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### Suburban Realities: The Israeli Case

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**Tamar Berger,**  
**"Suburban Realities: The Israeli Case"**  
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Thematic Issue **Materiality and the Time of the Present in Israeli Culture**  
Ed. Oded Nir and Ari Ofengenden  
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**Abstract:** In her article "Suburban Realities: The Israeli Case" Tamar Berger discusses the nature of the new building in Israel in the last 3-4 decades. Israel, she claims, has been going through a process of massive suburbanization, which is drastically changing the face of the country. Some of the features of the new space are similar to those of other places, globally, but it has its particularity, the result of both the local spatial history and the nature of Israeli society. Suburbs in general are hard to define. Still, a set of typical features of the Israeli suburbs can be noted: they are decentralized-centralized spaces; Typically, they are spaces of the middle classes; They rely heavily on the car and in fact cars determine to a great extent the morphology of these spaces; and "stage value" is particularly present in them, leading to a sterilization of the political.

**Tamar BERGER**

## **Suburban Realities: The Israeli Case**

### **Introduction**

Once concluded and published a project no longer belongs to its owners, who must behave like the "good-enough mother," and let it go. But since parental responsibility never ends completely I now return to my recently performed research into Israel's new in-between suburban space, *Autotopia*, to redefine and add some later thoughts to it.

The story set out here is highly nuanced and multidimensional but is ultimately a narrative of class, the middle-class, in all its breadth, and of the depoliticization as is recounted here. Depoliticization tends to be a hazardous affair, and in the Israeli case it is tangibly and extremely so.

As the discussion unfolds, it clarifies the use made here of the terms *suburb* and *suburbanization*, not the one that first comes to mind – single-family detached homes, out of town, identical in appearance, found in the west (principally North America, Australia, and Europe), in the postcolonial space (Asia and Africa), and in Latin America, and to different degrees almost world-wide. In Israel those terms comprise, as I show later, different forms of construction and various locations, sometimes intra-urban, and most importantly, it is discussed in its particular context.

Over the past three and a half decades, Israel has undergone an intensive suburbanization process that has markedly changed its appearance. In fact, the present paper deals primarily with recent construction in Israel which started in the 1980s. In many aspects, it resembles global processes, though it also has local particular features, resulting both from local spatial history and Israeli society's nature.

Following a presentation of the state of suburbia in Israel I focus on two aspects of that space: the suburban *topos* and the question of urbanity, as well as the relationship between the aesthetic and the political embodied in it. The discussion of the *topos* and urbanity engages critically with dystopic presentations of the suburbs, and proposes instead a clear-eyed perception, chiefly consisting of an attempt to characterize the specific way of life there without lamenting lost urbanity. My argument is that the suburban phenomenon should be explored from within, and that such an exploration elicits that it is a distinct way of life and to the extent that it is problematic, no solution will result from its re-urbanization. The discussion of the relationship between the aesthetic and political aims to elucidate how much suburbia relies on image, and how that fact is linked with the depoliticization unfolding there.

The research which this paper draws on has two poles. First the various theoretical, conceptual, and historiographic discussions of suburbs and suburbanization, and the social, economic, and cultural phenomena deemed relevant to it. Its foundations are also phenomenological, of the kind deriving from the phenomenon itself, observing and experiencing it, spending time there, and documenting it (descriptions had a special status in the original project). At the point where the two poles converge and create reciprocal clarification and reformulation, I believe the key lies to observing and researching phenomena in the physical space and its reliable interpretation.<sup>1</sup>

The present study is not comparative, and its findings are restricted to the Israeli case. Still, some use was made here of the theorizations of suburbs and the suburbanization process, and of the general urbanistic study, in contexts where I felt it could help in understanding the case.

### **Definition**

Any attempt to accurately define suburbia tends to fail. It is not by chance that a wide-ranging body of discussion exists on various aspects of suburbia and suburbanization – planning, architectural, administrative, environmental, social, political, and aesthetic – particularly in the western context, alongside a rather limited discussion of the phenomenon's definition. And it is no coincidence that suburbia is not an official form of settlement – not in the USA, where it is very prevalent, neither in Australia where it predominates, nor in Israel.

Formerly the suburbs were broadly defined as urban areas on the margins of metropolitan regions. Yet distinctive forms of suburbia are equally found in non-metropolitan regions and more importantly, a new form of living emerged, neither urban (in terms of congestion, mixed usage, and population mix) nor non-urban but a form in itself, whether it still retains an affinity with the city or no longer does so. Those are places that can be defined as in-between, post-urban spaces, both in the sense that they are located between clear existing forms and in that they extend across the space.

