Cultural-Geographical Aspects of Street Names in the Towns of Israel

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Abstract

A comparative analysis of the street names of many towns in Israel shows the importance of Zionist ideology in the process of naming, although there is apparently a central core of names boasting a national consensus. As a result of the War of Independence (1948), most of the Arab and English street names were changed, an act symbolic of the Jewish and Zionist nature of the urban environment.

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Introduction

A street is a space or an area within an urban system which not only satisfies physical needs, such as homes, businesses, and transportation, but also satisfies needs within the cultural value system (Bedarida and Sutcliffe 379-96). It is in the street that the users of social symbols express their beliefs by way of demonstrations, sign boards, and flags, turning it into a symbolic element.

Side by side with the study of names on the national level, as in settlements, there is ongoing research (not fully developed as yet) on names at the local level, most of which is devoted to the study of street names from a historical viewpoint. (See, for example, the articles by Pillsbury, Gilpin, Algeo, and McCarthy.) Generally speaking, this research concentrates on the street names of a single town in an effort to determine their characteristics in relation to a historical period. Wilbur Zelinsky takes a more comprehensive viewpoint in his analysis of street names in several towns and refers to the "nationalist" factor.

Besides the historical study of street names in a single town, there is a need for comparative research of such names in a number of towns in order to reveal the core and periphery of street names in certain cultures. The "core" may be those names regarded as important by many decision makers in various towns. By perpetuating the names in their streets, they

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express their feelings. We would expect the names of kings, presidents, and political events and such values as liberty, freedom, and independence to be perpetuated in many towns. The discovery of such names and the relative size and importance of the features to which they refer can help in understanding the value system of that culture. Names which appear less often indicate their peripheral nature in that culture.

A comparative study of street names in several towns should take into consideration the size of the towns and their rate of development. Large cities and towns of dynamic growth have a large stock of streets and a correspondingly greater scope for the perpetuation of names, even marginal ones. In small towns, or those of stagnating development, street names may preserve the values of the past, and the "maneuverability" of their capacity to commemorate is smaller and more complicated. In this study an attempt is made to determine the characteristics of street names in Israeli towns from a social-cultural rather than historical point of view.

Street names in Israel are usually chosen by Names Committees acting in the various towns. Members discuss, classify, and recommend the names and the streets for which they are designated. The final say is that of the Town Council, a political body chosen in municipal elections. The Town Council reflects the political division of the inhabitants as expressed in those elections and it is they who choose, change, or cancel names as necessary.

The Towns Selected and the Questions Studied

In Israel, in 1985, there were sixty-eight Jewish urban settlements of at least 5,000 inhabitants (Israel, Central Bureau 52-53). The research centers on Jewish urban settlements and mixed towns with an Arab minority in a Jewish majority. Some of the Jewish towns, for example, Jerusalem, Haifa, Akko, and Tiberias, have old quarters established before the renewed Jewish settlement of Israel in the late nineteenth century. Others, the veteran towns, were established in the period culminating in 1948 — the end of the British Mandate. Those established after 1948 in the process of population dispersal and absorption of Jewish immigrants were called "new" or "development" towns (Efrat).

Apart from the period of their establishment, the towns also differ from each other in size and location. The main research questions are:

(1)   From what thematic context are the Israeli street names derived?

(2) What are the patterns of street names in the towns according to the size and tenure of the towns?

(3) What is the core and periphery of names of personages given to streets?

I selected twenty-three Israeli towns, one third of the Jewish towns with 5,000 or more inhabitants, in the attempt to answer the first two questions. In selecting the towns I took into account such considerations as their tenure, size, geographical proximity to other towns, and the past and present composition of the population. I then divided this group into five categories (see Figure 1; Table 1).

On municipal maps and in lists issued by the Government Department of Surveying, I found more than 7,000 names of streets in these twenty-three towns.

The third question was answered by studying the names of personages in the list of street names in *all the towns* in Israel, drawn up by the Government Elections' Commission (M.L.M.). Guide lines used in choosing the personages will become clear in the course of analyzing the first two questions.

