

**NEIGHBORHOOD
as A GLOBAL ARENA**

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as a Global Arena**

A World War IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD: The Case OF MOREH NEVUCHIM STREET

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Picnic

In February of 2014 several right-wing activists from the Shapira and Kiryat Shalom neighborhoods decided to host a community picnic in De Modena Garden, on the junction of De Modena and Ba'al Hakida streets. However this picnic was not really a picnic, but rather a protest. The event, published on social media under the heading "Returning De Modena Garden to its Residents", was meant to thwart the mourning rituals held there each Saturday by the Eritrean refugees and "return this neighborhood garden back to its resident at all costs". On one fine Saturday, in the middle of such a ritual, Jewish activists arrived, hung balloons, turned on loudspeakers, blew whistles, brought their kids, and forcefully sat them on swings¹.

¹ The community website of South Tel Aviv neighborhood residents - <http://www.south-tlv.co.il/article12713>

This event was one of a series of violent actions taken by right-wing activists to disrupt the mourning rituals held in the vicinity of the garden, and prayers held in improvised churches established in various spaces in South Tel Aviv. These guerilla tactics included activists crashing ceremonies and disrupting them by raucously singing “Am Israel Chai”, playing Eyal Golan’s song “Believers Aren’t Afraid” and activist Shefi Paz’s song “In the Black City” on loudspeakers², calling loudly on megaphones, blowing whistles and also cursing, threatening, and even assaulting refugees and neighbors and left-wing activist who tried to stop their disturbance of the ceremonies.

Every Saturday morning in the years 2008-2014, mourning rituals were held in various sites in and around the De Modena Garden by the Eritrean community. In these rituals, Eritreans would gather to commune with those of their community that have passed, with the souls of relatives in Israel and abroad, as well as commiserate in the grief of other Eritreans, such as in the tragedy of the Lampedusa migrant shipwreck on October 2013, causing the deaths of hundreds of refugees from Eritrea and other African countries. Prof. Galia Sabar and Adam Rotbard (son of the author) from the *Tel Aviv University African Studies* Department have studied and recorded these rituals over the years. They found them to be significantly different from the usual grieving practices of the Eritreans. The fact these ceremonies were being held in the open and in public spaces presents a huge shift from their native land rites where such ceremonies are conducted in closed spaces³. Their research indicates that this new practice of holding such rituals in public was a controversial issue among the Eritreans in the South Tel Aviv area from the get-go, even before the intervention of the right-wingers, specifically because of their potential for volatility with the local population. For a long time these rituals drew very few participants, and so were largely dismissed by many of the Eritrean community even before right-wing activists decided to storm them.

The Orchard

In the early 20th century, the De Modena Garden and its surroundings were just an orchard, one of many in the area currently called “South Tel Aviv”. This orchard was part of the Abu Kabir village. In

the '20s, after the Jaffa riots of 1921, Jewish immigrants began looking for places outside the city of Jaffa. New Jewish neighborhoods began popping up around the orchard: Shapira, Givat Moshe A, Givat Moshe B, Givat Naar, Neve Sha'anani, and Hibat Zion⁴.

Prior to 1934, when Abu Kabir village was appended to the agricultural lands of Jaffa, the orchard became an island of green at the heart of the Jewish settlement. To its north it bordered on Salama St., to its west was Even Adama St.⁵, to its east was Givat Moshe A neighborhood, and to its south Givat Moshe B.

The orchard remained productive until the late '30s, even after linking Abu Kabir to Jaffa: the water pump in the red-plastered wellshed on the hills summit continued to thump⁶, the water was drawn and gathered in the pool, funneled in canals, and workers arrived each day from the village of Abu Kabir, digging trenches and placing hoses around the trees to direct the pumped water to them. Pini Mizrahi, a native of the Shapira neighborhood, recalls that - "in the center [of the orchard] were giant pine trees that marked its center, and on its northern border rose two tall palm trees that bore clusters of yellow dates. The orchard was fenced by a live hedge of thorny wattle trees with yellow blooms and an intoxicating fragrance. When they bloomed, girls would pick the flowers and soak them in water. The infusion they produced was called 'cologne'"⁷.

In the early '40s, with the outbreak of World War II and the stop of maritime trade, the export of fruit was discontinued and so work in the orchard halted. The thumping of the water pump was silenced, the workers no longer came, and fruit was left hanging on trees. A year later, Pini Mizrahi explains, the Hurani came to the area: "The Hurani were Bedouin that came from Huran in the Golan Heights. Their lives were miserable and pitiful, and they lived in burrows or tin huts. Their clothes were black and dirty, their feet always bare; the word hurani became a pejorative among Jews and Arabs alike. The Hurani sawed down the trees and took the branches. All that remained of the orchard were tree stumps and an open field. The neighborhood kids, who had no playground, suddenly had an open space to play soccer, fly kites, hold campfires, and all other manner of children's games of the time. The pine trees provided shade, and an abundance of pine

2 Shefi Paz, "In the Black City" - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-66lIQ8Yxl>

3 Galia Sabar and Adam Rotbard, *Eritrean asylum seekers' lament ceremonies in Israel*

4 The majority of these neighborhoods are currently known as "Shapira Neighborhood".

5 Currently Ba'al Hakida St.

6 Today the wellhouse is called the "Red House", the only conservation building in Shapira.

7 Pini Mizrahi, *Entering the Orchard*. In (Eds.), Sharon Rotbard & Muki Tsur *Neither in Jaffa Nor in Tel Aviv: Stories, Testimonies and Documents from Shapira Neighborhood*

cones for staging battles. The neighborhood residents of Givat Moshe paved paths in the abandoned orchard to shorten the walk from Shapira and Salame St., which were the neighborhoods center”⁸.

During the twilight period of the UN resolution of November 29th, the declaration of the establishment of Israel, and the civil war that broke out in the first months of 1948, the Shapira neighborhood became a border area, subjected to a barrage of shootings from Abu Kabir. The neighborhood youth were recruited, while older residents were asked to dig fortifications. Many of them stopped working⁹.

