the Gush Etzion settlements, the residents of Beit HaArava near the Dead Sea, as well as others. Arab rule erased almost every vestige of Jewish identity in its territory. All the old synagogues in the Old City of Jerusalem were destroyed, the tombstones in the old Jewish cemetery on Mount Olives were uprooted and Jewish settlements were razed to the ground.

In the Arab areas taken over by the state of Israel in the same war, various processes occurred. Some areas were abandoned by their residents, with the encouragement of the Arab leaders in the unfulfilled hope of returning after the anticipated Arab victory; some fled or were chased out by the Israeli army, while some remained where they were under Israeli rule. Wherever Arabs remained under Israeli rule, their icons remained as well. Abandoned places usually lost their symbols, although in some instances, the religious structures – the mosques – remained untouched, even if there were no worshippers.

There are many researches devoted considerable attention to the deletion of Arab and Jewish icons and Arab and Jewish cultural heritage and cultural-symbolic landscapes. A good example are the research of Azaryahu and Golan (2001, Levine (2004), Yacobi (2003) and Shai (2002). The latest analyzed an initiative adopted by the Israel Land Administration (ILA) to demolish uninhabited houses in abandoned villages in Israel in the years 1965-1967.

Since the summer of 1967, the Jewish areas and Arab areas, their symbols and icons are once again in contact.

5. 'Manshiya Project' in Tel-Aviv-Jaffa: History, Tradition, Memory and Commemoration

History - Until the year 1948, the Arab neighborhood of Manshiya was situated between the old Arab city of Jaffa and the new urban Israeli settlement of Tel Aviv. The neighborhood was established in 1870s following the razing of the old Jaffa city wall by the Turkish authorities and development of new neighborhoods – for both Arabs and Jews – outside the old city. At the end of the 19th century some Jewish families settled in Manshiya, some of them quite famous (such as the Amzalak family, entrepreneurs and public activists within the Jewish community in Jaffa (see Glass and Kark 1991, 161-163). In 1916 the Ottoman rulers built a mosque at the

northern end of Manshiya (Hasan Bek Mosque). On November 29, 1947, after the UN decision to partition Palestine into two states, the Arabs of Manshiya began to fire toward the southern Jewish neighborhoods of Tel Aviv. According to the partition plan, Jaffa was to be part of the Arab state. In order to prevent this from happening, the "Irgun Tzvai Leumi – Etzel" a nationalistic military organization, with a paramilitary force that operated against both the British and Arabs to win Jewish sovereignty, decided to conquer Jaffa and the neighborhoods along the seashore, between Jaffa and Tel Aviv. On April 27, 1948, the neighborhood of Manshiya was taken, followed by conquest of Jaffa.

On May 12, a delegation of distinguished Arabs arrived at the Hagana (the Israel Defense Forces) headquarters and following negotiations, signed surrender agreement. On May 13, 1948, the British left Jaffa and in 1950, Tel Aviv and Jaffa became one city, renamed Tel-Aviv - Jaffa. The Arabs of Manshiya fled, their houses were damaged, and Jewish immigrants were settled in the abandoned houses. The neighborhood deteriorated and became part of the Tel-Aviv – Jaffa southern slums.

Commemoration, Representation and functions - In 1951, the city leaders planned to establish a memorial on the Manshiya site for soldiers who fell in the battle for Jaffa. The memorial site was meant to tell the story of the two cities - Tel Aviv and Jaffa - as it had transpired in the War of Independence (Azaryahu 1993) rather than the national story (a memorial relating the national story was planned to be erected in city of Tel Aviv). However, the memorial on the Jaffa Tel Aviv border was never erected. Over the years, the houses of Manshiya were destroyed except for two authentic remains, which dominated the landscape – the village mosque and a house on whose ruins the Etzel Museum was built.

The exhibit in the museum does not present the history of the neighborhood or that of Jaffa and Tel Aviv. It rather describes the activities of Etzel in the War of Independence from November 29, 1947 until its dismantling on September 22, 1948. In September 1948, Etzel was incorporated into the Israel Defense Forces. A room in the Etzel Museum commemorates the history of the organization, honors the liberators of Jaffa, (the organization existed for 17 years) as well as an exhibition, which includes historical documents, photographs, maps and movies – describing the Etzel organization and the battle to liberate Jaffa.

