INTRODUCTION

THREE FRONTIER AND PLANNING ARE both likely topics for a “transnational history” that compares Israel with the United States and explores interactions between the two societies. The comparison of frontiers, in particular, is a modest but growing topic in the historiography of both countries. Claims that the frontier experience in America and in Israel is unique implies at least assumptions of difference. With Turner, the distinctiveness of America was initially asserted in reference to Europe. Successor students of the American frontier have been interested in comparisons with European colonization in South Africa, Australia, and Latin America. This discussion can be extended to the settlement of Palestine by European Jews.

Planning has also been the topic of a comparative discourse since mid-nineteenth century, when practitioners and students of American planning began to investigate how Europeans were coping with the development of urban/industrial societies. The genesis and diffusion of this transatlantic inquiry initially involved France, England, and the United States and then spread to include Germany. De Tocqueville was one of the initiators of this kind of analysis. It will be remembered that he was sent to America by a French scientific society to investigate prison reform, including issues of physical design. By mid-century, Americans, Englishmen and Frenchmen were actively engaged in studying each other to learn what might be valuable for understanding themselves and what could be applied to their own societies. They were particularly interested in observing how counterparts were coping with the physical and social pathologies they associated with the expanding industrial city. The first generation, from the 1830s through...
the 1850s, was particularly fascinated with issues related to epidemics and congestion. From mid-century through World War I, participants in this transatlantic discourse came to include a large number of housing and legal experts, philanthropists, and reformers concerned with understanding and correcting urban ills. At times this emerging discourse was limited to data collection and comparative analysis. But it also went beyond. Participants introduced historical perspectives to explain the behavior of different societies in the face of what they perceived to be common problems. With regard to understanding the United States, the experience of settling America’s frontiers came to be viewed as a formative influence in shaping the nature of American society. This early transatlantic discourse might also be considered a forerunner of the kind of transnational history offered here.

The notion of a transnational history involving the United States and Israel may appear far-fetched. The differences in size of population, extent of land, period and conditions of founding and development, significance in world affairs, and other factors may suggest that there is little basis for comparison in Israel that may be relevant for Americans interested in enhancing an understanding of themselves. On the other hand, Israelis are constantly invited, and even obliged, to compare themselves with Americans and to consider what might be learned from the American experience.

The process of seeking outside models was, in fact, inherent in Zionism, the movement that sought to reestablish a Jewish national home in Palestine, since its creation at the end of the nineteenth century. Zionists, whether or not they actually settled in Palestine, projected on the country that which they admired in the societies of the home continent. Political, social, cultural, architectural, and aesthetic models rooted in the experience of both Western and Eastern Europe consciously shaped the organization of Jewish Palestine. Zionists came to “discover” America only after World War II and the Holocaust, when they turned their focus from a Europe that had bitterly disappointed them to the promise of the United States as the new model of a productive, benign, and enlightened society. Even before the war, American experts in social development attempted to export to the growing Jewish community in Palestine concepts and practices rooted in the special circumstances of the American frontier. More recently, Israelis themselves engaged in this exercise.

Inspection and evaluation have not been unidirectional. There are instances, although less frequent or intensive, where Americans have both criticized and admired Israel’s frontier heritage and have employed their perceptions in affirming the strengths and failings of their own society. For
both Israelis and Americans, introspection can proceed through the prism of viewing the other.  

**Contrasting Frontiers**

In both the American and Zionist frontier experiences, ex-Europeans intended to create societies designed to serve primarily the interests and needs of settler populations rather than those of the inhabitants they encountered. In this process, both settler groups produced democratic societies, although with distinctive and even contrary characteristics. The crucial distinction is that Zionist colonization was a highly centralized and directed experience that often supported socialist and communist forms of settlement. It encouraged individual and collective self-sacrifice rather than “individual self-betterment,” which was the guiding ethos and purpose of the American pattern. The United States, in the course of several centuries, became a continental nation committed to individualism and to the furtherance and protection of personal rights. The Zionist experience was different. During the past century, it created about seven hundred urban and rural communities that were colonized, not by individuals, but by groups of men and women who were sent to locations chosen by the settlement authorities both before and after the establishment of Israel in 1948.

From the inauguration of Zionist colonization in the 1880s through the present, there has been almost no homesteading, or the establishment of farms by private individuals. Nor have towns or cities been organized and developed by “boosters”; that is, by individual entrepreneurs seeking profit. Israel has virtually no examples of “the little house on the prairie,” nor are there Levittowns. Instead, there are various forms of village settlement—of which the moshav [cooperative settlement of private landholders] and the kibbutz [collective settlement] are the best known. Urban colonies, too, were founded either entirely by the national institutions or with their assistance. Associations of future burghers established the country’s major metropolis, Tel-Aviv, as well as suburban estates during the pre-state period. At the same time, the major Zionist labor union, the Histadrut [General Federation of Labor] developed large-scale workers’ housing estates inside and outside cities. After independence in 1948, the Israeli government created regional cities and new towns. For most of the last twenty years, the government has programmatically established scores of largely urban colonies in the contested territories of the West Bank, the Golan Heights and Gaza. The only comparable case of extensive, centralized colonization by a distinct group in American history is the Mormon settlement of Utah.
Despite such fundamental differences in emphasis and form, American and Zionist settlement were similar at the outset. Like the Puritan settlements in the New World, the first Zionist settlements in Palestine in the 1880s were “covenantal” communities established by modest groups of settlers who organized in Europe to emigrate to Palestine. They were financially supported by associations that framed “covenants” that explicitly defined the colonies as “holy communities” that would abide by traditional Jewish law and that had assigned roles for religious leadership in community offices. The “covenants” are case in terms of pioneers fulfilling a national mission on behalf of the Jewish people, and their language resonates with references to national “redemption” as articulated particularly in the prophetic portions of the Bible, with Isaiah as the favored text. Even when Zion’s agricultural colonies were secularized, the dominant rhetoric continued to speak of fulfilling historic national objectives. In the American experience, the cohesion and homogeneity of New England towns declined, and common purposes were supplanted by individual concerns.

