Red Pitched Roofs: A (Post)Colonial Genealogy of Architectural Identity in the Jerusalem Area

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Abstract

Focusing on the implementation and perception of red roofs in the context of Palestine-Israel, this paper examines how it turned into a symbol of settler-colonialism. Conducting a genealogical analysis of the use, and avoidance, of using this architectural element, this paper explains how it constantly shifted from one side to another, starting as an urban Palestinian component in the late nineteenth century, turning into a sign of Zionism, and then becoming Palestinian once again by the early 2000s. Using the framework of *schismogenesis*, that is, the act of self-definition through differentiation, this paper first challenges the common conception of the red roof as a foreign colonial element and shows how its appropriation and reappropriation were an integral part of national narratives. Therefore, more than asking whether red roofs are colonial or not, this paper asks when they became perceived as such, examining the consistent inconsistency of nation-building processes and their relationship to architecture.

Keywords

Architecture; identity; Jerusalem; Palestine; post-colonialism; genealogy; schismogenesis; red roofs; settlements; nation-building.

A mural from 2020 in the Palestinian city of Rafah, in the Gaza Strip, expresses defiance against the proposed Israeli plan to annex the West Bank by depicting a fist with a Palestinian flag crushing an assemblage of houses,

symbolizing Jewish settlement in the occupied territories, laid over a broken blue six-pointed star (figure 1). Beyond the explicit symbolism of the Israeli flag-blue Star of David, the architectural characteristics suggest that the houses – white cubes covered by red pitched roofs – are meant to represent an Israeli settlement. This painting is not an extraordinary example, as these features have become a common technique to depict Israeli settlements, frequently used in Palestinian and anti-occupation demonstrations and campaigns.[1] The Israeli establishment also uses such images to denote Israeli settlements, as seen in some parts of the Wall, where the Palestinian landscape is effaced by the appearance of an Israeli one (figure 2). This article focuses on how red pitched roofs became associated with Israeli housing. If architecture is a cultural text, that is, a set of signs and symbols that reveal cultural meanings,[2] then how can we *read* red pitched roofs? Are they truly a colonial element, or are they just perceived as such? If the latter, then what does this tell us about the correlation between architecture, identity, and nation building?

Figure 1. A Palestinian woman and her son walking in Rafah, Gaza, beside a mural against Israel's West Bank annexation plans, 14 July 2020. Photo by SOPA Images Limited/Alamy Stock Photo.

Using the framework of *schismogenesis*, literally the creation of division, I explain how the use or avoidance of specific architectural styles contributes to the development of national awareness. I rely on aerial photos, plans, architectural drawings, interviews, and archival materials to examine the evolving use of red pitched roofs in the Jerusalem metropolitan area, and analyze the use of this architectural element by both Palestinians and Jews. Analyzing these sources in conjunction with the vast

literature on architecture in Palestine and Israel, the article follows the development of the image of red pitched roofs; it explains how its associations shifted, starting as a modern urban Palestinian element beginning in the late nineteenth century, adopted as a rural Zionist component in the pre-state years and later a symbol of Israeli settler colonialism during the 1980s, and eventually appearing in Palestinian construction once again by the early 2000s.

Figure 2. Israeli mural on a separation wall, Jerusalem area in 2006. Photo by Keith Limited/Alamy Stock Photo.

Drawing a line between different periods by focusing on the shifting implementation, and perceptions, of red roofs, this article raises questions about how the history of the built environment in Palestine is written and how this influences perceptions of the local built environment. Therefore, more than a paper on the history of architecture, this article is mainly a paper on the historiography of architecture in Palestine, proposing a new theoretical framework for analyzing historical architectural changes in a settler-colonial context. The paper does not seek to "prove" that the use or eschewal

of red roofs was done to create a visible difference between Zionist and Palestinian architecture; rather the schismogenetic perspective enables us to understand how the use and perception of a single architectural element constantly shifted. Schismogenesis does not form an Archimedean point that explains all architectural processes in settler-colonial contexts, but the endeavor to differentiate through negation forms an additional layer in the performative role of architecture in contested environments.

On Architecture and Nation-building in Palestine and Israel

Access to land constitutes perhaps the main dimension of settler-colonial conflicts, and thus for settlers the built environment is both a means and ends.[3] Correspondingly, Israel's territorial campaign and its ongoing project of spatial production and transformation has led to an enormous body of literature analyzing its political, economic, ecological, and cultural implications.[4] The house itself, not only as a nurturing element that is connected to the idea of nation-building, but also as an image, has become a pawn in this conflict. As Yael Allweil has shown, Zionism could be read as a housing regime, promoting a new national identity through architecture.[5] Moreover, the Israeli establishment's recurrent attempts to appropriate Palestinian houses constitute a struggle over narrative and historical right to the land.[6] Likewise, the house keys that Palestinians carried with them after their expulsion from Palestine in 1948 became symbols of resistance and a prominent image of Palestinian *sumud*, the famous idea of national steadfastness.[7]

By reading architecture as cultural texts, it is remarkable how ideologies, politics, and conflicts manifest in the local built environment. It would not be too farfetched to claim that even a non-expert visitor to Palestine/Israel can tell the difference between a Palestinian town and an Israeli one, on either side of the Green Line. Of course, these differences are significantly influenced by considerations of power, neglect, economic disparities, ethnic segregation, and spatial control. However, to claim that these are the only factors would deny the performative aspects of architecture, and how it symbolizes, expresses, represents, and displays the desires, ideologies, interests, and beliefs of its inhabitants and developers, whether as individuals, corporations, or regimes.[8] Therefore, it is important to ask how, on the performative level, architecture becomes distinct.

