

When the logic of late capitalism meets the logic of ethno-nationalism: An exhibition review of “Separation”

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ABSTRACT

This review of the “Hafrada” (Separation) exhibition in Israel argues that separation is the territorial manifestation of the confluence between the logic of ethno-national control, associated with practices of ethnic territoriality, and the cultural logic of late capitalism, associated with globalization and supra-national order. Thus, despite the supposed promise of globalization and European unification for minority rights and tolerance, segregation, exclusion and ghettoization remain apparent in contemporary urban life.

In recent decades, cities should have undergone a considerable socio-spatial shift. The promise of globalization, as well as European unification, seemed to guarantee that tolerance, plurality and recognition were meant to converge on the concept of difference. “Difference,” in this sense, acknowledges that population groups differentiated by ethnicity, religion, gender, class and sexual preference have different claims on the city, all the while retaining a “right to the city.” This right should be manifested in urban planning and structure (Sandercock, 2000), which should promise possibilities of complex experiences and engagements beyond their own communitarian boundaries. The logic behind these potential shifts rests on the idea that both globalization and unification expand the volume and significance of migration and foster the emergence of a supra-national order that concerns itself with human and minority rights, cross-border economic activity and the political idiom of multiculturalism.

This new urban pattern is a radical alternative to the social control and suspicion which have characterized patterns of ethnic territoriality. The latter is often associated with the national territorial order (known as “ethno-national control”) that is manifested in cities, comprised of majority strategies of ossified urban colonialism. The strategies include exclusion, segregation, walling-out and ghettoization—normally identified with the political domination of nation-state and the hegemony of its elite. To be sure, the shift between the old and new patterns is not total. The contemporary city is the main

geographical axis around which ethnic territoriality, on the one hand, and liberalism and multiculturalism, on the other, coexist. The outcomes of this coexistence affect the built urban environment and its architecture, as well as the respective identity, membership and right of communities to share the city. But this coexistence is not steady: as the forces that shape the city are becoming more global and increasingly identified with the moral trends of the European unification, the prospects of ethnic territory loss are improving. Is this the end of exclusion, segregation and ghettoization?

Following a review of the “*Hafrada*” (Separation) exhibition in Israel, I suggest that, despite the supposed promise of globalization and European unification, separation remains apparent in contemporary urban life. To some extent, globalization and unification make it even more rigid and inflexible, as these processes increase socioeconomic gaps between ethno-classes, gaps which foster the ambition of separation. Thus, separation occurs not only in societies whose regimes and structures are based on ethno-national logic, but also in societies containing a strong liberal or multicultural infrastructure. Separation, in this sense, is the territorial manifestation of the confluence between the logic of ethno-national control (Connor, 1994) and the cultural logic of late capitalism (Jameson, 1984) (sometimes called “post-Fordism”).

Either logic is capable of producing spaces of exclusion. However, the appearance of separation derived from the logic of ethno-national control differs from the one derived from the cultural logic of late capitalism. The brutal appearance of separation can certainly be found in arenas where ethno-national logic is dominant, such as Israel’s Separation Wall in the West Bank. In arenas where the logic of late capitalism is more dominant, the appearance of separation is softer, such as the gated communities in the US or Britain (Blakely and Snyder, 1997; Manzi and Smith-Bowers, 2005). The idea that there is a difference in appearance between the arenas provides the illusion that the two logics contradict each other, thereby resulting in a different urban reality. But their spatial outcomes, as presented by “*Hafrada*,” are similar: both logics produce physical and intellectual boundaries, which are never neutrally positioned. The result is spatial inequality and the perpetuation of spatial domination by hegemonic groups. The two logics not only coexist, but fuel each other. Meanwhile, globalization and unification blur the brutal appearance of separation derived from ethno-national logic.

The “*Hafrada*” exhibition, curated by Shelly Cohen and Haim Yacobi, opened in July 2005 in the gallery of the Architects Association in Jaffa, Israel. The exhibition consists of pictures of 12 separation sites in Israel/Palestine photographed by Yair Barak, Orit Siman-Tov and Amit Grun, combined with 12 essays by scholars, architects and activists, at the invitation of the curators. Each essay is in a dialogue with one of the pictures. Though this is a political exhibition (and therefore should indeed project its agenda immediately *toward the inside*), the pictures in the exhibits cannot by themselves impart anything about separation. The significance of a road, a garden, a block, a bridge, a field or a building is not immediately obvious to the viewer. Yet, each one of these objects hides a history of exclusion, oppression and social stratification.

Separation in the exhibition seems to have spread everywhere and has become part of the landscape and everyday life. It is even decorated with an esthetic camouflage that provides the objects with a semblance of normality. This constitutes the “soft” appearance of walls, fences, barricades and barriers.

The differences between brutal and soft facades of separation help distinguish the various essays from one another. In the case of brutal facades, Yuval Tamari brings out voices of Palestinians living in Ramleh, who faced a walling-out process in the last decade in order to insure the economic success of a newly constructed Jewish neighborhood. A similar case is presented by Haim Yacobi, but in Lod—a twin city of Ramleh. Ramleh and Lod are good examples of ethnic territoriality in the urban arena. The cities, located between Israel’s two major cities, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, are among the poorest in Israel and suffer from a poor reputation. Lod and Ramleh were once Arab cities; the occupation of the cities in 1948 by the Israeli army was accompanied by a mass expulsion of Palestinians. Abandoned Palestinian houses were settled by Mizrahi (Jews of Middle Eastern origin) immigrants (Nurieli, 2005). Since that time, the cities have been targets of demographic engineering (McGarry, 1998) aimed at maintaining a Jewish majority while ensuring spatial surveillance (Yacobi, 2003). One important dynamic at work here is the deliberate implementation of physical separation aimed at social fragmentation between the indigenous Palestinians and the Jewish immigrants.