The events unfolding in Israel, and the mass flight of Palestinian civilians, left very little doubt as to the future of this parcel of land. Pini Mizrahi describes one resident, an Ashkenazi Jew named Mister Kaplan¹⁰, who lived directly before the lot on 10 Even Adama St., who collected construction materials, planks and wood in his backyard, and thought this would be the right time to establish facts: “One Friday Mister Kaplan awoke, and with the help of his son Avraham, crossed the street towards the orchard, took logs from the pile and fenced an area of 200 square meters right in front of his house, inside the orchard. His son Avraham explained that from now on the land would be theirs. His father would build a house there, connecting it with a bridge to the existing house across the street”¹¹.

This settlement precedent determined by Mister Kaplan struck waves, and word spread like wildfire: “Very quickly rumor spread around the neighborhood that you could take over lots in the abandoned orchard, and “first come, first served”. Mister Kaplan has already done it. Our street never saw so many people, all trying to fence in lots for themselves and appropriating them. This takeover had several stages. First, you stand at the center of the lot and declare its boundaries. Then you send an emissary, usually your kids, to bring materials for fencing, the best are ropes, but if you don’t have them, then wool threads could help. The next step is the visit and tour of the women around the taken land. The final step is marking the lots, usually with colored fabrics, flags or any other marker. The fencing was quite difficult, as ropes were too expensive to afford. Some of the lots were small, some as small as a sukka. Towards evening time, the orchard looked like a field with humanoid scarecrows and colorful cloths. None of the markers were higher than a child’s knee. The entire event went on without any fights

or yelling, in a neighborly atmosphere and good spirits. At sunset many of the claimants left the lots to be with their families during the night, when the shootings started up and you needed to hide under cover, ensuring the kids didn't climb up to windows to watch the bullets zinging past, and the fireworks display that had already begun taking lives of neighborhood residents"¹².

And yet, the spontaneous settlement of the orchard did not last long (barely hours): "It was dusk, and two British armored vehicles on tracks rolled in. There was a machine gun on the front of the vehicles, and each carried three soldiers with red berets. The soldiers took one look at the orchard, understood what happened, and plowed into it while demolishing and uprooting any fence markers. They drove back and forth until everything was destroyed. They left Mister Kaplan's lot for last, asked him to take down the fence hedge himself, and said they would come back to check it was done. He did in fact take it down, and did so with a smile. The rumor of what the British had done spread from ear to mouth, and the following day no one came to survey their lots. Everything went back to how it was. Neighborhood residents returned to their routine of suffering and poverty, fatalities and casualties, snipings, bombings [...] in any case, the dream to "get rich" off abandoned land was cut short within a few hours"¹³.

Moreh Nevuchim Street

After the conquest of Jaffa, linking it to Tel Aviv and the appropriation of Palestinian lands with the *Absentee Property Law* (1950), the land was allocated to the Tel Aviv Municipality. As with all agricultural lands annexed to Tel Aviv, some became "brown" public spaces (public buildings) or "green" spaces (open public areas), some were turned into neighborhoods and residential projects, and in South Tel Aviv (meaning occupied Jaffa) much of the land was converted to industrial purposes and employment. The large majority of them were left fallow. According to municipal master plan 150# of 1961, the initial neighborhood plan (still mostly in effect), these agricultural lands in the center of Shapira were divided into several parcels. Shorashim School was built on one of them, on others warehouses and workshops

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Mizrahi claims that is was neighborhood custom, which always had a mixed population, to "call all Sephardic neighbors 'uncle' or 'aunt', while calling Ashkenazi neighbors 'mister' or 'ma'am'".

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

were established. As for the rest – any land between the streets of Ba'al Hakida and Turei Zahav were marked in green and left open.

Nevertheless, for some reason in the '60s the municipality decided to transform the eastern section into a residential area. At one point it was even named "Moreh Nevuchim Street". Although the street itself never existed, and no actual street sign was ever posted, the words "Moreh Nevuchim Street" still appear on several maps (also some internet sources).

In 1993 the Municipal Plan 2472# came into effect, increasing building rights in the northern reaches of the neighborhood while simultaneously providing official, statutory designation of this area for residential purpose. As a result, public spaces in the neighborhood were radically reduced in size; the municipality hoped to sell the lands to developers and generate profit from the sale and land betterment taxes it would accrue. During the '90s and 2000s, the Engineering Administration tried to promote tenders to build residential apartment buildings. None of these tenders drew sufficient proposals and were finally withdrawn.

In the meantime, there remained a large open space in the center of the neighborhood. Its western section became the De Modena Garden, and its eastern section - *Moreh Nevuchim Street* – was mostly a fallow, abandoned field, the rest used for industrial structures. In the mid-'90s, the period in which I was planning my house and getting to know the neighborhood, Moreh Nevuchim was basically just an unpaved road winding between empty lots and rusting warehouses, served as a chop shop. Every day stolen cars were brought in, disassembled, and set on fire. In the early 2000s the positive forces of residents began manifesting: people whose backyards bordered on the area, such as artist Yoav Ben Dov, opened entrances to the lot and used it. Residents held *Lag BaOmer* campfires and screened movies there, the Eitan Scouts used it for games, activities, and fire ceremonies. At some point, the municipality decided to create some order and designated the land as a "temporary garden", building a dog park there.

In this space, "*Moreh Nevuchim Street*", partially official and partially non-official, became the site of the refugees mourning rituals.

But in the interim, after the 2011 Housing Protest, the municipality decided to forego attempts to sell the land, and instead to take on the

establishment of the first affordable housing project. Construction began in 2012: the imaginary “Moreh Nevuchim Street” was enclosed and tractors entered. In order to conduct their rituals, refugees were forced to move to the adjacent public garden.

