



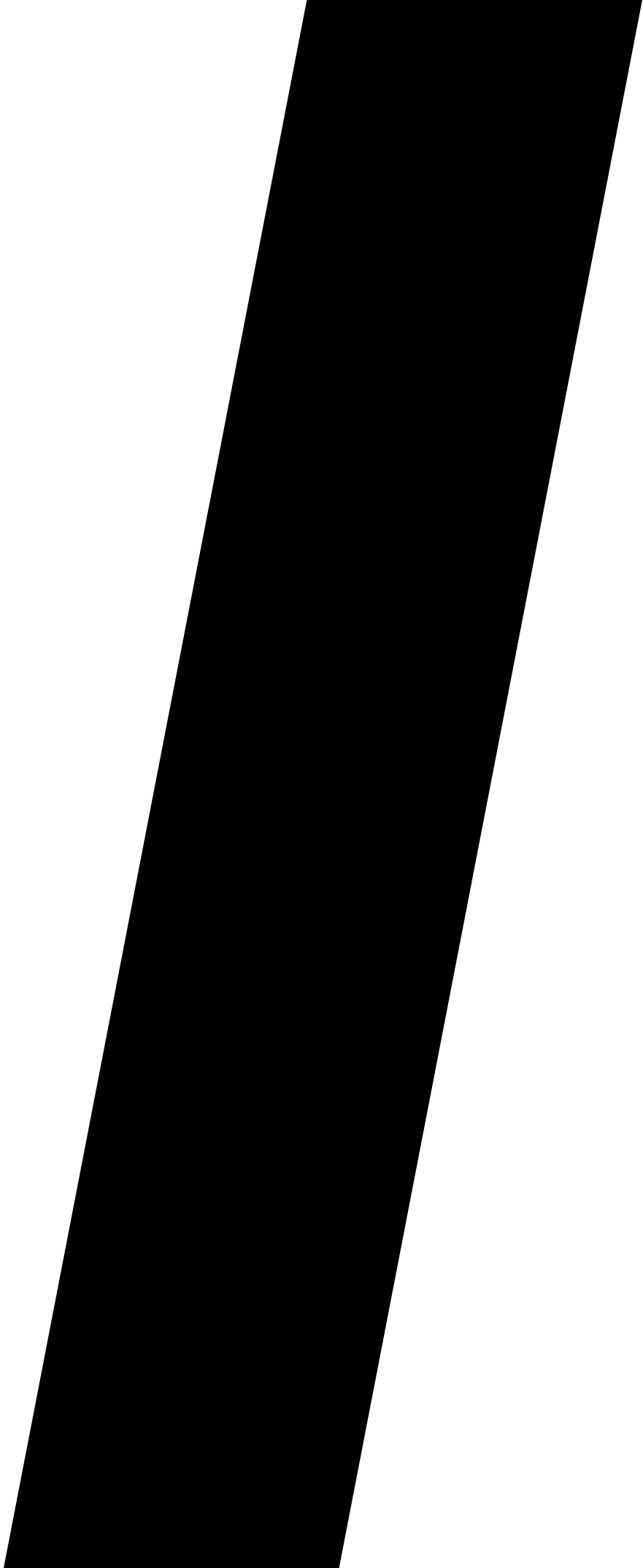
# Israel Lessons

## Industrial Arcadia

laba EPFL  
Teaching and Research in Architecture

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Industrial Arcadia



# Introduction

## Arcadian Dreams and Agricultural Myths: Israel's Promised Land

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# 1. The Garden of Eden and the Promised Land

Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.

— Genesis 2:8

The Middle East and its ancient territory of the Fertile Crescent are historically considered to be the cradle of Western civilization, home to a myriad of human inventions, such as agriculture, writing, and the city. It is the place where “humans”—from the Latin *humus*, meaning “land, soil, country”—defined themselves as “land creatures.” It is also the region where religions were manufactured, and where, in the beginning, God planted a garden and promised the land.

