Theorizing Tenure Restructuring in the Dynamic Metropolitan—Rural Frontier: Bedouin on the boundary of Beer-Sheva Metropolis

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To explore the way the borders of Bedouin informal settlements emerge and transform in the Negev, we construct a theoretical perspective of them as part of a wider spatial dynamic within a metropolizing region. This correlates with a growing political-economic study of the spatial dynamics of informal urbanization in the Global South, where the 'metropolitan frontier' pushes outwards and subsumes rural spaces that are neither fully integrated into the formal, modern market system nor strictly separated from it. The surfacing and re-use of indigenous/national ideology and struggle is understood as a result of the negotiation over incorporation and over material allocation.

Keywords: *frontier; informal; indigenous; tenure; Beer-Sheva metropolis; Bedouin*

"It requires an effort to discover, within this tangle of political violence and contests of power, the stern laws of the economic process" (Luxemburg, 2003: 178).

Conflicts over land tenure are proliferating around the world with the infiltration of market rationales and practices into spaces that were not yet fully structured accordingly. While significant attention was given to rural-Indigenous communities experiencing such a shift (e.g., Akram-Lodhi, 2007; Springer, 2013), metropolitan regions of the Global South-East have received less attention. These spaces pose several challenges for conventional West-centric studies (Bunnell et al., 2012; Wyly, 2018). Among them is the gap between the expanding metropolis and informal *rural-urbanizing communities* which stand in its wake. The metropolis is already structurally adjusted and integrated into global capitalist market and state

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regulation; the informal communities are integrating but gradually and partially. This disjuncture creates the platform for bitter conflicts over land tenure, but these cannot be adequately analyzed with either indigenous perspectives, that are better fitted for pre-modern communities in the 'wilderness,' or with legalist-rationalist views which are suited for spaces already privatized and absorbed into the state-market apparatus. We are witnessing the emergence and proliferation of a new type of frontier in multiple sites around the world, one that was not yet sufficiently studied or theorized.

This paper theorizes the political and spatial process of restructuring: it conceptualizes 'metropolitan frontiers,' 'non-frontiers,' and the spatiotemporal evolvement and shift between the two. After the theoretical background, an account of Beer-Sheva metropolis and its Bedouin communities in Israel is given as an example for implementation. The data collection draws mainly from findings and insights in previous studies and some new data gathered from several announcements of government officials and governmental decisions and reports.

FRONTIER AND NON-FRONTIER

From a political-economic perspective, the capitalist market is inherently a spatially ever-expanding system, always searching for new resources to exploit and markets to open up (Harvey, 2001; Luxemburg, 2003). It is also highly vulnerable to risk. At any space and time, there is a certain balance between two contradicting forces: the expansionist thrust, bursting out of the core (centers of progress, wealth, and power), searching for opportunity, and the risk it entails for capital(-ists). If the first wins over, then the expansion's horizon may be termed a '*frontier*' for capitalism. If the second one wins, at a certain space and time, it may be rendered a '*non-frontier*,' where capitalist interests are indifferent and unwilling to invest the needed costs to absorb it into its system.

Our engagement with 'frontier,' as a key concept, is meant to use its meaning as both a friction-line for material accumulation and as a site subsumed with ideological imagery. In classical accounts, the quest to conquer and inhabit the frontier has shaped national spirits and cultures. More than a spatial-economic term, the frontier is a poetically charged image and myth, and the catalyst for a new society, where savagery is to be unrooted by heroic pioneers that advance civilization (Kellerman, 1997). Smith (2005) has moved the spotlight from remote wastelands onto the 'new urban frontier.' He showed that after the inner-city was abandoned by middle-classes (non-frontier, in the above terms), the renewed potential-value attracted capitalist speculative attention, but also how the construction of frontier cultural and ideological images legitimates and motivates different publics to appropriate disputed urban sites (gentrification), lands, and resources, by drastic means if needed. Under the unfavorable and 'distorted' market conditions of the

frontier, where there is yet no political agreement over the 'rules of the game,' the use of extra-market power is often needed to forcefully overcome disagreements. Ideology and myth are among the key elements that facilitate this need, as they inspire pioneers and draw the state to back them with resources and force.