For Zionist settlers, promoting a national renaissance was simultaneously a physical and spiritual process that included the formation of a new Jewish identity that would negate that associated with the diaspora, including the common and antisemitic image of Jews as wandering moneylenders.[9] This process focused on giving birth to a newly unified nation through Jews who would synchronously "build and be built,"[10] by settling, farming, and constructing in Palestine.[11] It is important to remember that all Zionist ideologies perceived Jews as part of, if not the only, indigenous population of Palestine, and thus rejected (and still do) acknowledgement of being a foreign colonial entity. Accordingly, as Joseph Massad explains, Israel forms a "post-colonial colony," a settler entity that denies its foreign origin and insists on its connection to the

context.[12] Unlike other "Western" settlers, who brought their building typologies to the colonies from Europe and even imported their building materials, among Zionist settlers there was a constant focus on the local context. Early Zionist settlers thus sought inspiration from the local Palestinian community, due to its "authenticity,"[13] relying on Palestinian laborers and artisans and even applying Palestinian housing typologies in both rural and urban settlements.[14] Eventually, as mainstream Zionism sought to distance itself from Palestinian culture,[15] inspiration from the local built environment remained as an act of appropriation to highlight the settlers' connection to the land. Zionist fascination with the Arab village and Palestinian architecture – seen in examples like the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, built as a modernist version of a local village, and in preservation projects in Jaffa, Haifa, Jerusalem, and other cities – and their post-modern pastiche of Palestinian elements[16] served as a tool to possess the local built heritage by adopting and adapting its morphology while bypassing its population, denying the connection of Palestinians to the land.[17]

Zionist ideology did not have a monopoly on the idea of nation-building through architecture; we can see similar endeavors connected to Palestinian nationalism. One of the first texts discussing Palestinian architecture was written by Tawfiq Canaan, a prominent figure among the Palestinian bourgeoisie of Jerusalem, who held a strong nationalist ideology.[18] Canaan, who was not unsullied by self-Orientalism, initially adopted the "biblical" perspective of Palestinian historiography when discussing the supposed authenticity of local architecture.[19] At the same time, he focused on urban Palestinian houses, including the central hall typology and analyzed this architecture as a modern local phenomenon.[20]

After the Palestinian Nakba, with the expulsion of more than seven hundred thousand Palestinians before and during the 1948 war and the depopulation of more than four hundred towns and villages, the "home" itself turned into an object of national awareness. Consequently, the history of architecture in Palestine became a question of remembrance, emphasizing the connection to the houses that were emptied of their residents and then appropriated.[21] As Salim Tamari has shown, the Palestinian national agenda highlights the historical relationship between the people and the land, and thus the *fellah*, the peasant, became the protagonist of the national narrative, and the focus on agriculture and rural life.[22] If the grey concrete of the refugee camps represented Palestinian dispossession and repression in the homeland and the diaspora, then the historical rural setting represented what needed to be reclaimed, a future aspiration based on the image of the past. In line with this perspective, the yearning for pre-1948 Palestine is clearly visible in Palestinian architectural historiography, which is embedded somewhere between the monumental and an antiquarian focus on vernacular and traditional architecture, in contrast to Israeli settlements and the refugee camps,[23] and despite some recent research, the main literature usually disregards urban architectural history.[24] Accordingly, as Kareem Rabie has recently noted, the morphological resemblance of the new Palestinian town of Rawabi to Israeli settlements and its detachment from so-called traditional rural typologies formed points of criticism for those portraying it as a foreign, inauthentic, and even colonialist project.[25]

Architectural historians even slightly familiar with the Palestinian context know that the local architecture is far more complex and diverse than simple cubes merging with the local topography, and that the history of Palestinian architecture includes wide-ranging typologies and spatial practices. In the same manner, not all Israeli settlement construction is topped with red roofs. Nevertheless, such simplified images tend to dominate. By focusing on the use and avoidance of red roofs by both Palestinians and Israelis, I aim to illustrate the consistent inconsistency of ideas of a national architectural style. I use the framework of schismogenesis, where one group defines itself as a negation of another, to provide an additional layer of analysis, by showing how architecture in contested and settler-colonial contexts is constantly perceived and reconceived in relation to an "other." Before applying the framework of schismogenesis to the red roofs of Palestine, let us first discuss it in more detail.

Schismogenesis and the Taste of Difference

British anthropologist Gregory Bateson coined the term schismogenesis to explain people's tendency to act differently from others and then to define themselves by these differences.[26] Bateson's studies of the Naven people of New Guinea provided an insight into how people, both as groups and as individuals, would embrace behaviors to differentiate themselves from other groups and individuals, thereby developing behavior not through imitation, but rather through negation and contradistinction. Following Bateson, one's identity is defined by knowing what one should not do almost as much as by what one should do. Bateson's analysis focused on internal group dynamics and explained endless social relations concerning class, age, and gender differences and their accompanying manners. More recently, David Graeber and David Wengrow applied the concept of schismogenesis on a larger level, explaining not only internal group dynamics, but also how closely related groups eventually become distinct.[27] According to Graeber and Wengrow, while theories of social evolution and cultural geography tend to explain cultural developments as an outcome of a group's surrounding environment or as part of a larger ethno-lingual framework, schismogenesis provides an explanation on how groups sharing the same geography and language can develop not only different, but even conflicting behaviors, beliefs, and customs.[28] Cultural development, often seen as inevitable and explained in deterministic terms, is thus recast as an outcome of relationships, in which one group seeks to differentiate itself from the other.

