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Nationalism between Land and Environment: The Conflict between “Oranges” and “Greens” over Settling in the East Lakhish Area

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I think it goes deeper. It's about the connection between man and his land, not the environment.

What's the difference?

Environment is a very leftist thing, pardon my expression.

Is that so? Is that the connection?

Yes. They [the Green movement] don't use the expression “connection between man and land.” They're all about the environment. Land is not a value for them. For the settlement [movement] it is. And I think this is the deeper foundation. And it's a difference between worldviews and ways of thinking.

Ariel, one of the heads of the new Mirsham settlement, composed of evacuees from Tel Katifa in Gush Katif

Critical studies of Israel are mostly concerned with presenting the colonialist aspects of the various settlement enterprises in the open frontier both beyond and within the “Green Line,” i.e., the 1949 ceasefire line¹ (Peled and Shafir 2002; Kedar and Yiftachel 2006; Shafir 1989). Yet in Israel there are also conflicts over settlement activity with different ideas about nature, economic development, and the shaping of space. In this article I would like to focus on one struggle of this second kind: an environmental struggle that revolves around settlement issues. By examining the development of new Jewish settlements inside the Green Line, I hope to contribute to our understanding of the notion of the frontier by adding, in addition to its national, military, and cultural significance, a further environmental significance.

Contemporary social research makes it clear that environmental struggles deal not only with environmental protection and ecological issues. Such struggles also constitute an arena for the expression of tensions and conflicts between different groups over the shaping of space, society, and political interests. This article deals with an environmental struggle and with its accompanying political conflict, focusing on two social movements: The Gush Katif evacuees² who wish to settle in the Lakhish area, and the environmentalists who object to this.³ Through an analysis of the different conceptions of nature held by each group, and based on an ethnographic study using observations, interviews and texts, I will show how the different ways of framing nature expose different political, ideological, and cultural views.

The question of the relation between nature and culture or society is fundamental to anthropology in particular and to the social sciences in general (Kottak 1999; Descola 1996;

¹ While the English term *settlement* in the context of Israel is connotatively linked to the Jewish settlement in Judea, Samaria, Gaza, and Sinai (equivalent to the Hebrew term, *hitnachlut*), this article uses the term to describe the more general idea of the Jewish settlement of all parts of Israel (equivalent to the Hebrew *hityashvut*).

² These are settlers evacuated from the Gaza Strip during the 2005 disengagement. In this article I shall refer to this group as “evacuees” rather than “deportees,” one of the names they use for themselves, in addition to “settlers,” “oranges,” (the color associated with the anti-disengagement protests), and others.

³ I shall refer to this group as “environmentalists” rather than “Greens” or “the green movement” (the color associated with the environmental movement), in order to distinguish them from other parties with similar names.

Dova 2006). Some claim that the tension and separation between nature and culture constitutes the basic, universal structure of human civilization (Levi-Strauss 1966; Rappaport 1977; Ortner 1972; Goodman et al. 2003), while others consider this binary distinction a hallmark of Western civilization (Strathern 1980; Bird-David 1990; Descola 2006) and modern thinking (Latour 2007; Gibson 2006; Nelson 1998).

In recent years we find various trends challenging traditional ideas of nature and culture and the relationship between them. These range from understanding the nature/culture distinction as a continuum (Descola 2006; Holt 2005; West et al. 2006) to seeing nature as a central element in social research (Nazarea 2006; Giddens 2009; Beck, 2010; Escobar 1998; Berghoefer et al. 2010). Other approaches advocate expanding the notion of the social to all inhabitants of the planet, human and non-human (Appadurai 1986; Descola 2006; Latour 2007).

Some of these scholars emphasize the importance of analyzing the relations between nature and society and how these shape identities, power relations, and patterns of action. For example, in the 1960s and '70s, ecological and environmental anthropologists studied the relationships between native peoples' habitats and the formation of their culture, seeking to account for cultural differences. This "New Ecological Anthropology" examines how different groups understand and relate to nature, the influence human beings have over nature, and the political dynamics that shape these relationships (Dave and Carpenter 2008; Townsend 2009).

