

RECONSTRUCTING THE VERNACULAR: ARAB URBAN LIFE VS. THE "ARAB VILLAGE"

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The tension between modernity and tradition has played a major role in the subjugation of the Palestinian populations of Israel. It has confirmed the State of Israel's insistence that their backwardness renders them unfit for serious dialogue with a modern western state. The "Arab village" is the spatial representation of this attitude, the embodiment of a traditional and underdeveloped *modus Vivendi* (Eyal, 2003). Its vernacular pattern presents a negative rural tradition of backwardness deriving from Palestinian submissiveness (Rosenfeld, 1964; Lustick, 1985). The Palestinians themselves, however, tend to romanticize their past by imagining it mainly within a framework of village life (Hasan, 2005; Tamari, 2007).

Within this context of city/modernity vs. village/tradition, the paper examines current Israeli Palestinian's claims to the city as translated into new urban forms and politics. It focuses on an emerging urban vernacular and its potential challenge to the discourse and political practices of the Arab village. The paper examines the re-establishment of Arab urban life in an area of Haifa built by the German Templers at the end of the 19th century and recently renovated. The German Colony lies along a main north-south artery which is still an important axis linking the sea on one side with Mount Carmel on the other

via the newly rehabilitated Bahai Gardens. After many years of inertia, Haifa Municipality began restoring the area in the late 1990s during the euphoric days following the Oslo Accord, the aim being to attract tourists. The project, funded by the Ministry of Tourism and fueled by the newly developed Bahai Gardens, consisted mainly of restoring the public infrastructure in the expectation of attracting private investors. Following the Palestinian Intifadas and the escalation of terrorist attacks, the project, almost completed, was about to collapse, but little by little new bars and restaurants were opened by local Arab investors. This new urban area has attracted Arab and Jewish Israelis from all over the country, and has become a major place for leisure for the Palestinian of Haifa and the northern region of Israel.

The paper investigates the adaptation of vernacular form to new cultural meaning through the emergence of new forms and practices that re-establish Palestinian urban life. It examines the continuity/discontinuity of traditions, their role in creating a vernacular in the midst of a modern city, and how they give new meaning and authenticity to ethno-national aspirations.

Keywords:

Constructed vernacular. Urban life, Arab village, Israeli Palestinians, Haifa.