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An officer and a bourgeois: Israeli military personnel, suburbanization and selective privatization

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ABSTRACT

In the 1980s, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) initiated the construction of several suburban communities for the benefit of its personnel. These new settlements offered the opportunity of a better quality of life in a homogeneous and exclusive environment, all in a commuting distance from the main metropolises. The State subsidized the construction of these settlements to support the military, and in the hope that the prestigious image of the IDF would help in developing peripheral areas. Military officers could live their bourgeois dream while taking part in the greater national mission of urban development. Reut is an architype of such a suburban military settlement. It offered young officers the ability to obtain subsidized spacious houses in an exclusive community while forming a steppingstone in the later mass development of the area. Therefore, using selective privatization as a means to encourage the formation of a real estate market and to enable further development.

Introduction

Since the 1980s, the Israeli state has been promoting the construction of secluded residential projects for military personnel in order to develop peripheral and frontier areas. The Israel Defence Forces (IDF), in collaboration with the Israel Land Administration (ILA) and the Ministry of Construction and Housing (MCH) offer military personnel an affordable housing option with better living standards while expanding the state's spatial control. The ILA designates state-owned lands in peripheral and frontier areas to the IDF who acts as the entrepreneur, developer and client; forming a unique Israeli settlement method. With the advantageous position to affordably obtain lucrative real estate, the military families play a central role in the privatizing national development mechanism, which began evolving since the late 1970s,[1] while physically owning a piece of it.[2]

The suburban development of Reut of the 1980s exemplifies the selective privatization measures, which included the state granting a privileged group substantial spatial rights as a means to develop its frontiers (Figure 1). Unlike other Israeli settlements of that time, which were an outcome of
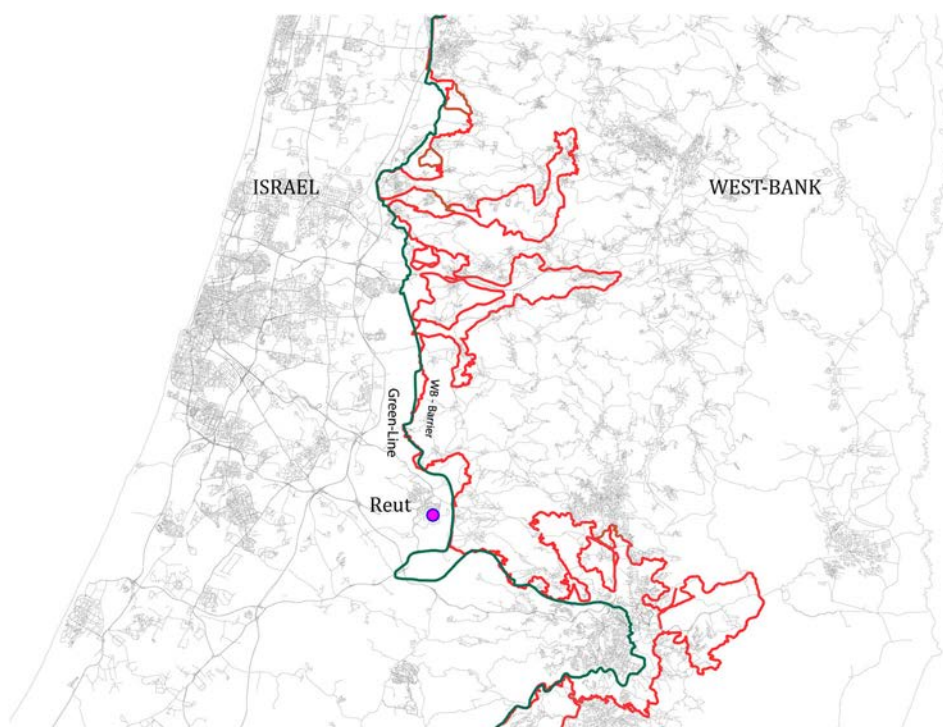
Figure 1. Reut, in 2015 near the border with the Palestinian West-Bank (green) and the West-Bank Barrier (red) (Illustrated by the author).

privatized property rights,[3] the development of Reut was particular, due to the significant privatized planning rights it included. Private military personnel controlled most aspects of the project, from the site's location to the architectural design of each unit. Using a variety of historical materials and interviews with several key figures, this paper analyses how the ILA promoted privatized spatial development, in order to attract military personnel to frontier areas and to spur further investment.