While a complete outline of the various developments in this field lies beyond the scope of this paper, we may suggest that they all share the understanding that different actors have different perceptions and interpretations of nature, which in turn influence their perception of society. Thus, rather than presupposing a single "nature" we must consider multiple "natures" (Berghoefer et al. 2010). Analyzing the different interpretations of nature enables us to understand national struggles (Chapi, 2000; Rabinowitz, 1992), ethnic diversity (Koenig 2001; Nelson and Hossack 2003), class struggles (Descola 2006; Dove 2006; Halvza-Delaynd and Davidson 2008), and ideological and cultural diversity (Latour 2004; Holt 2005; West et al. 2006). I shall try to demonstrate this through a case-study that seems to be about an environmental struggle, yet carries within it a wider, more complex conceptual world.

EASTERN LAKHISH AND MIRSHAM

Eastern Lakhish is located east of Kiryat Gat and stretches to the West Bank barrier. Thinly populated and close to the Green Line and to the Palestinian dwellings on the eastern side of Mount Hebron, the area has long been a focal point for settlement attempts by the Israeli state, albeit unsuccessful ones. Environmentalists, on the other hand, consider it a critical area with regard to natural conservation, its position as part of a chain of open wilderness areas and as an ecological corridor, and its importance for biodiversity.

Despite the failed attempts, plans for settling the area did not fade away. Following the Gaza disengagement,⁴ the government's intention to settle Lakhish seemed to provide a solution for the need to supply quick, alternative housing for the evacuees, and with the latter's wish to build new settlements, even if they would be within the Green Line.

In light of many objections by environmentalists and other groups, the settlement plan for the area was limited to three sites: Haruv, which has already been approved and was not intended for the evacuees; Hazan, a relatively large settlement for the evacuees of the Neve Dekalim settlement, located fairly close to the established communities Amatzia and Shekef; and Mirsham, projected for settling the evacuees of Tel Katifa, some of the evacuees of Kfar Darom, and some who joined after the disengagement.

Environmentalists actively opposed all three planned settlements. They argued that there was no need to build so many small settlements, and that they can be integrated. While they considered the planned locations of Hazan and Haruv as likely only to do minimal damage to the environment, the third settlement, Mirsham, was a red flag for them. Mirsham was to be built at the heart of the open land and, according to the environmentalists, its establishment would be an environmental disaster. Thus, most of their efforts were focused on it.

Eastern Lakhish region has long been a focal point for settlement attempts by the state of Israeli state. Yet environmentalists consider it a crucial area in terms of natural conservation, part of a chain of open wilderness areas, and important for biodiversity.

ZIONISM AND NATURE

A “green identity” and a love of nature were integral parts of the pioneer Zionist identity, and were major factors in Zionist strategies for acquiring and conquering the land. An essential concept in the Zionist discourse about land and the shaping of space is that of settlement (*Hityashvut*). Kimmerling and others point to the great significance of settlement in Israeli society, and its effect on shaping the character, dynamic, and history of the country (Shafir 1989; Kimmerling 1983; Rabinowitz 1997). The pioneer (*halutz*), the farmer working the land, and the settlement itself were key symbols of Zionism and of Israel. Israeli state and society, through its various mechanisms, promoted the “settlement myth” as identical with modernity and development, together with sacrifice and courage, thereby turning it into a central foundation of national memory and identity (Kellerman 1996: 363).

Israeli state and society, promote the “settlement myth” as identical with modernity and development turning it into a central foundation of national memory and identity.

Despite the historic importance of settlement in Zionist and Israeli perceptions, in recent decades one can identify a decline in both the symbolic and concrete force of the practice of settlement. Contributing factors include the rise of neo-liberal ideologies that promote market economy and individualism (Peled and Shafir 2002; Kedar and Yiftachel 2006), alongside the decline of

⁴ The Gaza “disengagement plan refers to the unilateral Israeli evacuation in the summer of 2005 of its settlements and military bases in the Gaza strip, together with four isolated settlements in the northern part of the West Bank.

previously dominant social groups (Kimmerling 2001). These factors have contributed to the receding importance of the narrative of settling and conquering the wasteland (Kedar and Yiftachel 2006). This has become so significant that some argue the state is deliberately picking on and discriminating against the settlement sector (Sofer 2010).

