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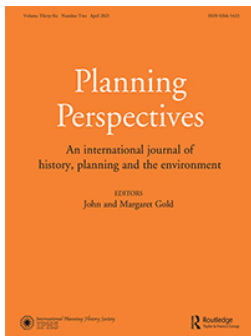
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The community settlement: a neo-rural territorial tool

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ABSTRACT

The Israeli Community Settlements are small-scale non-agricultural villages that consist of a limited number of families and a homogenous character. This method began to be used by the Israeli government and its different planning agencies during the 1970s as a tool to strengthen the state's territorial and demographical control over the Israeli internal frontiers of the Galilee, the West-Bank and along the Green-Line. Unlike earlier settlement methods that relied on ideological values such as labour, agriculture, redemption, identity and integration, as part of the nation-building years, the Community Settlements promoted a more individual and neo-rural lifestyle. In this paper I ask to show how the Community Settlements formed the new leading tool for a national agenda, in correspondence with the changing ideals in Israeli culture, moving from a quasi-socialist society into a market-driven neoliberal one. Later, suburbanising the neo-rural phenomenon.


KEYWORDS

Neo-rurality; neoliberalism; Israel/Palestine; Community Settlement; frontiers; suburbanisation; rural gentrification

Introduction

Neo-rurality is a post-industrial phenomenon that includes the immigration of middle-class and upper-middle-class city dwellers to rural areas. Fuelled by different incentives, such as the despair from urban centres or the renaissance of the countryside, it took variant manifestations. In most cases, however, this included the transformation of the rural built environment in order to adapt to the lifestyle sought by the newly arriving ex-urban settlers.¹ The rural, therefore, became an experience consumed by the migrating city dwellers.²

Rurality, in the Israeli context, was an integral part of the nation-building process. The early agricultural settlements of the *Kibbutzim* and *Moshavim* of the pre-state years, though being a relatively small portion of the local Jewish population, formed the ideological backbone of the leading Labour Zionist ideology. Focusing on the image of the pioneer, these rural settlements were not only a territorial tool of land redemption but also an educational one, intended to lead to the formation of a new and healthy nation, which is connected to its historic land and therefore its past.³ With the changes in Israeli society, economy and culture, the old pioneer ideology gave way to a pioneer experience, which was later replaced by an emphasis on better living standards.

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¹Chevalier, "Neo-rural phenomena," 175–91; Phillips, "Rural Gentrification and the Processes of Class Colonisation," 123–40; Smith and Phillips, "Socio-cultural representations of greentified Pennine rurality," 457–69; Joyce and Coombes, "In Search of Counterurbanisation," 433–46.

²Hines, "In pursuit of experience," 285–308.

³Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory*, 289; Shapira, *New Jews Old Jews*, 74–155.

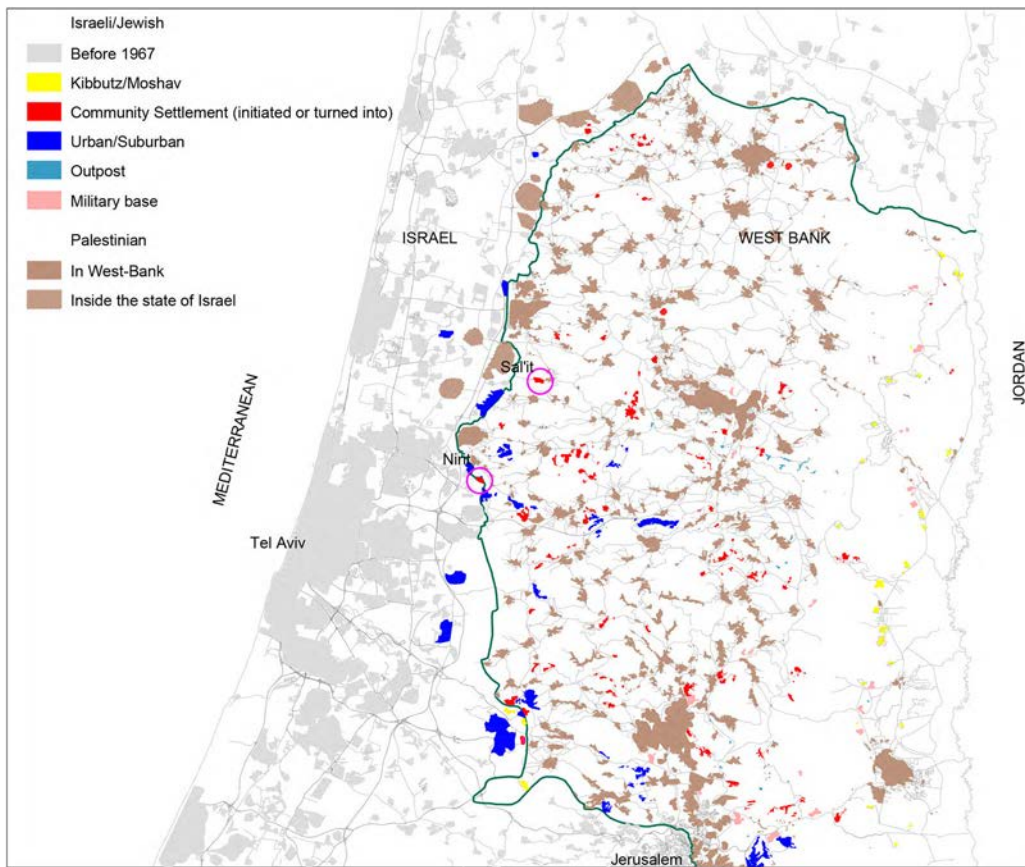


Figure 1. Location of Salit and Nirit and other Community Settlements along the Green Line and in the West Bank (illustrated by the author on a 2015 map from B'Tselem).

The paper shows how the Community Settlements of the 1970s emerged as a neo-rural experience, serving individuals and families seeking a different lifestyle. To do so, this paper illustrates its implementation along the border area with the occupied West Bank - the Green-Line. Focusing on the cases of Sal'it and Nirit (Figure 1), this paper shows how the increasing national suburbanisation process eventually began taking over the Community Settlements, and what began as an attempt to provide an alternative to urban centres ultimately turned into a mere extension of them. Moreover, this paper illustrates how neo-rurality was manifested in the spatial features of the Community Settlements, and how these transformed with their eventual Suburban turn, corresponding with the changes in the local space production mechanisms.

The neo-rural experience

There are individual men and women, and there are families ... There is no such thing as society
Margaret Thatcher⁴

⁴Thatcher, *Margaret Thatcher's Interview on Women's Own*, 29.

