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Constructing a Symbolic Desert: Place and Identity in Contemporary Israel

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Abstract
The paper focuses on images of the Negev desert in Israel among the Jewish population of Israel, presented in marketing websites of tourism and leisure resorts. The analysis of the data, focused on verbal and visual images of desert, shows a significant change in the symbolic construction of the desert compared to the first decades of Israeli statehood: from a desert conceived in light of national ideology and its imperatives, to one who's images highlight consumerism and individual preferences, fantasies and desires.
This change in the symbolic construction of the desert is treated as a part of some major changes in Jewish-Israeli collective identity thus pointing towards the link between two social processes: place-making and identity-work.

Keywords: place-making, identity-work, desert, tourism, leisure

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Introduction

In an essay published in 2000 the sociologist Thomas Gieryn encouraged "a place-sensitive sociology" – a sociology that sees place as a necessary dimension of everything that is social and uses *place* as an analytical category in the analysis of social issues:

"How do geographic locations, material forms, and the cultural conjurings of them intersect with social practices and structures, norms and values, power and inequality, difference and distinction?"[1]

This article is aimed to make a contribution to a place-sensitive sociology by examining a case study in the symbolic construction of place and contextualize it in the developments in place-making and identity-work in the Jewish sector of Israeli society. The case study in question is the branding of the *Negev* – a desert area in the southern part of Israel – for touristic and leisure purposes.[2]

Place-branding is the investment of a geographical location or space with meanings that are intended to give them a specific tone and character, and to present them as significant for target populations. Such meanings can be invented, or anchored in local characteristics and narratives.[3] It is usually done in

[1] Thomas F. Gieryn, A Space for Place in Sociology, in: Annual Review of Sociology 26, 2000, 468.

[2] The *Negev* desert is part of a much larger desert area in the Middle East and North Africa. It holds about 60% of the state of Israel's territory (1967 borders); see: Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstracts of Israel No. 64, Jerusalem, 2013, 65-67, table 1.1; map 1.1. Online; www.cbs.gov.il/reader/ shnatonenew_site.htm.

[3] See: Susan Broomhall/Jennifer Spinks, Interpreting Place and Past in Narratives of Dutch Heritage Tourism, in: Rethinking History 14 (2), 2010, 267-285; John Eyles, Housing Advertisements as Signs: Locality Creation and Meaning Systems, in: Geografiska Annaler 69b (2), 1987, 93-105; Marcus Funk, Imagined Commodities? Analyzing Local Identity and Place in American Community Newspaper Website banners, in: New Media and Society 15 (4), 2012, 574-595; Jon Goss, Placing the Market and

order to attract resources to a given location or space – money, human skills and knowledge, residents, visitors. It involves *place-professionals* such as planners, developers, architects or public relations specialists. Thus, using a concept of place inspired by writers such as Harvey, Lefebvre, Massey, Pred Relph and Tuan,[4] we can consider place-branding as an interest-oriented case of place-making. In the context discussed here, place-branding is aimed at producing a touristic product. As was shown by Urry, tourism is in fact the consumption of places, that is, the consumption of meanings embedded in them.[5]

It has already been established that collective identity is not fixed and primordially-given, but an arena of permanent reproduction, subject to changes in social, cultural and political circumstances, and in turn, influences such changes.[6] Thus, alongside place-making we also speak of identity-work. Seen that way, collective identity is not totally *collective* – it is not shared as a whole by all members of a social collectivity. On the contrary: it signifies differences between different sectors of society, or as Hall puts it: "[…] identities are constructed through, not outside, difference",[7] and "Not an essence but a *positioning*" (italics in original).[8] This means that collective identity is multi-vocal, a mosaic of sectorially-based versions, as well as an arena of debates and struggles.

The importance of place as a category in identity-work has already been studied. Works on this subject deal with class identity, gay identity, territorial identity, or accent and territorial identity.[9] Of special interest in this article are works relating to place as a category in the analysis of collective national identity.[10]

Marketing Place: Tourist Advertising of the Hawaiian Ilands, 1972–1992, in: Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 11 (6), 1993, 663-688; Amy, Hale, Selling Celtic Cornwall: Changing Markets and Meanings? In: Kevin Meethan/Alison Anderson/Steve Miles (eds.), Tourism Consumption and Representation: Narratives of Place and Self, Wallingford UK and Cambridge USA, 2006, 272-283; Maja Kunecnik-Ruzzier/Leslie de Chernatony Developing and Applying a Place Brand identity Model: The Case of Slovenia, in: Journal of Business Research 66, 2013, 45-52; Marion Markwick, Postcards from Malta. Images, Consumption, Context, in: Annals of Tourism Research 28 (2), 2001, 417-438; Robyn Mayes, A Place in the Sun: The Politics of Place, Identity and Branding, in: Place Branding and Public Deplomacy 4 (2), 2008, 124-135; Anthony S. Rausch, Place Branding in Rural Japan: Cultural Commodities as Local Brands, in: Place Branding and Public Deplomacy 4 (2), 2008, 136-146; Lesley Roberts/Derek Hall, Consuming the Countryside: Marketing for 'Rural Tourism', in: Journal of Vacation Marketing 10 (3), 2004, 253-263; Gao Shuang, Commodification of Place, Consumption of Identity: The Sociolinguistic Construction of a 'Global Village' in Rural China, in: Journal of Sociolinguistics 16 (3), 2012, 336-357.

[4] See: David Harvey, From Space to Place and Back again: Reflections on the Condition of Postmodernity, in: Jon Bird/Barry Curtis/Tim Putnam/George Robertson/Lisa Tickner (eds.), Mapping our Futures, London & New York, 1993, 3-29; Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space, Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford, 1991 [1974]; Doreen Massey, Places and their Pasts, in: History Workshop Journal 39, 1995, 182-192; Allan Pred, Structuration and Place: On the Becoming of Sense of Place and Structure of Feeling, in: Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour 13 (1), 1983, 45-68; Edward Relph, Place and Placelessness. London, 1976; Yi-Fu Tuan, Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience, Minneapolis–London, 2002 [1977].

[5] John Urry, Consuming Places, London–New York, 1995. See also: Broomhall and Spinks 2010 (see note 3); Lesley Fishwick/Joanne Vining, Toward a Phenomenology of Recreation Place, in: Journal of Environmental Psychology 12, 1992, 57-63; Goss 1993 (see note 3); Andrew Taylor/Bruce Prideaux, Profiling Four wheel Drive Tourism Markets for Desert Australia, Journal of Vacation Marketing 14 (1), 2008, 71-86; Mika Toyota, Consuming Images: Young Female Japanese Tourists in Bali, Indonesia, in: Kevin Meethan/Alison Anderson/Steve Miles (eds.), Tourism Consumption and Representation: Narratives of Place and Self, Wallingford UK–Cambridge USA, 2006, 158-177.

