

The Frontier Idiom on Borders and Territorial Politics in Post-1967 Israel

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The article deals with the political and cultural practices whereby the blurring of territorial borders became an inextricable part of Jewish nationalism in Israel after the 1967 war and until the early 1990s. Drawing on a constructivist approach that conceives of territorial borders as social and cultural constructs, I suggest that the liminal geopolitical situation of non-annexation/non-withdrawal in which Israel has been involved since 1967 can be understood with reference to the frontier cultural idiom that has structured Israeli politics and collective imagination when dealing with the nation's 'geo-body'. The article analyzes the Labor government discourse on territories and borders from 1967 until it lost power in 1977 to show how the frontier idiom became a dominant mechanism, structuring the tracks along which the territorial occupation was both perceived and implemented. It proceeds to show the ways in which the frontier idiom remained a central component of a territorial politics that crossed political parties and factions after the Labor party lost power. The frontier idiom in which territoriality in Israel is embedded places in question the self-evident assumption of the literature on nationalism, according to which the territorial state is inevitably the final goal of modern nationalism. It challenges the 'congruence' assumption epitomized in the notion of the nation-state as a 'power container' where discrete political and national boundaries overlap or aim to do so. Such an assumption stems from reified notions of space and borders prevalent in mainstream socio-political theory that a constructivist approach seeks to transcend.

Keywords: Borders, frontier idiom, territorial politics, frontier nationalism, constructivist approach, Israeli Labor movement, settler societies.

In 1999, a new multimedia museum dedicated to promote 'dialogue, mutual understanding and co-existence' between Palestinians and Jews was founded in Jerusalem. Its symbolic-ridden name, 'On the Borderline' (*al hatefer*), encapsulates the museum's aims: to re-present Jerusalem as a micro-cosmos for the conflicts and tensions pervading the Israeli and Palestinian realities. So does the site chosen for the museum. Erected on a former war-post nearby the Gate of Nablus, on the pre-1967 borderline, it denotes the transformation of the border from a site of war into a peace shrine. The significance of the museum lies however neither in its name nor in its geographic location alone. Its truly political meaning stems from the fact that it

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constitutes the 'border' as an 'objectified' reality, as something that belongs to the realm of the uncontested past, something worth of commemoration and celebration, in Pierre Nora's words, as a 'lieu d'memoire' (Nora, 1984). The museification of the border as it were, stands in sharp contradistinction with the modes in which the 'border' has been hitherto constituted within the national discourse in Israel.

The literature on modern nationalism has a great deal to say about mystification of the boundaries of the homeland (Wilson and Donnan, 1998; Hooson, 1994). Manifestly, borders can be drawn anywhere, and the size and shape of states are fluid. As clearly expressed by state-makers like Ben-Gurion, the setting of borders is an open-ended matter and no border is absolute (National Administration [*Minhelet Ha'am*] Minutes, 18 April–13 May 1948). Notwithstanding the fluidity and malleability of state borders, the fact should not be overlooked that since the late nineteenth century, Cartesian conceptions of territoriality became to be regarded not only as the ultimate expression of a state's sovereignty, but also as the utmost political symbol over which nations went to war and for which citizens were ready to fight and die (Prescott, 1987). The inviolability of political boundaries thus constitutes both a basic presupposition of modern sovereignty theory and a central element in the formation of the nation's identity (Sahlins, 1989).

This article deals with the political and cultural practices whereby the blurring of territorial borders rather than their demarcation, became an inextricable part of Jewish nationalism in Israel after the 1967 war and until the early 1990s. For almost thirty years, since the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula (since returned) by war, the state's spatial extent and shape have been contested not only from 'outside' but, indeed, mainly from 'inside'—between those that advocate the idea of Greater Israel and those that plead for territorial compromise in exchange for peace with Palestinians and with the surrounding Arab countries. No Israeli government however succeeded, or conversely attempted, at bringing about a consensus over the desirable shape of the national 'geo-body', thus leaving the Israeli society in a 'no-border' situation.

This protracted liminal situation—whereby the state neither annexed nor withdrew from occupied territories—calls for an inquiry into the internal conditions that prevented the institutionalization of a territorial identity in which political and national boundaries are congruent. Most Israeli scholars have tended to portray the Israeli territorial occupation since 1967 as an interim situation that will lead, in certain conditions, to annexation or to a territorial compromise. The territorial 'status-quo' that crystallized during the first decade of the territorial occupation has been explained as part of the political price paid by the ruling party in order to maintain a broad governmental coalition (Beilin, 1985). More recently, the decision not to decide that seemingly characterized the Labor party territorial policy during the 1970s has been related to the 'triumph of embarrassment', the embarrassment that seized Labor leadership in regard to the 1967 war results (Pedatzur, 1996; see also Gazit, 1999).