The migration of post-industrial middle class from cities to the countryside is referred to as a general process of 'rurbanisation'.⁵ This process, which emerged during the 1960s and 1970s, was characterised by a transformation in the patterns of population distribution, that included an increase in rural settlements at the expense of urban ones.⁶ Categorised by several scholars as *rural gentrification*,⁷ it is much more complex than a simple replacement of local low-income community by a new higher income one.⁸ *Neo-rurality*, however, refers also to the new ways of life city dwellers moving to rural areas were seeking to adopt or develop. Whether they were working-class groups looking to escape the hardship of urban centres or others that sought to adopt a peasant-like or an artisan-like lifestyle.⁹

Neo-rurality is not always mere suburbanisation but could also be part of a counter-urban process. Most groups of people moving away from urban centres are usually interested in improving their current living standards while searching for a more tranquil way of life. In *Suburbia* the emphasis is on being away from the city's disadvantages while yet being close enough to all of its advantages. In counter-urban examples of neo-rurality, the emphasis is on the remoteness from the entire urban system.¹⁰ Meaning that the rural idylls are enhanced by the distance from the city. Therefore, though it is sometimes hard to draw the line between both phenomena, counter-urbanisation and suburbanisation are not synonyms, but rather two different manifestations of rural gentrification and neo-rurality.¹¹ As an expression of post-industrial, which focuses on the production and consumption of experiences, neo-rurality is supposed to supply a new authentic experience, unlike the un-authentic everyday life of the city.¹² Neo-rurality is thus an experience that is based on a relaxed and pleasant life in affinity to nature and landscape, which is further enhanced by the 'sense of community' and social empowerment.¹³

The search for a sense of community was not unique to the neo-rural phenomenon but rather part of the larger neoliberal context. The decline of the welfare state and the rise of the neoliberal order in the 1970s did not only challenge the economic system, but also the concept of a society.¹⁴ With the liquidation of the welfare state the tie between the individuals and society was weakened, forcing them to seek alternative or compensatory systems, often found in smaller, more homogenous groups,¹⁵ that offered a sense of security and belonging.¹⁶ Accordingly, Hobsbawm would claim that this led to a greater focus to create smaller fragmented *Gemeinschafts* (communities), in contrary to a single unified *Gesellschaft* (society), as seen in separatism, identity politics, sectarianism and neo-nationalism.¹⁷ Not surprisingly, Margaret Thatcher, one of the leading figures of neoliberalism, undermined the concept of a society.¹⁸ The neo-rural experience, could thus be understood as an attempt of the post-industrial individual to escape the un-authentic context of the urban *Gesellschaft*, looking for a small-scale and authentic rural *Gemeinschaft*. Therefore, the Israeli Community Settlements, with their emphases on landscape and community life,

⁵Chevalier, "Neo-rural phenomena," 176.

⁶Guimond and Simard, "Gentrification and neo-rural populations in the Québec countryside," 449–64.

⁷Ibid., 449; Smith and Philips, "Socio-cultural representations of greentified Pennine rurality," 457; Hines, "In pursuit of experience," 287.

⁸Guimond and Simard, "Gentrification and neo-rural populations in the Québec countryside"; Rose, "Rethinking gentrification," 47–74.

⁹Halliday and Coombes, "In Search of Counterurbanisation," 433–46; Chevalier, "Neo-rural phenomena."

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Guimond and Simard, "Gentrification and neo-rural populations in the Québec countryside."

¹²Liechty, *Suitably Modern Making Middle-Class Culture in a New Consumer Society*, 16–7; MacCannell, *The Tourist*, 21; Hines, "In pursuit of experience."

¹³Ibid., 296.

¹⁴Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 23; Graeber, *Debt*, 377.

¹⁵Filc, *Hegemony and Populism in Israel*, 17; Gutwein, "The Settlements and the Relationship between Privatization and the Occupation," 21–33; Gutwein, *On Settlements and Thatcherism* - <https://www.ha-makom.co.il/post/gutwein-thatcher-settlers>

¹⁶Bauman, *Community Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*.

¹⁷Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*; Hobsbawm, "Globalisation, Democracy and Terrorism," 93.

¹⁸Gutwein, "The Settlements and the Relationship between Privatization and the Occupation," 21–33.

constitute an example of this neo-rural experience. At the same time, they also illustrate how neo-rurality is able to eventually become suburban, forming a mere extension of the urban context it was meant to oppose.

The Israeli rural experience

The early Zionist settlement mechanism in Palestine during the pre-statehood years, focused mainly on small-scale groups, usually from a similar origin and a shared ideological background. These groups would be assigned lands from one of the National Institutions, like the Jewish Agency (JA) or the Jewish National Fund (JNF), where they would be able to establish their own settlement. Though most Jews in Palestine at that time lived in the urban centres of Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem, this was still the leading force of the Practical Zionist approach, which asked to promote the foundation of a Jewish homeland, through active land acquisition and settlement actions.¹⁹ This led to the birth of the known *Kibbutzim* and *Moshavim*, which relied on an ideological community but as an integral part of a greater national process.

The establishment of the state in 1948 led to the nation-building years of the 1950s, where the government's main interest was to create a unified Israeli society. The state's '*melting pot*' assimilation policy asked to turn the numerous Jewish communities arriving from Europe, Asia, North Africa or the Americas, into a homogenous nation. Though the early rural settlements remained the ideal role models, the scale was significantly different. Ben Gurion, the Israeli prime minister, claimed that the newly coming Jewish immigrants are '*not yet a nation, but rather a horde of human dust lacking a language, education, roots and a national vision*'. Therefore, he asked to use the new state institutions, like the education system and the mandatory joint military service, in order to turn '*this human dust into a cultural, creative, independent and visionary nation*'.²⁰ Through what Foucault would call the '*disciplinary institutions*',²¹ Ben Gurion wanted to create '*a nation*', which embodies the transformation of various *Gemeinschafts* into one *Gesellschaft*.

The local urban planning mechanism fully cooperated with this vision.²² The abundance of previously Palestinian lands and vacated towns and villages that became state-owned following the 1948 war, together with mass confiscations, created an empty slate that supported the new state's territorial agenda.²³ The state, and later the newly established Israel Land Administration (ILA), which managed all state-owned lands, ran two complementary systems of urban and rural development, meant to disperse the newly coming Jewish immigrants along the state's new borders while providing them with the needed habitation, education and occupation possibilities. This, as described by Architect Arie Sharon, the chief state planner at that time, would '*expedite their integration into one organic and productive unit*',²⁴ while ensuring the state's territorial control.²⁵ Though the main emphasis was on new development towns, industry and infrastructure, the ILA, in a joint effort with the JNF and JA, continued to initiate new rural *Kibbutzim* and *Moshavim* along the state's

¹⁹Kimmerling, *Zionism and territory*; Portugali, "Jewish Settlement in the Occupied Territories Israel Settlement Structure and the Palestinians," 26–53; Shachar, "Reshaping the map of Israel," 209–18; Schwake, "The Americanisation of Israeli Housing Practices"; Schwake, "Settle and Rule".

