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The ethnocratic *shikun*: housing discourse in support of nation-building

Matan Flum

The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, University College London, London, UK

ABSTRACT

This research critically analyses the Israeli housing block ('*shikun*') discourse, as presented in cultural representations during 1948–1961, and its contribution to the evolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The study argues that the discursive exclusion of the shikun from Israel's socio-political history of planning and development is a central part of Israel's ethnocracy and has an essential role in exacerbating the conflict. It maintains that the shikun's exclusion is a reduction of its consequences, namely the Mizrahi population's dispersion through the shikun, which stands as one of the main foundations of the Israeli ethnocratic regime. Subsequently, I identify the shikun anew as the 'ethnocratic shikun', and suggest that it can be a better conceptualisation to reveal how ethnic oppression, by discursive and architectural means, affects national land regimes, and thereby exacerbating regional violent conflicts. This research has two main goals. First, achieving a better understanding of Israeli society and politics by delving into a crucial component of human existence – housing, and analysing its 'disappearance' from public debates regarding the Middle-Eastern geopolitics. Second, the research aspires to make a methodological contribution that goes beyond Israeli housing discourse, by adding another novel layer to the Cultural Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis.

Introduction

The article examines the Israeli housing block ('*shikun*' or '*shikunim*' in plural) discourse, as it is produced in cultural representations, and its role in the violent Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I address these issues by critically analysing and theoretically exploring the public, political, and cultural discourse regarding the shikunim from the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 up to the establishment of the Ministry of Housing on 6th November 1961.

This article will address the following core research question: How does a national housing discourse, by reflecting ethnic power relations, influence a regional violent

conflict? The importance of this question is placed in exploring how an 'internal' housing discourse may have further escalated an 'external' conflict. In turn, this will lead to a new discursive investigation of the theoretical relations between housing, ethnicity and violent national-territorial conflicts.

The aim of this research is twofold. First, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of Israeli society and politics by taking a close look at a crucial human element – housing and spatial design, and explain how it has 'disappeared' from the Middle-Eastern geopolitical debate.

Second, the research makes methodological insights by expanding the research foci of the Cultural Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (hereinafter CCDA) as a method that combines discourse analysis with cultural analysis. CCDA is defined as a theoretical and practical tool exposing cultural meanings implied in the discourse and their contribution to the reproduction of social dominance, military violence and social inequality (Gavriely-Nuri, 2012, 2014). The main contribution lies in the application of CCDA to a built environment case study that engages exclusion as a presentation of an object while concealing or ignoring its characteristics (Gavriely-Nuri, 2013, 2017).

The study will argue that Israel's ethnocracy is characterised by the discursive exclusion of the shikun from Israel's socio-political history of development planning, which has exacerbated indirectly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It will maintain that the shikun's exclusion is a minimisation of its ramifications, specifically the dispersion of immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa (*Mizrahi* Jews) by the shikunim, which is one of the pillars of the ethnocratic political system. Following this argument, the 'ethnocratic shikun' will be proposed as a better conceptual identification for uncovering how ethnic oppression, by discursive and architectural manners, constitutes national land regimes and escalates territorial violence.

Historical background: land conquest and demography

The shikunim projects' main motive was to house the mass Jewish immigration from Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa throughout the 1950s, which began during the 1948 War, resulted in the Palestinian *Nakba* ('catastrophe'), which refers to wide land loss, forced displacement and continuous statelessness (Sa'di, 2002).

Mass immigration changed Israel's demographics, representing relatively the largest immigration since its establishment (Naor, 1986). In the first decade, 54.8% were Mizrahi immigrants, while 45.2% included Holocaust survivors from Europe and North American Jews (*Ashkenazi*) who assimilated into the veteran Ashkenazi population. Israel's population doubled in three years, with 686,748 immigrants arriving from May 1948 to December 1951 (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 1973). By the end of the decade, Israel tripled its population to 1,855,000 (Sikron, 1986).

Israel's first masterplan for Jewish population dispersion, the 'Sharon Plan', named after Arieh Sharon, Head of the Planning Department in the Prime Minister's Office (Sharon, 2006), caused the establishment of 38 New Towns ('development towns') from 1948 to 1957, primarily in Israel's frontiers (Shadar, 2014, pp. 33–34). Approximately 230,000 mostly Mizrahi Jewish immigrants were settled in these towns (Yiftachel, 1998a). In contrast, Ashkenazi Jews mostly settled in central cities, along with rural-collective settlements – *Kibbutzim* (Swirski, 1981, pp. 62–64). Almost half a

million housing units were built during 1950–1964, 75% of them by the state (Carmon, 1999).

Shikunim were built in development towns, producing ethno-class divisions among Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews through three main factors (Yiftachel, 1998b): restricting mostly Mizrahi Jews to development towns, segregation between Kibbutzim and these towns, and demarcating 80% of state lands under 'regional councils' with only 8% of Israel's population (Hananel, 2008, p. 249).

Shikunim were constructed in 70 peripheral urban neighbourhoods as well (Gonen, 1979), some of them in locations with Palestinian 'abandoned property', Zionist referring to houses of Palestinian refugees. Initially, this began in cities with some Palestinian presence, then expanded to regions with large Palestinian population, and finally extended to the southern district, where no Palestinians remained (Yacobi, 2003). Within these circumstances, Kimmerling (1993, pp. 131–132) argues that development towns were designed to protect the 'national security', but faced threats in the frontier by Palestinian 'infiltrators' and attacks, thereby leading to Israeli 'reprisal operations' and a chain of mutual violent reactions between Palestinians and Israeli-Jews.