War

In the fall of 2012, after a long period in which this practice was conducted in the informal public space of the non-existent Moreh Nevuchim St. under the radar, the Eritrean community’s mourning rituals began drawing increasingly more attention. The turning point, as shown by Sabar and Rotbard, was the disastrous shipwreck of Lampedusa that produced significantly more turnout. In addition to those rituals held in De Modena Garden, others were also held in other parks and public gardens around South Tel Aviv, such as Levinsky Garden and Hahurshot Park that drew hundreds and even thousands of participants¹⁴.

From February 2014, just a few months after the Lampedusa shipwreck, these rites, initially just a personal obsession of a handful of neighborhood activists (May Golan, Shefi Paz, Sasi Ben-Menachem, Suzie Cohen-Tzemach), became a national problem, one that should be on the agenda of every Israeli politician. Of all the challenges and problems of Shapira neighborhood, the city of Tel Aviv-Jaffa, and the State of Israel, the “illegal immigrant problem” of South Tel Aviv is the one determined to be the most alarming, existential national threat – or so claim a distinguished list of politicians (Knesset members Arie Eldad, Michael Ben Ari, Ayelet Shaked, Miri Regev, the Im Tirtzu movement), rightwing activists (Itamar Ben Gvir, Baruch Marzel, Benzi Gopstein and LEHAVA organization), and municipal politicians (Tel Aviv-Jaffa council member Chain Goren), all of which have volunteered to fight the infiltrators under the banner of “the plight of South Tel Aviv residents”. In their view, this is a war of the homestead. De Modena Garden has been transformed into a battleground.

Is this truly a war?

It seems so. If simply due to the fact that war has been declared¹⁵.

14 As claimed by Sabar and Rotbard, prior to the Lampedusa shipwreck, conducting mourning rituals in public spaces was a controversial issue among the Eritrean community, and therefore number of participants was very small. The impact of the tragedy, particularly the large number of deaths, prompted refugees who had previously refrained from participation to begin attending such events.

15 The slogan “This is War”, and the extensive use of military jargon in publications, posts, and mass correspondence on social media. See Shefi Paz – “Infiltrators Are Coming to Get You”, MIDA website, June 28 2014 - <http://mida.org.il/2014/06/26/המסתננים-דרום-תל-אביב-יגיעו-גם-אליכם/>

World War

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Although this conflict seems small and local, held in our backyard, it is undoubtedly influenced by external events, people, and processes, in other cities and other continents. It occurs concurrently to other, similar events around the world. This is why many of those perpetuating this small neighborhood garden conflict believe it to be only a single battle in a much greater war currently being waged in Africa, Syria, and recently, with the waves of refugees coming to the West, also in Europe. The main characteristic of this war – one which began as the “war on terrorism” declared by George W. Bush after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and ostensibly ended with the retreat from Iraq on December 5 2011 on the command of Barack Obama – is that it has morphed into a kind of chaotic global civil war, with everyone fighting everyone else, and no one is clear on what the war is about and who is fighting whom. Is it Islam against the world? Shia against Sunni? Europe and the US against the rest of the world? North vs. South? The First World against the Third World? Or conversely the Third World against the First? White City vs. Black City?

The demographic changes incurred by the arrival of several tens of thousands of refugees to a relatively small segment of the city certainly undermined the existing order. And certainly no one could argue with the fact that this extra population burdened further already overburdened and underdeveloped infrastructure. And yet, as seen in the summer of 2015 with the waves of refugees fleeing Syria to Europe, these people could have been absorbed in myriad ways. In Israeli society and government there were those who decided to declare war on these people on behalf of a greater war: to discourage the entrance of additional refugees we will offer no hospitality, mistreat them and harass them.

From the point of view of such rightwing activists, the De Modena mourning rituals became the premise for declaring no less than a full-blown world war: a war against “invasion”, the “conquest” and “infiltration” of the Third World into our homes by creating a Black City along the White City, on the margins of the First World. De Modena Garden is the vanguard of the State of Israel facing the African invasion, and therefore here – particularly here – local and global arguments were

thrown in the mix: the refugees, through an amendment to the 1954 *Prevention of Infiltration Law* (regarding 1948 Palestinian refugees), automatically became “infiltrators”¹⁶. They are therefore, by their very presence here, criminals, and as such over the years many of the accepted criminal labels have been attached to them, denouncing them as rapists, thieves, drinkers and hoodlums, all of which were based on ridiculous manipulation of statistics¹⁷. They were suspected of feigning refugeeism, and called “work migrants” (in the view of the White City citizens, “work immigration” is an unforgivable crime, while “relocation” is absolutely fine). Additionally, they were accused of being radical Muslims (95% of the Eritreans, representing the vast majority of African refugees in Israel today, are in fact Christians), El Qaida agents and terrorists (in one case, Havtum Zarhum, an Eritrean refugee, was accidentally lynched after a terrorist attack in Beer Sheva)¹⁸. The Eritreans speak Arabic, and according to public opinion this precedes their religion, thus making them Arabs, and so in the local context are a demographic threat, as evidenced by the complaint made by Achihad Etinger, the rabbi of the Shapira synagogue, who cautioned against an “upsurge” of mixed marriages¹⁹.

Mixed Neighborhood

Work on the Shapira neighborhood master plan began in 2002. It was managed by the Tel Aviv Engineering Administration and Prof. Eli Stern of the Urban Planning Department, along with local residents. It was finally approved by the Tel Aviv –Jaffa local council in 2006. After months and years of deliberation in forums that included dozens and at times even hundreds of participating residents, endless meetings, workshops and work groups, it was determined that Shapira is a “mixed neighborhood”. Throughout work on the plan, it was decided that the particular needs and diversity of cultures of local residents must be acknowledged, and the incapability of some resident groups to participate in the planning process must be taken into consideration. Thus, the plan entails the creation of a mixed range of residential options that will enable - “the continued existence of population groups that

16 An act in complete violation of the United Nations Refugee Convention, of which Israel is a signatory – preventing the UN Committee for Determining Refugee Status from taking action.