²⁰Ben Gurion, *Unification and Calling - On Israel's security*, 129.

²¹Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 139.

²²Yiftachel, "From Sharon to Sharon," 71–103; Efrat, "Changes in Israel's Urban System after Forty Years of Statehood," 19–26; Efrat, *The Israeli Project*.

²³Abu Kishk, "Arab Land and Israeli Policy," 24–135; Khalidi, *All That Remains*, xvii; Abreek-Zubeidat and Ben-Arie, "To be at home," 205–26; Schwake, "Post-Traumatic Urbanism".

²⁴Sharon, *Physical Planning in Israel*, 4.

²⁵Ibid.

new borders.²⁶ These followed the pre-state models and were meant to assimilate the Jewish immigrants into the local rural culture.²⁷

During the 1970s Israel witnessed significant changes. In 1967, Israel occupied the Palestinian West Bank while the local economy began going through a series of liberalisation and privatisation processes.²⁸ These changes were enhanced with the election of the first right-wing and officially not socialist government in 1977, which intensified the privatisation and increased the state's territorial project. Simultaneously, smaller *Gemeinschafts* began emerging, as alternative welfare systems serving the different religious or national groups, which is expressed in the growing identity politics seen in the abundance of sectorial parties and organisations.²⁹ The Israeli typology of Community Settlement, which was used to enhance the state's territorial control, was an outcome of the liberalisation of the local economy and the search for an authentic rural experience.³⁰ Thus, functioning as a neo-rural territorial tool.

The Community Settlement

By the 1970s, the aura and economic rationale of agriculture had declined significantly. In the liberalising Israel, the old ideology of Labour or Socialist Zionism, that sought to promote the renaissance of the Jewish nation in its historic homeland by physically returning to it and cultivating it, was less relevant.³¹ The concept of a Community Settlement emerged in the different Israeli planning administrations and agencies in the mid-1970s. It was first mentioned in a report of the Movement for New Urban Settlement of 1975, which represented six Jewish settlements in the West Bank that wanted to develop a new framework that differed from the traditional Moshav or Kibbutz.³² This report, which was endorsed by the Ministry of Agriculture proposed focusing the settlement's inner structure on the community life while promoting a more flexible economic framework than the cooperative rural settlements.³³ The unity in this new model was not in the joint aspects of labour or production, but rather in the societal aspect of creating a homogeneous group interested in living together. Consequently, one of the main features of the Community Settlements were its relative small sizes, 250–500 families, and the central role of the admission committee, which made sure that the settling core would have common characteristics, promoting a 'closed society' that functions better than the 'larger' and 'open' one.³⁴ Therefore, this new mode was essentially a *gemeinschaft*-oriented framework, expressing the desire of middle-class families to look for 'quality of life' in 'gated localities' while being 'protected from undesirables'³⁵ of the greater *gesellschaft*. This report was endorsed by the Ministry of Agriculture (MA), the JA and the Settlement Division of the World Zionist Organisation (WZO), which embraced these exclusionary criteria and promoted them as a means to attract well-established families to areas of national interests.³⁶

Though being non-agricultural, the Community Settlements did mimic the previous rural models. The reliance on an association and the division into households, together with the emphasis on

²⁶Yiftachel, "The Internal Frontiers," 493–508.

²⁷Troen, "Frontier Myths and Their Applications in America and Israel," 1209–30.

²⁸Filc, *Hegemony and Populism in Israel*; Ram, *The Globalization of Israel*.

²⁹Gutwein, "The Settlements and the Relationship between Privatization and the Occupation."

³⁰Handel, et al., "Wine-washing," 1351–67; Yacobi and Tzfadia, "Neo-settler colonialism," 1–19.

³¹Segev, *Elvis in Jerusalem*; Ram, *The globalization of Israel*; Schwake, "Settle and Rule".

³²Movement for New Urban Settlements (HaTnua LeHityashvut Ironit HaDasha), *The Community Settlement*, 1.

³³Appelbaum and Neuman, *Between Village and Suburb*, 14–33.

³⁴Movement for New Urban Settlement, *The Community Settlement*, 2.

³⁵Yiftachel, "Bedouin-Arabs and the Israeli Settler State," 27; Allegra, "The politics of suburbia," 503.

³⁶Settlement Division, *The community settlement*, 1–3.

community life, all deriving from the former forms of the *Moshavim* and *Kibbutzim*, were meant to enable the Community Settlement to produce the experience of a rural lifestyle, without having to physically engage in agricultural work. Not by chance, the development of Community Settlements was carried out by the same institutions that were in charge of the former cooperative rural settlements, such as the JNF, the JA and the MA, and they were usually planned by the JA's rural settlement unit. Continuing the former apparatus, these institutions, now with the newly established Settlement Division, which was separated from the JA Settlement Department and focused on the occupied territories, encouraged small-scale groups, often with a common ideological background, to form an initial settling core for a future settlement.³⁷ By promoting these homogenous communities, the planning officials sought to attract middle-class families, that were seeking better living standards, or ones with a strong ideological adherence that asked to move out of the city.³⁸ Furthermore, the small-scale enabled the simultaneous development of dozens of new sites, in a relatively short period, unlike the time period that would have been needed for a new system of cities, towns and villages.³⁹ The Community Settlements thus answered two main demands: that of the government to create a bigger Jewish presence in areas with an Arab majority, and that of the different groups that sought to adopt a new lifestyle by moving to a gated community in an ex-urban context.⁴⁰

Consequently, as the Israeli governments asked to create new demographic realities in the 'internal frontiers'⁴¹ of the predominantly Arab Galilee,⁴² or the occupied Golan and the West-Bank, in a short period of time, Community Settlements, with their potential for better living standards, became the main settlement method.⁴³ Thus, in the privatising and liberalising Israel of the end of the 1970s, to continue its territorial project, the state had to rely on the creation of small communities, seeking to close themselves off the greater society.⁴⁴

The West Bank and the Green-Line area

Occupied in 1967 from Jordan and never officially annexed to Israel, the West-Bank remained an Occupied Territory. Though there were several settlements developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they concentrated in the border area with Jordan and in former Jewish areas that were lost during the 1948 war, like Etzion bloc and Hebron.⁴⁵ This changed in the mid-1970s with the emergence of the religious settlement movement of *Gush-Emunim* (the Believers bloc), that though being a grassroots movement, had a strong influence on the Israeli government. This influenced increased with the 1977 political turnover that brought to the formation of the first official right-wing and economic liberal government, where the radicalising national religious party, played a major role.⁴⁶

The Community Settlement model was an integral part of the West-Bank Project.⁴⁷ In the settlement plan for the West-Bank that Gush-Emunim submitted to the MA, they mentioned

³⁷Yiftachel, "Bedouin-Arabs and the Israeli Settler State."