THE METROPOLITAN FRONTIER

Recent uses of the frontier concept have moved attention to the Global South-East's metropolises (Harvey, 2010; Hudalah et al., 2016; Ortega, 2016; Sassen, 2018; Wyly, 2018). "The metropolis is an important site for the consolidation of various circuits of capital, from finance capital to property capital […] shaped by neoliberal agendas […] made possible by the aggressive role of the state in sponsoring and subsidizing urban development, and by transnational investors and diasporic capital" (Roy, 2011: 106). The metropolis' horizon of expansion is the friction-line between development coalitions (state agencies, capital, middle-upper-classes) and informal dwellers (the poor, rural communities without formal tenure). This is where most is at stake – the big money of real-estate developers, suburbanites, large-scale infrastructures, and the housing and livelihood of the lower-classes (Benjamin, 2008; Brickell et al., 2017; Goldman, 2011; Ortega, 2016).

Nevertheless, metropolitan expansion should not be conceived only in terms of land grabbing by specific powerful agents or encroachment by the poor, but also in terms of structural adjustment of tenures that is required for overall market expansion. Restructuring of pre-capitalist ownership systems, from socially embedded communal-traditional into privatized-standardized tenure, is one precondition for such expansion, repeating itself from the enclosure of European hinterlands of the 19th century, to the American frontier, to today's Global South-East countries and cities (Akram-Lodhi, 2007; De-Soto, 2000; Makki, 2007). Often, this process entails expropriation of rural lands by nationalization or reallocation to private agents (Ho and Spoor, 2006), what is often referred to as 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey, 2010; Ortega, 2016; Springer, 2013). Notably though, it is of value to distinguish between the two related but separate processes: The latter is a process in which certain powerful groups/classes seek to grab or appropriate land resources for their *particular* benefit. The former is a *generalized* process of structural adjustment of socially-embedded tenure systems, their incorporation into the capitalist (global) market.

The metropolis, and by extension the market system, is not always thrusting outwards. In 'premature' stages, the outskirts of the metropolis are of negligible potential market-value and its rural communities are left on their own – a non-frontier. Only in 'mature' stages the *generalized* capitalist interest is to formalize tenures so to allow land and housing markets to spatially expand – from now on, a metropolitan frontier. This rationale is what drives many policymakers to adopt De-Soto's (2000)

(neoliberal) principles, to formalize informal tenures as part of a pro-development economic agenda. But how is this different from other frontier types?

In a colonial frontier, Indigenous communities tend to utterly reject the capitalist-modern system, and the colonizers do the same with regard to traditional tenures, referring to the land as empty, 'Terra-Nulius' (Sheehan, 2012). The land is taken by direct force and legal impositions, since the colonizers can take it, and also since they cannot purchase it through (agreed-upon) market mechanisms. Tenure allocation will only occur *after* dispossession of the natives. Contrary to this, spaces in medium proximity to metropolitan cores may inhabit rural communities that are *gradually* exposed to the capitalist-modern system and adjust accordingly - culturally and economically. Commonly, they are referred to as informal, peri-urban, or desakota (Hudalah et al., 2016; McGee, 1991; Simon et al., 2004). If and when there is a wave of capitalist-urban expansion into these areas, there may be conflict between different agents that crave the land for themselves, but the general end result will be much more open to (political) negotiation. The 'urbanizing natives' may not struggle *against* the capitalist-modern socioeconomic system, but over the terms of *incorporation* into it or its incorporation into their spaces and culture, meaning, on the way privatized-formal tenures will be allocated. Importantly, this makes such conflicts significantly different from other, "classical," indigenous struggles.

URBANIZING THE POLITICS OF INDIGENEITY AND INDIGENIZING URBAN POLITICS

As the wave of capitalist development and restructuring sweeps through the previously rural periphery, farmers and pastoralists must realign their economic and cultural practices to handle the change. Having that their ownership system grew 'spontaneously' (as they divide the land among themselves according to inner customary norms and power relations) and were never officially recognized nor integrated into the formal apparatus, it is problematic (and not pre-given) to determine the 'right' tenure status they will receive when this happens (Ho and Spoor, 2006). Yet, unlike some remote Aboriginal spaces, with the advancement of the metropolis the natives further urbanize (wage labor spreads, salaries grow, modern materials and technics appear, and the population increases). The closer the city comes, the more pronounced is the transition from 'rural' to 'urban' characteristics (McGee, 1991; Simon et al., 2004). The lands are of high(-er) market-value and the traditional owners are beginning to integrate into that market, informally using and trading the land for profit. This entails the expansion of the village nucleus to its surrounding cultivated or open spaces, despite any legal restrictions. They build for the growing community, absorb rural-to-urban migrants, and in mature stages, for the rental market (Gough and Yankson, 2000; Wu et al., 2013; Zhao, 2017). Nonetheless, "village membership is often retained as the main source of community

identity, even long after settlements have been enveloped by the expanding city" (Simon et al., 2004: 239).