Neither of the above mentioned explanations takes into account how rather than why, did the no-border situation ('status-quo') assumed a status of permanence? In

other words, how was the frontier situation institutionalized as a central, not to say 'natural' component of the Israeli way of thinking, talking and acting about territorial boundaries? Drawing on a constructivist approach that conceives of territorial borders as a social and cultural construct, I suggest that the liminal situation of non-annexation/non-withdrawal can be understood with reference to the frontier cultural idiom that has structured Israeli politics and collective imagination when dealing with the nation's 'geo-body'. The frontier idiom that informs the discourse on national territory, comprises symbolic and institutional practices that render the blurring of borders, their continuous drawing and re-drawing, into a structuring mechanism for both nation-state building and identity constitution. As such, I will be arguing, it places in question the self-evident assumption of the literature on nationalism, according to which the territorial state is inevitably the final goal of modern nationalism. The 'congruence' assumption—epitomized for example in Giddens' notion of the nation-state as a 'power container' (Giddens, 1987) where discrete political and national boundaries overlap or aim to do so—is so strong that it has long ceased to be an analytical tool and has become a normative premise (Oommen, 1997). Such an assumption stems from reified notions of space and borders prevalent in mainstream socio-political theory that a constructivist approach allows me to avoid.¹

Frontier discourse existed in Israel long before the 1967 war and as such it is part of Israel's heritage as a settler society (Kimmerling, 1983; Shafir, 1989; Near, 1987). Even 'statism', the dominant ideology that prevailed after the constitution of the state in 1948, did not put to an end the frontier discourse that accorded to Jewish settlement in the frontier areas and to military practices beyond the borders a mythical value (Kemp, 1998). However, and this is my main point, it was in the aftermath of the 1967 war that the frontier idiom became a predominant structuring mechanism through which the simultaneous non-annexation/ non-withdrawal situation in the occupied territories was conceived and embodied in a frontier politics that crossed political parties and factions.

The article proceeds as follows: I first summarize existent explanations to Israel's geo-political situation after the 1967 war and pinpoint at their major weaknesses in explaining the ways in which the frontier situation has been institutionalized in Israel. In the second section I suggest that their treatment of the frontier situation as a temporary one stems from a reified understanding of territory and boundaries, one that takes for granted the inevitable and normative quality of the territorial bounded state. In the third section, I trace the emergence of the frontier discourse on territory and borders within the context of pre-state Israel and the period that preceded the 1967 war. In the section that follows I offer an analysis of the Labor government discourse on territories and borders from 1967 until it lost power in 1977. I discuss how the frontier idiom became a dominant mechanism, structuring the tracks along which the territorial occupation was both perceived and implemented. Finally, I argue that though the traditional social carriers of frontier practices from the Labor movement lost power in 1977, the frontier idiom, or what may be called 'frontier nationalism', remained as a central component of the Israeli way of thinking, talking and acting about territorial boundaries.

NEITHER PRIMORDIAL NOR RATIONAL: THE FRONTIER IDIOM AND THE TERRITORIAL OCCUPATION

Since Israel's 'opening of the borders' following the 1967 war and the occupation of new territories, political sociologists have been trying to explain Israel's geopolitical situation. Most of the explanations have been based on two theoretical approaches: the 'primordialist' approach, focusing on the changes that have taken place in the national ideology; and the 'rationalist' approach, emphasizing processes of state-building. Both orientations take their point of departure from the classic distinction, found in the literature on nationalism, between 'ethno-nationalism' and 'political nationalism'. The 'primordialists' argue that the 1967 war caused a weakening in the civil component of Israeli nationalism and a concomitant strengthening of primordial elements, both religious and ethnic (Kimmerling, 1985; Peri, 1988; Cohen, 1989). The renewed encounter with the 'land of the fathers' led to the formation of extra-parliamentary groups such as Gush Emunim (the Bloc of the Faithful), the Movement for Greater Israel and others, and also gave a boost to the right wing and to the religious camp, whose influence until 1967 was marginal. 'New Zionism' is the term these studies use for the national identity that has been forged since 1967. It is characterized as a type of integral ethno-nationalism, bearing a closer resemblance to the separatist Central and Eastern European national model, which places the *volk* at the center and ascribes to territory an intrinsic value, than to the Western national model which is grounded in civil and liberal principles (Weissbrod, 1981; Shafir, 1984; Seliktar, 1986; Yishay, 1987).²

In contrast to the primordialists, the rationalist studies refer to the 1967 war and to the processes it triggered within the context of a general and ongoing problematic of state building. The borders are said to be an institutional constraint, amenable to change in accordance with rational interests and considerations of diverse social actors—first and foremost, the state and the political elites—who are engaged in an internecine struggle to determine the rules of the political game. The de-facto annexationist policy pursued by Israeli political elites should be understood, according to the rationalists, as being part of a rational strategy geared to influence the shaping of the political structure in Israel. It does not derive, they maintain, from primordialist ideological trends which are prevalent among the public or within the Israeli political system (Lustick, 1993; Grinberg, 1991; see also Pedatzur, 1996).

The rationalists, then, discard the voluntaristic conception of the primordialist studies, only to replace it with an instrumental determinism that reduces Israeli policy in the occupied territories to articulated and self-conscious interests. This instrumentalism is problematic not because there have not been clear political and economic considerations involved in the Israeli occupation but because it ignores the fact that these interests have been mediated and constituted by certain ways of thinking and talking about the territorial occupation that crosscut political factions and narrow party interests. These 'cultural idioms' have been reinforced and activated in specific historical and institutional settings. Yet, once reinforced and activated, they have framed the tracks along which the practices of the territorial occupation

have been carried out and implemented. The more general analytical point is that cultural idioms are not neutral vehicles for the expression of preexisting interests: cultural idioms constitute interests as much as they express them (Brubaker, 1992). It is to the formation and consolidation of the cultural idiom that evolved around the question of borders and territories in post-1967 Israel that this paper addresses to explain.