Human land appropriation has always been layered with cultural and metaphysical meanings. Migration, agriculture, religion, and industrialization have all contributed levels of symbolic attachment to nature. In Western culture, environmental imagination is rooted in a myriad of landscape tropes, such as the Garden, the Wilderness, the Virgin Land, the Desert, and the Swamp.<sup>1</sup> These metaphors have become universal rhetorical figures, ideological filters that capture our dreams of environmental harmony with nature and inform our worldviews, our positions within the world.

Adam, the name of the Bible’s first man, is the Hebrew word for “human,” “man,” and “mankind.” It is also the masculine form of the word *adamah*, which means “ground” or “earth.” *Hava*, the original Hebrew name for Eve, also means “farm.” God created Adam “of the dust from the ground”<sup>2</sup> and told him to “Remember, O man, that dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return.”<sup>3</sup> The Bible tells us that God “planted a garden in the east, in Eden,”<sup>4</sup> and the Quran describes heaven as a garden. The Persians planted oases in the desert and called them *pairidaeza* (*pairi* means “behind,” and *daeza* means “wall”), a term that was later adopted by Christianity as “paradise garden,” or the *hortus conclusus* (enclosed garden).

The word *garden* derives from the Indo-European root *gher*, which appears in many Latin, Greek, Slavic, and Germanic words for things such as farmyard, pasture, field, hedge, house, fence, enclosure, stable, girder, fortified place, and garden. All of these words imply enclosure.<sup>5</sup> In his 1755 book *Discourse on Inequality*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau writes that “the first man who, having enclosed a piece of land, said ‘This is mine,’ and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society.”<sup>6</sup> Gardens are the result of this primordial act of land appropriation that separates a familiar inside from a strange outside. The act of framing an inner space of residence, storage,

and defense, makes the garden an agent of social cohesion and segregation, identity and difference, thereby establishing a physical link between clan and land, “blood and soil.” Through collective solidarity in domestic labor, gardening acquires a mythical dimension that has been echoed in literature since ancient times, from the Bible to Homer and Virgil: the act of cultivating a homeland.<sup>7</sup> Gardening shapes the land and the people.

Gardens are a symbol of the human urge to cultivate and civilize. Within enclosures, nature is ordered rationally according to ecological and aesthetic considerations, and every aspect of plant reproduction is carefully and constantly regulated. Its outer correlate is the wasteland (the *terra nullius* awaiting *occupacio*<sup>8</sup>) and incidentally, to colonize means “to farm” (from Latin *colonia*, “settled land, farm” and *colere*, “to cultivate, to inhabit, to guard”). The very concept of Western progress indicates this idea of advancement from wilderness toward agri-culture (*agros* means field), whereby nature must be fought and sanctified.

The secular parallel of the Judeo-Christian garden is the neo-classical Arcadia. The term is derived from the Greek province of Arkadia, a remote and mountainous region located at the heart of the Peloponnese. As may be expected, the mythical Arcadia is as far removed from its geographical eponym as the Garden of Eden is from the Levant. Virgil’s *Eclogues* described it as a pastoral scene where young shepherds and shepherdesses (*pastor* is Latin for “shepherd”) roam with their flocks in an everlasting and blissful spring.<sup>9</sup> Like Eden, Arcadia is a fantasy realm of freedom and plenty located somewhere between the restrictions of society and the violence of nature. Its secular idealism struck a chord in Western Enlightenment, during which time divine authority gradually gave way to scientific interpretations of natural law as the mirror of social order. Romantic nationalism and its plethora of nature representations found a new political power in landscape: When site turns into sight and soil into country (from the Latin *terra contrata*, meaning “land lying opposite”), land becomes the *locus* of the nation, and nationalist claims over the territory become naturalized, ahistorical.