³⁸Settlement Division, *Master plan for settlement development in Judea and Samaria*, 2.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Rosen and Razin, "Enclosed residential neighborhoods in Israel," 2895–913; "The Rise of Gated Communities in Israel," 1702–22.

⁴¹Yiftachel, "The Internal Frontiers," 1

⁴²Falah, "Israeli 'Judaization' Policy in Galilee," 69–85; Soffer, "Mitzpim in the Galilee," 24–9.

⁴³Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape*; Yacobi and Tzfadia, "Neo-settler colonialism and the re-formation of territory"; Weizman, *Hollow Land*.

⁴⁴Handel, "Gated/gating community," 504–17.

⁴⁵Portugali, "Jewish Settlement in the Occupied Territories Israel Settlement Structure and the Palestinians."

⁴⁶Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape*.

⁴⁷Newman, "Gush Emunim and settlement-type in the West Bank," 33–7.

several reasons for preferring the Community Settlement method. First was the lack of agriculture possibilities in the West-Bank, as the suitable areas for farming were cultivated by Palestinians. Furthermore, unlike cities, the construction of these settlements needed a significantly shorter period of time. Moreover, they highlighted the need for homogenous communities to attract families to the area.⁴⁸ Though the Gush-Emunim plan was not officially accepted by the state, it did influence later plans like the Master Plan for Settlement Development in Judea and Samaria (also known as the 'Droble Plan'), issued by the Settlement Division in 1978, and the '100.000 plan' of 1981.⁴⁹

While addressing national territorial interests, the lifestyle and experience discourse was not absent from these three plans. They all mentioned the need for a small size group to generate high living standards in their own way of life. The Gush Emunim plan called for the creation of 'closed societies' as promoters of 'vivid communal life' where 'the individual's participation is willingly and consciously'.⁵⁰ The Droble plan stated that 'In order to create a widespread of settlements that would consist of high living standards, it is suggested that the settlements in Judea and Samaria would be constructed as Community Settlements'.⁵¹ In the 100.000 plan, Community Settlements were mentioned once again as a tool to create 'special social qualities', that would attract potential settlers.⁵²

Almost forty years later, the same values are still visible in the commercial for the expansion of Shavei Shomron:

*Shavei Shomron is a religious settlement established in 1977 close to the remains of the biblical city of Shomron. Today, the village has 180 families and attracts many young people ... Shavei Shomron has educational institutions for all ages, many community services, a swimming pool and more.*⁵³

Initially, the qualities of the Community Settlement were not based on a suburban commuters' community, but rather on an ex-urban lifestyle. As explained by Droble, the majority would work inside the settlement, focusing on handcraft, small-scale industry, tourism and leisure, while only a small portion would work outside the community.⁵⁴ Therefore, the Community Settlement offered the sought post-industrial artisan or quasi peasant experience that was based on a neo-rural and pioneer-like lifestyle. By the mid-1980s, the Settlement Division decided that this model is suitable for more ideological settlers, in the depth of the West-Bank, designating the area along the Green-Line for urban and suburban typologies.⁵⁵ Subsequently, the fringes of the West Bank went through an intense suburbanisation process, which relied on private corporate-led and real estate oriented development of commuter-based residential environments that were significantly larger, and did not originate from an initial settling core.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, before the suburban turn in the mid-1980s, the state did promote the establishment of neo-rural Community Settlements in the area, those include Shilat, Shaked, Reihan, Kfar Ruth, Kfar-Matityahu, Hinanit, Nirit and Sal'it. Though all initially were built as counter-urban settlements, they too were incorporated into the growing suburban enterprise. Correspondingly, beyond the emphasis on the communal life, the 2018 commercial for Shavei Shomron also states that 'The settlement is located

⁴⁸Gush Emunim, *Proposal for Settlement in Judea and Samaria*.

⁴⁹Settlement Division, *The 100.000 Plan*.

⁵⁰Gush Emunim, *Proposal for Settlement in Judea and Samaria*, A3.

⁵¹Settlement Division, *Master plan for settlement development in Judea and Samaria*, 2.

⁵²Settlement Division, *The 100.000 Plan*.

⁵³Go Yosh, *Living in Judea and Samaria*.

⁵⁴Settlement Division, *Master plan for settlement development in Judea and Samaria*, 11.

⁵⁵Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape*, JA and WZO, *Nahal Eron Project*.

⁵⁶Allegra, "The politics of suburbia"; Yacobi and Tzfadia, "Neo-settler colonialism."

about 30 min from Netanya and 25 min from Kfar Sava';⁵⁷ highlighting its proximity to the Israel coastal plain.

As of 2018, the majority of more than 400.000 Israeli settlers in the West-Bank do not live in Community Settlements and are mostly concentrated in cities and towns like Beitar Illit, Modi'in Illit or Ariel.⁵⁸ In matters of numbers of points on the map and territorial sequence on both sides of the Green Line, the Community Settlements proved to be the leading and most efficient method, that changed the existing reality of the West-Bank, limiting the possibilities of future territorial compromises. This paper focuses on two of them.

Sal'it

Sal'it was first formed as an outpost in 1977, a couple of kilometres eastern to the Green-Line, officially in the occupied Palestinian Territories. It first emerged as a military settlement, inhabited by soldiers from the *Nahal* corps. This practice of a *Nahal* settlement was quite common in developing frontier areas, and it usually consisted of preliminary a military outpost that after a certain period was turned into a civilian settlement, whether by a group of former *Nahal* soldiers, or from another political settling movement.⁵⁹ As a preliminary outpost, the *Nahal* settlement of Sal'it consisted of five prefabricated buildings that were used as barracks and as a communal kitchen and dining area. Arranged in a U-shaped form, and positioned at the highest typographical point, they created a defensible inner courtyard suitable for a military base, which the soldiers used for informal and formal activities.