IDF and Suburbanization

Frontier settlement was an integral part of the Jewish national revival in Palestine since the late nineteenth century. Before the formation of the state of Israel in 1948, national Zionist institutions, such as the Jewish Agency (JA) and the Jewish National Fund (JNF), promoted the construction of small-scale frontier rural settlements to enlarge the future Jewish state while fostering a new local identity.[4] The young state of Israel continued this territorial agenda and began with concentrating land by mass confiscations and nationalization of former Palestinian property, turning more than 90% of its area into state-owned lands. This enabled the state to plan, fund and develop a series of new rural and industrial towns that expanded its spatial control. To optimize this mechanism, the government established the Israel Land Administration (ILA) that took charge of managing all public lands and assigning sites for new Jewish settlements.

Israel's territorial expansion in 1967 boosted its geopolitical project, and with the liberalization of the local economy during the 1970s the state began relying on the private sector to develop new

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[3]Yacobi and Tzfadia, "Neo-Settler Colonialism and the Re-Formation of Territory," 1–19.
[4]Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory*, 9–30; Schwake, "Settle and Rule," 1–22.

settlements.[5] Instead of encouraging rural settlements in its expanding internal frontiers, the state promoted the construction of ex-urban housing-only Community Settlements (*Yeshuv-Kehilati*) for small homogenous groups of 200–300 families.[6] During the mid-1980s, with the state's new metropolitan-based approach,[7] this model gave way to the Suburban Settlement (*Yeshuv-Parvari/ Toshava*),[8] which consisted of up to 2500 households and resembled American tract-housing developments.[9] Usually, it housed members of leading political organizations, the military, or workers of one of the large governmental organizations and ministries, which were either granted a site by the ILA, or were selectively targeted by private developers that sought to attract esteemed families as means to promote sales.

The Israeli Suburban Settlement was an integral part of the state's 'selective privatisation' measures, which relied on granting 'substantial spatial rights' to 'selected elites' as a means to 'increase the number of Jews in "frontier" regions' and thus to promote the 'state's control of space'.[10] In their analysis of 'neo-settler colonialism', Yacobi and Tzfadia claim that the selective privatization of Israeli settlements was part of the attempt to harness the national territorial project to the rationale of the market; ensuring its survival during the neoliberal turn. The military settlement of Reut, which housed the 'selected elite' of the IDF personnel while developing the eastern peripheries of the Tel Aviv metropolitan area, exemplifies this. Yacobi and Tzfadia claim that with the new neoliberal settlement approach the state enhanced its role as the planner, and the privatized spatial rights it granted were mainly property rights, rather than planning rights. Therefore, as the ability of members of privileged groups to affordably obtain attractive real estate increased, the ability of 'contractors, property owners, [and] tenants'[11] to participate and influence the planning process decreased. While this might be true for most frontier Israeli settlements since the 1980s, Reut illustrates a different scenario, where the state privatized both property and planning rights, turning the IDF into the local council, settler and developer that was thus able to form a distinctive Suburban Settlement.

IDF Housing Administration

Military officers and other officials of the Ministry of Defence were an integral part of the emerging Israeli upper-middle-class and its suburbanization. National and local planning administrations perceived them as a stable, ideological and rewardable group.[12] Since the mid-1980s, mid-level military personnel thus became a crucial factor in the development of the local suburbia.[13] The military enjoyed cross-ministerial support and financial aid, as well as help from the ILA and the MCH, who allocated the needed sites and provided professional assistance and subsidized mortgages (Figure 2).