Nevertheless, despite its secular associations, the pastoral Arcadia still harkens back to a quasi-religious nostalgia for a Golden Age and to various mythologies about ancient creation. In a lecture delivered in 1966 titled “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” American historian Lynn White Jr. claimed that Western concepts of nature can, to this day, be traced back to Judeo-Christian theology: “... modern science is an extrapolation of natural theology and ... modern technology is at least partly to be explained as an Occidental, voluntarist realization of the Christian dogma of man’s transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature.”<sup>10</sup> White claims that modern secularism has

not broken with the creationist dogma completely and has in fact sustained the idea of human ownership over our planet, still seen as if it were rightfully promised to us: “Despite Copernicus, all the cosmos rotates around our little globe. Despite Darwin, we are *not*, in our hearts, part of the natural process. We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim.”<sup>11</sup>

All forms of life affect and modify their contexts, but humans have achieved the unthinkable feat of changing the planet’s biosphere. It began 9000 years ago, when humans started domesticating plants and animals in order to mitigate seasonal variations. Today, domestic animals far outnumber the nondomesticated ones,<sup>12</sup> and 83 percent of the earth’s land surface has been directly influenced by human activities.<sup>13</sup> Atmospheric concentrations of “greenhouse gases” are rapidly warming the Earth’s climate, and thin layers of carbon residue have permanently deposited in the Earth’s crust.<sup>14</sup> Pollution, mass extinction, global warming, and population explosion are today’s haunting fallouts of civilization, summed up in the poignant name given to the dawn of this new era: the Anthropocene.

In a lecture delivered in 2015 at Barnard College, American anthropologist Anna Tsing described the global phenomenon of the Anthropocene as an assembly of landscape patches with different local impacts on livability and place, enacted and operated through the landscape metaphor of the “plantation”: “By plantation I mean those ecological simplifications in which living things are transformed into resources, future assets, by removing them from their life-worlds. Plantations are machines of replication, ecologies devoted to purification and the production of the same.”<sup>15</sup> Plantations are the agricultural acts of ecological acculturation that are at the root of our environmental dilemmas and at the origin of the nature-culture split. <sup>[Fig. 1–2]</sup>

## 2. Drain the Swamps and Make the Desert Bloom

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

— Genesis 1:28

The word *homeland* appears in the Bible 19 times, mostly in the Genesis. Its meaning has to do with birthplace and familial heritage, and there is no mention of the political, civil, or public dimensions of the national homeland as encountered, for example,

in the cultures of the Greek *polis* or the ancient Roman Republic. The word *land*, however, shows up more than a thousand times.<sup>16</sup> The land that God gave Abraham, “from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates,”<sup>17</sup> is described as a place of compensation, inheritance, and bounty: “a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates,”<sup>18</sup> a land “flowing with milk and honey.”<sup>19</sup> But the people that God chose for the Holy Land were actually not the land’s natives. Immediately after delivering the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, God promised Moses to expel the autochthonous inhabitants of Canaan in order to make room for the Israelites. The land of the chosen people was not their homeland, it was their destiny.

There is a paradoxical, double temporality in this idea of a predestined homeland. It holds both the traces of ancient origins as well as the prospects of utopian futures, while remaining always beyond the present. In other words, it is heir to a noble and idealized past, but its full potential can be fulfilled only in the form of a redeemed, and improved version of itself. Consequently, the present becomes the in-between predicament that must be wandered, in the hopeful promise of something ever about to be.<sup>20</sup> In 1902, Zionist forefather Theodor Herzl identified the Holy Land as the *Altneuland*, the “Old New Land,” in his literary account of a utopian *Judenstaat* named the “New Society” established in Palestine by Jewish Europeans. The *Altneuland* is a literal testimony to the double temporality of the Holy Land: It is both the old home of the primordial Israelites and the new home of the future Jewish state, while the present is stalled in the diaspora. The Holy Land has a messianic impulse marked by idealism and a crusading spirit. Jewish people do not immigrate to the land, they “ascend” to it, through *aliyah*. In settling the territory, they do not merely occupy it, they fulfil their destiny to cultivate and “redeem” it.

