Journal of Historical Geography 39 (2013) 113–124

Contents lists available at SciVerse ScienceDirect

Journal of Historical Geography

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jhg

Territorial stigma formation in the Israeli city of Bat Yam, 1950–1983: planning, people and practice

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Abstract

The paper analyses the process of territorial stigma formation in the case of the Israeli city of Bat Yam. Focusing on the period of 1950–1983, it argues that the stigma was constituted historically by a combination of three distinct attributes, namely its accelerated urban growth and (a lack of) appropriate planning, the (ethnic) composition of the population, and everyday practices of deviant conduct, primarily crime. Taken together, these produced the city as a socio-spatial mélange in which physical disorder, ethnic 'others' and explicit illegality reign. Using a wide range of primary and secondary sources, the paper seeks to refine understanding of the discursive mechanisms by which images of (types-of) people are juxtaposed with those of (types-of) places at particular historical junctures to create and sustain territorial stigmas.

Keywords: Territorial stigma; Israeli cities; Ethnicity; Environment; Planning

> Stigma is not something which dissolves in one minute, but I think we're on the right track….The media, too, has changed its treatment towards Bat Yam. No longer a god-forsaken city.[1]

In recent scholarly literature, the phenomenon of city branding is often explained with reference to processes of economic neo-liberalization that force urban administrations to re-invent the local in order to improve its image, stimulate urban development and attract new residents, tourists and investors alike.[2] For some places, such processes may prove particularly daunting, due to their entrenched reputation as dangerous, disorderly, or deviant.[3] For particular neighborhoods or whole towns, high rates of crime or specific ethno-racial composition – and often both – are often presented as potential impediments to regeneration, preventing the construction of a revitalized image.[4] And while a fair body of literature exists that explains the formation of positive urban images, mostly through the lenses of the so-called 'cultural economy',[5] relatively few studies pay attention to the social construction of stigmatized places.[6]

Drawing upon Loïc Wacquant's work, this paper analyzes the formation of a 'territorial stigma' in the Israeli city of Bat Yam. Focusing on the period between 1950 and 1983, it argues that the stigmatization process was fashioned historically by linking up three distinct place-related and people-related attributes, namely planning, population, and everyday practices of behavior.[7] Firstly, under the heading of planning, I am concerned with the accelerated process of urban – both population and physical – growth which city managers promoted during its formative years. Within less

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[1] Interview with Mayor Ehud Kinnamon, To get rid of the stigma, *Two Cities* (February 1986).
[2] G. Evans, Hard-branding the cultural city: from Prado to Prada, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27 (2003) 417–440.
[3] E. Avraham, Media strategies for improving unfavorable city image, *Cities* 21 (2004) 471–479.
[4] R. Pain, Place, social relations and the fear of crime: a review, *Progress in Human Geography* 24 (2003) 365–388.
[5] G. Richards and J. Wilson, The impact of cultural events on city image: Rotterdam, cultural capital of Europe 2001, *Urban Studies* 41 (2004) 1931–1952; A.J. Scott, *The Cultural Economies of Cities: Essays on the Geographies of Image-Producing Industries*, London, 2000; R. Paddison, City marketing, image reconstruction and urban regeneration, *Urban Studies* 30 (1993) 339–349; S.V. Ward, *Selling Places: The Marketing and Promotion of Towns and Cities, 1850–2000*, London, 1998.
[6] But see E. Goode and N. Ben Yeuda, *Moral Panic: The Social Construction of Deviance*, Oxford, 2009.
[7] I chose this period for two main reasons; first, because it corresponds approximately with the mayoralty terms of the city's first two mayors, David Ben Ari (1950–1964) and Menachem Rothschild (1964–1974 and 1978–1983); and second, because Mayor Ehud Kinnamon (1983–1993) campaigned strongly against this entrenched stigma, partly reversing some of the qualities associated with it. His tenure, corresponding to what Goffman termed 'stigma management' merits a separate analysis and is therefore excluded from this paper (E. Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, New York, 1963, chapter 2).