Schismogenesis can be applied usefully to several historical architectural phenomena. Unlike Patsy Healey's account of ideas, concepts, and techniques in planning "traveling" through cultural exchange and thereby being adopted in new and "foreign" contexts, schismogenesis explains how architectural cultures of closely related groups become distinctive.[29] Heinrich Wölfflin's *Principles of Arts History* discusses history as a series of contrasting developments, the linear versus the painterly, the plane versus recession, closed versus open, and multiplicity versus unity, best seen in the transition from Renaissance to Baroque. Yet it is difficult to ignore the fact

that this transition is entrenched within the context of the counter-Reformation, with the Baroque forming an extravagant contrast to Protestant iconoclasm.[30] Accordingly, Protestants and Catholics defined themselves (architecturally) in part through the difference between somber and richly decorated interiors. Another famous example from the twentieth century is the Nazis' response to the modernist Weissenhof Estate of 1927, which included the works of leading architects such as Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Gropius, Taut, and others. The white cubic buildings of Weissenhof constituted an alien form that threatened German culture according to the Nazis, who went as far as mockingly naming the project New Jerusalem and distributing a photomontage that included Arab-looking characters with camels around Weissenhof.[31] After the Nazis rose to power, they promoted a nearby exemplary project, the Kochenhofsiedlung, which consisted of traditional German houses decorated with pitched roofs. The roof, flat or pitched, was one of the main issues in this controversy and while for the architects in Weissenhof the flat roof signified the proper use of material and truthfully represented the values of the Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity), for the Nazis, such a roof was a threat to German identity. Therefore, for the Nazis the deliberate rejection of flat roofs was as important as the use of pitched ones, as a "true" German house is one whose roof is not flat.

Schismogenesis also provides an interesting perspective on cultural exchange between colonizers and colonized, and is thus highly relevant to the context of Palestine.[32] Zionist architectural schismogenesis is identifiable through the attempts to negate the diaspora and the Orient, while simultaneously appropriating local practices to establish a colonizing rootedness that allows the settler to claim to be "more native than the natives."[33] Palestinian architectural schismogenesis, meanwhile, is manifested in the emphasis on the pre-1948 rural environment as a negation of exile, the camp, and Israel. These dual processes of Zionist appropriation through negation and Palestinian decolonial antiquarianism illuminate a kind of mutual schismogenesis. Yet, we cannot forget the inevitable exchanges that also take place in settler-colonial environments, including mutual influences between Jewish Israeli culture and Palestinian culture.

While the adoption of Palestinian customs by Jewish Israelis is usually considered a form of cultural appropriation,[34] it is also unsurprising that Israeli culture, consciously or unconsciously, would take on some Palestinian traits. At the same time, these exchanges are a two-way street: for example, as 'Abd al-Rahman Mar'i has shown, Hebrew has had an enormous influence on the Arabic spoken by Palestinian citizens of Israel, leading to unique bilingual combinations and expressions.[35] And with Palestinians forming the main workforce in the Israeli construction sector, German professional terms such as *gehrung*, *pauschale*, and *spachtel* (miter joint, flat rate, spatula), that Jews brought with them from Europe became widely used on both sides of the Green Line. Just as Rudolf Wittkower warned against writing off the entire Baroque as a simple counter-Reformation style, schismogenesis cannot explain all architectural transformations in Israel/Palestine.[36] Like Aby Warburg's concept of *Nachleben*, which refers to the way in which anachronistic motifs reappear in contemporary art,

we should opt for a complex perspective that takes into consideration that negation is inseparable from exchange, and that the negated object would also resurface.[37] In that sense, the red roof and its shifting association from one architectural culture to another offers an ideal object to study architectural nation-building through negation, subjected to the constant return of the object of contradistinction.

Revisiting pitched red roofs in Palestine through the framework of schismogenesis, and examining their recurrent use over the past 150 years, this article challenges simplistic explanations that conceive of this element as a colonial and foreign motif. Analyzing this architectural element as simultaneously an object of cultural exchange, appropriation, reappropriation, and avoidance, it will shed light on questions of architecture and nation-building, focusing on the Jerusalem metropolitan area. Starting with the early appearances of pitched roofs in Palestine during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, moving to post-1948 urban and rural construction, and then examining the reemergence of pitched roofs in Jewish areas and settlements in comparison to adjacent Palestinian neighborhoods, it will analyze how these roofs became a hallmark of Israeli territoriality. The article closes by noting the disappearance of red roofs from Jewish Israeli contexts and their reemergence in particular Palestinian contexts.

North–South, Not Just West–East

Despite the common conception of red pitched roofs as a Zionist architectural element, in the late nineteenth century they were a standard, and even a characteristic, feature of the developing Palestinian urban context. Existing documentation of the Old City of Jerusalem and its environs fits the common architectural history narrative of small-scale cubic houses with vaulted tops, a product mainly of a lack of varied construction material in Palestine, especially timber, which thus limited housing typologies.[38] Whereas monumental buildings contained light-weight domes or relied on imported cedars from Lebanon – as in the case of al-Aqsa Mosque, as well as the myth regarding Solomon's temple a millennium earlier[39] – most residential construction had to rely on traditional masonry, limiting the possible dimensions of residential units and resulting in the typical domed houses that historically characterized both urban and rural Palestine. This is evident in the Old City of Jerusalem and the villages in its vicinity, such as Silwan, Lifta, Bayt Hanina, and Bayt Safafa (figure 3). The residential units that characterized the Palestinian landscape thus represented the reasonable use of local building resources, relying on local materials, craftsmanship, and well-coordinated group labor.[40] With a combination of mud and mortar, the vaulted ceilings received a "flattened" exterior, which became the image of both urban and rural Palestine (figure 4).