The American and Zionist frontier experience can be compared by observing how pioneering in each has been idealized and stereotyped. The equivalent of “pioneer” in Hebrew is derived from the biblical halutz, one who went before the people and was in their service. It derives from biblical passages describing how the Israelites overcame Jericho upon entry into the Promised Land:

And he [Joshua] said unto the people: “Pass on, and encircle the city, and let the halutz pass on before the ark of the Lord.” And it was so, that when Joshua had spoken unto the people, the seven priests bearing the seven rams’ horns before the Lord passed on, and blew the horns; and the ark of the covenant and the Lord followed them. And the halutz went before the priests that blew the horns (Joshua, 6:7–9).

While the root of the word halutz contains the meaning of “armed soldier,” it also and more popularly came to mean one who goes before the people. The halutz is part of the avant-garde. While the word virtually disappears from use in Hebrew during the Middle Ages, Zionist writers at the beginning of the twentieth century rediscovered the term and employed it extensively to describe pioneers [halutzim] and pioneering [halutzut]. Although the initial context was of one fulfilling a divine mission, secular Zionists readily appropriated the term and the concept in emphasizing the necessity for leadership that would act on behalf of a national, secular movement. Indeed, many of Israel’s secular founders celebrated their own
past in terms of halutziut and were able to apply this term in a host of areas. Thus, one could also pioneer on the frontiers of the nation’s commerce, education, literature, etc.¹⁰

What is common to all Zionist pioneering is that it is never done on behalf of oneself. By definition, the pioneer cannot be a solitary person acting alone and for self-interest. The idea of mission on behalf of the nation is the most common and strongest association with halutziut. One may be an individualist in the sense of an eccentric, but peculiarities and individualism are placed in the service of the larger body from which one emanates and that one represents. On the other hand, pioneers and pioneering in the United States have been traditionally viewed as sources of a form of individualism that is rooted in the realization of self-interest.¹¹

The relationship between the nation or state to land and the policies that are deemed appropriate for its disposition are prime examples of the impact of the distinctive frontier experiences in both societies. Since the colonial period, protection of private property has been connected with civil liberty and has become deeply ingrained in the politics and intellectual traditions of American society. External factors made the American version of liberty a real possibility for millions. The abundance of land, the need to attract more settlers, the continuing erosion of powers of colonization companies or other entities contributed to the evolution of one of the most individualistic land systems anywhere. Indeed, an essential distinction between the two societies is that the State of Israel is defined in ethnic, national terms and was created as an instrument for fulfilling national Jewish purposes rather than for “the pursuit of happiness” by individual Jews or anyone else. The prominence given the nation and its rights would have been unthinkable in the American context where the state is not conceived as a particularistic polity created by and for a distinctive people or ethnos.¹²

The nature of the American settlement experience lead to individualistic land laws. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 provides but one example of how easy access to an abundance of available land was codified. Land ownership was open and easily available to all, with notable exceptions based on race. By the mid-nineteenth century, the cumulative experience in land acquisition and transfer was expressed in the Homestead Act of 1862:

Section 1.: Any person who is the head of a family, or who has arrived at the age of twenty-one years, and is a citizen of the United States, or who shall have filed his declaration of intention to become such, as required by the naturalization laws of the United States, and who has never borne arms against the United States Government or given aid and comfort to its enemies, shall . . .
be entitled to enter one quarter section . . . of appropriated public lands, . . . at one dollar and twenty-five cents, or less, per acre; or 80 acres at two dollars and fifty cents.¹³

Americans may be unaware of how extraordinary this law is. Land as a social resource for the benefit for a large group, such as tribe or nation, is literally “foreign” to American experience, with the notable exception of assigning Native Americans to reservations. On the other hand, whether under the Ottomans or the British Mandate, Jews in Palestine were limited in where they might purchase land and were often deprived entirely from such an elementary right. The process was so difficult that few individual pioneers had the ability or the means to negotiate the difficulties. Only the national Zionist institutions had the financial resources, legal expertise, and connections to overcome obstacles and acquire land by oblique and often surreptitious means. Territory, once acquired, was held in reserve for the national movement in the name of a people rather than for individuals. Israelis typically “own” their property through long-term and renewable leases from the Israel Lands Authority or the Jewish National Fund. Hence, land is referred to as “Jewish” or “Arab” throughout historic Palestine.