In 1979 the *Nahal* soldiers were replaced by a civilian settling group. The sight of Sal'it was promised by the Settlement Division to the settlement movement of *Herut Beitar*, which was part of the right-wing *Herut* party (and later Likud). Unable to find a suitable group in time, Matityahu Drobles, head of the Settlement Division and the former head of *Herut Beitar* settlement mechanism, approached the *B'nai Brith* organisation, which had already organised a settling group and was looking for a fitting location. This group, referred to in Hebrew as a *Gar'in* (kernel or nucleus), consisted of 16 young urban couples that were interested in leaving the city and adopting a new rural way of living.⁶⁰ As members of the politically neutral *B'nai Brith*, the group was not focused on strengthening the Jewish presence in the West Bank per se, and were thinking of allocated to other ex-urban regions. At the same time, the offer of the Settlement Division was too attractive to refuse, as the group was not sure whether there will be another possible site in the near future. As the site was reserved for *Herut Beitar*, the group had to officially join the right-wing movement. At the same time, the military, which occupied the outpost for almost two years, was not interested in maintaining its position and declared that it would leave the outpost by the end of 1979. The Settlement Division, afraid of losing this foothold, pressured the group to replace the soldiers and to inhabit their barracks in a temporary manner while the planning process, infrastructure works, and construction were underway.⁶¹

Already before the arrival of the civilian settlers, the Settlement Department began drafting the first plans. These were done before the settling group was chosen and followed similar former planning procedures run by the JA. Though officially under the responsibility of the Settlement Division

⁵⁷Go Yosh, *Living in Judea and Samaria*.

⁵⁸CBS, *Localities in Israel*.

⁵⁹Douer, *Our Sickle is Our Sword*; Davar, "The three settlements," 2.

⁶⁰Gilboa, *Interview in Salit* [Interview]; Eitan, *The construction of Kockav Yair* [Interview].

⁶¹Ibid.



Figure 2. Sal'it Outline Plan, 1977. Settlement Division. Rural Unit (Central Zionist Archives).

due to its location in the West Bank, the planning process was done by the planners and architects of the Settlement Department's rural unit.⁶² Correspondingly, the planners gave Sal'it the form of a *Moshav Ovdim*, a rural settlement made out of private family households with a cooperative system of purchasing supplies and marketing of produced goods. Accordingly, they turned the former military post on the hilltop into the new centre while spreading from it a system of inner dead-end streets with adjacent private households along it. This 'star shape' model indeed resembled the common form of a rural moshav, however, in the case of Sal'it, the presence of agricultural fields and other means of production was clearly absent and reserved only to the north-western entrance (Figure 2). Additionally, the Ministry of Agriculture recognised Sal'it as a Community Settlement, and therefore was not willing to develop any local agricultural uses.⁶³ Together with the restricted options due to the rocky and sloppy terrain, this limited the future agricultural options and the formation of family farming parcels. This emphasises that though the initial idea was that Sal'it would take the shape of a rural settlement, yet rely on other forms of employment; thus, becoming a neo-rural settlement.

In the first year, the initial 16 ex-city-dwelling families continued to live in the former barracks. In the meantime, they began taking agricultural vocational training to adjust to their new peasant-like lifestyle.⁶⁴ In December of 1980 the Ministry of Construction and Housing (MCH), supplied the first permanent housing units. They were pre-casted concrete units assembled on site, which the MCH used in other Community Settlements in the West-Bank and even in its project in the Sinai Peninsula.⁶⁵ The houses consisted of two 36m² cubes, that were placed one attached to the other, with a minor setback, creating an L-shaped form, leading to a larger joint area between every two neighbouring units. According to several of the first settlers, they were able to convince the MCH to improve the common model, and to turn it into a split-level unit with a division between the bedrooms and the living room area.⁶⁶ To enhance the rural appearance of the pre-fabricated

⁶²Settlement Department, *Outline plan for Sal'it*; Settlement Department, *Sal'it, Conceptual Plan*

⁶³Sal'it Council, *Letter to Deputy Minister Michael Dekel*, 1.

⁶⁴Gilboa, *Interview in Salit*; Eitan, *The construction of Kockav Yair*; Aigen, *35 Years to Sal'it* [film].

⁶⁵Ashtrom, 2015 *Milestones*.

⁶⁶Gilboa, *Interview in Salit*.



Figure 3. Construction of Houses and Greenhouses in Sal'it, 1980. (35 Years for Sal'it, 2014 – photographed by Smadar Gilboa).

houses, they were covered by a sloping red roof, giving it the shape of an ideal countryside cottage (Figure 3).

The greater plan for Sal'it was partially fulfilled. The first houses formed the northern part of the larger plan of the settlement. Unlike the initial idea of creating an alignment of private households, the first setting was much more *gemeinschaft*-oriented and followed the 'compound model' of units sharing a collective open space that lacked any parcellation. Slowly, Sal'it began admitting new members and expanding, however, this was done in a significantly slow manner. Each new family would be admitted only following a trial period of one year residing in the former barracks, and after passing the settlements admission committee. This meant that only one or two new families could join each year. The slow admission process was reinforced with the frontier location of Sal'it at that time, which still meant a significantly long car-ride from main urban centres and a guarding duty. Therefore, Sal'it of the 1980s was still an ex-urban frontier settlement with a small community, limited accessibility, and quite spartan conditions which included interrupted water and electricity supply.⁶⁷

Sal'it's definition as a Community Settlement was not merely a technical or formal procedure, as it had consequences on its budget and the assignment and development of means of production by the MA. Though some initial agricultural industries were developed in Sal'it, they were insufficient, limiting the local employment options. In a letter from the Sal'it secretariat to the Jewish Agency in 1984, they protested their treatment as '*any other community settlement*', regarding the term '*community settlement*' as a derogatory one.⁶⁸ Yet, as the local means of production were not provided, Sal'it began losing its already limited rural character, and the majority of its families soon left their new agricultural profession and sought other employment, though not yet cities due to the undeveloped infrastructure.⁶⁹ Consequently, Sal'it, remained remote, small and still counter urban.

With the slow expansion of Sal'it, its original plan was gradually fulfilled. By the end of the 1980s, the development of the regional infrastructure and the rise in the demand for the area, exposed Sal'it to a larger group of potential members.⁷⁰ The admission process was not revoked, yet the settlement was now open also for families interested in improving their living standards while staying within the context of the greater metropolitan region. Furthermore, newly built houses were no longer the spartan prefabricated dwelling units, but rather larger and much more exclusive villas, designed and

⁶⁷Aigen, *35 Years to Sal'it*.

⁶⁸Ilan, *Letter to the Jewish Agency*, 1.

⁶⁹Gilboa, *Interview in Sal'it*.

