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Visions of landscape photography in Palestine and Israel

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ABSTRACT

Landscape photography is a visual construction of nature. Viewing recurrent representations of landscape photographs can contribute to the creation of national and political visual heritages, appropriation, and cultural claims over lands. Thus, landscape photographs serve as mediums for influencing political agendas and ideologies. These ideas are illustrated in this study by analysing European, Palestinian, and Zionist landscape photographs of the Holy Land (Zion/Palestine) from the middle of the nineteenth century and up to contemporary artistic Israeli photography. I contend that landscape photography was employed as a political tool at the hands of European and pre-statehood, Zionist photography for cultural land appropriation in their political struggles, while local Palestinian documentation was absent from this arena.

KEYWORDS

Photography; Palestine; Israel; landscape; Zionism; appropriation; colonialism

Introduction

Since the nineteenth century, the Holy Land (Zion/Palestine) has attracted photographers, whether missionaries, gentlemen-travellers or Jewish pioneers, seeking to explore the land. The development of the attraction to the land in the West paralleled the evolution of photographic technology, which enabled the construction of images using the newly invented science. Landscape photographs that emerged at that time launched the use of photographs as cultural and political tools of visual appropriation globally. The uniqueness of the case of the Holy Land lies in the simultaneous emergence of a multiplicity of photographic narratives as a result of a brewing political conflict between groups of population in the territory. This particular case is characterised by conflicting populations with conflicting agendas, employing landscape photography simultaneously as an instrument to promote their separate causes. Palestine became a fascinating laboratory for landscape photography in which there was a flow of influence of style, genres, points of view, and techniques from one population to the next, and from era to era. This study seeks to present the evolvement of landscape photography in the region, its origins, effects, and surprising success in shaping public opinion and affecting local history.

As European colonialism expanded to the Middle East in the nineteenth-century, the Western world became fascinated by the images of the Holy Land. Photographers arriving from the West created photographs that promoted political agendas and ideologies, since, 'concepts of land are instrumental, economic, rational, legal … and territorial' (Kark, 1992, p. 64). Based on mythical origins that go back in time, the photographs of the Holy Land, in particular, were used to evoke the viewers' reverence and construct a sense of affinity and belonging to the land. 'In the mythological imagery of most traditional nations, land is construed as the creation of either God or a mythical hero, as a component of the divine mating of landscape and the heavens … The land is perceived as a goddess who mothers all living creatures' (Kark, 1992, p. 64).

The timeframe of this study extends from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century when Palestine was transferred from the rule of Ottoman Empire to the British Mandate,

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and the Palestinian-Zionist conflict was brewing. This period was the heyday of the activity of the Jewish Zionist institutions. The last section of this study investigates how past photographic legacies affect contemporary Israeli Jewish landscape photography, through the work and narrative of Simha Shirman, a contemporary Israeli artistic photographer.

The visual analysis used in the study incorporates different ways of selecting, interpreting, and analysing data found in archives, publications, exhibits, catalogues, photography galleries, and museum collections. I examined photographs by Felix Bonfils and Sgt. James MacDonald, of the Palestine Exploration Fund, and made use of rare material in the Yad Ben-Zvi Institute. The G. Eric and Edith Matson Collection in the US Library of Congress was a rich source for commercial images made by members of the American Colony in Jerusalem and Western photographers. For Zionist photography, I relied largely on the Photographic Jewish National Fund archive.

The criterion for selecting photographs was whether they contained signs and symbols that enable the development of a visual analysis. A visual analysis considers the formal construction of the photograph: the use of angles and distance from the photographer, composition, and information to be gleaned from the background and foreground. The social and cultural settings of the creation of the image, as well as the dynamics of the social power of its circulation, distribution and publication, and process of viewing of the images, are part of the data. (Sturken & Cartwright, 2009, p. 21).

Methodologically, I have chosen mainly an etic approach, which seeks to analyse the multi-layered visual presentations. Accordingly, the analysis of the process of documentation is indirect, the narrative or experience of the photographers is not expressed. In the last section of the paper, I switch to an emic approach and present the narrative of a renowned Israeli artist. I use an interpretive approach to analyse his personal remarks, from an interview which I conducted with him (Gubrium & Harper, 2013, p. 69).

Landscape painting and landscape photography

Landscape photography is based on Western culture styles of landscape painting. Some photographers had been painters and illustrators before they turned to the new medium of photography (Jeffrey, 1984, p. 9). The word 'landscape' was originally a Dutch word, meaning a 'segment of nature that can be grasped in one glance … in order to be turned into a picture.' (Oren, 2006, p. 178). The concept involved contemplation of the world's beauty, a divine reflection, and painting presented a perfection of earthly order. Classic landscape painting of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries involved a fixed point of view and compositions that were structured according to visual rules anchored in the Western tradition. Balance and sense of depth were important features both in classic landscape painting and photography.