The use of power – violence, manipulation, ideological and political influence, etc. – is the key through which different actors attempt to grab hold of land within the not-yet-structured market system of the frontier. Politics inherently predate the construction of the land market and predetermines tenure allocation. Both sides of the struggle develop sets of images, ideologies, and myths that legitimize their right to the land, and address other parties to gain legitimacy, solidarity, political allies and aid. This is where we find an (understudied) convergence of urban and Indigenous politics.

The urban aspect is well studied regarding 'informal' spaces. The poor (usually impoverished rural-to-urban migrants) that informally occupy state or private lands, act in various ways to take hold of land, assert their right to it, and withhold eviction. They bribe officials, manipulate the law and enforcement system, riot violently, go out on public campaigns and so forth (Benjamin, 2008; Brickell et al., 2017; Dekel, 2020a; Miraftab, 2009). They commonly assert their right to inhabit and own land as a 'right to the city,' rooted in citizenship rights (Holston, 2012). Indigenous ownership, however, in contrast with Western-modern formal or informal ownership, is often described as part of an entirely different ontology. It is neither land alone, which anyway cannot be merely forfeited in a profit-oriented transaction, neither is it spirituality of some supra-natural power alone. It is a relational assemblage of people, place and belief into 'country' as a more-than-human agent which constitutes Indigenous identity (Bawaka Country et al., 2016, 2017; Larsen and Johnson, 2016). Indigenous politics usually turn to anti-colonial framings, addressing identity and culture, creating 'sons of the soil' movements and asserting their right to land and country as a tribal, ancestral, and spiritual right (Akram-Lodhi, 2007; Sheehan, 2012; Vandekerckhove, 2009).

The two forms of political struggle basically contradict each other on various conceptual axes: communal vs. private tenure, traditional vs. modern law, autonomous vs. national sovereignty, spirituality vs. materiality, and so forth. But, within the already gray area of 'urbanizing-rural' spaces, the contradictions are also vague (Gough and Yankson, 2000). The advantage of such a convergence must be also noticed: the set of (mythical) images that constitutes indigenous discourse holds great legal-ideological-political power in relation to struggles over tenure. We submit that at the metropolitan frontier, where rural-urbanizing communities face structural policies of formalization and regularization, coupled with threats of expropriation and eviction, 'urban-Indigenous' politics emerge. In this, the indigenous discourse and struggle are not mobilized to protect a pre-modern spatiality and autonomy but to assert the demands over the terms of incorporation into the modern metropolitan space. This holds the key to a pragmatic negotiation and incorporation into the ever-expanding modern market space and modern society. The following case of Beer-Sheva's metropolitan frontier portrays one form that such convergence takes.

BEER-SHEVA METORPOLIS: CURRENT PERSPECTIVES

Beer-Sheva metropolis in the Negev desert (see Figure 1), inhabits some 350,000 Jewish and 300,000 Bedouin-Muslim residents. Most Bedouin live in formal towns planned by the state but approximately 100,000 live in informal impoverished settlements that surround the metropolitan core. Many of them lay ownership claims for lands, covering a significant part of the region. These claims were repeatedly denied at courts and the lands were declared as state-owned, what didn't end the conflict. There are several rival schools which analyzed this conflict from different perspectives (Dekel, 2020b). The first and dominant, is the post-colonial, that heavily relies on critical theories of colonialism, indigenous people, settler-societies and cultural studies. In broad outlines, it asserts that the Bedouin are native to the region, inhabiting it for some 400 years. They have traditional legal codes and internally-agreed ownerships over land. During the 19th century, they have experienced a shift from nomadism to a pastoralist-tiller society, with permanent settlements and a customary tenure regime. The imperial Ottoman ruler never disputed the Bedouin's autonomy and when needed, it tended to acknowledge their traditional law. There is significant evidence for Bedouin sedentarism, land purchases, and governmental acknowledgment of these arrangements, also by the following British ruler (Meir, 2009; Kedar, et al., 2019). During the War of 1948 massive expulsion or fleeing of the Bedouin took place (only 12,000 out of 80,000 were allowed to remain). It is argued that as a colonial settler-state, Israel imagined the Negev region as empty, waiting for the modernized Jewish people to settle there and 'make the desert bloom' with innovation and pioneering spirit. They have framed the Bedouin culture as primitive, destined to disappear, and its traditions as invalid (McKee, 2016). By various means – violent and procedural - the state expropriated lands which remained vacant after the war, and also lands that it evicted later, relocating the inhabitants into other parts of the region. Later, when the Bedouin filed appeals to regain their tenure rights (lately, aided by professional scholars of this school), they were rejected by manipulative legal measures that framed their lands as 'dead' (*mawat*), having that they were never used in an intensive Western-style manner. Nevertheless, as indigenous people, they remain loyal to their land, attaching their identity and culture to their ancestral landscapes, and remaining on the ground, defying the colonizers' laws (see: Meir, 2009; Meir and Karplus, 2018; Kedar, et al., 2018; Kohn et al., 2018; Sheehan, 2012).