The Thematic Context of Street Names in Israel

I carried out the classification of the thematic context of street names on the basis of Cohen and Kliot's research into the names of towns in this country. However, the different level of research necessitated the addition of further groups of classification. Altogether, the street names fall into eleven groups: (1) places in Israel, including names of towns, rivers, mountains, and regions; (2) names deriving from nature – usually those of trees and flowers and to a lesser extent of animals; (3) local elements in the town, such as the sea, a church, a panorama; (4) names of Arabic origin, witness to the pre-State period and a non-Jewish population; (5) international places and personages; (6) symbolic names – important concepts in Judaism, Zionism, and the names of organizations with a symbolic meaning for the population; (7) names expressing heroism,

Table 1. Grouping the sampled towns according to the size and the period of establishment.

	No. of Street Names	Size of Population (in thousands) 1984*
A: LARGE ESTABLISHED CITIES		
Jerusalem	1071	446
Tel-Aviv	1666	323
Haifa	734	225
Ramat Gan	420	116
Netanya	381	107
Rehovot	309	70
B: ESTABLISHED CITIES WITH HISTORICAL CORE		
Akko	80	38
Tiberias	126	29
Lod	156	41
Ramia	176	43
C: ESTABLISHED TOWNS		
Nahariyya	182	29
Afula	135	23
Quirat Motzkin	81	28
Nes Ziyyona	85	16
D: LARGE NEW TOWNS		
Beer Sheva	364	114
Ashqelon	363	55
Ashdod	194	69
E: SMALL AND MEDIUM NEW TOWNS		
Migdal HaEmeq	42	14
Nazerat Illit	55	25
Karmiel	48	18
Ofaqim	24	13
Netivot	27	8
Sederot	9	9

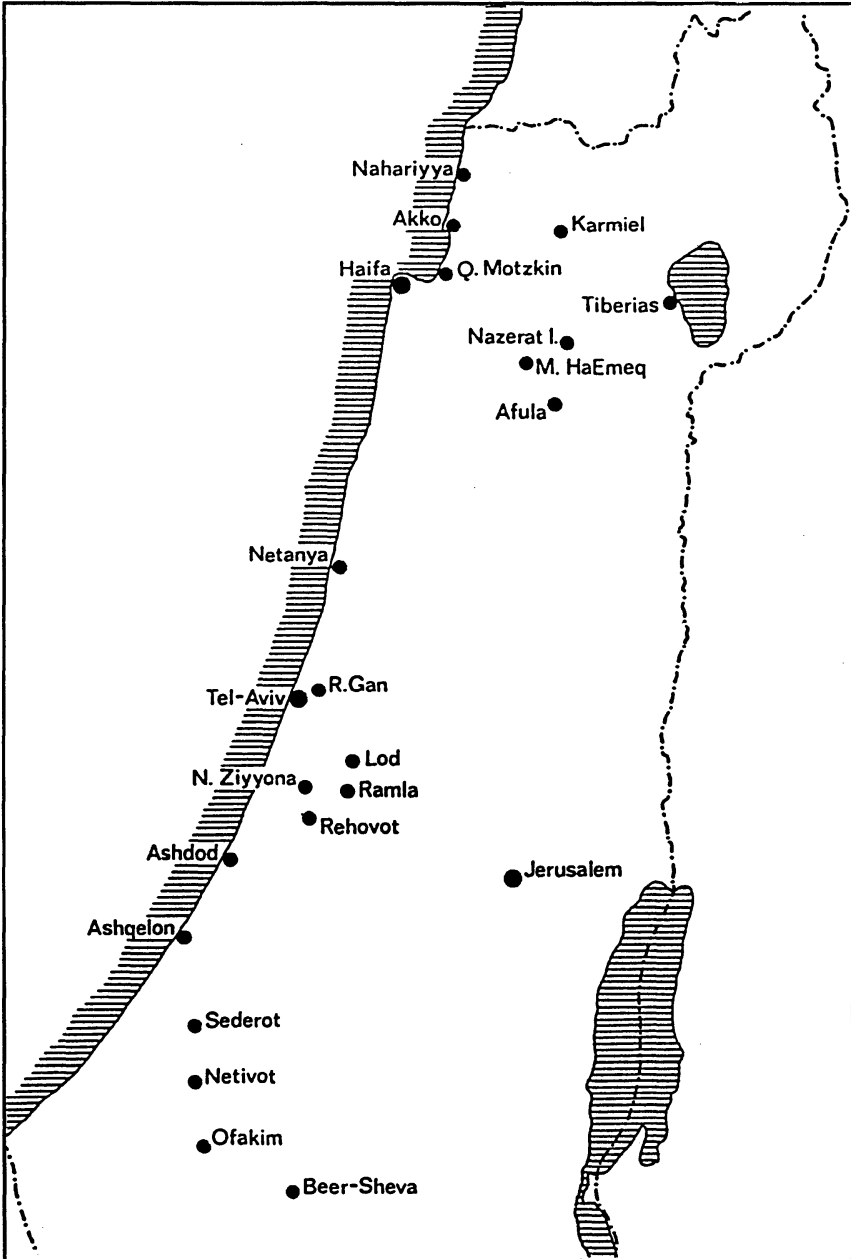*Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, 1985

