

**ZIONISM'S SPATIAL LOGIC**

**Rethinking Israeli Space: Periphery and Identity**, by Erez Tzfadia and Haim Yacobi. New York: Routledge, 2011. ix + 121 pages. Notes to p. 124. References to p. 140. Index to p. 144. \$130.00 cloth.

*Reviewed by Nasser Abourahme*

To say that Zionism is an acutely spatial project is to run the risk of stating the obvious. It is not only—as is any other

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settler-colonial enterprise—irreducibly territorial, but also politically mechanized largely through architecture. “Facts on the ground” remain its *modus operandi*, and cement probably its most devastating weapon. With this in mind it is perhaps not surprising that some of the most trenchant Israeli critiques of the Zionist project have come from geographers and urbanists (E. Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel’s Architecture of Occupation* [London: Verso, 2007]; O. Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006]) trying to parse the relationship between logic and form.

Space is a privileged lens in a context that remains territorially overdetermined. Here, there has been no wholesale transition to a liberal or market-based logic in the production of space and the allocation of land, and yet Israeli governance has been nothing if not decisive in its strategic appropriation of such techniques and discourses. It is at this place of creative tension—between a colonial/ethnonational logic and a (neo)liberal logic—that Erez Tzfadia and Haim Yacobi’s book seeks to intervene. How do the uptake of market-driven dynamics and the discursive apparatuses of liberal democracy (equality, multiculturalism, recognition, and so on) intersect with the colonial/ethnonational logic in the contemporary Israeli production of space? This question is all the more vexing given that liberal-democratic and colonial logics are often seen as contradictory—at least since David Harvey, following Giovanni Arrighi, posed the relationship between territorial and capitalistic logics of power as such (*A Brief History of Neoliberalism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007]).

The authors’ intervention entails certain key departures from the existing literature, including an emphasis on peripherality and nonindigenous minorities in Israeli society, and a methodological-conceptual use of what they call a “postcolonial approach.” The crux of their argument, however, is “that while the implementation of power over space and society has changed throughout the years, the colonial logic has maintained its hegemony, thus creating

new technologies of control” (pp. 118–19). There are times when the logics conflict—take, for example, the need for migrant labor following the closure of the West Bank and Gaza, which eventually developed into a demographic anxiety about non-Jewish presence—but what is striking is the strategic synergy of these logics. The authors illustrate this coalescence with several examples: the development towns that deployed poor immigrant Mizrahim in the Naqab as both a source of cheap labor and a colonizing frontier community (in fact the development towns have colonized more land than any other settlement type) (chap. 2); the private real estate developers and U.S.-style housing associations that generate private profit in a deregulated urban landscape and at the same time act as racial screening devices in neighborhoods in “mixed cities” like Lod, almost subcontracting this discriminatory responsibility from public entities (chap. 3); Moshav Hatzeva in the Jordan Valley, which is at once a high-tech agricultural producer “plugged in”—in real time—to the global export economy and a Zionist frontier settlement on the border (chap. 5); or the way “multicultural rhetoric is used to secure the hegemony of the Jewish majority” in places like the Galilee (chap. 7, p.102).

One of the book’s key insights is the observation that it is in these synergies and occasional contradictions between colonialism and multicultural capitalist democracy that the Israeli production of space “works.” It’s not simply that the colonial logic always trumps the latter (it does), but that the spatio-political machinery draws its strength from the creative and generative ambiguities between a hierarchical, colonial-territorial logic and a capitalistic, diffuse, seemingly “market-led” dynamic. The colonial/ethnonational, as they write, is a “flexible logic and practice” with, we should add, the capacity to obscure its mechanisms of power in spatial production (p. 119).

Central to their reading is a notion of the periphery as “a politically constructed social category that can be identified geographically” (p. 58). That is, it is not strictly a territorial relation but a

contingent spatio-discursive product defined by different variables (race, class, legality, territory). What counts here is the periphery's indexical relation to the frontier that can exist at multiple sites across the depth of territory, as with the Russian neighborhoods in the central city of Lod mobilized as a bulwark against Arab encroachment. In Israel, the periphery often *is* the frontier. And therein lies the rub, for the class and racial inequality of poor and non-European Jews—that is, their very peripherality—is subsumed by still-salient narratives of the frontier. By the same token, however, these people can exploit this to play up their frontier qualities, insert themselves more centrally in the symbolic order, and garner more resources from the central government.

While this point is well received, such a notion of peripherality seems almost too wide to retain analytic strength. It's not clear, for example, how Moshav Hatzeva, which is almost exclusively Ashkenazi with above average per capita income rates, and southern Tel Aviv, which is home to undocumented labor migrants (chap. 4), can both inhabit the same category. There is an obvious risk of homology here.

This small critique notwithstanding, the book remains a powerful corrective to those claims that "globalization challenges the ethno-national logic" or that the colonial-sovereign logic of power in Palestine-Israel is waning (p. 83). More importantly, the text opens inroads into the largely unexplored convergences between contemporary liberal modalities of governance and the colonial-sovereign form in which the Israeli production of space is a critical cog, not only as a laboratorial site for these emergent hybrids, but ultimately as an "exporter" of these "new technologies of control" back across the hyper-securitized urban landscapes of our age.