The institutional perspective (Dekel, 2020b) challenges the clear-cut dichotomy of native-colonizer: most Bedouin tribes entered the region as it was already a sovereign Ottoman territory. They have practiced pastoralist nomadism up until 1948 and rarely, if ever, sedentarized in any kind of legally acceptable form of permanent settlement. They were well aware of the formal law and tenure system and their inner land divisions related only to tribal influence, herding rights, and customary but not formal ownership rights. The Ottoman, and later the British rulers, did not see the Bedouin codes as legally valid. When the authorities invited them to claim

ownership, so to motivate intensive cultivation, they rejected the offer due to lack of interest and will to pay taxes or related military service, as well as tribesmen fear of the might of tribal sheikhs. The 1948 events were actually part of mutual Israeli-Arab hostility, in which most tribes who initially participated with the Arab forces in the fights, willingly fled with Israel's victory. Those who remained neutral were allowed to stay. During the years, the state invested in developing the Bedouin and offered them modern settlement solutions and free land plots. As in other fields, the state inherited the previous sovereign's law system and acknowledged any previous tenure, but Bedouin claims, having no supportive evidence nor formal legal status, were not accepted by the courts (though listed and handled with all required procedural means). Out of social sensitivity to the tenure issue, the state largely refrained from strict enforcement and offered far reaching compensation agreements to those who willingly forfeited their claims and resettled in (subsidized) formal towns. According to Yahel (Yahel, 2017; Yahel and Kark, 2018; Yahel et al., 2017) the discourse of Bedouin indigeneity is promoted by outside political interests and does not reflect reality, nor does it aid the Bedouin's interests.

The dispute between the two schools is not just theoretical but ideology-driven, a contest between so-called Zionist and post/anti-Zionist critics. The Achilles-heal of both perspectives is their attempt to portray some absolute tenure right, or lack of, under objective standards. 'Politicizing' the tenure issue is regarded by both only as the rival's weakness and not as a defining inherent feature of all involved parties. Scholars advocate for the 'right' legal interpretation while it is clear that it was already marked a-priori according to each scholar's choice of perspective (Dekel, 2021a). The Post-colonial takes for granted that the Bedouin are indigenous par-excellence; the institutionalist generally assumes the opposite. The inherent ambiguity in this dichotomous separation suggests that both Bedouin's indigeneity and non-indigeneity are a matter of *political* construction – one in which, by the way, scholars are key actors (ibid).

Thinking through political-economy, politics is always the precondition under which ownership rights are allocated. Land ownership, despite the claim for an existential right to it, is in practice a politically determined right, as Murtazashvili (2013: 37) wrote: "private property institutions do not exist, hypothetically or otherwise, unless there is a system of governance to specify and enforce them [… they] come from human organization." The fact of the matter is, after reviewing both schools' findings, that since the 20th century the Bedouin acted in a form of informal (peri-urban) occupation of peripheral lands in what was a *non-frontier*. They were never detached from urban society but relied on it for work and consumption, with changing intensity (Marx, 2006). As in parallel global cases, they gradually parceled out the land according to their own codes and inner power relations, not since they had a sovereign-legal 'right' to do so, but since the sovereign had no interest in preventing them from doing so. The gradual emergence of a more-or-less privatized ownership division was in part a reaction to the developing markets in nearby cities

(Gaza, for example) and governmental restructuring, but it hadn't fully 'matured' and formally structured prior to 1948 (see also: Grossman, 1994; Kressel et al., 1991). The Bedouin cannot be dispossessed out of something they never formally owned, but at the same time, their long use of and attachment to it, supported by their informal customary law, cannot be overlooked. It remains the state's *political* mission to decide how to address it but also depends on the Bedouin's own political reaction. The question of how such political decision unfolds is determined by the political-economic context within which it is addressed. The following examination of the changing context of non/frontier after 1948 allows further understanding.