The peculiar American emphasis on individual rights contributed to obstructing those who wished to pursue the public interest. By the end of the nineteenth century, reformers were forced to engage in an arduous process of employing the “police powers” in their effort to attain purposes defined as valuable for the common good. The classic text used at Harvard Law School, Charles M. Haar’s *Land-Use Planning; A Casebook on the Use, Misuse, and Re-use of Urban Land*, cites numerous instances rooted in this historical experience, and it has become the staple of law courses in land-use planning. The Boston City Council was prohibited from using municipal funds to assist owners in rehabilitation after a devastating fire in 1872; and landlords opposed “nuisance” legislation regarding types of construction, usage of buildings, pollution problems, dangers to public health, tenement codes, and zoning ordinances. Even during the Great Depression, the federal government was prohibited by private landowners from condemning land in Louisville, Kentucky, in one of the first instances of a federally-sponsored urban renewal project. In sum, the American legal tradition has typically favored agrarian yeoman even in urban settings, and has encouraged speculation in the name of individualism. While this tradition may have contributed to the rapid development of a continent, it also stood in the way of community interests and proved an obstacle to social improvements.¹⁴
TRANSPLANTING AMERICAN PRACTICE

Although, as we shall discuss below, some historians, social critics, and planners have criticized the social costs developing of the United States, others have tried to export American practices and values to Israel despite the understanding that they are rooted in unique historical circumstances.

Since agricultural conditions in Palestine were similar to those in many parts of the American West, the United States was an excellent source of expertise in rural development. American agricultural experts and engineers who had experience with irrigation and large-scale water control projects for arid or semi-arid zones had developed new technologies to make America’s deserts bloom. A corps of experts had transformed large sections of the West, particularly southern California, into fabulously successful oases and had gone on to advise in the reclamation of deserts from China to the Middle East. With this in mind, Louis Brandeis, as the leader of American Zionists, urged Chaim Weizmann, President of the World Zionist Organization (WZO), to invite American experts to Palestine with the onset of the British Mandate after World War I. ¹⁵ Over the next quarter century, a steady stream of American experts made their way to Palestine. They included H. T. Cory, a recognized authority in irrigation and water-power, who thought to transfer his experience on the Colorado River and the Imperial valley to the Jordan River and adjacent areas; Walter Clay Lowdermilk, an irrigation expert, who pressed for a Jordan Valley Authority (JVA) as a Palestinian equivalent to the New Deal’s Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA); and Elwood Mead, an agricultural specialist, who wanted to bring homesteading from the Middle West to the Middle East. Such experts were attempting to export, not only settlement technologies, but also the social and economic values underlying America’s development of its own frontiers.

The most far-ranging and radical advisory project to Palestine was Reports of the Experts (1928), which focused on agricultural settlement. Largely through the initiative of Brandeis and the leadership of the American branch of the WZO, a joint Anglo-American commission of professionals, most of whom were American, was sent to Palestine to study the changes in agricultural colonization. Their report was put forward as an American-oriented capitalist alternative to the socialist Labor Zionist conceptions of colonization championed by European-born Zionist experts. Proponents of the Reports of the Experts wanted to stem pressure from groups of colonists to adopt the kibbutz as the chosen instrument of Zionist settlement.
The commission’s chairman and leading figure was Dr. Elwood Mead, a former professor at the University of California and then Commissioner of Reclamation in the Department of the Interior in Washington, who had already conducted research on Palestine in 1923 at the behest of the WZO. His findings on the potential of the Yishuv [Jewish settlement in Palestine] were acclaimed, and Mead himself was touted before American audiences by Zionist leaders as “the best living authority on agricultural colonization.”

Most of the 1928 report is appropriately technical. It identifies good soils, assesses water resources, evaluates suitable crops, and suggests the kinds of modern technologies required to make farming not only possible, but profitable. The report also touches on Arab-Jewish tensions. Written prior to the eruption in 1929 of violent Arab protests against Zionist colonization and the consequent British White Papers that restricted Jewish immigration and land purchases, the authors are hopeful for relations to be sufficiently amicable to permit Jewish agriculture to expand.

The remainder of the report concerns the cultural, political, and economic problems of transforming European Jews into farmers. In the opening section of their study on Palestine, the experts evaluated a range of strategies from California and Germany to Australia that were designed to enable individuals to settle and remain on their own land. Their evaluation was based on a belief in private ownership. This was what had occurred in the United States, where agriculture proceeded on the ideal of independent homesteaders with title to their own farms. The American experts advocated a similar model for Jews in Palestine.

The commission’s proposals for Palestine derive from their analysis of what afflicted American agriculture. From the Greenbackers of the 1870s through the Populists and to the agricultural crisis of the 1920s, American farmers had sought technical, political, and economic assistance to enable them to remain on the land. It had been a losing struggle. The 1920 census officially announced that the United States was an urban nation and confirmed the diminishing proportions of Americans living on the land. The deteriorating situation in America gave urgency to the conviction that Palestine could and must be different.

Mead and his commission understood that it was a daunting challenge to achieve in Palestine what was difficult in the United States. In America, which began and expanded as an agricultural nation, the primary problem was holding people to the land. In Palestine, Jews had yet to become farmers. The American experts advised that instruction prior to and subse-
quent to emigration from Europe, as well as continuing education in Palestine, could compensate for technical ignorance. However, in their judgment, the most serious impediment to the success of Zionist colonization was cultural and ideological:

Another intangible, but serious difficulty, in the creation of a solvent Jewish agriculture, is the appeal this [agricultural settlement] movement makes to emotional people-poets, reformers, labor and social leaders, men with keen minds and lively imaginations, but lacking the rural traditions, practical experience and balanced judgment so necessary to success in farming. The tendency of people so equipped is to try experiments.  

Indeed, it was the tendency of Zionist farmers to engage in ideologically-motivated social experimentation that the American observers viewed as the most serious obstacle to widespread, private ownership. Thus, beyond the technical aspects of the report, the most important item on the agenda was to rebut the collectivist and socialist alternatives to an individualistic and capitalist agriculture. Drawing on the American experience, Mead and his associates advocated homesteading as the key to establishing an agricultural society in Palestine.