17 To review the misleading and manipulative use of crime statistics, see – Ishton, August 29 2013 – “66% of crime in Israel: Eritrians and Sudanese. Police response: “...their fingers become knives and they eat babies” - https://eishton.wordpress.com/2013/08/29/eritrean_sudanese_crime/

18 Whether Havtum Zarhum was murdered due to being too black or not black enough, the incitement leading to the lynch in Beer Sheva first began on social media and Facebook correspondence of radical “local” and “national” rightwing activists.

19 Beni Tocker, December 12 2012 – “South Tel Aviv: Flood of Marriages between Jewish Girls and Eritreans” - <http://www.inn.co.il/News/News.aspx/244107>

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are diverse in character and composition, and expanding residential supply accordingly". According to the plan, there will also be a mixed school established in the neighborhood.

This generalized definition is in keeping with an all-inclusive consensus, according to which the one kind unchanged fact about the neighborhood since its establishment is the immense diversity of its residents. In contrast to the monolithic nature of other places in Israel – kibbutzim, communal settlements, and agricultural or rural towns – and the tendency of more affluent areas of Tel Aviv to architectural, social, and cultural homogeneity, Shapira has always been a mixed neighborhood of great diversity. Its miscellaneous architecture reflects the social and ethnic variety typified there. There have always been both Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews, Jews and non-Jews, religious and secular residents. From its earliest days, it has always been an immigration destination, regarded as an immigrant neighborhood, and this reputation has ensured constant turnover of its population. Within three decades of its establishment, and until its annexation to Tel Aviv, the entire original population was replaced. The first residents, primarily immigrants from Eastern Europe, Bulgaria, Afghanistan, Thessaloniki and Turkey, as well as *Bukhari* Jews that arrived from Bukhara and later from Jerusalem, were replaced by new residents. After the War of Independence, when the orchards were added to the neighborhood area, then the construction of residential projects in the 1950s, new people arrived with the waves of immigration flooding the country. The friction and meeting between communities, traditions, and backgrounds was a prominent element in the childhood stories and life tales gathered in the popular history project conducted in the neighborhood²⁰.

Even in the following decades, local population continued to diversify. In the early '90s, this meant Jewish immigrants from Bukhara (Uzbekistan, along with families and individuals from all the republics of the previous Soviet Union). Later that decade, it filled with Palestinian workers seeking employment in the greater Tel Aviv area, many of them finding lodgings there. After the Second Intifada and the imposed closure on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip during the early 2000s, the Palestinians were replaced by foreign workers from Turkey, the Ukraine, China, the Philippines, Central and Western Africa, and

towards the end of this decade East African refugees also began arriving – people from Sudan, South Sudan and Eritrea, as well as young Ethiopian Jews struggling to rent apartments in central or north Tel Aviv.

In recent decades this weaker population was joined by a more affluent one: the first wave of secular Israeli families of the “creative class” began settling there in the mid-‘90s, including artists, designers, architects, and photographers that were meant to promote the inevitable gentrification process of the neighborhood. Since 2010 additional individuals and groups have come with the neo-Zionist settlement revival of organizations such as BINA²¹ or HaNoar HaOved VeHaLomed youth movement that had bases in the area²².

And yet, the most significant and well-organized wave of affluent immigration to the neighborhood are the religious-national settlers that moved there from the West Bank within the framework of the “Settling within Hearts” project. This initiative to settle within the territories of the Green Line, and particularly in the central Dan area, most specifically in the heart of the Ajami neighborhood in Jaffa, began around 2005 after the evacuation of Gush Katif - a kind of reverse version of the attempts of unity and solidarity styled by BINA or Tzav Pius that cropped up after Rabin’s assassination. The idea motivating this immigration was to deliberately choose ancient sites of Jewish settlements, influencing their municipalities and thus national Israeli politics and Israeli society as a whole.

Jewish Neighborhood

In 2002 Rabbi Mishaël Cohen came to Shapira from Hebron to “bring the beacon of Torah light to Tel Aviv”, and constitute “a spiritual lighthouse radiating a great light on the areas residents”. He founded the Orot Aviv Yeshivat Hesder (a program combining Torah studies and military service) that began operating in the synagogue on 24 Israel Maslet St. Rabbi Cohen, a man who in 2006 ordered students to disobey military commands and refuse participation in the Disengagement Plan, divides his time

20 A selection of stories and testimonies from the project *Neither in Jaffa Nor in Tel Aviv* were later published in a book.

21 BINA - Center for Jewish Identity and Hebrew Culture – is a quasi-organization quasi-youth movement for adults established in 1996 by historian Muki Tsur after the assassination of Rabin. It focuses on Jewish education from a secular perspective, conducting a wide range of educational activities in community centers and also its “secular yeshiva”. In the years 2007-14 the organization was based in a clinic building on the junction of Yesod Hama’ala and Levinski streets in South Tel Aviv. It is currently based in the education compound allocated by the Tel Aviv Municipality in Hahurshot Park.

22 The HaNoar HaOved VeHaLomed youth movement has offices on Kibbutz Galuyot St. built during the late ‘70s on the ruins of the Yatzkar Building”, the wellhouse in which Yosef-Chaim Brenner and others were murdered in on May 1921.

23 Kobi Nachshoni, YNET Jewish Affairs correspondence, claims that in 2014 only one student registered to the yeshiva. This was after 3 years in which not a single student registered. Kobi Nachshoni – “Yeshivat Hesder with No Students: 20% of yeshivas under the 1-mark”, October 23 2014 - <http://www.ynet.co.il/>

between Hebron and Tel Aviv. Over time, he has been joined by other rabbis, including Achiyah Etinger, Yuval Alpert, Pinchas Tzabari and Bchor Dezorayev (Yadid).