⁷⁰Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape*.

constructed according to the needs and demands of the new families moving into them. Sal'it began transforming from a frontier settlement into an exclusive community of commuters. With the ongoing expansion, the southern arms of the planned 'star model' were steadily forming, developing a more private household-based layout. Moreover, the former setting of the houses, which created shared entrance areas, was replaced by single entrances and a greater emphasis in the inner arrangement of the private houses on the secluded family area.⁷¹

In the early 1990s, the infrastructural development around the Green-Line enabled the further development of Sal'it. Governmental investments in the expansion of roads and highways connected the settlement in the areas to the greater Tel-Aviv metropolitan. Consequently, this led to rising interests from families seeking a suburban lifestyle, which led to the settlement's significant expansion during the late 1990s. The Settlement Division, interested in expanding Sal'it commissioned a private architect and planner to draft a new plan for the settlement. The new plan consisted of an array of private parcels along an access road, intended for self-construction. The plan for a new Build Your Own House (BYOH) neighbourhood, was meant to attract families in search of expressing their own needs in a customised home of their own.⁷² Thus, replacing the focus on the *gemeinschaft* to a focus on the individual.

After a slight setback, the suburban potential was fulfilled during the second decade of the 2000s. The violent clashes of the Second Intifada (2000–2005) depicted the area as a frontier region once more,⁷³ which caused a significant decrease in demand. This was enhanced by a local construction recession that halted development projects nation-wide.⁷⁴ However, the housing crises of 2010 with the sharp increase in real estate prices⁷⁵ resulted in a greater effort to expand the areas of demand and to develop peripheral areas like Sal'it.⁷⁶ Moreover, the construction of the West-Bank Separation Barrier in 2006, which blocked the settlement from the neighbouring Palestinian environment, and though *de jure* it was still in the occupied West-Bank, *de facto* it was in Israel. Left on the 'Israeli' side of the barrier, cleansed Sal'it from its West-Bank affiliation, enlarging the number of potential families interested in moving to it. Sal'it thus became an attractive piece of real estate, and after completing the planned expansion from 1999 in a ten-year delay, the Settlement Division initiated a new expansion neighbourhood which it handed to a single private entrepreneur that would develop the site, build the houses, and market the units to the new arriving families.⁷⁷ The new distinctly suburban features of Sal'it are perhaps best expressed in the promotion of its extension neighbourhood

Figure 4:

In the heart of the country, next to Highway 6, lies the expansion of Sal'it, which overlooks an open panoramic view in all directions. The expansion ... consists of quality families who have chosen to join the quality community.⁷⁸

Sal'it, as depicted in the mentioned commercial, has all the virtues of an ideal Suburbia. It has a good affinity to nature and landscape, high living standards and a strong community. Most important, Sal'it is located near the crucial highway system, enabling it to be close to nature but not too far from the city. Not surprisingly, the current population of the settlement is in the top 10% of all Israeli

⁷¹Samaria regional construction committee, Permit 852/84; Permit-8/3/0/1; 8/52; 8/55; 8/68; Permit- 8/77; 852/84; 8/1.

⁷²Ravid Architects, *Outline Plan 112/1/2*.

⁷³Levi-Barzilai, "A house with an attached garden and tank," 18–21.

⁷⁴CBS, *Construction Beginnings and Ends*.

⁷⁵Israel Tax Authority. *Israel Tax Authority Real Estate Information Portal*.

⁷⁶Charney, "Supertanker" Against Bureaucracy," 1223–43.

⁷⁷Ravid Architects, *Outline Plan 112/3*, 1.

⁷⁸Ampa Israel, *Ampa Israel Website*.

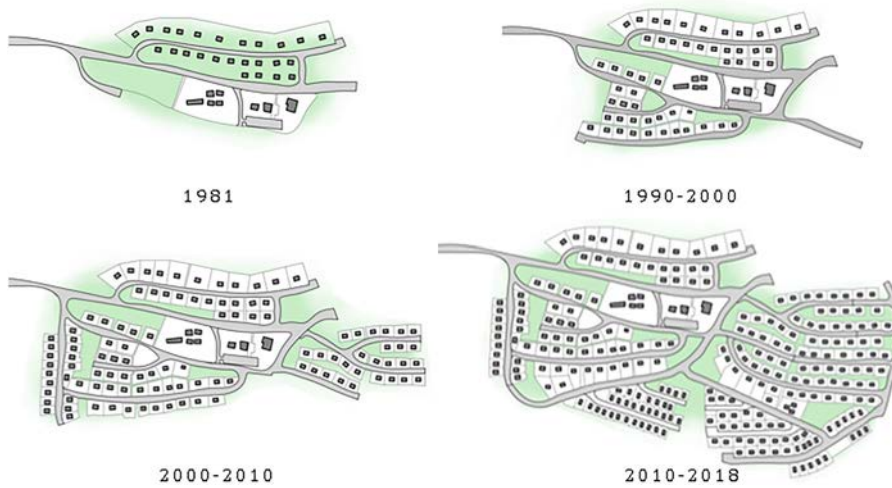


Figure 4. Sal'it along the years (illustrated by the author).

localities (in the West-Bank and Israel) regarding socio-economic standards.⁷⁹ At the same time, the first families still maintain a separate agricultural council, which has minimal responsibilities as the settlement is run by the general communal council; yet, this functions mainly in order to express the difference between the counter-urban 'pioneer' veteran families, and the new suburban ones. In an interview, one of the first members claimed that *'we came here because we wanted a rural village, we wanted to leave our urban life'*. Later, while talking about a neighbouring family he stated that *'they, they came from the city, but they're ok, they came here long ago'*.⁸⁰ Using the terms *'we'* and *'they'*, the member distinguished between the two different motives of settlement. Yet, as the family has been living there for a long time, they were able to become part of the restricted small community.

Sal'it, is a classic case of neo-territoriality. The state asked to use the neo-rural aspirations of the first families in order to settle this specific area and they were able to create their own rural-like frontier community. Eventually, with the suburban turn, it was transformed into an exclusive settlement, attracting investors, developers and entrepreneurs. The built environment of Sal'it transformed according to the different stages of development. While the first neo-rural phase was a mass standardised mode of production that consisted of small-scale repetitive prefabricated units sharing a common open space, the suburban phases emphasised self-expression and consisted of customised houses built in an array of private parcels. This later gave way to the single-developer model, that turned the self-customisation into mass-commodification. Thus, leading to a residential environment made out of the same repetitive and reproduced housing units, promoted as a means for better living standards.

Nirit

Nirit began as an initiative of the *Moshavim* movement and the Agricultural Centre, two main representatives of the rural sector regarding settlement issues. It started as an attempt to answer the demand of young couples from the Moshavim in the area by providing the option of a Moshav-like

⁷⁹ICBS, *Socio-economic index value*.