This paper cannot, therefore, offer a "litmus test" definition of the phenomenon, but rather an approximate one, based on findings obtained through observations in concrete suburban space, that

<sup>1</sup> See also [tamarberger.com](http://tamarberger.com) for articles and essays (in Hebrew) on the theme of space.

were later processed. In the Israeli context, they are neighbourhoods built since the 1980s, both single-family detached houses and saturated construction, on city outskirts or at some distance from metropolises, places that sometimes have a certain affinity with cities although they are not totally dependent on them, places of the middle-class and fundamentally family-oriented places with specific lifestyles.

Among the most prominent differences discernible in the suburban space, at least in the phenomenon's broad definition in the Israeli context, are those between single-family neighborhoods and multi-story neighborhoods on the edges of cities and towns. The formal difference between them seems substantial, and the decision to link them under the heading of suburbia lies in the similarity of both forms' deep structure, which has morphological, socioeconomic, and ideological aspects. We can thus indicate a way of life embodying a certain relationship between residence and occupation, trade and leisure – one of separation – and the space thus created, which is simultaneously centralized and decentralized. The suburban space is both rhizomatic, that is diffused, and recurring, organized and geometric.

This various suburban forms have diverse common characteristics: socio-political (middle-class, strong sense of family, sectoral attitude, relative homogeneousness, residential areas separate from work areas, commercial centers and leisure facilities concentrated in outlying or separate areas); morphological (clear, planned order, uniformity, de-centralized concentration, centralized public functions, privacy, isolation, green spaces, and high automobile accessibility); and cultural (reliance on image, neoliberal aesthetics, utopianism, being the object of aspirations and their implementation, and a place of freedom).

Yet since the definition of this new form of living-space remains rather obscure on the margins and the boundaries distinguishing it from preceding living-spaces and at times also from contemporary forms are not always sharply defined, it is reasonable to talk not only of a distinct form that is embodied physically to some extent in the space, but also of suburbanism as a quality shared with other forms.

### **Cars, Roads**

A suburb is also its technological affinities. It would not have grown and flourished without electricity, trains, electrical kitchen appliances, the phone and television – all autonomist technologies providing their users with independence and control, and autistic – eliminating the need for most external affinities, although simultaneously dependent and communicative. Heading them is transportation technology, particularly the car, without which no present-day suburb can survive.

John Urry coined the term *automobility* in the beginning of the 2000s, sparking off a surprisingly unprecedented discussion into the cultural, social, political and economic implications of the car. And since suburbs are car-dependent, the insights obtained by that discussion are cardinal for understanding it.

Automobility, as Urry and others viewed it, is a system. It entails planning, production, marketing, advertising and purchasing, and has numerous aspects – technological, economic, political, cultural and psychological. It is a relatively stable expanding system which creates unplanned results (Featherstone 2), and its changing form is the outcome of different processes occurring in tandem, (Urry 33). Automobility is the triumph of liquidity over the urban, Urry contends, and thus qualifies suburbia for the discussion.

Over the twentieth century – in the wake of several experiments that began in the mid-nineteenth-century, that were followed by Oldsmobile's launch of the first production line in 1902, and then Ford's – one billion cars were manufactured (Featherstone 1). Today there is a similar, and even greater, number of cars across the world.

Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics notes that in 2015 there were close to 3,092,000 vehicles, of which 2,583,000 were passenger vehicles – with 85.8% of them privately owned. Motorization level – 365 vehicles per 1,000 citizens, is relatively lower than that of other developed nations ("3.09 million").<sup>2</sup> (At the same time, if one takes into account household size and the relatively low average age, that average is closer to the European one).

By nature, the road-car situation is dialectical. While the road itself and its usage flatten the landscape, blur the details, render everything uniform to a great extent, even bring everything into the car, as Marc Augé contends – still it does not annul the experience of taking in the landscape, and often supplies a new experience. The car, too, is a dialectical object in the sense that together with the option

<sup>2</sup> The data in *Autotopia* makes use of was collected in 2012-2015. The data used here was partially updated to 2015, also assuming that the general tendencies noted then are still valid.

of movement it is static, stable, homely to some extent and protected, whose owners control the right to enter.

This dialectical meeting point characterizes not only the car and automobility culture but also the suburban experience itself. Larsen, Urry and Axhausen discuss movement in the broad context of temporal and spatial compression described by David Harvey, and others too. They add that as well as compression, there is also a distancing (perhaps it would be better to say – a broadening) of the space, which results from the massive growth in the scope of travel and the formation of more means of communication allowing us to communicate remotely and remain in touch (Larsen et al. 1). It also reflects the fundamental suburban dialectic: a fixed place, conservative, strongly rooted on the one hand, although its very nature requires constant movement because of the spatial organization of lifestyles – the separation of dwelling, work, leisure, and consumption.