Despite different urban backgrounds of development towns and previously Palestinian neighbourhoods, the focus on the shikunim can showcase their mutual, usually invisible, geopolitical agenda of land control, evident in external frontiers, such as development towns (Yiftachel, 1997) or internal frontiers, for instance former Palestinian neighbourhoods (Milner, 2020).

The theoretical framework

The shikun as a project of nation-building

A growing body of literature has examined the shikun through critical lenses of nation-building and colonisation processes. Kallus and Law Yone (2000) argue that by housing provision for hundreds of thousands of Jewish immigrants, the State of Israel has conducted a colonisation process in its borders, exploiting Mizrahi Jews, as well as forcing them to adopt a Western-modernistic housing tradition. They further argue that the Israeli government tried to control these new inhabitants and use them as raw material to 'Judaise' – establishing a Jewish dominance – the new territories by dispersing and settling them in shikunim mainly in Israel's social-geographical periphery.

Kallus and Law-Yone mention that the shikun's execution of 'desert conquest' – the myth assuming the land is terra nullius – was made along with massive usage of scientific terminology as an adoption of the rational-technologic modernisation process that enabled this serial-formative reproduction of Israeli space in cities and the periphery (2000, pp. 157–158).

Significant postcolonial work on the identity of the shikunim's residents in the context of modernistic architecture has been carried out as well. In a series of articles, Yacobi (2007, 2008) and Shadar and Yacobi (2014) reexamine modernistic architecture and the cultural relations between the shikun's architecture and its residents. Following Appadurai (1996), they argue that instead of the original planning, the residents used the shikun to create alternative modernity and a hybrid 'Third Space' (Bhabha, 1990) that

doubted the mainstream residential conception. Therefore, they claim the shikun questions the national project's aspiration to produce identical-cultural uniformity.

These publications of Yacobi and Shadar reject the claims made in the critical literature regarding national space control. They attempt to prove the shikun ultimately allowed the residents to take initiative and oppose the Israeli hegemonic Ashkenazi culture, as they made some physical changes to the shikun.

Ethnocracy

The ethnocratic theory (Yiftachel, 2006) achieves a better understanding of the process of 'Judaising Israel/Palestine', as Yiftachel defines it – an ethnicisation process that shaped the space, wealth and political power in Palestine/Israel. In an ethnocratic state, it is ethnicity, and not citizenship, that is used by the government to decide on resources and power distribution. This political structure is relevant to many states that deal or dealt with ethnic conflicts, for example, Rwanda, Sri Lanka and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Yiftachel & Ghanem, 2004).

The nation-building project in Israel, as in other ethnocratic societies, established a three-layered group hierarchy: The Ashkenazi founders' group, the Mizrahi new immigrants' group, and the Palestinian citizens within Israel's borders post-1948 War (Tzfadia & Yiftachel, 2001). Therefore, Mizrahi Jews were positioned in a dual location – agents of the 'Judaisation' process but entitled only to inferior substantial citizenship compared to the Ashkenazi hegemonic group.

Some scholars applied and developed the theory to examine the Palestinian-Jewish division in Israel. Rouhana and Ghanem (1998) argue that Israel, as an ethnic state, positions Palestinian citizens of Israel in political and existential relations of a crisis with the state's democratic mechanisms, their belonging to the broader Palestinian nation, and in the development of their communities. Ghanem et al. (1998) highlight the Israeli legal system, especially constitutional law, as reinforcing exclusive Jewish privileges in migration, obtaining citizenship, and Israel's fundamental identity. Similarly, Ghanem and Rouhana (2001) explore ethnicity's impact on Israel's political system, through limitations on political participation, and specifically voting patterns.

Several studies have examined the interlinks between the population dispersion policy and the Israeli ethnocracy. The 'population dispersion' is used as a cultural code in Israel that describes the settlement process of merely Jews (veterans and new immigrants). That is, it is a nationalist policy that attempts to limit the lands held by Palestinians and provide Jews a general sense of national security (Efrat, 1987).

Yiftachel and Meir (1998) argue that this policy had three concealed objectives. First, using Jewish settlement to constitute an Ashkenazi narrative of nation-building by implementing collective beliefs of 'desert conquest' and 'land redemption'. Second, the policy assists the dominant Ashkenazi population in taking control of the lands where Palestinians had settled before and fled during the 1948 War. Third, the policy's implementation distanced the Mizrahi Jews from the power and capital centres by turning them into a settler force. However, simultaneously, they allegedly become partners in the nation-building project. Therefore, they were included within the new Israeli-Jewish nation, but from an inferior standpoint that reveals the ethnic power relations.

Following the ethnocratic theory, an important work focuses on the logic behind ethno-nationalist efforts to achieve domination over a specific territory (Tzfadia, 2009; Yiftachel & Kedar, 2000). Yiftachel and Kedar (2000) name the stratification mechanism during the settlement process upon Israel's establishment as the 'trickling of national-ethnic logic'. That is, a dominant lifestyle, which includes the idea that discriminating and settling immigrants in peripheral towns is normal and natural, just trickles to all the population's layers (Tzfadia & Yiftachel, 2001). Tzfadia (2009) describes the 'ethno-national logic of territory control' as control mechanisms resulting in settling members of the nation in territories populated by a majority of minorities, discriminatory centralised planning, and expropriation of land belonging to a minority group.