In the mid-nineteenth century, a new element began characterizing the local landscape – the pitched red roof. Different documentation of Jerusalem depicts a growing presence of red roofs by the turn of the century in all of Jerusalem's historical quarters, and especially in the new neighborhoods built outside the city walls.[41] In the same years, Jerusalem witnessed increased involvement of European powers

reflected in the built environment, starting with the Russian compound (1860) and proceeding with the German colonies (1873), and new Jewish neighborhoods like Mishkenot Sha'ananim (1860) and Mea She'arim (1874).[42] The buildings in these new developments were mainly topped with red-tiled roofs.[43] Consequently, the red roof became associated with foreign presence in Palestine, and its use in Arab buildings was usually depicted as a sign of Westernization; that these tiles were imported from Marseilles offered evidence to support this assumption. This conception began already with European travelers of the late nineteenth century, who with an Orientalist nostalgia mourned the disappearance of the traditional roofscape, as apparently they would have liked to encounter "authentic" domes.[44] Arab construction outside the walls simultaneous to, if not preceding, that of Western agents – beginning with Shaykh Jarrah and then spreading out to other urban clusters[45] – also included residential buildings with red roofs, creating a visibly distinct, unified "red" (and literally "western") aerial view that contrasted with the Old City.[46]

Figure 3. "Jerusalem (El-Kouds). Village of Siloam [Silwan]," south of Old City of Jerusalem, c1898–1914. G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Washington, DC; online at (loc.gov) bit.ly/3FnVcPj (accessed 31 August 2023).

While the growing popularity of the red roof in late nineteenth-century Palestine could be seen as an outcome of colonial intervention and of a west–east axis, it was in fact more of a Levantine north–south influence. One of the main factors in the
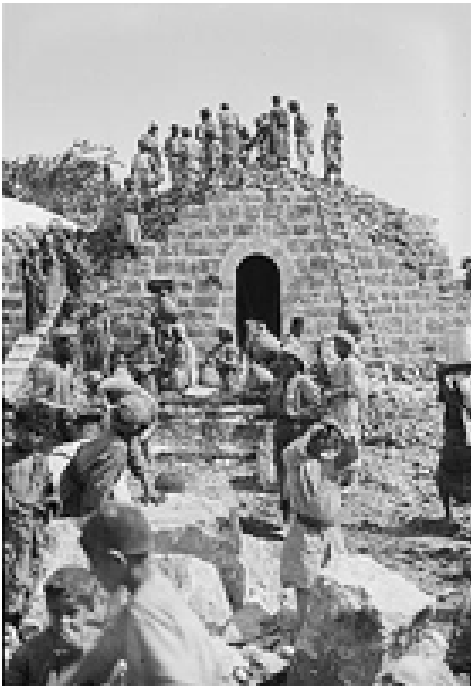
Figure 4. "Building stone house in village in hill country," c 1898–1946. G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Washington, DC; online at (loc.gov) bit.ly/46DZddK (accessed 31 August 2023).

adoption of red roofs in Palestinian cities was the popularity of the central hall house, a new residential typology that emerged in Lebanon during the 1800s, and which swiftly began appearing in the main cities of the Levant, becoming the dominant architecture of the new local bourgeoisie.[47] A two-story residential building with an upper floor consisting of two symmetrical rows of small lodging spaces surrounding a central dwelling area, this new typology constituted a development of former housing practices, facilitated by new building materials such as Marseilles tiles, timber, and iron beams, that allowed builders to cover greater spans with simplified techniques and reduced construction time.[48] The characteristic triple-arched facade indicates the location of the central dwelling area and reflects the typology's connection to the centuries-long practice of *liwan* (long entrance hall) houses, with influences from Ottoman typologies like the *konak* (large house) and *yali* (waterfront mansion).[49] The central hall typology was already widespread in Lebanon and Syria well before Western settlers reached the shores of Jaffa.[50] Thus, it is more accurate to see the red roof as a Levantine element, arriving in Jerusalem from the north, despite the materials it relied on having arrived from the "West."

Even when adopted by European communities in Palestine, a comparison of the roofs of "Western" houses in Jerusalem with those used in these communities' country of origin emphasizes the extent to which the red-tiled roof became a local element. In the Kingdom of Württemberg, the origin of the German Templers who settled in Palestine by the turn of the twentieth century, the houses during the 1800s were built with a steep double-pitched roof, comprising two to three stories of dwelling and storage functions. In Palestine, however, most Templer houses had a modestly sloping four-directional roof that functioned simply as a decorative cover, just as with most Palestinian Arab central hall houses (figure 5). Moreover, the German settlers even initially tried to use local techniques and imitate the local "flat" roofs that relied on vaulted ceilings; yet due to a combination of the settlers' lack of expertise and problems maintaining flat roofs, they eventually switched to slightly pitched ones, which were more easily constructed.[51] Contrary to the interpretation of red roofs in Jerusalem as a colonial

influence, then, it would be more accurate to see them as a local element also used by foreigners. The reason foreign builders adopted the local technique of red roofs derived from their reliance on local Arab labor. Accordingly, even Zionist Jewish settlers (as distinguished from the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community that was largely anti-Zionist) initially applied local dwelling practices and relied on Arab manpower as well, leading to the construction of Palestinian housing typologies in Zionist neighborhoods.[52]
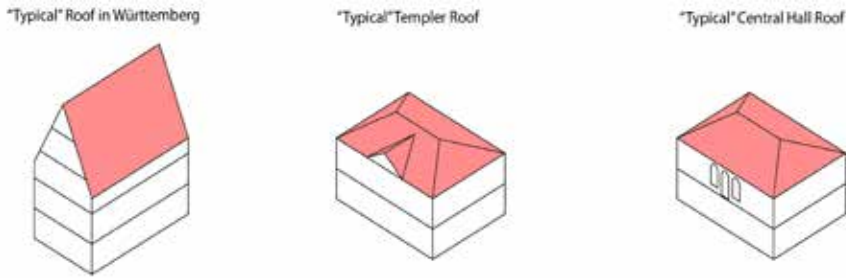

Figure 5. Roof types showing the connection between the Templer house origin and the local central hall typology. Illustration by author.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the red roof became the main characteristic of the local urban environment, adopted by Muslims, Christians, and Jews, Arabs, and Europeans; however, following World War I and the increase in Zionist construction and settlement, the "Arab" connotations of the pitched red roof would lead to its gradual marginalization.

