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“THE ETERNAL NATION DOES NOT FEAR A LONG ROAD”:

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF JEWISH SETTLERS IN ISRAEL/PALESTINE

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

"The Eternal Nation Does Not Fear A Long Road":

An Ethnography Of Jewish Settlers In Israel/Palestine

By ASSAF HAREL

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This is an ethnography of Jewish settlers in Israel/Palestine. Studies of religiously motivated settlers in the occupied territories indicate the intricate ties between settlement practices and a Jewish theology about the advent of redemption. This messianic theology binds future redemption with the maintenance of a physical union between Jews and the "Land of Israel." However, among settlers themselves, the dominance of this messianic theology has been undermined by postmodernity and most notably by a series of Israeli territorial withdrawals that have contradicted the promise of redemption. These days, the religiously motivated settler population is divided among theological and ideological lines that pertain, among others issues, to the meaning of redemption and its relation to the state of Israel.

This dissertation begins with an investigation of the impact of the 2005 Israeli unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip upon settlers and proceeds to compare three groups of religiously motivated settlers in the West Bank: an elite Religious Zionist settlement, settlers who engage in peacemaking activities with Palestinians, and settlers who act violently against Palestinians. Through a comparison of these different groups, this dissertation demonstrates that while messianism remains a central force in the realities of Jewish settlements and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it exists these days in more diversified forms than before. In addition, this ethnography illustrates how religion both underlies and undermines differences between Israelis and Palestinians and argues that local communities and religious leaders should be included in peace processes. Finally, by examining how messianic conceptions of time among different groups of Jewish settlers connect to their settlement practices, this study reveals the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to be as much about time as it is about space. Accordingly, this dissertation has broader implications for understanding the contemporary role of religion and time within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the political struggles of the Middle East.

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The data contained in chapter 1 is based on fieldwork that I carried out as an anthropology undergraduate in 2005 with the support of UC Berkeley's Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship. Some of the findings of chapter 1 appear in my Anthropology Senior Honor Thesis, entitled "When a Jew Expels a Jew: An Israeli Exception to the Rule" (Harel 2006), supervised by Prof. Lawrence Cohen and Prof. Charles Hirschkind. In addition, parts of chapter 6 have appeared before in Anthropology Now Website (Harel 2011), Journal of Contemporary Anthropology (Harel 2012), and Footnote, Research Driven Insights into Israel/Palestine (Harel 2013). Likewise, a small section of the conclusion appeared before in the Journal of Contemporary Anthropology (Harel 2012).

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Introduction

This is an ethnographic account of Jewish settlers in the Occupied Territories of Israel/Palestine, a population whose major force expands beyond the political boundaries of the region, yet one that remains little understood outside of its own communities. My research with religiously motivated settlers therefore addresses three interconnected questions: *Who are the settlers? What motivates them? And how do they make sense of life in the midst of a violent conflict*? In exploring these questions, this dissertation opens up an ethnographic window onto settlers and, in doing so, tells a wider anthropological tale about being Israeli and Jewish in the Holy Land during the 21st century.

Amid a never-ending chain of global events, one small place continuously attracts disproportionate attention: the Biblical Holy Land, known today as Israel and Palestine. The land hosts 13 million souls in less than 11,000 square miles, an area not much larger than the state of New Jersey. The size of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the main territories under dispute, is about 2,200 square miles. Fewer than 3 million people live there: 2.5 million Palestinians and about 500,000 Israelis, including close to 200,000 in East Jerusalem (CIA 2014a). Close to 2,000,000 Palestinians live in poverty in the Gaza Strip, a territory of less than 140 square miles, which borders Israel and Egypt (CIA 2014 b).

Located at the intersections of three continents, Israel/Palestine is of great geopolitical importance. But the historical significance of the land also helps explain, at least partially, the exceptional international public attention directed at the land and its people. The place is laden with religious and historical meanings, perhaps even overburdened by such meanings. There are Jews, Muslims, more than a few Christians,

along with other religious, national and ethnic minorities. There are also people who don't believe in God at all, but there are sacred meanings in that place for them, too, from family and nation to money, technology, and modernity. For thousands of years people have been living, coexisting, fighting and dying there. And still today, Israelis and Palestinians are living mostly in a state of violent enmity rather than peaceful coexistence.

As the common view goes, Israelis and Palestinians are in conflict. Some say this is an ethnic conflict over land and the Palestinian right of national self-determination and statehood (Khalidi 2006). Others claim it is in fact an Arab-Israeli conflict because it expands beyond the Palestinian case (Dershowitz 2003). There is also a popular conception that this is a religious conflict between Jews and Muslims and even Christians and thus see it as extending all the way back in time to the birth of Islam, the days of Jesus and even before, to time immemorial. And more than a few, especially on the political Left, contend that there is in fact no conflict—not because of the lack of violence but precisely because of the asymmetrical properties of violence. They argue that the word 'conflict' connotes symmetry of power, and Israel possesses immense military and political power in comparison to Palestinians (Idan 2014). Acknowledging the political relevance and cultural contingency of all of the above positions, I nevertheless use the term "the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

The Israelis who live at the heart of the conflict are commonly referred to as "settlers." Settlers reside in the territories Israel conquered in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Often denoted as 'the occupied territories,' the land on which they settled is located beyond a geopolitical boundary known as the Green Line. It is a 1949 armistice line set

by Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the establishment of the Israeli state.[1] These territories are also known as the Gaza Strip and West Bank, with the latter term reflecting the location of the territories west of the Jordan River, which from 1948 to 1967 was under the control of Jordan.

Today, the approximately 350,000 Israeli settlers of the West Bank dwell in more than 200 settlements of varying sizes – from an outpost of several families to cities of tens of thousands residents. There are more than 120 officially recognized settlements in the West Bank (not including East Jerusalem and Hebron), and about 100 smaller settlement outposts, which lack an official status even though a substantial number received governmental assistance such as access roads or connection to water lines (B'Tselem 2013). Some settlers live there because of affordable housing and relative proximity to Israeli cities; others settled to fulfill religious and political values, and some for all of these reasons and more. But Israel did not conquer empty land in 1967. It conquered a land full of human beings, many of whom had already lost their homeland to Israel in 1948. The settlements in the West Bank are located next to and amidst a population of about 2.5 million Palestinians. The exact numbers remain disputed. One fact, however, cannot be contested: now, after almost half a century of Israeli settlement in the West Bank, settlers benefit from Israeli citizenship and democratic rights, while Palestinians hold limited political rights, remain stateless and live under Israeli military rule.

[1] Although the Green Line was never set as an actual border, following the Israeli 1967 conquest of the West Bank, it is often referred to as the "1967 border" by various international actors, including the US.

Who Are the Settlers?

Settlers are often described in academia and the popular media as radicals, messianic[2] zealots, or irrational fundamentalists (for critiques of this form of representation see Dalsheim and Harel 2009; Dalsheim 2011; Fischer 2007; Rosenak 2013; Roth 2014). The tendency to portray them in such demeaning terms is problematic for two main reasons. First, settlers do not comprise an ideologically bounded religious unit, they have always contained inner tensions and dilemmas, and have been undergoing dramatic changes since the early settlement days. These changes increased in intensity and scale following the advent of post-modernity and the aftermath of the 2005 Disengagement Plan, which entailed the unilateral withdrawal of Israel from the Gaza Strip, the dismantling of its settlements and represents as a whole a critical moment in settlers' complex relationship with the state. The divisions and similarities within this population require close attention because they bear upon the human dimensions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the democratic character of the Israeli state, the geopolitics of the Middle East and the historical shaping of Judaism as well.

Many settlers understand themselves as embodying the national return from exile foretold by the Hebrew prophets and perceive this return as signifying the advent of redemption (an idea described further in Chapter 3). At the same time, settlers are divided along theological lines that relate to the meaning and the actions required for redemption. These differences are tied to their religious attitudes toward the Israeli state and touch upon their perceptions of Palestinians, too. There are devout settlers who engage in

[2] Messianism is commonly loaded with negative connotations: irrationality, mysticism, apocalypticism and so forth. Although I do not contest the messianic label that is ascribed to settlers, I do view the associated stigma as a common expression of a modernist construction of the religious subject as primitive and irrational (Harding 1992).

peacemaking activities with Palestinians, while others actively attempt to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state through violence that includes physical attacks against Palestinians, the torching of agricultural fields and the desecration of mosques. Such contrasting theological orientations and attitudes toward Palestinians within a population often grouped under a single term, "the settlers," require close attention.

Consider the following highly influential rabbis as examples of the diversity of the settler population:

- Rabbi Yehuda Amital (1924-2010), a Holocaust survivor, was one of the founders of the first West Bank settlements to be built upon land without prior Jewish presence in the modern era. He is known for encouraging his pupils to think independently rather than emulating his own ideas, which included political support for the establishment of a Palestinian state (chapters two).
- Rabbi Hanan Porat (1943-2011) was a child when he was evacuated from his religious settlement before it was destroyed by Arab forces during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. He returned to the ruins of his home following the Israeli victory in 1967, and guided by a strong belief in the organic ties between settlement and the advent of redemption, he rose to be one of the most important actors behind the post-1967 settlement enterprise (chapters three and five).
- Rabbi Menachem Froman (1945-2013) was generally viewed as an outsider among settlers. He was too fond of dramatic flares for some and his politics struck many as strange, to put it mildly. He was a mystic man and a peacemaker. He would meet with Arab leaders, including representatives of the Hamas, widely

considered to be a Muslim terrorist organization, and offered to live as a Jewish minority in a future Palestinian state (chapter five and six).

- Like Rabbi Froman, Rabbi Yitzhak Ginsburgh (b. 1944) is a Jewish mystic. He discovered the Kabbalah, the Jewish mystical realm of hidden truths, through his graduate studies of mathematics in the United States. The author of close to 100 books, he is considered to be one of the greatest renovators of Kabbalah in our age. He is also notorious for his theological rationalization of Jewish acts of terror against Arabs and his explicit opposition to the Israeli state, which in his view fails to uphold Jewish values and whose secular institutions strangle the exalted soul of the Jewish nation (chapter six).

The second problem with grouping "settlers" under a single rubric relates to their representation through reductive and generally derogatory tropes, such as "zealots" or "irrational" in the popular media, or "fundamentalists" in the world of academia (Antoun 1998; Aran 1991, 1997; Feige 2009; Lustick 1988; Sivan 1995; Silberstein 1993). Such terms often reveal more about the moral and political opinions of those who write about settlers than about settlers themselves. Settlers have become the "repugnant cultural other" (Harding 1992) of many liberal, progressive and left wing groups and individuals, in Israel and abroad (Dalsheim 2011). The depiction of settlers as morally despicable allows those who write about them to emerge as rational, humanistic and enlightened figures, representing themselves as all that settlers are not. Likewise, the application of the fundamentalist paradigm toward settlers facilitated their perception as radically different from other Israelis, construed their beliefs as a deviation from Judaism and represented their settlement practices as distinct of those conducted on the other side of

the Green Line. In short, the use of the fundamentalist framework emphasizes differences over similarities. This dissertation therefore produces knowledge and increases understanding of a population whose religious worldview is often discarded too easily as fundamentalist and irrational.

Conceptual Framework

In examining Jewish settlers, this dissertation builds upon and contributes to three main areas of anthropological knowledge and investigation: the anthropology of Judaism, the anthropology of violence and engaged anthropology.

Harvey Goldberg, one of the most influential anthropologists of Jews and Judaism, points out (1987, 2003) that although foundational social theorists such as Frazer, Durkheim and Weber treated Jewish themes in their work, the study of Judaism remained rather marginal within anthropology. One of the reasons for this marginality is the lack of linguistic and textual skills that are required for the study of Jewish texts. While Mary Douglass' (1966) analysis of Jewish dietary rules uses Jewish laws as textual evidence, she does not offer a perspective on how these laws are lived and maintained by Jews. Goldberg suggests therefore that an anthropological examination of Jewish phenomena with all of their cultural fluidities can benefit a perspective that is linked to the more established modes of Jewish self-representation through textual and historical study (2003:11). Following up on Goldberg's suggestion, my examination of Jewish settlers provides historical and theological context along with textual analysis (e.g. exegesis of miracle stories in Chapter 2) that serves to relate and situate settlers within larger frameworks of Jewish traditions.

Anthropological works that do study Judaism are generally characterized by an orientation toward memory and the past. In her review of anthropological studies of Jews and Judaism, Marcy Brink-Danan (2008: 683) argues that "anthropology is responsible for representing Jews as a passé – and past – object of analysis." Similarly Matti Bunzl pointed to the need for ethnographic studies of Jews that pay attention to the present (2003). Indeed, the anthropological focus on the Jewish past has resulted in some beautiful and theoretically sophisticated ethnographies that memorialize the lives of Jews (Bahloul 1996; Behar 2007; Boyarin 1991; Kugelmass 1988). Nevertheless, this overt emphasis on memory represents Jews as a nostalgic symbol of the past (Fabian 1983) rather than a living and ever-changing population.