[6] See: Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities, London, 1991 [1983]; Stuart Hall, Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?, in: Stuart Hall/Paul Du Gay (eds.), Questions of Cultural Identity, London–Thousand Oaks–New Delhi, 1996, 1-17; Stuart Hall, Cultural Identity and Diaspora, in: Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), Identity: Community, Culture, Difference, London, 1998, 222-237; Kathryn Woodward, Concepts of Identity and Difference, in: Kathryn Woodward (ed.), Identity and Difference, London–Thousand Oaks–New Delhi–Milton Keynes, 1997, 7-62.

[7] Hall, London–Thousand Oaks–New Delhi (see note 6), 4.

[8] Hall, London (see note 6), 226.

[9] See: Philip Boland, Sonic Geography, Place and Race in the Formation of Local Identity: Liverpool and Scousers, in: Geografisca Annaler: Series B, Human Geography 92 (1), 2010, 1-22; Robyn Dowling, Geographies of Identity: Landscapes of Class, in: Progress in Human Geography 33 (6), 2009, 833-839; Hazel Easthope, Fixed Identities in a Mobile World? The Relationship Between Mobility, Place and Identity, in: Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power 16, 2009, 61-82; Annette Pritcahrd/Morgan, Narratives of Sexuality, Identity and Relationships in Tourism Places, in: Kevin Meethan/Alison Anderson/Steve Miles (eds.) Tourism Consumption and Representation: Narratives of Place and Self, Wallingford UK and Cambridge USA, 2006, 236-252; Mike Savage/Gaynor Bagnall/Brian Longhurst, Globalization and Belonging. London, 2005.

[10] See: Stephen Daniels, Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States, Princeton, 1993; Joan Nogue/Joan Vicente, Landscape and National Identity in Catalonia in: Political Geography 23, 2004, 113-132; Brian Osborne, Interpreting a Nation's Identity: Artists as Creators of National Consciousness, in: Alan Baker/Gideon Biger (eds.), Ideology and Landscape in Historical Perspective, Cambridge,

This article has two concrete aims. Firstly, to explore how a desert area is symbolically constructed as place, through the branding of the *Negev* desert for tourism and leisure purposes. Secondly, to present this symbolic desert as a contemporary phase in place-making and identity-work within the Jewish sector in Israeli society.

The first part of the article will present findings regarding the touristic branding of the desert, i.e., the symbolic meanings encoded in marketing texts, and summarize them as the contour of a symbolic desert. The second part of the article contextualizes this symbolic desert in the processes of place-making and identity-work by describing a brief history of the symbolic construction and status of the *Negev* desert, and by a comparative analysis of the symbolic desert analyzed here, and an older one that was prevalent some decades ago.

Rural tourism has already been recognized as a leverage for economic growth of the *Negev*.[11] The *Negev* desert has significant advantages for nature lovers and for eco-tourism: open areas, a variety of landscape forms concentrated within a small area, a relative proximity to the Israeli heartland, live presence of Bedouin culture, and relics of ancient cultures.[12]

Full scale development of small privately-owned touristic ventures started in the 1990's as part of a renewed governmental attention given to the *Negev*. This came due to the large Jewish immigration from the former Soviet Union, growing disparities between center and periphery and a governmental policy aimed at limiting Bedouin land holding in the *Negev* and strengthening the Jewish one.

The *Negev* area became an object for organized development projects, all done in the name of national imperatives. These projects included: improving transportation infra-structure in order to improve the connection with the heartland; building higher-quality housing in order to attract middle-class population; establishment of new rural settlements; creating new job opportunities and introducing new high-tech industry; moving military bases from the heartland; opening academic colleges and launching technological education projects in the school system.[13]

Within a few years time there was a 70% growth in accommodation ventures in spite of a relative recession in the late 1990's and early 2000's.[14] From 1997 to 2012 there was an increase in the number of rooms and beds, and in bed occupancy in rural tourism resorts.[15] Between the years 2006-2013 the number of visitors to the *Negev* has doubled, from 500,000 to 1,000,000 per year. Many of them (groups, families and singles) travel in the area for few days and camp out in the open. Tourism facilities in the *Negev* are diverse: 520 hotels' rooms and about 300 rural hosting units of varying standards; field camps rent out tents and mattresses; private ranches offer hosting units, sell food products and

1992, 230-254; Shanti Sumartojo, Britishness in Trafalgar Square: Urban Place and the Construction of national Identity, Studies in Ethnicity and nationalism 9 (3), 2009, 410-428.

[11] Aliza Fleischer/Abraham Pizam, Rural Tourism in Israel, in: Tourism management 18 (6), 1997, 367-372; Daniel Freeman/Esther Sultan, The Economic Impact of Tourism in the Central and Outlying Regions of Israel: A Multiregional Input-Output Model, in: Shaul Krakover/Yehuda Gradus (eds.), Tourism in Frontier Areas, Lanham–Boulder–New York–Oxford, 2002, 61-82; Arie Reichel/Natan Uriely, Tourism Development in a Dwesert Frontier Town, in: Shaul Krakover and Yehuda Gradus (eds.), Tourism in Frontier Areas, Lanham–Boulder–New York–Oxford, 2002, 195-203; Arie Reichel/Natan Uriely, Sustainable Tourism Development in the Israeli *Negev* Desert: An Integrative Approach, in: Journal of Park and Recreation Administration 21 (4), 2003, 14-29.

[12] This was mentioned by the tourism coordinator of the *Negev* Hights regional council, which has most of the *Negev* area under its jurisdiction.

[13] Information on this subject was obtained from written sources and from officials at the Center for Development of the *Negev* and the Galilee. See also: Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), Transport Statistics Quarterly, Jerusalem, www.cbs.gov.il/webpub/ pub/text, Several Years A; Yehuda Gradus/Roi Nuriel, Industry in the Negev: Processes, Structure, Location. Negev Industry Survey, Beer Sheba, 2009, [Hebrew]; Roi Nuriel/Esther Levinson, Statistical Abstracts of the Negev. Beer Sheba, 2008, [Hebrew].

[14] Sigal Haber/Miri Lerner, Small Tourism Ventures in Peripheral Areas: The Impact of Environmental factors on Performance, in: Shaul Krakover/Yehuda Gradus, (eds.) Tourism in Frontier Areas, Lanham–Boulder–New York–Oxford, 2002, 141-161; Reichel/Uriely, Lanham–Boulder–New York–Oxford (see note 11).
There are several difficulties obtaining reliable, consistent and accurate data about tourism in the *Negev* desert. Firstly, owners of small private resorts (which are the majority of tourism ventures in the *Negev*) don't tend to cooperate on this matter. Secondly, The official statistics is organized along administrative districts and the southern district is larger than the *Negev* desert though data about the district as a whole can give an indication about the *Negev*.