Roads and cars create, enable, and reinforce the suburban way of life. Roads are the static element, granting space a form that matches the movement of cars and connects its parts. The concentric structure of distinguished space and sub-spaces within it, and the marked, clear spatial separation between different living functions (residential, work, public, commerce, leisure) become possible through roads and are reinforced by cars.

And where people mostly drive and rarely walk, when there is almost no space that can be decoded by walking, when people can at the most show flexibility to accord with traffic flows (Featherstone 1), there are no options for the tactical resistance that de Certeau describes.

The affinity between the road and the suburb is clearly expressed in Israel's Highway 6, a fast highway running the length of much of the country. Its construction began in 1999 and is still in process, and it is discernible that it principally serves the country's central region.<sup>3</sup>

### **Morphology**

With the identification of the suburb phenomenon, even in general lines, we can now analyze it in terms of difference. Three types of suburban settings can be distinguished: (1) the original ones; (2) additions: (a) urban (b) rural; and (3) metamorphoses. The first type includes the new suburbs, with their distinctive lifestyle, whose construction was launched in Israel in the late 1970s though most were built in the 80s and 90s, and new ones are still being constructed. They resemble the classic Western suburb, particularly the earliest North American model – the suburbs of the 1950s and onwards. They are usually typified by uniform construction, with a choice of several models, on not particularly large plots and with the "pictorial pattern" that Zafir-Reuven described in a taxonomy of prototypes of the morphological patterns found in Israeli cities (9). The pictorial pattern is based on a network of short streets, many of them cul-de-sacs, that branch out from wider streets to create a geometric-diagrammatic shape that is clearly visible from above. Comprised in this type are the "community settlements" and the earliest suburbs, despite morphological differences: they are less uniform, their dispersal within the space is less methodical, and their residents often have higher socioeconomic status than those of the new suburbs.

The second type comprises construction annexed to existing localities with a familiar character – urban or rural. They are outlying neighborhoods of large or medium-sized cities and towns and also new "expansion neighborhoods" of rural agricultural settlements. If they were self-sufficient, they would belong – at least morphologically – to the first group, but they are a secondary part of a dominant entity on which they depend to some extent.

In the third category are long-established forms that have changed their appearance: apartment blocks in cities or small towns to which major construction has been added, and homes in kibbutzim or moshavim that have been adapted as single-family villas (and paradoxically seem at times more bourgeois than the new adjacent building).

Israel's suburban space, as noted, is simultaneously centralized and decentralized, and in this it resembles suburbs elsewhere. While that duality also characterizes contemporary cities to some extent, it is particularly visible in the suburbs.

There is on the one hand the retreat – a major reason for its existence – which enables homogeneity, the desired quality of life, security, and quiet. It is centralized not only in the local lifestyles: its sub-sites too – commercial and leisure sites, as well as workplaces, shopping centers, community centers, cultural facilities and office blocks – are centralized by nature. And yet, the suburb is wholly dispersed

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<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive critical discussion of Highway 6's contribution to bolstering Israeli suburbia see Rabinowitz and Vardi, as well as Sadan et al.

– there is urban sprawl, embodied in attached neighborhoods, large parks, broad access roads, parking areas, and the very decentralization of the various functions (though a centralized sort of decentralization). Residential areas, places of work, public institutions, commercial and leisure areas are separate and at a driving distance.

The suburb is unusual in terms of style and worldview. It doesn't belong to the modernist order, but neither is it completely rhizomatic or non-hierarchic in a non-modernist (or postmodernist) way. On the other hand, it is properly organized, geometrical and hierarchic – an aerial view convinces one of this, and on yet another hand it is not concentric or radial but rather a split fabric with many centers and peripheries, somewhat rhizomatic (a statement that is valid concerning both its flat protrusions in the form of attached houses and also regarding the multi-story buildings and towers, that even when relatively dense, often do not create a local environment, real or virtual). It disturbs the existing order of lifestyles and is neither urban nor rural. It is a hybrid space, with its own identity, and is also part of the in-between space, which contains other forms and uses relevant to it – of commerce, leisure, services, and infrastructures.

In his book *The Rise of the Network Society*, Manuel Castells (424- 438, 440-448) depicts that kind of centralized-decentralized space – in a broader context and with a different emphasis but addressing the question of the suburbs. Castells looks at the digital space via the basic assumption that space in general is a social expression and that following social changes, new spatial forms emerge. His discussion returns us to the question of the disappearance of the classical cities, in this case in the context of the virtualization of life, the increasing divide between spatial closeness and daily functioning, urban decentralization, the decentralization of jobs, the increase in suburban occupation control centers, the relatively easy movement between suburbs, the growth of genuine meeting-places (shopping centers), the general centralization and decentralization of people-oriented services (remote medical service on the one hand, and huge medical centers on the other, for example), and "home centralization" (working from home, for example) that have all joined forces to create the "space of flows." Castells examines the concept of *edge city*, coined by Joel Garreau, to depict the new suburban space – cities combining homes with businesses – which he maintains are in a mushrooming process. He places this against the concepts of James Kunstler, who defines a "geography of nowhere", which he says is a European model.