Although there is a considerable amount of literature on the shikun and its accompanying population dispersal policy, it appears that less attention has been given to the systematic analysis of the shikun discourse itself. Analysing the shikun discourse may assist in deconstructing and exposing ethno-nationalist logic and meticulously political biases and manipulations regarding the shikun, and observe how these reinforce each other.

Throughout this review, it is also revealed that the shikun's deep links to Israel's ethnocratic regime were not explained adequately. The academic publications that use the ethnocratic theory do not address the shikun as the most significant physical-architectural tool that constituted the Israeli ethnocracy and Israel's land regime. On the other side, ethnocracy and violent regional conflict are rarely examined in the literature that focuses on the shikun and its tremendous effect on its residents. That might happen because of the different foci of the two disciplines – architecture and political geography. However, due to this limited approach, it is still poorly understood how the shikun discourse contributed to the ethno-national logic embedded in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Due to the shikun's European ideological origins (Shadar, 2014), current literature overlooks the political and violent consequences of its discursive construction in the Middle-Eastern. Inspired by Yiftachel and Mammon (2022), I aim to contribute the wider knowledge-production by adopting a Middle-Eastern perspective, which seeks to complete the theoretical picture through the Middle-Eastern historical experience, collective memory and context, opposing the common approach that dominant Western knowledge-production is universal, invisible and irrelevant to power relations' reproduction. The article focuses on Middle-Eastern Jews residing in shikunim, and not on the minority of Ashkenazi Jews who lived in shikunim, since the shikunim have become culturally symbolic for Mizrahi Jews in their collective memory and discourse, as evident in many cultural representations (Yacobi, 2008, p. 188). I suggest this might enhance our understating of the geopolitical power of housing policies within the regional context of violent conflicts and ethnocratic regimes.

Methodology: the cultural approach to critical discourse analysis

Following Gavriely-Nuri (2012, 2013, 2015, 2018), I will use CCDA to explore the linguistic, cultural, and historic foundations of the shikun, and thereby exposing cultural codes rooted in the shikunim discourse and their contribution to power exploitation. Using CCDA, I analytically depict the crossings between 'discursive strategies' and 'cultural codes' that usually promote hegemonic political standpoints.

I adopt Gavriely-Nuri's (2017, p. 146) definition of 'discursive strategy': 'every discursive manipulation that intends to influence the listener or the target audience for the purpose of realising the political goal of the speaker'. I also adopt her definition of 'cultural codes': '"Economical" packages of conventions, values and social beliefs known to members of the specific community and that usually are not known to outsiders' (Gavriely-Nuri, 2013, 2015). The cultural codes' importance and value derive from the community's mutual past, and they construct in a dynamic process its common logic and prospectively its values. Hence, they might be described as organised, hidden, and biased cultural principles, that are used as a mutual logic that directs citizens' behaviour and political decision-making process.

These are the guidelines for the approach (Gavriely-Nuri, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2017):

(a) The corpus: The approach is involved with verbal (texts and linguistic means) and nonverbal (caricatures, national ceremonies) practices, as well as cultural sites – the locations where the collective representations of society are manifested – dominant symbols and axioms. Simultaneously, the approach analyses factual and fictional discourses, and artistic and political texts.

(b) Analytic tools: The approach uses tools and methods from cultural studies, mainly decoding cultural and inter-cultural codes that oppress and promote inequality. The decoding process demands a close acquaintance with the community's language, history and culture, as well as special awareness of how its social constructs are presented as natural.

(c) The cultural space: The approach encourages a comparative inter/multi-cultural analysis. A multi-perspective analysis will ease the definition and identification of unique elements that belong to certain cultural codes, and thus to a more accurate decoding process.

(d) The analysis involves three stages: First, identifying inductively discursive strategies from the data, which combine discursive and linguistic means, like tropes and narratives, that validate cultural codes, and promote specific political objectives, such as public policy or ideology. Second, exposing the cultural codes, recognised from academic literature, that are triggered by these discursive strategies. This decoding involves dissecting the cultural code into three components (Gavriely-Nuri, 2017): its permanent core, its identification marker known to the cultural group, and its embedded message that serves the group's interests while under-presenting the factual reality. The identification marker and message depend on place and time. Third, presenting the intersection between discursive strategies and cultural codes, as one that encourages manipulation of political power. I.e. the analysis uses discourse-culture-politics triangulation and situates each representation on these three axes.

I created a corpus which includes 62 publicly available items:

(a) Knesset (parliament) records: A computerised database preserved by the Knesset Archives, which according to the Knesset website includes: 'every writing of Knesset plenary meeting since the People's Council to this day'. The search for this study produced 29 results, and was carried out as follows: a search of the word

'shikun', and afterwards a reading only of documents that, according to the daily agenda, the issues of the shikun, housing, settlement, development towns and population dispersion were debated. The usage of this component relates only to speeches given by Knesset members in the Knesset Plenary and not in the Knesset's committees.

(b) Speeches and writings of Israeli Presidents and Prime Ministers: The study examined two main types of speeches. First, from the Israeli Presidents and Prime Ministers memorialisation series of the State Archives. The Israeli leaders that their speeches were analysed: David Ben-Gurion (Rosental & Shaltiel, 1996), Haim Weizman (Fisher and Rozental, 1994), Zalman Shazar (Zoref & Rozental, 2008), Moshe Sharet (Fisher & Rozental, 2007), and Levi Eshkol (Zoref & Lamfrom, 2002).