While I will elaborate on this point in further sections of this article, it is worth noting that both the primordialist and the rationalist approaches share one major assumption when explaining the Israeli territorial occupation since 1967. Both approaches view the Israeli territorial conquest as an interim situation that will ultimately lead either to the return of the territories or to their annexation. Interestingly, the definition of the occupation as an 'interim situation' or as a temporary 'status quo' underlies the political debate over the territories. The various studies have failed to develop an analytical logic different from, and critical of, that propounded by the political protagonists. But more seriously, they have taken this debate at its face value, as a substantial debate between two seemingly unbridgeable positions regarding the fate of the occupied territories.

Their assumption that the 'non-withdrawal/non-annexation' situation is temporary has meant that neither of the two approaches above-mentioned has tried to resolve the duality at the heart of the Israeli occupation. This duality was defined by one Israeli scholar as 'simultaneous [demographic] segregation and [territorial] integration' (Benvenisti, 1988:49). Moshe Dayan, one of the architects of Israeli rule in the territories, referred to it as 'control of topography but not of demography'. In other words, both approaches tend to overlook at the possibility that the blurring of the borders is an intrinsic part of the process of nation-state building in a frontier society and a settler state like Israel rather than the result of unbridgeable positions in the territorial debate (on this point see Yiftachel, 1997). In doing so they are taking for granted too readily the modernist assumption that nationalism presupposes necessarily striving for a bounded territoriality and apply it to the Israeli context.

The conceptualization of the Israeli case as a frontier settler society and state is not novel. It is based on a basic distinction well known to geographers between two spatial concepts: 'frontier' and 'borders'. The concept of frontier describes the spread of settlers into new areas, mostly in stateless societies but during state expansion as well. Although the frontier is a region of inter-penetration that does not distinguish between the settler population and the natives, it does not, for all that, give rise to integration between the two groups. On the contrary, in frontier situations the process of territorial expansion and appropriation is usually premised on the conceptual emptying of the target land, which is declared *terra nullius* (land unoccupied), thus both enabling and justifying the dispossession of its native inhabitants (Jacobs, 1993). As such, the concept of the frontier differs from that of the political border, which represents a kind of political statement about territorial integrity, a symbolic wall both separating and protecting the sovereignty of adjacent states and their populations (Billington, 1974; Ruggie, 1993).

Two leading researchers of settler societies have stated that probably the nearest contemporary approach to a frontier situation, 'where rival societies compete for control of the land, is to be found in Israel' (Lamar and Thompson, 1981:312). Israeli scholars, and most notably Kimmerling (1983) and Shafir (1984;1989) have analyzed Jewish nation-state building within the framework of frontier-settler society. In his groundbreaking book *Zionism and Territory*, Kimmerling (1983) analyzed the Zionist nation-state building in terms of the dialectical connection between a 'settler society' and the physical surroundings in which it settles. Drawing on Frederick Jackson Turner's 'frontier thesis' relating to the North American experience, Kimmerling shows how the absence of an open 'frontier' in the Zionist case determined the institutional patterns of the Jewish settler society, the strategies of taking control of the land, the building of the political and economic institutions, and the modalities of the legitimation of territorial control. Drawing on a comparative analysis, Shafir (1989) shows how the struggle for land and labor shaped the model of Jewish colonization in Palestine at the beginning of the century setting at the same time the paths for a protracted Palestinian-Jewish conflict. However illuminating, both Kimmerling's and Shafir's analysis present the frontier as a mechanism that pertains first and foremost to the infra-structural realm of state-building rather than to the realm of identity-formation and culture. The emphasis on the 'materialist' nature of the frontier draws on the ontological dualism characteristic of mainstream political theory when dealing with space and territory. This ontology does not recognize that space is not separate from the social world nor does it have causal powers as such; space and territoriality are the dialectic product of material and cultural practices. As Henri Lefebvre's pioneering teachings on space establish: 'Space has been shaped and molded from historical and natural elements [...] Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies' (Lefebvre, 1976:31. See also Lefebvre, 1991).

In the following section I shall try to show how the cultural idiom, or what Lefebvre would call the 'ideological load' of the frontier informed the territorial debate over the destiny of the occupied territories and the state borders conducted within the Labor party. I will focus on the ways in which seemingly unbridgeable positions regarding the future of territories and borders became an instrumental debate over how to rule them while at the same time feeding a frontier politics of settlement.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE FRONTIER IDIOM IN PRE-STATE ISRAEL

As already mentioned, the territorial idiom of the frontier existed in Israel long before the 1967 war and it was an inextricable part of Israel's heritage as a settler society. Zionism was premised on the idea of an all-encompassing Judaization of 'the land' (*ha'aretz*) that was presented by one of the Zionist movement leaders as 'a land without people for people without a land' (Usishkin quoted from Kimmerling,

1983). However, as in most settler societies, the frontier was not empty nor were the 'natives' invisible (Turner Strong and Van Winkle, 1993). The voiding of the land, both conceptually and physically, meant the concomitant de-Arabization of the country. The 'opening of the frontier' was therefore a pivotal element in the struggle between the Zionist and the Palestinian national movements. During the pre-state period, the fusion between settlement and military practices constituted a principal mechanism for state building as well as central icon in the formation of an ethnonational identity (Oren, 1978; Naor, 1987; Shiran, 1991). The frontier kibbutzim (collective rural villages) constituted a role model for the native-born generation who was called to enroll into the national effort (Ben-Eliezer, 1998). The frontier ethos became part of the national lexicon filling it with positive images such as *aliya lakarka* ('ascent to the land'), *ge'ulat hakarka* ('land redemption'), *kibbush hashmama* ('conquest of the desert') and *hafrachat hashmama* ('making the desert bloom') among many others (Yiftachel, 1997). All these were encapsulated in the notion of *hagshama* ('fulfilment') which denoted that personal fulfilment could only be achieved through the collective goal of settling the frontier.