[15] Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), Statistical Abstracts of Israel, Jerusalem, www.cbs.gov.il/reader /shnatonenew_site.htm, Several Years B

some of them offer catering;[16] trekking firms organize treks by foot, 4x4 vehicles, camels and horses. Other touristic services and facilities include: Bedouin hosting; alternative medical treatments; archeological sites and natural reservations. All of the above, except the last two, are privately owned but enjoy state and municipal assistance.[17]

Methodology

The main empirical body is composed of textual and visual references to the desert in websites of 50 tourism and leisure resorts in the *Negev*.[18] The websites were sampled in a convenience sampling in 2012. The texts are written in Hebrew and some are partially translated into English. In addition, five in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with officials in the three authorities that are in charge of tourism in the *Negev*.

The analysis focuses on the verbal and visual images of the desert as used in descriptions of the facility, its vicinity, and the experiences awaiting the visitors on location and around it. These images, it is assumed, comprise *a theory of place*[19] concerning the desert, that visitors have in mind and would like to meet. The study did not examine tourists' views about the branding of the desert.

The raw data was analyzed in four stages. After an initial mapping, a more detailed analysis of the texts was done, in which four types of information were gathered: detailed visual description of the resort and its surroundings; background information about the resort and its spatial self-identification; factual information about leisure products and experiences offered by it; and images and symbols drawn from these texts. In the third stage, these were analyzed using detailed field-grounded categories of meaning representing *a theory of place* – its uniqueness, its atmosphere, and the place experience it provides. Finally, these were clustered into three more general categories, which form a kind of branding packages, each representing distinctive features which are meant to characterize the desert and each carrying a distinct world of meaning.

Findings: branding the desert through touristic marketing

The findings are presented along a two-layered division: the three branding packages divided into narrower meaning units. this is done in order to portray a detailed symbolic contour of the desert.

The desert experience: exclusiveness and otherness

The texts in the websites present various experiences as exclusively typical to the desert. The verbal descriptions and the visual images carry a hidden promise that visitors will experience something unique, that goes beyond their everyday urban life.[20] This promise is encoded in three forms: descriptions of the desert's landscapes; descriptions of the experience in a rugged environment; and the use of the word *desert* as a signifier of otherness.

The experience of landscape and nature

Visual and verbal references to the desert's landscapes and nature are very common in the websites. Visual references include photos of barren plateaus or hills, dunes, dry land, dry canyons, the special landscape of the Ramon crater, sunsets and sunrises in the desert or a desert flood. Verbal references turn to landscape features such as spaciousness, quietness or barrenness. Thus, in one of the websites it is written: "One can experience the silence and the wide open spaces of the desert;" in another: "Endless quiet desert space around, fresh air that fills the lungs." Another landscape feature is its primeval nature: "[The resort] is located at the end of the world, on the edge of a cliff in an ancient, primeval landscape," "the *Negev* mountain enables dozens of treks saturated with primeval landscapes." Some of the web-

[16] The Private ranches are part of the Wine Road project, initiated in 1991, in accordance with the government's agenda to prevent Bedouins from settling on state-owned lands, and to establish a continuity of Jewish settlements. About 30 privately-owned ranches were established, situated mainly in the area of the ancient Incense Route and making their living from agriculture, manufacture of food products and tourism.

[17] This data was obtained from the statistics of the department of tourism at the *Negev* Hights regional council.

[18] URL's were omitted deliberately in order to avoid unintentional marketing.

[19] Goss, 1993 (see note 3).

[20] With no available data concerning the permanent place of residence of visitors, It is plausible to assume that more than two thirds of the visitors come from urban areas, as two thirds of the Israeli population live in towns with over 20,000 residents (70% after omitting the *Negev* urban population (calculated from CBS, Jerusalem (see note 2), table 2/18, 136.

sites highlight the opportunity to watch wild life that can only be found in the desert, and others highlight the unique geological phenomena of the *Negev*'s three craters. A different kind of verbal references are those that use non-physical features of landscape to convey the promise of uniqueness, such as "magical desert landscape," or "the beautiful desert views."

Other common themes in describing the experience of the desert are sensing the power of nature and achieving harmony with nature. Many of the desert hikes (done by camels or by 4x4 vehicles) contain references to the desert's intense features. A hiking firm promises that, "we shall climb the winding gorge until its dramatic entrance to the crater." Other references use adjectives such as "wild," "breathtaking" or "amazing" when speaking of the power and intensiveness of nature in the desert, before turning to specific visual and verbal descriptions of high and steep cliffs, canyons or floods.

Some of the resorts emphasize in their websites an ecological ideology and practice and offer ecotourism experiences.[21] Usually this goes hand in hand with a statement about living in harmony with nature in the desert, and with references to actual ecological practices in infra-structure and maintenance such as solar energy, biological recycling of water or biological pesticide. The hosting units in these resorts are made of local natural materials such as mud, clay, stones and palm branches, or recycled materials. They specialize in organic agriculture and serve vegetarian meals made of local raw materials and products. The leisure products they offer include various workshops dealing with these ecological technologies and practices, highlighting their practicality.

At times emphasizing harmony with the desert strikes an ironic chord. Some of the resorts specialize in the production of culinary and musical events, or festive gatherings, using the desert landscape as a backdrop decoration. However, these events and gatherings include additions which are quite foreign to the desert, such as furniture and tablecloths, fine tableware, an amplifying system, or electric lighting – the last two are meant to intensify the experience of landscape and otherness of the desert as compared to urban life.

[21] See: Arie Reichel/Natan Uriely/Amir Shani, Ecotourism and Simulated Attractions: Tourists' Attitudes Towards Integrated Sites in a Desert Area, in: Journal of Sustainable Tourism 16 (1), 2008, 23-41; Reichal/Urieli, 2003 (see note 11).

Experience in a rugged environment

In many of the websites it is declared that environmental conditions in the desert are rough and uncompromising. Hence, there are leisure products that offer visitors to experience such conditions.

A survival workshop is such an experience, in which the participants learn how to cope – alone and in a group – with rough topography and extreme weather conditions. Such workshops go on for a few days. Another experience of this kind is offered in various hikes, especially the long ones (2-3 days) which are done by foot or by camel. The 4x4 hikes usually offer air-conditioned vehicles (though of a less fancy type), along with professional guides. Still, these are off-road hikes, done in difficult ground conditions that promise a bumpy ride which may end up with aching backs. Sometimes such hikes combine challenging walking treks and extreme sports activities such as snappling.