Nonetheless, in Israel the state, with its various mechanisms and agencies, settlement is still a major factor in the shaping of space and in land-allocation (Kimmerling 2001; Hananel 2010). As the decisions of the various planning agencies show, prioritizing settlement activity is still a constitutive element in an ethno-national (Fenster and Yacobi 2005; Hananel 2010) and economic (Kedar and Yiftachel 2006) ideological arrangement. As these institutions constitute a central arena for struggles between the various relevant players, examining their activities is essential to understand the issue at hand.

NATURE BETWEEN LAND AND ENVIRONMENT

When analyzing the evacuees' understanding of nature, one finds that it is in the tradition of the "classical" Zionist idea of nature. Among the evacuees, both nature and relating to it are primarily about the relationship to the land. Knowing the land, knowing the country, guarding it, settling and holding on to it (*he'achzut*), are central elements in their definition of nature.

The evacuees from the Gaza strip, nature and the relation to it are mostly about the relation to the land. Knowing the country, guarding it, settling and holding on to it are central elements in their definition of nature.

This attitude can be understood as consisting of three main perceptions: marking nature, creating it, and becoming integrated into it. Each perception is accompanied and expressed by a certain practice: hiking as a way of marking nature, planting trees as the creation of nature, and settling as integration into nature.

HIKING AS A WAY OF MARKING NATURE

According to the evacuees, the hike is a key element in the relation between man and nature. This came up in an interview with Itzik. Head of the boarding school and the temporary community Rabbi, Itzik, together with his family, was one of the first to join the temporary settlement group in Shekef after the evacuation, although he himself is not originally from Gush Katif. In answer to the question whether he defines himself as Green, he replies: "At the beginning when we [evacuees] were there, every week we went to the surrounding caves. We hiked, got to know the place, spent a lot of time there in the Hazan caves, getting to know them, getting connected. We took a lot of hikes. So yes, we're Green

and we're nature-lovers... That's also what bothered me the most: that I, who define myself as Green, how did I turn into an enemy of the green?"

Itzik sees himself as Green and as a nature-lover. For him, this means getting to know the environment, the surrounding area, and the land. The common practice identified with this love of nature is the hike. Itzik and other interviewees emphasized that most holders of the Israel Nature and Parks Authority's membership card (the "*matmon*" card) are people wearing *kipot srugot* (knitted yarmulkes, associated with religious Zionists). For them this is a symbol and an expression of their love of nature. Hedva, the community coordinator of the temporary settlement in Shekef, and one of those who joined it after the evacuation, considers hiking to be a central part of her self-identity as well as the identity of her fellow religious Zionists. In her interview she draws a connection between hikes, love of nature, and environmental protection: "In general, I believe that our [national-religious] public is one that is very connected to the land and to hikes and to protecting the environment. Go to our schools and to the other schools and see who's protecting the environment. Because I was brought up to love the country by hiking in it; by using my feet."

Since the early days of Zionism, hiking has been seen as a practice of marking territory, which promotes ownership and "nativeness" over the land (Ben-David 1997:130). Following this tradition, Hedva sees love for the country and the protection of nature as acquired through the physical act of hiking, an experience of "connection through one's feet." She and the others single out the religious or national-religious sector as comprising the majority of Israeli hikers; unlike the "others", namely, the secular sector. Hiking is a practice that marks not only territory and country but also distinguishes those who know and love the country from those who do not. Hiking is therefore a classifying practice.