0305-7488/$ – see front matter
http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2012.07.004

than two decades, this dual process of what some described as 'unregulated growth' exhausted more than four-fifths of the city's available land, earned it the dubious title of 'the most densely populated city in the Tel Aviv metropolitan area', and secured its image as a poorly planned, indeed physically disorderly environment. Secondly, the process of stigmatization operated with reference to the ethnic composition of the local population, which, from the mid-1950s onwards, saw a gradual shift from *Ashkenazi* to *Mizrahi* dominance.[8] Aided by an Orientalist, deeply essentializing discourse concerning the nature of the young(er), masculine ethnic body which had come to gradually dominate urban space, an inextricable link was produced by the media between *those* (young Mizrahi) people and *that* place, further augmenting the territorial stigma. Thirdly, ineffective planning and ethnically distinct population gradually became associated with a predisposition to certain deviant practices. Rationalized as inherent to the culture of the growing Mizrahi population and explained against the backdrop of rapidly deteriorating physical conditions (a phenomenon which Wilson and Kelling famously termed 'broken windows'),[9] itself a consequence of the unregulated growth process, practices of petty and organized crime provided a final justification for a fear-filled discourse that reinforced the territorial stigma. Taken together, this formation rendered the city a socio-spatial mélange in which physical disorder, ethnic 'others' and illegal conduct reigned. Referred to by one city administrator as the 'Wild West along the Mediterranean',[10] Bat Yam's case is emblematic of how certain types of planning, people and behavioral practices converge in particular socio-historical junctures to create and sustain territorial stigmas.

The following paper is divided into three parts. First, I survey the literature on the emergence, evolution, and persistence of territorial stigma. I then briefly set the city's geo-historical context, locating it within the broader spatial history of the greater Tel Aviv area. It is argued that the situation of Bat Yam, namely its position relative to adjacent cities within the metropolitan area, most notably Tel Aviv to the north, has played an important role in its stigmatization process. A crossbreed between the self-declared 'white city' of Tel Aviv, whose claims to being a European style, liberal, bourgeoisie urban center have been well documented,[11] and Jaffa, a mixed city whose Arab heritage has rendered it Tel Aviv's ambivalent alter-ego, evoking simultaneous desire and fear, Bat Yam (and to some degree its neighboring cities in the southern part of the metropolitan area) was stigmatized as the 'other'.[12] Neither neatly planned and euro-culturally sophisticated like Tel Aviv nor mysterious, exotically Orientalized and culturally inspiring like Jaffa,[13] Bat Yam was to become the metro's forgotten periphery, the disrespected, graceless home of mostly lower middle-class Mizrahi Jews often depicted in the Tel Aviv-based media as the undesirable 'national average'.[14] Finally, an analysis of the three aforementioned bases of stigmatization is presented, invoking the inherent linkages between physical processes of poor urban planning, ethno-class population composition and practices of deviant conduct. Using a wide range of primary and secondary historical sources, including personal interviews, local, regional and national newspapers, official protocols of city council meetings, and various city-commissioned reports, the paper traces the historical roots of one of the most persistent stigmas in Israeli urban history.[15] The paper concludes by discussing some potential implications of these inter-related processes in the formation of territorial stigmas.

Theoretical notes on stigmatized places

In his classic book, Erving Goffman defined stigma as a deeply discrediting attribute.[16] Tracing its roots to the Greek tattoo-mark, 'a brand made with a hot iron and impressed on people to show that they were devoted to the services of the temple, or…that they were criminals or runaway slaves',[17] a stigma not only reduces the identity of an individual to a single characteristic, but further constitutes a social impediment, a major axis along which all other characteristics are measured and evaluated. Goffman identifies three different types of stigma, namely that of the body, of individual character, and of tribal affiliation. While the first two are personal, associated for example with disability, ugliness or flawed character, tribal stigma is collective, stemming from one's descent and affecting whole ethnic, religious or national groups.[18] Subsequent conceptualizations of the term have further emphasized the link created between the individual and her aversive – bodily and other – attributes, as well as the spatial and temporal situatedness of both stigmatized practices and associated social responses.[19]

[8] Ashkenazim are Jews originating from Europe and North America; Mizrahim are Jews hailing from the Muslim countries of the Middle East and North Africa.