Frontier practices implemented first and foremost by the younger native-born generation in the army and in the settlement movements, were instrumental in creating a spatial infrastructure on which the state was founded. According to the modernist understanding of state territoriality, the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948, its recognition by the international community, and the armistice agreements it signed with the Arab states would have meant that the frontier territoriality, both as a strategy and a vision, had to give way to the existence of linear borders and sovereign national space (see, for example, Giddens, 1987). However, even after the state's legal establishment, and in clear contrast with the modernist vision of political space in which frontiers are supposed to be replaced in a unilinear historical movement by borderlines, the attitude prevalent in the new state of Israel towards its borders was ambivalent. Native-born officers that became the admired heroes of the Independence War defined the new armistice lines as a 'decry for generations' and the belief gained credence among military and political circles that Israel should be prepared for a 'second round' (Morris, 1993).

The ambivalence towards the borders reached its peak in the 1956 war launched by Britain, France and Israel in the peninsula of Sinai. The war's military achievements—the conquest of the entire Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip—fulfilled the frontier yearnings of many Israelis. But those feelings were abruptly curtailed. Faced with an ultimatum from the superpowers (the Soviet Union and the United States) to withdraw and the U. N. resolution to the same effect, the Israeli political leadership under Ben-Gurion decided to comply (Bar-On, 1992). Thus in the 1950s the opening of the border brought about by war did not result in the 'opening of the frontier', although it did present the possibility of giving expression to the yearning for the frontier and of a desire to realize that longing. Those that adhered to the vision of a Greater Israel viewed the withdrawal decision as a serious historic blunder (*Davar*, 4 March 1957). 'The day will come', one of the disappointed promised,

when the Gaza Strip will be 'an irremovable part of the body of Israel' (Galili quoted in *LaMerhav*, 7 March 1957). It would not take many years before that prophecy was fulfilled. When it was, the frontier idiom of the pre-state era that had been institutionalized through settlement and military practices as well as through a romanticist ethos on 'the land', would become a predominant structuring mechanism through which the simultaneous non-annexation/ non-withdrawal situation in the occupied territories was conceived and maintained.

THE POST-1967 TERRITORIAL DEBATE AND THE FRONTIER POLITICS OF THE LABOR GOVERNMENT

Two conditions enabled the frontier idiom to become a predominant structuring mechanism after 1967: the debate over the destiny of the occupied territories conducted within the Labor party, then the ruling party; and the frontier politics practiced by the Israeli-born generation of army generals who became central figures in the Labor government during the war and in its aftermath. Immediately after the war, a vociferous debate arose in the Labor party between those who believed that the new territories should be held as a bargaining card for peace negotiations and those who saw them as part of Greater Israel (Kemp, 1991). The former stand was supported by the majority of the party's veteran leadership. Yet even they were ambivalent. Their recognition of the territories' security worth was tempered by concern that the high Arab birth rate, relative to the Jewish birth rate (the 'demographic problem', as it was termed), would threaten the Jewish nation-state. So apparently, demography qualified geography, producing readiness for a territorial compromise. However, territorial compromise was made conditional on the signing of a peace agreement after direct negotiations with the Arabs, a possibility that became feasible only after 1977, when the right-wing Likud government was in power.

Other groups in Labor advocated preserving the war's achievements and called for immediate settlement throughout the new territories. This viewpoint was supported primarily by circles within *Hakibbutz Hameuhad*, a land-settlement movement headed by many native-born generation leaders. In their consciousness, as one of them acknowledged, 'the land had never been divided, not by the messianic craving for the expanses that were closed to them and not by recognition of the actual political right in the struggle that the youngsters of the time were involved in' (Ben-Aharon, Labor Party Secretariat, 5 October 1972).

Seemingly, the party could not absorb two polar, unbridgeable orientations (Beilin, 1985). But what has been consistently presented both by scholars and politician's common wisdom, as a paralyzing debate over principles was in reality a technical disagreement. A case in point was the 'open bridges' policy introduced by Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, a leading native-born figure and one of the architects of the Israeli occupation (see Gazit, 1999). The finance minister, Pinhas Sapir, a leading

advocate of territorial compromise, argued that this policy would effectively bring about the integration of Israel and the territories, interweaving two populations, two economies and two infrastructures (transportation, roads, electricity, water, telephone system, etc.). Sapir was concerned that Dayan's policy might transform Israel into a binational state with a *de facto* Arab majority or, alternatively, into an apartheid state. Dayan and his followers, though, believed that the occupation would inevitably bring about integration and that it was preferable to control that process. Dayan accused his critics of hypocrisy, stating: "An inhabitant of the territories who comes to work in Israel, makes 15 pounds a day and returns home is 'South African-style segregation'... On the other hand, when we send our Jewish carrots to a packing-house in the Gaza Strip and the same worker packs them for 4 pounds a day, isn't that 'segregation'? Can we really take pride that this is 'Jewish labor'?" (quoted in Gazit, 1985, 149). Dayan's point was that the supposed dispute within Labor over 'principles' was becoming an argument over how to rule in the territories, rather than about whether to annex or return them.