Traditionally, the idea of redemption has the meaning of “salvation, rebirth, and liberation from enemy hands.” In a literal sense, it can also mean “to buy, or take something back.” In the context of Zionist self-determination, these meanings came together in a new heroic slogan whereby the purchase, reclamation, and settlement of land in Eretz Israel became equated with the moral redemption of the Jewish nation. Integral to this process was an overarching image of Palestine as a desolate land, a boundless, virginal environment eagerly waiting to be fertilized. A wasteland needed to exist in order to justify the need for a garden and in order to portray, as is usually required, the national project as a natural process. According to this conception, Palestine was a desolate combination of desert and swamp, and only the true love of the land’s true people could ever restore it back to “milk and honey.” The land is hence conceived as being metaphorically empty—“a land

without a people for a people without a land”<sup>21</sup>—until the long-awaited arrival of its predestined pioneers, conquerors and saviors. *[Fig. 3–5]*

From the nation’s valley of death rose a new generation. This generation finds life’s meaning in toiling our ancestors’ land and reviving our ancient tongue. The draining of the Harod swamps, which only covered the land after our people were forced to go into exile, is a true wonder. But this wonder also symbolizes the draining of the swamp our nation was bogged down in during two millennia of exile. You, the pioneers of Harod, are the heroes of the new generation. What you are doing is healing the land and healing the nation. You are taking us back to the source.<sup>22</sup>

The trees were our proxy immigrants, the forests our implantation. And while we assumed that a pinewood was more beautiful than a hill denuded by grazing flocks of goats and sheep, we were never exactly sure what all the trees were *for*. What we did know was that a rooted forest was the opposite landscape to a place of drifting sand, of exposed rock and red dirt blown by the winds. The diaspora was sand. So what should Israel be, if not a forest, fixed and tall?<sup>23</sup>

### 3. Lines in the Sand and Walls in the Garden

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates—the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.”

— Genesis 15:18–21

All nationalisms are a retroactive combination of historical and literary constructions. Zionism emerges in the context of European nationalist outbreak, with its inherent racism and Judeophobia, that swept across the continent in the nineteenth century. This new shared identity was achieved in the combination of ideas of cultural background, such as linguistic past and religion, and a notion of biological origin, or blood ties, then understood as a category of natural fact. In its many variations, the idea of nationhood oscillated between three complimentary principles: the softer idea of “people” as a dynamic cultural aggregate; the more rigid concept of “*ethnos*” as a cultural unit; and the utterly problematic concept of “race” as a group that shares a common descent.<sup>24</sup> In any of these circumstances, however, human rights became tied with national citizenship, and contrary to the concept of “humanity,” “nationality” is an idea that includes some but excludes others, so that the non-citizen (the

foreigner, the refugee, the illegal alien) can be placed in a condition of sub-humanity.<sup>25</sup>

It was in this context that the Jewish Question came into existence, originating for the first time in Great Britain in 1750, and further evolving into a 200-year-long debate dealing with the civil, legal, national, and political status of Jewish people as a minority within modern European society. It was especially fervent in Central and Eastern Europe, where conceptions of citizenship were linked more to parental descent than to place of birth (*jus sanguinis*, the right of blood, rather than *jus soli*, the right of soil). In this context, Zionism set out to guarantee the stateless Jews of the diaspora a place where they could claim national citizenship and emancipation. It was a colonialist movement born out of precariousness, violence and oppression, fuelled by romantic idealism and a sense of religious predestination.

Under the political conditions that prevailed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the notion of settlement in “desolate” areas was still credited with considerable logic. It was the high point of the age of imperialism, and the project was enabled by the fact that its land of destination was populated by an anonymous local population, devoid of national identity. Had the vision and the movement appeared earlier ... the process of colonization, and the displacement of the local population, as had been taking place in other colonial areas, could perhaps have been achieved with greater ease and fewer misgivings. ... The Second World War and the Jewish destruction it wreaked created circumstances that enabled the West to impose a settler state on the local population. The establishment of the State of Israel as a place of refuge for persecuted Jews took place during the last hours, or, to be more precise, the final moments, of the dying colonial era.<sup>26</sup>