Among the first new suburban military projects of the 1980s was the Air Force neighbourhood in Yavne. The town's young mayor, Meir Shetrit, who was interested in improving his

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[5]Gutwein, "The Class Logic of the "Long Revolution", 1973–1977," 21–30; Filc, *The Political Right in Israel*, 121; Ram, *The Globalization of Israel*, 29–50, 151–80; Segev, *Elvis in Jerusalem*, 2–13.
[6]Movement for New Urban Settlements, "The Community Settlement," 3; Schwake, "The Community Settlement."
[7]Shachar, "Reshaping the Map of Israel," 210.
[8]Benvenisti, *The West Bank Data Project*, 49.
[9]Schwake, "The Americanisation of Israeli Housing Practices"; Schwake, "Settle and Rule."
[10]Yacobi and Tzfadia, "Neo-Settler Colonialism and the Re-Formation of Territory," 5–6.
[11]Yacobi and Tzfadia, "Neo-Settler Colonialism and the Re-Formation of Territory," 11.
[12]State Comptroller of Israel, "Yearly Report: 34," 104.
[13]Tzfadia, "Militarism and Space in Israel," 338.
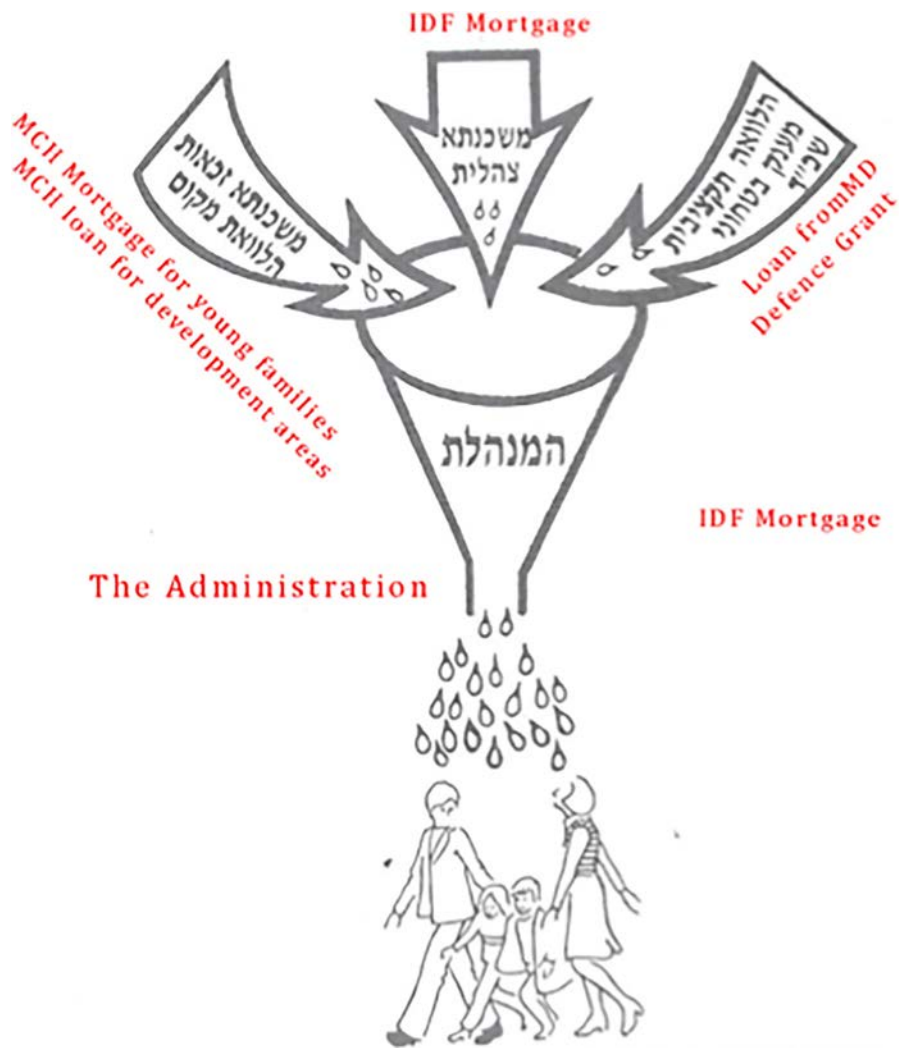
Figure 2. Illustration of the different funding possibilities for military families, which include three main sources: the MCH, IDF and MD. All managed by the Administration. 1991 (IDF-HA)

