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Territoriality of negation: Co-production of "creative destruction" in Israel

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ABSTRACT

Based on an examination of Israel's territorial conceptions, strategies, and achievements since the establishment of the state, this article shows how state territoriality subsumes ideology and political agendas and may, under certain circumstances, lead the state to negate its very self-conceptions and harm its own perceived interests. Its analysis pays special attention to the state's inadvertently produced territories of negation, which run counter to its own conception of territoriality, and considers the kind of social–spatial entities produced by the state. It also considers Israeli territoriality's more recently asserted goal of shaping Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, in addition to the goals of controlling Jerusalem and Judaizing the Galilee and the Negev. To illustrate the theoretical assertion that discriminatory and marginalizing state territoriality has the distinct potential to bring about its own negation, the article concludes with two prominent expressions of this phenomenon. The first is manifested in green-line Israel, where the state's territorial policies and the resulting marginalization of the Palestinian minority has resulted in collective resistance against the state and its policies, basic Jewish-Israeli symbols such as the anthem and the flag, and Israel's very definition as a Jewish State. The second is manifested in Israel's inadvertent creation of bi-national spaces both within Israel proper and in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, indirectly promoting the solution of a single bi-national state and posing a serious challenge to the very goals that Israeli territoriality has consistently strived to achieve.

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1. Introduction

As a core concept of political geography (Cox, 2002), territoriality is a central component of our understanding of states' production of space. State territoriality is a powerful and ubiquitous mode of space production that employs social, spatial, economic, legal, political, and defense-related processes and practices. Territoriality's multiplicity of aims includes social control, classification, symbolic representation, communication and identity creation (Balibar, 2004; Cowen and Gilbert, 2008; Paasi, 2003; Sack, 1986). Through territoriality, states simplify issues of control, management, and administration and imbue relationships of power with more material and symbolic tangibility (Anderson, 2010). However, state territoriality is also "a violent act of exclusion" (Elden, 2007; see also Connolly, 1995) that can serve an ideological agenda in the interests of dominant people, factions, and classes (Anderson and Shuttleworth, 2007).

By virtue of its coercive capacity as a politically and ideologically powerful mode of space production, territoriality is implicated in the shaping and reshaping of cities, towns, villages, neighborhoods, commercial centers, and other kinds of spaces that appear desirable from the perspective of the state. However, under conditions of ethnic, sectarian, religious, and other social conflicts, and when the territoriality in question is founded on the exclusion of, and failure to recognize, disadvantaged groups, social–spatial entities must also be understood as imposed spaces of exclusion and inequality in which the needs and identities of the territory's disadvantaged collective groups are never normatively or adequately addressed. As a result, these social–spatial entities are, in effect, forever situated on foundations of contention and instability. In such circumstances, some of the spaces that state territoriality co-produces, alongside those it desires to create, contradict the state's own vision and conception of its territory and bring about their negation, or counter territoriality, which seeks greater social–spatial justice. As a result, although the state will inevitably achieve territorial victories, such victories are often temporary. As Lefebvre (1991) points out, state spaces are historical, unfinished, evolutionary, and in a constant state of mobilization. Indeed, it is in precisely such spaces that ethnic conflict comes most sharply into play.

This article examines the socio-spatial products of state territoriality in Israel since the establishment of the state in 1948. It pays

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special attention to the state's inadvertently produced territories of negation, which run counter to its own conception of territoriality, and considers the kind of spaces produced by the state. In this way, it also offers new insight into the territorial contention between Israel and Palestinians.

1.1. The case of Israel

The 1948 war in Palestine resulted in the establishment of the state of Israel, the dispossession and displacement of 780,000 Palestinians, and the total destruction of an estimated 400 Palestinian cities, towns, and villages (Abu Lughod, 1971; Morris, 1987). In the course of the war and its immediate aftermath, approximately 85% of the Palestinians living within the territory incorporated into the new one were expelled outside of its borders, while only approximately 156,000 remained in Israel and became citizens (CBS, 2015). In this way, the overwhelming Palestinian majority of pre-1948 Palestine was transformed almost overnight into a Palestinian minority in Israel, while most Palestinian inhabitants of the state's territory were uprooted, becoming refugees in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the neighboring Arab countries.