The year 2017 marks the the fiftieth anniversary of the Six Day War and the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. 1967 was the year when the Holy Land became sacralized from a nationalist perspective and was elevated to the status of an idol, a magic object that compels human sacrifices and conjures feelings of mass hysteria.<sup>27</sup> Today, large blocks of ethnocentric, religious nationalists have a solid presence amongst Israeli society. Hard-right Israeli Education Minister Naftali Bennett said recently in an interview with Al Jazeera that Israel has a right to occupy the West Bank because it says so in the Bible.<sup>28</sup> In 2016, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Uri Ariel declared that the world should forget about a Palestinian state, and that Israel has to aspire to the annexation of Area C,<sup>29</sup> a region that covers 60 percent of the West Bank and is home to 300,000 Palestinians. Over the course of the past five decades, Israel has succeeded in settling over half a million people inside the occupied territories, keeping the Arab population fenced off in complicated ways that compromise human rights and en-

courage a feedback loop of terrorism and counter-terrorism.

The occupation is carried out through a complex land entanglement that generates structural chaos and misunderstanding. Settlement spots grow into enclave alignments that swell up into corridors and eventually form a network thread of controlled space. Almost three million Palestinians are confined to 40 percent of the West Bank, Areas A and B. Their daily movements are restricted by Israeli checkpoints and travel permits. A multilayered separation barrier, measuring 708 kilometers in length and reaching as high as 8 meters, runs roughly along the Green Line,<sup>30</sup> sometimes cutting as far as 18 kilometers deep into Palestinian land. In the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Palestinians are registered in a Population Registry controlled by Israel. About a quarter of Gazans have family in the West Bank, in occupied East Jerusalem, and in Israel itself. The main currency traded throughout the whole territory is the Israeli shekel. Inside Israel's recognized borders, there live 1.5 million Palestinians (20 percent of the Israeli population) who are Israeli Arab citizens.<sup>31</sup> Most, if not all the residents of Palestine, especially the refugees, have a historical, familial, real-estate, and emotional connection to the area inside Israel. Therefore, as the likelihood of a double-state solution appears ever more implausible, it is useful to underline the fact that, for 50 years, Israel-Palestine has existed as single state. In the dream of creating a worldwide Jewish nation, Zionism created an Israeli nation—bilingual, bicultural, and binational—albeit one with massive inequalities.

Jewish-French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas wrote a text in 1961 titled "Heidegger, Gagarin and Us." In it he opposes Russian Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin's "absolute homogeneous space" to German philosopher Martin Heidegger's mysticism of place, memory, and landscape: "One's implementation in a landscape, one's attachment to Place, without which the universe would become insignificant and would scarcely exist, is the very splitting of humanity into natives and strangers. ... [Hence, w]hat is admirable about Gagarin's feat is [that] for one hour, man existed beyond any horizon—everything around him was sky or, more exactly, everything was geometrical space." He claims that, contrary to Christianity and its nurturing of local cults, saints, and household gods, Judaism has always been detached from place and idols. Like Gagarin, Judaism aspires to dwell in the abstract spaces of humanist values rather than in the landscapes of superstition and mysticism. For Levinas, home is not a correlate of autochthony. Rather, home realizes its potential for being a place of dignity only when it becomes open to the Other, the stranger. Home, and one might extrapolate homeland, is a place of hospitality and welcome. Ecology, we might add, is the same thing.<sup>32</sup> [Fig. 6–8]

## 4. Lessons from Israel: Imagining Hospitable Environments

For the Lord shall comfort Zion: He will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

— Isaiah 51:3

The present book presents the results of the studio course offered in the 2016–17 academic year by laba (Laboratoire Bâle), the architecture and urban design studio of the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL). As a European institution of education, we wanted to look at Israel in order to examine Western conceptions of social space rooted in land domestication and landscape idolatry, demonstrating the ways in which facts and narratives related to agriculture and the climate crisis are intertwined with geopolitics and sectarian ideals of earthly paradises. We wanted to critically examine our collective responsibility as inheritors of the European colonial project, the many waves of Jewish persecution across our continent, and our ongoing military and political meddling in the region. It is our obligation to help turn the European gaze back on itself and to learn from the experiences of those who have been historically excluded and dehumanized, especially when faced with the ecological challenges to come. As Barry Commoner said in his 1971 book *The Closing Circle*, a human economy based on ecological principles should be aware that "everything is connected to everything else" and "everything must go somewhere." In our global age of pollution and contamination, thresholds have become blurry, and what affects some affects us all. Our landscape tropes need to be updated beyond identity ideals of ethnical purity and moral redemption. They must include borderlands, toxic waste, the home, the body, landscapes of resistance, and other strange trans-corporealities.<sup>33</sup> This shift needs to happen with the collaboration of those excluded from the garden trope so far, if we wish to construct a progressive ethics of environmental hospitality that might mend the damage inflicted by nationalist ideologies and their competitive economies upon our landscapes and geographies.<sup>34</sup>