The distinction between nodes and hubs – that is, between local centers and sites where general interaction in the network is being coordinated, side by side with the prevailing decentralization that creates an entire mutually dependent system and the general spatial division of work that generates connections, and also the existence of nodes of the elites – all these traits of the network space (*Network society* 442-453) are relevant to the suburbs. So are centered decentralization, a-historicity, the absence of contextuality, and the boundary-crossing resemblance between places that characterize it.

## Geography

The way of life analyzed here is chiefly located in central Israel, in the region between the city of Haifa in the north and Ashkelon in the south. Similar phenomena are discernible in the metropolitan area of Be'er-Sheva and similar ways of life – in the Jewish Galilee, but most construction has taken place in the center where the majority of the suburban population resides.

The main general growth in Israel's population has in fact happened in the central region. Attesting to this are data of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) showing that migration from the periphery to the center increased constantly between 2000 and 2015 ("Shnaton 2016"), as well as examining aerial photographs and visits on ground. Corroborating this are data on inner migration within the central region to the settlements of the Sharon region and the cities of Ramla, Rehovot and Petach Tikva.

The CBS data presented in the 2015 Yearbook reveal that the population's growth scope in the cities is lower than in rural settlements – 1.9% as compared with 2.9%. Of this, 2.1% was in moshavim, 4.9% in community settlements, 2.6% in rural settlements defined 'other', and 5.3% in West Bank settlements.

The marked increase in relocation to secular rural settlements and to West Bank settlements is evidence of a clear trend – a suburbanization process of rural areas. It is noteworthy that Israel's suburbanization process is two-directional. Although it reflects departure from cities to the rural space, it is equally the outcome of a process that has suburbanized the rural agricultural space; that is, gave it urban qualities. While the process also characterizes other nations, the uniqueness of the Israeli case is a transition from a relatively collectivist form of settlement (at varying levels, in accordance with the nature of the agricultural community) to a privatized form.

As for the West Bank settlements, one must emphasize that the suburbanization process does not acknowledge political boundaries. The years of construction of the West Bank in the format of Palestinian enclaves crossed by Israeli settlements and infrastructure system have blurred the green line border to



a huge extent. A dual latticed space has in fact been created on the West Bank. Local roads and highways create continuity between West Bank settlements and the State of Israel from the west. Their appearance – identical to the latter's (apart from the security fences and their strategic location on hilltops) – also contributes to structuring a uniform space, which is compounded by national and demographic homogeneity.

### **Demography**

No official calculation has been made of the suburbs' residents and certainly not as they are defined here. Apart from the difficulty in defining suburbs the fact that they are not homogeneous – that is, that many of the suburban sites are sections of different kinds of settlement (cities, towns, rural agricultural and rural non-agricultural) – makes precise calculation even harder.

The growth of the suburbs is connected to the fact that population growth in Israel is faster than the average growth in the western world and constant construction is thus needed. This must be borne in mind alongside the ideological and cultural explanations for the phenomenon.

From what is measurable, it's clear that Israeli suburbia is not the phenomenon of a numerical majority. Bi-directional computation – through elimination on the one hand, that is, subtracting much of the urban, non-suburban sections, most of the Arab settlements, and the kibbutzim and moshavim that are still mostly agricultural or that have not changed significantly – and on the other hand, calculating the obvious suburbs, including even post-1967 Jerusalem neighborhoods, residential quarters north of the Yarkon river in Tel Aviv, and the neighborhoods on the Carmel in Haifa (that is, long-established neighborhoods with suburban qualities) – elicits that we have only about 20% of the whole population. But due to the spread and dispersal that typify suburbs, the phenomenon reflects a more powerful presence than its statistical proportions. Therefore, there could be no doubt that this is growing trend.

It is notable that this calculation is general and hypothetical, based on data of the CBS for 2013 concerning the distribution of population by type of settlement and the number of residents in different settlement, and it has a geographical basis – it was performed by place and type of residence, not for example, by socio-economic indices.<sup>4</sup>

### **Status, Ethnos, Property**

The Israeli suburbs are places where families live; that is, they have specific age-based qualities. And while there have been dramatic changes in this and other aspects in the western world, particularly in the US, in terms of class, ethnic attribution and others – in Israel the situation has remained quite conservative.

The suburbs are the locus of the middle-class. There is a substantial debate about defining that class and its boundaries, entailing substantive disagreements: here we present only some of their traits which let us make a general identification of them (which does not rely on professional statistical efforts) by their geography, appearance, and several socioeconomic patterns. In other words, an affinity is proposed between general definitions of the Israeli middle class and the qualities of suburbs already identified as such, among others in accordance with socioeconomic criteria, but not with them alone. Identifying them as a locus of the middle class is performed after they have been identified.