Fig. 1. Israeli towns used in the sampling of street name patterns.

armies, and the Holocaust, mostly of the last hundred years, including units, famous battles, generals and heroes; (8) figures of antiquity — Kings of Israel, prophets, philosophers and Jewish humanists of past ages up to the nineteenth century; (9) local personalities — the town's pioneers, public representatives, and people active in various fields; (10) personages representing the spirit of Zionism and rejuvenation of the state, its pioneers, early writers, and artists, political leaders, etc.; and (11) other names that of not fit the above categories such as names of books or working tools.

Most names fit easily into a single category. Others may fit into two or more categories, and I determined the final classification according to the main connotation of the name. The largest group, comprising about a fifth (19.7%) of the total number, consists of names of modern figures connected with the history of Zionism and the State. Not far behind this group come names that perpetuate heroism, the army, and the Holocaust (16.1%), and names deriving from nature (15.2%). These three groups make up over half of the street names in the towns and reflect fundamental tenets of the Zionist ideology: return to the land and nature and Jewish heroism as connected with the establishment of the State. The other elements, graded according to their importance, are from the world of symbols and values (13.6%), figures from antiquity (11%), places in Israel (10.8%), local personalities (7.5%), international names (1.8%), local elements (1.6%), and names of Arab origin (less than 0.5%).

In the towns chosen, these findings form average values. Is this average context representative of the sample towns? In order to test the homogeneity of the thematic context or, in other words, the number of deviations from the mean value in the sample, I calculated the absolute and relative standard deviations. The relative standard deviation indicates that the two dominant groups (Zionist and heroic personages), are the most homogeneous, their relative standard deviation being the smallest. The large standard deviations, however, show that there is an extensive variety in the distribution of street names in the different towns.

The data on street names in the towns studied generally present a different picture of the thematic context from that revealed by Cohen and Kliot's research of settlement names in Israel. According to their

findings, antique names originating in the Bible and the Talmud form the largest group (39.5%), followed by nature-oriented names (18.2%), with the Zionist and national-oriented group coming third (16.5%). The difference may be explained first by technical reasons of classification and second by the more profound considerations of the Government Committee's preferences in fixing the names of settlements as against those of Municipal Committees in naming streets. An example of this would be the weight given to the proximity of a new Jewish settlement to an ancient Jewish one which is irrelevant to the problems of street-naming. When we study the three groups as one unit, we see a striking cultural similarity between the names of settlements and those of streets, with both reflecting Zionist ideology and the rejuvenation of the State and the Jewish nation.

Patterns of Street Names in the Various Town Groups

The above analysis of all the street names in the towns demonstrates that the relative difference between the towns is high. In this section, I will analyze the names according to groups in the various towns. Table 2 shows the findings on name distribution in each town separately.

A first glance at Table 2 shows that in some towns the thematic context of the street names is more concentrated than in others, a large part of the names being centered in one or two groups. In Karmiel, for example, half of the names derive from the world of nature. In Nazeret Illit 60 percent of them come from places in Eretz Israel or from nature. In Rehovot 40 percent of the streets are named after local personages. Such a concentration of names in a small number of groups indicates a clear, unequivocal policy on the part of the town leaders. In Nazeret Illit, for example, since the town was founded in 1957 there has been a clear-cut decision to choose names from nature or from geographical sites rather than people.