[9] J.Q. Wilson and G.L. Kelling, Broken windows: the police and neighbourhood safety, *Atlantic Monthly* (March 1982) 29–38.

[10] Personal interview with Shmuel Penn, former City Engineer, Tel Aviv, 3 December 2010.

[11] M. Azaryahu, *Tel Aviv: Mythography of a City*, Syracuse, 2007; M. Levine, Re-imagining the 'white city': the politics of world heritage designation in Tel Aviv/Jaffa, *City* 8 (2004) 221–228.

[12] While the city of Holon – and to a much lesser extent Rishon LeZion – have also been stigmatized, as evident for example in the demeaning acronyms of *Hubat* (Holon-Bat Yam) or Hay-Bar (a Hebrew synonym for Zoo, which also stands as an acronym for Holon, Bat Yam, Jaffa, and Rishon LeZion), the process was qualitatively different. Holon, for example, whose territorial jurisdiction is more than double that of Bat Yam was never conceived as particularly dense or poorly planned, partially because its population growth was significantly slower. Moreover, studies show that the city had a higher share of middle class, educated Ashkenazim in its population (S. Rollbant, *Holon: Ways for its Social and Economic Advancement*, Tel Aviv, 1966). Only in the early 1980s, as economically mobile upper-middle-class residents who left in search for better housing opportunities were replaced by lower middle-class families from other towns, including Bat Yam, did the city acquired its infamous stigma. In contrast to Bat Yam, Holon has successfully shaken its stigma, owing to a highly successful rebranding process embarked on since the 1990s (see E. Avraham, *Campaigns for Promoting and Marketing Cities in Israel*, Jerusalem, 2003, 81).

[13] Despite, or perhaps because of its annexation to the city of Tel Aviv, Jaffa was quickly stigmatized as well. However, due to its unique situation – the only mixed town at the heart of the (overwhelmingly Jewish) metropolitan area – its stigmatization process took quite a different path than Jewish towns. As Monterescu (2009) shows, the discursive formation of Janus-face Jaffa rendered its 'double image as either a nationalist, Islamist, and violent town, and hence a threat to the Zionist political project, or conversely, as an authentic, deeply historical, and multicultural site of encounter and political action…' (671). See D. Monterescu, The bridled bride of Palestine: Orientalism, Zionism and the troubled urban imagination, *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 16 (2009) 643–677.

[14] G. Sammet, What is new with the national average?, *Haaretz* (4 January 1989) 11. The degrading acronym *Hubat* was conceived in the early 1980s by the local newspapers in Tel Aviv who sought to stigmatize their residents and thereby prevent them from frequenting the city's 'hip' clubs and bars. See E. Zandberg, Hubati in Tel Aviv, *Haaretz* (9 October 2005).

[15] National newspapers included *Haaretz*, *Yediot Achronot*, *Ma'ariv*, and *Davar*; Local newspapers used were *Bat Yam*, *Two Cities*, *Bat Yam/Holon*, and *Ha'Ir*.

[16] Goffman, *Stigma* (note 7).

[17] L. Osborne, Beyond stigma theory: a literary approach, *Issues in Criminology* 9 (1974) 71–90.

[18] Goffman, *Stigma* (note 7), 3–4.

[19] E.E. Jones, *Social Stigma: The Psychology of Marked Relationships*, New York, 1984; J. Crocker, Social stigma and self-esteem: situational construction of self-worth, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 35 (1999) 89–107.