Second, Golda Meir's (Meyerson) speeches as the Labor Minister in the relevant period from the website of Golda Meir's Institute. There are 11 speeches regarding immigration and settlement that enable a deeper understanding of her political stance.

(c) Textbooks in geography, history, and civics in middle schools and high schools (please find the list of the relevant textbooks at the end of this article). While exiting the exact time frame of the article, this component includes 13 textbooks in Hebrew. Four of the textbooks are on civics subject, five on history subject and four on geography subject. Each page was examined meticulously. All the textbooks were approved by the Education Ministry.

Proficient in both Hebrew and English, I collected and translated all the items from Hebrew to English for this article. Notably, the speeches by Knesset members and Israeli Presidents and Prime Ministers were carried out during the 1950s, whereas the school textbooks were written in the last 25 years. This temporal gap allows to notice the discursive trajectory and examine the evolution of preservation of the shikun discourse.

I analysed the corpus by repeatedly reading every item and identifying keywords, and creating a categorised list. During repetitive readings, I applied the coding categories to relevant text aspects related to the shikunim without overlap. I then searched for mutual patterns, shared motifs, and emerging meanings. Finally, I explored truisms and presentation of 'objective' knowledge, contradictions, and absences within the shikunim discourse, and reviewed the discursive strategies found.

In this study, I focus on three secondary discursive strategies: quantitative exclusion, lexical exclusion, and scientification. Quantitative exclusion harms the number of representations of the object in the public discourse, while qualitative exclusion presents the object in a reduced manner (Gavriely-Nuri, 2013, 2017). In our case, quantitative exclusion is significant because it dictates the 'discursive territory' within which we can critically discuss the political meanings of shikunim. To locate quantitative exclusion, I counted the amounts of terms such as 'shikun', 'development towns', and 'public housing' in the items and, where possible, checked with textbook indexes.

Lexical exclusion changes the character of a phenomenon through unique vocabulary, definitions, and naming. It is particularly prominent in discourse when terms such as 'racism' or 'discrimination' are erased from the lexicon to hide power relations between discriminative and discriminated groups. Instead, as a mirror image, the discourse

focuses on 'deprivation[1] feelings' and '(social) gaps', purposely to argue that there is no substantive discrimination but rather a subjective interpretation influenced by feelings, that are not grounded in objective reality and facts.

Scientification entails describing a phenomenon using scientific terminology and outlining facts, numbers, and statistics. It shifts public debate into the scientific arena, transforming complicated political situations into abstract mathematical problems solved with scientific tools.

Findings and discussion: exclusion of the shikun

As demonstrated below, this case study involves omitting the ethnic identity of shikun residents and the abusive outcomes of shikunim construction, aiming to marginalise verbal tropes illustrating residents' misery and moral questions about the construction.

Quantitative exclusion of the 'shikun' term

In examining the textbooks, a significant quantitative exclusion of the term 'shikun' was found. Adan et al.'s (2001) textbook, specifically in the chapter 'the sectarian split' (pp. 317–331), does not mention the word 'shikun'. However, 'development towns', 'distressed neighborhoods', and 'ma'abarot' (transit camps) are mentioned nine times, three times, and three times, respectively (pp. 318, 319, 321, 322, 331). For instance, a striking photograph, by the photographer Boaz Bouky, at the end of the chapter features

Figure 1. Photographer: Boaz Bouky.

graffiti on a wall in Jerusalem (p. 331; see Figure 1): 'You are not going to take us back to the ma'abarot!!! No!!'. This quantitative difference suggests that 'shikun' is coded into broader spatial nouns, diverting attention away from the most common form of dwelling in Israel and disconnecting Mizrahi residents from the shikun.

In Ashkenazi et al. (2016), 'shikun' is mentioned twice without prominent political context: first, in an exercise on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (p. 206) and second, regarding the preoccupation of Arab civic organisations (p. 479). 'Ma'abara' (transit camp) and 'development town' are not mentioned, and the term 'public housing' ('*Diur Tziburi*') is noted once as an example of social-democratic policy (p. 278). The 'sectarian split' is noted only on page 461. This disregard from the 'shikun' and linked terms can be explained as denying Israeli space as political, especially the Mizrahi symbolic space, attached with political injustice. In Goodman and Barak (2011), the term 'shikunim' is mentioned only four times in Chapter 9, subsection 'socio-economic policy in Israel: a historic perspective' (pp. 180, 182, 197). In Nave (2001), 'shikun' appears four times: twice in praise of the Jewish Agency's work (pp. 58–59) and twice in lists of citizen needs from the state (p. 142) and economic occupations (p. 96). Both examples show a minimalisation of the shikun's role as a geopolitical tool, emphasising its positive association with economic development.

In Gal and Priel's textbook (2011), 'shikun' is mentioned only once as 'The Shikun Ministry', the Hebrew name for the Ministry of Housing (p. 329). This is despite an extensive explanation of urban renewal projects, which demolish the shikunim. This indicates the shikun 'disappears' both physically and discursively due to its cultural meaning of discriminatory population dispersion. Furthermore, Israeli 'public housing' is described in two different paragraphs without mentioning the 'shikun' (pp. 229, 313). 'Development towns' are mentioned only three times, unrelated to the shikun debate (pp. 18, 208). Similarly, in Segev et al. (2010), two almost identical paragraphs discuss public housing without mentioning 'shikun' (p. 212). 'Development towns' are noted once (p. 157), identically to the textbook by Gal and Priel (2011), even though these texts have different authors. These examples are in line with other findings in this section, indicating the under-representation of the shikunim.