"I PLANTED A TREE IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL": TREE-PLANTING
AS A WAY OF CREATING NATURE

Another expression of the love of nature—and at the same time of man's central place vis-à-vis nature—is tree-planting. "Do not uproot that which is planted" (a well-known verse by the iconic Israeli songwriter Naomi Shemer) is a symbol of the love of the country and its nature (Tal 2002). In the eyes of the evacuees, tree-planting is regarded as a true form of love of nature, taking care of and protecting the environment, as well as creating nature. Hence, during my fieldwork in Lakhish, I found *Tu B'shvat* (the Jewish holiday marking the "New Year for the trees") to be a major event, which drew not only the evacuees settled in the area, but also National-Zionists and students of the B'nei Akiva religious youth movement from across the country. The people of Mirsham also produced a special booklet, consisting of songs and tales marking their connection with the area and the land, which was read during the Israeli Independence Day celebrations. The national naming committee changed the settlement's name from Mirsham to Netta, meaning sapling, and the new name was quickly embraced by the settlers. Thus, like hiking, tree-planting is seen as a practice of territory marking, of holding onto and striking roots in the land, as well as one of creating nature; cultural practice signifying the hierarchy between man and nature.

THE CONNECTION TO THE LAND AS A CONNECTION TO NATURE: THE *HITYASHVUT* (SETTLEMENT)

In the epigraph to this article, Ariel, one of the heads of the Mirsham community, describes what he regards as two different ideas of nature. Ariel was one of the founders of the Gaza settlement Tel Katifa, and one of the leading forces behind the idea of settling in eastern Lakhish following the evacuation. These different ideas of nature are connected, in his view, with political and ideological differences. Ariel and the other interviewees argue that for them, nature means land and the relation to it, whereas for the Greens, who they believe see no value in the land, nature means environment. Moreover, the act of settlement is seen as central for the creation of this connection between man and land, and between man and nature. Ariel and the other evacuees regard settlement activity and interference with nature as the way to connect with nature and with the land. This understanding of nature contains additional dimensions, such as the ethno-national dimension (which in the evacuees' discourse is referred to by the Israeli codeword "the security aspect"), and the social-religious dimension, which links the connection with the land to a healthy soul and society. In settlement practice, these three aspects interrelate and feed into each other.

NATURE CONSERVATION AS ABSTENTION: THE COUNTER-APPROACH OF ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

The environmentalists, on the other hand, redefine Green identity and oppose the settlers' approach. They object to the three components of the settler's "Green" identity, arguing that each one in fact harms nature. Hiking, they argue, is indeed important, but when it comes to balancing the importance of the hike for learning about the natural environment, against preventing potential harm to habitats as a result of the hike, it is clear to them what the correct balance ought to be. Likewise, tree-planting as a practice of creating nature is here regarded as a risk to nature. One of the interviewed environmentalists described an encounter he had during a court session in which I was also present: "One of them [the evacuees] told me during one of the sessions: 'I'm greener than you are; I planted trees even before you were born.' So should I explain to him that planting trees isn't green? That all it does is ruin nature, habitats, and the landscape?"

The environmentalists are aware of the Zionist ethos of building settlements, planting trees, and hiking as acts of connecting with the land and nature, yet they object to linking these with environmental protection. The settlement activity is regarded by them as the main

source of harm to nature. Sigal, who holds a senior position in the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI), and one of the leaders of the struggle against the new settlement movement in general and Mirsham in particular, finds it hard to accept this link between interfering with nature

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and protecting it: "They say they will build an ecological settlement and protect the

environment... What can I tell you? I'd rather they didn't write that. It's really shameful. Because how can you say that, when your very residing within the wilderness harms the environment..."

The environmentalists believe that the state of Israel shouldn't build new settlements. They believe that, on the contrary, it should direct the bulk of its resources to urban renewal and the expansion of existing communities. Moreover, they argue that the very act of settlement causes damage to nature and to the environment. Representatives of environmental organizations in various planning committees have led the opposition to the establishment of new settlements and, combined with public protests and pressure on decision-makers, have managed to prevent their establishment in most cases.