Figure 1: Beer-Sheva metropolis
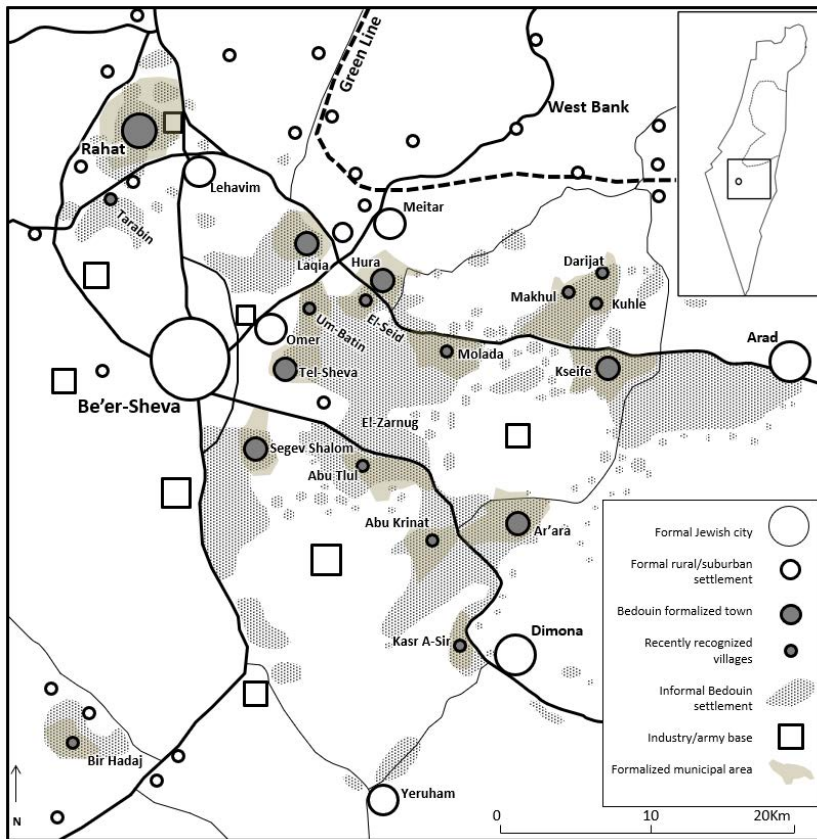
THE NEGEV: FROM NATIONAL FRONTIER TO NON-FRONTIER

The Zionist movement ideologically cherished the Negev, hoping to create a "new man" out of its pioneers. But the early thrust into the Negev was motivated by the state's fear of losing it to neighboring states under British geopolitical pressure. When

the pressure was removed in 1956 (Asia, 1994), the urgency to settle it diminished and with it an important engine behind the frontier ideology and practice. Market forces drew migration and capital to Israel's center and only few pioneers moved into the arid Negev. The planes around Beer-Sheva remained nearly vacant of formal settlement (except the small towns of Dimona, Yeruham, and Arad), dotted with tents of the few remaining Bedouin. Only a negligible number of new Jewish formal settlements were established after 1962 and up until the 2000s, and most of the land-uses were of military or polluting industry. The global economic crisis in the 1980s and the following neo-liberal readjustment, triggered a severe regional crisis of deindustrialization, unemployment, and Jewish outmigration (to the national center) (Gradus, 2008; Kutuk et al., 2018). Although the frontier myth was sustained, the reality of the region was no longer of a frontier but of a periphery (Hasson, 1991) or, again, a 'non-frontier'. As such, land-values were low, and little private initiatives emerged. The insistence of post-colonial research to ascribe a continuous colonial ideology to the Zionist society and state is thus exaggerated, having that most of the disputed area remained unsettled and unused by Jews and calls for settling the Negev are mostly political leap service. A more nuanced analysis needs to account for the economic context that limits ideology, and further, determines it.

The Bedouin population grew rapidly due to exceptional fertility rates and unlicensed migration of polygamic wives from neighboring states (Abu-Srihan, 2018). The changing economic context has rendered most of the traditional pastoralist-tiller economy irrelevant, at least as a primary source of livelihood. The Bedouin turned to wage labor but competed for work in an already impoverished region with diminishing jobs. Bedouin unemployment ranges between 20-50%, especially in informal settlements, and large numbers depend on (shrinking) welfare payments or illegal occupations. Governmental child support cuts in the early 2000s further buried large families in economic hardship and deepened Bedouin poverty. Regional development schemes failed to take care of the rapidly growing surplus of young low-skilled Bedouin workers, many of them are unemployed. They largely lack language skills, higher education, or social status, and are frequently discriminated against in hiring and wage (Abu-Bader and Goettlieb, 2009; Jakubowska, 2000; Marx, 2000). Their poverty is a crucial aspect that encourages informality, but it is often overlooked in political and academic discourse.