It was a point well taken. It is interesting that of all the plans and options that were raised concerning the future of the territories, the government adopted the 'Allon Plan'. Minister of Education Yigal Allon, the glorious general of the 1948 war and one of the leading representatives of the native-born generation in the Labor government, first put forward his idea on 26 July 1967. It was a political plan, based on the selective annexation of territories thinly inhabited by Arabs and considered crucial by Israel for security reasons. Although the plan was never formally adopted, in practice it was the basis for the Labor government's operative policy for the decade following the Khartoum Summit in August 1967. At that meeting the leaders of the Arab world declared that they would not negotiate with, reach a settlement with, or recognize Israel. Allon himself described the plan in the following words: "It is intended to ensure the fusion of the vision of Greater Israel from the strategic viewpoint with a Jewish state from a demographic viewpoint" (quoted in Tzur, 1982:85). Why was the Allon Plan so attractive? Allon himself provided the explanation. He thought it would be acceptable to both the Greater Israel advocates—it stipulated the Jordan River as Israel's eastern security boundary—and to the proponents of territorial compromise, as it left open options for a settlement with Jordan in areas densely populated by Arabs (Beilin, 1985).

Indeed, the ruling party implemented the plan partly not because it eliminated the internal disagreements but because it made them irrelevant. This point is not addressed by either the rationalists or the primordialists in their studies of the occupation. They argue that the inability of the Labor leadership to decide between the two ostensible principles—'territories for bargaining' or 'territories for annexation'—led to a state of political paralysis and, as a result, to the decision 'not to decide' on the future of the occupied territories (see for example Beilin, 1985; Pedatzur, 1996). What they overlook, though, is that the 'paralyzing' controversy itself became an active element in constituting a new, two-pronged reality: of inter-state inaction but of ramified action in the areas of settlement, economy, demography and the army, with powerful both external and internal political implications.

The complex of settlement, economic and military practices in the occupied territories transcended the temporary and brought about, simultaneously, their demographic segregation and territorial integration (Benvenisti, 1992). The blurring of the 'Green Line' (pre-1967 borderline) was also performed in more subtle ways. From the outset, the Israeli government decided to allow non-citizen Palestinians to appeal before Israeli civil courts on matters decided by the military authorities in the occupied territories. The decision was fraught with obvious symbolic implications: from the Palestinian viewpoint it meant according legitimation to the Israeli occupation whereas from the Israeli stand, it meant exerting one common system of justice that does not stop at the state borders (Gazit, 1999).

A reality was created in which the decision not to decide did not mean 'doing nothing'. As Allon himself noted succinctly in a speech he gave at the Labor Party Convention on the creation of new Jewish settlements in the occupied territories: "It is true that the government decided not to decide on the shape of the future map, but at the same time it decided on a series of actions [...] that have already changed the map of the future" (Labor Party Convention, 4 August 1969).

The decision 'not to decide' was a suitable backdrop for the implementation of practices that maintained the open frontier. It was a necessary condition for maintaining the status-quo but certainly not enough for transforming the complex of practices into a dominant structuring principle of the territorial discourse and praxis. The process through which the open frontier situation became institutionalized and legitimized was fed by the struggles in which different political actors tried to promote and implement their perceptions, actions and interests. In our case, these were the political struggles between two major figures of the post-1967 political map, Allon and Dayan, over the political geography of the territorial occupation. Allon, a longtime chairman of the Ministerial Committee on Settlement who wished to see his plan implemented, made a major contribution to the crystallization of the frontier discourse into a clear and distinctive ideology. As a member of the native-born generation who in the 1970s became a dominant figure in Israeli politics, Allon believed that the opening of the borders annulled the 1947 partition plan and offered an opportunity to resolve the country's political problems by practical means involving military and settlement activities. However, his perception of the open frontier was not solely an essential element in his worldview. It was also a resource with which he could consolidate his status and entrench his generation's ruling position, by enabling him to demonstrate expertise in the realms of security and settlement. "I would talk less and build more", Allon said in a lecture to the Labor's young generation (Lecture to the Young Generation, 30 June 1967).

Allon was as good as his word. Prompted by him and his associates, the government 'decision not to decide' gave a tremendous boost to the realization of 'sheer' frontier politics that fed onto a liminal territoriality. Allon himself was the first to break with his plan's implicit principle of 'selective annexation' which made annexation of territories contingent on their Arab population density. In January 1969 Allon submitted a proposal to the cabinet to build Jewish urban centers at various

places in the territories that were not very far from large Arab population concentrations. His proposal seemed to be endorsed in March 1970, when the government decided to permit two hundred and fifty families to settle near Hebron. Allon's support for settlements that were situated at high elevations in the Hebron area, reaching almost to the ridge of Mount Hebron, an area heavily populated by Palestinians, shows that his plan left 'open' and 'nonbinding' options regarding Israel's future borders—options which Allon did not balk at implementing (Efrat, 1984; Gazit, 1985).