Cross-referencing CBS statistics for 2013, which relate to the entire population, by settlements, with suburban places (based on an examination of several dozen communities identified here as suburbs, or partially suburban) elicits that ethnic origin is also relevant here to some extent, although not crucially. A significant Ashkenazi majority of Israeli-born residents is found in the well-established suburbs (Savyon, Kfar Shmaryahu, Bnei Zion, Batzra and so on), in the community settlements, and also in some of the obviously suburban localities (Lehavim, for example). Elsewhere, in new and adapted suburbs, there is a small majority of Ashkenazim (Bat Hefer, Pardess Hannah, Hod Hasharon), or a more or less equal number (Shoham, Ma'aleh Adumim, Tzoran and Or Yehuda too, which had a Mizrahi majority before its suburbanization). There are also suburbs where a Mizrahi majority prevails (Tel Mond, Kfar Yona, and Ness Ziona). Meticulous statistical work must be performed with the appropriate tools, in a different framework. These are hypotheses. It is uncertain whether the missing data lie hidden in the database of the CBS.

There is no doubt though as to the national characteristics of Israel's suburbs; they are totally Jewish. In all their forms – urban or with rural tendencies, those with city roots, moshavot and farming

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<sup>4</sup> The assumption made here is that even if changes have occurred since 2013, they were in the direction of movement to in-between spaces, and that in any case the numerical change is not dramatic. This is in reliance on data for the changes in population previously presented.

community roots – there are no Arabs. Indeed, on 17 September 2014 the Supreme Court held that admission committees may be set up in community settlements (though the decision was made based on procedural grounds, and with various caveats). These data are notable in view of the urbanization process of the Arab villages that has continued since 1948, when the cities emptied out, land was expropriated, and civil restrictions put in place, and bearing in mind the constant growth of the educated Arab middle-class (Abu Bakr & Rabinowitz; Bishara; Khamaisi *Expanding*; Khamaisi *From Restrictive*). Exceptional to this trend is the controversial decision ratified by the National Council for Planning and Construction regarding the construction of an Arab city in the Galilee, at the state's initiative – the first since 1948, to be called Tantur. The city plans show that it is obviously a city-suburb, with a modernist and western appearance (Notably, the new Palestinian town of Rawabi, built to the west of Ramallah, is also a middle-class city with a suburban character).

According to the 2014 data, a household income of NIS 16,000 and capital of NIS 200-300,00 make it possible to purchase a four-room apartment (the standard, for the middle class) at NIS 1.2 million (Smolski). One must add regular maintenance costs to the cost of the apartment itself, both in single-family homes and in apartments in multi-story blocks.

In very many cases, buying a home is only possible with a mortgage. The data for 2012 show that the largest group of people who took mortgages, 36% of them, is of those who buy apartments and homes at NIS 1.2–2 m. (Amit). Hundreds of thousands of people took out loans of 0.7–1.5 m. NIS, the majority on repayment terms of 20-30% of their salaries, at index-linked, changing interest. The implication is that those who add to a certain equity a loan of NIS 1 m., for example, will repay NIS 5,000 per month. An increase of half a percent in interest brings the sum to 10%, in addition to the 15% increase in the index over the past five years and 20% over the past twenty years. Data on the housing market, presented in 2015 by Karnit Flug, then Chancellor of the Bank of Israel, show that 94 salaries are needed to buy an apartment in the fourth decile, and up to 70 months in the ninth decile (Flug).

### **Mechanism – Land, Planning**

Space is manufactured – that is, manufactured in the way that Henri Lefebvre meant, which was later adopted in the Israeli context (See for example Yacobi; Fenster; Fenster and Oren). Now that the characteristics of the Israeli suburban space have been defined, an outline of its manufacturing mechanism is due.

This is a question of land, planning, control, financing, and ownership. Whose land are the suburbs built on? who initiates and who executes their construction, and who finances it? The description of this mechanism as it takes shape must be considered using the question – for what and for whom does it operate, immediately followed by the question for whom and for what purpose it does not. For it is abundantly clear that this is a selective mechanism.

One can generally state that the picture of the land's ownership structure on the one hand, and of the planning mechanism that supplements it on the other, is complex. Several forces push here, sometimes from different directions. The mechanism is driven by the forces of ideological motivations (both from "above" and from "below"), economic ones (public and private) and perhaps also by the power of inertia, with no clear and known motivation.