An interesting parallelism appears in the study of Jewish settlers in the post-1967 territories. They became an object of scholarly scrutiny approximately at the time when Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful)—the central Religious Zionist settlement movement—began to lose its political dominance in the early 1980s. Still, Gush Emunim survived discursively as a trope that subsumes all religiously motivated settlers and represents them as homogeneously unchanged and frozen in time (Dalsheim and Harel 2009). This ethnographic account of Jewish settlers contributes to the anthropological study of Judaism by focusing on the contemporary sociocultural variances among Jewish settlers.

I do not intend to conceptualize Judaism only as a religious system of faith and laws. Although this is what Judaism means to many Jews, it is of course more than that. For many, Judaism is a national or ethnic sense of identity, linguistic community, political orientation, sense of cultural difference and much more. As the "Religious

Zionist" identity of settlers attests, the political and the religious are intimately intertwined and form inseparable elements of settlers' personal and national senses of self. In examining the relations between "Zionist" and "religious" elements of settlers' identity, I aim to convey not just the cultural intricacies of settler lives, but also how religious practices and ideas emerge in relation to current political conditions. Religion is not a static system. It changes over time, a process rife with inherent tensions between the new and the need to maintain continuity with the traditions of the past. I attempt therefore to show how the political and the religious domains of settlers' Jewishness are established, protected and debated, with varying sectors of the settler population vying over the meanings and actions that define normative Jewish behavior.

Due to their central involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and their impact upon the lives of both Jews and Arabs, the examination of Jewish settlers cannot be separated from the problem of violence. Indeed, the questions of how local practices and forms of knowledge influence territorial conflicts and the ways in which people manage their lives in the midst of political upheavals engage many scholars in the humanities and social sciences (Ghassem-Fachandi 2012; Goldstein 2004; Greenhouse 2002; Hughes 2010; Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois 2004). However, as Tobias Kelly argues in his study of Palestinian laborers in the West Bank (2006:8), in focusing solely on "spectacular acts of violence, there is a danger of missing the reality of daily life in the region," which forms the wider context of violence. Thus, while this dissertation delves into "spectacular acts of violence" committed and experienced by settlers, it also examines more mundane dynamics of settler life and the settlement

regime, which serve to illustrate how settlers understand Palestinian violence as well as how settler violence is perceived, negotiated or ignored.

Like many other anthropologists, my fieldwork experience produced a sense of indebtedness and an accompanying desire to disseminate anthropological knowledge to a wider public and thus influence public policy. The need to publicly address crucial social issues is the subject of numerous books and articles on engaged anthropology (see for example, Beck and Maida 2013; Goldstein 2012; Lamphere 2004; Low and Engle Merry 2010; Mascia-Lees and Sharpe 2000) and writing to a wide audience is thus one central form of practicing engaged anthropology. As Micaela di Leonardo argues, "anthropologists *can* reach large popular audiences… with accessible, historical ethnographic narratives …" (2009:166). Accordingly, this dissertation seeks to uncover social processes of conflict and violence in a language that is accessible to an audience beyond the academy. Furthermore, it represents an attempt to practice engaged anthropology through a mode of storytelling that moves beyond hegemonic categories of identity that set and frame scholarly and public understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, all of which limit the possibilities of understanding the present and imagining and acting toward a different future.

Storytelling is one of the most fundamental human ways of creating personal and social meanings. Stories always involve the complex interaction of private and public areas of life and therefore their value is not limited to their entertainment capabilities (Arendt 1958). They can illuminate similarities and bring people together or exaggerate differences and drive people apart. They reflect and influence our perceptions and ways of acting in the world and therefore possess political qualities (Jackson 2002). From this

perspective, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can also be seen as conflict of stories. It is fought and expressed in the realm of historical narratives, not only in the plot of the story, but in how the story is being told. There are competing Zionist and Palestinian tales about the violence of the other, about deep attachment to the land, or about the origin of the conflict along with new and old religious claims about the sacred truth of place and God.

To illustrate, the problem of interpreting and telling the histories of Israel and Palestine has been the source of an intellectual dispute between Edward Said, an American-Palestinian and Michael Walzer, An American Jew. The dispute has its roots in the 1984 publication of Walzer's book *Exodus and Revolution* (1984), which asserts, "that the Exodus story, when properly secularized, provides a paradigm for revolutionary politics (1984:7). According to Waltzer,

> The escape from bondage, the wilderness journey, the Sinai covenant, the Promised Land: all these loom large in the literature of revolution. Indeed, revolution has often been imagined as an enactment of the Exodus and the Exodus has often been imagined as a program for revolution." [1984: ix]

As a committed supporter of the Palestinian struggle for national self-determination and statehood, Edward Said was highly cognizant of the ways in which the Exodus story plays as a proxy for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and had a very different interpretation of the Biblical tale. He sees Walzer's reading of the Exodus story as a prototypical example of Israeli historical narratives, which systematically ignore evidence of different rights over the Biblical Promised Land. In an exchange of letters, Said asks Waltzer "how can one exit Egypt for an already inhabited promised land, take that land over, exclude the natives from moral concern... kill or drive them out, and call the whole thing 'liberation'?" Said states that "there is no Israel without the conquest of Canaan and

the expulsion of inferior status of Canaanites – then as now" (cited at Hart 2000: 194-195).

As this short and simplified example illustrates, although Exodus is a Biblical tale, its depiction of oppression, divine deliverance and the conquest of the Promised Land (the Land of Canaan) is of current political significance. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is thus influenced by stories that people tell about past in order to make sense of the present, by the stories they tell about their current hopes, about their fears, about their visions of the future. There are privileged voices that reach public audience and there are countless of other stories that remain censored, private or simply suppressed and untold. Stories matter politically and they matter especially in a place where religious stories about the meaning of life, the creation of the world and its end inform the experiences of the present and the shaping of the future.

Stories matter in anthropology too. [3]They matter because of anthropological interest in the stories people tell and because anthropologists tell their own stories about the people they meet. Because anthropology and storytelling are intimately tied, engaged anthropology can also be conceived as entailing a commitment to a narrative that does not surrender to what Michel-Rolph Trouillot calls "the aestheticization of theory." (2003:137). According to Trouillot (2003:137), the academic discourse is closing off to

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[3] Stories and storytelling are important within Judaism as well. Jewish written and oral traditions are comprised of numerous parables, legends and stories that are disseminated, interpreted and debated with each passing generation. For example, one of the most famous religious commands is to retell the story of exodus during Passover, an act which demands a deep, active and communal engagement with the exodus process so it may become more than a memory, but an actual lived experience in the present. Likewise, within Hassidic Judaism, the figure of the *Maggid* (Hebrew: מגיד) - a religious storyteller- is sometimes ascribed with redemptive powers that emanate from the Maggid's unique ability to bring about personal and collective (and even cosmic) spiritual improvement through tales that encapsulate and elucidate the meanings of life and faith (Buxbaum 1994). As a religious practice that contains the capacity to shape and transform personal and collective ways of being and acting in the world, storytelling is a politically potent human activity.

"the problems felt by the majority of the world population" and academic works are becoming "increasingly inaccessible to lay readers." In this dissertation I therefore attempt to write in a manner that is legible to non-professional audience and is driven by characters, themes and events rather than conceptual abstractions. In the process I hope to shed ethnographic light on 'ground' realities that remain relatively hidden from the public eye even though they bear upon the micro and macro dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

My dissertation also draws upon and contributes to the anthropology of time and more specifically to question of messianism. Virtually all studies of the post-'67 religious Zionist settlement project indicate its intricate ties to a messianic theology about final redemption (Aran 2013; Feige 2009; Lustick 1988; Ravitzky 1997; Schwartz 2009). This messianic theology binds redemption with the maintenance of a physical union between Jews and the Biblical Land of Israel, a union that would move history to its redemptive end. However, among settlers themselves, the dominance of this messianic theology has been undermined by postmodernity and most notably by a series of Israeli territorial withdrawals that have contradicted the promise of redemption.[4] Thus, while messianism remains a central force within the religious realities of Jewish settlements and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it exists in more diversified forms. The religiously-motivated settler population is divided these days along theological and ideological lines that relate among

[4] Nevertheless, the sociocultural dynamics that appertain to religiously motivated settlers do not necessarily stop or begin at the Green Line. They related to local processes such as the liberalization of Israeli politics and the decline of the Zionist settlement ethos. Even more so, they are part of broader global processes that are imbricated with the greater world of Jewish orthodoxy that touch, for instance, upon issues such as the place of the individual within the collective, the status of women and the nature of the relations to the secular and non-Jewish world. At the same time, because settlement realities impacts local and global realities, settlers are themselves powerful agents of change and the religiously motivated ones are especially so.

others issues to the meaning of redemption and its relation to the state of Israel, which is often denoted in Religious Zionist prayer as the "first flowering of redemption." This central role of messianism within the settlement enterprise illustrates that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not only about territory, but also about the ways in which Israelis and Palestinians understand and act in relation to the past, present and future.

But what is messianism and what are its relations to time? More than simply a belief in a messianic figure, in a savior, messianism is closely connected to cultural constructions of time's ends, a topic which has been an early source of anthropological investigations of millennial movements. For example, the now widely contested concept of "cargo cults" (Kaplan 1995; Lindstrom 1993; Williams 1923) appears in early anthropological writing on the southwest Pacific. Similarly, the Native American millennial movement of the Ghost Dance occupied the American anthropological imagination from its early days (Kroeber 1904; Lowie 1953; Mooney 1965). However, as Kathleen Stewart and Susan Harding point out (1999), the case of the Native American Ghost Dance is but one among multitudes of apocalyptical formations in America. They further argue it would be erroneous to couple apocalypticism solely with religion. Indeed, as Talal Asad (1993) observed, the discursive emergence of "the modern" produced a distinction between the religious and the secular, with the latter defining itself in opposition to the former through its relegation to apolitical domains of action. In doing so, religion becomes the target of a secular redemptive project that is based upon a progressive conception of history as shaped solely by human action.

The interdependency of the secular and the religious forms but one of the problems of defining messianism. For instance, the Israeli historian, Jacob Talmon (1916-

1918), dedicated his work to the study of political forms messianism and traced their origin to the French Revolution (Talmon 1960). Like religious forms of messianism, political messianism, such as within communism, entailed a belief in a radical betterment of humanity and society that was grounded in a conception of history as progressing linearly and often dialectically toward a revolution in the future. In addition, similar to Jewish forms of messianism, political messianism is often associated with an orientation toward the future, which nonetheless builds upon a retroactive relation toward a past that acts both as a source of authority and legitimation as well as a model for things to come.

Moreover, even within Judaism, it is possible to distinguish between different types of messianism. For example, as Gershom Scholem (1971), the founder of the academic study of Jewish mysticism argued, throughout Jewish history "restorative messianism" sought a return of sovereignty like in the era of the Davidic Kingdom, a return that was revolutionary, but occurred within the confines of tradition. In contrast, "utopian-catastrophic messianism" envisioned a complete rupture of history and tradition and the ushering of a completely different era. Scholem contended that these two forms of messianism existed dialectically throughout Jewish history. As Scholem's observation illustrates, not all forms of messianism are apocalyptic, a concept which is derived from Christian theology to begin with. Yet, as argued more recently by Moshe Idel (2000) —a professor of Jewish mysticism— Jewish and Christian forms of Messianism contain a complex history of mutual influences along with active attempt to distinguish themselves in opposition to the other.

Clearly, the messianic phenomenon is multifaceted and therefore perhaps it is best to broadly define messianism as the complex of ideas, sentiments and practices that are

oriented toward redemption (Idel 2000). From this perspective, redemption can be understood as the goal of messianism. But what is redemption? In the Hebrew Bible, the term redemption, *Geula* (Hebrew: גאולה), means a restoration to a former status. Hence, land can be redeemed, for example, from a foreign ownership (Leviticus 25) and a person can be redeemed from harm's way (Genesis 48:16). The act of restoration to a former status implies an act of rescue, of liberation, of salvation; and indeed the idea of redemption as an act of salvation constitutes one of the most central tenants of Jewish faith (Schweid 1985). The idea of salvation, in turn, points to the existence of a troubling condition within the present, one which is disturbing enough to necessitate actions that are intended toward the perfection of present.