"NEW ZIONISM" VERSUS "OLD ZIONISM"

In the eyes of the evacuees, settling the country and connecting with the land not only have the value of conserving nature, but also a national value or, to use the more accepted parlance, a "security" value. The Zionist movement, although declaring itself a secular project, has always exhibited an ambivalent relation to Judaism (Feige 2009). The settlement movement *Gush Emunim* combined National-Zionist ideology with religion, a combination often referred to as Religious Zionism. They regarded the establishment of the state of Israel as a step towards salvation. Aran named this phenomena "Zionist Religion," one in which God is brought back into the Zionist rhetoric, which in turn paves the way towards salvation (Aran 1986). Aran also pointed to the mystic-messianic elements of this movement, as well as to the ecstatic kind of faith typical to most of its members, as indicators for its being a pre-modern movement (ibid: 135). Other researchers, however, argue in favor of seeing it as a modern political movement, which emerges out of modernity yet criticizes it (Feige 2009)—as the case in question seems to suggest.

The environmentalists believe that the state of Israel shouldn't build new settlements inside Israel, but direct the bulk of its resources to urban renewal and the expansion of existing communities.

The Gaza Strip evacuees, like most members of the *Gush Emunim* movement, regard themselves as heirs to the early Zionist settlers of Degania, Nahalal and Hanita; hence as "true" Zionists occupying the land. Ariel pointed out the strategic importance of settling for the sake of security:

I'm not going to lecture you now about the importance of settlement, but the rural settlement is also important for security. There are places that are now in the middle of the country but used to be in the front line. Once, the rural settlement between Ashkelon and Kastina was "the south." Why, the Egyptians [the Egyptian army in the 1948 Israeli War of Independence] got all the way up to *Metzudat Yoav*! Back then, the line of defense was the rural settlements that are now at the center of the country.

Ariel and others regard themselves as heirs to those who fought the Israeli War of Independence and as a link in the chain of “rural” front line settlements. They associate themselves with the classic Zionist security doctrine (Feige 2009:37), and regard settling as a crucial element in enforcing Jewish nation’s claim for territory. If Jews won’t “occupy” the land by building settlements, someone else will connect to that land. For Moshe, head of the Lakhish Settlement Administration, the importance of settlement in general, and settlement in Lakhish in particular, is very clear. In an interview at his small office in Shekef he draws a map of Israel on a piece of paper, then draws a line from the northern to the southern tip,

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explaining: “You see, here [in the North] there is the Hizbullah, right? This here is Judea and Samaria area; this is Gaza. They [the Arabs] already took the Central Galilee... There’s an Arab continuum that cuts across the state of Israel. This is a national struggle. The Greens don’t care about that... They [Arabs/Bedouin] already took from us the northern part of the Negev.” Moshe thus marks the establishment of Mirsham as part of the national struggle and as an essential element in severing the “Arab continuum”, which he believes threatens the existence of Israel. Settling is for him the means by which the national Jewish space can be created.

Most environmentalists are aware of the importance of the settlement practice in Zionist ideology in general and in the evacuees’ worldview in particular (Tal 2002). However, in their view, this approach is obsolete. Tal, southern regional coordinator at the SPNI, claims that

[T]his is where it has to do with Lakhish. Because the Zionist narrative that says we have to settle everywhere in order to populate the land; that was a narrative from my parent’s generation. When my father sees a working factory, that makes his day, because there’s a factory, there are people working, producing. That’s the beauty of it. But today we look at things differently... We call this the New Zionism, Green Zionism.

The environmentalists also see themselves as heirs to the Zionist movement and to its pioneers (*halutzim*), yet argue that today the focus should be different. Amir, an environmental activist and one of those who filed a petition against Mirsham, portrays this settlement activity as provocation, as an act of border-marking and of determining facts on the ground: “What’s happening in Lakhish, that’s against the Palestinian Authority, against Beilin’s [Israeli leftwing politician] ideas of land-exchange.⁵ But also against the Bedouin, even though there are no Bedouin in this area...”