Orot Aviv has a very long way to go before becoming a successful Yeshivat Hesder²³, but as a neighborhood settlement enterprise it has increased in popularity since the completion of the Disengagement from Gaza in 2006, revitalized with a new initiative to “settle in hearts”²⁴. Through this new settlement project, the Shikmim Garin Torani were sent to settle in the center of Jaffa along with kippa sruga (national-religious) settlers and the REUT group of National Service girls, as well as dozens of families that uprooted themselves from the hills of Judea and Samaria. The project enjoyed the generous support of the Settlement Division, Tel Aviv Municipality, the city’s Religious Council, the Ministry of Religions, and foreign contributors. Within a decade, settlers managed to take over a large portion of neighborhood infrastructure, including the synagogue, the Activist Committee, and the community center. Several local kindergartens were opened exclusively for Jews, the Shorashim School finally had its raison d’être²⁵, and the new residents even succeeded in getting their representative elected to the Tel Aviv-Jaffa city council in the “Drom HaIr” (South of the City) list of the 2013 local elections: Chaim Goren, currently a coalition member of Mayor Ron Huldai.

It may be that this new global world war is a distraction and a diversion, that basically what we have here is just a continuation of the Jewish wars. Or, to be more precise, the fight against illegal immigrants in the garden was primarily motivated by religious reasons. In fact, the Jewish settlers were the ones to start this war. As early as June 2010, there were public statements made by 25 rabbis from South Tel Aviv issuing a decree banning the residents of South Tel Aviv from “leasing apartments to infiltrators and other illegal foreign workers”. In a poster hung around the neighborhood, it said that this injunction was based on a Jewish religious prohibition stated in the Bible as Lo Techonem²⁶, and on a newspaper article published in Ma’ariv on the 7th of the month of Sivan it stated that –“40% of crimes in the Yiftach Sub-District are perpetrated by illegal immigrants”, and “in the last year four murders were committed by illegals”²⁷. These claims were supported by other arguments, such as - “the proliferation of

mixed marriages.....are considered...and no further explanation is necessary". The initiators of such posters, printed and hung on every neighborhood bulletin board, were none other than the rabbis of the Orot Aviv Yeshiva and the Jaffa-based Garin Torani, Achiyah Etinger and Yuval Alpert.

The neighborhood settlers also attended the street fights held each Saturday in De Modena Garden in the winter of 2014. Rightwing activists armed with whistles and megaphones arrived to raise hell and disrupt the (Christian) rituals of the Eritrean community, while the neighborhood settlers – Chaim Goren and others – stood and watched. They obviously could not take active part, as this would be a violation of Sabbath rules witnessed in public²⁸.

In other words, the war over De Modena Garden, facilitated by "Shabbat gentiles" such as Shefi Paz and friends from the "National Liberation Front of Tel-Aviv", is actually a war to establish a Jewish territory within the neighborhoods public space. This represents a new claim: *Shapira neighborhood is a Jewish neighborhood*.

A Neighborhood World War

From the tribulations of the planning and urban renewal processes of Tel Aviv to the developments and global disputes between North and South and the Third World, from the wars raging in East Africa to the struggles over hegemony within Israeli society and the re-importation of conquest practices and illegal settlement from the West Bank into the borders of the State of Israel, the "*Moreh Nevuchim St.* case" is a complex entanglement of conflicts and changes of various and odd calibers. It must be understood as the struggle between different groups over ever-diminishing public spaces, as a war of religion, and also a world war.

While privatization, trade, spatial standardization and human and social homogenization have neutralized the political dimensions of the White City, transforming it de facto to a space that is, at its very core, almost free of politics²⁹, the

24 To review the phenomenon of domestic settlement and Garin Torani groups of Rabbi Elyashiv Reichner see: Particularly here: The story of social settlers (Yeiot Acronot – HEMED 2013).

25 Prior to the arrival of the settlers the majority of children who attended the Shorashim School were brought in on buses. There were discussions that dealt with desire to make it a mixed school, or alternatively establish a mixed school on nearby public grounds. Despite the master plan, in 2014 a gymnasium for Shorashim was built on this designated lot.

26 *When the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them (Deuteronomy 7:1,2 KJV).*

27 The various versions of this astonishing claim regarding crime rates in Yiftach Sub-District, an utterly groundless claim, was discussed extensively in the Ashton list listed above.

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neighborhoods of Black Cities have undergone the reverse. Today, these are the places in which civilizations perpetually clash. Places in which politics, on a neighborhood, national and global scale, are evident in every aspect of daily life. Black City neighborhood populations are currently a constantly transient and necessarily random human cluster (and are therefore completely non-random) of individuals and families, minorities and communities, of varying degrees of marginalization and poverty, brought together by an indiscriminate reality to the same geographic area, forced to live together or vie for resources. Although living side-by-side in the same physical space, on the same street or neighborhood, they are separated by an endless number of methods and mechanisms, from the legal status of each individual or group to the ways in which each is allowed or prohibited from access to public resources (education, health, security, employment). In a reality such as that of Israel, where the system does not encourage integration of such groups (quite the opposite), this separation is implemented from early childhood through the education system. Shapira kids scatter each morning to their different schools: Ashkenazis attend Teva School, foreigners go to Bialik-Rogozin, national-religious children attend Shorashim, and Haredis go to various religious schools. As written by Guy Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle* - “...as they have been dangerously brought together [...] they must be isolated together”.³⁰

The random nature of this human clustering, its arbitrary composition, and its unforeseen or uncontrollable diversity of classes, cultures or ethnicities, complicates definitions and classifications, perhaps even undermining any possibility of joint political conceptualization (as all traditional and European political conceptualizations are based on right-left relations and require – even just for show and establishing such distinctions outward – a deliberate blindness to racial or ethnic origins). This makes any possibility of creating a unified community extremely difficult, and further weakens these neighborhoods. Within Black City neighborhoods one can no longer discuss symmetrical politics of left and right, black and white. The demarcating lines are rough, and definitions inherently non-symmetrical. In many, more than one language is spoken. Neighborhood politics may create surprising coalitions, such as with the struggle over Shapira where LGBT activists worked with particularly Orthodox rabbis,

truly reminiscent of the insane apocalyptic geopolitics suggested by French-Canadian author Maurice G. Dantec³¹.