In the mid-70s, the Tel-Aviv-Jaffa municipality evacuated 3,100 residents, mostly Jews who immigrated to Israel in the 1950s, from the old Manshiya neighborhood and built a park and a business center on 600 dunams (60 hectares). Only the mosque and the museum were left untouched. The business center is part of the large Manshiya Project meant to **represent** the modern developing city in contrast to Old Jaffa. Ultimately, however, the large project was not approved by the regional planning authorities, although part of it was built. During the 1980s, the Tel-Aviv – Jaffa planning authorities planned to convert the Hasan Bek mosque into tourist attraction as part of the new image of the business center. Public objections prevented the plan, but the adjoining tall modern buildings overshadow the mosque and it is difficult to discern the old building from afar. In contrast, the museum remained an isolated island in the large park on the seashore; a park which is part of the open urban spaces of Tel Aviv-Jaffa. The area where the two remnants are located remains the border where Tel Aviv ends and Jaffa begins.

6. The Olive Tree

History, Heritage, Commemoration and Functions - Different rituals, messages and values of the two societies – Israeli and Arab – surround the olive tree, a symbolic feature in many cultures. An example can be seen in Thomas L. Friedman's book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, 2000. The tree plays an important role as an Arab-Jewish icon in that it is common to both cultures. However, over time, it has acquired different meanings. And in today's Israeli reality, it represents different and even opposing values in the two cultures.

The Israeli olive tree is a relatively short tree, up to six meters high, evergreen and long lived. The tree is distinguished by its thick gnarled trunk and silvery-green leaves and is very prominent in the Mediterranean flora. Its appearance arouses interest and easily explains its sacred status in the various communities. It is often planted – alone or in a grove – next to the grave of a righteous or a holy person. The tree has deep roots and can thus grow almost anywhere. It quickly takes root in the mountain slopes and rocky areas of the Galilee. Frequently, when natural and manmade disasters injure or destroy orchards and forests, the olive tree remains standing.

There are a few olive trees in Israel, in the Galilee, dating from the Roman period, two thousand years ago; and there is also testimony that olives were cultivated in the Land of Israel and in Syria more than six thousand years ago. The old trees become hollow inside as they age. These characteristics make the olive tree unique and also explain its values: its deep roots, hopes, aspiration for peace as well as providing security, light, beauty and health, a declaration of control and victory and so on and on. Nations, states, cultures and religions - all have utilized the olive tree, its branches and leaves, to present their messages, and so there are many visual symbols which give expression to the tree, its branches and leaves.

The olive tree occupies an important place in Jewish tradition. It is one of the seven species that Eretz Israel is blessed with – 'a land of olive oil and honey' (Deuteronomy 8:8). One can learn about the status and significance of the olive tree from many sources. One is the parable of Yotam (Judges 9:8-10) "The trees went out to anoint a king over them; and they said to the olive tree, reign over us. But the olive tree said to them, Should I leave my fatness, with which by me they honor God and man, and go to hold sway over the trees?" The olive tree symbolizes fertility and rootedness: "Thy children like olive plants round about thy table" (Psalms 128:3) and its economic importance is emphasized in a harsh reproof: "Thou shalt have olive trees throughout all thy borders, but thou shalt not anoint thyself with the oil for thy olive shall cast its fruit" (Deuteronomy 28:40). The olive is a basic agricultural product (Babylonian Talmud, Brachot, 41, a). Many laws from the areas of agriculture and Jewish ritual are connected with the olive and its oil. Olive oil is the best of oils and is thus used for religious ritual.

The connection between the olive branch and the striving for peace originates in the story of Jonah and the olive leaf and the story of Noah and the ark (Genesis 8:11). The olive branch also had a great influence on Zionist renewal. The branch appears as the symbol of the state of Israel (Mishory, 2000, 139-164) and in the symbols of the IDF (Israel Defense Force) and represents the striving for peace and security: in the IDF emblem the olive branch embraces the sword. The olive tree does not appear in national symbols only. It also appears in paintings, shields of local authorities, and in names of settlements. Its appearance in the local Jewish space, especially the Zionist space, symbolizes the hope for survival and the ability to cope with the difficulties of settlement.

The striving for peace and the relationship to the olive branches as symbols of peace are also expressed in international symbols. Among these symbols, the UN symbol stands out with its double motifs: the map of the world and the two olive branches next to it. The symbol expresses the UN's aspiration of spreading peace throughout the world.

In Christian tradition as well, the olive – the tree, its branches and fruit – has a symbolic meaning (for example, Christian tradition identifies the Garden of Oils on the Mount of Olives as the garden in which Jesus walked, surrounded by his students). The olive tree is also important in Muslim tradition. In the Koran, the olive is mentioned six times, as one of the fruits given by Allah. Olive oil is only mentioned once in the chapter which talks about the divine light which will shine in the hearts of the believers.

The hollowness of the olive tree generated one of the legends in Islam: When the prophet Mohammad died, all the trees mourned for him and as a result of all the pain and suffering, their branches fell to the ground. Only the olive tree's branches remained green. The other trees asked the olive tree, "Why aren't you mourning the death of the prophet?" The olive tree answered, "I mourn him greatly, but you wither on the outside and my heart is burnt on the inside".