Amir points out who it is that, in his view, the building of the settlement is directed against; who is the “other” against whom one has to form a front and establish facts on the ground. But he and other environmentalists also make the point that settlement activity is perceived as establishing a reality on the ground against future agreements or any planned land-exchange

⁵ One of Yossi Beilin’s plans for permanent agreement with the Palestinians marks the unpopulated Lakhish area as a potential area for land-exchange with the Palestinian Authority. The Greens claim that, precisely in order to prevent such development, the evacuees, as well as certain elements in the state bureaucracy, wish to settle the area. As noted, this claim was also raised by the evacuees, albeit from the opposite direction, namely as an explanation for the Greens’ struggle against these settlements (Beilin 2007).

with the Palestinians. The Greens argue that the approach that sees settling as a practice of marking new borders is no longer relevant, yet they are aware that it is still operational.

Unlike the evacuees, who regard settling as a value that is on the decline and hence must be revived and strengthened, the Greens see it as a practice that is still active and needs to be reduced. Tal, who closely follows the settlement attempts in the Lakhish area, presents what he regards as the alternative approach that should replace the modernist view of the previous generation:

The fact that they told us [environmentalists] that we're anti-Zionists or post-Zionists, that's nothing new. And we really do think that Zionism today is not only about "We shall dress you with a dress of cement and concrete" [a line from the Israeli poet Nathan Alterman], not only about building new communities and roads, but about strengthening existing communities. What we need is not only urban settlement but also to maintain what exists. There's land shortage and water shortage. So you have to take care of the land. Therefore today's Zionism has to be a Zionism whose goal is the preservation of open wilderness areas.

"New Zionism" or "Green Zionism", as Tal presents it, was one of the main clauses in the Green Party's 2009 general elections' platform, a party in which most of the environmentalists interviewed were active.⁶ An article entitled "The New Zionism" by Iris Han, who was fifth in the party's candidate list, attempts to provide a clearer definition of what she thinks is the relevant kind of Zionism today:

We all love the land of Israel, but apparently we disagree over the way to realize this love. Zionism has many faces... the days of 'conquering the wasteland,' so important in past times, are now gone, and we are all happy about that. The land of Israel is flourishing and prosperous. Let's spare the little bit of 'wasteland' still left, the open wilderness areas that are fading away, and with them all that puts us in touch with the beauty of this land (Han 2008).

The interviews with the environmentalists reveal that they are trying to present an alternative to the ethno-national narrative that sanctifies the control of territory. Yet they do not oppose its national presuppositions, including Zionist ideology. Uri Ram (2006) points out that, since the 1990s, "Post-Zionist" has become a derogatory term used by political opponents within the boundaries of the Zionist consensus (ibid: 165). Indeed, Tal and his fellows object to being defined as "Post-Zionists," a term which they as well as the evacuees regard as implying lack of love and support for the country. The environmentalists challenge neither the ethno-national identity of Israel nor the central role the state plays in managing it. While they do try to present an alternative to the hegemonic security policy, the Greens, in the same way that Feige characterized the *Shalom Achshav* peace movement (Feige 1998), are trying to create a "sane" form of Zionism, without occupation and free of environmental harm. In so doing they are not trying to challenge the existing consensus but only to alter or "whitewash" it to some extent, to conform to their worldview.

⁶ See the Green Party's website at <http://www.yeruka.org.il>

SHADES OF GREEN: TRADITIONAL VERSUS PROGRESSIVE ENVIRONMENTALISM

The environmental movement offers a wide array of different approaches which have proliferated as the movement developed. While tracing the entire history of this movement lies beyond our scope, we may draw on the common typology found in the literature and suggest two broad types of environmental thought that have developed over the years.

The first approach sees man and nature as two separate entities. It regards environmental preservation as the protection of “wild” nature and landscape in certain places, alongside development for the sake of human welfare in other places. The scientific basis it relies on consists of taxonomy of the natural world, based on such values as landscape, biodiversity, etc. This approach is known, primarily among environmental activists, as the “classic” approach, in juxtaposition to the second, “progressive” one (Benstein 2004).

The progressive approach, also referred to simply as Environmentalism, tries to bring together man, society and nature (Carter, 2001). It is centered around the notion of sustainability, alongside that of sustainable development (De-Shalit 2000). The term refers to the kind of development that answers the needs of the present without hindering the capability of future generations to provide for their needs. This should be achieved by striking a balance between man’s use of nature and nature’s ability to regenerate itself. This is the dominant approach among most Green organizations in Israel and abroad, or at least the one dominant in their discourse.