As modernization has passed them by, or at least is taking its time to reach them, these neighborhoods usually preserve community, religious and cultural traditions that have generally been rendered obsolete in White Cities, and they are also the crossing places of various populations in their migration. These migrant populations, who are also excluded from modernization and enjoy none of its benefits (in fact, are often the victims of modernization, the reason they were uprooted in the first place), arrive at the Black City's neighborhoods with their languages and norms, and little faith in the promise of modernity. The meeting between old and new populations, between natives and immigrants, may be volatile. Without any horizon offering a possibility of integration, or some form of inclusion, the neighborhoods social reality has but one option – paradoxical and hopeless politics. The basic composition for this “separation together” (such as with natives and immigrants) results in only one possible consensus in neighborhood politics - that political awareness and identity of individuals and communities is shaped not only by their economic reality, but also and primarily by a growing range of cultural, religious and ethnic constructions, conditions and circumstances. The only agreement in this politics of identities may be the source and cause of endless other disagreements, thus establishing a local geopolitical arena that is seemingly always unique and unprecedented, with endless potential for divergencies, entanglements, disputes, frictions, distortions, wrangling and conflicts.

In a world where neighborhood and world politics are one and the same, it is reasonable to assume such politics range to other avenues. The combination of municipal segregation policies with current nationally instated segregation politics may provoke a civil war that mixes religion and ethnicity on a scale that is simultaneously of neighborhood and global dimensions, a neighborhood world war.

28 I personally witnessed several such incidents during the mourning rituals. This was my usual time to walk the dog.

29 In Paul Virilio's book *City of Panic*, he describes the politics of panic through which the media and its means of production standardize behaviours and synchronize opinions and primarily emotions.

30 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Chapter 7 – “The Organization of Territory”, 172. <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/Sl/en/display/24>

31 Maurice G. Dantec, *Babylon Babies*, Gallimard, 1999.

URGent Imagination

Liat Brix-Etgar

In the context of a post 9-11 political equator¹ that divides the world and the city between enclaves of mega wealth and sectors of poverty, urbanities of labor and surveillance, the formal and informal, our institutions of architecture have lost their socio-political relevance. Instead, the architecture avant-garde has become fully complicit with an international, neo-liberal project of privatization and homogenization, by camouflaging gentrification with a massive hyper aesthetic and formalist project

Teddy Cruz, Manifesto #47²

The political equator traverses the world and divides between isolated areas of deprivation, lack of planning and neglect, and global enclaves of prosperity where architectural institutions currently cluster. These institutions are linked to networks of professional knowledge, technology, and innovation. Within these networks, architects plan the future, shape a way of life worthy of us, residents of the connected “core” of the global cities. In the open sphere, spectacular architectural forms fly by along with fashionable buzzwords such as “sustainability”, “zero energy building”, and “sharing economy”. Conversely, within the areas of wealth and their extensions, a “gap” is produced – holes within the global network within which the “others” reside.

Teddy Cruz – architect, activist, and lecturer in UCLA – running across both sides of the border. In view of the paralysis gripping the architectural avant-garde, and its lack of response to the problems of the *gap* residents, Cruz proposes a worthy method for reflection on different architectural practice. Cruz operates on the seams between urban planning, architecture, pedagogy, activism, and art. Since 1994 he has been researching and planning in the Tijuana-San Diego area, the political border between the US and Mexico. His practices link different forms of action and knowledge, including architecture, urbanism, community work, political theory, visual culture, and urban policies. He has established an architectural practice that integrates these fields, impacting planning, and education approaches around the world.

Cruz outlines a route that does not adhere to the horizontal boundary separating between prosperous enclaves and its economic power and areas of poverty. His path crosses the border – and thus also the imaginary vertical plain between top-down and bottom-up planning. It is a path that allows for movement in all directions: shifting between forms of social organization and spatial design based on local knowledge, to a planning mechanism founded on institutional power and professional knowledge. In other words, a practice of dynamic and inclusive processes that rely on networks of knowledge and action in lieu of hierarchical structures. Such an approach champions structural and program flexibility, temporary actions, incrementalism, and modifying space to suit changing needs without ceding the claim to distributive justice and the responsibility of government over space and the people that inhabit it.

The retreat of the “public”

“I have always operated in the context of crisis”, answers Cruz defiantly in 2009 when asked about the impact of the global economic crisis on his professional practice³. The distinction between the financial crisis of the mega-rich enclaves – the playground of contemporary architecture – and the profound and ongoing socioeconomic crisis created by the neoliberal reasoning behind urban planning is evident in the interview. The neoliberal city takes on various forms in different parts of the world, claims Cruz, but one of its clear traits, evident in all forms, is the emergence of the political equator and the worsening of “the socio-economic and demographic conflicts of an uneven urbanization – an urban asymmetry which is at the center of today’s crises”⁴.

From the late 1970s onward, the sovereignty of government has diminished through privatization and neglect of various areas relinquished to the mercy of market forces. Economic institutions in Israel began adopting neoliberal policies as early as the ‘80s, but it was a decade later when this approach was elevated to a government ideology accompanied by significant privatization manifested, among other things, in privatizing lands and planning-construction processes. In recent years, international corporations have managed to gain the support of the new local economic elite to engineer additional privatization, this time in areas traditionally managed and protected by the state. These include not only welfare services and mechanisms of social solidarity, but also portions of urban infrastructure and public space.

These processes encourage urban development on a large scale, entailing the demolishment of urban textures, and accelerated construction while redistributing public resources. This is conducted by developers who purchase extensive areas of land, then inundating them with generic building compounds. The form of such compounds, and the lifestyle possible them, are dictated by economic considerations of developers, and the regulations of local government planning institutions. Such

1 Cruz uses the term “political equator” to describe the border of Mexico and the US as equivalent to that proposed in “The Pentagon’s New Map” by Thomas Barnett that divides the world in two. One half is characterized by a “functioning core”, a globalized, open and networked sphere, while the other is described as a “non-integrating gap”, not linked to the global network and typified by oppressive rule, poverty, disease and conflicts. See – T. Cruz “From the global border to the border neighborhood”, conference lecture at the Symposium “Archipelago of Exceptions.