As editors of this book and educators in this studio, we wish to clarify that this work does not, at any moment, aspire to question the right to self-determination of modern-day Judeo-Israelis or the legitimacy of the State of Israel. Nor does it wish to conflate criticism of Israel and its policies with anti-Semitism or to promulgate any kind of gross generalization about the Jewish people as a whole. The studio and its faculty stand with the international consensus that opposes the Israeli occupation of Palestine since 1967.<sup>35</sup> We



support any solution to the conflict that is consistent with the full rights of both Palestinians and Jewish Israelis, be it in the form of two nation-states, one binational state, or some other configuration that they might agree upon. In accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we defend the right of return for all refugees. We do not oppose the Boycott Divest Sanction (BDS) movement, as long as it does not discriminate against individuals on the basis of their national citizenship and is instead directed exclusively at Israeli state agencies and corporations that are complicit with the occupation. Consequently, we do not support the Academic Boycott of Israel or any kind of collective punishment of Israeli academia. We believe that the principle of academic freedom is designed to provide platforms in which we might be able to reflect together on difficult problems, generating safe spaces for the kind of democratic debate that the academy is morally obliged to uphold. This especially applies to our academic field of architecture, urbanism, and landscape design, for which the politics of territorial occupation through architecture must be critically addressed as the central core of our discipline. We have tried to provide our students with the chance to listen to multiple points of view and the right to concur or dissent from those points of view individually. Therefore, while this introduction exposes a political and ethical consensus shared by laba's faculty, it does not in any willful way reflect the views of our mother institution, the EPFL, nor those of our Israeli partners at the Technion.<sup>36</sup>

"Israel Lessons: Industrial Arcadia" is third of a series of studio courses offered by laba titled "Industrial Earth" that addresses issues of environmental aesthetics in our advanced industrial society. In the present volume, our focus was directed to the role played by agriculture in contributing to climate change, structuring urban development, and supporting homeland narratives. The book's three-part structure reflects the academic method employed in the studio. Part 1, "Territory," presents a territorial reading based on cartography. Part 2, titled "Field," shows photographs of a trip to Israel-Palestine that took place in December 2016. And part 3, "Architecture," presents 18 architecture designs produced by our students as critical syntheses and proof of concept of the analysis and commentary generated in the territorial reading.

— *Bárbara M. Costa*

— *Harry Gugger*



[Fig. 1] *Topographia Paradisi Terrestris*, illustration from *Arca Nöe* by Athanasius Kircher, 1675.



[Fig. 2] *The Golden Age*, by Lucas Cranach the Elder, ca. 1530. Oil on Panel, 75×103.5 cm. National Gallery, London.



[Fig. 3] *May our eyes behold your return in mercy to Zion*, illustration by Ephraim Moses Lilien for the Fifth Zionist Congress, Basel, 1901.



[Fig. 4] *Cotton fields of Kibbutz Shamir*, ca. 1958. Photograph from the Shamir archive.