The distributions in Table 2 therefore show opposing patterns of thematic contexts in the names of the streets, the first showing a preference for centering on a relatively limited context and concentrating the names within a small number of categories, the second pattern being more variegated. In examining these patterns according to the different towns, we find that small, new towns tend to reveal the first

Table 2. Distribution of names in the selected towns.

TOWNS	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k
AFULA	12.6	8.1	0.7	-	1.5	19.2	17.8	5.2	5.9	27.4	1.5 100%
AKKO	6.2	2.5	-	-	-	18.7	26.5	7.5	1.2	36.2	1.2 100%
ASHDOD	15.4	21.5	2.6	-	1.5	10.3	18.0	6.2	6.0	15.9	2.6 100%
ASHQELON	8.3	11.0	1.9	-	2.2	9.6	14.6	28.2	5.2	16.2	2.7 100%
BEER SHEVA	9.9	9.8	0.8	-	2.7	11.8	14.0	26.4	6.0	15.9	2.7 100%
HAIFA	11.4	11.0	3.7	7.7	5.1	7.1	8.5	13.0	9.6	22.4	0.5 100%
JERUSALEM	8.5	3.9	2.0	2.3	6.3	13.8	6.4	20.4	15.9	16.5	3.9 100%
KARMIEL	8.3	52.2	2.0	-	-	29.3	6.2	-	-	-	2.0 100%
LOD	6.4	7.7	-	-	6.4	5.8	21.8	5.8	16.0	27.6	2.5 100%
M. HAEMEQ	28.6	23.7	2.4	-	-	21.4	14.3	4.8	2.4	-	2.4 100%
N. ILLIT	32.7	29.1	1.8	-	-	27.3	5.4	-	1.8	1.8	1.2 100%
N. AIYYONA	10.5	11.8	-	-	-	22.3	28.3	7.0	2.3	17.8	1.2 100%
NAHARIYYA	13.7	18.7	1.6	-	2.2	7.1	16.5	10.9	3.8	23.2	2.2 100%
NETANYA	7.3	5.2	0.5	-	4.5	8.9	11.3	16.8	12.1	31.8	1.6 100%
NETIVOT	14.8	-	-	-	-	7.4	11.1	14.8	25.9	25.9	1.2 100%
OFAKIM	-	29.2	-	-	-	8.3	25.0	8.3		29.2	1.2 100%
Q. MOTZIN	12.3	17.3	-	-	-	8.6	22.2	11.1	3.7	23.5	1.2 100%
RAMAT GAN	11.4	9.8	1.9	-	2.0	14.5	13.8	14.5	7.1	20.9	4.0 100%
RAMLA	6.2	1.1	1.1	-	6.8	6.2	22.2	21.0	10.2	23.4	1.7 100%
REHOVOT	3.9	7.4	1.0	-	0.6	8.4	8.4	8.1	41.1	20.7	0.3 100%
SEDEROT	-	55.5	-	-	-	-	33.3	-	-	-	11.1 100%
TEL-AVIV	11.2	7.0	2.9	0.1	5.9	16.0	7.3	15.9	7.0	21.1	5.5 100%
TIBERIAS	15.1	6.2	1.0	-	1.0	7.8	16.5	18.2	5.5	25.1	3.6 100%

a. Places in Israel
b. Nature
c. Local Events
d. Arabic Origin
e. International Origin
f. Symbolic
g. Heroism
h. Ancient Personages
i. Local Personages
j. Modern Personages
k.Other

pattern while the large towns, with their larger scope for maneuvering because of the number of streets at their disposal, favor the more variegated pattern. The political considerations of a variegated and more complex society in the large towns probably influence the decisions of the municipal names committees. This aspect of the names' distribution into the different patterns appears clearly in Figure 2, which demonstrates the Lorenz distribution curves.[1]