Desert as a signifier of otherness

The data offers two kinds of significations of otherness using the word *desert*, depending on the familiarity of the visitors with their meanings. In the first, the meaning belongs to the prevalent stock of taken-for-granted knowledge. This is the case with phrases such as *desert hikes*, *people of the desert*, or *desert convoys*. However, the meaning of phrases such as *a desert brunch*, *desert aroma*, or *desert gatherings*, is less self-explanatory. The visitor remains with an implicit promise that the mere usage of the word *desert* will add something unique and out-of-the-ordinary to the experience that is described.

The most common usage of *desert* as a signifier of uniqueness is in the more general notion of *desert experience*. Reference to this notion is always accompanied with some clarifications about its content – desert hikes, desert landscape, desert spaciousness etc. – and an explanation of the link between it and certain conceived characteristics of the desert.

A hosting resort in a small town located in the heart of the *Negev* desert uses the notion of *desert experience* in a unique way. The accommodation units are renovated standard tenement flats – the like of which can be found anywhere in Israel. However, they are transformed into *desert flats*, and de-

scribed as "located on the edge of the desert", looking over "a magical desert view", surrounded by "a magical desert garden", painted with "soft desert colors", contain "natural desert elements" and named after desert animals. All this is accompanied by photos.

Seeking a haven, longing for spirituality

Both ancient Judaism and Christianity saw the desert as a place of solitude, spiritual contemplation as well as religious purification and virtuosity.[22] Moses, some of the other Hebrew prophets, Jesus Christ, the secessionist Jewish sects of the second temple era, hermits and monks of early Christianity – all are well-known examples of religious virtuosos who went to the desert. These notions of the desert have evolved into modern western civilization. Thus, in one of the websites it is written:

"In our times, when population density and air-pollution in the cities have reached the scale of disaster, the desert is a place that relatively speaking has not yet been damaged. People are re-discovering the desert as a source of inspiration, serenity and relaxation of the soul. There is a need to keep the desert as the last resource of space, quietness and clear air."[23]

This statement tells the story of another branding package, namely, the desert as a place of refuge from hectic urban life. The desert is constructed as a place for those who seek "inspiration, serenity and relaxation of the soul", or even intimacy and romance – a haven that enables the individual to care for his inner being, his dreams and fantasies (or perhaps, his personal plight). As noted earlier, this branding package has deep cultural roots and many of the texts use references to this tradition.

This branding package can also be broken into several meaning units that match desert's characteristics as an individual haven.

Serenity

The use of the notion *serenity* (in several variations) intends to assure visitors that while spending time in the desert they will be able to find the peace of mind that they seldom have in their daily urban life. We may see it as a special case of highlighting the otherness of the desert and indeed, this image of the desert is often mentioned along with some of other characteristics that serve as images of otherness, such as spaciousness, quietness, wide vistas and clear air. One of the websites promises "[…] mainly quietness and desert-like serenity while facing a magical landscape and colorful sunsets.' Another, while praising the serene atmosphere of the resort promises that, "[…] one can experience the quietness and wide-open space of the desert."

Some resorts offer their visitors various body and soul treatments inspired by eastern traditions while highlighting their spiritual merits. In many cases these treatments are gathered under headlines such as "serenity in the desert."

Freedom

The desert is conceived of as a place where one can find ultimate freedom, and feel it deeply, as one of the senior tour guides in a hiking company wrote: "I am glad I shall never be young without a wild country to be young in; of what avail are forty freedoms, without a blank spot on the map?"

Freedom is also connected, with wide-open spaces, and with the opportunity of walking away from the beaten track: "Freedom is to climb – off track – to the peak of a bold mountain and look around on primeval space bounded only by the horizon." Another reference, taken from Saint-Exupery's book 'Wind, Sand and Stars', is to the freedom of the lonely and secluded individual: "Here I possessed nothing in the world. I was no more than a mortal strayed between sand and stars […] and yet I discovered myself filled with dreams."

Detachment

In some websites the desert is presented as a place of seclusion and detachment. This reference to the desert is prevalent among texts describing hosting units. All of them promise "detachment and rest from the urban rat race for at least several hours or a couple of days." Hosting units are described as scattered on a wide area, and located in a site free from urban noises and nuisances: "[…] here there is no cellular reception and no disturbances of alarms or sirens and thus, quietly quietly, one can let the soul rest."

Some of the hosting resorts that promise detachment from the city take another element from the tradition of seclusion in the desert by stressing

[22] See: Peter Brown, The Body and Society, New York, 2008 [1988].

[23] This text has been translated from Hebrew by the author. The English version of this website is slightly different.

the modest (sometimes spartan) conditions they provide their visitors with. However, others do just the opposite by highlighting luxury and the indulging conditions.

Seclusion and detachment are often connected with privacy and intimacy, and with the opportunity to experience *a relaxed and romantic vacation*. Promises of intimate and romantic vacation are often accompanied by emphasis on indulging hosting units: super-sized double beds, electronic appliances, soft colored decor, aromatic oil baths, wine bottles etc. We see that here seclusion and detachment from civilization are far from being absolute and its interpretation is quite remote from the religious tradition of seclusion, that embraces simplicity and asceticism.

Spirituality

As part of the same tradition, spirituality is also woven into several of the products offered to visitors in the *Negev* desert. Two of the hiking firms explicitly relate to spiritual experience. One cites words of praise about the desert from a book by Kazantsakis ('Report to Greco'): "It is here, I reflected, the soul of a proud or desperate man may find ultimate happiness." The other recommends survival programs for those who "seek the physical aspect and those who seek the spiritual aspect." These programs "provide deep knowledge in desert behavior, combined with a strong spiritual experience that nourishes from the power of the desert."

Many resorts offer spiritual experiences via mysticism and the super-natural. One of them presents itself as "[…] a special place. Built from love and connection to the earth, desert and human nature. A simple, true and ecological place full of beauty and harmony." In addition to several meditation techniques, this resort offers also several healing and guided imagination techniques, all taught inside "an energetic pyramid, an unforgettable powerful experience."

Other resorts offer various workshops of spiritual nature: meditation, interpretation of dreams, "intuitive drawings" for understanding the inner being, or workshops in techniques of personality and fortune telling.

* * *

The images in this branding package are mutually complementing in promising the visitors a refuge from the hectic urban life and materiality. Branding the desert as an individual haven pours new content into an old tradition – that of the desert as a refuge for religious virtuosos and a place for spiritual elevation. Here, the appeal to go to the desert lies not on religious but on a rather mundane basis: the fantasy of many city-dwellers, to escape the urban rat-race. This escape is temporary, certainly not a break away from civilization, as tourists who spend their vacation in the *Negev* return to their urban homes. Basically, they accept the *civilized* nature of urban life but enjoy a short break from it.