Figure 1 shows the extension of a romantic, painterly picturesque approach to an engraving of the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem. The aesthetic rules of engravings, etchings, paintings, and photographs were similar in composition, organisation, and angle. In Figure 1, we see the slopes of hillsides of Jerusalem with the people in the foreground blending into nature in the form of dots that illustrate the scenery. The human figures were mere staffage, appearing as backdrops rather than people with a clear identity. Erasing the 'habitus, the imagery, the viewpoints, and, eventually, the physical existence of indigenous people' (Smith, 2014, p. 267) became a process of visual obliteration which found its roots in picturesque landscape painting. This approach is described as a visual regime, which 'became indispensable to colonisation, the 'human face of imperialism' (Smith, 2014, p. 268).

Following, landscape photographs of the nineteenth century were shot from afar or above; the technicalities of photographing landscapes required a distance from the object to be able to capture an entire scene in the frame.

The act of photographing and viewing landscapes

The act of photographing is a form of seizure; photographers, metaphorically speaking, 'shoot' photographs and 'capture' scenes (Barromi-Perlman, 2017). Hence, once something is photographed, it belongs to the photographer, and later, to his audiences. This action is enhanced in

Figure 1. W. H. Bartlett, engraved by R. Wallis The Mount of Olives and Jerusalem—from the North East, ca.1847. Courtesy of James E. Lancaster.

the eyes of the viewers by forms of circulation and distribution of the photographs. Viewers tend to view historical landscape photographs in context. Viewing is contingent on socially constructed information, such as the time and historical/cultural context of the place.

In this context, landscape photography of the Holy Land represented a Western conviction regarding the land of the Bible that connoted claims on it. Thus, landscape photographs of the Holy Land were carriers of a multiplicity of messages, serving as instruments in power struggles and employed as a means to raise Western public interest in the region. Shifting political dynamics influenced the reading of landscape photographs over time, creating shifts in meanings. Mitchell argues in his phenomenological theorisation that the question is not what landscape 'is' or 'means' but rather what it 'does' or how it works as a cultural practice. Referring to the process of interpellation of photographs as analogous to individuals' response to ideologies, individuals respond to a landscape in a 'determinate relation to its givenness as sight and site.' (Mitchell, 1994, p. 2).

In a similar vein, Pollen explains that summarising what a photograph 'is' oversimplifies what it may 'do'; one must take into consideration the journeys the photographs may take, and the uses to which they may be put (Pollen, 2016).

Landscape photographs' journeys involve paths of circulation, in their route to becoming sites of visual appropriation. Oren explains that the circulation of landscape photography can reinforce an affinity and a sense belonging to the land (Oren, 2006).

The emergence of landscape photography in Palestine

In the analysis that follows, I argue that landscape photography in Palestine was employed as a tool of political and cultural appropriation at the hands of European and pre-statehood Zionist photography, and characterised by the glaring absence of local Palestinian documentation from this arena. At the turn of the

twentieth century, Palestine was a region in transition, both demographically and in terms of industrial development and cultural evolution. Much of the terrain under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, which ruled Palestine until 1917, was arid with sparsely distributed settlements (Friedlander, 1998, p. 173). During the second half of the nineteenth century, European powers and churches became increasingly involved in Palestine.

They built missionary schools and hospitals and applied pressure on the Ottoman Empire to allow an increased European economic presence and flow of travellers. The underdeveloped landscape of Palestine was perceived by the Europeans as virgin land. It evoked strong spiritual emotions among Western Christian viewers, who were nourished by romantic notions of Palestine as the cradle of Christianity.

With the increasing popularity of leisure travel among the new middle class in this period, which coincided with the development of photography, The Holy Land attracted pilgrims, tourists, missionaries, painters, scientists, and adventurers (Hannavy, 2008, p. 475). The Holy Land became one of the most photographed places on earth, boosting the burgeoning tourist industry. Many of the travellers were 'Gentlemen Travelers' making a stop on their Grand Tour—a new phenomenon of the modern tourist pilgrimage (Bar & Cohen-Hattab, 2003, p. 131). Interest in Palestine was particularly pronounced in Britain; its cultural identification and Imperial colonial ambitions, trade interest, and drive for exploration, resulted in a surge of British photographic activity.

Photography was considered as a reliable, scientific tool. Viewers of landscape photographs had a naïve faith in the mimetic ability of photography and accurate portrayal of nature. Hence, landscape photographs of the Holy Land were perceived as visual scientific proof of a biblical world, frozen in time. For their part, photographers strove to provide images which would confirm for European viewers—who sought the past in the present—that Palestine illustrates for Christians what life was like in biblical times.