The Red and the Grey

The visual variation of the Jewish built environment went together with Zionist nation-building processes during the British Mandate. With the gradual implementation of modernist architecture on the one hand, and the growing the emphasis on Hebrew Labor, that is, hiring Jewish workers instead of Palestinians, on the other, the Zionist building industry replaced local stone, associated with Palestine's Arabs, and implemented new materials, like cement blocks and bricks, that were more suitable to the unskilled manpower.[53] This change accompanied Zionist attempts to develop a new national architectural style, seen in the eclectic buildings of the 1920s, which were perhaps "Oriental," but clearly not Palestinian, and the modernist turn of the 1930s.[54] Consequently, in the ethnically mixed cities of Palestine, it became possible to demarcate the border between Arab and Zionist neighborhoods from the contrast between Marseilles tiles and flat concrete roofs. In the context of Jaffa, Sharon Rotbard ties these differences to the birth of the concept of the White City, the modernist and positively perceived Tel Aviv, versus the Black City, the old and negatively perceived Jaffa.[55] However, if aerial photos had been in color, it would be possible to speak instead of a grey city versus a red city.
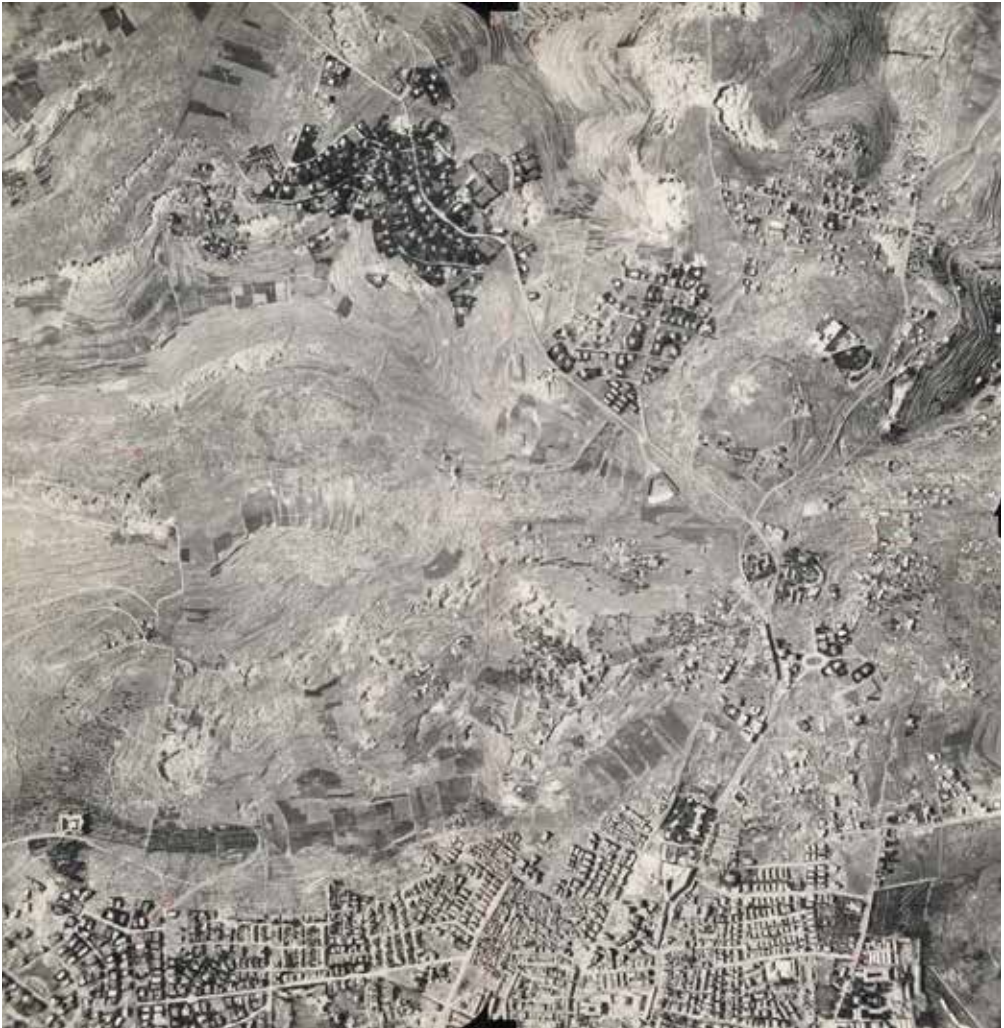
Figure 6. Rehavia and its flat roofs (bottom right), in contrast to the red roofs of all other Jewish neighborhoods – Beit Hakerem and Kiryat Moshe (left) and Ohel Moshe and Makor Baruch (upper right), western Jerusalem, 1944. Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Geography Archives.