If the yearning for redemption points to the existence of a troubling condition within the present, Messianism can thus be understood as entailing the negation to the present: an imperfect present has to be changed in order to bring about a longed-for future, which may be based upon a conception of a glorified past. At the same time, the realization of messianic desires translates into a practice that shifts the center of activity almost exclusively into the present, which becomes a temporal arena where reality is both negated and fulfilled as part of a revolutionary practice with redemptive ends. Messianic practices are therefore often described as having "a distinctive time perception" of messianism, which is "informed by an acute sense of imminence and urgency" (Kravel-Tovi and Bilu 2008:64) and is accompanied and sustained by a desire to bring about a drastic social change. Messianism should be understood therefore as a practice with a revolutionary essence. Nevertheless, as my research demonstrates, rather than exhibiting an acute sense of urgency, some religiously motivated settlers feel relatively complacent

about their present conditions (chapter 3), while others do not seek an immediate revolution and act patiently toward the future (chapter 5).

The temporal dimensions of settlers' messianism are well encapsulated in a catchphrase and a song that became popular among settlers during the period of the Disengagement Plan: "The eternal nation does not fear a long road" (Hebrew: עם הנצח לא מפחד מדרך ארוכה). The use of a spatial metaphor of time as a "long road" points to the inextricable relation between time and space and reflects a particular understanding of the form, direction and outcome of history since any notion of history is predicated upon underlying conceptions of time. However, the relatively equivocal nature of the slogan permits multiple readings. It can be confidently discerned that the destination of the "road" pertains to a religiously redemptive end, but the manner in which this end will manifest itself, the implied dangers along the historical road, or its temporal length, remain unspecified. Thus, arguing that the conflict is about time as it is about space, this dissertation examines and analyzes differing forms of settler messianism and shows how settlers understand and act toward redemption in ways that are imbricated with territorial aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In building upon these areas of anthropological investigation and practice, this dissertation demonstrates that the politics of the conflict cannot be understood apart from their religious elements. Undoubtedly, the distinction between religion and politics has always been murky, especially when considering the modern constitution of this conceptual distinction (Asad 1993) along with the Latin and Greek roots and English articulations of these concepts. For example, The Hebrew word for religion, *Dat*, (Hebrew: דת), is etymologically connected to ancient Persian and originally meant "the

Law" (Eilam-Gindin 2012). Thus, in Hebrew, 'religion' is deeply tied to obedience and fulfillment of commandments rather than, for example, to the question of identity: one can be Jewish, but non-religious nonetheless. Within the context of Judaism, the conceptualization of religion is further complicated by the disruptive character of Jewishness, a topic that will be further discussed in this chapter. Furthermore, as will be elaborated upon in chapter 5, mysticism, which is an important part of the religious phenomenon, exists somewhat tenuously with religion, with the former sometimes undermining the authority of the latter through its destabilization of literal meanings and legal norms.

Taking into account the socially and historically contingent nature of *religion*, I nonetheless use it here as a broad analytical concept that refers to beliefs, practices and institutions that invoke powers beyond the ordinary, and within Judaism is connected first and foremost to a monotheistic belief in the eternal existence of a God that can be experienced but never fully known by human beings. Yet, this broad definition opens up another question: what is belief? When approaching the meaning of belief, the problem of context and translation arises yet again. For example, without even entering into the relations between *faith* and *belief*, it is important to realize that the Hebrew language does not distinguish between the two terms. Thus, *Emuna* (Hebrew: אמונה), the Hebrew word for both faith and belief, is connected to the word *Amen*, and can be etymologically understood as stability, persistence, affirmation, artistry, truth, and loyalty, to name a few of its meanings. These multiple meanings point not only to the linguistic intricacies of *emuna*, but also more generally to its complexity as a social phenomenon.

The problem of defining emuna is further complicated when examined through the realm of religious practice. To illustrate, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903-1993) — one of the greatest leader of 20th century modern-Orthodox Judaism — conceived (Soloveitchik 2011) emuna as involving an existential state of loneliness in the face of both a secular society that becomes estranged from the religious experience as well as loneliness in the face of a God that cannot be fully known by human beings and often remains present through absence. This conception connects to Rabbi Soloveitchik's view of Jewish religiosity as unique because it allows for creativity to emerge through rational, analytical and critical engagement with life and Jewish laws rather than though an emotional search for transcendental effervescence (Soloveitchik 1983). This perception of Jewish religiosity contrasts, for example, with both the Hassidic idea of divine immanence —that God was present everywhere — and the concomitant Hassidic emphasis on the fostering of personal relations between the individual, God and fellow human beings as opposed to focusing solely on the intricacies of Jewish Law. These kinds of divergent approaches to the meanings and religious expressions of emuna playout today among religiously motivated settlers in multiple ways that in addition to illustrating the tenuous ties between ideology and practice, relate to the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Indeed, there is nothing new about the claim that religion and politics are intertwined in Israel/Palestine or elsewhere. For example, the identification of religion with nation - that national identity is part of a particular religion - is part of the history of the modern nation-state.[5] Similarly, as Robert N. Bellah (2005[1967]) argued, religiously

[5] To further illustrate, as Durkheim (1995[1912]) argued, every modern society has a religious basis because the idea of the social is the heart of religion. Similarly, while Weber (1980 [1920]) notes the

founded ethics and secular political principles merge and form an everyday, taken-for-granted "civil religion." In Israel, traditional Jewish symbols are constantly used to evoke the sense of the sacred in order to integrate and mobilize the society and to provide legitimacy to the political system (Liebman and Don Yehiya 1985). The Menorah (the seven-branched lampstand that was used in the ancient Holy Temple), for example, forms the national emblem of the Israeli state. Likewise, state-sponsored rabbinical courts enforce Jewish law on domestic matters and coexist tenuously with a more secular legal system.

Nevertheless, through depiction and analysis of settlement realities that remain understudied, especially ethnographically, I move beyond the fundamentalist paradigm to show how and why the religious beliefs of settlers matter politically. This offers a means of creating ethnographic pathways for better understanding settlers and the settlement regime and thus the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In addition, I argue that religion does not only have to be a force of violence, but also has the capacity to overcome political hostilities. This last point about the ameliorative capacity of religion is of special pertinence due to the global prominence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the continuous national and international efforts to end it. This dissertation enhances therefore scholarly knowledge of a population whose historical and political significance stands in contrast to its relative size, with broader implications for understanding the role of contemporary religion in the political struggles of the Middle East.

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decline and marginalization of religion in the modern world, he also argues for the religious foundations of the modern bourgeois world. A more recent approach that emphasizes the relations between religion and nationalism can be found in the work of Anthony Smith (2003), who sees the two as analogous social phenomena.

To better understand contemporary settlement realities, the next sections provide a historical review of the religious and political forces in which the settlements and their inhabitants are constituted.

From Judaism to Zionism

Judaism is based on a belief in a transcendent God that cannot be fully known by mortal beings, but nonetheless manifests its powers within human history, which is also shaped by the actions of the Jews, both the virtuous and the sinful. History thus becomes for Jews an arena for witnessing and interpreting God's works upon the earth in reaction to their deeds. Jewish religion centers on the Torah, its foundational sacred text, and its related oral traditions, the legal commentaries on the Torah. Its tradition states that the Torah was given during the divine revelation in Mount Sinai, the religiously formative moment when the ancient Israelites transformed into a nation – *Am Israel* (Hebrew: עם ישראל, lit. the Nation of Israel). According to rabbinical Judaism, which emerged following the 70 CE destruction of the Second Temple and the subsequent loss of political sovereignty to Roman rule, the oral tradition, recorded in the Halakhah (Hebrew: הלכה), the corpus of Jewish laws, was also given during the revelation in Mount Sinai. The word Halakhah derives from the Hebrew root Halakh (הלכ), meaning "to walk," "to travel" "to go." Halakhah can be therefore translated as "the path that one travels" or "the way to go."

The Jewish religion emphasizes the maintenance of order and difference: between Jews and non-Jews, sacred and profane, pure and polluted and much more. The sense of chosenness and difference solidified Jewish collective identity, but also contributed to

their suffering throughout history. Jews have experienced exile, conquest, political oppression, religious persecution and genocide. The story of the Jews is part of the history of the West, but it also predates the West and expands to the Levant, the Middle East and far beyond. Jews are a central part of the West, but simultaneously remain its internal other, having been identified as a race, an ethnic group, a religion, as well as a nation. As the notable scholar of religion Daniel Boyarin argues, "Jewishness disrupts the very categories of identity, because it is not national, not genealogical, not religious, but all of these […]" (1994:244). Not surprisingly then, the culturally disruptive character of Jewish identity has been a source of much interest and debate within and outside Judaism.

Following the destruction of the Temple and the loss of sovereignty, the vast majority of Jews lived for centuries as a Diaspora in exile, in what is called the *Galut* (Hebrew: גלות, lit. exile). Overcoming the problem of geographic dispersion, Jews managed to keep close cultural affinities through experiences of time that generated similar sacred meanings. In Passover they recalled the miraculous exodus from Egypt. They mourned on the same Hebrew date the destruction of the Holy Temple. Each week they read the same portion of the Torah and each day they prayed toward the direction of Jerusalem, yearning for a messianic salvation that would include the ingathering of exiles, the return of their independence as a nation in *Eretz* Israel (Hebrew: ארץ ישראל, lit. the land of Israel)[6] and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. Judaism is therefore

[6] The term 'Eretz Israel' appears several times in the Bible (e.g. Ezekiel 47:18, Samuel 1 13: 19), but it is mostly called in the Bible by other names: the "Land of Canaan" (e.g. Genesis 45, Numbers 32), "The land of the Hebrews" (Genesis 40: 15), "the Land of Judah" (Deuteronomy 34: 2), "a Land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3: 8), or simply as "the land" (Numbers 14) . The term 'Eretz Israel' began to be used more excessively during the Hashmonite period (140 – 37 BCE) and then appeared almost exclusively in Jewish Oral Law, commentaries and prayers following the loss of the land.

also a religion of place: the Holy Land. For about 2000 years, Eretz Israel was understood primarily in symbolic terms, as a spiritual place to yearn for rather than to inhabit. This religious attitude began to change dramatically in the 19th century.

Until the 17th and 18th centuries, Jews lived primarily in small and culturally segregated communities, although there were always different levels of contact with the neighboring cultures, ranging from commerce to the cross fertilization of theological thought. Throughout this time, the intense religious link to Eretz Israel, a connection which sustained the Jewish people's sense of national identity across space and time, was not translated into a mass movement of return. It was only the rise of Zionism that transformed the hope of national return and its accompanying potential into a reality centered on the physical bond between Am Israel and Eretz Israel (Avinery 1980). The European Age of Enlightenment and its Jewish counterpart, the *Haskalah* (*Hebrew:* השכלה*,* lit. enlightenment/education), brought about a historical rupture in the world of Judaism. With the rise of social values emphasizing the private aspects of religion over public ones, and with the opening of schools and universities to Jewish people, the Jewish community began to lose its power to the idea of a Jewish person as an autonomous individual.

As a result of European political emancipation, Jews began to face new challenges. How was one to act in a society with a different social rhythm than the Jewish one? How should one dress, speak and even name oneself in order to allow social integration without losing Jewish identity? Tackling these social difficulties, Jewish leaders who were influenced by the enlightenment began to emphasize the importance of secular values over religious ones. They propagated the secularization of the Hebrew

language and its transformation from a sacred language of prayer into a vernacular language of daily use. They shifted attention from the pious reading of the Torah to the study of the entire Bible as a literary piece of great historical, national and ethical importance rather than a merely religious one. And, they advocated the integration and assimilation of Jews into the larger European societies in order to solve the problem of Jewish difference, limited political rights and growing anti-Semitism. These practices were meant to achieve Jewish emancipation from both oppressive political chains of foreign rule as well as what was perceived as the backward world of Jewish religious orthodoxy. Out of Haskalah, Zionism was born.

In the late 19th century, Zionism rose as a solution for the Jewish Question[7], a term which refers to the 19th century intellectual discussion about the existential circumstances of Jewish minorities in Europe during a time of growing state nationalism (Boyarin 1997). Zionism emerged out of the Haskalah and in response to the rapid increase of European anti-Semitism, which thrived on accusations of a Jewish double loyalty (to the Jewish people vs. the local nation-state) and included massacres and pogroms. As part of a strategy for protecting Jews from persecution, Zionist movements sought to mold a Jewish national identity, particularly in Eretz Israel, the cradle of Jewish civilization. While Zionist thought was far from having a unified form, and although many Jews were opposed to its political solution (especially out of fear that Zionism would increase anti-Semitism by serving as a proof for Jewish double loyalty), it was eventually Herzlian secular Zionism which retained control over the Zionist discourse.

[7] See, for example (Marx 1978 [1843]).

Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), a Hungarian born Austrian Jew, was interested in the creation of a new Jewish character, one that would replace the *Ostjuden*[8] and "coffee house Jew," who were viewed by secular and liberal Zionists as weak, passive, "feminine" and timid (Weiss 2002:1). The aim of the Zionist project was therefore not only to politically propagate the idea that Jews were a collective national entity that deserved an independent state in Eretz Israel, but also to create a modern Jewish person (Boyarin 1997). Unlike the Jews of exile, the new Jewish person, the New Hebrew, the *Sabra* (Hebrew: צבר, lit. prickly pear) - would be strong, active, resourceful and fearless (Zerubavel 2002). The Jews of Zionism were to be far removed from the Jews of exile and closer in their character and national essence to their Hebrew forefathers in the Holy Land 2000 years ago. The Zionist national story was one of historical progression away from the Jewish decline of the Galut.

Zionism can be understood as a political messianic movement because it rebelled against the old Jewish order and aimed to bring about a new social order: to end Jewish life of exile, create a new secular national identity on the basis of the old one and construct a modern Jewish person within the Biblical Promised Land (Ohana 2012). Even more so, the Zionist national project was based upon an exclusive political interpretation and realization of Jewish theology, and most importantly, of the messianic vision. However, Zionist thinkers sought to distinguish the Zionist endeavor from Jewish messianism, which was construed as a passive, irrational and apocalyptic yearning, while Zionism was said to constitute a break from these mythical-religious elements because it formed an active and politically rational realization of the messianic myth (Raz-

[8] The German word for those Jews who fled religious prosecution in Eastern Europe and lived in ghettos in the midst of Western European cities.

Krakotzkin 2013).[9] This conception of Zionism as a non-messianic political movement points to an internal contradiction within Zionism — a simultaneous dependence upon and rejection of Jewish religious tradition — and marks an ambivalence toward messianism that paradoxically sustains the messianic element as a misrecognized force within contemporary Israeli realities (Raz-Krakotzkin 2002). The rise of Religious Zionism in the 19th century, offered a solution to this Zionist paradox.

From Zionism to Religious Zionism

Religion is not a static and bounded cultural system. The product of human thought and action, it is a diverse cultural phenomenon that always reacts and derives meanings from the larger environments in which it exists. Religion therefore always consists of inherent tensions between the traditional and the new. Throughout the Galut, Jews prayed daily for their salvation and concluded some of their most important prayer services, such as those of Passover and Yom Kippur, with the words "for next year in Jerusalem." Yet, the vast majority of Jews prayed and waited for the mystical emergence of a messianic leader who shall redeem them from the spiritual tribulations of the Galut. This Jewish messianic yearning for redemption from the Galut was characterized mostly by a passive approach that left redemption to the realm of transcendental mercy rather than human action (Ravitzky 1997).

The appearance of Zionism, which secularized and politicized Judaism and purported to bring Jews to Eretz Israel and thus fulfil the task traditionally left for the Messiah, was perceived by many orthodox circles as a heretical act of forcing the

[9] The differentiation between "messianism" as a morally negative term, and "redemption" as a morally positive term continues until this day, and, as exemplified in chapter 3, is even present among certain groups of Religious-Zionist settlers.

redemptive end. Instead of waiting for the moment when the pious actions of Jews would be reciprocated by divine grace, Jewish sinners took upon themselves the role of the Messiah. This unparalleled historical development engendered a spiritual crisis in the world of Jewish orthodoxy and out of this crisis Religious Zionism was born. In the mid-19th century, two rabbis who were influenced by the political climate of growing European nationalism added important active elements to this messianic yearning. They were Rabbi Yehuda Chai Alkalai (1798-1878) and Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Kalisher (1795-1874), who are often referred to as the forerunners of Zionism because their ideas were echoed later in the writing of Herzl and other Zionist thinkers, although the question of their direct influence remains a matter of historical disputation (Shimoni 1995).

Both Rabbi Alkalai and Rabbi Kalisher conceptualized redemption in concurrence with the laws of nature, but from within the religious logic of Judaism. Following the ideas of the great medieval Jewish thinker, Maimonides, they argued that redemption will not occur as a sudden supernatural event, but as a gradual process that will require human preparation. Rabbi Alkalai, for example, offered to revitalize the Hebrew language and turn it into a language of daily use. This act would facilitate the fostering of collective consciousness to allow Jews to better communicate across differences and join forces in their efforts to bring about redemption. Rabbi Kalisher maintained that redemption could be achieved through the initiation of agricultural work and the subsequent fulfillment of Commandments Dependent upon the Land of Israel. These commandments define agricultural rituals and ceremonies that are specific to Eretz Israel, emphasize the holiness of the land and insure the social support of the poor people and the spiritual

leaders who were prohibited from conducting physical labor (Avineri 1980; Ravitzky 1997; Schwartz 2009).

The most influential approach to the centrality of Eretz Israel in Jewish consciousness and its relation to the secular endeavor of Zionism emerged from the writings of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook (1865-1935, often referred by the acronym Haraay"ah), a Jewish mystic, philosopher and the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Eretz Israel during the British Mandate. Due to his status as one of the greatest Jewish thinkers of the 20th century, Rabbi Kook is known simply as Harav, the Rabbi. Rabbi Kook's religious thought drew from Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism) and the philosophical traditions of his time, such as Hegelian dialectics, and believed that good and evil, salvation and destruction all spiral upward in an all-encompassing path of goodness toward divine wholeness, progressing Jewish and world history to its promised redemptive end. His massive, complex and immensely rich body of work is devoted to the radical interpretation of Jewish tradition while also maintaining its religious validity. Much of his writings reconcile the visible antinomies between religious tradition and Zionism. He saw substantial spiritual values in the earthly aspects of Eretz Israel, developed a dialectical approach to the relations between Jewish religion and Zionism and provided a cosmic and universal meaning to the Zionist revival of Judaism from within the rubric of Jewish worldview (Ravitzky 1997).

Eretz Israel has always occupied a central position in Judaism, but throughout the diaspora it was mostly conceived in spiritual terms. Rabbi Kook expounded upon the sacred qualities of the land itself, seeing it as an independent sacred entity with metaphysical qualities that desire the unification of People and Land. He believed that

while it is possible to fulfil all the commandments while living in exile, the detachment from the actual materiality of Eretz Israel resulted in a spiritual existence that was partial and deficient. The return to Eretz Israel was therefore not just a required condition for the advent of redemption but an immediate need of all Jews, for life in exile is life of spiritual impurity. Am Israel, Eretz Israel and the Torah of Israel comprise one sacred and complete totality that must be made whole through the embodied unity of the three (Schwartz 1997).

In providing a substantial religious meaning to the land itself, Rabbi Kook could also find deep religious values in the secular aspects of Zionism. According to Rabbi Kook, secular Zionism operated under a divine providence and unwittingly laid down the political foundations for redemption. The subjective intentions and secular rationalizations of Zionists where merely an outward shell that contained an inner and objective truth of a higher source. Orthodox Jews therefore needed to approach and understand the anti-religious leanings of Zionism through an examination of the divine essence of Zionism's inner contents rather than its outward form. Instead of pushing the Zionist pioneers away, the religious public should look beyond the external veil, recognize their true internal light and join forces in the settlement of Eretz Israel (Avineri 1980; Ravitzky 1997; Schwartz 2009).

Zionism engendered a deep spiritual crisis in the world of Orthodox Judaism, but the establishment of the Israeli state following the horrors of the Holocaust contributed to an eventual prominence of Zionism among many Jewish communities across the world. It became widely accepted that Jews needed their political independence and the necessary means to protect their collective existence.

The Founding of Israel

Until 1948, the land called Palestine has passed through a successive rule: it was controlled by the British Empire, which defeated the Ottoman Empire, which ruled the land before replacing the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt, which followed in turn the Ayyubid Dynasty that triumphed with Saladin over the crusaders, who won against the Fatimid Caliphate that captured it from the Great Suljuk Empire and so on and on. At the end of the First World War, Britain and France divided the Middle East and decided the boundaries of Palestine would stretch from the Red Sea in the South to the surroundings of the Sea of Tiberius in the North, from the Mediterranean in the West to the Jordan River in the East[10]. Strategically situated at the intersection of the three continents of the Old World, Palestine emerged as an elongated, sharp-edged shape deeply nestled in the Middle-East.

On the 29th of November 1947, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a plan to divide British-ruled Palestine into two states, one Arab and one Jewish. The plan was accepted by Zionist leaders and rejected by Arab ones. War ensued immediately. The Zionist fighting units were better organized and equipped than many of the Arab fighters. During the war, hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Arabs were expelled or fled hoping to eventually return to their homes following a Zionist defeat. There were cases of massacre of Arabs, and many villages and towns were abandoned or destroyed. There were also many Arab acts of cruelty. Eventually, the Zionist forces won and the Israeli state was established in 1948 on more territories than originally allocated by the UN Partition Plan.

[10] See Figure 1 above.

The Jewish migration to their Biblical homeland and the war leading to the establishment of the Israeli state resulted in Palestinian exile, the *Nakba* ("the catastrophe" in Arabic). Displaced, dispossessed and dispersed throughout different Arab countries, they lost a homeland and their society disintegrated. Their national aspirations fell to ruin and their culture began to vanish. "Between 77 and 83 percent of the Palestinians who lived in the part of Palestine that later became Israel – i.e. 78 percent of mandatory Palestine – were turned into refugees" (Sa'di 2002:175). Israeli political leaders wanted to maintain a Jewish majority and did not allow Palestinian refugees to return to their homes. Arab countries also contributed to the Palestinian plight. They refused to assist the resettlement of Palestinian refugees because it would have created a *de facto* recognition of Arab defeat and Jewish victory. It would have also signaled the end of Palestinian hope of return to their lost land and homes (Morris 1994). Palestinians continue to claim their 'Right of Return' to the land lost in 1948 and some still keep the keys to their former homes in Jaffa, Haifa and other Israeli locales as a material symbol of their lost hopes and yearning to return and regain what has been lost.[11]

Under the auspices of UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine, the largest United Nations agency, the number of Palestinian refugees continues to grow. Unlike the UNHCR (the United Nations High Commissioner for

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[11] The legal dimensions of the Palestinian Right of Return emerge out of Article 11 of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194. Article 11 states:

> that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible

Israel points out that the text refers to "should be permitted," as opposed to "must," for example. Likewise, the text does not give a specific framework of time for the return and speaks about peaceful intentions. In short, according to Israel, Article 11 uses a vague language the does not settle the important issues.

Refugees), UNRWA allows patrilineal descendants of the original Palestinian refugees to register as refugees as well. Consequently, the number of Palestinian refugees has grown to about 5,000,000 (UNRWA 2014). Israel sees the inheritance of the refugee status as a threat to its existence as the only Jewish state and does not recognize the Palestinian 'Right of Return.'

After the 1948 war, the Israeli state ratified laws that allowed the appropriation of "abandoned" Palestinian land and property and employed emergency regulations to declare land belonging to Arab Israeli citizens as closed military zones. Newly arrived Jewish immigrants were settled in abandoned Palestinian homes, and Arab place names were changed to Hebrew ones: Akka became Akko, Yazur became Azur and so forth. New towns were built and pine forests were planted on the ruins of Palestinians villages, an altering of the natural and cultural landscape aimed at building a new Israeli future on the rubbles of the Palestinian past. The Palestinians who remained within the boundaries of Israel were granted Israeli citizenship. They were able, for example, to vote in Israeli elections. Nonetheless, they were also subjected to martial laws that lasted in some areas until September 1966. Throughout these years, they experienced movement restrictions, curfews, expulsions and arrests without due legal process (Berda 2012).

The fledgling Israeli state was coping with the casualties of war and the traumas of the mass extermination of Jews in the Holocaust. There was no political intention, emotional capability nor time necessary to assimilate the experiences of the recent past into nation-building efforts. As far as most Israelis were concerned, the War of Independence entailed a miraculous victory of the brave and the few over the armies of

seven Arab nations set to annihilate the Jews and finish the genocidal acts of the Nazis.[12] And so, during the early years of the state, the Holocaust was surrounded by silence that was mirrored by the silence about the Nakba, which remains a never-ending event in Palestinian lives. With the rise of a new generation of historians that began a critical investigation of state archives in the 1980s, the Zionist denial of the Palestinian past began to be publically challenged.

In 1967, Israeli and Palestinian histories intertwined yet again, but this time, Religious Zionism played a dominant role.