At the height of the war, Israel's newly established Central Bureau of Statistics conducted its first population census. According to Leibler and Breslau (2005), the undertaking involved the imposition of a seven-hour curfew throughout the country, during which military and security personnel visited every household in Israel and registered all its residents. Another order stipulated that all those absent from their homes not be registered as citizens and their rights of ownership to property and land not be recognized. Despite the order's universalistic formulation, it was actually only applied to the country's Palestinian population. This stemmed from the fact that hundreds of thousands of Palestinians had fled or were driven from their homes during the fighting, representing the overwhelming majority of those who were not home at the time of the census. While the census was ostensibly an enumeration of the residents of the new country, it actually created the population it was counting, excluding those who were not registered and stripping them of their rights. Those absent during the census also included many internal refugees, as well as many external refugees who managed to return to the country before the next population registration two years later. The members of this group were subsequently granted Israeli citizenship but were denied rights to formerly held property, relegating them to the statistical category of "present-absentees." As a result of Israel's first census, approximately half of the Palestinians who ultimately became Israeli citizens were legally deprived of rights to their property and land (Leibler and Breslau, 2005).

Since the establishment of the state, Israel has been remarkably successful in implementing its domestic territorial policies. Kedar (1998, 2001) and Yiftachel and Kedar (2000) contends that soon after 1948, Israel implemented a comprehensive land and settlement policy grounded in powerful new legislation that nationalized public and hitherto Palestinian-owned land and selectively allocated land rights within the Jewish population. This process transferred usage, control, and ownership of the vast majority of land in the country into Jewish-Israeli hands. As a result of the national-collectivist land regime that emerged during the first decade of statehood, a situation quickly arose in which a staggering 93% of all land in the country are owned and controlled today by the state itself, where the Israel Land Authority (ILA) is the government agency responsible for managing this land which comprises 4,820,500 acres (19,508,000 dunams) (ILA, 2015). Interestingly, "ownership" of real estate in Israel usually means leasing rights from the ILA for 49 or 98 years (ILA, 2015).

The nationalization of Palestinian land proceeded along two primary routes. The first involved the seizure of Palestinian land by the state by virtue of its military, administrative, and legal powers, and the transfer of Palestinian refugee property to Jewish "public" ownership. At the same time, the Palestinians who remained within the borders of the new state and became Israeli citizens lost and the vast majority of their lands and own today only about 123,550 acres (500,000 dunams), which are about 2.5% of the entire state area (Jabareen, 2014a). This aspect of the Israeli land regime, which relied to a substantial degree on rulings of the Israeli Supreme Court, served the Zionist aim of Judaizing Israeli space and society (Yiftachel and Kedar, 2000).

Unlike the vast majority of countries in the world, the Israeli state currently controls approximately 93% of its total land area, which, under Israeli law, is publically owned and administered by the state itself (ILA, 2015). This area includes most of the formerly Palestinian-owned land in the country that was appropriated by the Israeli authorities during the first few decades of statehood. As a result, the Palestinian citizens of Israel, which now constitute approximately 20% of the country's overall population, currently own only 2.5% of the land in the country. Moreover, in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), which was occupied by Israel in 1967, Israel has thus far constructed approximately 245 Jewish settlements, which today house an estimated population of 515,000 settlers (CBS, 2011) and control about 40% of the total land area of the region (ARIJ, 2014). Here, I offer a critical interrogation of the elements of Israeli territoriality that have underlain this transformation, with an emphasis on the spaces it has produced and the strategies it has used to create them. I also analyze how these spaces have been destructive to the state conception of territoriality and, ultimately, to future prospects for a sustainable state. Specifically, the article hones in on a number of key Israeli planning documents to trace the ways in which the Israeli state has utilized a particular territorial logic to set specific governing strategies and practices in motion. In this way, I seek to interrogate the co-production of territoriality and territory in and by Israel and to consider its internal contradictions.

This article analyzes state territoriality by means of three dimensions, which are elaborated from Henri Lefebvre's conceptualization of "political space" or "state space" (Brenner and Elden, 2009):

1. *The state's conception of territory (the ideological)* – This dimension reflects the state apparatus's conception of territory both inside and, in many cases, outside its sovereign borders. It is political and ideological and reflects the conceptualization of state space by politicians, decision makers, and state professionals and technocrats. Following Lefebvre (1991: 31), space "is not a scientific object removed from ideology or politics" (170) but "has always been political and strategic" (170) and "populated with ideologies" (179). Such representations of space are therefore always abstract, "entirely ideational, made up of projections into the empirical world" (Soja, 1996: 79), and 'imagined' representations of national geographies and their spatiality.

2. *The state's spatial strategy (the tactical-strategic)* – This dimension reflects primarily the subordination of a territory's resources to political ends. State strategies mobilize resources in order to shape, produce, reproduce, and control patterns of industrial development, land use, energy production, transportation, and communication within and beyond their borders (Brenner and Elden, 2009: 21). These strategies aim to fulfill the state conception of territoriality through manipulating, managing, and regulating spatial planning and development.

3. *The products of territoriality* – This dimension reflects the social–spatial products of state territoriality. It encompasses the physical characteristics of the social–spatial spaces of territoriality, i.e. the location and social attributes of settlements, villages, towns, cities, and regions.