Besides the difference mentioned above in distribution patterns of names, various towns in the sample groups stress different elements. Table 3 shows the distribution of names according to the groups of towns. The small, new towns and those of medium size tend more towards names
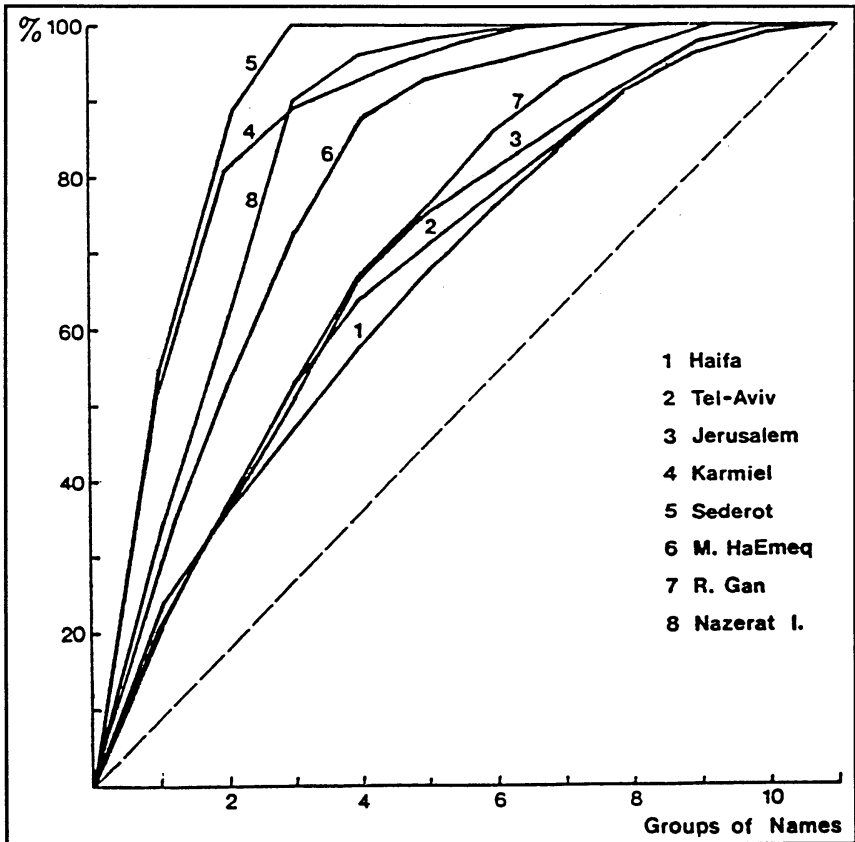

Fig. 2: Distribution pattern of street names expressed in Lorenz curves.

from nature. However, this choice does not come at the expense of names of figures connected with Zionist history and antiquity. Instead, it replaces names of countries or international figures. Older cities of various kinds, on the other hand, lean toward names of figures in the Zionist and international pantheon and to a lesser extent toward names from nature. It is only in the large, veteran towns that street names of Arabic origin appear, something one would not expect in new Jewish towns. It is interesting to note, however, that in four towns which boast an ancient historical core as well as a present Arab population, Akko, Tiberias, Lod, and Ramla, names of Arab origin have been erased from their maps. The data presented in Table 3 show another phenomenon: the ancient towns lay greater stress on honoring the memory of local personages by naming streets after them. As to symbolic names and those of places in Israel, there is no significant difference among the town groups.

These findings raise another question regarding the various groups: how similar are the towns in each group in the matter of the thematic context of street names? I made correlations of the names' distribution among all the towns in every group. The correlation rate within the

Table 3: Distribution of street names in the town groups.

	New Towns		Older Established Towns		
	Small and medium	Large	Medium size	Historical core	Large cities
Places in Israel	14.0	11.2	12.2	8.5	8.9
Nature	33.6	14.0	13.9	4.4	7.4
Local element	1.0	1.8	0.6	0.5	2.0
Arabic origin	--	--	--	--	1.7
International origin	--	2.1	0.9	3.5	4.1
Symbolic	15.6	10.6	14.3	9.6	11.4
Heroism	15.9	15.5	21.5	21.7	9.3
Ancient personages	4.6	20.2	8.5	13.1	14.8
Local personages	5.0	5.7	3.9	8.2	14.6
Modern personages	9.5	16.0	22.9	28.2	23.2
Other	0.7	2.7	1.2	2.2	2.6
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