Consequently, picture postcards of Palestine that were circulated in Europe and the West referred mostly to picturesque biblical scenes. The landscape was presented in a way that nourished the romantic and religious desires of the Christian Westerners. The assumption was that the 'appearance and customs of the present-day inhabitants of Palestine had not changed' (Moors, 2001, p. 17). Biblical image-making became an industry, with photographs illustrating editions of the Bible. By viewing pictures published in travel literature, the public could participate in the same visual imagery that eventually became a familiar, culturally-constructed conception of what Palestine and its inhabitants looked like, in lieu of actually travelling there.

Figure 2. Bonfils Studio. Elisha's Spring. Ca. 1880. Courtesy of extended loan of Joseph and Elaine Monsen, Henry Art Gallery.

Figure 2, by Félix Bonfils (1831–1885), a French commercial photographer whose images of historic sites were sold as souvenirs, illustrates this phenomenon (Hannavy, 2008, p. 173). The textual reference of the photograph in Figure 2, Elisha Spring, is from the Old Testament, 2 Kings 2:19, describing a miracle performed by Prophet Elisha. The indexical choice was to define and refer to the spring in its biblical context, rather than mention its local Arabic name, Ain-es-Sultân, or its geographical location near Jericho. Thus, the man in the picture is viewed and contextualised in a biblical reference, blending into the background, and serving as a staffage.

Figures 3 and 4 show two photographic versions of the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem, taken from a similar angle, three years apart, by different European photographers. In Figure 4, the gate appears dark, obscure and difficult to penetrate. The people appear as dark spots. In Figure 3, a low wall separates the viewer from the gate and the people. The wall serves as a visual barrier, the tilted angle and the lack of perspective flatten the image. The functions of the gate as a passageway, the entrance to the market and a major crossroad for the local inhabitants, are not evident in either photograph. In both images, the vantage point is distant and there is no evidence of life beyond the wall. The thriving life that goes on in and around the gate (to this very day) is not discernible; the gate appears as a desolate place to be reclaimed rather than as a passageway for a vibrant people. These visual manipulations objectify the gate in the eyes of the Western and European viewers, as an object rather than as a crucial element of the fabric of the city of Jerusalem.

The photograph in Figure 5 shows a view of Bethlehem. The physical distance between the people and the photographer detaches them from the viewer and creates a perception of visual aloofness. This perception is enhanced by the high angle which diminishes and flattens the crowd, transforming it into clusters of dark spots and shadows. The large buildings proportionally reduce the size of the people, who

Figure 3. Studio Bonfils. Porte de Damas—Damascus Gate, ca. 1870. Courtesy of the University of Chicago, Special Collections Research Centre.

Figure 4. Damascus gate, 1867. James Robertson and Felix Beato. Courtesy of the Getty Collection.

Figure 5. Studio Bonfils, Bethlehem Christmas pilgrims enter town 1890, ca. 1870 (published 1890). Courtesy of PikiWiki—Israel free image collection project.

Figure 6. Men resting their camels and smoking by Jacob's Well at Shechem, D. Roberts, 1839. Courtesy of Wellcome Collection.

blend into the background, appearing blurred and lacking a clear identity. This composition creates a visual hierarchy between landscape and inhabitants, prioritising the first over the latter. The aesthetics of flattening the local inhabitants has its roots not only in technical considerations but also in a particular point of view, described by Behdad as an 'absence of humanity in the Orientalist view' (Behdad, 2013, p. 24).

Figure 6 shows a lithograph of Jacob's well, by David Roberts, from 1839. Jacob's Well is located near Shechem (the city of Nablus in the West Bank) and has been associated in Christianity as the place where Jesus held his conversation with the Samaritan woman. Roberts, a Scottish artist, created lithograph prints produced from a series of sketches and drawings he made during tours of the region (1838–1840). This image shows a romantic scene influenced by the nineteenth century Orientalist genre of painting. The people are dressed in colourful and mysterious attire, typical to this genre. They are seen overlooking a field, smoking and conversing. Some have their backs to the viewer; others are hunched over, seated on the ground. They appear in clusters, as distant, idle people, who pose no threat. There is no visual indication of a well, other than the caption.

Figure 7 shows a photograph of Jacob's Well, by Francis Firth, from 1857. In this photograph, five people are shown sitting on the ground, one man is standing.

The group acknowledges the photographer; the standing man and two seated men are looking at the photographer, as if in dismay. It is probable that in 1857—the estimated time of this photograph—this is their first encounter with a camera, or a Western photographer. The people, attired in garments that resemble garments of people from Biblical times, appear in an empty field, with no road, tree or building in sight. The people are resting; one man is reclined and two men are facing each other, ignoring the photographer, who has no direct interaction with them. In Firths' photograph, the men are aware of his intruding presence. They glare back at him. In spite of their diminished size, which 'subjugates them in the eyes of the viewers'

Figure 7. Francis Frith, Jacob`s Well, Near Shechem, 1857. Courtesy of the Paul Getty Museum.