Lexical exclusion

In Adan et al. (2001), lexical exclusion appears in different forms. The chapter 'the sectarian split' (*Shesa Adati*)[2] is an example of this discursive strategy, as this term repeats itself throughout the entire chapter (p. 317). The linguistic significance of this idiom is twofold. First, the adjective 'sectarian' has a leading part in constructing a separate popular semantic field that actives when inter-Jewish ethnic racism is publicly discussed. The language use of 'sectarian' and 'sects' lowers the severity of the Ashkenazi cultural domination, depoliticises this situation and conveys the message it is just a difference of folklore.

Second, the use of the noun 'split' neutralises the power relations involved because it does not suggest any hierarchy, but some kind of a 'natural separation' between two Jewish social groups. A term such as 'sectarian gap' (*Pa'ar Adati*) serves as an example as well. For instance, in the sentence: 'when we talk about the sectarian gap in Israel, we talk about the gap and tension between sects', and in the sentence 'to understand the sectarian gap, the society's structure in Israel must be recognised' (p. 317). These

are aligned with the previous semantic explanation of the 'split' – a 'gap' means there are some differences, however, there is no intention to gain dominance. In addition, these examples have an educational attitude or an obligation conveyed to the students through the words 'when we talk', 'to understand', and 'must', while using the pronoun 'we' to stress the shared Israeliness superior to sects.

Similar expressions are 'absorption conditions' and 'absorption difficulties': 'the lack of resources made it difficult for the government to absorb the hundreds of thousands of new immigrants, Ashkenazi and Mizrahi, and they suffered from difficult absorption conditions' (p. 318). And in the sentence: 'these absorption difficulties caused Mizrahi Jews to be in difficulty to escape the distress much more than Ashkenazi Jews, they were pushed to the bottom of the socio-class ladder' (p. 319). Analysis of these descriptions reveals the speaker's Zionist position – holding a belief in the virtue of 'absorption' which was less successful because its 'conditions' have been interrupted. Except of the laconic 'lack of resources' explanation, the readers do not know anything about the production of these circumstances – who set these difficulties, why Mizrahi Jews 'were pushed', in a passive voice to obscure any accountability, to lower classes and how. The only known issue is that both Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews 'suffered' together, and then suddenly, the latter group managed somehow to 'escape the distress', as it was caused by high forces and not a planned colonial process to establish an ethnocratic hierarchy.

Another example is the term 'inequality', for instance in the sub-chapter's title 'economic inequality' (p. 319). This discursive strategy works through the words 'condescension', 'contempt' and 'rejection' as well: 'The rejection of Mizrahi culture was also expressed in the attitude of condescension and contempt of some of the absorbing Ashkenazi society towards the immigrants from North Africa and Asia' (p. 320). The use of these lexical choices for describing the oppression of the Mizrahi population has a chilling effect on the Mizrahi struggle and on readers who might think to join it. '(Economic) inequality' does not indicate necessarily discrimination against Mizrahi Jews, but implies that it is a temporary condition until Mizrahi Jews will be more successful economically. 'Condescension', 'contempt' and 'rejection' are euphemisms for the Eurocentric cultural dominance of the Ashkenazi elites, which oppressed any Arab/Middle-Eastern characteristics of Mizrahi culture in order to constitute only one modern Israeli culture. This also reinforces the idea that the 'absorbing' society first of all helped the immigrants, and it was not a systematic or institutional discrimination by the state itself.

It is interesting that for explaining the 'sectarian split', this textbook chooses to present and interpret first the composition of classes in Israel (p. 317). However, simultaneously, at the beginning of the discussion, there is no explanation regarding the impact of the place of residence in determining the location of a person in one of the mentioned classes (high, middle, middle-low, and low): 'The person's position on the socioeconomic scale is influenced by his income, occupation and place of work, from his ownership of assets and education level' (p. 317). Nevertheless, later in this textbook's discussion, and in order to describe the composition of the lower and lower-middle classes, it is in fact written that 'they are living in distressed neighborhoods and development towns', in addition to referring to them as Mizrahi Jews, immigrants from the Commonwealth of Independent States and immigrants from Ethiopia (p. 318). Moreover, especially in

the sub-chapter 'the sectarian split: ways of expression' (p. 320), the authors choose to emphasise the issue of the place of residence, e.g. in the following paragraph (p. 321):

> The majority of the population in development towns and distressed neighborhoods in the major cities is Mizrahi population. Living in areas far from the center of the country reduces the possibilities of acquiring an education and adequate employment. The residents of these places work in professional areas that lack prestige and their incomes are low.

This section in the textbook reveals the contradiction within its discourse regarding the Mizrahi built environment in Israel. First, it denies any link between socio-economic hierarchy and residence. When using the semantic field of economics ('income', 'occupation', 'assets'), the political decision on population's dispersion becomes a question of economic success and 'free market'. However, then, the discourse changes, and although it admits lower ethnic classes live in a specific built environment, it still disconnects the shikunim from Israel's political geography and does not discuss their existence. The section ends by using an active voice and a distant look at the Mizrahi residents in ways that construct their responsibility for their conditions and 'otherness', without any examination of the state's role in producing poverty in these locations.