⁸⁰Member of Sal'it, [Interview].

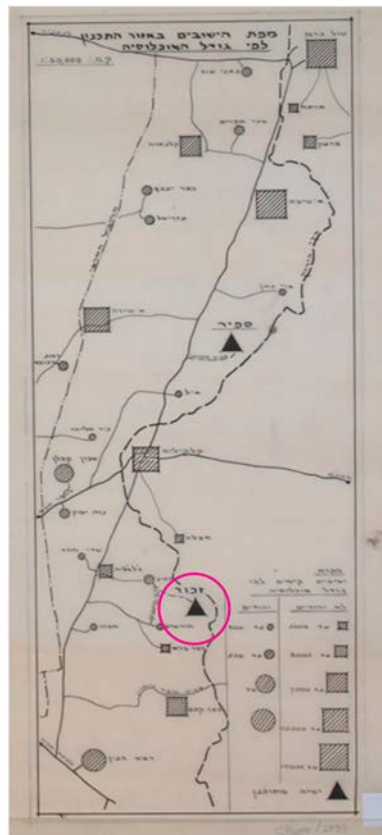


Figure 5. Site of Nirit in a map for new settlement sites. The Settlement Department of the Jewish Agency (Central Zionist Archives).

living, though with no agricultural functions. It was defined as a '*landless village*'⁸¹, and later as a Community Settlement.⁸²

The site of Nirit was already mentioned in the plans of the Settlement Division for developing settlements along the Green-Line, in order to strengthen Israeli control in the area (Figure 5). The site was named *Mitzpe Zchor*, due to the nearby ruins of a former Palestinian village by the same name. Located western to the Green-Line, in official Israeli territory, and on state-owned land, it was under the responsibility of the Jewish Agency and the Settlement Department.⁸³ This also made it an attractive option for members of the Agriculture Centre and the Moshavim movement, which were relatively less keen to settle inside the West Bank.

The planning of Nirit was handled by the Settlement Department rural unit. The unit's planners initially began with mapping the precise state-owned parcels and then drafted the layout of the first temporary phase.⁸⁴ Respectively, Nirit's development followed the common trajectory of a Moshav, which included a first temporary outpost phase that consisted of a small number of families, a Gar'in,

⁸¹Davar, "First experiment in Eastern Sharon," 7.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Levav, "JNF to establish 3 more points in the triangle areas," 4.

⁸⁴Settlement Department, *State Land Survey*, 1; Settlement Department, *Mitzpe Yarhiv*, 1.



Figure 6. First Houses in Nirit, 1982 (Nirit Council).

that would hold and safeguard the site while the preparation works and the search for new members were underway. Located on state-owned lands, inside the official borders of the state made the temporary outpost phase redundant, yet, it gave the entire process the sought pioneer-like aspect. The plans for the temporary phase were *gemeinschaft*-oriented resembling the typical ‘compound model’ and consisted of minimalistic dwelling units sharing a communal open space, a public area and a peripheral service road.

The initial *Gar’in* of Nirit was formed from young couples from Moshavim in the Sharon area. They consisted of 15 families that were organised by the Agricultural Centre, which settled the site in 1981, living in prefabricated asbestos shacks, provided by the Jewish Agency (Figure 6). Meanwhile, the Moshavim Movement began searching for new members that would form the 80 families in the first development phase and 200 in the final one. The Moshavim Movement launched a call for families interested to join. First, the search was in the Moshavim of the Sharon area, but due to low response it expanded to Moshavim in other places and eventually even outside of the Moshavim Movement.⁸⁵ In 1985, 85 families were admitted to the settling group, from which more than half were from cities and towns that sought a more rural lifestyle. Each joining family had to go through a selection process handled by the Agricultural Centre, in order to make sure they fit the needed rural profile.⁸⁶

While recruitment was underway, the Settlement Department continued with the plans for Nirit. As a ‘*landless*’ Moshav, the proposed layout of Nirit resembled a typical rural settlement, just lacking family farming parcels and any other agricultural functions. The planners of the rural units did attempt and designate an area for small industrial and agricultural uses, however, they eventually had to revoke this attempt and focus on housing, mainly due to lack of lands and the need to preserve the forests in the area.⁸⁷ Preserving some spatial concepts of a Moshav, Nirit had a clear public core, which was the initial outpost, and besides the temporary dwelling units, it included the settlement’s main public functions. This core was also Nirit’s main focal point, as its suggested ‘star model’ layout consisted of smaller streets spreading from a main central area. Therefore, though the eventual goal

⁸⁵Glick, *Nirit: labour pain*, 21.

⁸⁶Dor, *Development of Nirit* [Interview].

⁸⁷Planning Administration, *Meeting regarding Nirit Outline Plan*, 2.

was to create detached private parcels, the *gemeinschaft* aspect was still a crucial issue in the planning process.

The transition from the temporary outpost to the first permanent houses took almost ten years. This was mainly due to the construction method the Moshavim Movement and the Agriculture Centre chose to conduct. On one hand, they were not interested in an entire settlement made out of the same repetitive model, while on the other, enforcing a BYOH method meant a long and expensive process, which the young couples moving to Nirit wouldn't have been able to sustain. Therefore, the Agricultural Centre contacted two architects, Azmnaov and Sofer, which already had built themselves a reputation for designing private family houses in the area.⁸⁸ The architects were asked to propose three different models each, producing a pool of six possible variants each family was able to choose from. Every model had a full and a partial option, according to the families' needs and abilities, as well as a possibility to add a basement for additional costs. The Agricultural Centre together with the communal council of Nirit, was then in charge of contacting the needed developers and managing the construction process. Each family had to pay the ILA a subsidised fee for the cost of the parcel, the infrastructure development costs for the MCH, and the council for the construction of their own dwelling unit.⁸⁹ In the meantime, though most members of Nirit lived outside the settlement, it functioned as a community in exile, with organised meetings and trips, and even an on-site guarding duty each member had to fulfil on a monthly bases.⁹⁰

The transition period suffered from several disputes in the community and repeated bankruptcies of the developers engaged in Nirit.⁹¹ The main disagreements were regarding the needed payments for development costs and the components of settlements' development, with several members advocating for a cheaper process while others supporting improved pavements and other infrastructure works. These disputes were eventually handled by the Agricultural Centre that took the mandate from the existing council.⁹² The construction of the houses, however, was a long process that witnessed the change of several contractors. Finally, after not being able to find a proper developer for all houses together, the Agricultural Centre forwarded the responsibility to each family, instructing it to find a contractor on its own that will complete the construction process.⁹³ This concluded in a long process that lasted much longer than expected.⁹⁴

The first of the permanent houses were finished in the summer of 1989, and almost all families moved in by the end of the year. Made out of different variations prepared by two architects that followed the same design concepts they were relatively similar, consisting of two-story white cubes covered by a sloping red roof. Thus, forming a hybrid version of standardised customisation. With some the house reaching almost 300m², and the long disputes over construction costs and the attempt of Agricultural Centre to manage Nirit as an organised Buyers' Club, it is possible to claim the transition from counter-urban to suburban began already before completing the first phase. Still, Nirit was not yet fully suburban, as it still suffered from a lack of proper connection to the cities of the coastal plain, disrupted supply of electricity and proper development of local facilities.⁹⁵

Nonetheless, the suburban turn was underway, manifested in two additional expansions. One in the form of two cul de sacs, with 42 additional houses built in the same models as the first permanent

⁸⁸Sofer, *Nirit* [Interview].