socioeconomically disadvantaged locality by bringing in well-perceived young families, collaborated with the Israeli Air Force (IAF) to initiate a new residential neighbourhood for its officers. The planning of the Neot-Idan neighbourhood was officially commissioned by the local council,[14] yet its entire construction was managed by IAF Col. Gov-Ari, who named it after his son, Idan.[15] This project proved to be very successful and similar initiatives followed. The new Housing Administration (*Minhelet-HaMegorim*-HA) was responsible for organizing and managing projects that served officers from all branches of the IDF.[16] The admitted members had to be younger than 35, and to agree to extend their service for an additional five years while refraining from selling their new

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[14]Nahoum Zolotoz Architects, "Outline Plan YV-132-1."
[15]Oren, "Reut" [Interview].
[16]Berger, *Autotopia*, 79.

property for the same period; thus, ensuring their stay in the army and the military character of the future project.[17] Since its establishment, the HA managed the construction of more than 6000 housing units in more than 20 different settlements. All these suburban projects were an outcome of substantial spatial privileges that the state granted to the IDF. Yet in Reut, the scope of these privileges was unprecedented, and it therefore constitutes a unique and exceptional case study and a starting point for a new planning approach.

Reut

The planning of Reut started in the mid-1980s as a small-scale suburban project to serve military personnel. It was located midway between Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem, in the then undeveloped regional council of Modi'im[18] (Figure 3). Adjacent to the Green-Line, the site was part of the government's efforts to settle the area, which started with the establishment of the nearby Maccabim in 1985. It was inspired by the Yavne Project and the association formed by the HA to manage the project was initially named Neot-Idan B (later Neot-Reut. hereafter 'the association').[19]

Reut was an outcome of a collaboration between the IDF, ILA and the MCH. The military was interested in the site due to its proximity to the centre and the ability to house hundreds of families, forming an opportunity to motivate officers to remain in service. The ILA, saw the young officers as a steppingstone for its larger plans for the area, which at that time was mainly a military training zone.[20] These mutual interests and the support of the MCH led to the Israeli government's authorization of the project in December 1985.[21] By settling the area with military personnel, the ILA sought to transform its frontier-like nature, vacating the existing bases and training zones and promoting its development;[22] fitting the common phrase that 'the only one that can move the IDF, is the IDF'.[23]

The mandate the state granted the IDF in Reut went beyond the exclusive use of the site, and the military thus enjoyed an omnipotent status that enabled it to control all aspects of the project's development. This included planning, design and construction, guaranteeing the resourceful and efficient planning of an attractive Suburban-Settlement. According to Col.(ret) Oren, the head of the HA at that time, though the official decision stated a specific location for the project, he was able to move it by more than a kilometre to ensure better topographic conditions, surpassing even an official governmental decree.[24] The authority of the HA continued to the planning process, as the ILA declared that the site would be planned and developed by the HA. The site of Reut was not part of an existing locality, therefore the HA was both the entrepreneur and the local council, and thus subjected only to the authority of the district's planning; ensuring a rapid and efficient process.

Reut's layout followed both suburban desires and efficiency aspirations while lacking any rentability concerns of a private entrepreneur. The HA hired the office of Meir Buchman, a leading architectural firm, with experience in suburban planning,[25] who proposed a purely residential and housing-oriented layout that resembled other suburban projects of the time. Yet, while the

