



SEIZING LOCALITY

JUDY PRICE

To understand how quarrying has become such an intrinsic part of Palestinian livelihood, we must unfold the narratives around Israel's appetite for the stone.

Collective memory has been an important objective in Israeli national state building. Archaeology, architecture, history and education have been main players in activating collective memory towards a retrieval of the past and creation of a future. While archeologists have sought Jewish history below the ground, architects have worked on the ground to define Israeliness ?as a local native culture? that has been taken over by the Palestinian latecomer. In 1967, following the Occupation the West Bank and Jerusalem, Israel encouraged the excavation of the stone from the West Bank as a way of naturalising construction projects in Israel and the settlements. In doing so, Israel invested the stone with national, ideological and spiritual narratives as a way of symbolising their presence in the landscape. In 1968 the masterplan for the city of Jerusalem stated that:

The value of the visual impression that is projected by the stone?[carries] emotional messages that stimulate other sensations embedded in our collective memory, producing strong associations to the ancient holy city of Jerusalem. (1)

The stone also functioned as a unifying material and a way of designing strategic military outposts in the West Bank.

Throughout the twentieth century a number of bylaws, initially implemented by the British Mandate, were put in place to ensure that the main material of construction in Jerusalem was the saffron coloured limestone. On a symbolic level the stone was appropriated to capture a sense of spirituality and holiness, petrifying all construction in Jerusalem and its surrounding areas, from shopping malls to schools and community centers, synagogues and offices, and residential houses with a sacred identity. In sales brochures the yellow hued limestone was portrayed as ?a precious stone, carved from the holy mountains of Jerusalem?. However, as Eyal Weizman makes clear in his book *Hollow Land*, ?when the city itself is perceived as holy, and when its boundaries are flexibly redrawn to suit ever-changing political aims, holiness inevitably becomes a planning issue.? (2)

The stone was also used as a central component in post-modern architecture in Israel and in particular Jerusalem, coinciding with the housing boom post-1967. Architecture

of this period was infatuated with 'place' and 'region' where the idea of 'dwelling' was pitched against 'housing' and 'home' in an increasingly alienated post- modern world. Ram Karmi, chief architect of the Ministry of Construction and Housing in the 1970s, was responsible for overseeing the construction of residential areas in Israel. In his introduction to 'Israel Builds,' an official publication by the Ministry of Housing he stated that:

We make every effort to build as much as our budget permits? Still I feel that in all those efforts there is a lack of one component, the component around which Israel came into existence: The establishment of a 'national home' ?? Home means more than just the narrow confines of one's apartment; it implies a sense of belonging to the immediate surroundings. (3)

For Karmi, the search for national identity meant a sense of belonging to one's immediate surroundings and was to be conveyed and executed through architecture in which the quarried limestone from the West Bank played a central role.

However, the stone not only embodied the earthly nature of place but also became a unifying material in strategically defining and extending Israel's borders beyond the green line. In 1967 a new urban masterplan for the city of Jerusalem was put in place to ensure the city's unification. The architects of this plan stated that they must 'build the city in a manner that would prevent the possibility of it being repartitioned.'(4) In addition, they argued, the material used in masonry construction must be measured according to its cultural value, with buildings seen as conveyors of emotional messages. As a consequence, a unifying regulation was introduced stating that new construction on the periphery of Jerusalem -- construction that was fast moving into the remote hilltops of the West Bank, becoming the origins of the settlements that we see today -- required stone cladding throughout the expanded municipal area.

For the Jewish people, the stone facilitates an emotional identification with the landscape that cements their presence, ownership and authenticity. However, the ordeal of daily life for Palestinians under Occupation, and the exhausting and dangerous physical labour provided by Palestinian quarry workers is not accounted for in the Israeli narrative. The stateless Palestinian, the dispossessed, the exile, and the exploited subject as cheap labour with no civil rights, has been used for political calculation in the struggle for land and territory of which the stone and the quarries are part. The vast and multiple spaces of the quarries epitomise a region ravaged by ethnocide, colonialism and globalisation.

2. (1) Avia Hashimshoni, Scweid Yosef and Zion Hashimshoni, Municipality of Jerusalem, *Masterplan for the City of Jerusalem 1968 (1972)*, p. 13 (Weizman, *Hollow Land*, p. 28).
3. (2) Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (Verso, 2007), p. 33.
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6. (3) Ram Karmi, "Human Value in Urban Architecture?", in *Israel Builds 1977*, eds. Amiram Harlap and Hari Frank (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Housing, 1977), p. 31, cited in Weizman, *Hollow Land*, p.43.
 8. (4) Hashimshoni, *Masterplan for the City of Jerusalem?* (Weizman, *Hollow Land*, p. 28).
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Cluster: White Oil

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