⁸⁹Dor, *Development of Nirit*.

⁹⁰Nirit Council, *Guarding Duty in Nirit*, 1.

⁹¹Eter, "Houses with no permits, sewage with no way out," 8.

⁹²Dor, *Development of Nirit*.

⁹³Glick, "The price of cheap construction," 5.

⁹⁴Sofer, *Nirit* Savion.

⁹⁵Dor, *Development of Nirit*.

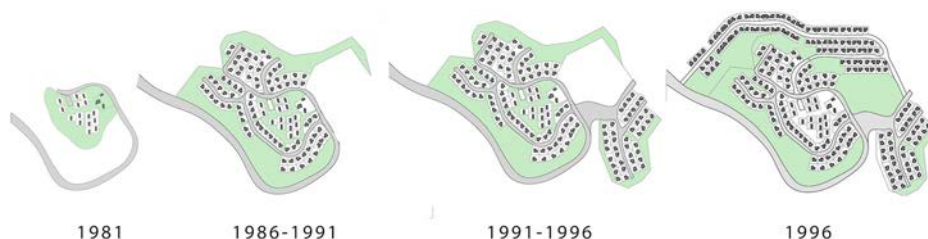


Figure 7. Nirit along the years (illustrated by the author).

ones,⁹⁶ and a second neighbourhood in the mid-1990s, which consisted of 97 further units.⁹⁷ Moreover, unlike the first phase, which still had some families from the Moshavim, these two phases consisted mainly out of urban ones.⁹⁸ Furthermore, while the second phase was part of the initial plan of Nirit, the third phase was basically a winding access road that surrounded the settlement, designed to produce as many private parcels as possible. Besides, while the first two phases were made out of the same housing models, the third phase was built in BYOH model; thus, contributing to the suburban image of self-expression. At the same time, almost half of the units were built by a single developer that constructed the houses and sold them to the newly admitted members.⁹⁹ Therefore, Nirit was going through the same commodification process as in Sal'it, which followed the earlier ones of standardisation and customisation [Figure 7](#).

Promoted by the JA and handled by the Agricultural Centre, yet with no agricultural uses, turned Nirit into a combination of territorial, and neo-rural interests. The settlement followed this neo-territorial combination, and this initially resulted in the creation of a secluded frontier outpost. Yet, its location, as well as its commuting population, eventually turned it into a suburban community. Between 2000 and 2018 housing prices in Nirit were doubled,¹⁰⁰ turning it into an attractive real estate. The admission committee, which is still valid, ensures that the new members are entitled to become part of the community; retaining the settlement's secluded character and promoting the exclusiveness of its houses.

In 2010, when a new residential complex adjacent to Nirit, but on the other side of the Green-Line was underway, the community council asked to prevent its construction, fearing that a connection to a West-Bank settlement would hinder their reputation and character.¹⁰¹ As the objection was rejected the private developers of the new neighbourhood, would use the proximity to Nirit as the main marketing tool, promising future buyers a quality of life in the midst of nature.¹⁰² The Green-Line was thus the limit of the neo-territorial project in the eyes of Nirit, yet not for the state.

Conclusions

The national logic behind the development of the neo-rural Community Settlement model was very clear. Being it in the Galilee, in the depth of the West-Bank or along the Green-Line, the different Israeli governments asked to strengthen their control in a given area by offering families the

⁹⁶Settlement Department, *Nirit -Community Settlement*, 1.

⁹⁷Settlement Department, *Outline Plan -Nirit*, 1.

⁹⁸Dor, *Development of Nirit*.

⁹⁹Drom HaSharon regional construction committee, *Permit-98281*.

¹⁰⁰Israeli Tax Authority.

¹⁰¹Israeli High Court of Justice, *Decision: 10309/06*.

¹⁰²Glick, "Nadlan Website."

opportunity of communal life and a rural experience. Here, Sal'it and Nirit created an Israeli territorial sequence that ultimately enabled the construction of the West-Bank separation barrier eastern to the Green-Line, *de-facto* incorporating the lands between them into the greater Israeli context.

Initially, the focus was on families interested in changing their way of living while leaving the city and adopting a new rural lifestyle. The neo-rurality of the late 1970s and early 1980s was therefore much more counter-urban than suburban. Still, with the expansion of Israeli suburbia, it eventually integrated the counter-urban settlements, turning them into an extension of the urban lifestyle they were supposed to form an alternative to. Nonetheless, the ability of a settlement to become part of suburbia, dependent on the development of the needed infrastructure that would enable the commuting lifestyle. Therefore, the transition from counter-urban to suburban was done gradually over the years.

This transition was not merely conceptual, as it was manifested in the materialisation of the settlements. While the counter-urban phases consisted of standardised units sharing a communal setting, the suburban turn started a larger emphasis on the private household and the need for self-expression. This, however, concluded in attracting larger numbers, which enabled corporate-led construction, that homogenised the built environment once again, this time due to its commodification.

Though the essence of the Israeli neo-rural experience changed from counter-urban to suburban, it remained part of the different governments' and settling bodies' attempts to use the growing demand for homogenous and gated rural communities for the national mission of territorial control. With the decrease in the pioneer aspect of the neo-rural experience, quality of life, and later also entrepreneurial interests began taking the lead. Thus, the early pioneer Labour Zionism, which concentrated on redeeming the land of Israel by cultivating it, gave way to a new Real Estate Zionism, that asked to redeem the land of Israel by commodifying it. Accordingly, the focus shifted from *gesellschafts* to *gemeinschafts*, and then to individual detached parcels. Or as explained by Thatcher, '*There is no such thing as society*', just individual men and women, their families, and the houses they live in.

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