In the textbook of Avieli-Tabibian (2009) the term 'racism' is not mentioned. The name of the sub-chapter, 'the sectarian problem and social polarisation are worsened' (p. 226), is another example of this reductive discourse. The nouns 'problem' and 'polarisation', again, avoid any critical perspective, and the adjective 'social' loads the rest of the sub-chapter with meaning irrelevant to ethnicity. Furthermore, the discourse deals with 'sectarian distress' during Wadi-Salib protest (p. 226); 'the social and economic deprivation' during the Israeli 'Black Panthers' protest (p. 246); and the veteran group's view of the Muslim world immigrants as 'stragglers and uneducated' (p. 246). These subjects emphasise the contrast to the sub-chapter name and other nouns used to describe racism ('distress', 'deprivation') – the subjects concern the Mizrahi struggle for equality; however, their framing makes an effort to keep in the dark the ethnocratic structure to its full extent. In the textbook of Inbar (2000, p. 270, 273, 274) there is repeated use of the phrase 'sectarian tensions'. Moreover, it is written about the 'sense of condescension' of the veteran Ashkenazi settlement movement and the view of the immigrants as 'primitive and uneducated' (p. 276); and about a 'severe sense of humiliation' that accompanied the Muslim world immigrants – 'dismissive' attitude, 'insensitivity' and 'attempts at coercion of another culture' (pp. 277–278). These descriptions portray Ashkenazi Jews as a social group of very unpleasant interpersonal feelings and attitudes. However, in exchange, that repetitive narrative also serves to cover up the in-depth Zionist ideological dynamics that cause the development of this vantage point, and situates the implications of it only as hurtful feelings, rather than seeing how much violence it might bring in Israel's politics and society.

As stated, as a mirror image, the textbooks focus on 'deprivation feelings' and the 'subjective' feelings of Mizrahi Jews. In Adan et al. (2001), we can read about 'policies that the Mizrahi Jews interpreted as discriminatory policies when it comes to directing them to development towns, distant from urban centers' (p. 319), and a sense of resentment 'towards the establishment that assisted them to be absorbed into the country' (p. 319). Moreover, it is written about 'feelings of deprivation, of inferiority and sectarian separatism' (p. 320), in part, as a result of the low representation of Mizrahi Jews in the

political system. A paragraph in the textbook, titled 'subjective deprivation feeling' says (p. 322):

> In some of Mizrahi population there is a subjective feeling of deprivation that is not necessarily based on facts, but on their perception of themselves and others. These feelings of deprivation reinforce the tension and alienation between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews. This is despite the fact that about 1/3 of all marriages are inter-sectarian marriages.

An analysis of the repetitive use of emotional keywords confirms that the textbook does not perceive the oppression against Mizrahi Jews as an objective realm, which can be proved by scientific research and statistics. The textbook claims that Mizrahi Jews 'interpreted' the dispersion policy as discriminatory, although the state 'assisted' to absorb them – i.e. Mizrahi Jews hold the wrong perception of reality in their minds, while the state genuinely made a positive act in favour of them. Later on, the paragraph in the textbook bluntly blames the Mizrahi Jews for their situation. It emphasises 'their' otherness feelings are not necessarily based on facts, without presenting sufficient supporting evidence, and criticising them for contributing to the ethnic 'tension'. In order to show certainty and position the speaker as an expert, the textbook mentions 'the fact' about inter-ethnic marriages, which should have uncovered the 'truth', but raises many questions on references to external sources, credibility and the statistics showing only 1/3 of the cases seems to be an achievement within the same nationality.

The only time when it is mentioned there is discrimination in the textbook is in the following: 'The sectarian label, prejudices and manifestations of discrimination in social relationships resulting from a stereotype reference of one sect towards another – are still felt' (p. 320). Nevertheless, the term 'racism' is yet to be written, and the discrimination manifested in inter-personal relations and not from the state. The social situation is presented as symmetric – stereotypisation and feelings of Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews alike. On the other hand, it should be mentioned that in the sub-chapter regarding the immigrants from Ethiopia, the term 'racism' is depicted, in two ways. First, it is written: 'The attitude of the veteran society is expressed in fear and suspicion and even in manifestations of vanity and feelings of superiority to the point of racism' (p. 330). Second, in a photo of immigrants protesting (of the Government Press Office) where on a sign it is written: 'stop with the racism' and on another sign it is written in English: 'Apartied in Israel' (sic; p. 329; see Figure 2). This reveals the significance of skin colour as a 'race' marker in the writers' perspective, which enables them to acknowledge racism. It might be also that the Ethiopian Jews are a small social group that does not threaten the Ashkenazi hegemony and the imaginative Zionist unity narrative of the textbook.

Scientification

The scientification is produced in part by tours of the field, discussions, meetings, and committees. Unsurprisingly, these are characteristics of a bureau or a project – 'the shikun project' in this case, as an expression that illustrates this discursive strategy. In the lecture of the Labor Minister, Golda Meyerson, about the labour problems (12th August 1953) she pointed out that

Figure 2. The Government Press Office.

> this week we toured in Haifa in places of the Popular Shikun [*Shikun Amami*], and in my opinion the shikun is beautiful and the construction work is fantastic. We toured with journalists […] and thought someone will be also impressed by the beautiful apartments.