Experiencing authenticity

The concept of authenticity, which stands at the heart of the third branding package, has played a central role in the analysis of tourism and leisure since MacCannell's seminal article, which establishes that the tourist is an authenticity-seeker.[24] However, a history of the concept is beyond the scope of this article. It will suffice to mention that above all the different perspectives of analysis, and typologies which stem from them, there is an agreement on the basic meaning: the quality of authenticity is linked to what is genuine, sincere, true to its nature and is a target of modern man's quest for what is "really real".[25]

Being part of the tourism industry, the websites emphasize how authentic the desert can be. The authenticity of the *Negev* desert is constructed through two desert populations – The Bedouins and the ancient Nabataean tribes.

[24] Dean MacCannell, Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings, in: American Journal of Sociology 79 (3), 1973, 589-603.

[25] In addition to MacCannell, see: Peter Berger, 'Sincerity' and 'Authenticity' in Modern Society, in: Public Interest 31, 1973, 81-90; Cohen, Erik, Authenticity and Commoditization in Tourism, in: Annals of Tourism Research 15, 1988, 371-386; Charles Lindholm, Culture and Authenticity, Oxford, 2008; Philip L. Pearce/Gianna M. Moscardo, The Concept of Authenticity in Tourist Experiences, in: ANZJS 22 (1), 1986, 121-132; Britta Timm Knudsen/Anne Marit Waade, Performative Authenticity in Tourism and Spatial Experience: Rethinking the Relations between Travel' Place and Emotion, in: Britta Timm Knudsen/Anne Marit Waade (eds.), Re-Investing Authenticity: Tourism, Place and Emotions, Bristol, UK, 2010, 1-19; Lionel Trilling, Sincerity and Authenticity, London, 1972; Ning Wang, Rethinking Authenticity in Tourism Experience, in: Annals of Tourism Research 26 (2), 1999, 349-370.

Experiencing the Bedouin ways of life

Some resorts invite visitors to explore Bedouin customs and traditions. The websites of these resorts use Arabic words for various objects (some of which are familiar to many Israelis) in order to shed an extra authentic light to the description.

Three types of Bedouin experiences are offered to visitors.

Bedouin hospitality. Two versions of Bedouin hospitality are offered: hosting in traditional hosting camps (*Khan*) which operate on a commercial basis, and hosting by Bedouin families who need the money they get for it as an extra income. In some of the *Khans* there is a big tent at the center presented by its Arabic name – *Mad'afe* – the tent for guests. in this tent visitors are served with meals and sometimes they also sleep there. In other *Khans* visitors sleep in smaller tents or in shacks located nearby. In all the commercial *Khans* a considerable effort has been made to give them a traditional Bedouin look, with straw mats, colorful striped carpets and colorful cloth-covered mattresses, big leaning pillows and low tables inside the main tent.

A bonfire is constantly burning in the center of the *Khan*. Around it the visitors are served with sweet tea and bitter coffee. The tea is brewed in a sooty kettle; the coffee beans are toasted on the bonfire and brewed in a *Finjan* (a small coffee pot) by a Bedouin host. In some resorts this ritualistic experience includes a story-teller that tells the visitors folk stories, called in the texts "desert stories."

Some of the resorts take their visitors to be hosted by Bedouin families in the vicinity. This kind of hosting includes catering or festive meals of traditional Bedouin dishes, a ritualistic preparation of tea and coffee and getting to know Bedouin tradition and folk stories. This kind of hosting, together with a night's stay in a Bedouin tent, is also included in some of the long treks offered.

Bedouin meals. Here too there are two versions – catering and festive meals. Catering usually includes Sheep and goats' cheese, olives and *Fteers* (the Bedouin bread). The other version is a much larger meal, called in all the texts by its Arabic name – *Khafla*. These meals include Bedouin dishes cooked on bonfire and served in Bedouin style: a common tray while the guests are sitting around it on mats spread on the ground.

In one of the resorts, festive meals are accompanied with music played on traditional instruments and sometimes there is also a belly dancer.

"The Bedouin experience." This was the headline given to a variety of experiences in some traditional Bedouin practices and skills which form part of Bedouin cultural heritage. One such experience is baking *Fteer* by using the *Saj* (a round iron device made for this purpose). Another Bedouin experience for tourists is bonfire cooking, in which the participants learn about cooking methods and skills and about various dishes and herbs for cooking and healing. The text praises the special tastes and aroma of dishes cooked in this way. The photos that accompany the text show sooty cooking dishes, herbs and strings of dried hot peppers.

In one of the Bedouin music experiences participants learn about rhythms and instruments and in another they learn how to make a *Nai* flute. In some of the websites visitors are offered to learn about the basics of tracking.[26]

The most known Bedouin skill – camel riding – is present in almost every resort's repertoire of tourist products. Camel riding is done in short or long treks and the visitors are informed that it is done in a way "similar to the Bedouin camel convoys." The food served on the long treks is cooked on bonfire, served in the evening and accompanied by "long forgotten desert stories".

In the footsteps of the Nabataeans[27]

The Nabataeans are an inseparable part of the *Negev* history and mythology, and the desert contains many relics of their presence. These relics, partly restored by state and civic bodies, include the ruins

[26] The Bedouins are famous for their tracking skills.

[27] The Nabataeans were ancient Arab tribes that lived in seven towns in the southern part of the Negev and in the Trans-Jordanian desert, between the 4th century b.c. and the 7th century a.c. They were mainly a society of traders who moved through the desert along the Incense Route (see next footnote) in big camel convoys, however they also succeeded in developing a flourishing agriculture in spite of the rough desert conditions. After the Muslim conquest they were assimilated into the conquering population.

of four of their towns and some fortified posts which were also used as rest places (*Khans*) for convoys on the Incense Route.[28] There are also agricultural relics – terraces and cisterns – scattered in the area.

These relics make it easy for tourism entrepreneurs to promise their clients an authentic experience through an imagined journey to the past and a symbolic reproduction of the Nabataean experience.

All hiking firms offer camel or 4x4 vehicle trips along the Incense Route. One of the websites describes the hike as a "journey into the mysteries of the ancient Nabataean culture […] through 2000 years old fortresses and hotels." In another one it is stated that:

"Just like thousands of years ago, we shall experience the same enchanting landscapes and sights while crossing the ancient Incense Route, the Nabataean route of the ancient world that connected east and west […]" [Translation by the author]

All hikes along the Incense Route include lectures and explanations about the Nabataeans, their trade and their culture, as the hikers spend the night in the reconstructed *Khans* and towns. There they have a Bedouin meal, tea and coffee at the bonfire "like it was in the era of the convoys, 2000 years ago," and are invited to close their eyes and imagine "the splendor of the *Khan*."

