

Michael Baris

**Reflections on a Mirror: Conceptualizing Land  
Registration in Jewish and Israeli Law**

Property law – particularly that pertaining to land – lies between opposing conceptual poles. On the one hand, property represents various dimensions of the direct bond between owner and land including: control, usage, dwelling – even status and heritage. On the other hand, ownership of land can be viewed as a purely social construct, whereby society withdraws from its claims to space on the earth. This latter idea is the key to understanding the public dimension of real property and the transfer of ownership rights in land, as a facet of social epistemology: land that society perceives as belonging to an individual is what constitutes the individual's right per se. Both Jewish and Israeli legal systems have, at times, attempted to reduce the transfer of ownership rights in land to epistemic terms. Jewish law refers to a seemingly mythic stage of land transfer through public ceremony, involving children as guardians of the public memory. Contemporary Israeli law perfected the Torrens system of land registration, which in its pure form strives to reduce land property rights to public record – jettisoning rights in equity, that might obfuscate the metaphoric polished mirror of the land registry. What might seem at first to be a rabbinic misreading of Israeli law is revealed as a conceptual precursor of ensuing legal change. Both systems ultimately abandoned these attempts, thus shifting their conceptualizations from the pole of social epistemology to that of the individual's bond with the land.