When we use this typology to analyze the different ideas of nature held by the two groups discussed here, we see that unlike the traditional approach of the evacuees, the environmentalists call for the adoption of the progressive approach with its idea of sustainability. However, when we look more closely at what the environmental activists, in their struggle against Mirsham, say and, more importantly, at what they do, the emerging picture does not always fit well with the principles of sustainability, or at the very least raises some questions.

Based on the analysis of dozens of objections raised by environmental activists against the establishment of Mirsham, together with the claims they presented to the various planning committees and courts, one can portray their view of nature and the relation to it as based on an “abstention” approach.

Asaf Meroz, ornithologist and member of the SPNI, described the harmful effect on birds:

We’re losing the goldfinch, we’re losing the robin, we’re losing birds and butterflies and lots of other animals that rely on these strata, on this habitat, on this unique vegetation... I’ll jump right to the conclusion... During our survey we spotted sixty kinds of birds, out of which about fifty nest in this area. You have no idea. It’s such a rich variety...

Dovi Binyamini, president of the Israeli Lepidopterist Society, depicted the impact on butterflies to the council representatives:

You can’t raise a butterfly in a potted plant or an aquarium. It needs open space.

Where is it going to fly? In Tel Aviv?⁷ In the settlers' gardens? [...] Butterflies don't like the way we smell... So wherever there's human settlement the butterflies won't come within a few kilometers; they just won't come near there... Several decades ago they discovered a new butterfly species that's endemic to Israel, called the Cleopatra's Blue. Write that down please. Where is the Cleopatra's Blue flying around today? Only there [in Eastern Lakhish]... All we have is this little bit of butterfly that's already in Israel's protected species list... Leave that butterfly alone, let it fly...

And so it goes on, testimony after testimony, survey after survey, article after article. The basic argument raised by environmentalists against the building of Mirsham has to do with the damage to biodiversity and the destruction of habitats, based on scientific surveys of the natural environment. In the "professional" opinion of the environmentalists, settling on the specific site of Mirsham in itself constitutes damage to nature and the environment. Hence, despite their alleged adoption of the progressive approach, it appears that, at least in the case of Mirsham, they adopt the traditional one.

TWO DIFFERENT GROUPS, NOT JUST WITH RESPECT TO NATURE

Throughout the interviews and observations for this project, each group tried to distinguish itself from the other. The present/absent shadow cast over these attempts was the political shadow that characterizes Israeli society in general: the ideological difference between left and right.

The evacuees argued that this is precisely one of the foundations of the struggle over Lakhish: a struggle between a rightist-religious ideology and identity and a leftist-secular one. Eli, secretary of the Kfar Darom evacuees, describes it as follows:

I'm talking about the fact that some of the Greens that refer to themselves as such come from the left side of the [political] map. Obviously there are compatible interests here. Green is left and left is Green, and so they serve one another. We couldn't find, from among those we met, a rightist person in the Green coalition. Look at the attitude towards the professors from our side who signed [a petition supporting the establishment of the settlement]. Their claims were discounted because they are rightists or because they wear yarmulkes [i.e., they are religious]. Their opinion is irrelevant because they can't be Green, since they wear yarmulkes on their heads.

Eli picks up the line adopted by Ariel and other evacuees, seeing this as a struggle between ideologies. The environmentalists try to shake this critique by pointing to those among them who hold right-wing opinions or are religious. However, the evacuees' view seems to gain support from the participation of the "Green Movement/*Meimad*" party in the 2009 elections: a party that most interviewed environmentalists supported and even took active part in, and which is located at the left side of the Israeli political map.

⁷ Tel Aviv or "The State of Tel Aviv," as the evacuees pejoratively refer to it, is regarded as a symbol of an urbanism detached from nature, with its inhabitants—which include, according to the evacuees, the majority of environmental activists—detached from the rest of society and from the state of Israel (see for example Sofer and Bistrov 2006).