Tenure and Facts on the Ground

During the 1970s the state surveyed the land and listed all tenure claims. Subsequently, the court rejected them, and yet the state largely refrained from changing the status-quo. Most Bedouin, with or without claims, were unofficially allowed to remain on the land (State Comptroller, 2016). With demographic growth and spread of labor wages and building materials, their habitats grew and spilled over into adjacent lands. New tin shacks replaced traditional tents, spreading in a wide dispersal of familial clusters over wide territories, facing little interference

from enforcement units. This building pattern was used to facilitate the housing needs and sometimes to use the land for small familial farming (providing some resilience under extreme conditions of poverty and unstableness of work, see Abu-Rabia, 1994). Another important aspect behind it was to affirm their claim over the land with physical presence, 'facts on the ground' (Dekel et al., 2019b; Meir, 1997; Yahel and Kark, 2018). They continue to sustain strict obedience to their traditional codes and customary tenure system and regard '*sumud*,' the holding-on to their ancestral land, as an ideological mission (Yiftachel, 2009). Owning and using the land by Jews was allegedly the Zionist stated goal, but officials constantly approved of its continuing occupation and use by Bedouin.

Occasionally, state agencies provided quasi-official approval for certain groups to relocate into areas they preferred, or even – after negotiations and protest – into territories in which they lived previously and were evacuated from[1] (Dekel, 2020b). At two locations, new squatting occurred on land privately owned by Jews.[2] The state consented, and the owners had no interest in struggling for their un-valuable assets (Administrative-appeal 21013-09-1). The Bedouin gradually gathered allies from political parties, the academy, and civil society (Dekel, 2021a; Dekel et al., 2020b), and managed to persuade special governmental committees to 'gray' their houses, meaning, to officially refrain from demolition and allow temporary legal status until some future formal solution would appear (see Goldberg, 2008; Committee for Interior Affairs and Environmental Protection, 2001). In practice, the buildings were repeatedly 'grayed,' decade after decade, despite the cry of Zionist ideologists against the "loss of the Negev" (e.g., Sofer, 2007). Throughout the years, the Bedouin consolidated a 'trans-local civic network,' connecting with a plethora of NGOs, political parties, movements, and foreign institutions, and successfully struggled to draw some infrastructures and services to their settlements, and gain formalization of more and more of them – 'whitening the gray' settlements (Dekel, 2021a; Duchan, 2010), a process still unfolding today. Presently, only 25% of Bedouin population remains in places that are neither recognized nor earmarked for recognition by the state. Eleven settlements were recognized in-situ (except one of them, in a new location) and developed (Dekel, 2021a). Recently, another three settlements were recognized, and a new urban settlement is being planned (State of Israel, 2021). It is evident that for years, despite the dry law, there was no significant interest holder among the state or private agents that was willing to invest the needed costs to take hold of the informally occupied lands.

This *de-facto* continuance of presence, use, and rule of traditional codes, under the state's *quasi-de-jure* (gray) approval, renders the so-called 'Zionist frontier ideology' somewhat meaningless. An apt description for it may be, drawing from Beck (2002), a 'zombie category,' a 'living-dead' concept that continues to circulate and draw attention while being drained out of its original meaning. As long as only few ideologically inspired Zionist agents are seeking to settle the land (only a handful of new settlements were established in the region since 1980s), it is *practically* given to

the Bedouin in mass scales, first through unofficial permission to remain, later with formal recognition in-situ, and eventually with regularization and compensation for those who relocate to new plots. 'Graying' and formalizing are the products of (politically driven) compromise over non-frontier low-value lands.

Beer-Sheva's Metropolitan Frontier

In the last two decades the conflict escalated and regained public attention. This happened while several (Neo-) Zionist political leaders and activists claim there is urgency to fulfill the call to settle the Negev. For example, the president of Ben-Gurion University in Beer-Sheva, a prominent public figure, proclaimed that: "the hills beyond Beer-Sheva are the future of Israel." The way towards this future, he declared, is through making Beer-Sheva into a thriving metropolis (Braverman, 2001). As shown by Gradus (2008) Kutuk et al., (2018) and Porat (2009) these notions were grabbing hold of many policymaking circles by that time. Yet, this reemergence of frontier-nationalist ideology should not be seen as some social phenomenon that is independent of its economic underpinnings.