Sovereignities of extraterritoriality”, CCCB 10-11, November 2005. It should be noted that this text, unlike most essays discussing Cruz’s work, does not include presentation and analysis of his architectural works, but rather tries to extract from it a lexicon of thought-action terms that will allow for new architectural forms and unique local organization in the communal space his philosophy creates.

2 T. Cruz, “Manifesto #47”, Icon [journal] international design, architecture & culture, Vol. 50 (2007).

3 T. Cruz in conversation with C. Waldorf, “Learning from Tijuana”, *Triple Canopy*, Issue 7 (2009).

partnership models between government and private capital, thus far typified primarily by the construction of new neighborhoods in Israel, have lately also been evident in “urban renewal” processes through local projects, creating homogenous and fenced regions in the heart of neighborhoods while isolating and marginalizing weak populations.

Despite the continuing privatization of the “public”, the “public space” remains the self-evident of planning discourse, serving as the foundation for urban architectural design. “Public planning” is still a key principle in training architects, artists and designers, and is a central base of the city’s culture institutions. The retreat process of the “public” is camouflaged by its usual forms of appearance, but the fact remains that the “public is collapsing”⁵. This concept is being emptied of its political meaning, clashing with a socioeconomic reality of privatization and neglect. In order to allow for the reappearing of the public space, we must first expose the reasons for its retreat: “Without an understanding of the conditions that produced this crisis – which can themselves be thought of as the architect’s materials – we will just be making public art or decorating the failings of misguided planning and selfish economics”⁶.

Cruz claims that the crisis is primarily cultural, stemming from the inability of social institutions to question their own approaches, their excluding policies, and their rigid protocols. Thus, the most significant arena of action open to architects and artists is the distance created by these institutions and the “public”. According to Cruz, artists and architects play a role in inventing and conceptualizing new protocols. Meaning - “It is the construction of the political itself that is at stake here: not just political art or architecture”⁷.

Shrinking of time: The time of urgency

Architectural planning focuses on establishing a concrete future, aspiring to provide form to reality worthy of existence. However, the time of “architecture” as a field of knowledge and a social institution spans past to future, while temporarily constructing traditions and a progression of knowledge and skills. In the continuum of moments bridging what has past and the moment ahead, there is a brief flicker of the present. The architectural practice proposed by Cruz serves him

in presenting the lack of the immediate as a social-political problem.

In his work, the time of the architectural action is minimized to the *urgent*, to the presence of a suffering body that demands immediate action. In his view, the urbanization crisis requires we - “reconnect our artistic practices and academic research to an urgency of the everyday”⁸.

Architectural work focusing on the *urgent* distinguishes between political architectural activism and other forms of “social” architecture and “tactical urbanism”, all absorbed into the neoliberal urbanist mechanism. I suggest this distinction following Adi Ophir’s differentiation between ethics that deal in the good life (or the life worthy of *me*, that which suits *me* and others like *me*⁹), and between morality, focused on “not ‘our’ good life, but rather the miserable lives of others”¹⁰. Architecture’s address of the *urgent* prioritizes the immediate suffering of others. Lessening evil is a moral imperative – and if so, any solution to a “global” problem, and any action taken to establish a worth future while deferring this moral obligation, are merely an ethical occupation in self-shaping. Architects dedicating themselves to such actions in the midst of crisis simply participate, even unwittingly, in reproduction of evil and extending the distance between the “core” we inhabit and the abandoned space of those “others”.

Reducing the distance: The urgent space

I therefore propose interpreting the artistic and architectural practice suggested by Cruz as a “distance reducing” action. In my opinion, its radicalism stems from the fact that this distance is an essential characteristic in the historic formation of these methods of action and their demarcation as autonomic spheres.

From its inception, architecture is rooted within the political, social and cultural contexts in which it germinates and evolves - but it is specifically within such contexts that it aspires to be for its own sake. One that follows its own internal logic. It is clear that realizing this aspiration requires defending itself against external, non-artistic demands (one could say that it is actually the close proximity to such matters between such spheres makes the construction of some distance between them necessary).

4 T. Cruz, “Returning Duchamp’s urinal to the bathroom? On the reconnection between artistic experimentation, social responsibility and institutional transformation” in M. Fraser (ed), *Design Research in Architecture: an overview* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited), p. 209.

5 Ibid., p. 209

6 T. Cruz, “Learning from Tijuana”, *op.cit.*

7 T. Cruz, “Spatializing citizenship and the informal public”, in E. Shaw Crane and A. Roy (eds.), *Territories of Poverty: Rethinking North and South* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2015), p. 321.

8 Ibid.p. 318.

9 Ophir, A. (2000) *The order of evils: Toward an ontology of morals*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved [in Hebrew].

10 Ibid., p. 333

And yet, neoliberal logic, along with the perceptual or “critical” distance, establishes an ever-growing class-based, physical distance. The centers of architectural avant-garde research and action are located in prosperous enclaves of the global “core”, disengaged from the urgent problems of neighboring people. Even on those occasions when some manifestation of that misery materializes from that other space (such as the anonymous construction worker falling to his deaths while working on the entrepreneurial city)¹¹, he remains erased. Nameless, without presence.

In view of this state of affairs, Cruz suggests expanding the *critical distance* of architectural practice to include a *radical proximity* directed towards the conflict zones, starting with social institutions. Such proximity, he claims, can “... transform them from the inside out in order to produce new aesthetic that can problematize the relationship of the social, the political, and the formal”¹².