Speaking three years earlier at a conference to welcome a delegation of workers returning from the U.S. (25th July 1950), Meyerson suggested the delegation tour the country and told them that she was on such a tour beforehand. In the tour she saw how the state absorbed immigration in transit camps and in 'places in which we build and need to establish many hundreds of housing units'. The tour, which appears more as a military patrol, validates scientifically the values that the urban planners and architects on behalf of the government were interested to impose the land – through the tour the speaker can claim that their conclusions were inferred from the field, in a positivistic and objective method. The tour locates the discourse in a concrete place; it is an act that serves to persuade the listeners in the shikun's beauty (beautification).

Nonetheless, initiatives for preliminary tours to examine the settlement areas took place already in the first year of the establishment of the State of Israel. Levi Eshkol noted at the discussion of the Jewish Agency's management (22nd November 1948) that a 'committee for touring the land and examining the territories' was established. He also said during the deliberation that the committee marked until that day 96 settlement places, 'that most of them are near the border of the country in one place or another, or that are of other strategic importance'. This finding contributes to our knowledge regarding the ideological use of the tour and confirms previous studies regarding

the 'strategic importance' of the new settlements' location and number. It appears that establishing these settlements is not enough to ensure they will secure the frontier properly, and therefore the 'committee for touring' was established urgently. Some other Knesset members addressed the issue of tours as well. MK Hillel Kook (Herut party, 18th May 1949) suggested establishing a special committee that would deal with the shikun question, and that it would visit immigrants' camps on behalf of the Knesset and examine 'why we do not build houses for these camps residents?'. MK Akiva Govrin (Mapai party, 18th June 1957) told a few years later that some more Knesset members and himself 'toured in different towns and saw the different shikunim, including the shikunim in Be'er-Sheva and immigrants' towns and got to know the problems of these towns'. Here, this finding sheds light on the use of the tour/committee by two representatives. MK Kook, from the opposition, claims, by using a question that conveys irony, that the government does not build enough, and wishes to 'prove' it by a tour and committee. MK Govrin, from the coalition, implies the shikunim's problems are addressed thanks to the tour. Both members use linguistically the active voice to emphasise their agency in favour of the immigrants, although neither of them undermines Israel's dispersion policy, and certainly not the ethnocratic regime.

There is also a motif of professionalism and reliance on professionals, that is derived from the scientific discourse. In this way, relying on architects, for example, will glorify modernist planning in the research period. For example, when Levi Eshkol argued, after he was criticised, in the general assembly of the Jewish Agency's management (24th January 1952), that those sitting down in the discussion are not all settlement experts, while the planning of the country is done with 'the best experts that the Jewish people in the Land of Israel have'. Moreover, he said that 'these are the settlement experts that the Jewish people have, and should not be ashamed of. They plan the land and observe and look how to settle every area'. Eshkol uses a few linguistic features to fend off the criticism. First, he contrasts between the assembly members who 'sit down' and the 'experts', who, as implied and we know from the context, 'tour the field'. Second, he glorifies the experts ('the best') and loads their work with national meaning ('the Jewish people … have'). He uses modality ('should') to indicate the obligation to praise the experts, and highlights their effort by outlining the verbs that describe their work ('plan', 'observe', 'look', 'settle').

Golda Meyerson used this secondary discursive strategy most extensively. In her announcement as Labor Minister on the Shikun Plan (31st May 1949), she gave many numerical details: Amidar company will build by the end of that year 16 thousand housing units; the government is about to finish building 10 thousand units until the end of June, and 3000 units were built immediately; and a total of 30 thousand housing units will be built in a year when 300 thousand Jews will immigrate to Israel. More than two months later (3rd August 1949) she told that 'until the end of the year we will finish building the 30 thousand units', and that 'we submit a plan for more 3,600 new units. It is almost certain that in that period at least 5000 units will be built'. After two more years, she delivered a statement that 'on October 1st 1951 there were 19,600 families in tents, and today there are still 10,900 families in tents' (28th November 1951). Later on, she stated that 'on November 1st 1952, 5,300 families were left in tents' (18th November 1952). On 25th January 1956, in response to the government's accusation of being discriminatory, Meyerson said: 'MK Altman, you are used to speak in

numbers, percents and statistics. But here we have numbers, and there is no denying them'. These findings underscore there is control over the discourse through loading with numbers and an attempt to show linear-numerical progress and geometric series – in year A there were X shikunim, and in year B there were already many times more shikunim. This is done to showcase the government's agency, influenced deeply by the modernist narrative of 'progress'. By repeating the numbers, as a rhetorical device, Meyerson conveys the message that there is a kind of a mathematical problem, but the government will certainly solve it with success ('certain', 'no denying').

It appears that the preoccupation with 'numbers' regarding building was throughout the 1950s. MK Menachem Bader (Mapam party, 1st June 1949) noted that 'yesterday the Labor Minister voiced critical commentary regarding the press releasing daily fantastic numbers and perhaps even some that cause sleepiness about the large construction that is becoming or planned to be done'. The Labor Minister Giora Yoseftal stated at 30th December 1959 that 'until November 1st 1959, 10,058 families were transferred to permanent shikunim. As I already said, 4,400 housing units are under construction, and we hope to start building another 1,000 units in the next three months'. The discursive usage of numbers over the entire decade reveals the survivability of this feature of the 'progress' narrative. The narrative appears to 'recycle' itself in order to efficiently address the political needs, and take part easily in the cultural construction of the Zionist-Israeli identity, constituted on beliefs in Jewish immigration, absorption and nation-building – physically and symbolically.