[17]IDF Housing Administration, "Housing Administration Homepage."
[18]Not to confuse of the city of Modi'in.
[19]Meir Buchman Architects and Planners, "Detailed Plan GZ/117," 1.
[20]ILA Council, "A New Residential Neighbourhood," 3.
[21]Government of Israel, Decision 1196, 1.
[22]Fogel, "Highway 6 Settlements" [Interview]; Eitan, The construction of Kochav Yair [Interview]
[23]Berger, Autotopia, 78; Mentzel, "Reut and Rosh Ha'ayin" [Interview].
[24]Oren, "Reut" [Interview].
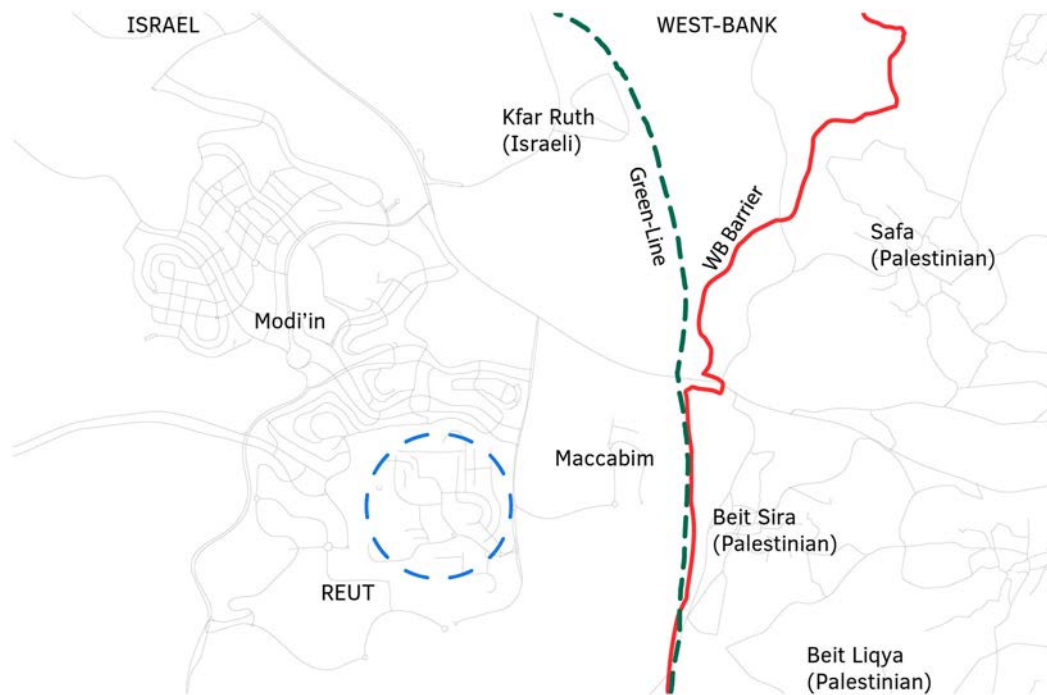[25]Buchman, "Kochav Yair" [Interview].

Figure 3. Site of Reut on a 2015 map (Illustrated by the author).

common suburban layout consisted of parcels of different sizes,[26] Buchman focused on a single dimension (ca 450 m^2), creating a non-hierarchal and uniform layout; fitting the egalitarian nature of the military.[27] The IDF was not a profit-driven developer, which allowed Buchman to avoid the common resourceful parcellation of the site. Accordingly, Buchman's plan consisted of 30% residential areas,[28] whereas in similar projects it is more than 50%.[29] This enabled him to propose a system of *cul de sac* streets which used the site's topography to form independent compounds surrounded by an abundance of open public spaces; addressing the main interests of the military officers for a secluded settlement. The absence of economic optimization requirements allowed Buchman to evade the popular tract-housing layout, which relied on a property-minded setting that located all public and commercial uses outside the settlement. Therefore, Reut included a public core, which fitted its profile as a settlement of a well-integrated community (Figure 4).

To ensure the quality of future houses, the association commissioned leading architects like Chyutin, Riskin, Bracha & Hakim and others, ordering a number of housing models with an option for partial or full construction according to the needs and economic abilities of each officer. Each family was then able to choose their preferred model with a maximal size of around 250 m^2. At the same time, despite the apparent abundance of choice, the different housing models were significantly