The Rise of Gush Emunim

The institutional roots of the post-1967 settler movement can be traced to 1924, when Harav Kook founded in Jerusalem the most famous Religious Zionist Yeshiva: Merkaz Harav (Hebrew: מרכז הרב, The Central Yeshiva of the Rabbi). Yeshiva is a religious institution for the advanced study of Torah, and at Merkaz Harav, the students delved deeply into the writings of Rabbi Kook, whose ideas were further elaborated by his Yeshiva's disciples and by his only son and spiritual successor, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Hacohen Kook (1891–1981). However, while Rabbi Avraham Kook wrote in a period when the idea of a Jewish sovereignty was a mere dream, his son had to reconcile his father's complex and abstract theology with concrete political realities.

The 1967 Arab-Israeli war changed not only the geopolitics of the Middle East, but also the internal religious and political dynamics of Israel. Before the war, the general

[12] One of the most famous embodiments of Jewish hatred among Arab leadership is Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, who was in charge of the Islamic holy places in Jerusalem from 1921-1937. An Arab nationalist, during the Second World War he met with Fascist and Nazi leaders, including Hitler, with the intention of seeking assistance in ending Jewish presence and control in the Holy Land (Morris 2008).

mood among Israelis was dominated by feelings of anxiety about an impending doom. Israelis were haunted by fears of annihilation that were stimulated by the trauma of the Holocaust and the war propaganda of the surrounding Arab countries (Shavit 2013). However, the unexpectedly quick and decisive Israeli victory in June of 1967 resulted in the seizure of the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip from Egypt and the Golan Heights from Syria. Israel experienced an unparalleled triumphant wave of nationalist euphoria. Not only had its army defeated its enemies in six days, it had also conquered territories of great religious importance, most notably the eastern part of Jerusalem, where the sacred Old City lies.

The First World War; the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which was the first political recognition by a great power of the Zionist aim of establishing a Jewish home in Palestine; the Holocaust; the establishment of Israel; the separation from the holy sites of Judaism and the national existential dread before 1967; and finally the decisive victory leading to the reunification with these sites, all engendered powerful emotional and mystical reactions in Jewish circles, secular and religious alike. The response to these events was significantly meaningful in Religious Zionism. Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook and his disciples interpreted them as historical proofs for the dialectical road to redemption. Relying on the thought of Nahmanides—the famous Medieval Jewish rabbi and scholar who named the settlement of the land of Israel as one of the most important commandments of Judaism—Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook's thought emphasized the metaphysical importance of the wholeness of the land and opposed political positions that advocated withdrawal from the territories. He also placed great religious importance on the state of Israel, which is often seen among Religious Zionists as "the beginning of

redemption." Merkaz Harav's graduates became leaders of the growing Religious Zionist movement, which perceived the state of Israel as representing a divine entity, as a political institution that reflected the exalted spirit of God and his Chosen People.

Israeli settlement of the West Bank began in September 1967. It was aided by a strong historical sentiment and religious ties to the territories, and buttressed by a security rationale that emphasized the importance of military control over strategically located territories that create buffer zones between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Later, the security rationale would extend to surveillance needs and control over an increasingly hostile Palestinian population. There were natural resources, too, perhaps the most precious one being water. Lacking enough fresh water resources, Israel was ready to use the newly conquered mountainous aquifer.

In November after the war, the UN Security Council issued Resolution 242, which called for "the withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict" and the termination of state belligerence (MFA 2013a). However, there are essential disagreements about the meaning of this resolution as well. It has two versions, in English and in French, with the former one denoting a withdrawal from "territories," thus leaving a legal ambiguity concerning the size of the territories to be withdrawn from, whereas the latter version uses the definite article "the" before "territories," to mean a withdrawal from all of the territories. Regardless of the resolution, the settlement enterprise was aided by an Israeli sense of isolation and a lack of Arab partnership for peace. The Khartoum Resolution of September 1967, issued at the

conclusion of the Arab League summit, called for "no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it" (MFA 2013b).[13]

Nostalgia played a role as well. Aging Israeli political leaders were haunted by a desire to relive the youthful rebellious excitement of the pre-state era, long-since erased by old age and their engagement with state bureaucracy (Gorenberg 2006). They saw their own image reflected in that of the young, religious and ideologically committed Israelis who pushed for the settlement of the territories, just as they once did in opposition to the pre-state British rule over the land. The first Israeli settlements in the West Bank were built in places where Jews were present prior to 1948. From this perspective, the settlements are both a colonial offshoot of sovereign Israel and a return to the struggle for sovereignty over territory of the pre-state era.

In October of 1973, a coalition of Syrian and Egyptian armies launched a surprise attack on Israel during Yom Kippur, the holiest day in Judaism. Israel eventually won the war, but due to the sheer number of casualties, wounded, imprisoned and missing soldiers, and because Israel came close to losing the war, the national atmosphere was one of shock and reawakened existential dread. In response to the overwhelming collective pessimism, Rabbi Kooks' students established *Gush Emunim* (Hebrew: גוש אמונים, lit. Bloc of the Faithful), an extra-parliamentary national-religious movement that operated in collaboration with the state, but also in opposition to it. Gush Emunim began to create and expand the Jewish presence in the newly occupied land in order to invigorate national self-confidence and to fulfill the redemptive vision of Rabbi Kook

[13] In 2002, The Arab League Summit in Beirut published a peace initiative that calls for the normalization of relation with Israel in return for Israeli withdrawal from all the territories conquered in 1967, including East Jerusalem and the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with Jerusalem as its capital. This initiative also call for a solution of the Palestinian refugee problem based on the UN resolution 194, which Israel sees as a threat against the maintenance of Jewish majority.

(Friedman 1989). The settlement of the newly conquered land became the *modus operandi* of Gush Emunim, which by then had gained strong control over the Religious Zionist discourse.

Before Gush Emunim, the Religious Zionist public suffered from feelings of inferiority in relation to both the Zionist and ultra-orthodox publics. Most of the Zionist pioneers were devout secularists and ultra-orthodox Jews viewed Religious Zionist engagement with the secular world as an infringement upon the sacred ideal of uninterrupted Torah study. Religious Zionists were neither Zionist enough nor religious enough. Now, the people of Gush Emunim began to perceive themselves as the vanguard of Zionism and the carriers of religious truths (Aronoff 1989). Up until the late 1970s, Gush Emunim's redemptive understanding of history conformed to the territorial politics of the Middle East, and Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook's devotees continued to expand Jewish presence in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Any notion of territorial concession was perceived as a heresy against Jewish destiny. Nonetheless, in 1982, as part of the peace agreement with Egypt, Israel withdrew from the Sinai Peninsula and Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook passed away shortly thereafter. The construction and expansion of settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strips continued nonetheless.

Gush Emunim sought to lead all of Israeli society, to become the vanguard that unites Jewish orthodoxy and Zionism. Instead, it transformed over time into a settlement movement that divided Israeli society and spurred Palestinian national aspirations. Gush Emunim was officially dismantled in the early 1980s, but its theological and political offshoots have changed and continue to influence the cultural and geopolitical landscape of the region and Judaism. Replacing Gush Emunim, Yesha Council (Hebrew: יש"ע, lit.

salvation, the acronym for Judea, Samaria and Gaza) rose to prominence, functioning as a political organization that unites the settlements' regional councils. In comparison to Gush Emunim, Yesha is comprised of fewer rabbinical figures and more political actors, including the Knesset (Israeli parliament) and government members.

Gush Emunim has survived as a trope that subsumes all religious settlers even though there have been many cultural changes among settlers since the early settlement days. For instance, with the global rise of the New Age spiritual movement, Hasidic Judaism, which emphasizes personal relations with God and fellow human beings, has gained a greater hold among Religious Zionists and settlers.[14] As time passed and the pioneering spirit and rebellious spark of Gush Emunim's founders and early participants subsided in favor of the comforts and pragmatic demands of family life, counter-culture youth movements have emerged in reaction to the bourgeois lifestyle of their parents' generation. Furthermore, the 2005 unilateral withdrawal from Israel from the Gaza Strip and the dismantling of its settlement turned out to be a critical event in the human and geopolitical realities of the region. These changes bear political and religious implications that remain understudied, especially from an ethnographic perspective.[15]

The Settlements: Legal Background

The growth of settlements also pertains to the legal sphere: to judicial questions of authority, enforcement, precedents and ideas and norms of justice. Yet, as this section illustrates, the language of history and religious tradition was used in Israeli courts to

[14] Not all religious settlers are Zionists and not all Religious Zionists are settlers. In fact, most of them are not.

[15] There are many other important changes in the life of the region that are not discussed here due to limitations of length. These include the first Palestinian uprising, the Oslo peace Accords (see page 28 and footnote 10) of the 1990's and the second Palestinian uprising of the early 2000's (see chapter one).

ground legal claims that led to settlement expansion and the seizure of Palestinian land.[16] This was done in opposition to the wide-ranging international consensus that Israeli settlements are illegal. Such was a 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which drew upon the 1979 United Nations Security Council Resolution 446. This Resolution states that "the policy and practices of Israel in establishing settlements in the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967 have no legal validity and constitute a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East" (UN.int 2015).

This legal opposition to the settlements is commonly based on the 1907 Hague Regulations and the Fourth Geneva Convention (ICRC 2015). The 1907 Hague Regulations set international legal norms for the treatment of population in times of war and peace. These regulations prohibit the destruction and seizure of enemy property "unless it is imperatively demanded by the necessities of war"; then it is the occupier's responsibility to respect the life, property and customs of the occupied population. The Fourth Geneva Convention was adopted in 1949 in response to Nazi atrocities during the Second World War and sets international standards on the treatment of civilians in times of war. Article 49 of the convention states that "[i]ndividual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not, are prohibited, regardless of their motive." Section 6 of Article 49 states that "The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies" (ICRC 2015).

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[16] This section relies on *Lords of the Land: The War for Israel's Settlement in the Occupied Territories 1967-2007* (Zertal and Eldar 2007).

Israel, however, asserts the irrelevance of Article 49 because it did not deport or transfer its own population by force. Furthermore, some legal experts (Stone 2003) claim that Article 49 is inapplicable in the Israeli case because no state ever held legal title over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. From 1948 to 1967, the Gaza Strip was occupied by Egypt, and the West Bank was annexed by Jordan. However, the Jordanian annexation was not recognized internationally. Therefore, those who argue for the inapplicability of Article 49 state that the lands in question are "disputed territories" with a legal status that can only be determined in an agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which was established following the Oslo Accords of the 1990s.[17] Israel also argues that the Geneva Convention does not apply because some of the settlements are established in areas populated by Jews before the 1948 Arab-Israeli war—like in Hebron, the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem and Gush Etzion, where Jews fled, were expelled or massacred by Arab forces.

However, from the beginning, the settlement of the newly conquered territories constituted a judicial problem for the Israeli legal system. Instead of clearly defining the legal status of the territories, Israel enacted a policy of ambiguity and vagueness. It did not declare the West Bank and the Gaza Strip sovereign entities, nor did it annex and institute its own sovereignty over these territories. It did not define the newly conquered

[17] The Oslo peace process began with the signing of the 1993 Oslo Accords between the Israeli Government, lead by Yitzhak Rabin, and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), lead by Yasser Arafat. The peace process included the mutual recognition of Israel and the PLO and created the Palestinian Authority, which was granted with a limited authority to govern parts of the territories Israel occupied militarily since 1967. The West Bank and the Gaza Strip were divided into three categories: Area A, with full civil and security control of the Palestinian Authority (PA); Area B, with civil control of the PA and security control of Israel; and Area C, with civil and security control of Israel. The process was also set to determine the borders between Israel and a future Palestinian state; the status of Israeli settlements; and the legal standing of Jerusalem. While Israel declared Jerusalem as its "complete and united" capital, because of its control of East Jerusalem following the 1967 war, no country in the world officially recognizes it as its capital and all foreign embassies are located in Tel Aviv and its surrounding. Instead, there are only foreign consulates in Jerusalem.

territories as "occupied," and affirmed the applicability of international laws. Instead it began to refer to them as 'administrated,' insinuating that the territories were never recognized as parts of any state. Nevertheless, state representatives declared in international forums that despite its legal inapplicability, Israel takes upon itself the humanitarian responsibility of the Fourth Geneva Convention (Zertal and Eldar 2007).

The conquest of the territories resulted in an Israeli encounter with multiple systems of law. An 1858 Ottoman Land Law established land rights that were still being used more than 100 years later. There were also British Mandatory laws and Jordanian laws that affirmed the relevance of the Ottoman Land Law. In addition to these legal traditions, and due to the legal vagueness on the part of the Israeli government, the Israeli security forces became the ruling force in the territories. Having ruled over Israeli Arab citizens from 1948 to December 1966, the Israeli security institutions already possessed the experience and administrative apparatus necessary for the policing and control of a non-Jewish civilian population (Zertal and Eldar 2007).