(Barromi-Perlman, 2017, p. 52), their particular glare disturbs the balance of self-assurance of the observer.

Firths' photograph does not successfully deliver a privileged colonial point of view, but rather conveys an impression of the instability of the colonial gaze. The photograph does not replicate Robert's lithograph of a visual hegemonic construction of reality, since the medium of photography reveals the complex reality of the local populations.

Yet, the photograph by Firth, taken twenty years after Roberts' lithograph perpetuates his style of documentation of the Holy Land, demonstrating how the extension of a romantic, picturesque approach evolved into photography. Firth, a professional photographer (Friedlander, 1998, p. 170), created an aestheticism of observation from afar; the space and composition are well balanced. He photographs a scenic view, without actually showing the well. His hand-written caption in his book, 'Where Jesus conversed with the woman of Samaria', serves as a textual reference to the importance of sight in Christianity. The process of viewing images and textual references of Christianity in photographs contributed to evoking European viewers' religious persuasion and affinity to the sites of the Holy Land.

Figure 8 shows a view of the northern wall of Jerusalem. The composition, too, is based on a painterly and romantic approach to landscape. The focal point is far to the right. The people walking on the road and the donkey cart appear as silhouettes. One man is walking away from the photographer. The people appear again as staffage, their identities are insignificant. The cactus on the right and the shadow on the left creates a frame, through which one sees the entire view, all the way to the end of the road. The ability to encompass with one's eyes the entire wall enables the viewer to see the limits of the wall and its size. This photograph was published in 'Palestine and Transjordania' (1926) by Rohrbach (Author) and Preiss (Photographer). Contrary to the previous photographs from the nineteenth century, Preiss photographed in a period in which Palestine was rapidly developing and modernising. Jerusalem was composed of a diverse international population,

Figure 8. Northern wall of Jerusalem, Photograph by Ludwig Preiss. 1926. Courtesy of Piki Wiki Israel.

hospitals, a university, cafes, shops, transportation and urban facilities were in existence. Preiss's selective presentation is intentional, and does not reflect the development of modernity in Jerusalem at the time.

The documentary style of Western photographers, which, in general, avoided unpleasing, unaesthetic scenery, did not depict the Holy Land in a way that interfered with the promotion of picture postcards, albums, and lantern-slide shows. Poverty did not sell photographs, and hence, depictions of dirt and misery were absent from them. By emphasising certain aspects of the landscape and ignoring others, such as the development of industry, education, health, and transportation that took place during this period, Western photographers contributed to creating a stereotyped vision of Palestine, helping to perpetuate their myths. This practice tapped into mechanisms of European control and cultural colonialism in the Middle East. In general, Western tourist-photography was defined by orientalism, according to Behdad (2013). The local Arab inhabitants were portrayed as primitive beings or traditional ethnic types. Graham-Brown writes that 'the spread of colonial rule in the Middle East created images to be superimposed on stereotypes: "backward" people were shown to be reaping the benefits of Western rule in the form of schools and hospitals.' (Graham-Brown, 1988, p. 23).

The emergence of Arab-Palestinian visual narratives

Unsurprisingly, Western photography of Palestine's landscape has been viewed critically by Palestinians, albeit in hindsight. Al-Hajj claims that Western photographers were 'obfuscating local reality' in their photographs of Palestine. He writes that 'This consciously or not, served the cause of colonialism and led to the fall of Palestine in 1948.' (Al-Hajj, 2001, p. 39). Kabha claims that documentation of cultural, social and historical facets of the Palestinian population suffered from neglect which 'resulted in the exclusion of many sectors, and the silencing of other voices, and involved avoidance of documentation and analysis of processes which took place on the local level and were not directly linked to the conflict.' (Kabha, 2008, p. 279).

Nevertheless, Jerusalem-born Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi managed to compile photographs created by local photographers into a book: *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians 1876–1948*. In the book, Khalidi presents a choice of photographs depicting Palestine as a country with a thriving political, economic, and cultural life, which undermines the conventional stereotype of the Palestinians' backwardness (Khalidi, 2010). In his selection of photographs created by local photographers, the cities are presented as sites of relative modernity. Moors describes such a project as part of a process in which 'not only those in power but also subaltern groups have made use of photograph's indexical qualities and its status as evidence to engage in ideological struggles, through the production of an alternative visual imagery.' (Moors, 2010, p. 93).

Khalidi presents work of local Palestinian photographers who depicted everyday life in Palestine of the local inhabitants, including events such as ceremonies, festivities, parades, portraits, as well as some local landscapes, sites, towns, and architecture. Among them was the well-known photographer in Jerusalem, Khalil Ra'ad.

Ra'ad's photographs describe Palestinians' daily life up until the 1948 war, providing a window into the world and attitude of the local Palestinian population (Sela, 2010). Ra'ad advertised himself as a 'photographer of sites, scenes, ceremonies, costumes, etc.' (Sheehi, 2015, p. 28). Figure 5 presents a group of Palestinians in the Old City in Jerusalem in 1929. The caption describes the people as mourners protesting the Balfour Declaration of November 1917, in which the British Government supported a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine.