The Allon Plan ran into strong opposition, less from those who favored the 'bargaining' approach than from another 'frontierist'—Defense Minister Dayan. Dayan devised an 'autonomy' plan that was eventually adopted by Menachem Begin and incorporated into the Camp David accords. This conception proposed a 'functional compromise' as an alternative to Allon's 'territorial compromise'. Concretely, the functional compromise signified a distinction between rule over territory and rule over population: autonomy for people but not for land. Israel would continue to hold the state lands and control the water resources, but would not intervene in the lives of the inhabitants. The autonomy regime, then, would lack geographical borders, as though referring to a population detached from the land upon which it lived (Rubinstein, 1990). In contrast to Allon, Dayan considered a Jewish civilian presence on the slopes of the West Bank mountain ridge to be a central element in settlement-security strategy. He adamantly opposed Allon's proposal to establish paramilitary outposts in the Jordan Rift Valley, near the Jordan River, arguing that they would break the physical connection between the East Bank and the West Bank and thus exacerbate the tension in Israel's relations with the Arabs of the territories.

Dayan's objections to the Allon Plan were only in part substantive. After all, Dayan himself was responsible for the mixed policy which on the one hand sought to reduce friction with the Palestinians but on the other hand stopped at nothing to implement the Israeli takeover of abandoned Arab lands which were classified as state-domain land. In pursuit of this 'schizophrenic' policy, Dayan sought to minimize the military government's intervention in the daily life of the Palestinians. Yet, he also introduced practices of demolishing houses, encouraging refugees to move eastward and expropriating land (see *Divre HaKnesset* 26.1.83, 1145; Hofnung, 1991). Dayan's settlement policy was enshrined in the so-called 'Galili Document' of 1973. Drawn up by Minister Without Portfolio Israel Galili, this was a kind of ideological-political platform of the Labor Party regarding the territories, which in practice supported civilian settlement on the slopes of the West Bank ridge (Tzur, 1982; Efrat, 1984).

The struggles between Allon and Dayan over settlement strategy in the occupied territories had the effect of transforming the frontier idiom into the dominant structuring mechanism of the Labor government's policy and discourse on territory and borders. Allon, who did not believe in the possibility of 'coexistence', accomplished the transformation by means of a plan that advocated leaving 'open options' for the selective annexation of unpopulated territory; while Dayan, who did not believe in

border arrangements entailing territorial division, supported the separation of the principle of citizenship from the geographical principle. In any event, whether what was involved was Allon-style 'selective annexation' or a Dayan-type 'functional compromise', both strategies endeavored to answer a question that only full-fledged 'frontierists' would place at the center: how to achieve control of topography while ignoring or overcoming Palestinian demography.

The Labor Party lost its hegemonic power and control of the government in 1977. Interestingly, even after the hegemonic era of the Labor came to an end, the frontier idiom retained its paramount place in the discourse on territory and borders.

THE NEW CARRIERS OF FRONTIER NATIONALISM

In the 1970s, various developments, among them international pressure exerted chiefly by the United States, brought about the possibility of an Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement. The Israeli leadership and the public began to voice the possibility of returning the territories. Some believed that an approach based on real-politik, espousing moderation, balanced judgment and political compromise was emerging in Israel. Was the frontier idiom coming to an end to be replaced by a modernist territorial idiom on bounded sovereignty? It was to combat such tendencies and prevent a return to the territorial status quo ante that Gush Emunim, an extra-parliamentary protest movement, was founded in 1974. The movement was comprised of observant Jews who spoke about the Jewish people's historic-religious right to the whole Land of Israel. Nevertheless, the movement also attracted a large number of secular sympathizers, and for a very simple reason: very quickly Gush Emunim became the most vigorous spokesman of the frontier idiom which sought to replace 'the experience of the state with the experience of the land' as an all-conquering experience. "Israel", one settler explained, "will not be able to conceal the Land of Israel under its wings" (quoted from Gurevitch and Aran, 1991:36). This was an emphatic reaction to the possibility that political arrangements might be worked out, based on territorial compromises and the demarcation of borders. The most striking concrete expression of this reaction took a well-known form: settlement.

Gush Emunim founded its first settlements in 1974. The new thrust was immediately apparent: settlement in the heart of areas with dense Arab populations. Developments unfolded as though on cue. The Labor Alignment was hesitant and internally split over how to deal with the situation, but in the meantime the new settlements stayed where they were. As a leader of Gush Emunim noted: "We knew that we were facing a government which in principle would not agree to permit settlement in Samaria... To this day I find it hard to understand how we had the brashness to embark on that road" (Katzover quoted in Raanan, 1980:143-4). Even though Gush Emunim consistently defied formal government decisions, its funding came largely from state sources, including government ministries (Hofnung, 1993). By the end

of 1976 there were some two hundred Gush Emunim settlers and it was clear that the Alignment government would not uproot the new settlements, particularly as various ministries had assisted them by supplying water and electricity and given them army protection. By 1977 Gush Emunim had already established twelve settlements and the drive was in full momentum.

The goal of Gush Emunim was clear: the liminal situation of the open frontier, a political creation of the Labor movement, was to become institutionalized as a permanent phenomenon. Unhesitatingly, the observant Jews of Gush Emunim associated themselves with the frontier tradition of the secular, socialist Labor movement, to whom they felt closer than they did to the world of religious Judaism. As one non-observant kibbutz member explained: 'They have great respect for the Second Aliyah, for the kibbutz movement... The kibbutz movement gives them legitimacy, they know who their partner is' (quoted in Raanan, 1980:219). Like its native-born *halutz* (pioneer) forerunners, Gush Emunim also advocated 'creating facts on the ground', primarily by means of settlement but also through symbolic practices which expressed a romanticist orientation to 'the land', such as planting trees and hiking through the countryside. Inevitably, this 'love of the land' increased the friction and tension with the local Palestinian population, often leading to serious incidents, in some cases involving fatalities (Ben-Eliezer, 1998a,b).