groups among all the towns is 0.68; in towns with an ancient core: 0.78; in medium-veteran towns: 0.68; and in the larger new towns: 0.65. In the small, new towns, conversely, the average correlation is 0.39. These findings how that there is a relatively high homogeneity of the thematic context of names in the veteran towns as compared with the new ones and in the larger towns as compared with the small ones. The analysis of the correlation among all the towns studied indicates that there are some towns with an extremely high rate of correlation, i.e., a similar thematic context exists among them. Out of 253 possible correlations among twenty-three towns studied, eight correlations are over 0.90. These are the town pairs: Beer Sheva and Ashqelon: 0.99; Quirat Motzkin and Nahariyya: 0.97; Migdal HaEmek and Nazeret Illit: 0.95; Afula and Akko: 0.93; and Ramat Gan and Tel-Aviv: 0.92. It appears that, at least in some cases, these correlations are not fortuitous. In half of the cases the similarity of the thematic context may be explained by the towns' similar size, age, and geographical proximity.

Perpetuating the Names of Personages in the Streets of the Town

An analysis of the thematic context of street names on the general level shows that the two most frequent groups are those of personages involved in Zionism and the State of Israel and those that immortalize heroism and the army. Not only are they highly ubiquitous but they are also the most homogeneous in a comparison among the sample settlements. It follows, therefore, that these street names form the social-cultural core in Israeli towns. I therefore decided to analyze the two groups in greater depth in the attempt to determine the characteristics of those personages that rendered their names the most common in the towns. I carried out this in- depth research by surveying all the urban settlements in Israel, aided by a state-wide list of addresses (M.L.M.). The names are those of personages who have been memorialized in at least three streets in Israeli towns, on the assumption that three towns are the minimum for distinguishing between personages on a national level and those on the local one, such as mayors, founders of a certain community, etc. A total of 130 names satisfied the above criteria.

There are only sixty-eight towns in Israel today with a population of over 5,000, yet not one of the names of personages is to be found in all of them. The ten most ubiquitous names to be perpetuated in the towns' streets are as follows: *Herzl* (58 towns), *Jabotinsky* (53), *Weitzman* (52), *Ben Gurion* (41), *Bialik* (39), *David Remez* (38), *Eli Cohen* (38), *Trumpeldor* (37), *Berl Katzenelson* (37), and *Harav Kook* (36). This group can be divided according to its members' activities and contributions to Zionism and the founding of the State of Israel. A difficult distinction to make is between the group of "Founding Fathers" and politicians. The criterion used for classification was as follows: a politician is one elected by means of a democratic election. Ben Gurion, for example, also one of the Founders of Zionism, I defined as a politician. The group therefore consists of four founders of Zionism, active in its political factions (Herzl, Jabotinsky, Weitzman and Berl Katzenelson); two politicians active after the founding of the State (Ben Gurion and David Remez); two representatives of Jewish heroism in Israel (Trumpeldor and Eli Cohen); one representative of Hebrew literature (Bialik); and one representative of the founders of Religious Zionism (Harav Kook).

The large number of settlements perpetuating the names of a certain personage by means of street names indicates a national consensus regarding the achievements of that personage. The number of names of figures representing a field of activity in a certain town reflects the political preferences and cultural background of the decision-making groups in that town. Is the trend evinced in the ten most frequent names also characteristic of the other 120? To find the answer to this question, I classified the list of 130 names into five groups according to the frequency of their use. Apart from the rabbis (10), the other personages are more or less equally represented in the list — about thirty in each group. However, there are frequency variations. The Zionist Fathers enjoy a relatively high frequency of perpetuation, but for politicians, proponents of the humanities and the arts, and figures symbolizing heroism and the army, the frequency is relatively low. Half of the personages in these groups are commemorated in the streets of three to ten settlements only. In other words, the distribution of just under half the names is far from widespread.

According to the rank scale of commemoration, a study of the list of personages indicates that certain famous people rank quite low. Take,

for example, past prime ministers, Levi Eshkol (25), Moshe Sharrett (22), and Golda Meir (11); presidents, Ben Zvi (26) and Zalman Shazar (20); and politicians, Igal Allon (14) and Moshe Dayan (3).