This new aesthetic will reveal to all the intimate relations between architecture and the wealthy elites - a closeness without which architecture could not defend its “artistic autonomy”. Such as a change is necessary as - “Without altering the exclusionary policies that have produced the current crises in the first place, our professions will continue to be subordinated to the visionless and homogeneous environments defined by the bottom-line urbanism of the developer’s spreadsheet and the neo-conservative politics and economics of a hyper-individualistic ownership society”.¹³

However, with the prioritization of the *urgent*, it is apparent that ethical actions to design the edifices of architecture are insufficient. Cruz’s approach offers another dimension of radical proximity, one that homes in on the “neighborhood” as the site for ethical action, as well as close partnerships with local organizations. Neoliberal urbanism gives preference to the “individual” over the “citizen”, and therefore sees neighborhoods as communities of individuals, meaning a sphere of needs-based, discrete social identities, usually barred from the city’s political life. Community planning entails small interventions in the communal neighborhood space, actions that express the unique identity of the community, and address the practical and immediate needs of daily life.

or its aesthetic outcomes, but an interpretation of his work that only discerns its “community” elements overlooks the political potential inherent in it. The forms of local government, established and founded as one part of the “community” planning process, enable identifying the neighborhood as a political unit, and the participation of its residents as neighborhood-civic action. The architectural actions proposed by Cruz extend beyond merely redesigning physical space; it a redesign of the political space through an urban pedagogy that exposes conflicts and reveals the conditions which generate crisis, such as lack of distributive justice, discriminatory policies, and absence of governmental responsibility. Nevertheless, architectural activism is not fashioned to resist all forms of government, but to negotiate over the form and methods of government. In this way, Cruz weaves anew the frayed threads between “community” and “civic”, creating the infrastructure for binding the rift between neighborhood and city.

Urgent imagination

“The future of cities today depends less on buildings and, in fact, depends more on the fundamental reorganization of socioeconomic relations... the best ideas in the shaping of the city in the future will not come from enclaves of economic power and abundance, but in fact from sectors of conflict and scarcity from which an *urgent imagination* can really inspire us to rethink urban growth today”¹⁴.

It is the narrowing concentration of the *urgent*, more than any other approach, which will allow architecture to redirect its energies to the future. Architectural planning requires its partners to imagine what has yet to transpire, and create the space for it. Unlike the despair that stems from the self-image of neoliberalism – meaning, assuming this is the “natural” world order – such planning enables us to see a more tangible order together, and to do so with architectural tools. In the Israeli-Palestinian space, constricted by a mix of neoliberal reasoning and an ethnocratic regime that produce suffering, we must favor the *urgent*. In the professional sphere, where planning institutions and professional protocols institute more and more separation fences, isolated

11 For the Israeli context, see – “Two construction workers fell to their deaths in Midtown Tel Aviv”, November 12 2015 - <http://www.ynet.co.il/>

12 T. Cruz, “Returning Duchamp’s urinal to the bathroom? On the reconnection between artistic experimentation, social responsibility and institutional transformation”, *op.cit.*, p. 205.

13 Ibid. p. 206.

14 T. Cruz, “How architectural innovations migrate across borders”, TEDGlobal 2013 from: https://www.ted.com/talks/teddy_cruz_how_architectural_innovations_migrate_across_borders

neighborhoods, and forsaken residents from Jesse Cohen to Kafr 'Aqab, we must act in concert. The political force of architecture lies in its power to imagine together, each time anew, another possible space.

Urgent Imagination

Neighborhood as a Global Arena

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Program English translation: Margalit Rodgers
Graphic concept and design: Guy Saggee – Shual.com
Covers print: Dfus Golem | Graphic Books Publishing
Thanks: Sebastian Quack, Jennifer Aksu, Hanno Hauenstien, Birgit Luig, Sylvia Winkler, Stephan Köperl
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Project “Hall” and the Lobby of the Center for Digital Art: Luciana Kaplun, Ira Shalit, Mai Omer and the youth group from Jessy Cohen neighborhood.
Technical Engineer: Igor Halezky
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Culinary Encounters in Jessy Cohen: Dina Yakerson, Haim Burshtein
Entrance space: Marjetica Potrc and students from Design for the Living World Studio: Finn Brüggemann, Moritz Brettschneider, Janis Fisch, Tino Holzman, Lea Kirstein, Max Neu, Francisca Rodríguez, Kathrin Sohlbach, William Schwartz, Julia Wycisk, Kathrin Zelger.
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Coach: Eyal Vexler.
Thanks to Igal Eyal and the City Stadium.

Time Capsule: Udi Edelman

Glocal Neighbors – the Song: Sylvia Winkler, Stephan Köperl

Lectures and Talks: Leah Abir, Nisan Almog, Yehuda Alush, Ytav Bouhsira, Liat Brix Etgar, Hila Cohen-Schneiderman, Matthias Einhoff, Dana Gazy, Gilly Karjevsky, Aurele Mechler, Mai Omer, Hadas Ophrat, Marjetica Potrc, Sharon Rothbard, Maozia Segal, Ruti Sela, Kochavi Shemesh, Meir Tati, Osnat Trabelsi, Iris Tzur, Shay-Lee Uziel, Neta Weiner, Glocal Neighbors members.

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Robin Bischoff, Eyal Danon, Omer David, Orel Galina, Gilly Karjevsky, Stephan Köperl, Lukas Lendzinski & Peter Weigand (Umschichten), Kirsten Maiba, Aurele Mechler, Mai Omer, Liv Pröenneke, Nuno Rodrigues, Carla Schwarz, Maayan Sheleff, Meir Tati, Meirav Twig, Antonio Vulcano, Sylvia Winkler, Miri Zwang.

The conference and reader Neighborhood as a Global Arena was supported by a grant from the Stiftung Deutsch-Israelisches Zukunftsforum | ישראל-גרמניה העתיד פורום קרן

This publication was supported by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung with means provided by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. And with the generous support of Goethe-Institut Israel, Mifal Hapais Arts and Culture Council, Artport, ifa.

ISBN 978-965-91994-3-3

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