In pursuit of its goal to locate the frontier at the center of the public consciousness and agenda, Gush Emunim formulated a comprehensive plan designed to establish one hundred settlements, to be populated by a million Jews, within a decade. The settlements were to be scattered throughout the occupied territories in an interlocking rural and urban grid. Resources would be diverted from the coastal plain to the West Bank hills to accelerate settlement, an economic corporation would be created to promote industry in the new territories, the state would seize all lands of doubtful ownership, and profit-making enterprises would be developed rapidly in the new settlements (Efrat, 1984). By establishing settlements on the hillside, in the midst of a dense Arab population, close to major traffic arteries (Jerusalem-Hebron, Jerusalem-Nablus), and near old, deeply rooted Arab villages (as contrasted with the 'temporary' refugee camps that had existed since 1948), Gush Emunim demonstrated that it was the most vigorous continuer of a frontier idiom on territory and borders, one that 'voided the land' of its local native population.

But if the Labor movement had ignored the Arabs simply by attempting to minimize contact with them or by proposing functional separation, Gush Emunim opted for a different approach. Its strategy was one of establishing tiny settlements, isolated and insular, with one or two houses, protected by the army, in the midst of densely populated Palestinian cities like Nablus and Hebron (see Raanan, 1980; Lustick, 1988).

The 1977 change of government brought to power for the first time a right-wing government, whose leaders had consistently declared their support for the Greater Israel idea. Gush Emunim naturally hoped that its frontier-oriented plans, which until then had received vacillating backing from the authorities, would now receive

legitimacy and commensurate support. But to the movement's surprise, the new government, headed by Menachem Begin, preferred to respond to the initiative of Egyptian President Sadat and entered into negotiations that produced the Camp David accords. Gush Emunim protested sharply against the agreement and its implications. But it quickly became apparent that Israel was not implementing the Camp David autonomy plan for the Palestinians. A symbiotic relationship soon sprang up between the state apparatuses and the settler movement, furthering the institutionalization of the frontier idiom as a dominant structuring mechanism in the territorial discourse.

The Likud enunciated a clear policy on settlement in the West Bank. The idea was to create belts of Jewish settlement along main traffic arteries in order to break the continuity of Arab settlement. The many new settlements were supported by an economic infrastructure of development enterprises (nothing was done to promote the local Arab economy) which, naturally, required large tracts of land. Until 1979, land expropriation was carried out in accordance with Jordanian law or for military purposes. Some 30 percent of the land in the territories were expropriated in this way (Efrat, 1984). Following a Supreme Court decision of October 1979 prohibiting the expropriation of private land for settlements, the government adopted a new policy.

In a sweeping operation that violated international law, the military government defined large areas in Judea and Samaria as 'state-domain lands'. These were rocky, uncultivated areas where Arabs could not prove full ownership according to Israeli authorities. In addition, substantial areas were expropriated for public purposes and, emulating one of Moshe Dayan's methods, 'large areas were declared closed for security needs' (Hofnung, 1991, 309). These strategies succeeded. By the end of the 1980s it was estimated that more than half the area of the West Bank had been removed from Arab control, in one way or another, and placed at Israel's disposal. If in May 1977, when the right-wing Likud came to power, there were thirty-four Jewish settlements in the West Bank, the majority located along the Jordan River and around Jerusalem, with a total population of some 5,000, by the end of the 1980s there were one hundred and thirty settlements with a population of 70,000. Frontier politics had achieved concrete results (Lustick, 1987; Benvenisti, 1988).

At the same time, an intensive effort was undertaken to undermine the Palestinians' relationship to their land and their homes. The techniques included dispossession, building bans, cuts in water supply, prohibitions on travel in certain areas, economic siege, stifling of independent economic development, uprooting the *fellahin* (peasants) and making them an urban proletariat detached from their land—causing a partial evacuation of rural areas—and the use of harsh punitive measures such as deportations and demolition of the Arab's stone houses (in the knowledge that their inhabitants would not easily be able to raise money for rebuilding) (Rubinstein, 1990).

The Likud, then, had abandoned its traditional conception of political Zionism reverting instead to a policy based on the old concepts of 'practical Zionism' that

were identified with the Labor movement. The Likud emulated the Labor movement not only in deeds but also in declarations. The founders of the Revisionist movement believed in political Zionism and throughout the Yishuv period were contemptuous of the Labor movement's myth of 'the dunam and the goat'. They would have been shocked to hear the Likud-appointed head of the Jewish Agency's Land Settlement Department, Matityahu Drobles, assert: "The settlement of the land... that is a paramount security and national mission that guarantees Jewish rootedness in the soil of the land" (*Be'Eretz Israel*, April–May 1980).

The Likud government's attempt to create an irreversible situation in the territories suffered a serious setback when the *Intifada* (Palestinian upheaval) broke out in December 1987. Labor's return to power in 1992 and Oslo agreements brought about an interesting situation: frontier practices had become more closely identified with Gush Emunim and the extreme right than with their traditional Labor movement carriers.