It is in this sense that the report may be read as a brief against the growing commitment of Zionist settlement authorities to the kibbutz. Mead’s report not only called for the transfer of agricultural expertise, but for the establishment of a free enterprise ethos. The American experts, who saw socialist colonization as both impractical and incompatible with American values, buttressed their report by citing alternative forms of colonization in the United States and elsewhere. They also searched the recent history of Palestine for examples and focused on the Templars, German religious societies that had settled in Palestine in the latter half of the nineteenth century and built flourishing villages based on private ownership of land. There were also a few independent Jewish farmers. One of them, a Mr. Broza, came to Palestine around 1890 and pioneered in the hill country outside Jerusalem.

That a Jewish farmer can, without outside help, overcome all local obstacles, acquire a farm and prosper in its cultivation in direct competition with Arabs, is shown by the case of Mr. Broza. . . . Mr Broza has prospered because he exercises all the faculties with which his race is so richly endowed. He is a worker, an organizer and a business man.

*Courtesy Fred Hulstrand History in Pictures Collection, NDIRS-NDSU, Fargo.*
The illustration is based on a picture of a sod house homestead near Milton, North Dakota around 1895. Like the Homestead Act commemorative stamp, the photograph captures the nuclear family in its isolation as a common experience in settling much of the American west. 

*Courtesy Fred Hultstrand History in Pictures Collection, NDIRS-NDSU, Fargo.*
The Zionist settlement experience is largely a collective one. The aerial photograph is of Nahalal, a cooperative settlement in the western section of the Jezreel valley. Designed in 1921 by Richard Kauffmann, a devotee of Ebenezer Howard and his “garden-city” concept, it differentiated the community in concentric circles defined by use. Communal services were located in the center. The dwellings of individual family units were in the next circle, and the fields were in the outer ring. Although this circular design was rare, it is typical of most Zionist agricultural settlements in that the community is divided into zones defined by function rather than fragmented into discrete and autonomous family sections.

*Courtesy of the Government Press Office.*
The dining hall at Kibbutz Ma’abarot illustrates the communal nature of kibbutz life. Meals were taken outside the domiciles of members. Around the tables are men and women, nearly all of whom would have been single at the founding of the kibbutz. Separate homes for members, with kitchens and dining facilities for accommodating the nuclear family, are a relatively recent phenomenon.

*Courtesy of the Government Press Office.*
Broza’s successful experience could be replicated, the experts argued, if Zionists only remained faithful to what had motivated colonizers in other places in the world: “As a rule, the governing motive in colonization is to build up a permanent and prosperous rural life with broad opportunities for qualified people of small means to become home owners.” Instead of adopting such a well-tried approach, the commission lamented, Zionist authorities were subordinating success in colonization “to the creation of a new economic and social order, with a strong antagonism to Capital.” The villain was the Histadrut, the Zionist labor union: “It is the view of the Commission that . . . the influence of the Jewish Federation of Labor is giving these colonies a character not in harmony with the ideals and aspirations of the Jewish race.”

The report mustered scientific arguments to support the vision of a Jewish homeland with independent farms owned by inherently bourgeois Jews, free of the taint of socialism. From the perspective of American agricultural experts, Palestine’s Jews could and must become Jeffersonian yeomen.

It is clear that Mead and his colleagues did not appreciate local conditions. Cooperative and collective models of settlement were preferred during the 1920s, in part because middle-class Jews were not coming to Palestine in sufficiently large numbers, and most of those who did come settled in Tel-Aviv and other cities. There were not enough potential Zionist homesteaders. In view of a growing lobby within the Zionist movement, particularly among colonists already in Palestine, the moshav and the kibbutz offered the best hope for insuring large-scale settlement of immigrants anxious to work the land: poor and idealistic young people prepared for physical hardship and self-sacrifice. Moreover, for political and security reasons, Zionism required strategically placed villages rather than individual farms spaced out, as in the United States, in an inexorable geometric grid over the landscape.

Rejecting the model derived from the American frontier, with which many were familiar from visits to the United States, local Zionist experts worked from an interpretation of the European experience. Although they valued American agricultural technology, they rejected the American rural settlement model. Spokesman for the Zionist model was Yitzhak Elazar-Volcani, who was Lithuanian-born and German-trained. He argued that Zionist colonization had more to learn from European agricultural society in the Middle Ages than from the United States in the modern period.

Volcani’s historical perspective was related to the dangers of mechanization. In his view, modern, mechanized agriculture led to a fundamentally undesirable and perhaps dangerous social, political, and economic order.
The use of machines generally required and fostered big farms, which Volcani viewed as vestiges of a feudal system dominated by large landowners. Moreover, the introduction of machines resulted in the displacement of rural populations, and this was precisely what Zionist colonizers were trying to avoid. In effect, farmers were impoverished so that large landowners could prosper. Volcani observed that “machines such as reapers, binders, threshing machines and elevators do not create, do not increase production; they simply help to economise in taking the place of manual labour, or in certain cases to make the labour itself easier and more agreeable.” The result, while maintaining production and increasing profits of the landholders, was to push agricultural laborers to the cities. In Palestine, that could mean an Arab-dominated countryside. Zionist planners had to place their people on the land and keep them there. This required training Zionist pioneers in scientific techniques and provide them with light and handy implements to increase productivity. If this were done, Volcani maintained, Palestine could support a relatively dense countryside of a labor-intensive, medieval agriculture with the productivity of modern farming. “From the point of view of the national economy,” Volcani argued, “a large farm, however well run and managed, is never to be recommended, as it would always bring in more [income] if it were divided into small farms . . . From the point of view of the national economy, national assets are wasted through large farms.”