Ra'ad's choice of subject and caption visualise the Palestinian political narrative at the time. The chest of the second man on the left is covered with a slash reading, 'honor thy martyrs.' In August of that same year (1929), Palestinians rioted in several towns following a clash with Jews over religious rights on Temple Mount, resulting in massive casualties on both sides: 133 killed and 339 wounded on the Jewish side, and 116 and 232 wounded on the Palestinian side (Khalidi, 2010, p. 90).

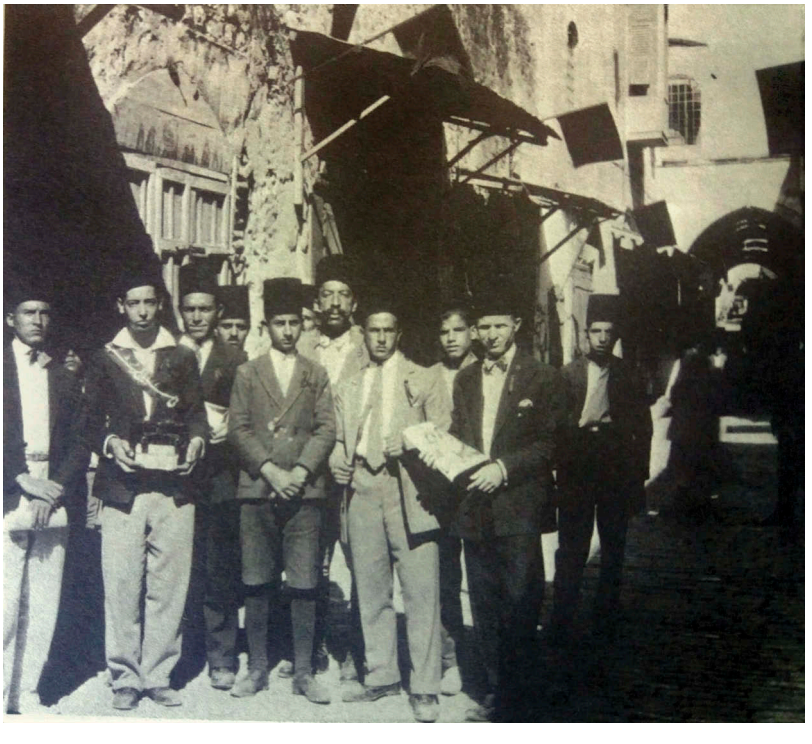

Figure 9. Photograph by Khalil Ra'ad, Jerusalem, Mourning of Balfour Day, 1929. Khalid Ra'ad Collection. Public Domain.

In Figure 9, a black flag appears on the top left of the picture, and a collection box on behalf of the Emergency Relief Committee in aid of the afflicted Palestinian families is held by the second man on the left. The Old City of Jerusalem appears in the background. Visual signs of male Western attire combined with Turkish turbans are juxtaposed with ancient archways and cobblestone roads in this image. Since the men are standing on the left-hand side, the right-hand side leaves room for the Old City of to visually interject into the subject matter. Thus, the men in the photograph are physically located in a significant place and time, transforming the image of the mourners into an image of mourners in the landscape of Jerusalem.

Unlike their Jewish counterparts who were employed by Jewish Institutions, Palestinian photographers such as Khalil Ra'ad and Garabed Krikorian worked mostly independently, covering their expenses through private studios and photo stores in Jerusalem. Krikorian's studio dedicated itself to studio-portraiture. American Colony photographers in Jerusalem accepted contract work to photograph industrial and agricultural sites, transportation, army camps, and field hospitals (Bair, 2010, p. 34–5). They maintained an independent status, taking commercial photographs, and selling them alongside the running of a guesthouse.

Despite the contribution of local photographers, Nassar writes that Palestine was not 'used to the idea of a native photographer' since 'photography was seen as a European phenomenon.' (Nassar, 2000, p. 27). Local Palestinian documentary work catered to the needs of the domestic population and foreign tourists but was not publicised in the West. Although the choice of photographs in Khalidi's book reflects the Palestinian national narrative, these photographs, at the time, were not used as forms of propaganda to influence world public opinion. Nassar explains that it is 'possible to argue that overlooking early Palestinian photographers [by the West] is part of a larger process through which Palestinians themselves were written out of the history of their own country.' (Nassar, 2000, p. 27–28).