At the end of 1967, the army issued an order stating that the 'West Bank' and the biblical names 'Judea and Samaria' would be identical. This rhetorical move of legally naming the West Bank after the Biblical kingdoms of Israel (Judea, the Southern West Bank) and Samaria (the northern West Bank) reflected a conceptual amalgamation of the new political realities with ancient Jewish history. The territories were no longer defined only in relation to their modern history, but through the realm of law became part and parcel of Jewish tradition. The control over the territories thus transformed into a fulfillment of religiously-derived rights. In addition, in its capacity as the High Court of Justice, the Israeli Supreme Court was authorized to review the army's administrative and

legislative activities. This was supposed to grant Palestinians legal leverage to petition against the actions of the military. However, the result was another blurring of boundaries between the State of Israel and the 1967 territories, this time through a prism of the law that conceived them as a single judicial and political unit. Over the years, the Israeli Supreme court consistently showed greater leniency toward the activities of the military and Israeli settlers at the expense of Palestinian civilians (Zertal and Eldar 2007).

Local inhabitants first appealed to the Supreme Court in the early 1970s. The plaintiffs were Bedouins[18] who were evicted from their homes on the Rafah Plain in order to establish a 'buffer zone' between the Gaza Strip and Sinai that included civilian settlements. The military legal representative argued to the Supreme Court that it is possible to create a buffer zone with fences and barriers as well as through the incorporation of civilian settlements. The court ruled there was no violation of Article 49 of the Geneva Convention. The legal reasoning was straightforward enough: the petitioners were transferred "within the territory of the military Government and not from it to the territory of the state of Israel" (B'Tselem 1997:15). The Bedouins' petition was rejected, they were not allowed to return to their homes and the Rafah case set a legal standard for the dispossession of people and the establishment of civilian settlements for security needs. The Israeli civilian settlement Yamit was soon built on the Rafah Plain by the serene shores of the Mediterranean. Its residents benefited from governmental subsidies and cheap Arab labor, including that of the expelled Bedouins. However, a few years later, in 1982, Yamit was destroyed by the Israeli government as part of the peace treaty with Egypt.

[18] Bedouins' relations to Palestinians are complex. Some Bedouins identify as Palestinians and emphasize, for example, the same experience of land dispossession, while others distance themselves from the Palestinian national identity and even serve in the Israeli military.

Another important milestone in the legal history of the settlements occurred in the late 1970s, the days of peace negotiations between Israel and Egypt. Palestinians petitioned to the Israeli High Court of Justice after their lands were seized for "crucial and urgent military purposes" that included a plan to establish Beit-El (Hebrew: בית אל, lit, House of God), a civilian settlement by a military camp, north of Jerusalem and next to the Palestinian city Ramallah. The Palestinian owners of the land were offered leasing fees, and a number of them accepted. Others petitioned against the seizure of their lands, the denial of their right to access their land and the intention to establish settlements there. The Plaintiffs' attorney argued that unlike Rafah, this area was quiet and safe. The Court responded that "there is no better remedy for an illness than its prevention before it starts, and it is better to discover and thwart the act of terror before it is carried out," thus legally transferring settlements into a preventing measure against terror (Zertal and Eldar 2007:349-351).

The Court also bypassed the obstacle of the Hague Regulations, which prohibit the destruction and seizure of enemy property by arguing that the seizure of land was not a legal act of 'confiscation' but a security-based act of temporary 'requisition' that does not deprive the plaintiffs' land ownership (Weitzman 2012). As to the contradiction between temporary land requisition and the establishment of permanent settlements, the court explained that the requisition may end one day as a result of international negotiations and new agreements that would determine the status of the settlements. The plaintiffs' complaint was denied, and civilian settlements transformed into security measures in the name of Israeli law (B'Tselem 1997:15-16).

In 1977, half a year after the Beit-El decision, the same court dealt with the case of Elon Moreh (Hebrew: אלון מורה), a settlement further north by the central Palestinian city Nablus (Biblical Shechem). The name Elon Moreh is first mentioned in the Old Testament: "and Avram passed through the land until the place of Shechem, until Elon Moreh, and the Canaanite was then in the land. And God was revealed to Avram, and said: to your descendants I will give this land, and he built an altar there to God who was revealed to him" (Genesis 12:6-7)[19]. Since 1974, the new Elon Moreh was constantly manned by settlers who would construct a small house and raise a flag at the mountaintop, only to have it forcefully removed by the Israeli military. Eventually, the Israeli commander of the Nablus area issued a seizure order to cultivated land for "military need." The Palestinian owners discovered this only after they found settlers plowing their land. Military vehicles cut a new route from the main road to a bare hill, in an area densely populated by Palestinians.

The owners petitioned against the seizure of their lands. This time they were equipped with statements from the former Israeli Chief of Staff, Haim Bar-Lev and Reserve Major General Matityahu Peled. Bar-Lev stated that Elon Moreh does not contribute to Israel's security and that its placement in the midst of a densely populated Arab territory is liable to make attempted terror attacks easier: "the securing of movement to and from Elon Moreh and the guarding of the settlement will disengage security forces from essential missions." Peled stated, "The argument as to the security value intended for Elon Moreh was not made in good faith, and for only one purpose: to

[19] Unless noted otherwise, all biblical quotations are taken form the Jewish Publication Society's Bible (1985).

give justification for the seizure of the land that cannot be justified in any other way" (Zertal and Eldar 2007:357; Taub 2011).

The court issued an interim order to stop the construction of the settlement. In response, Menahem Felix, one of the settler leaders, told the court that Elon Moreh is "the very heart of the Land of Israel." He elaborated further that Elon Moreh is not important merely for strategic and geographic reasons, but "above all of this," it is "the place where our land was promised for the first time to our first forefather, and it is the place where the first purchase was done by the father of the nation after whom the land is called – the Land of Israel" (Zertal and Eldar 2007:358). Menahem Felix was sincere about his most important motivation for settling the land: a biblically-based fulfillment of a divinely sanctioned religious right. However, his sincerity brought about an unintended consequence. The court took his testimony seriously and determined that the reason for settlement was indeed religious and not based upon security needs; therefore, Elon Moreh must be dismantled.

Following the decision of the court, the Israeli right-wing government, led by Prime Minister Menahem Begin, moved on to other legal channels in order to enable settlement expansion, mainly the Justice Ministry. Prime Minister Begin encouraged the establishment of new settlements and aided their expansion. His period marks a transition to a policy of massive settlement and included the movement of secular Israelis to settlements marketed as suburbs of larger Israelis cities, where housing prices were more affordable than on the other side of the Green Line. Using an Ottoman Law from 1858, which stated that any land that was not properly registered or cultivated for ten years was considered state land, the government gained hold over settlement construction. In 1973,

175,000 acres (ten percent of the West Bank) were considered state land and by 1984, 450,000 acres. By 1993, 625,000 acres (almost half of the West Bank) became readily available for settlement. Out of the legal defeat of Elon Moreh, the settlement enterprise eventually emerged victorious. Thereafter the Supreme Court rejected petitions against the legality of this procedure and referred petitioners to appeals committees dedicated to land disputes, which repeatedly legitimized land confiscation based on laws the date to the 19th century (B'Tselem 1997; Zertal and Eldar 2007).

Under the supervision of the Supreme Court and the leadership of all post-1967 Israeli governments, both right and left, Palestinian lands were systematically confiscated, civilian settlements and military bases were built upon them, thousands of homes were demolished and thousands upon thousands of Palestinians were court-marshaled and arrested, including minors, sometimes without due process. Some were tortured, many were killed and the temporary Israeli military rule over the lives of Palestinians transformed into a permanent reality.

Finally, it must be noted that in addition to the legal intermingling of religious and political rationales, money, as always, plays an important role in settlement expansion. Financial benefits have been granted to individual citizens by Israeli governments through the designation of many settlements as "national priority areas." Settlement authorities, from local municipalities to regional councils, have benefited from a higher rate of financial incentives when compared to parallel authorities on the other side of the Green Line. As a report by the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem notes: "all Israeli governments have implemented a consistent and systematic policy to encourage Israeli citizens to move from Israel to the West Bank…. [O]ne of the main tools used to

realize this policy is the provision of significant financial benefits and incentives" (B'Tselem 2002). Such incentives included low-interest housing loans that were sometimes converted into grants from the Ministry of Housing and Construction, discounted purchase of land by the Israel Land Administration, and substantial tax breaks and other forms of subsidies to approved businesses from the Ministry of Trade and Industry (B'Tselem 2014a). There are more examples, of course, and much still remains unknown.

Present Day

Today, about one third of the about 350,000 West Bank settlers are religious nationalists; one third are ultra-orthodox and another third secular. Religious nationalists settle to fulfill religious ideals, while ultra-orthodox and secular settlers were attracted to the West Bank because of economic incentives, although as illustrated in chapter two, the division between ideological and economic motivation is problematic. Each one of the settlements has its own particular history that reflects the unique goals of the people who founded it. Nevertheless, taken together, the settlements form part of a larger national political project that aimed to increase Jewish presence in the post-1967 territories.

Most of the settlements are located next to the Green Line, near a massive barrier that Israel began building in 2002 for security purposes that has since become one of the most visible signs of the conflict. Made from concrete, electronic fences, ditches and roads for security vehicles, the sinuous barrier is about 700 kilometers long and 60 meters wide on average, cutting through close to nine percent of the West Bank, severely hurting Palestinian freedom of movement and access. Contrary to its permanent appearance and

international opposition, Israel contends that the barrier is but a temporary security solution and will not determine the future boundaries of the state. Close to 200,000 settlers live on the western side of the barrier (excluding those of East Jerusalem) and about 100,000 on its eastern side. Urban space accounts for less than two percent of the West Bank. Close to ten percent is under juridical control, while the areas under direct Israeli control are close to 40 percent (B'Tselem 2012:11; Peace Now 2010).

Israel and the settlers are widely condemned by the international community. They are criticized for dispossessing Palestinians, for encroaching upon their lives, for using violence against civilians, for increasing hatred and thus for contributing to regional instability. In addition to these factors, the historical emergence of Israeli settlements in the West Bank at a time when European empires withdrew from off-shore colonies contributes to their perception as an anachronistic colonial relic in a post-colonial age.[20] The fall of the Apartheid regime in South Africa is also frequently mentioned as a useful comparative model of political action and justice. An increasing number of individuals, institutions and states participate and call for the boycott of settlement products and even the Israeli state. The call for boycotting Israel extends to academia as well.[21]

Many Israelis, especially on the political left, also denounce settlers as individuals and as a movement. They accuse them of entangling Israel in a military occupation and endangering the democratic future of the self-defined Jewish state. Criticism comes from

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[20] Some researches argue that Israel itself is a settler colonial state (Shafir 1989), while others see it as an immigrant-settler state (Kimmerling 2002). In either case, because the 1948 foundation of the Israeli state occurred in a place where Palestinians already lived, the foundation of the conflict with the Palestinians is identified by these researchers as 1948 rather than 1967. Israeli historian Hillel Cohen (2013) argues that the origins of the conflict can be traced even earlier to the Arab-Jewish riots of 1929.

[21] In 2014 the question of boycotting Israeli academic institutions became one of the most contested issues within the American Anthropological Association.

within the world of Judaism as well. Because of their Jewish identity and invocation of religion to justify their settlement project, settlers are criticized for pairing Judaism with militancy and domination and deviating from the peaceful ethical essence of Judaism. Still, despite ongoing opposition and many failed attempts to create a Palestinian state, the settlements continue to steadily expand, although not as fast as many settlers desire.

In 2012, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon announced, "the two-state solution is the only sustainable option [for peace]. Yet the door may be closing, for good. The continued growth of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory seriously undermines efforts towards peace. We must break this dangerous impasse" (cited at UN.org). Ban Ki-Moon's words echo a popular position toward the settlements and reflect a powerful anxiety about the future: the time for peace between Israelis and Palestinians is running out and the consequences may be disastrous, not just for Israelis and Palestinians, but for the entire region and beyond. However, in contrast to these fears, Religious Zionist settlers tend to believe that time is on their side. They are informed by a deep religious sense of history and believe they have already embarked upon a journey toward redemption, a journey that contains obstacles along the way, but from which there is no retreat. The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is perceived therefore by settlers as more than a conflict about territory. It is also a conflict about time, about the ability of Israelis to imagine and act toward a future that transcends the perceptual constraints of the present. From this temporal vantage point, which contracts the political realities of the present into a critical but passing occurrence within the long frame of Jewish history, national resolve is tied to the ability to position the difficulties of the present within a timeframe that begins with time immemorial and stretches to eternity.