Yacob Garb provides another example of the brutal separation between Jews and Arabs, associated with ethnic territoriality and spatial nationalization. He explores what he calls *three-dimensional* roads—that is, a network of bridges and tunnels in the southern part of Jerusalem which guarantees that Jewish settlers and Palestinians do not travel on the same routes. The road meant for Jewish traffic beneath the Palestinian towns of Bethlehem and Beit Jala serves the settlement project in the Occupied Territories by facilitating straightforward access to Jerusalem. Oren Yiftachel and Haia Noah write about the separation of the Bedouins of the Negev from Jewish towns and settlements, particularly on the fence separating Jews and Bedouins who live in Omer—an affluent Jewish suburb in the southern part of Israel. While all these essays focus on the brutal separation (ethno-national logic) between Jews and Arab, implemented in order to serve the territorial and economic interests of the Jews, Tamar Berger writes about another brutal face of separation between Jews, grounded mainly on the logic of late capitalism: the separation fence that has sprung up between Modi’in, a middle-class city, and Reut, a wealthy suburb.

The soft facade of separation, which is the result of the escalating forces of globalization and unification, takes up a major part of the exhibition. Frequently, the pictures demand previous knowledge or a provided explanation in order for the observer to realize the dynamics of separation at work. Their esthetics are represented by ordinary architectural objects. In many cases, these objects separate the Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel, both in the name of ethnic territoriality and in the name of property rights (of

the dominant Jews). Reli de-Vries explores the logic behind the artificial “garden hill” separating Caesaria, an affluent Jewish suburb, and Jaser-a’-Zarka, a poor Palestinian village. Dan Rabinowitz explains how the new Trans-Israel Highway, which was constructed with the promise to connect the center with peripheral regions and the rich with the poor, cuts off Arab villages along its routes from their agricultural lands. Nah’la Shekar speaks of the gated neighborhood of Andromeda Hill in Jaffa as being “implanted like a foreign body in a painful surgical procedure.” The gated neighborhood is a wealthy Jewish enclave near the coast in the Arab section of Tel Aviv, which enjoys an exotic and oriental image, yet is considered underprivileged compared to Jewish Tel Aviv.

The other side of the soft facade is the infusion of the logic of ethno-national control into the dominant society. This advances the processes of internal separation, exclusion and biased allocation of land resources according to ethnic affiliation. However, this facade should be considered carefully, because it is based upon simultaneous processes of exclusion and inclusion throughout the project of nation- and state-building. In immigrant-settler societies, like Israel, Jewish immigrants were excluded from centers of power and wealth, but were included as part of the dominant nation (Tzfadia, 2000). One practice to advance this inclusion-exclusion process was to settle poor immigrants in frontier regions (Kemp, 2002; Khazzoom, 2005; Tzfadia, 2005): Uri Vaknin writes about the public housing projects in Jerusalem’s Katamon neighborhood that turned their Mizrahi residents into a “human wall” facing the Jordanian border (before 1967), hence exploring how the logic of capitalism exploits poor immigrants in advancing the logic of ethno-national control. In recent decades, immigrant-settler societies have faced a rapid process of privatization and a market-oriented regime (Pearson, 2002; Yiftachel and Ghanem, 2004)—processes which pay more attention to the cultural logic of late capitalism. Neta Amar focuses on the “temporary” residential camp of Ethiopian Jews in Beer Sheva, located behind bars and gates on the edge of the peripheral city. It is a city that shares borders with the desert, a highway and a psychiatric hospital.

The other side of soft separation, highly relevant to the cultural logic of late capitalism, is walling-out. Defined as “the voluntary coming together of a population group for purposes of self-protection and advancement of its own interests through the mechanism of excluding others. It is the process of formation of an exclusionary enclave” (Marcuse, 2001:2), walling-out is usually associated with preferences by upper classes to improve their standards of living within “communal” settings. Two projects of walling-out are presented in the exhibition; both mingle their walls with the natural walling supplied by the ocean, and together, the sea and the walls create the exclusionary enclaves. The first case, by Alona Vardi, focuses on the “Towers of Carmel Beach,” a project which provides dwellings for the upper class of Haifa on the seafront. The second case, by Yonit Na’aman, brings us the story of Arsuf. Arsuf can be described as the richest enclave in the country, as it is located on a cliff in a nature reserve and bounded by a wall. Both projects are portrayed as benefiting the upper-upper class, allowing them to enjoy public beaches exclusively for themselves.

It should be clarified that the appearance of soft and brutal separation is not new, and it was not initiated by globalization and unification. However, there has been a change: this new pattern centers upon the expansion of the number of walls and the reinforcement of pre-existing ones. Walling between national communities was already widespread when the model of the nation-state gained popularity, along with the naturalization of international borders. Today, walls can run between communities of any type. This reinforcement is not merely physical; rather, it is a separation in *life-world*. Therefore, what is new, as Marcuse and Van Kempen (2000: 266) argue, is “the continuation, in more extreme form, of conflicts and divisions that have existed since the beginning of the capitalist transformation of cities.” Neo-liberalization, as an ideology of universal inclusion represented by globalization and unification, was supposed to stand up against the politics of exclusion. Yet this is not really the case. We are, in actuality, facing the creation of closed spheres of interest within “open” neo-liberal and global economies (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000). The *depolitization* of separations and their displacement into discourses of recognition, communitarianism or economic sociology cannot conceal the fact that globalization and European unification have opened up new avenues for structural stratification and material oppression. In this sense, separation exists as a contemporary pattern of ethnic territoriality and a strategy of spatial colonialism.

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