The separation between the red and the grey became highly noticeable in Jerusalem in the 1930s–40s.[56] The main catalyst behind this change was the construction of Rehavia neighborhood. Planned by German-born architect Richard Kauffmann, who was in charge of key Zionist urban and rural projects in Palestine, and executed by workers of the Yosef Trumpeldor Labor and Defense Battalion (Gdud HaAvoda), a pioneering ideological group involved in promoting Zionist settlement and Hebrew labor, Rehavia embodied the spatial shift in labor Zionism toward modernism.[57] Its garden city layout and the international style of architecture created a clearly distinct spatial entity, in terms of both urban planning and design.[58] Had it not been for the

urban regulation to clad all buildings in the city with limestone, the distinctiveness of Rehavia would have been much more noticeable.[59] Consequently, a clearly divergent Zionist urban unit began to emerge, its visual character distinguished from the Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods of Mea She'arim, Geula, or Nahalat Shiv'a, the Palestinian Talbiyya, Shaykh Jarrah, and Musrara, and the European complexes (figure 6). Moreover, while most neighborhoods in the newly developing areas outside the Old City of Jerusalem functioned as distinct compounds housing specific communities,[60] Rehavia, despite its seemingly suburban garden city layout, functioned more as an urban neighborhood that would eventually form the backbone of the post-1948 "western" city.[61] Modernist architecture was not limited to Jewish Zionists before 1948 – one could indeed find several Palestinian examples – but in terms of scope, Rehavia was unparalleled.

The red–grey distinction continued to grow in the decades following the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. When the western side of the city became the capital of the Zionist state, it witnessed substantial construction characterized by modernist architecture, as in the neighborhoods of Kiryat HaYovel, Gonenim, or Ir Ganim, which differentiated visually from the depopulated Arab neighborhoods, for example, of Qatamun, Baq'a, or Malha.[62] The tilted roof and its red tiles became a relic of the "other's" architecture. The fact that most depopulated Palestinian neighborhoods were settled by impoverished Mizrahi Jewish families who had recently immigrated from Arab and Islamic countries only emphasizeed the negative connotations of Palestinian architecture and its structural elements. Zionist architecture continued to distance itself from the red roof after 1967 and the occupation of East Jerusalem. The wave of new construction in the newly "unified" capital included a series of experimental housing projects that signify the Israeli transition from modernist architecture to brutalism. These projects were clearly influenced by the newly "liberated" Old City of Jerusalem, and thus included architectural motifs such as arches, alleys, and courtyards.[63] These references to the "ancient" left the red roof once more out of the dominant Zionist architectural toolbox, discarded as a foreign and contemptable element.

In more rural parts of the Jerusalem metropolitan area, however, the separation between the red and the grey was actually reversed in the period before and immediately after 1948.[64] In the Zionist rural sector, where metal beams and concrete casting were less available than in the urban sector, pitched roofs were a common feature. Relying on small-scale construction, usually initiated by the settlers themselves, and unskilled labor, rural settlements were built using modern brickwork or concrete blocks covered by a sloping roof, which formed the most simple and efficient method to cover a small dwelling unit.[65] In Palestinian villages, meanwhile, the use of concrete and flat roofs enabled a more efficient construction of the traditional dwelling units. Accordingly, red roofs became typical of pre-state and early-statehood Zionist rural settlements,[66] while the white domes of Palestinian villages gradually became flat grey roofs, as one can see in the comparison between the village of Bayt Hanina and the nearby settlements of Atarot or Neve

Yaacov (both abandoned in 1948) (figure 7). The use of red roofs continued to characterize the construction of new moshavim initiated in the Jerusalem area by the state and the Jewish Agency, usually built on depopulated Palestinian villages and lands that Palestinians had owned and worked.[67] These simple cubes and their red roofs, would become what Allweil referred to as the Zionist *good house*, the dormitory of the ideological pioneer – the *halutz*, the main protagonist of Labor Zionism, characterized as hardworking, ideological, and humble, a kind of Zionist interpolation of the Palestinian *fellah*.[68] Yet, while the halutz and the fellah were imagined with similar qualities, they were also imagined as inhabiting houses with different kinds of roofs – an architectural marker of schismogenesis that operated in reverse fashion in the urban context, as in the case of Jerusalem. This would begin to change by the 1980s, however.

Figure 7. Bayt Hanina (bottom) and the Zionist settlement of Neve Yaacov (top), north Jerusalem, 1945. Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Geography Archive. Note the difference in the shape of the roofs, seen in the gradient shading in Neve Yaacov (indicating tilted roofs), in comparison to the consistent shading in Bayt Hanina (indicating flat roofs).

Urbanizing the Rural and Suburbanizing the Colonies

In the late 1950s and the 1960s, the red tiled roof began to disappear in both Arab and Zionist construction. The expulsions and depopulation of 1948 produced a physical rupture in the Palestinian built environment, with hundreds of Palestinian towns, villages, and cities rendered desolate landscapes and dozens of refugee camps springing into being in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and neighboring Arab states.[69] The loss of major Palestinian cities like Jaffa, Haifa, ʿAkka, al-Ramla, and Lydda, as well as the division of Jerusalem, shifted urban-rural dynamics, limiting internal Palestinian migration from the countryside to the cities and putting unprecedented pressure on villages. Rural localities in the larger Jerusalem metropolitan area witnessed an intensive construction boom, and the Corbusian *Maison Dom-Ino* of concrete slabs held by reinforced concrete columns, provided a suitable structural framework to support these developments while promoting a new modernist Palestinian architecture. Bayt Hanina, which until 1948 was a small rural village and during Jordanian rule was merged into Jerusalem's municipal area, expanded in the 1960s into one of the city's fastest developing neighborhoods, home to a series of upper-middle-class single-family and low-rise multifamily dwellings (figure 8). Other, less well-off villages, like Silwan, Sur Bahir, and Shuʿfat (and its neighboring refugee camp), which were also merged to Jerusalem, became homes of necessity, and were quickly urbanized, their narrow multistory buildings of unfinished concrete becoming the image of East Jerusalem.[70]

Figure 8. New Bayt Hanina in north Jerusalem, during its occupation by Israeli forces in June 1967. Photo by Zeev Spector, Israeli Government Press Office.