Volcani considered his approach, so strangely anachronistic to a modern reader, as a pragmatic response to settling Palestine with Jews. It was from the national perspective that individualistic agriculture was rejected. Such considerations made homesteading a political and practical liability. Zionism’s frontiers required the kibbutz rather than the homestead.

**American Self-Criticism**

Americans also criticized how their frontier was settled, although for different reasons and purposes. Lewis Mumford, writing from the 1920s to the 1970s and urban historians writing since the 1960s have found fault with the urban frontier and have illustrated their views through comparative perspectives. They generally lament that non-Americans have been more successful in coping with urban problems. The assumption is that there are concepts and technologies that can be readily implemented, but that American political culture inhibits the adoption of useful strategies. The individualistic consequences of the frontier experience are contributing factors cited widely in assigning fault and explaining failure.

Mumford systematically argued this thesis in analyses that are manifestly comparative. From *The Story of Utopias* (1922) and *Sticks and Stones*
(1924) through *Technics and Civilization* (1934) and on to *The City in History* (1961) and *The Urban Prospect* (1968), there is a well-documented brief against the failures of the American urban civilization that evolved out of the individualistic traditions employed in settling the continent. In *Sticks and Stones*, for example, he writes of America’s Turnerian past as a heritage of “ruthless exploitation of the individual muckers and scavengers who hit the train west of the Alleghenies.” He also observes that “the pioneer inheritance” of exploitation has had destructive consequences for American society, its architecture, institutions, and mores. In the countless ways he develops and illustrates this theme in twenty books over nearly half a century, he identifies heroes and scapegoats, not only in America, but among a wide variety of peoples from the ancient world through the present. His choices for alternatives are played off against the failings of crass, materialistic American individualism.

In his review of American history Mumford finds a usable past in a founding moment that went wrong as Americans abandoned “Yankee communism” to venture forth to new frontiers. In his search for alternatives, he turns, like Volcani, to the Middle Ages. For Mumford, the medieval town was the preferred choice because of its corporate character. In certain respects, the medieval town had succeeded as no previous or subsequent culture. People were responsible for one another and generally happy. Even the “ghetto” was a positive environment because it was a neighborhood. Both instances avoided the disintegration and atomization associated with uncontrollable expansion. Rome, on the other hand, was a negative example. Its decline and dissolution were the inevitable consequence of unbridled expansion, an absence of control, unscrupulous exploitation, and materialism. For Mumford, the United States was the contemporary Rome.

These principles are already clearly articulated in *Sticks and Stones* in his description of the New England town during the first stages of colonization:

The Puritans knew and applied a principle that Plato had long ago pointed out in *The Republic*, namely, that an intelligent and socialized community will continue to grow only as long as it can remain a unit and keep to its common institutions. Beyond that point growth must cease, or the community will disintegrate and cease to be an organic thing... The advantage of the Puritan method of settlement comes out plainly when one contrasts it with the trader’s paradise of Manhattan...
Mumford also advocated his views in the classic film, *The City*, which appeared in 1938 under the sponsorship of the Museum of Modern Art and for which Aaron Copland wrote the score. The film graphically and movingly contrasts the early New England town with contemporary Manhattan. It begins by showing how people once lived in harmony with nature and with each other in a village; it goes on to depict how the capitalist-industrial city expanded to an inhuman scale and then suggests how modern technologies can contribute to decentralization and return people to the harmonies of life in small communities. Copland's music and the imaginative film editing constantly move the viewer from scenes of choking, smoke-filled Pittsburgh and the chaos of Manhattan's streets to prospects of the planned community of bucolic Radburn, New Jersey, which was championed as the contemporary equivalent of the New England town.\(^3\)

The dangers of materialistic individualism and the deterioration of community became central themes of American urban history as it developed during the 1960s. This perspective informs the work of Sam Bass Warner Jr., an influential figure who helped shape the field, for the time, a radical critique of American society. An avowed disciple of Mumford, Warner described in *Streetcar Suburbs* how speculators became enriched as they took advantage of the undirected expansion of the American city. An unfortunate byproduct was the fragmentation of American society, which impaired proper decision-making for the benefit of the common good. In subsequent studies he continued to attack the political culture that contributed to the entrenchment of individualistic values. Their titles reflect the object of his indictment: *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* and *The Urban Wilderness*.\(^3\)

It must be emphasized that, at the same time this literature was being created, more traditional scholars were still celebrating the role of individualism in developing America’s rural and urban frontiers. Daniel Boorstin, a latter-day Turnerian, finds in the individualistic ethic both creative energy and admirable political values. In the first volume of his prize-winning trilogy, *The Americans: The Colonial Experience*, Boorstin extols the Puritans for adjusting their society and principles under the rubric of a fundamental American value—“pragmatism.” In the second volume, *The Americans: The Democratic Experience*, he praises their successors, “The New Englanders,” for venturing beyond the town in their constant and successful search for commercial profit; he celebrates Americans who kept moving from place to place, thereby creating a “democracy of haste”; and he delights in anecdotes of boosters whose commitment to newly-founded towns and cities was
rooted in the quest for personal profit. Those who served and furthered growth and expansion become the heroes for post-Revolutionary America as the new nation expanded across the continent. In rhapsodic terms, he describes the role of individuals in abetting a process that contributed to shaping a unique, energetic, and variegated version of a democratic society.15

The Israeli experience in developing villages and cities on its frontiers could not have been more different. With independence and the de facto partition of Palestine in 1948, Zionism had finally achieved a sovereign state that had adequate land and the opportunity to develop it. There was to be no Israeli equivalent of the Northwest Ordinance or the Homestead Act. Instead, Israel opted for the National Master Plan of 1950, which was widely hailed as one of the best examples of post-World War II national planning.