Starting the 1990s, the region gradually went through a government-led remaking as a post-industrial metropolis. The trend took shape with new masterplans, infrastructures upgrading, subsidies for middle-class housing, military industry development, and hi-tech clusters. It is largely the product of political-economic dynamics and less a resurgence of national Zionist aspirations. Among other reasons, this wave of development is induced by demands spilled-over from the center, low interest rates and rapid increase of housing prices, coupled with attempts to mitigate urban sprawl and preserve open spaces in the center (Tel-Aviv metropolis). These dynamics facilitate the movement of demand to the once peripheral Beer-Sheva region (Dekel, 2021b). The growing demand for land finds comfortable allies within Zionist civil society. The fact that the suburbanites are conceptualized as 'pioneers' enables them to enjoy the aid of NGOs and governmental institutions (Kutuk et al., 2019). This act is also publicly legitimized as part of the urgent regional need to lure army-personnel and other potential middle-class suburbanites by providing them with exclusive housing solutions (e.g., Knesset, 2018)

It is under these circumstances that lands which were useless in the past for the (Jewish) middle-higher classes, suddenly become prime locations for development. As the non-frontier reemerges as a metropolitan frontier for a plethora of economic interests, the land conflict is restructured from 'gray compromise' into a struggle for 'black-or-white' concrete decision making. This is perhaps best exemplified with the first-of-its-kind attempt at a comprehensive plan for resettling the entire informal settlements (while formalizing some of them in-situ which recently becomes an acceptable option by state planners), the 'Prawer-Begin Plan' (Begin, 2013). Concurrently, the regional masterplan of 2012, while zoning several areas for formalization, zoned other for conservation or infrastructures, meaning, for future eviction of their Bedouin inhabitants (RMP 4/14/23, 2012). Significant subsidies

are now allocated to develop formal settlements, compensation of evacuees, and facilitating improved enforcement units (State Comptroller, 2016).

For the Bedouin, the era of latent disagreement is giving way for an era of publicized conflict. Their grassroot organizations and leaders connect the land conflict with the wider Palestinian-Islamic struggle (Rubin, 2017). They charge the land issue with religious meanings, as evident from leaders declaring "It is forbidden to sell land to non-Muslims" (Dhuh-Halevi, 2012; also, Kohn et al., 2018) or nationalist meanings, for example, by arranging 'Land-Day' demonstrations against evictions (Globes, 2005) – a ritual of protest practiced since 1978, symbolizing the Palestinian struggle against Israel. Concurrently, the struggle is depicted as indigenous and anti-colonial. Their connection to the land is commonly portrayed as spiritual and historical, a part of their identity and heritage (Kohn et al., 2018). This, somewhat new, framing of the conflict is circulating in widening academic and human-rights transnational networks, producing studies, reports, and conventions (e.g., Zochrot, 2015). The tenure issue is *politically* reframed as a mythological battle against the colonizer. The courts' decisions to deny the land claims are thus portrayed as illegitimate while resistance is legitimized (e.g., Basuk, 2011), bringing to eruptions of mass riots and protests whenever eviction and expropriation policies are brought forward (Dawber, 2013; Hakmon, 2022).

Accumulation by Regularization and Negotiation

The current unfolding of the conflict portrays how the advancement of the metropolitan frontier is molded according to the interplay between development on the one hand and the indigenized political resistance on the other.

While the reemerging politics of Jewish settlement is revived through certain political channels, it is of importance to notice where it is practically manifested and where it is not: during the last two decades, only a handful of Jewish settlements were established, mainly in prime locations – near main roads and close to the metropolitan core – and on lands that were either claimed by Bedouin but unoccupied (e.g. Gva'ot-Bar) or lands occupied by Bedouin squatters who had no traditional claim for it (e.g. Omer's northern expansion or Hiran). In other examples, the developers and NGOs currently attempt to reclaim lands that are owned by Jews but were squatted in the past (Neve-Gurion, Neve Tmarim, Omarit) (Nerdi, 2017). Meanwhile, there are no significant attempts to expropriate claimed lands, settled by Bedouin, for the purpose of Jewish settlement. It is apparent that Bedouin traditional claims, although not officially recognized as legally valid, are treated as such.