[26]Schwake, "The Americanisation of Israeli Housing Practices."
[27]Oren, "Reut" [Interview].
[28]Meir Buchman Architects and Planners, "Detailed Plan GZ/117," 1.
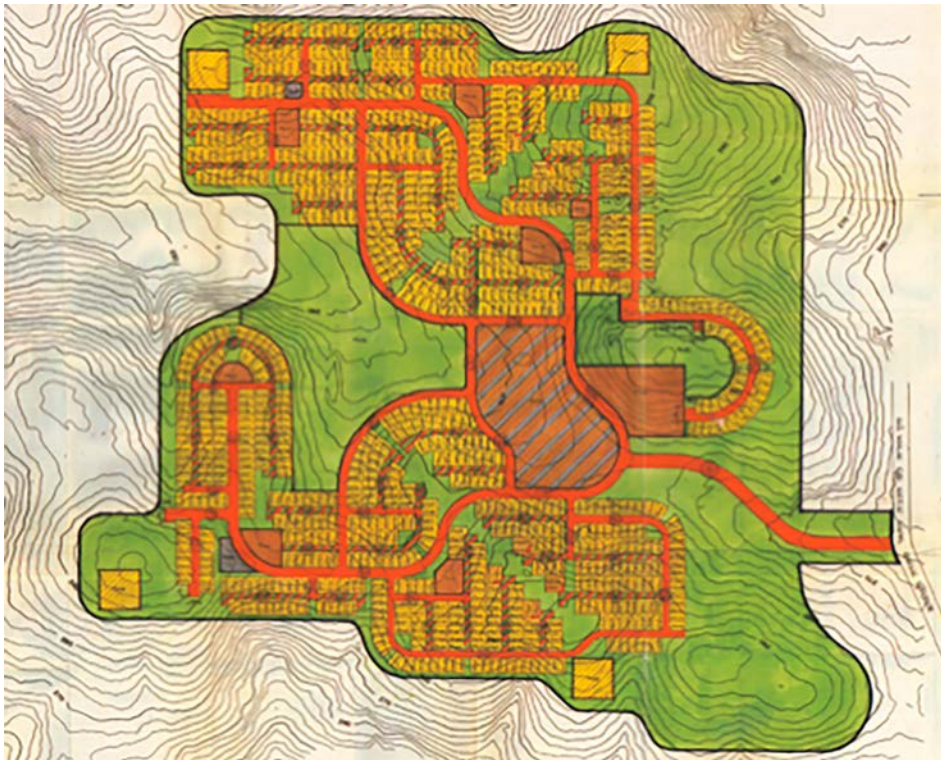[29]Schwake, "Settle and Rule."

Figure 4. Reut, 1986. Meir Buchman. (ILA)

similar, following the same spatial characteristics and design regulation established by Buchman and the association.[30] This included an insistence on single-slope red roofs, specific cubic dimensions, and white exterior walls,[31] giving Reut the appearance of an idyllic suburb, made out of rows of homogenous white houses (Figures 5 and 6).[32]

The architectural guidelines imposed by the association went beyond mere design and included specific instructions that ensured the formation of a withdrawn and introvert residential environment. These guidelines included specific parameters for the placement of each house in the lot, creating a buffer zone that disconnects it from the nearby street and emphasizing the centrality of the backyard and the private family area.[33] Focusing on the private family, the different models consisted of a split-level home, using the site's topography to create an inner division between the family area and the bedrooms while orienting the living room towards the backyard (Figures 7 and 8).[34] The only case where the association asked to place the family area in the front of the house was in parcels that were higher than the adjacent street. This increased the panoramic view from each living room yet did not improve the connection between the family and the community; especially as each parcel was then forwarded by a retaining wall that secluded it from the street.[35]

[30]Buchman, "Kochav Yair."
[31]IDF Housing Administration, "Reut B."
[32]Oren, "Reut."
[33]Riskin, "Houses in Kochav Yair and Reut" [Interview].
[34]Maccabim Reut Local Council Construction Committee, "Permit 524/210001 [Reut]"; Maccabim Reut Local Council Construction Committee, "Permit 910127/4560 [Reut]"; Maccabim Reut Local Council Construction Committee, "Permit 1715/210014 [Reut]."