The hikes along the Incense Route are meant to reproduce a Nabataean desert experience, but these reproductions are partial, to say the least. Formally, many elements in these experiences can be considered as successful reconstruction: the hikers ride along part of the real course of the route; the Nabataean traders did go in camel convoys; and the architectural outlines of the buildings on the route were reconstructed. Thus, the forms are there, but all the rest is left for visitors' imagination.

A different kind of Nabataean authenticity is provided by the private ranches of the Wine Route project (many of which are situated along or near the Incense Route). It must be said that the name *Wine Route* is an example of an invented authenticity as there was no such route in Nabataean times and its use is meant to be associative with the Incense Route. All these ranches announce in their websites that they are situated near "relics of ancient Nabataean agriculture" or other Nabataean relics. Some of the ranches declare the use of ancient terraces as a base for their vineyards. Thus the owners claim to reconstruct and continue the ancient Nabataean agriculture:

"A vineyard was planted in the ranch, a direct continuation of the famous grapes that grew in the area 1500 years ago and produced excellent wine sent to the ancient capital of the Nabataean kingdom – Petra. […] In order to keep the ancient terraces all work in the vineyard is done manually, including grape harvest."

Another ranch intends to use archeological knowledge and build "a reconstructed Nabataean olive press in order to produce olive oil and to instruct groups of visitors on the subject of oil pressing."

The relics of four ancient Nabataean towns, reconstructed and maintained by The Israel Nature and Parks Authority, are another touristic focus in the quest for authenticity.[29] The most impressive reconstruction is that of *Ovdat*. The website of a ranch whose hosting units overlook *Ovdat*, says that,

"In the town one can find the big regional winery, to which convoys of grapes' loaded camels came in large numbers during the harvest seasons. The wine cellars and the storerooms in which the expensive liquid was stored before marketed on top of camels' humps all over the kingdom, are excavated in the chalk sloaps."

The reconstructed Nabataean towns also provide the setting for the staging of scenes from Nabataen life. In the site of *Mamshit* (*Kurnub*) a reproduction of a Nabataean market was built:

"The market of ancient Kurnubb will return to life temporarily for the benefit of the group.

Real traders and artisans will take their place in the ancient shops and in the streets; products will be sold in the ancient Nabataean market: glass products, pottery, soaps made of natural materials, aromatic oil, olive oil, honey, Kaffiyas [Arab head covering] and clothes, mats, pillows and colored carpets, narghiles, incense, special clothes, fragrant spices etc."[30]

* * *

The tourist's quest for authenticity is provided here with the experience of two desert societies (one con-

[28] The Incense Route was a Nabataean traders' route going from the south of the Arab peninsula to the Mediterranean coast, crossing the Negev desert from south-east to the north-west.

[29] These towns are: Ovdat, Mamshit (Kurnubb), Halutza and Shivta.

[30] It should be noted that the traders are local people who take part in this staging in an archeological site on a commercial basis.

temporary with a long history and the other ancient). They are manifested in the display of ancient customs and traditions, simplicity of life, together with an aura of "the noble savage." The desert is thus presented as a place saturated with authenticity. It is beyond the scope of this article to systematically define and characterize this authenticity itself according to the several theoretical variations of the concept.[31]

Summary: the commercially-meaningful desert

As in other touristic locations, the *Negev* desert is symbolically constructed for commercial purposes, and is epistemologically located in a world of commodities and individualistic consumerism. It is a desert whose symbolic meanings are to be consumed for individual satisfaction.[32]

One such meaning is that of otherness. All desert experiences are presented as different from what can be found in urban life even though in some cases boundaries are blurred. The presentation of the desert as a refuge implies a special case of otherness. Though modern urban man's reasons for seeking such a refuge may differ greatly from the reasons of ancient religious virtuosos, however, the lure of the desert remains the same. The desert continues to supply a refuge because it represents a certain otherness, an alternative to settled life in ancient times, as well as to hectic and materialistic modern urban life. The alternative offers a wide space, emptiness, primeval scenery and serenity.

The link between authenticity and otherness in the eyes of modern man was established by MacCannell and Cohen.[33] Modern man looks for authenticity – i.e. genuineness and unity between self and societal institutions – as he is unable to find it in his surroundings. Urry and Larsen go on and state that there is a certain contradiction between the concept of authenticity and the daily home experience of the tourist. Thus, for modern man the authentic is the other, compared to modern urban reality. The desert, which is presented as a place saturated with authenticity, is also a place of otherness.[34]

Another symbolic meaning of the desert encoded in the marketing texts is the appeal to the cult of the individual. This feature is mainly present in the branding package which was termed above as "seeking a haven, longing for spirituality" and in the offer to go through rugged experience. The fantasies and expectations to be fulfilled by the desert (such as serenity, merging with nature, privacy or romantic intimacy) are all individual in nature and the texts appeal to the individual visitor in an explicit way. However, the offers made to visitors in all three branding packages appeal to the individual's aesthetic sense and preferences (experience landscape and nature) and to personal curiosity (meet authentic cultures). Thus, it seems that tourism entrepreneurs in the *Negev* present the desert as a place that can give an answer to some of man's fantasies and wishes concerning himself.

The third symbolic meaning is liminality. Urry and Larsen point that a long-established school in the sociology of tourism associated with Cohen, Shields and others, identifies tourism with pilgrimage, in the way Turner conceives it – as a rite of passage.[35] This means the identification of three stages in which the middle one – the experience at the place of destination – is that of liminality.[36] As in rites of passage, in this stage the tourist finds himself in a situation where all his conventional social ties and daily obligations are suspended, daily behavior can be inverted and the tourist goes through an uplifting experience. Thus, the study of tourism is

[31] See the references in note 25.
In one case at least, the staging of authenticity is clear – the experience of a Nabataean market, resembles tourist sites such as the fishermen's village in Mistique port, Con.

[32] See references in note 5, about tourism as the consumption of places.
Compare also with Dinero who discusses the commodification of Bedouin culture and places it within neo-colonialism and within power relations between the Israeli government and the Bedouins; Steven C. Dinero, Image is Everything: The Development of the Negev Bedouin as a Tourist Attraction, in: Nomadic Peoples 6 (1), 2002, 69-94.

[33] MacCannell, 1973 (See note 24); Cohen, 1988 (see note 25).

[34] John Urry/Jonas Larsen, The Tourist Gaze 3.0. London–Thousand Oaks–New Delhi–Singapore, 11-12, 2011 [1990].
It should be noted that in the Israeli context, the Bedouins are also playing the role of the political other.

[35] See: Cohen, 1988 (see note 25); Rob Shields, Places on the Margin, London 1990; Victor Turner, The center Out There: Pilgrim's Goal, in: History of Religions 12, 1973, 191-230; Victor Turner, The Ritual Process, Harmondsworth, 1974; Victor Turner/Edith Turner, Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture New York, 1978.