Land claimers who willingly enter negotiation are given significant monetary compensations, alternative plots and even formalized tenure over part of the claimed area, sometimes with permits to build buildings of several stories (Basuk, 2011; Dar'el, 2018; Dekel, 2021a; Israel Land Authority, 2018; Yahel, 2017). In certain cases, the political struggle subverts from discussions of the ancestral-existential

right of the Bedouin onto arguments over the height of compensation. Those are rightwing Zionist politicians that lead this policy, offer large compensation deals, in contradiction with their electoral base's ideological views, facing severe criticism for doing so (Kedar, 2019; Libskind, 2016). Similarly, state planners, who are working to regularize the formalized settlements, are significantly shifting their practice from modernist impositions 'from-above,' to a cautious awareness of the existing traditional tenure system. To gain the residents' cooperation with the new formalization and development schemes, they structure the new formal plots to match the traditional structure of ownership (Dekel, 2021a).

In their practice, these state agents reflect the state's willingness to recognize the indigenous claims de-facto, in an extra-legal manner, so to promote the more important vision: the general restructuring of the region's lands and settlements to promote its future economic growth. The most recent manifestation for this is the publication of a new regional master plan for complete regularization of the informal settlements (budgeted with 9 billion dollars). In stark contrast with past policies (and ideological declarations), it designates mass unclaimed state lands for Bedouin housing in formal towns, formalizes multiple newly formed informal sites, and avoids expropriation of most of the claimed lands.

The Bedouin Settlement Authority's chief, Yair Ma'ayan, expresses the crucial shift of policy towards land and development: "We have successfully negotiated over 4 claims lately due to reforms in the compensation mechanism. I claimed that real-estate prices went up so the compensations should rise too" (in: Melnitski, 2020). "This dispute will never be solved. We only deal with planning and developing neighborhoods over state lands […] half the population is unregulated and needs solutions" (Ma'ayan, 28/6/2017; also in: Frenkel, 2019). In a step-by-step process, the land is restructured through negotiations and development, in alignment with the general overall growth of demand for land. The "large" ideological struggle still hovers over the region but the spatial manifestation of it is not some indigenous vision nor a Zionist-modernist triumph but a pragmatically emerging suburban formalized landscape.

CONCLUSIONS

The paper investigated the formation and reformation of the borders of Bedouin settled regions in the Beer-Sheva metropolis and theorized it as an outcome of the changing metropolitan dynamics. We did not attempt to provide an answer to the question 'who rightfully owns the land or can settle it?' in the Bedouin-Jewish dispute. Rather, we contextualized it to expose how it appears in real-politic and how it receives certain answers when sufficient material interests are consolidated regarding it. Where and when the land is valueless to the general market, the question was of negligible importance, so it was de-facto given for practical use

of the Bedouin; where and when this has changed and the potential market value increased, the question reemerged and was given conflicting answers from rival actors, competing for the way the valuable land resource will be allocated formally.

There is an inherent political aspect of tenure conflicts in frontier regions that are not yet structured and integrated into the formal market system. This is particularly the case with metropolitan expansion in the Global South, where development interests collide with rural-urbanizing communities. Drawing from political-economy studies, we conceptualized the outskirts of the metropolis as 'non'-frontiers,' where market-state actors had negligible interest and rural communities were left under informal 'gray' status, gradually growing and urbanizing, until some future interest will arise. We also conceptualized the 'metropolitan frontier,' where and when the metropolis grows intensively and strives to expand into its surroundings (formerly, the area of the non-frontier) while provoking conflict with the communities that were previously left to grow and spread unchallenged.

The rural-urbanizing landscape is typically unstructured or regulated so the shift from neglect to intensive development boils up tension over the proper way to re-allocate the land. In the transformation into a frontier, political images and narratives of resistance gain momentum since they assert land claims of both sides. Yet, there is no clear cut 'right' solution since the allocation is inherently political. The struggle may result in collision between different stakeholders. Alternatively, though, the overall will of all parties to take part and support the metropolitan immanent growth leads them to negotiate and reach agreements to regularize and incorporate the informal landscape into the (spatial) market system. To achieve this, without sliding into ethnic conflict and more importantly, without jeopardizing the ability to draw investment and middle-class suburbanites into the metropolizing region, the Israeli government was more than willing to make compromises regarding the Zionist-nationalist ideology that allegedly guides it. This insight is important for the abundant research of the Bedouin space and society, that commonly focuses on the political images that the conflict produces (the indigenous, the Zionist, etc.). We learn from this insight that it is crucial to also frame the economic context that molds these images and address the ways that pragmatic materialist solutions are actually found.

NOTES

1   Such as in Laquia or Bir-Hadaj.
2   El-Zarnug and Bir-Hadaj.

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