CONCLUSION: THE IDEA OF NATURE

This article dealt with struggles over settlement in Israel. The subject is not new in the Israeli context; research on Israel is replete with questions that have to do with the colonialist aspects of the various settlement enterprises and with national struggles over land and borders, both outside and within the Green Line. This article, however, dealt with a slightly different conflict, an environmental one. While the conflict had to do with settlement, it mainly revolved around issues of preservation and love of nature.

One of the claims I have tried to make here is that through the examination of the different ideas of nature held by the different groups involved in this conflict, we can understand the broader political and cultural issues behind them. These different ideas of nature can be seen as relating to two different metaphors: nature as land vs. nature as environment.

While the evacuees regard settlement activity as a way of connecting with nature and with the land, the environmentalists regard it as the primary means of harming the environment.

While the two groups, the evacuees and the environmentalists, consider themselves to be “Greens,” committed to protecting nature and the environment, they provide different content to this Green identity. The evacuees’ understanding of nature can be brought under the *land metaphor*. The connection with the land serves for them as a connection with nature, with a national identity, and with the construction of a community, and the practice

of settlement serves as a connecting link between these three elements. Their idea of nature preservation consists mainly of *intervening in nature*: marking nature through hikes, creating nature by tree-planting, and integrating with nature by their most central practice, i.e., settlement.

The environmentalists, on the other hand, see the settlement effort as a continuation of the alienation with nature that is typical of the modern capitalist world, which values development over conservation. They also see it as opposed to the “New Zionism” they wish to promote over and above the “Old” Zionist ethos of the evacuees, which they regard as no longer relevant. Hence the Greens see nature as an *environment*, an approach based on a scientific outlook, which uses surveys in order to analyze the area and the natural habitat that is intended for settlement. This scientific approach has a universal dimension that sterilizes nature, disengaging it from social and political issues. Unlike the evacuees’ mode of intervention, the environmentalists promote nature’s preservation through *precaution*: the attempt to maintain nature in a “wild” and untouched state as a way of preserving it. While the evacuees regard settlement activity as a way of connecting with nature and with the land, the environmentalists regard it as the primary means of harming the environment.

This analysis of the different views of nature and settlement can help us gain a better understanding of the struggle over the definition of society and nation in Israel, over what should be its future vision, over how to perceive its past; and above all, the debate over the political, ideological, and practical way of dealing with and overcoming this struggle. Those who perceive nature as land consider the capture and conquest of this land as necessary acts for maintaining Israel's resilience as a Jewish nation-state, even for its continued existence. On the other hand, those who perceive nature as environment tend to hold views that are opposite to this dichotomous one, arguing that it is imperative to find other solutions to ensure the continued existence of the state of Israel.

We can also see that, despite the different ideas about nature and land and despite the ideological and political differences, the two groups are underpinned by the same national foundation. Both come out of the Jewish national ideology, each giving it a different interpretation based on its worldview and on the way it understands nature. The critique voiced by environmentalists regarding the new settlement movement doesn't at all address the colonialist issues that appear in the critical debate over settlement (Shafir 1989; Kimmerling 1983). Their critique does not question the importance of settlement in the past but rather its necessity for the present. Thus, the debate between the two groups remains within the confines of the "legitimate" political debate in Israel. This is not a conflict between Post-Zionists and Neo-Zionists, but a complex political struggle within the spectrum of the National Zionist consensus. Be they orange, green, or red, at their core both groups are still the Israeli blue and white.

This article seeks to contribute to the examination of the development of the new Jewish settlement practice within the green line and the limited, internal, frontier, by adding to the national, military, and cultural significance of the frontier an environmental significance as well.

I would like to conclude by asking whether it is at all possible to sustain a social-environmental organization, whether in Israel or in general, which will rely only on social and environmental metaphors for nature without resorting to an ethno-national logic. In other words, can "sustainability" and "nationality" go together, or is this relationship bound to fail? An answer to this question requires more extensive research, but it must be based on an examination of people's idea of what nature means in the first place.

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