The nature of the exclusion which goes hand-in-hand with the mechanism's activation, that removes specific sectors from the picture (residents of peripheral regions, Arabs, the poor), also illuminates the diverse forces exerted on it – national, ethnic, and class-based. The pivotal context in which the suburbs are rooted is privatization, or more accurately – the privatization process that Israeli society has been undergoing in the past decades. There are various descriptions of this process in terms of planning, and the correlation between land and planning (Hershkowitz; Yacobi and Zfadia), marking a process of "creeping privatization" – a new relationship-pattern between the free market and public policy, in which lessees of agricultural land and the free market are awarded – even in an undeclared way – more and more rights and freedom of action in public assets.

One of the first facts that must be addressed when looking at the Israeli space and within it the suburban space in terms of neo-liberalization is that the state still owns 93% of the country's land. This is public ownership on a scale unparalleled in the western world (Alterman), which grants the state substantial control over actions performed in the land. At the same time, we should recall that most of the land it owns is not settled. While the state is capable, in these cases, of allocating land as it pleases, most land-related activities happen in settled regions, in the large cities, and there the proportion of private ownership is greater. And as noted before, in a slow and continuing process, that started in the 1990s (though it has older roots) and is supported by a string of official decisions, the Israel Land Authority is de-facto transferring ownership to leasers of land. Leasing, in other words, is becoming almost indistinguishable from selling. What illustrates this best is the ongoing suburbanization of



cooperative or semi-cooperative agricultural settlements, built on state land, (in other cases rural locations, even if they are becoming suburbs, are not usually cooperative). Hadas Shadar claims that centralization remains untouched and only its carriers have changed – the place of the nation state has been taken by a few tycoons, while the land is no longer a national asset but has become a real-estate resource (222-24). And furthermore, the initiative to build, and the actual construction, have passed into private hands (although regulation lies with the Ministry of Interior).

We can talk in this context of a general paradox of development: the suburbs were established historically in reaction to the cities and to a strong degree this remains their driving power. In tandem with this, they are causing large-scale environmental damage. Secondly, the suburbs contribute to enhancing socioeconomic and national inequality since they attract relatively strong populations, and in the process they weaken their original localities (Braude and Navon). At the same time, they provide improved residential conditions for the lower middle-class, which in many cases could not have achieved them in cities, and thus they contribute to pushing out the boundaries of the class and its diversity.

## Two last thoughts

### ***Topos, the Question of Urbanity, and the Suburbs' Future***

Critical thought about the suburbs, in terms of a looming catastrophe and dystopia, stand in contradiction to their residents' utopian aspirations. Homi Bhabha, a sworn enemy of suburbs, talks of the urge to "'suburbanize' the soul of America." "Its agenda," he writes, "is traditional and conservative; its buzz words are predictable – 'family values', 'opportunity society', 'individual responsibility', 'free-market' and 'the work ethic'" (298). This way of thinking is present in Israel too – a lament over the greedy suburban sprawl, the decline of urbanity, the uniformity and monotony, extreme individualism, closing-off by class, etc.<sup>5</sup>

The suburbs are undoubtedly spreading through the space, although the transition from single-family homes to saturated construction reflects an attempt to deal with the problem. As noted, they are not urban in the sense familiar to us: their space is centralized-decentralized, they have no streets, uses in the suburban neighborhood framework are usually restricted, they are concentrated in specific sites (not infrequently in marginal areas), movement through them is significantly performed by car. Their appearance is uniform, both their general appearance and the houses and public buildings, which are built according to several models, highly similar to each other even when they are autonomous and their class cross-section is one, although quite extensive.

A look at the American suburbs reveals that over recent decades there has been a series of change processes which their Israeli counterparts haven't yet undergone (though signs of them can be detected), which have been extensively discussed. The current traits were there from the outset, principally the broadening of uses beyond residential, that occurred in stages (Jackson; Rowe; Teaford;; Kotkin; Mazingo).

Starting in the 1970s, and throughout the 1980s, the American suburbs have changed markedly. In fact a new entity took shape, and received new conceptualizations. The scope of the change and the massive autonomization of the suburbs was documented by the previously cited fact that around 2000, over 60% of the workplaces were located outside cities and inner movement between suburbs was greater than that to the cities (Kotkin).

The social nature of the American suburbs has also gone through profound changes: they have become multi-racial and multi-ethnic, and are home to migrants and new types of families – single-parent, non-traditional, and older families – outnumbering the classic bourgeois families (Hall and Lee). The resulting new patterns, extra-urban and non-urban, are sufficiently different from the classic suburb of single-family detached homes, clear separation of uses, and varying levels of affinity to the city to obtain its own definition, yet resemble it enough to preserve a sign of its older affinity and can therefore be defined post-suburban. It appears under different names: the post-suburban metropolis, technoburb, *zwischenstadt*, edgeless city, urban village, post-suburban metropolis, and meta-suburb. These may be varying formations but they share in common that fact that they no longer depend at all on a core city, but are autonomous phenomena. Though not cities in the familiar and accepted sense, they do have clear urban qualities, such as high-rise building and employment zones, congested roads, and all entail urban sprawl.