[36] Urry/Larsen, London–Thousand Oaks–New Delhi–Singapore (see note 34), 12-13.

based on a distinction between the routine and the out-of-routine, the familiar and the non-familiar. Put differently, Urry and Larsen point towards the linkage between otherness and liminality.

The desert is constructed as a place of liminality in several ways: providing an opportunity for uplifting experiences such as watching wild nature and scenery; being depicted as a place for those who seek to switch temporarily from the urban tempo to the tempo of the camel; and by being depicted as the place of authentic and unique cultures. All can be considered as providing liminal experience for urban people. Thus, the stay in the desert – short as it may be – can be seen as a kind of a liminal experience which stems from desert's attributed characteristics.

The symbolic desert and the two phases of place-making and identity-work

The symbolic construction of the desert before and after statehood as nationally-meaningful

The symbolic construction of the desert depicted above is a late product in Israeli place-making. However, the *Negev* desert was present in the symbolic landscape of the Jewish sector in Israeli society ever since the pre-state years and during the first years of statehood. Zionism had developed a symbolic desert, relying on some of its basic ideological principles and its interpretation of Jewish history. By means of that, the desert became a nationally meaningful place. This symbolic desert was analyzed by Zerubavel and will be discussed later on.

A pendulum swing in the status of the *Negev*

Being nationally-meaningful, the *Negev* had a high national status. Its settlement had begun as early as the 1940's and intensified in the 1950's.[37] Many immigrants (mainly from Islamic countries) were sent to newly-established small towns and agricultural settlements in the *Negev*,[38] and two irrigation projects were completed, in the 1950's and 1960's. The *Negev* desert continued to be an important feature of Israeli symbolic landscape.[39] "Conquest of the desert" and "making the wilderness bloom" became popular slogans. These slogans were present in school curriculums, in popular songs, in literature, and in political leaders' rhetoric.[40]

However, although the *Negev's* new Jewish settlers who came from Islamic countries took an important part in the settling of the desert, they did not enjoy any symbolic capital in return (as did their few predecessors).[41] Being discriminated against, and negatively stereotyped by the dominant sector of European Jews, they were pushed into low class positions. The *Negev* became identified with underdevelopment, peripheriality, poverty, unemployment and hopelessness.[42] Theoretically, the desert continued to be considered an important place in the national narrative, but in practice it gradually lost much of its high symbolic status.

[37] The *Negev's* indigenous inhabitants, the Bedouins, did not count in the eyes of the Israeli government. Its attitude towards the Bedouin tribes has always had a strong discriminatory and oppressive tone.

[38] See: Dvora Hacohen, The Grain and the Milestone. Tel-Aviv, 1998, [Hebrew]; Chanina Porath, The Development and Settlement of the Negev 1949-1956, Sede Boker, 2002, [Hebrew].

[39] Shlomo Hasson, From Frontier to Periphery in Israel: Cultural Representations in narratives and Counter-Narratives, in: Oren Yiftachel/Avinoam Meir (eds.), Ethnic Frontiers and Peripheries: Landscapes of development and inequality in Israel, Boulder Col., 1998, 115-140.

[40] David Ben-Gurion, The Meaning of the Negev, in: Davar 21.1.1955, p. 2, [Hebrew]; David Ben-Gurion, Southbound, in: David Ben-Gurion, Vision and Way, Tel-Aviv, 1957, 297-309; Yael Segal, Development and Environment in Israel Curriculums in 1940-1979, M. A. Thesis, Beer Sheba, 2012, [Hebrew]; Oren Yiftachel/Batia Roded, Boundless Homeland: The Ethnicization of israel/Palestine in Hebrew Popular Music, in: Oren Yiftachel/Batia Roded/Uri Ram (eds.), Motherland/ McDonald's: Trends in the Construction of Space and Culture in Israel, Beer Sheba, 2003, 7-67, [Hebrew]; Yael Zerubavel, The Conquest of the Desert and the Settlement Ethos, in: Paul A. hare/Gideon M. Kressel (eds.), The Desert Experience in Israel, Lanham, 2009, 33-44.

[41] Gonen uses a distinction between "well-prepared pioneers" and "reluctant pioneers" in order to explain this disparity between pre-state settlers in the frontiers and their successors. The Middle-Eastern immigrants were forced to settle in the Negev, with no preparation for the harsh living conditions, no enthusiasm and not much esteem on behalf of the hegemonic elite. See: Amiram Gonen, Who to the Frontier? Changing Policies in the Peopling of Israel's Frontier, in: Oren Yiftachel/Avinoam Meir (eds.), Ethnic Frontiers and Peripheries: Landscapes of development and inequality in Israel, Boulder Col., 1998, 141-170.

[42] Daniel Ben-Simon, Dirty Business in the South Jerusalem, 2002, [Hebrew]; Gonen, Boulder Gol. (see note 41); Yehuda Gradus, The Emergence of Regionalism in a Centralized System: The Case of Israel, in: Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 1, 1984, 87-100; Shlomo Hasson, Social and Spacial Conflicts: The Settlement Process in Israel During the 1950's and the 1960's, in: L'espace Geographique 3, 1981, 169-179; Hasson, Boulder Col. (see note 39); Erez Tzfadia, Trapped Sense of Peripheral Place in Frontier Space, in: Haim Yacobi (ed.), Constructing a Sense of Place, Aldershot–Burlington, 2004, 119-135.

The re-development of the *Negev* area from the 1990's onwards was accompanied by efforts to raise its status and attractiveness, done by government agencies as well as by local authorities. The symbolic construction of the desert in the tourism and leisure context that was depicted in this article should be understood in light of these efforts. However, it should be seen also in light of more general trends in place-making and in identity-work within the Jewish sector in Israeli society.

Two phases in the symbolic construction of the desert and in identity work in Israel

This article discusses a commercially-meaningful symbolic desert that represents a distinct phase of place-making in Israel, as compared to the nationally-meaningful symbolic desert analyzed by Zerubavel.[43] Let's have a comparative look at the two of them, using Zerubavel's binary structure of desert/settlement as an analytical tool.

In the nationally-meaningful desert there were two versions of this binary structure identified by Zerubavel, in which *desert* and *settlement* stand in opposition to each other. In one version *desert* stands for wilderness and desolation which must be transformed into *settlement* in the name of national goals. The other version mobilizes liminality in the service of these goals. The desert is a liminal place in the national ritual, in the sense of being a site where one can set out to and prepare himself for the turning of desolation into settlement, by getting used to the rugged environment. *Desert* and *settlement* stand in complementary relations, yet *settlement* is preferable.