Zionist photography: an ideological- institutional visual narrative

Pre-state Zionist landscape photography shared with the picturesque paintings and Christian photographers of the Holy Land the inherent belief that the landscape in Palestine is a virgin, underdeveloped, terrain awaiting revival. Zionist photography, which was developed and sponsored by the Jewish National Fund (JNF), employed certain tropes of earlier picturesque and Christian styles of landscape photography, as will be demonstrated below in the photographs of Avraham Melavsky. However, the use of this style for propaganda material diminished due to the development of a realistic agitprop Soviet-style, that proved more effective in promoting the cause of the Zionist pioneers in their mission of redeeming the land (Barromi-Perlman, 2015, p. 192).

Established in 1901, the JNF was a land-purchase and development fund created for buying land in Eretz Israel ('Land of Israel' in Hebrew). The JNF photography department was part of the Publicity Department, whose goal was to document and publicise the reclaiming, or redemption of land in Eretz Israel. The Jewish population in Palestine grew dramatically in the first quarter of the twentieth century through waves of immigration of Jews fleeing persecution from pogroms in Russia and Europe (Meltzer, 2007). The immigrants were pioneers in the service of the Zionist cause, who came to settle the land and thus created the need for land purchases. The Zionist immigrants were mostly refugees who considered themselves not only victims of persecution but also victims of British colonialism and created imagery as a form of rebellion for independence.

The JNF was the main source of propaganda for influencing public opinion and fundraising for land purchases amongst Jews in the Diaspora for settlement (Sela, 2000). It recruited photographers whose mission was to encourage the rebirth of a Jewish nation in their homeland. Deriving their inspiration from Soviet Realism and agitprop photography, the Zionist photographers focused on photographing the land from the perspective of their pioneering activities: settling the land and farming. They concentrated on images of heroic pioneers, using low angles to empower and enlarge their presence in the images.

The presentation of the land was instrumental. At times, the terrain was depicted as barren and covered with weeds and thistles; some parts of the countryside were lush and others—infested with

swamps. The countryside was mostly presented as harsh and waiting for 'redemption' and 'conquest' by building, industrialising, agricultural, and urban development. The notion of making the desert bloom was presented by images of pioneers setting water pipes, building highways, and constructing housing projects. Photographs of built landscape symbolised a heroic victory over the rugged terrain. For the settlers, the land was only an uninhabited surface, serving as a platform for building and cultivation; the land had no calling of its own; nature had no rights.

One of the prominent photographers of the JNF was the Polish-born, Avraham Malavsky (1907–-1999), who immigrated to Palestine in 1925. In the course of his work, Malavsky toured the land from north to south and photographed the new villages, towns, kibbutzim. His postcard-landscape photographs presented scenes of construction of settlements that appear as part of the natural growth. Malavsky's recurrent themes of landscapes, hillsides, and valleys all became objects of identification. The two photographs by Melavsky below (Figure 10, 11) present a transition from the picturesque style to a realist depiction of the landscape, though they are similar in composition, angle and distance.

In Figure 10, we see a photograph of Kibbutz Ginegar in the Jezreel Valley. This image is an extended form of the picturesque landscape painting. In this image, Malevsky positioned himself at a high and distant vantage point; the hills and workers (who are relatively small) in the foreground, the trees and the cluster of houses in the background merge into a picturesque romantic scenery of people immersing and blending with nature.

Figure 10. Avraham Malavsky (1930) Kibbutz Ginegar, Ya'ar Balfour. Courtesy of the KKL-JNF Archive.

In Figure 11, Melavsky employs the genre of photographic realism. It is a photograph of the landscape in the Emek Hefer region along the coastal plain taken in 1939. Small houses are scattered on both sides of the frame, showing signs of civilisation in an uninhabited land. Here too, the vantage point is high, the

Figure 11. Avraham Malavsky, (1939) Kfar Elyashiv, Emek Hefer. Courtesy of the KKL-JNF Archive.

viewer, who is empowered by the angle, is slightly aloof. The physical distance of the photographer from the location overshadows the grim reality and hardships of life in the remote village at that time. Unlike the previous image (Figure 10), Malavsky leaves room for the sky to occupy a third of the frame, the bottom two thirds shows rows of constructed houses. The landscape is desolate, and the land is flat with no romantic hillside overlooking. The village appears bleak, presenting modernist architecture in arid surroundings.

The classic composition of third/two-thirds is employed ironically to present scenes of housing construction, scattered telephone poles and a barren land, rather than a picturesque scenery. In this photograph, the picturesque genre is transformed into Zionist photographic propaganda dealing with a harsh reality.

Figure 11 presents a visual form of the Zionist 'Realist Utopia', as termed by Gorny: an ideal but pragmatic vision that propels people to realise their aspirations (Gorny, 2015). The pre-state Zionist viewer translated the images in the photograph to visions of an imagined future, in which the Emek Hefer region would flourish with trees and villages (as indeed, it did). Despite the scant signs of buildings (whether of an Arab or Jewish community) in the background, the foreground of the photograph contains the message—a new Jewish settlement.