In Joel Garreau's book *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* he invented the term to describe the phenomenon (for critiques of Garreau's analyses, see Jonas; Carter et al; Phelps & Parsons). He depicted

<sup>5</sup> In Israel, "National Outline Plan 35," approved in 2005, sought among other things to contend with the sprawl and to shore up the four main metropolises, but failed to halt suburbanization in central Israel.

a new hybrid, urban/non-urban, independent in most senses but not autonomous in terms of government. This configuration does not replace the classic residential suburb, neither the city, but is added to them as sort of interim version, self-contained and spreading from the United States to other continents. Like the classic suburb, the edge city is situated near a city, often on agricultural land that has been adapted to building-land. And like a city, it offers functions of employment, commerce, and leisure and sometimes reproduces the city's central business district, thus creating alternative urban centers.

Some of these new formations, the majority in fact, did not appear in the Israeli space unchanged, but it undoubtedly includes suburban cities – Modi'in and Shoham, and large suburban areas within existing cities, separate to some extent from them – Western Rishon Le'Zion – which are urban and contain employment and commercial zones, and in this sense are not dependent on cities, or less so than the classic suburbs.

And yet an aerial view of Israel discloses that the various definitions of the post-urban configuration are relevant. The liquidity of the space is clearly discernible. The familiar categoric distinction – cities, towns, kibbutzim, moshavim, Arab settlements – is still present, but is becoming more blurred. It doesn't imply that the space lacks order – far from it – but its kinds of order have changed.

The creation of these edge-cities, places of residence, employment, commerce and leisure, which fully meet their needs themselves, signifies the suburb's war of independence. Their deep structure – the physical, social, cultural one – signifies them as a self-sufficient phenomenon. They cannot be made into cities. It doesn't mean they lack flaws, but it's not at all certain that an amendment will be achieved following thoughts about urbanizing or re-urbanizing the suburbs. We have to understand their inner logic and act from within it.

Lamentations for lost urbanity are grounded, then, on a correct analysis of the circumstances but suggests what seems to be an incorrect approach.

### **The aesthetic and the political**

Suburbia is an object of desire. People aspire to it and fight to get there. Sometime it is a stage on a journey, sometimes it creates disillusion, and in yet other cases it is no longer suitable for a stage in life or is no longer an object of desire but has become a habit, a constant experience of fulfilled desire (satisfaction with a way of life) or an accustomed lifestyle that one was born into.

Above all, the desire is for better quality of life: spacious homes, good education, a clean environment, personal security. A generous mortgage, large payments by parents, and a security company often help to achieve all those. From the rather sparse database available on national crime, we can conclude that it is indeed lower in the suburbs than in cities (Dekel-Koren; "Shnaton 2013").

The suburb is closely linked with the new, and desire for the new. Levelling hills, pulling up vegetation, reviving dunes – clothing them with concrete and cement and greenery – a contemporary version of "wholly new" Zionism (as defined by the poet Avot Yeshurun), the next step after the modernism of the Zionist movement and its ethos of creation and of eradication of the past. This time, the new is total. Recollections of the past accompanied the Zionist eradication, sometimes even its perpetuation attesting to the greatness of the victory and the outcoming threat, but there is no hint of it here. The suburb is to a great extent the present. Not the contextual present, but the one chiefly defined by immediacy, efficiency, functionalism, a sort of timeless life in a hyper-space that is a non-space. The Zionist project of repression, considerably undermined in recent decades, could well find here an heir to continue its path.

Hand-in-hand with the new goes the prestigious. The sight of apartments in suburban high-rises in Israel, the latest reincarnation of the modern suburbs, and the marketing method through advertisements, on street-posters and the internet, show how significant the prestige element is. Huge apartments, open spaces, smart and expensive construction details, the detachment from the street, as Shadar (264) points out.

What is powerfully expressed in the suburbs is the force of the image. In tandem with its figurative and social traits this living space also has structural-aesthetic features: It is serial (a seriality that differs from the ostensibly neutral and context-detached one of the modernist form of living); It is crammed, overflowing, full of items, and has multiple sources; it draws on brands, models, and is substantially based on image, signifiers, and the "staging value." These are "quasi" qualities suggested by the homes in the "Nobel Prize Winners' neighborhood" in Western Rishon Le'Zion. Its planners were well aware of the status inherent in that image, as were those considering the purchase of a home there with the aim of creating a suburban spatial heterotopia. Those qualities are numerous: the quasi-antique (the external window-frames, some of the furniture, the patina on garden urns); quasi-classic (pillars and arches); quasi-modern (the whiteness, the accessories), quasi-rustic (wooden furniture and fences),

quasi-natural ("natural stone" flower-pots, rough paving-stones), quasi-affluent (the size of the home, the leather furniture, the deck), quasi-indigenous (the climbing vines ornaments, the *mashrabiya*, the street names), quasi-overseas (i.e., western, the general appearance so familiar from movies and TV series; the neighborhoods' names); quasi-TV (the daughter's room); quasi-hotel (the guest toilet). Quasi-private but sharing a wall with the neighbors, and very close back-gardens, quasi high-quality and high-end but built with cladding, reproductions, and concrete. Quasi-unique, quasi self-fulfillment but amazingly similar to others around it, quasi-organic but not so, quasi-community but not really. Like everyone else, *comme il faut*. And all these at one and the same time: the personal and original seem to vanish into that "quasi."