Ann Louise Strong, an American expert, also considered the Israeli experience to be part of a larger international movement and compared it to the post-war planning in Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, and France. Her interest in all these case studies was to exhort Americans to imitation. Of all these cases, she concluded that Israel was in many ways the most important. She was particularly impressed by a scheme that created about 30 “development towns,” largely in frontier regions. This concept—the Israeli version of the new town, neustadt, villeneuve, novgorod, and novigrad—was realized throughout much of Europe.

Strong understood the role of a nation’s history in developing the values required for such a program. She compares the United States with Israel in terms that reflect the analyses of Mumford and Warner:

Israel’s people have many of the better attributes of our pioneers: optimism, vitality, courage, and strength. Their confident belief in their country and its future is reminiscent of a spirit we have lost. The analogy to an earlier America ends there. The Israelis are builders, not plunderers. . . . They have taken a barren and inhospitable, backward and lightly populated land and, with the resources of brains and money, have transformed it into a productive and, absent war, almost self-supporting economy for more than 2.5 million people. Israel has a national physical master plan and, under it, has shaped the settlement of people, the allocation of land to agriculture or development, and the management of scarce resources, particularly water. To an even greater extent than Great Britain (given their comparative population bases), Israel has built and populated a hierarchy of new towns . . . down to scores of farm villages. In the process, Israel has learned much about new town size and structure.16
For Strong, the success stories of Israeli planning featured alternative forms of urban settlements that were difficult to replicate in the United States. For other American observers, there was a discovery that the rural kibbutz had many redeeming characteristics from which Americans might learn.

Unlike Mead in the 1920s, some post-World War II Americans came to understand that there was much that was admirable in the kibbutz and in kibbutzniks, who came to represent the idealized Israeli in books and in films. The study of their way of life became a topic of academic interest, especially the processes by which children were prepared for life in democratic and egalitarian societies.

The social critic Paul Goodman and his architect brother, Percival, captured what became the new interpretation of the kibbutz in *Communitas* (1947): “The most perfect viable intentional community of modern times has been the kvutzah or kibbutz of the Zionists and Israelis.” They not only made the desert bloom, but created an idealistic and democratic society that resembled the New England Town Hall system. They found that its citizens were cultured and protective of individualism but still maintained a deep commitment to community together with a strong sense of national purpose.

Through the rest of the volume, which provides examples of planning from China and Russia to Western Europe and the United States, the Goodmans assumed that physical form and social organization are reflections of national cultures. They are keenly aware that what America was producing was deeply rooted in the country’s frontier experience. Mumford noted approvingly that *Communitas* is a “wise book” for it deals “with the underlying values and purposes, political and moral, on which planning of any sort must be based.” Following on Mumford, the Goodmans urged that modifications were required for contemporary society, and it behooved Americans to look elsewhere for possible models. In this context, Israel was identified as an attractive locus for investigation.  

**Israeli Self-Criticism**

While some Americans became critical of their individualistic inheritance, some Israelis have found fault with Zionist collectivism. Yaron Ezrahi’s recent *Rubber Bullets* (1997) is an excellent, recent example of a flood of writing that is critical of the national, group, and collective traditions in Israeli society and espouses their replacement with an explicitly American-inspired individualism. The attempt to enhance individualism, based on
what is perceived as an American model, can be found in many academic disciplines, including “critical” sociology, the “revisionist” history, “postmodern,” and “deconstructionist” critiques; in recent decisions in Israeli courts; in literature, theater, and film; in the movement to privatize government- or Histadrut-controlled companies and institutions; and, in the Americanization of the political system through the direct election of the Prime Minister, the head of Israel’s representative government. It is in this climate that Ezrahi attacked formerly sacred principles: “The primacy and the omnipresence of the community in the kibbutz and in the larger Israeli society seem to have inhibited the growth of individualism and the culture of the self, two aspects of democratic life that have been essential for the formation of assertive, competent, critical, and largely independent citizens in other Western countries.”

Roles and cultural heroes are now thoroughly confused. Americans express favor with the kibbutz and its culture. Israelis wish to escape its limiting and confining character. Indeed, Ezrahi found stifling the very qualities others may find attractive, particularly nurture of group solidarity and responsibility. Even the architecture of Israeli cities, especially in the development towns, does not allow for enough private space. Life is too intimate, and interactions are too intense. In an extraordinarily graphic image, Ezrahi wrote that “Israeli cemeteries are in fact an illuminating iconography of the poverty of Israeli individualism.” Gravestones and headstones are so close to one another “that one’s experience of mourning is almost inescapably social.” In one metaphor after another, he expressed a search for private space and individualistic expression. Throughout, he extolled America as the model of the ideal society that had made possible the realization of individualism and democracy. In urging Israelis to escape their collectivist past, he offered the goal of an American version of an individualistic civil society rather than the Israeli ethnic nation-state.