In the commercially-meaningful symbolic desert, *desert* means those experiences that are desired by potential visitors, and *settlement* – here, the city and its life – means (temporarily) undesired ones. Symbolically *desert* represents possibilities for out-of-routine, individually-centered, and authentic experiences, while *settlement* represents (mostly in a latent way but at times explicitly as well) the routine life-world from which the urban individual seeks a temporary escape. Seeking such experiences is a part of normative individualism in late-capitalist era. The desert is not a target for transformation but stands in complementary relations with *settlement*. Here, desert is a liminal place in an individualist and consumerist ritual of temporary break away from city life. The symbolic desert as analyzed by Zerubavel is located in the world of national-collectivist imperatives and action. The experience of this desert is meant to arouse a drive for national-collective action among a nationally-conscious public. It is an arena where *national goods* are produced. Branding the *Negev* desert for touristic purposes defines it as a place, in a world of commodities, capitalist imperatives and the cult of the individual. The desert is an arena of individualistic consumerism and self-indulgence in which its symbolic and real features are consumed by individuals who are encouraged to do so by marketing tactics. Being an object in a consumer culture makes this symbolic desert a commercially-meaningful place. It appeals to a consumption-oriented public, a central characteristic of late capitalism especially within the boundaries of the urban middle class, in Israel and elsewhere.

The differences between the two symbolic constructions of the desert represent two historical phases, not just of place-making, but of identity-work in general, within Jewish-Israeli society. The first phase, beginning in the 1920's, is one in which national ideology and rhetoric were the hegemonic tone in place-making processes.[44] Within this tone, the main imperative concerning the desert was to make it bloom, transform it into settlement. This tone is continuing to be heard,[45] However, it is no longer hegemonic. Furthermore, though the current re-development of the *Negev* is accompanied by slogans of patriotic character and others that stress national imperatives, as was done in the 1940's and 1950's,[46] the means and ways of realizing these imperatives bear an individualistic and instrumental character as it is carried out mainly through private initiative. Thus, national imperatives still dominate rhetoric but not practice.

[43] See note 40.

[44] See: Ze'ev Shavit, The Production of a Sense of Place among Jewish Immigrants in Mandatory Palestine, in: Diasporas, Histoire et Societes 20, 2012, 59-84.

[45] Don Handelman/Lea Shamge-Handelman, The Presence of Absence: The Memorialism of National Death in Israel, In: Eyal Ben-Ari and Yoram Bilu (eds.), Grasping Land, Albany, 1997, 85-128; Yiftachel/Roded, Beer Sheba (see note 40).

[46] These slogans stress national imperatives such as "making the desert bloom", absorbing new immigrants, lessen socio-economic disparities or keep the land in the government's hands i.e., in Jewish hands.

The second phase is a part of a transition from national hegemony to multi-vocality in place-making and in identity-work, in which the national voice is heard among a variety of voices. An anthology published at the late 1990's contended that Jewish-Israeli place-making is becoming multi-vocal.[47] Besides the established voice, it presented also the voice of the immigrants from Islamic countries (the Jewish-oriental voice) and the Arab voice. Another voice that takes part in place-making – the radical nationalist-religious one – is highlighted by Feige and reflects the rift between moderate (mainly secular) Jewish nationalism and militant religious nationalism.[48]

The appearance of these voices in processes of place-making represents recent struggles over participation in identity-work. These struggles took place between the formerly hegemonic social sector of secular Jews of European origin, and an empowered upwardly-mobile group within the Jewish Oriental sector and nationally militant religious Jews. These struggles were investigated and analyzed by many students of Israeli society.[49] As Hall suggests, they can be conceptualized as struggles over social positioning.[50]

The case discussed here highlights another voice in place-making and identity-work – that of consumerist urban middle class, or, the new middle class.[51] The formal political organization of this sector may be fragmented; however, there is no doubt as to its presence in a variety of social arenas in Israel – communal organization and action, institutional and non-institutional politics, consumer culture, or cultural production.[52]

There is also some evidence to this sector's presence in place-making,[53] and identity-work.[54] The data presented here testifies for symbolic meanings of place originating in middle-class consumerist and individualist culture, thus contributing to the understanding that the voice of the middle class in late capitalist Israel is loudly present in place-making and through it – in identity-work.

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[47] Eyal Ben-Ari/Yoram Bilu (eds.), Grasping Land. Albany, 1997.

[48] See: Michael Feige, One Space, Two Places: Gush Emunim, Peace Now and the Construction of Israeli Space, Jerusalem, 2002, [Hebrew]; Michael Feige, Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories. Detroit, 2009. This rift in its identity-work context was first pointed upon by Kimmerling, see: Baruch Kimmerling, Between Primordial and Civil Definitions of the Collective Identity: Eretz Israel or the State of Israel?, in: Baruch Kimmerlling, Clash of Identities, New York 2008 [1984], 85-103.

[49] See: Guy Ben-Poart/Brian S. Turner (eds.), The Contradictions of Israeli Citizenship, London–New York, 2011; Feige, Jerusalem, Feige Detroit (see note 48); Adriana Kemp/David Newman/Uri Ram/Oren Yiftachel (eds.), Israelis in Conflict. Brighton–Portland Or., 2004; Baruch Kimmerling, The Invention and Decline of Israeliness, Berkeley, Los Angeles–London, 2001; Kimmerling, New York (see note 48).

[50] See: Hall, London (see note 6); Ze'ev Shavit/Orna Sasson-Levy/Guy Ben-Porat (eds.), Points of Reference: Changing Identities and Social Positioning in Israel, Jerusalem–Tel-Aviv, 2013, [Hebrew].

[51] Alvin Gouldner, The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class, London, 1979.

[52] Amir Ben-Porat, The Bourgoisie: The History of the Israeli Bourgeoises, Jerusalem, 1999, 161-176, [Hebrew]; Guy Ben-Porat, Between State and Synagogue. The Secularization of Contemporary Israel, Cambridge, 2013, 138-212; Daphna Birenbaum-Carmeli, Tel Aviv North: The making of a New Israeli Middle Class, Jerusalem, 2000, [Hebrew]; Amir Shmueli/Ira Igudin/Judith Shuval Change and Stability: Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine in Israel: 1993, 2000 and 2007, in: Euroean Journal of Public Health 20 (2), 2010, 1-6.

[53] Orit Ben-David,. *Tiyul* (Hike) as an Act of Consecration of Space, in: Eyal Ben-Ari/Yoram Bilu (eds.), Grasping Land, Albany, 1997, 129-145; Ze'ev Shavit, The Bourgeois Construction of the Rural: An Israeli Case, in: Israel Studies Review 28 (1), 2013, 98-119.

[54] Ben-Porat, Jerusalem (see note 52).