CONCLUSION AND POSTSCRIPT

Modern nationalism has been historically premised on a revolutionary idea: that of 'congruence' between political and national boundaries. Ever since, the demarcation of borders and boundaries has been regarded by western geopolitical imagination as a foundational element of nation-state building. The article has dealt with a somehow contradictory phenomenon whereby the blurring of territorial borders rather than their demarcation, becomes an inextricable part of nation-state building. Drawing on the analysis of the territorial discourse that evolved within different Israeli governments after the 1967 war and until the early 1990s, I argued that the liminal geopolitical situation of non-annexation/non-withdrawal in which Israel has been involved since 1967 can be understood with reference to the frontier cultural idiom that has structured Israeli politics and collective imagination when dealing with the nation's 'geo-body'. Furthermore, I suggested that the frontier idiom in which territoriality in Israel is embedded places in question the self-evident assumption of the literature on nationalism, according to which the territorial state—and the Cartesian imagery upon which it draws—are inevitably the final goal of modern nationalism. Following this line of the argument, one is tempted at concluding (although not too tempted) that at the dawn of a post-modern era in which modernist notions of territoriality and space are being recasted, Israel's political geography has not yet been 'modern'.

Although beyond the scope of this paper, it is interesting to point out at the intriguing and ambiguous situation that has arisen around territories and borders during the Oslo era in which decades-long tensions are being dissipated. On the one hand, political developments between Israelis and Palestinians seem to be slowly but steadily conducting to a final agreement to take place in September 2000 whereby the Israeli army will withdraw from considerable tracts of land in the West Bank

and Gaza Strip. On the other hand, decisions taken by the Israeli government show that the era of frontier nationalism may be on the verge of a resolution, but has not yet disappeared. Even as withdrawal from the territories assigned to the Palestinian Authority is gradually taking place, the various post-Oslo governments have created a deliberate ambiguity about the future of the Jewish settlements in the territories and about the final boundaries of the Palestinian state-to-be, which have been sarcastically described as 'zipper' boundaries (Yossi Sarid, *Ha'aretz* 3 March 1995).

Indeed the Oslo era has created its ritualized versions of frontier discourse. In January 1994, for example the settlers proclaimed 'Operation Double'. The plan was to establish dozens of new settlements—for each existing settlement, a new one would be set up nearby, hence the code-name—in reaction to the Oslo Agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. Slogans such as 'quiet action on the ground' that were voiced by the initiators of the campaign reflected the ritualization of the frontier concept into a kind of 'Disneyland' simulacrum (*Ha'aretz*, 26 January 1994; *Yediot Aharonot*, 13 February 1994).

Interestingly, as the extreme right-wing seems to be conducting a desperate battle to prevent the implementation of the agreements, a different discourse that transcends in many ways the border/frontier dichotomy is currently developing in Israel. Its object is neither to fix static borderlines nor to establish exclusive national jurisdictions but rather to encourage movement and flux across them. This 'transnational' discourse aims at transforming former military frontiers into transnational sites for capital and labor flows, and it draws on a neo-liberal perception, may be a vision, of the contemporary world as one that resembles more a 'space of flows' than a 'space of places' (Castells, 1989). Thus for example, as the demilitarization of the frontier proceeds, IDF and Security Office representatives have expressed the view that the state of Israel should do away with the quota system for labor force from the Palestinian Authority and allow workers to respond freely to labor market push-pull forces. An IDF prominent officer put it clearly: "The quota issue for workers from the territories has passed away from the world. If the Israeli labor market demands 70 thousand workers", he argued, "we will allow the entrance of 70 thousand. Supply and demand are the decisive factors" (*Ha'aretz* 9 February 1998). The emerging transnational discourse on territories and borders is most clearly articulated by Shimon Peres who has been recently appointed as Minister of Regional Development, a brand new ministerial office. Ever since the Oslo agreements, Peres has expressed his view on a 'new Middle East' in which common factories will be erected along the Jordan-Israel border and across the Little Triangle; and in which airports, hotels and industrial parks will replace military bases and security zones (*Ha'aretz, Supplement*, 3 September 1999).

However marginal, Peres' vision on the future border zones is not solely his. The transnational idiom seems to be permeating local initiatives by flower growers from the Negev area that requested the Minister of Agriculture to allow them to export their goods through the Dahaniye airport in Gaza. According to them, this could be

the first in a series of joint projects between Israelis and Palestinians along the borderline (*al kav hatefer*) (*Ha'aretz*, 5 September 1999). While the significance of this new discourse on transnational border-zones still remains to be elucidated, it is clear that it leans on a conception that recognizes the existence, actual or future, of borderlines between a bounded state of Israel and a Palestinian entity.

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NOTES

1. A constructivist approach deals with the question: how does a border come into being? As such it bypasses reified notions prevalent in socio-political theory that conceives of space and borders as something exogenous to social action. On the reassertion of space into social sciences see Soja (1989). On the constructivist approach in socio-political and international relations theory see Biersteker and Weber (1996).

2. On the contradistinction between the two types of nationalism see Sugar (1969), and Plamenatz (1973). Israeli scholars tend, however, to disagree on 'New Zionism's' 'real' nature: some view it as a religious-messianic ideology (see Weissbrod (1981) for example), while others question the emphasis on the messianic element and stress its secular 'hawkishness' (see Seliktar, 1986; Shafir, 1984; Yishay, 1987).

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