This visual construction of visual utopias catered to a larger imagined future, of building a homeland for the Jews that envisioned trees, gardens, roads, and development of the region. The photographs were manipulative in the sense that what Zionists read in the picture was based on a promise of a future that did not yet exist in the pictures. In Zionist photography, in general, the landscape was mostly presented as a wasteland that the Zionists, the architects of modernism, have come to redeem.

The local Arab population which rarely appeared in their photographs, was portrayed as primitive, ragged, and backward (Bar-Gal, 2003). Oren explains that 'Zionist discourse that saw "national building" and "land redemption" as constructive concepts from a Jewish historical point of view,

looked upon the Arab as the "other", the backward and aggressive enemy who objected to the legitimate renascent nationhood of the Jews in their homeland' (Oren, 2008, p. 250).

The visual effacement of the local Arab population from Zionist landscape photographs (as well as avoidance of visible signs of the British Mandate) and the exclusive appearance of Jewish settlers in Jewish settlements was intentional and ideologically motivated. This practice was in tandem with practices and aspirations for controlling the land by European settlers in other colonial settings around the globe. In Australia and East Africa, the effacement of the indigenous population from the landscape has been described as a step in the process of their obliteration (Behrend, 2013; Smith, 2014). According to Smith, in Australia, 'A settlement progressed to a point when it needed to introduce its own practices of selective forgetting' (Smith, 2014, p. 268). Hence, pre-state Zionist photography can be linked to orientalist photography. Behdad argued that orientalist photography is characterised by the desire to create images 'unobstructed by the presence of indigenous people', and the tendency to 'depopulate' the Orient of its inhabitants since they 'rob the image' of its quest for visual monumentalism (Behdad, 2013, p. 24).

The visual narrative of Simcha Shirman

Did Malavsky's landscapes and romantic picture-postcard style images leave a lasting legacy for contemporary Israel? In this section, an artistic reaction to this style by a renowned Israeli art-photographer, Simcha Shirman will be analysed. Shirman's art photography of Israeli landscape expresses a visual discourse that reflects a contemporary perspective of Israeli society conflicted about its legacies. His works display an attempt to sever any ties of affinity with the landscape that Malavsky toured and documented before the founding of the state of Israel in 1948.

Born in Germany in 1947 and brought up in Israel, Shirman considers himself a native Israeli. His photographs of Israeli landscapes, which he has been taking for over three decades, reflect a sense of unpleasant, transitory existence. Shirman argues first, that the land he treads upon and visits does not belong to the Jewish Israelis by entitlement; second, that it should be treated with respect rather than mistreated, mishandled and abused, since it has a history of its own.

In contradistinction to Zionist photographers (who avoided depicting hardships beyond the desolate landscape), and the Christian photographers (who avoided poverty and decay), Shirman intentionally portrays festering and waste in his photographs. His landscape photographs deal with Shirman's immediate personal sensation that something has gone wrong. In his words:

> 'I treat the land with reverence; look for signs of effacement of the land, such as trees that are planted and uprooted, holes that are dug and filled and waste that accumulates on the land. I deal with our lack of temporality of the land, and with fears and feelings of threat. I relate to the surface of the land rather than the history of the land' (Shirman, private interview, 2016).

In Figure 12, we see a pile of waste burning on the ground. Shirman chose to give the photograph the name of hursha in Hebrew, which means, a grove. There are only a few trees in the photograph, and the mound of waste in the centre creates a dissonance between the expected image implied by the caption and the photographed ground. Since words in Hebrew relating to trees, growth, forests and the countryside conjure utopia images, using hursha in juxtaposition with a pile of waste creates a new visual language of disillusionment. Shirman does not turn his back on beauty but instead creates a new form of aesthetic composition and balance, based on classic formats of landscape imagery. The depth in his shades of grey alludes to lost memories; to images created in the present which resonate to layers of social deception, as can be seen on the ground. In this photograph, the viewer finds himself deliberating between the intention of the photographer, the image, and the 'disintegration of myths' (Haikin, 2012, p. 212).

The damage and neglect of the land, which Shirman highlights in his narrative, is a result of the political abuse of the land. The dilapidation and refuse which he photographs are not just evidence of an ecological crisis, but also of an existential one growing out of a history of disrespect to the legacy of the land.

Figure 12. Simcha Shirman. hursha, 2010. Courtesy of Simcha Shirman.