Despite the importance of the olive tree in both Jewish and Arab cultures, time brought with it many changes. To a great extent, Israeli-Jewish society underwent the processes of secularization, modernization and post-modernization. Today, this society is primarily urban, secular and post-modern. As such, it emphasizes the "Lexus" from the well-known title of Tom Friedman's book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, that is to say, the most up-to-date model of the prestigious car is more important than the symbolic old olive tree. The tree has lost its actual significance and only its symbolic significance remains.

In contrast, in Israeli-Arab society, the olive tree is not only a symbol but is a central component in the life of the village and the life of the community. In many villages the olive tree is an important part of the economic base and the period of the olive picking is the important economic period in village life. The family and its olive trees are deeply connected. The tree connects the villagers to their land and signifies their ownership of the land and its borders.

In the territorial competition between Jews and Arabs over spatial dominance, the olive tree serves as a first degree instrument for expressing Arab ownership of the land. Planting the olive tree is a sign of a border, and its uprooting by Israeli groups – for security purposes – symbolizes the attempt to evict the Arabs from their land, from their territorial rights.

In recent years, the tree symbolizes the aspiration for shared life and coexistence in the same territory in the State of Israel. Every year there is an olive festival; alongside the olive picking are meetings and discussions. The event has two goals: an economic-tourist goal and a social-cultural goal.

7. Interpretation of Landscape: Discussion and Conclusions

The landscape, like a written text, can be interpreted on two levels: the appearance and the image.

The historical museum on the Jaffa - Tel Aviv border displays an architectural encounter of natural building materials from the environment with synthetic building materials – limestone at the base of the building and on the top, glass and metal. The modern-artificial materials grow out of the original natural materials. The building is a landscape relic in the area of contact between Tel Aviv and Jaffa. The foundation of

the building is a remnant of a Jaffa neighborhood, Manshiya, which was erased from the landscape. On this foundation, a new addition takes over, adapted to the needs of a historical museum in a modern city.

The structure that serves the historical museum not only gives expression to the national Jewish-Arab encounter, it also expresses a process of urban renewal. In this process, old relics are ignored and new modern and post-modern structures are preferred, without the historical context and cultural tension.

The mosque, an authentic remnant of the Arab Manshiya neighborhood, is also outside its natural environmental context. Consequently it loses some of its urban and communal relevance and remains solely a monument. The encounter between Jaffa and Tel Aviv as it is described by the landscape remains, also raises historical paradox. Until 1948, Tel Aviv functioned as the core of Zionist settlements in the Land of Israel. As such, it was not a frontier area. Jaffa, was an Arab enclave that bordered the Jewish city. The area of contact between the two cities was the front line during the establishment of the State of Israel. The decision to build the historical museum atop a structure, which remained from the Arab neighborhood, as well as the decision to leave the mosque, as is, was made to document this historical encounter. Over the course of time, alongside the historical encounter, a new urban encounter began to develop in the form of the business center. At the present stage, the historical encounter is already serving as decoration for urban renewal.

The olive tree: branches and leaves of the olive tree are of universal status, symbolizing peace and hope. Contrasting with this universality, we can discern here the cultural differences between Jews and Arabs in respect to the olive tree. In a picture of a Zionist landscape, the olive tree will always appear in the background or adjoining other landscape symbols, such as a water tower, houses, orchards, etc. In a picture of an Arab village, the olive tree will always appear involved with a significant action - olive picking or planting – in order to display ownership of the territory.

An examination of the two landscapes indicates that although the geographical environments are different, the struggle for cultural dominance between Arabs and Jews is the same struggle expressed by the different cultural landscapes. In some instances, the two landscapes may coexist in the same geographical area. In other instances, each community acquired different messages in respect to the same landscape. This approach shows that the cultural heritage and cultural landscape possesses sometimes different and varied facets. Each community chooses for itself the components of the landscape that can be used for its cultural identity and for the messages it wishes to transmit, and uses them to weave a tapestry of its unique cultural landscape. In this weaving process, it ignores and abandons the components that are foreign or do not belong. In this way two cultures can exist side by side in the same area and relate to the same landscape with different interpretations. This shows that one interpretation of the landscape does not of necessity lead to the deligitimization of the other interpretation; it also shows that a definition of "Contested Landscape" can be used to describe an outstanding value of cultural heritage sites or cultural landscapes.

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Curriculum Vitae of Dr. Irit Amit-Cohen (Senior Lecturer)

Research Fields and Specialization: Culture Geography; Historical Geography; Urban Planning; Conservation, Planning and Sustainable Development of Cultural Built Heritage in Rural Area and in Urban Area.; Member of Israel's ICOMOS Council and Israel's Heritage Committee; The head of "School of Preservation, Planning and Development" in Bar Ilan University, Israel.