Figure 5. Houses in Reut under construction, 1989. (IDF-HA)

Figure 6. Reut in 1997, with Modi'in under construction in the background. Moshe Milner (GPO).
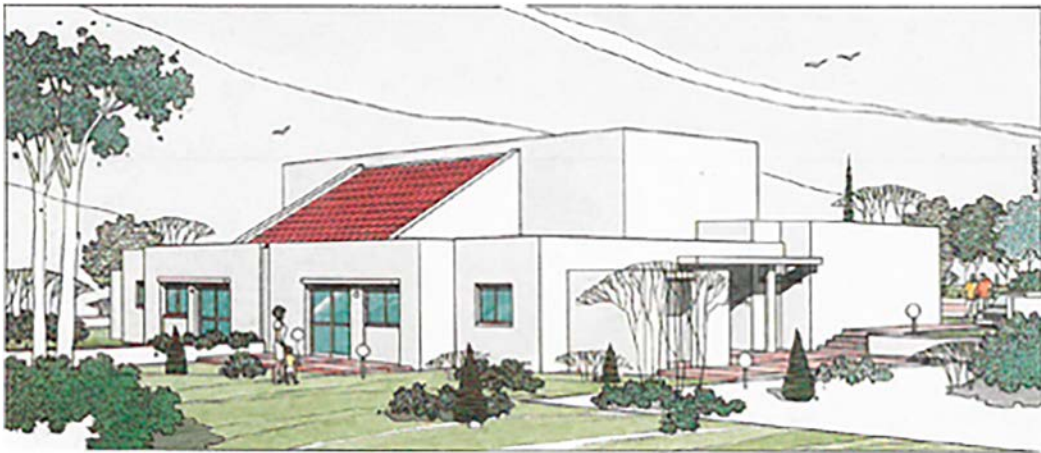
[35]Oren, "Reut."

Figure 7. Model for a house in Reut, Izik-Wieser Architects. 1991. (IDF-HA)
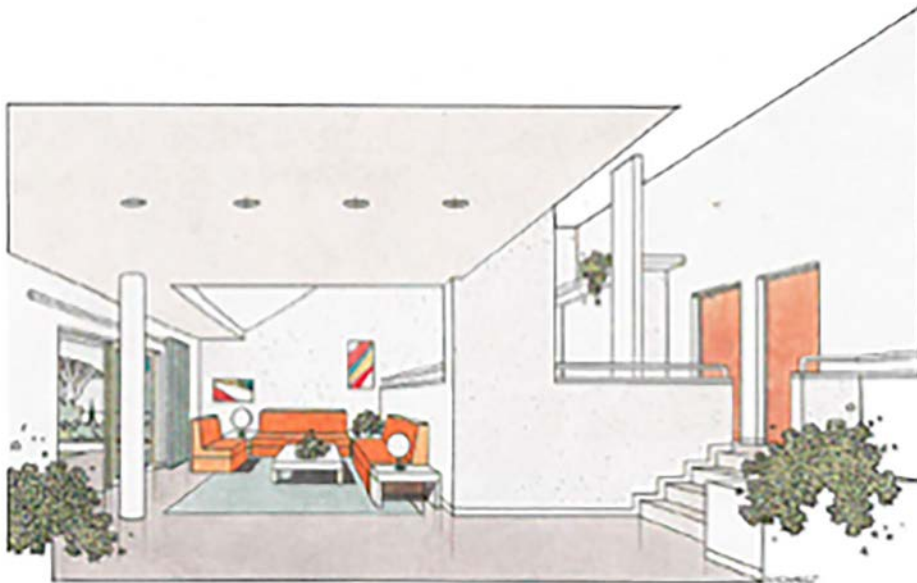
Figure 8. Inner perspective for a house in Reut, Izik-Wieser Architects. 1991. (IDF-HA)

The association wanted to create single-model compounds that would consist of the same housing type, leaving each family to select the model of its choice. This enhanced the uniform and military-like appearance and optimized the construction process.[36] To improve the process further, the association established a parallel development company, named *Megorei Modi'in* ltd, which was run by the same officers. As a private corporation, it was able to manage the procedure economically, ensuring the quality of construction in relatively low prices. Consequently, the first phase of Reut,

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[36]Mentzel, "Reut and Rosh Ha'ayin."

which included around 1000 housing units, was a focused construction effort that the association was able to conclude in around three years.[37]