In Figure 13, we see Shirman's shadow on the ground as a reserve-duty soldier. In many of his landscape photographs, he chooses to present himself in the form of his own shadow. He explains: 'My frustration leaves me with no answers. Thus, I photograph myself like a tourist, near a tree, near a tent, leaving no mark. I live in fear in this country. We are temporary, our actions are temporary, and they are connected to an underlying fear regarding our existence.' (Interview on 25.8.16). Shirman is ceaselessly preoccupied with the surface of the land, with what is left on the surface—be it waste or only a fleeting shadow. Thus, Shirman participates in a post-colonial visual practice of 'surfacism' in his artwork. In these practices, 'the surface becomes a site of the refusal of the depth that characterized colonial representational regimes' (Pinney, 2014, p. 450). Photographing a shadow cast on the surface of the land, presents a 'mobile location on the surface' (Pinney, 2014). The materiality of the surface in his photographs, the parched land, the waste, the refuse—all negate the colonial practice of presenting the surface of the land as invisible, with no calling of its own. This, for Shirman, is an act of defiance against Israeli legacy. As his shadow is contingent on his physical presence, he employs it both to negotiate notions of obliteration and effacement, and express his view that Israeli-Jewish physical presence on the land is a disputable construction of modern history:

> On the one hand, there is a distant history of 2000 years ago, and there is a lack of short- term history for what we have today. I deal with effacement of local, collective memory, with my relationship with the place, the locality, and the landscape. The relationship to nature and our surroundings erases the immediate past. We build and forget, build and erase; we forget the filth in the fields and the Arab houses being demolished. We forget what was here yesterday. We have a selective memory; we only remember what we want. We erase Arab villages; we even erase places that existed ten years ago, lack of respect for the past. I speak of concerns regarding the future. When I was on reserve duty in the army, doing something I did not identify with ideologically, I took photographs as if I were a tourist, near the tent, near the hill. My shadow as a soldier has more impact than my regular shadow. (Shirman, August 2016).

Furthermore, Shirman's shadow is thrust on the surface, so that his physical presence vanishes once he moves away. The only mark he leaves as a soldier is a fleeting shadow. Shirman's sense of disillusion and hopelessness generated images in which he effaces himself both as an Israeli and as a soldier.

Figure 13. Simcha Shirman, Self Portrait and Shrub, 1982. Courtesy of Simcha Shirman.

Figure 14. Family, Shirman, 2000. Courtesy of Simcha Shirman.

In Shirman's view, the foundations of the Israeli historical homeland rest on 'our sins of the past', including the struggles over territorial identity. Hence, the sense of despair and distress in his artwork, which can be seen in Figure 13.

Figure 14 was taken on the Tel Baruch beach, adjacent to an affluent Jewish neighbourhood of Tel-Aviv. An Arab family is photographed from a distance, from the back. They appear focused on a fishing boat ship, the beach, and the children in the water. The family seems to be ill at ease; they are standing and sitting awkwardly; their appearance seems transient. In contrast to historical photographs, they are not presented in their natural habitat. They appear tense; the father is pointing his left hand outwards, beckoning the children to pay attention. The woman is holding a baby and her body tilted, as if ready to leave. Even though the family is central to the composition—its members occupy most of the frame—they appear as if they do not belong in this environment.

Conclusion

The accumulated effort of photographing the landscape of the Holy Land created a complex plethora of political readings of photographs of the land and its inhabitants, and a multiplicity of visual discourses.

There is a link between the style of the Western photographers touring the Holy Land in the late nineteenth century (designed to suit the eyes of the Christian world), and the iconographies and visual symbols of the Zionist photographers of the first half of the twentieth century (designed to suit Zionist utopian aspirations). Both reflected an orientalist, manipulative approach in their choice of visual presentations, which made the life of the local Arabs invisible, as argued by Palestinian visual researchers. Palestinian political weakness was reflected in its photography. The idea of developing landscape photography as a means for appropriation of Palestine was foreign to Palestinian photographers. Unlike the Westerner's and JNF's photographs, their images were not disseminated to external audiences for promoting their political causes.

The works of a politically disillusioned Israeli art-photographer in the twenty-first century, Shirman, can serve to illustrate the revisionist readings of the Zionist utopia, after seven decades of Israeli hegemony. The artistic response of Shirman in his photographs of waste, of fleeting shadows, reflects his perception of the ecological and political calamity that is the result of struggles and disputes over the land and its people. The photograph of the restless Palestinian family at Tel Baruch Beach transforms the Zionist utopia into his personal, private visual representation of dystopia. The common thread in all visual discourses displayed in the photographs is that this land contains an emotional and nostalgic value to many people. Photographs become meaningful if they can reflect desires, public concerns, or create public discourses. Private memorials and experiences related to photographs become consequential if they play a part in a broader social context.

In conclusion, landscapes are glorified and contain an emotional and nostalgic value; however, the land itself can be purchased, conquered, built, ruined, or appropriated. Thus, a photograph of land is not just an image but also an instrument, which represents goals and ambitions. The landscape serves not only as an object in the photographs, but also as a symbol, an icon, and an idol. In this regard, landscape photographs of Palestine and Israel, since the end of the nineteenth century have always served as a pivot for power struggles of religious and national ideologies, but at the same time, the land itself and its claims as a natural resource was overlooked, disregarded, assuming it will always be there.

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