The historical village, the image associated with pre-Nakba Palestine and the antithesis to this new condition, thus became a site of longing, and the red roof that decorated the Palestinian urban space disappeared both physically and in the Palestinian imagination. At the same time, Israeli rural settlements after 1967 would also differ architecturally from the Zionist pre-state and early-statehood moshavim and kibbutzim, mainly due to a new feature that entered the scene: the prefabricated house.[71] These prefabricated concrete dwelling units formed the main settlement tool in the areas occupied by Israel in the 1967 war. In the greater Jerusalem metropolitan area, the settlements of Gush Etzion in the south and Ofra in the north (figure 9), began as assemblages of minimalistic concrete units assembled on site.[72] Until the 1980s, then, the use of pitched red roofs gradually decreased throughout Palestine, whether by Palestinians or Israelis.

This shifted again in the 1980s, when pitched red roofs began reappearing in the Israeli built environment. A key factor in this architectural renaissance was the Israeli suburban turn that affected local building style on both sides of the Green Line.[73] Newly developing "rural" settlements throughout the Jerusalem metropolitan area went through a process of suburbanization, which included a new clientele of settlers interested in large detached private houses that corresponded with their socio-economic class and desire for distinction.[74] Therefore, the prefabricated units topped with pitched red roofs, usually from asbestos and not clay tiles (figure 10), gave way to lavish villas designed with sloping roofs.[75] This was part of a broad stylistic transformation, intended to provide settlements a more "rural" and "aesthetic" appearance that would attract future homeowners, and which would eventually lead these features to be associated with the stereotypical appearance of an Israeli settlement.[76]

The Israeli fascination with red roofs during the 1980s was not limited to suburban settlements. As the sloped red roof became the symbol of desired suburban living standards, and the same architects and planners were being commissioned for both suburban and urban projects, the red roof began decorating not only low-rise buildings in urban neighborhoods, but also multistory ones, leading to high-rise buildings that mimicked the appearance of a suburban house.[77] This enlarged suburban typology became, due to both regulations and aesthetic preferences, the new norm in Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem, which sought to appeal to a clientele desirous of suburbia, yet unable to afford it. Accordingly, Pisgat Zeev, Gilo, and Har Homa settlements became characterized by an urban-suburban hybrid of large-scale construction covered with tilted red roofs (figure 11). This was also the case of Ma'ale Adumim settlement, northeast of Jerusalem, which began as a modernist suburban settlement, and whose roofs gradually turned red throughout the late 1980s and 1990s.[78] The new image of the desirable Israeli environment was accompanied by the growing Israeli perception of the Palestinian built environment as an assemblage of grey concrete cubes.[79] Nevertheless, by the early 2000s new forms of cultural differentiation emerged in Jerusalem's architecture. Revisiting the Palestinian neighborhoods of Jerusalem, we can see how this took shape.

Figure 9. A general view of the West Bank settlement Rosh Zurim in Gush Etzion settlement bloc, south of Bethlehem, 1976. Photo by Moshe Milner, Israeli Government Press Office.

Figure 10. View of new Israeli dwellings in the West Bank settlement of Tekoa, built on land confiscated from nearby Tuqu' village, with Herodion in the background, 1982. Photo by Chanania Herman, Israeli Government Press Office.

Figure 11. Pisgat Zeev settlement in East Jerusalem in the 1990s, showing the growing use of red roofs and the urban-suburban hybrids in the background, 1997. Photo by Moshe Milner, Israeli Government Press Office.

Neo-modernism and Palestinian Self-expression

During the early 2000s, Israeli architecture witnessed a neo-modernist wave. While this was a global phenomenon,[80] the renaissance of the so-called Bauhaus style had deep political and ideological connections to the concept of the White City in Israel. Architectural neo-modernism was thus an integral part of attempts by the veteran secular Ashkenazi hegemony to retain its cultural distinction, portraying its architecture as clean, modern, Western, yet simultaneously also local, in contrast to the decorative, extravagant, and supposedly vulgar taste of Palestinians and Mizrahim in Israel.[81] This Tel Aviv–focused phenomenon made its way to Jerusalem, and by the second decade of the 2000s, titled red roofs began disappearing (again) in the post-1967 neighborhoods and the more suburban settlements, like Giv'at Zeev and Ma'ale Adumim, giving way to more "clean" and seemingly "modern" architecture. Consequently, the "typical" Israeli settlements began losing their stereotypical image, becoming superficially minimalistic yet practically exclusive: white cubic volumes of apparently high-end construction materials and details like metal beams, large windows, marble, wooden panels, and architectural concrete.[82]

In the Palestinian sector, however, it is possible to notice a contrary trend. In his book *Architexture*, Kobi Peled analyzes the architectural styles applied by Palestinians

living inside Israel and the dual process of influence from their Jewish neighbors (and employers) and (national) self-expression through differentiation.[83] In that sense, Peled discusses the offensive Israeli term of "Arab taste," which by the early 2000s referred to architecture that did not follow hegemonic neo-modernism. The sloped red roof increasingly became associated with Palestinian architecture inside Israel.[84] This shift gradually began defining Palestinian residential architecture on both sides of the Green Line.