Three decades after its completion, Reut continues to form a privileged housing project. While the Israeli government originally authorized Reut as a neighbourhood in the future city of Modi'in, its socio-political capital and status as an 'officers' settlement' enabled it to retain its status as an independent locality for almost fifteen years. With a single gated entrance and no physical connections to Modi'in, Reut was run by the same local council as Maccabim and functioned as s separated upper-middle-class gated suburban locality. By the early 2000s, as the Ministry of Interior asked to merge the two with Modi'in, the citizens of Reut tried to resist the union. Eventually, though Reut became officially a part of Modi'in-Maccabim-Reut, it still retains its unique tone and independence, run by its own borough council. The Neot-Reut Association is still active in the borough, and there is still no direct car access from Modi'in. Reut is accessible only through the same single gated entrance, and it is thus still the same idyllic segregated suburban upper-middle-class settlement which its initiators envisioned.

Conclusions

Reut, with the omnipotent status of the IDF in its development, presents a unique case of the selective privatization of the Israeli settlement mechanism. The unprecedented spatial rights that the IDF enjoyed in Reut enabled it to control almost all aspects of its production. Its developers' desires for quality suburban lifestyle, as well as their interests for an optimized, efficient and resourceful construction process produced a unique settlement. The suburban features that characterize Reut, are an outcome of the unique development method that turned the military into both the producer and consumer of the new settlement. During the 1990s the state began incorporating investors and speculators in its territorial project, turning its former frontiers into a real estate market as a means to attract larger private developers. In that sense, Reut was both the Swan song of the non-corporate private settlement mechanism and the instigator of the next large-scale projects.

Following Reut, the HA continued developing additional housing projects in the Israeli periphery. First were the military neighbourhoods of Rosh Ha'ayin, which the ILA used in order to attract young and well-established families to the then underprivileged and neglected town, promoting its status and enabling its development.[38] Later, were smaller compounds in the new city of Modi'in or new neighbourhoods in other underdeveloped peripheral towns like Nazareth-Illit, Akko, Gadera or Beer-Sheva.[39] In all the following projects, the HA had to work with an existing local council and a prevailing local masterplan, which decreased its exclusive status and ability to control every aspect of the project. At the same time, as a representative of the IDF, the HA was still able to negotiate key planning issues for the benefits of the military families. The logic behind these projects was maintained, as it promised officers large houses in cheap prices while extending their service and gentrifying under-developed areas.[40] Accordingly, these military neighbourhoods were secluded and segregated residential area, as implied by their names, which almost always consisted of the words *Naveh* or *Neot* (Hebrew for Oasis). These Oases, with their unique method of gentrification, prepared the transformation of the public image of the areas they were built in, turning them from

[37]Fogel, "Highway 6 Settlements" [Interview].
[38]Eitan-Goshen Archivets and Z.Hashimshoni Architects and Planners, "Detailed Plan AF/BM/2009/1.".
[39]IDF Housing Administration, *Nofei Ramot, Petah Tikva.*
[40]Bar-Eli, "IDF Housing Administration Offers."

frontier regions or impoverished towns to fertile ground for larger investments, and the ILA was thus willing to continue privatizing both property and planning rights.

For years the slogan of the IDF's education corps was 'the nation builds the army that builds the nation'.[41] Whether this sentence is valid for Israeli society in the individualistic twenty-first century or not, it still implies the role of the IDF as an integral part of the local culture and identity. However, in the case of Reut, it may be more suitable to claim that *the nation builds an army that creates real state*, as it was through this unique case of selective privatization that the state sought to develop its frontier; using the military personnel as a real estate *avant-garde* in order to attract further investment and promote future development.

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Disclosure Statement

Notes on contributor

Gabriel Schwake is a doctoral researcher at TU Delft and a fellow of the Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich Studienwerk (ELES). He is a trained architect and urban planner who graduated from Tel Aviv University's school of architecture in 2013, and from its post-professional master's program in 2016. Gabriel's research focuses on the influences of nationalism and market economy on housing developments since the 1970s. His main areas of interest include urban and architectural history, housing, conflict areas, neoliberalism and post-colonialism..

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[41][In Hebrew: A'm Bone Tzava Boneh A'm] Sasson-Levy, "Where Will the Women Be?" 183.

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