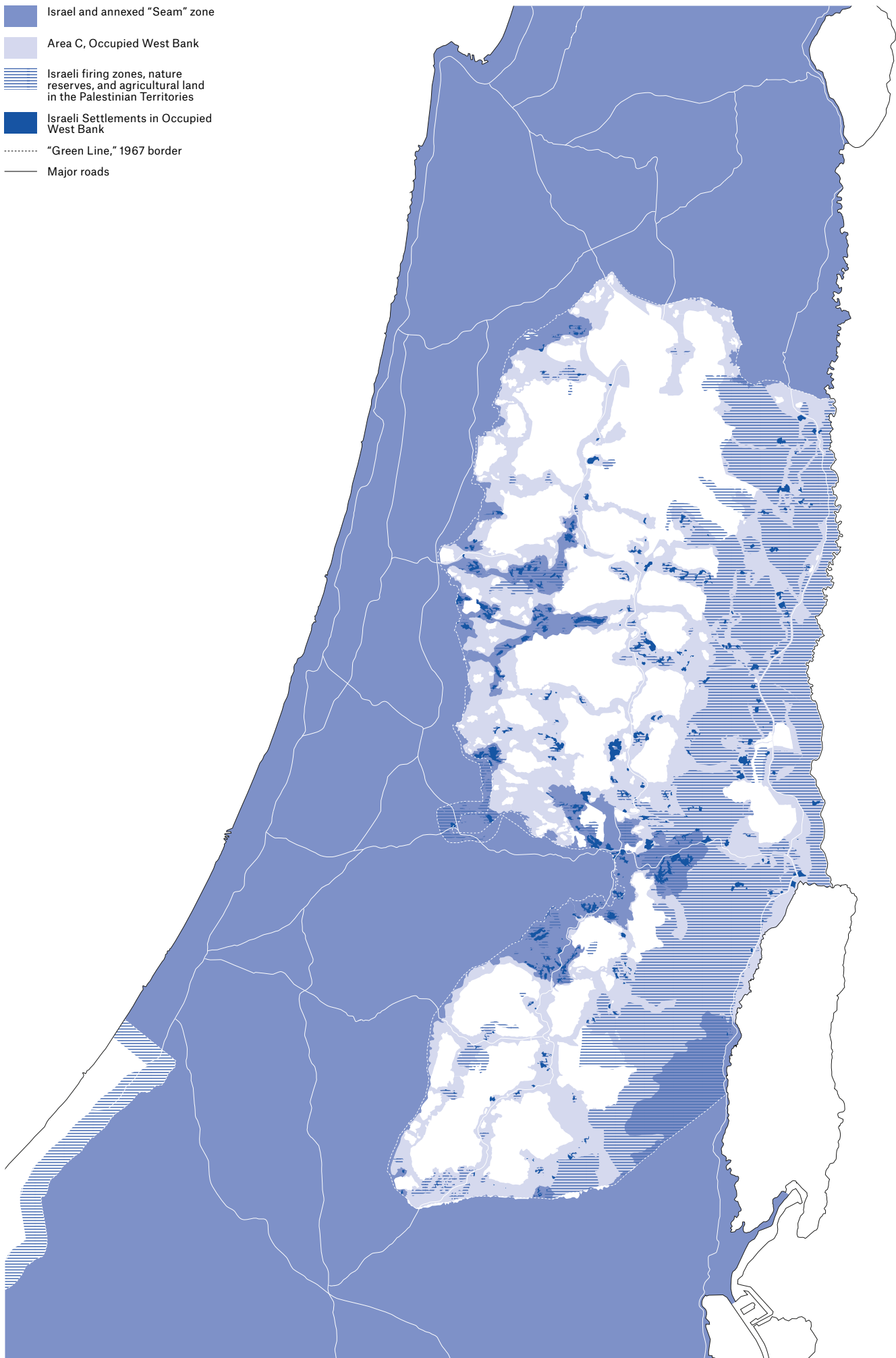
[Fig. 5] *Inmates in the uniform of Holocaust survivors holding the flag of Israel on the deck of an illegal immigration ship prior to their arrest by British soldiers*. Photograph by Uri Dan, 1945.



[Fig. 6] *Israeli settlement in Jordan Valley. Ma'ale Adumim, Occupied West Bank*. Photograph by Alan Whelan, 2012.



[Fig. 7] *Shoaffat refugee camp near Jerusalem*, 2007. Photograph by Tamarah.



[Fig. 8] Map of Israel-Palestine

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laba has been operating in Basel since September 2011 and is directed by Professor Harry Gugger. *Israel Lessons* is the ninth volume in a series entitled *[Place] Lessons: Teaching and Research in Architecture* that documents laba's academic work.

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