In the past two decades, it became almost impossible to ignore the wide use of red roofs by Palestinians in East Jerusalem. Red tiles had
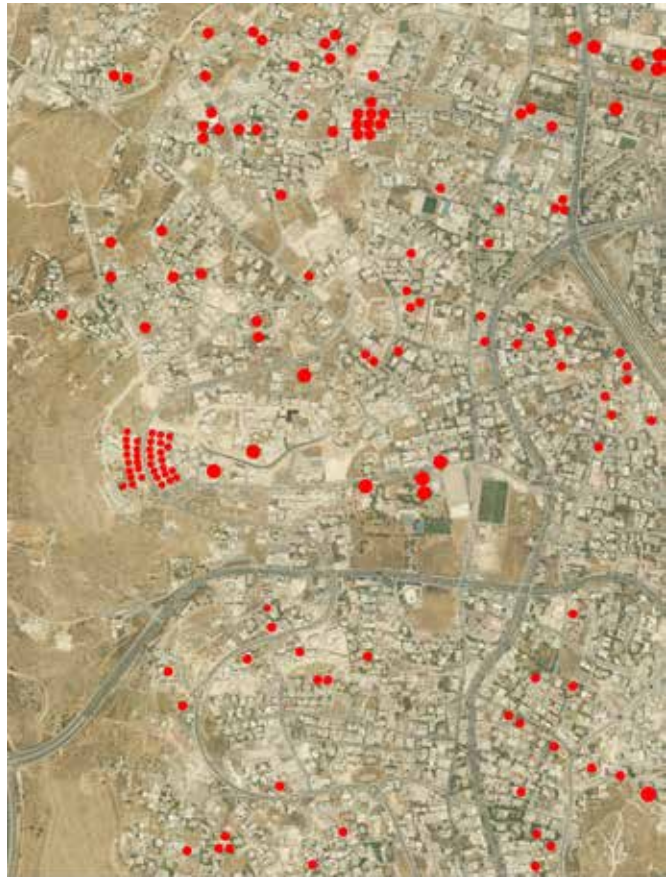

Figure 12. Red roofs built in Bayt Hanina between 2005 and 2022. Jerusalem Municipality GIS, 2022.

been used in Palestinian construction previously, but to a limited degree and mainly to cover staircases leading up to a flat roof. However, this element began gradually to expand, to cover roofs over entire buildings. Moreover, if before 1948 it was the Palestinian urban bourgeoisie who most commonly used the red roof, it was now used in both rural and urban contexts. Across the West Bank, the sloped red roof turned into a recurring architectural element, characterizing expanding Palestinian villages and private urban construction. While the large-scale development of Rawabi and other similar initiatives supported by the Palestinian Investment Fund opt for simple repetitive residential buildings, within Palestinian cities like Ramallah, Nablus, Qalqiliya, and Tulkarm, it is possible to notice a significant increase in red roofs since the early 2000s, covering new projects and multistory structures. A similar process is noticeable in the Palestinian neighborhoods of Jerusalem: turning to Bayt Hanina once again, peaked red roofs are proliferating, especially in comparison to neighboring Jewish neighborhoods where this element had become obsolete (figure 12).

After an absence of more than seven decades, the red-tiled roof returned to the

Palestinian urban context, yet only after appearing and disappearing from the Israeli one. This may be a mere coincidence or a circumstantial change of fashion. However, in Israel/Palestine, where everything is politicized, the use or absence of a certain architectural element can also be read as a kind of schismogenetic cycle: for Israelis red roofs could be used only after being de-Arabized, and for Palestinians they could be used only after losing their association with colonialism, producing a recurring cycle of appropriation, differentiation, and reappropriation (figure 13).

Figure 13. The changes and transition in the use of red roofs in Palestine/Israel. Illustration by author.

Conclusions

Revisiting the use of red roofs in Palestine, it is clear that, instead of an element of colonization, the pitched red roof is an element that underwent colonization, as it was appropriated and made to appear as a foreign component detached from the local context. What is peculiar here is that both Israelis and Palestinians have played a role in this process, integrating red roofs into architectural narratives linked to nation-building processes and their connection to built heritage. In retracing the genealogy of red roofs in Palestine, we might ask whether the idea of red roofs being attributed to colonial enterprises is itself a colonial perspective, belittling and patronizing the local population as being unable to independently import foreign elements and technologies, and thus relying on European settlers and their projects to enter the modernity of the twentieth century. Defining the pitched roof and its red tiles as an integral part of Palestinian architecture, by contrast, offers a more nuanced history of the local built environment and a multilayered perspective on pre-1948 urban Palestine.

The disappearance of red roofs could simply be attributed to the increased use of concrete, which allowed flat roofs to cover wide spans. Had the red roof not reappeared as a decorative element, then there would be no cause to question its genealogy. Yet, in the 1980s, when red roofs reemerged for the sake of beautification, or perhaps normalization, of Israeli settlements, they became inextricably tied to settler colonialism. Although their subsequent use seems to have gone back and forth between Israeli and Palestinian built environments, potentially shedding light on architectural schismogenesis, as we have seen, even when Palestinians themselves promote projects with red roofs, there remains a certain equation of red roofs with Israeli and flat roofs with Palestinian construction. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek revisits Marx's reference to the manifestation of ideology as, "They do not

know it, but they are doing it," and claims that a cynical view of ideology is more accurate: "They know very well what they are doing, yet still, they are doing it."[85] Applying this to Palestine-Israel, we might suggest that it is known very well that red roofs are not (just) colonial, yet still the equation is made.

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