This quest for change is readily apparent in the way in which Israelis are now contemplating their future. A significant illustration is Israel’s second national master plan—Israel 2020. It is an extraordinarily ambitious, systematic analysis of Israel in the twenty-first century. Since 1993, when the first projections were published, more than 250 professionals from a wide variety of academic disciplines as well as professionals and public officials have produced more than 200 overviews, scenarios, and specific plans. The urgency behind this remarkable effort is that Israel (with the exclusion of the lightly populated Negev and Galilee) is already the fifth most densely populated country in the world after Singapore, Malta, Bangladesh, and Bahrain, and it could become the most densely populated by
2020. At the same time, Israel’s rapidly expanding, high value-added, and increasingly hi-tech economy is pushing per capita wealth to the levels of Western European countries.39

These prospects require careful reevaluation of the relationship between the state and its citizens with regard to the limited amount of land that is still available. New political and objective circumstances make such a reevaluation possible. Clearly, the traditional patterns of directed and centralized planning, where individual needs are necessarily subservient to the requirements of the nation, can change. The prospect that the Arab-Israeli conflict may be resolved encourages thinking about the future as if Israel were a “normal” country.40 Access to land is a prime index of how far Israel can move to a non-ethnic, civil society.

Increasing numbers of Jewish Israelis have come to view the prohibition of transfers of land on the basis of nationality or religion as conflicting with the rights of individuals; i.e., non-Jewish citizens. Such conflicts have become issues of public debate and legal suits. In particular, the claims of Israel’s Arabs for equal access to the lands of the “Jewish State” can now be raised with great power and effect. As a recent editorial in Ha’Aretz (Israel’s equivalent of the New York Times) noted:

After fifty years of statehood, can there be a moral justification for designating lands exclusively to Jews while consciously discriminating against Arab citizens of the state who suffer from severe housing problems? Are concepts such as “the conquest” [kibboq] of the land or “the redemption” [geulah] of the land or the “Judaization” [yehood] of the land, which were of significance in the period prior to independence, still valid in a state that pretends to equality in its relations with its citizens?41

The policy of the Supreme Court, under the leadership of the liberal Chief Justice Aharon Barak, has been to have the different sides work out a solution on their own. While citizens’ rights groups may find this lamentable, the court prefers not to intervene in such a sensitive and defining issue. It is probable that in a previous period the court would not have hesitated to favor security and national interests in quashing appeals to individual rights. The court’s reluctance stems from a more recent sensitivity to the need to balance individual rights with the state’s obligation to defend collective Jewish interests. American legal theory has clearly affected Israeli judicial thought in this and in a host of other issues concerned with civil liberties. Now that the possibility of peaceful coexistence with Arab neighbors has somewhat allayed security concerns, the state is under in-
creasing pressure to acknowledge the rights of individual citizens without reference to the community with which they are associated. It is an indication of Israel redefining itself with the attributes of an American-inspired civil society.  

The weight given to ecological issues in planning debates is yet another area of tension. What once passed for ecology was only nature preservation. This coincided with a romantic nationalism that sought to rediscover the country as it had been in the ancient world. Generations of Israeli youth have hiked the country becoming intimately familiar with the natural and historic treasures present in the landscape. This satisfied the need of Zionism to encourage an essentially immigrant population to become reacquainted with their ancient homeland and to nurture a sense of collective rootedness in it.

As in other countries that have undergone rapid development and engaged in the pursuit of a higher standard of living, much of Israel’s natural environment has also been abused. The search for wealth and the needs of industry place enormous demands on the scarce resources of a small country. The ten-fold increase in Palestine’s population over this past century has also resulted in growing competition between industrial and residential needs and between both of those with the need to preserve the country’s landscape. Struggles are also looming over choices of means of transportation and land-usage. So, too, there are debates over whether to encourage private-home ownership through suburban development or to maintain land reserves by allowing for greater urban densities. Still other points of dispute concern the disposition of Israel’s very limited littoral areas and the few remaining vacant interior lands. The terms of dispute in these and a host of other issues emphasize the public’s needs versus the private interest. The challenge by individual citizens and NGOs against the “official” version of the public good is a new phenomenon. In all of these, the American experience is an important point of reference for rallying opposition to official policies. This represents a significant departure from acquiescence to planning by a centralized bureaucracy that has been trusted to determine the best interests of a nation under siege.

The efflorescence of issues and parties to controversy are reminiscent of debates in the United States and other modern societies. This, too, reflects a new stage in Zionist planning. The erosion of exceptionalism, particularly the salience of state-building and national security in shaping policy, is clearly part of this trend. Many contemporary Israeli planners, even without the benefit of outside experts such as Mead and his colleagues, have now become convinced of the imperative of replicating American
methods and values. Nevertheless, it is likely that in Israeli society the claims of individualism will continue to compete with the need to preserve and protect a collective heritage and peoplehood. The terms of the debate will most likely continue to invoke approval or criticism of the American example.

The foregoing sketches of the history of comparisons and interactions concerning assumptions about pioneering, frontiers, land management, and the conflicting claims of the individual and the community suggest one way in which a transnational history between the United States and Israel may be conducted. It is not surprising that Israelis became interested in the principal center in the modern world. Americans and American ideas can be found nearly everywhere in the contemporary period. Citizens of small and ambitious states are particularly receptive to the example and influence of great and powerful ones. Moreover, the extraordinary range, energy, and creativity of American scholarship provide a powerful attraction to those in a relatively limited society. Living in a small country is a constant inducement to engage in transnational history.

Moreover, even when Americans fail to penetrate and transform other societies, there is much that can be learned about America precisely because of the inability to apply its experience elsewhere. “Failure” to export itself or to be exported by its foreign proponents may serve to highlight distinctions between the United States and other societies. Transnational history, like a pane of glass, can be a window and a mirror simultaneously. One may look beyond one’s own society to notice what is common, and through the recognition of commonalities, also perceive what is genuinely unique. It can also reveal how ideas and values pass from one culture to another. As such, transnational perspectives enable discovery and reflection that even the most detailed but exclusively internal examination cannot provide.