What is the reason for the frequency rating of the commemoration of these personages? Rather than being fortuitous, it reflects their importance in the Israeli consciousness, past and present. Decision makers in the various towns regard these names as social and cultural symbols worthy of commemoration. The Zionist Fathers enjoy the widest national concensus in this respect and form the core which is repeated in most Israeli towns. The fact that their importance in modern Jewish history is universally accepted makes them the group most perpetuated. Another influencing factor is the importance of the personages to the labor movement in Israel. Names of personages like Arlozoroff (32 settlements), Brenner (31), Kaplan (27), and Yoseph Tal (25) enjoy a high degree of profusion. In contrast, it is hard to find names connected with the political right and center in the list, except for Jabotinsky (53). The reason for this may be found in the political history of the Zionist movement and the State of Israel, where for many years the labor movement and its various factions enjoyed full power on both the national and the local levels (Eisenstadt). Commemoratory differences between left and right find expression in other symbols as well, for example, the names of the pre-state underground organizations: those identified with the labor movement have a higher frequency; "Hagana," and "Palmach" appear in forty-eight places each, whereas the "rightist" organizations, "Etzel" and "Lechi" appear in twenty-nine and twenty places, respectively.

Beside the factor of political affiliation, the time factor, too, seems to play a role. Those who died before the declaration of the State or in its early years are more widely commemorated than those who have died recently. The commemoration of the former went hand in hand with the intensive process of town building and enlarging in the fifties and sixties, a period of growth for the Israeli population. Today the stock of streets available in the various towns is more limited and there is an objective difficulty in finding a commemoration site, which probably explains the low frequency of political names such as Golda Meir and Moshe Dayan. There is, however, the case of Eli Cohen, the Israeli spy executed in Syria

in 1965, whose name epitomizes heroism in Israel: he has been com-
memorated in thirty-eight settlements.

Besides the attempt to find explanations in the political and tem-
poral factor we also sought one anchored in the geographical back-
ground, such as the size and location of the town. The findings reveal no
essential difference, no specific pattern. This conclusion is important
with regard to small and medium settlements, whose stock of streets is
relatively small. There are about a thousand of them where even names
like *Herzl* and *Jabotinsky* do not appear, probably a result of the policy
in some settlements to prefer names from nature, especially plants, or
antiquity, as shown in Table 3.[2]

Conclusion

In contrast to a historical study of street names within one town, this
has been an attempt to widen the scope of the subject by means of a
comparative study of many towns in a single cultural region. Street names
in each town form the cumulative sum of decisions made over many
decades and may therefore be used as a means of pinpointing cultural
and value symbols within the societal system of a certain cultural region.

Changes in names may occur as a result of two factors: (1) rapid
changes resulting from war or a cultural revolution or (2) slow cultural
modulation, each capable of creating a new thematic context in street
names. As this research deals with the present, there has been no
reference to important aspects of permutations in names over long
periods — aspects demanding further research. It may be said in general
that the War of Independence (1948) was a turning point in the choice
of street names in most of the towns inhabited by a mixed Jewish and
Arab population (Tel-Aviv, Haifa, Akko). This war, which resulted in
the founding of the State of Israel, caused most of the Arab and English
names given to certain streets in these towns to be changed, an act
symbolic of the Jewish and Zionist nature of the urban environment.
This process is mainly prominent in the mixed towns, where names of
Arab origin are now due to the municipal committees' method of
decision-making.

The comparative analysis shows the importance of the Zionist ideol-
ogy in the thematic context of the process of naming the town streets of

Israel, though there is, apparently, a central cultural core of names boasting a national concensus. Small new towns tend to ignore names commemorating personages more than do the large, veteran towns. It has also become apparent that there is over-commemoration of names of personages connected to the Israel labor movement. The slow social changes taking place in Israeli society — the shift to the political right and center manifested in the elections for Parliament in 1977 — are still not evident in the names of the streets.

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Notes

1. The Lorenz curve is a means of measuring the relative concentration of one phenomenon as compared with another. In a study area of several discrete geographical units, the relative concentration of the two phenomena is calculated for each unit and then ranked from high to low. The curve is then drawn from the relative concentration of the ranked units. A straight diagonal line represents an even distribution (i.e., no concentration); a curve close to the two axes of the graph represents high concentration.

2. It should be noted that the specific names of plants are taken from plants commonly found in Israel, such as the olive (52 occurrences), the vine (47), the pine (44), the poppy (56), and the cyclamen (46). The most widely distributed names from the Bible are the prophets (24), King David (23), and King Solomon (21).

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