Nevertheless, the prevailing international position about the conflict is that the current political status quo cannot continue: Israel cannot continue to rule over millions of stateless Palestinians. They must gain their basic citizenship rights. In accordance with democratic norms of governance, this can happen in two ways: the popular 'two-state solution,' involving the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, or the less accepted 'one-state solution', involving the creation of one state for all Palestinians and Israelis.[22] In the latter case, the Jewish character of Israel, the only country where Jews form a majority, would be threatened since Jews would lose their political and social dominance as demographic trends would soon result in the creation of a Palestinian majority. In addition, the intermingling of two populations with a painful history of violence may result in more bloodshed, but this time under a single political entity, whose democratic character would be threatened by deep religious, ethnic and national fractures that could entrench political inequalities between privileged Jews and underprivileged Arab. For a Palestinian state to arise alongside the Israeli one, Israel would have to relinquish its political claim to places of Jewish importance and cede power to a Palestinian polity with a majority of Muslim Arabs. Many Israelis, especially on the political right, fear that this may result in the creation of another despotic Arab state that is hostile toward Israel, but this time with geopolitical borders that would be very hard to defend militarily.

[22] For a comprehensive discussion of the origins and applicability of two-state solution, see Ruth Gavison's "The Two-State Solution: The UN Partition Resolution of Mandatory Palestine - Analysis and Sources" (2013). For information on the one-state solution see Virginia Tilley's "The One-state Solution: A Breakthrough for Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Deadlock" (2005). An incipient solution to the conflict is the "parallel states" approach. See "One Land, Two States Israel and Palestine as Parallel States" (Levine et al. 2014).

Many opponents of a Palestinian state also claim that this would be just a first step in a Palestinian-Arab scheme to gradually take over all of Israel; the Palestinian Liberation Organization's (PLO)[23] 1974 Ten Point Program, for example, called for the establishment of a national authority "over every part of Palestinian territory that is liberated" with the purpose of "completing the liberation of all Palestinian territory," that is, over all of the land upon which the Israeli state now stands (MFA 2013c). Israel would also have to dismantle settlements and forcefully evacuate thousands upon thousands of citizens who hold a formidable political power, an act which could easily increase its internal instability. Time keeps passing, though, and as a result of high birth rates and constant migration, the number of settlers continues to grow at a rate that is more than twice as fast as the general Israeli rate (Peace Now 2010). With each passing day, the growth of settlements decreases the likelihood of the 'two-state solution' as settlements take up more and more space and contain more people, reducing the likelihood of their dismantling as well as of a Palestinian territorial contingency.

A myriad of economic, political and legal forces are implicated in the formation of military occupation and settlement realities. Nevertheless, in the Holy Land, in Israel and Palestine, religion is deeply entangled in violent realities and the possibilities of their amelioration. It forms both an important context and content of the troubling dynamics of the conflict and thus constitutes a political matter that should not be disregarded. Religion holds a significance that cannot be contained or managed solely through political means and needs to be approached with an open mind and a genuine attention that does not succumb to the secular temptation to cast it away as a primitive and superstitious thing of the past.

[23] The PLO was established in 1964 before Israel conquered the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Method and Personal Background

This dissertation is based upon extensive fieldwork conducted intermittently between 2005 and 2013. In the summer of 2005, I carried out fieldwork in Gush Katif (Hebrew: גוש קטיף, lit. Harvest Bloc), the largest settlement bloc in Gaza Strip, and observed the unilateral withdrawal of Israel from Gaza, which entailed the expulsion of about 8,500 Israeli settlers and the destruction of their homes. Following the beginning of my graduate studies, I conducted preliminary fieldwork in the summers of 2008 and 2009 in the West Bank to assess the impact of the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip on settlers' worldviews. I conducted my dissertation fieldwork from June of 2010 to December of 2011. For 18 months I resided in a Religious Zionist settlement in the West Bank and examined three settler groups: the religious settlement and two radical settler groups with members from all across the West Bank. The final stage of my fieldwork was carried out between June 2012 and August 2013. I resided within the internationally recognized boundaries of Israel and conducted weekly excursions to the West Bank and began a thematic analysis of data collected.

I am an Israeli-born and -raised anthropologist who grew up in a sea-side working class town just south of Jaffa, which is a city of mixed Arab and Jewish population. All of my grandparents arrived to Israel after escaping Romania following the Second World War. As a result of anti-Semitism and the subsequent loss of political rights, both of my grandfathers worked in forced labor camps, and my grandparents lost all of their possessions. They did, however, gain a new homeland in Israel. Instilled with Zionist ideals since their birth, my parents did their best to distance us from Romanian culture. For example, they would rarely speak Romanian to each other, and my two sisters and I

grew up without much knowledge of Romanian cuisine. Our family's kitchen table talks revolved primarily around quotidian domestic issues, and politics were not regular topics of conversation. My limited political consciousness reflected the national narratives taught at school. Peace talk, military occupation, Jewish settlement, Palestinian uprising—all of these powerful signifiers that spur ideas about the precariousness of life in Israel and Palestine—appeared to me as if drawn from a separate realm of existence.

As a child, my loose ties to Jewish religion came from my maternal grandparents, who were originally from the Romanian countryside. Although far from being orthodox in their daily practices, they did only eat kosher food, and my grandfather would often pray at the synagogue during the Shabbat. In contrast, my paternal grandmother,[24] who was from the Romanian capital Bucharest, perceived herself as an enlightened Jew and saw religion as a primitive thing of the past. Around my Bar-Mitzvah, the Jewish rite of passage into manhood at the age of 13, I became interested in Judaism. My paternal grandmother became very alarmed about my potential regression into the world of Jewish religion and decided to take necessary steps to save my impressionable soul from the lowly grip of primitive ways. She brought salami to our home. It was strongly scented, oozing with oily fat, shaped like a flower, with a dark purplish color. The taste was irresistible, incomprehensibly rich. It almost overwhelmed me. I later discovered it was not kosher and made from horse meat. Eating one of my favorite animals signified a moment of departure from God.

In 1998, following the completion of my mandatory three-year military service in the Israeli Navy, I traveled to South America where I met and fell in love with an American woman. At the age of 25, I followed my love, moved to the US, married,

[24] My paternal grandfather passed away when I was two years old. I have no memories of him.

became an American citizen, and acquired my academic education. I studied at two community colleges and then transferred to UC Berkeley as an undergraduate anthropology major. I found myself increasingly reflecting upon the complexities of Israeli life and my own identity. I realized my intimate ties to the place acted upon me as a centripetal force and that I could apply this strong attraction to my scholarly endeavor. And so, when I first heard about the Disengagement Plan I knew I had to be there. I received research funding from UC Berkeley and went to the Gaza Strip, not knowing much about Jewish settlers and even less about their communal life in the Gaza Strip. When I returned from the fieldwork, my wife and I divorced, ending a relationship that lasted for seven years.

Conducting fieldwork within a settlement bloc on the verge of destruction was a disorienting ethnographic experience. This experience was exacerbated by the fact that the social fabric of settlement life was already dramatically altered by the threat of destruction and by the masses that kept flooding the place, comprised both of Disengagement Plan opponents and hordes of media reporters. I could not become an insider and form intimate ties with people fighting for the survival of their communities in a desperate race against time. I was merely one of numerous outsiders who were attracted to a violent geopolitical spectacle, and hence my outsider status was a normal situation in an abnormal social reality. I conducted nine recorded interviews and engaged in dozens of informal conversation with residents of Gush Katif. Additionally, I observed many communal and anti-disengagement activities ranging from guest lectures, group talks and town meetings to mass prayers and massive protests. I also spent time in public places (e.g. the town hall square, the minimarket, synagogues), where I observed and

eavesdropped on people's conversations and collected folklore items such as local poetry and miracle stories.

My experiences in the Gaza Strip instilled in me a desire to gain a better understanding of settlers and settlement, and so I began to familiarize myself ethnographically with the West Bank settlement phenomena during the summers of 2008 and 2009. While conducting dissertation fieldwork in the West Bank during 2010 and 2011, I sought to become a member of a community of religiously motivated Jewish settlers. I desired to be accepted as one of them, wanting to take on the role of a settler in order to become one, if only temporarily for the duration of fieldwork. For 18 months I lived in Alon Shvut, an elite Religious Zionist settlement. I practiced participant-observation at events of religious and political nature, interviewed more than 50 settlers and interacted casually with many more. I prayed, ate and hung out with them in various ways and settings that included Torah study, Shabbat dinners, public meetings, shopping, holidays festivities and funerals and weddings, to name a few. Knowledge was also produced through informal encounters and close relationships with several key informants, both settlers and Palestinians.

In general, anyone I interacted with for more than several minutes learned about my anthropological identity and research interests. Yet, when asked about my own religiosity, I commonly revealed that while I come from a secular background and am deeply immersed in an academic project informed by liberal sensibilities, the personal and the professional often mix in anthropology, and therefore my attempt to understand settlers is also an attempt to find faith and understand my own Jewish and Israeli sense of

belonging.[25] I also wore a kippah, the Jewish head covering, to show respect and to mark myself as an insider for the purpose of passing and becoming one of them. If I was to understand religiously motivated settlers and establish rapport with them, I thought, then the visible presence of the kippah on top of my head was surely a basic condition of acting as and becoming one of them. The kippah is one of the most recognizable signs of Judaism, although wearing it is a religious custom and not a law. The covering of the head with the kippah is a religious act of humility and obedience as well as a social sign of belonging. In indexing Jewish identity, the kippah also acts as a social sign of difference between Jews and non-Jews.

The style and size of the kippah is also an indicator of political and religious affiliations within Judaism. I chose to wear a dark-blue, medium-sized, crochet kippah. In general, the crochet kippah is the "classic" settler kippah and signifies affiliation with Religious Zionism or modern Orthodoxy. With its geometric patterns and color combinations it marks a change from the dark and relatively somber aesthetics of Jewish ultra-Orthodoxy into a visible sign of the joy of being Jewish within the Land of Israel during these times of redemption. The kippah I selected resembled those worn by many young males in my settlement: its simple design reflected a subtle balance between contemporary style and respect to tradition; its dark color hinted at a religious attraction

[25] Throughout fieldwork, people have been very nice and hospitable toward me. Some, however, were suspicious about my identity and intentions: was I truly an anthropologist or was my professional identity just a cover story for a secret agent or for some liberal academic bent to further delegitimize Jews and their presence in Judea and Samaria? Walking around with a kippah and *tzizit*, looking as one of them, but lacking in basic religious knowledge and etiquettes, contributed to difficulty of discerning my intentions. I made some embarrassing mistakes, too, especially at the beginning of fieldwork. I tried to shake the hands of women in violation of religious norms of modesty, a curse word would accidently slip out of my mouth, and I did not know the words and melodies to some of the most common prayers, like those chanted around the Shabbat dinner table. Still, people constantly invited me over to their homes, and when they found out I was single would often offer me a *shidduch* (Hebrew: שידוך. Lit, matchmaking). As written in the Torah, "it is not good for man to be alone" (Genesis 1: 22), and the first command to Adam and Eve is "Be fertile and increase" (Genesis 2:18).

to the black of orthodoxy; its lack of blackness revealed a religiously progressive expression of individual aesthetics of piety.

Over time it became clear to me that the symbolic meanings of the kippah expand beyond religion and into the political realm. This is especially true in Israel and Palestine, where religion and national politics become ever more entangled, feeding into an overabundance of meanings in the Holy Land. For example, before crossing Israeli military blockades and checkpoints, I sometimes tilted my kippah toward the driver's side window, making it easily discernible to the Israeli security personal positioned there. In presenting myself as a Religious Zionist settler, I conveyed to the soldiers that I was not only committed to the Israeli state, but was also someone who regularly crossed checkpoints and expected the passage to occur in a swift and speedy manner.

Alternatively, the same sociopolitical symbolism of my kippah sometimes marked me as a dangerous insider in the mind of some radical settlers. A growing numbers of religiously motivated settlers are becoming ever more disillusioned with the Israeli state, seeing the state as ceding to secular and gentile values instead of Jewish ones. This process of disenchantment with the state increased in scale and theological diversity following the unilateral disengagement of Israel from the Gaza Strip. As a case in point, during an early encounter with radical settlers in the northern West Bank I was scrutinized by them for my Religious Zionist identity, and was called "a fascist" because of my alleged sanctification of Israel's political institutions. My religious politics were discerned simply by looking at my kippah, which differed from the large and thick woolen kippah worn by many of the more radical settlers. The political meanings of the kippah became even more evident during encounters with Palestinians. Because settlers

and soldiers are the most common Israeli faces of the occupation, many Palestinians perceive the crochet kippah as a sign of personal and national threat (Boyarin 1996). When meeting with Palestinians, I often removed the kippah as an act of self-protection, which also helped to protect Palestinian interlocutors from accusations of collaboration with the ultimate national enemy, the Jewish settler.