NOTES

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1. For an analysis on the state, purposes, and practices of transnational history in topics that are relevant to this paper, see Louis Hartz, The Founding of New
Transnational perspectives are more frequent in those social sciences that tend to work with models that are applied to various societies. Explicit and systematic comparative studies of Israeli society have been largely the province of political scientists such as Michael N. Barnett (ed), *Israel in Comparative Perspective: Challenging the Conventional Wisdom* (Albany, NY, 1996); Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies, Weak States* (Princeton, NJ, 1988); Ian Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands* (Ithaca, NY, 1993).


antebellum New York reformer John Griscom through Lawrence Veiller, Woodrow Wilson, and Robert Moses. Any list of English observers would have to include Edwin Chadwick in the 1830s and 1840s and Lord Bryce at the end of the century. By the beginning of the twentieth century, perhaps the most visible way in which mutual inspection is institutionalized is through the social exhibits of world fairs and in international congresses. See Evan Luard (ed), *The Evolution of International Organization* (London, 1966). The most important recent study that explicitly identifies itself as transnational history is Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA, 1998).


6. It is important to note that the collective impetus was also nationalistic. Indeed, it favored the nation over the individual, as well as varieties of group organization, whether socialistic or communistic. For a systematic exposition of this point, see Ze’ev Sternhell, *Founding Myths of Israel: National Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State*, transl. David Maisel (Princeton, NJ, 1998).


A short review of Zionist pioneering from the perspective of a pioneer and statesman is found in David Ben-Gurion, *Like Stars and Dust: Essays from Israel’s Government Year Book* (Jerusalem, 1997) 411–76. For a comparison between the Zionist and American concepts of pioneer, see Henry Near, *Frontiersmen and Halutzim* (Haifa, 1987).


Haar, *Land-Use Planning*. For an earlier but still valuable discussion of the relative powers and responsibilities of the individual as opposed to the state, see Ernst Freund, *The Police Power, Public Policy, and Constitutional Rights* (Chicago, IL, 1904).

16. Elwood Mead *et al.*, *Reports of the Experts submitted to the Joint Palestine Survey Commission* (Boston, MA, 1928) 15–15. In addition to Mead, the commission members were Dr. J. G. Lipman, Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station of the New Jersey College of Agriculture, Mr. A. T. Strayhorn, soil technologist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Professor Frank Adams, an irrigation specialist at the University of California, Mr. Knowles Ryerson, an American serving in the Agricultural Experiment Station in Haiti, and Mr. C. Q. Henriques, Irrigation Engineer of the Zionist Organization in Palestine. For an appreciation of Mead, and the value of his comparison of Palestine with California by the leading Zionist official responsible for colonization, see Arthur Ruppin, “The Economic Development of Palestine,” *The Zionist Review*, 8 (May 1924) 9–10.


21. The problem of injecting a minority settler population into a host society that was also potentially hostile was recognized by Zionist settlement authorities in the decade prior to World War I. The model that was uppermost in their minds was the German attempt to settle colonists among the largely Polish inhabitants in the region around Posen. See Derek Penslar, *Zionism and Technocracy: The Engineering of Jewish Settlement in Palestine*, 1870–1918 (Bloomington, IN, 1991) esp. 41–110; Shalom Reichman and Schlomo Hasson, “A Cross-Cultural Diffusion of Colonization: From Posen to Palestine,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 74 (1984) 57–70.


24. By the 1930s, the kibbutz emerged as the favored form of colonization among Zionist planners. Only in the decade after the establishment of the state, when a national army could take responsibility for defending the borders of Jewish territory and it proved difficult to recruit new members, did the kibbutz decline as an instrument of colonization. On the strategic purposes of the kibbutz, see Elhanan Orren, *Hiyashvat haShnot Ma’avak: Astrapegis Tishuvit Bitetem Midina* [Settlement and Struggles; the Pre-state Strategy of Settlement] (Jerusalem, 1978) [Hebrew]; Troen, “Spearheads of the Zionist Frontier.”

27. Ibid., 18.
29. Ibid., 16–17.
38. Ibid., 40.
39. Most of the findings and reports of the project have not yet been translated. For a selection of items that have been published as of the writing of this paper, see Adam Mazor et al., “Afterword,” in *Yisrael 2020: Tochnit Av liYisrael baShnot ha’Alpayim* [Israel 2020: Master Plan for Israel in the 21 Century; Summary Report] (Haifa, 1997) 197–219 [Hebrew]. See also “Population of Israel: 5,940 million people,” *Tedi’ot Akharonot*, 29 April 1998 [Hebrew].
politi’im l’Yisrael baShnot haAlpayim” [Security perspectives and geopolitical scenarios for Israel after 2000], in *Yisrael 2020*, v2 (Haifa, 1993) Sec. 3 [Hebrew].


42. For extended analysis of changes in the Israeli legal system, particularly during the Barak incumbency as Chief Justice, see the special section on “Law and the Transformation of Israeli Society,” in *Israel Studies*, 3(2) (1998). See also Lahav, *Judgment in Jerusalem*.

43. Yoram Bar-Gal, *Moledet vGeografiya bMe’ah Shnot chinuch Zion* [Moledey and Geography in Hundred Years of Zionist Education (Tel-Aviv, 1993)] [Hebrew]; Ruth Firer, *Sochnim shel baChinuch* [The Agents of Zionist Education] (Tel-Aviv, 1985) [Hebrew].