It has to be stated clearly: living in accordance with image isn't unique to suburbia. Nothing in the suburbs is actually unique to them – not life in compliance with image, not individualization, nor complete reliance on the car – but they are however empowered there and in this context receive their own image. Baudrillard would say that suburbanites aspire to wellbeing (Baudrillard) – quiet, security, stability, family, work, success, happiness; that chain of myths, legacy of the bourgeois revolution, whose focus is the myth of happiness embodied in the myth of equality, which is equality before the Object and visible signs of social success and happiness. In other words, objects and signifiers that are measurable and visible – because the visibility of objects and social relationships are one and the same. The objects exist in the "hermaphroditic ambience of fashion", sexless, identical, homogeneous, acclimatized, "all at last *digested* and turned into the same homogeneous faecal matter" (30). The material of that life cannot encapsulate meaning (metaphors, contradictions, duplications) or what is based on relations between discrete things. Eternal spring, he terms it – we (all of us, not only suburbanites) inhabit an illusion of fulfillment, gratification, and thus are responsible for the depoliticization of our lives by severing the affinity between the objects and their manufacturing process, and human endeavor.

Here we should repeat Susan Buck-Morss' warning to (the later) Baudrillard after he referred to September 9/11 as the ultimate simulacrum (Buck-Morss). She pointed out that the victims were real people with real problems who were doing real work. People like that – with work and work-related problems, and family, sometimes feeling frustrated, sometimes satisfaction or even happiness (as they attest) – live in the suburbs. And Baudrillard too knows that clinging to signs, like magical thinking, is a way of seeking protection from the real world, from history.

None the less, the image is significant in this context. Gernot Böhme's concept "staging value" (73) could clarify the extent of anesthetization embedded in the image-based relationship. The concept addresses capitalism's transition to a new stage; no longer the fulfilling of people's needs, but the exploitation of their desires. Böhme terms this stage the "aesthetic economy" because it is based on the anesthetization of the tangible. The stage value joins the Marxist use value and exchange value. Böhme refers to the appearance of the goods made so that it will raise their exchange value. The stage value is self-sufficient, since it plays a role not only in the context of exchange but also in the context of use; it is not the classic value of use however, but a new type, deriving from the value of exchange. The economy becomes an economy of aesthetics. Desires nurture the economy of aesthetics and are fulfilled there – but never completely fulfilled. On the contrary, they multiply with their fulfilling. In this sense the economy of aesthetics has no natural boundaries.

Desires that are never exhaustively fulfilled nurture the economy of the suburbs (within the present-day form of the capitalist economy), and demand sanctification of the new. The new is the bait which lures and drives that economy onwards. The result of the process of distancing from the original object, and from the context of that immanent motivating dissatisfaction, even though it's repressed and unconscious, is the depoliticization of life. The suburbs are not a place of controversy and resistance and difference and usually also not a matter of deciding between choices, but rather a place of approval and agreement. Individual self-fulfillment is actually an act of joining. Uniformity and figurative order that are calming and joining – responding to an image – are also reflected in sociocultural terms. As Jacques Rancière remarks, consensus sterilizes the political. Instead of consensus he suggests dissensus – a speech act that lays bare the arbitrariness of separating the political from the aesthetic (that "modernist project of separation") and undermines the given sensory nature of the "natural" order (Rancière). While his discussion engages with art, his proposal may well shed light on the suburban situation as well.

The Pueblo Español neighborhood of western Rishon Le'Zion once demonstratively embodied the ethos of "quasi" and the new and the family. Now, its peeling homes make very clear that the new is fated to age, that image ultimately loses its charm. Western Rishon Le'Zion in general is beginning to sense that distress. It has aged and become more expensive, it has fewer young children, schools are emptying out, and more tempting options are available nearby. What is the future of that way of life,

based wholly on the new? Perhaps it will also disintegrate, perhaps it will give way to a new undreamed-of form, and maybe it will succeed without choosing, even partially, to return to the political, to reality – to itself.

It must re-engage with the political and the critical. Perhaps we can still turn our backs on the appalling road to fascism on which we tread.

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