The usage of statistics comes seldom unexpectedly from the opposition in order to strongly criticise the governmental housing policy's consequences. For example, MK Ester Vilanska (Maki party, 18th November 1952) spoke about the high rates of infant mortality in the transit camps:

> While the average infant mortality in Israel is usually 39 per thousand, the average mortality among the new immigrants is 82 per thousand, and the infant mortality rate in the transit camps was 157 per thousand last year. This is one of the tragic outcomes of shortage of home, of livelihood, of human housing conditions.

However, even this exceptional criticism does not link the housing policy and the ethno-nationalist logic that operates it. Thus, housing in Israel remains marked merely as a social problem.

Conclusions: the ethnocratic shikun

This study examined various cultural representations of shikun in textbooks of the last 25 years, Israeli leaders' speeches, and Knesset records during 1948–1961. The analysis points on an exclusionary discourse of the shikun, communicated through three secondary discursive strategies: quantitative exclusion, lexical exclusion, and scientification.

Quantitative exclusion is prominent in Israeli textbooks, where the term 'shikun' is notably absent despite its importance in shaping the Israeli national landscape. Lexical exclusion removes racism or discrimination from Israel's socio-political history, while scientification is highly noticed in speeches by Israeli leaders, who utilised numbers and field tours to shift from political debates to technical discussions, assuming clear solutions.

The analysis underscores a shift in the representation of the shikun discourse from scientification in leaders' speeches to quantitative and lexical exclusions in the school textbooks. This is linked to the temporal context of the shikun discourse: scientification coincides with the modernist architectural discourse of the 1950s, while the quantitative and lexical exclusions of the shikun match the current desire to forget the past injustice, neglect shikunim and even demolish them (Cohen & Yacobi, 2020).

The investigation reveals that the discursive exclusion conceals the shikunim's outcomes – maintaining Israel's borders and sovereignty while marginalising Palestinian and Mizrahi populations. It discourages questioning the instrumentalisation of shikunim construction for shaping the frontier and gaining spatial control. This exclusion strongly relies on linguistic tools to activate the cultural code of 'population dispersion'. The analysis demonstrates that this code is a spatial mechanism, that enables a sense of stability, public order, and social consolidation in the presence of 'external threats', such as hostile Arab states, Palestinian resistance, and economic crises.

The study shows how the representations of the shikun actively follow an ethno-nationalist logic and thus, empower the Israeli ethnocracy and the continuance of an ethno-national conflict over territory. Therefore, the study classifies the Israeli housing block as the 'Ethnocratic Shikun'. This novel conceptualisation equips us with a better perception of the spatial logic of the shikun within diverse urban settings (marginal neighbourhoods, Palestinian 'abandoned property' and development towns), which aims to deny the social injustice of building the shikun, as a geopolitical tool to colonise Israel-Palestine lands and frontiers.

This logic operates to present the ethnocratic shikunim's construction in the Israeli frontier as a necessity for establishing the Israeli-Jewish nation. It aims to normalise and naturalise them, promote ethnic unity of thought, and contribute to a unified modernist architectural language. Consequently, it justifies the use of the shikun to oppress any Israeli-Palestinian marginalised groups that might resist the obligatory order of this land regime.

The 'ethnocratic shikun' conceptualisation exposes that Palestinian space in Israel challenges the fundamental Israeli housing experience. Despite being initially built as public housing, highlighting their ethnocratic character and 'disappearance' from Palestinian spaces illustrates the difficulty to establish a substantial egalitarian welfare state that realises the Israeli aspirations for architectural modernism and 'Western' identity for all citizens, even in their private homes. Instead, in Israel's ethnocracy, dwelling is not a neutral everyday experience, but a geopolitical means to a permanent territorial expansion, posing a threat to one's true home, leading to a militaristic landscape embedded in Israeli cultural codes and to the exacerbation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The importance of this analysis is twofold. First, it stresses heavily that the Israeli-Palestinian geopolitical conflict has evolved culturally from within Israel as well through the Israeli government's oppressive housing policy towards Mizrahi Jews. Second, it encourages the ongoing dialogue between Political Geography and Architecture by offering a new conceptualisation – the ethnocratic shikun – that clearly demonstrates at once the political dynamics between local ethnic oppression, national land regimes and regional violent conflicts.

The main limitation of this study is the focus on specific period and representations. A future study should expand the variety of representations and periods in order to present

further interrelations between the shikun and this regional conflict, and to provide important comparative perspectives to additional ethnocratic states. This has to be done by further developing the 'ethnocratic shikun' conceptualisation through an attempt to comprehend its implications on the ethnocratic theory.

Notes

1. The term 'deprivation' in Hebrew, in the Israeli debate regarding Mizrahi Jews' discrimination is a well-known Ashkenazi language-laundering for the terms 'discrimination' and 'oppression'. In contemporary Hebrew, this term is perceived to be not harsh.
2. In this article, I will use the term 'sectarian' in translation of the Hebrew word 'Adati'. Although the proper translation should have been 'ethnic', the latter has its own word ('Etny') which is purposely not used to describe Jewish ethnic groups in the common Israeli public discourse.

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Disclosure statement

Notes on contributor

Matan Flum is a PhD candidate at the Bartlett Development Planning Unit at University College London (UCL). His research interests include critical urban studies, critical whiteness studies and critical discourse studies.

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