Throughout fieldwork, I played with the kippah, wearing and removing it in an attempt to influence both how people reacted to me as well as how I related to people and my surroundings. Sometimes the kippah laid a heavy burden upon me and sometimes the mere thought of not wearing the kippah made me feel overexposed. I developed anxieties about losing it—the kippah, to be precise—during fieldwork. Strangely or not, it was only under the cover of the kippah that I was mostly able to work, seeking intimacy, privileges and protection from self, other and place until I could wear it no longer only to cover later yet again.[26] As the kippah illustrates, religious matters are of political significance. Furthermore, the complex layers of meanings found in the kippah reflect the complexity of my fieldwork as well. It was rife with ethical challenges and hindered by my limited Jewish literacy.

Equally important, my anthropological examination of settlement life was an existentially straining journey to examine my own ambivalent relations to Judaism, Zionism and Israel in a place that sometimes felt like home, sometimes too close to home, and other times foreign and threatening. For example, Zionism is central to my identity, at least by culture, but my political ties to Zionism were and remain fraught with

[26] My use of the kippah, as a religious artifact that is largely associated with the domain of Jewish masculinity, also points to another fieldwork difficulty: gaining intimate access to women's domain of life. This ethnography is therefore comprised primarily by male interlocutors and the result is a gendered portrayal of settlement life.

tensions. To illustrate, I think the rather predominate Zionist assumption that Jewish life is somehow more authentic or safe within Israel endangers the exterritorial dimension that is so integral to the plurality of Jewish forms of diasporic existence. This does not mean I oppose the idea of a Jewish state. That is, I see Jews as a People and not only as a religious group and support Jewish national self-determination. At the same time, I am deeply disturbed by the ways in which the Jewishness of the Israeli state is realized by chauvinistic politics of discrimination and oppression.

I find it hard to reconcile my Zionist upbringing and inclinations with the fact of the occupation. Irrespective of the legal debate over the status of the West Bank, I cannot deny a reality in which Israel rules militarily over Palestinians. At the same time, I refuse to ignore similarities between Zionist settlement acts and discriminatory practices before and after 1967. I do not discount the fact that unlike the earlier Zionist settlement project, the settlement project beyond the Green Line was carried out after Israel was already an internationally recognized sovereign state, nor do I discount the ways in which the West Bank settlements implicate Israel in a military occupation that oppresses Palestinians and endangers both the Jewish and democratic character of the state. Yet, I am also aware that the land beyond the Green Line that forms the cradle of the Jewish civilization and that it was on the basis of Jewish religious ties to the Holy Land that the state of Israel was established where it did to begin with. [27]

Ethically perplexed, I searched for answers among Jewish settlers. Initially, I was attracted to them because they appeared to me as a population that was exotic but familiar

[27] As mentioned before, the Jewish relation for the Holy Land was expressed throughout the last 2000 years in mostly spiritual rather than material ways. Moreover, there were some Zionist plans to settle Jews in other places across the globe. There were clearly other possible historical outcomes. Nevertheless, the state of Israel was eventually established in the place where Jews yearned to return to in their daily prayers.

enough to allow for a successful anthropological research. However, as I continued to "study" them, I realized I was not so different from them and that the lcommon iberal-progressive antagonism toward them stems not only because of their religious belief or because of the ties that bind settlements with occupation and Palestinian suffering, but also because settlers blur the historical and ethical lines between '48 and '67. Today I perceive the settler population in the West Bank more as a microcosm of the Israeli society and contend that Israeli life over there, on the eastern side of the Green Line, constitutes an amplified version of life on the western side of the Green Line — an amplified mirror image that brings into sharper relief many of the ideological dynamics and practices that remain less visible within Israel "proper". At the same time, settlers are powerful agents of change, and the often encounter between religion and politics in the West Bank impacts the realities of Israel and beyond.

Thus, living among religiously motivated settlers offered a means of examining the sociocultural complexities of Israel. I hoped to find answers within the heart of the conflict and out of all the settlers I met, I was especially attracted to Rabbi Froman and a group of his followers who engaged in peacemaking activities with Palestinians. I was attracted to the idea of settlers and Palestinians making peace; to the hopeful possibility of radical change in the tragedies if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; to the idea of Jewish settlers — the embodiment of Palestinian national enemy — redeeming themselves, Israel, Palestinians and Judaism from the violence of the occupation. This attraction to Rabbi Froman and his followers may cast doubts on my ability to achieve a necessary critical distance when writing about them. Yet, writing objectively about the human realities in the Holy Land is an impossible task for the same reasons that writing

objectively about anthropological fieldwork is an impossible task (Behar and Gordon 1995; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Mascia-Lees 1998). This impossibility does not mean that striving for objectivity is not an ideal worth pursuing, but it does attest to the fact that the production of anthropological knowledge is based upon the particular intersubjective qualities of the ethnographic fieldwork.

I conducted fieldwork in the midst of both Palestinians and settlers. However, I interacted mostly with settlers because of my limited knowledge of Palestinian society, because of militarily-enforced political forms of separation and the attendant challenges of conducting a comparative ethnographic study of two populations whose relations are often defined through violence. In addition, many of the Palestinians I did interact with represent a specific segment of the Palestinian society that is able or choses to interact with settlers. Consequently, my representation of settlers is much more nuanced than my limited representation of Palestinians. The coupling of this asymmetrical representation with my assertion that peace may be found through an increase role of religion and perhaps without the dismantling of settlements may paint me as a pro-settler, especially since this assertion echoes Rabbi Froman's notion of peace (chapter 5). As Rabbi Froman used to say, "Eretz Israel does not belong to Am Israel. Am Israel belongs to Erez Israel as much as Palestinians belong to Eretz Israel, which is Palestine. "

I may be perceived as a pro-settler, but I see myself as a pragmatist. Indeed, my arguments correspond to my particular Israeli positionaly and ties to settlers. Yet, based upon my empirical findings, my arguments reflect an acknowledgement of a difficult reality that many ignore. Regardless of the Green Line, Israelis and Palestinians live in a tightly-threaded binational space both demographically and culturally, and both People

have deep ties to the whole of the land. Furthermore, I doubt the possibility of Israel dismantling its West Bank settlements. At the same time, because the idea of national self-determination is central to both Israelis and Palestinians, my opinion is that a Palestinian state needs to be established alongside the Israeli one for the sake of both. However, so far, the quest for total separation has only resulted in the growth of fear, violence and hatred.

A resolution of the conflict should promote cohabitation rather than separation. From a geopolitical perspective, this could be achieved perhaps through an Israeli-Palestinian confederation, which would consist of two independent states with shared institutions (e.g. on issues of policing, infrastructure etc.) and permeable borders that would also allow for Israelis to live as residents of Palestine and for Palestinians citizens to live as residents Israel (see Levine et al. 2014). While I remain unsure about the appropriate geopolitical solution, I am convinced that an Israeli-Palestinian peace process must not exclude religious leaders from negotiations that engage, among other complex issues, with the political status of places of tremendous religious importance. In addition, peace needs and can be predicated upon territorial notions of belonging rather than ownership, upon a deep understanding the both Israelis and Palestinians belong to the place and not the other way around. Sadly, the road to this kind of peace appears longer with each passing day. In the following chapters, I aim to shed light upon realities that transcend my own experiences, even though this ethnography is also a tale of my troubled Israeli self.

Dissertation Outline

The first chapter following this introduction is based upon my undergraduate fieldwork and focuses on the 2005 unilateral "disengagement" of Israel from the Gaza Strip. Prior to their expulsion, the settlers of the Gaza Strip were also the targets of routine Palestinian attacks. Yet in the midst of state and Palestinian violence, settlers found hope in miracle stories about failed Palestinian attacks. The stories rendered a chaotic reality of violence intelligible through a representation of Palestinian rockets' inability to harm settlers as a sign of divine revelation. This chapter points out the violent affinity between miracles and states of exception and argues that miracles should be understood not only as a religious phenomenon, but also as political phenomenon that is tied to violence and the promises of redemption.

The second chapter introduces the Etzion Settlement Bloc in the West Bank and focuses on Alon Shvut, one of the more elite Religious Zionist settlements. It also tells the story of the Yeshivat Har Etzion, the religious educational institution from which Alon Shvut was born. I show how the notion of return, both real and imagined, led to the establishment of Alon Shvut. I suggest that as a settlement that demonstrates the inseparability of ideological and economic forces in Religious Zionist settlement realities, Alon Shvut can be viewed as model of the successful institutionalization of settlement life and the messianic phenomena.

The third chapter interrogates the meanings of redemption in relation to the state among settlers and illustrates their complicated and sometimes contradictory set of relations to the state. It suggests that settlers' understanding of redemption exists along two interrelated positions: instrumental and messianic. I use the example of Rabbi Hanan

Porat to illustrate the predominating messainic approach toward redemption among Religious Zionist settlers. However, in Alon Shvut, many settlers often publicly invoke the instrumental position toward redemption rather than the messianic one. I argue that this use of instrumental explanations is tied their attempt to present themselves as respected citizens of the state and align themselves more closely to it. This discursive rejection of the messianic label is exemplary of a larger set of complex relationships with the state, a complexity that is further demonstrated through a discussion of a celebration of Israel's Independence Day at Alon Shvut.

The fourth chapter probes Religious Zionist settlers' perceptions of Palestinians. I delve into the impact of a new supermarket where settlers and Palestinians shop side by side. The opening of the supermarket resulted in increased settler demand for Arabic language courses and strengthened their general perception that coexistence is becoming a reality. At the same time, the increased presence of Palestinians and the fear of Jewish-Arab romantic relationships resulted in rabbinical opposition to the employment of Palestinians at the supermarket. Through an examination of the tensions between the visible and the invisible, I show how Palestinians are rendered invisible by settlers as well as how this invisibility is undermined by changing realities that bring settlers and Palestinian into closer contact. I argue that Palestinians are not really "seen" by most settlers and remain at the fringes of settler consciousness, always present as a natural part of the local landscape, but not fully recognized as human beings deserving the same care and political rights enjoyed by settlers.

The fifth chapter moves away from the bourgeois comforts of settler life, away from the self-perceived moderation and pragmatism of settlements such Alon Shvut, and

into the fringes of contemporary settlement life. It discusses Jewish mysticism and its influence upon Rabbi Menachem Froman, a settler, a leader and, without contradiction, a peacemaker. In addition, it elaborates on the case of a new settler peace movement, *Eretz Shalom* (Hebrew: ארץ שלום, lit. Land of Peace), which is inspired by Rabbi Froman and attempts to overcome the political realities of the conflict through religion. I use the examples of Rabbi Froman and his Hassidic mystical theology along with the more quotidian religious basis of Eretz Shalom and its Palestinian partners to show how religion can operate at different levels as a force of peace. I thus argue that religion can propel settlers to take responsibility for their centrality within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and that rather than simply constituting an irrational phenomenon, mysticism can unsettle binary political distinctions and reveal the humanity of the enemy.

Contrary to the peaceful impulses of the settlers discussed in chapter five, the sixth chapter expounds upon the case of Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh and his influence upon settlers colloquially known as the "hilltop youth." Rabbi Ginsburgh conceptualized a mystical messianic theology that opposes the Israeli state and Palestinians. I relate this mystical theology to settler acts of violence and vandalism known as "Price Tags" and argue that this violence should also be understood in relation to a religious disenchantment with the Jewish qualities of the Israeli state. Finally, building upon the former chapters and in spite of Ginsburgh's influence and theological orientation, I argue that the search for solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should also include religion because it constitutes an important cultural realm through which violent ideas and practices can be changed, and through which peaceful behavior can be fostered.

This dissertation therefore opens up an ethnographic window onto settlers and the settlement regime, enhancing scholarly knowledge of a population whose historical and political significance stands in contrast to its relative size. Through the depiction and analysis of settlement realities, including the ideas and practices of religious leaders as well as the more ordinary settlers, I call attention to the multilayered role of religion within the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I begin with the Disengagement Plan, an event that had a profound influence upon settlers and the region at large. I then move on to discuss more "mainstream" Religious Zionist settlement realities in the West Bank. This discussion is aimed at familiarizing the readers with the more ordinary dynamics of settlement life and provides the contextual knowledge that is necessary for understanding the religious practices that are taking place at the fringes of the religiously motivated settler culture. Using the examples of settlers who are influenced by Hassidic mystical traditions, I demonstrate how religion operates as a powerful destabilizing force. It is able to both reorganize relations with Palestinians, and thus to deeply influence the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and regional geopolitics, while also calling into question the foundational rationales of Israel by its emphasis on the inherent tensions between the secular and religious dimensions of Zionism. Because religion underlies and undermines differences between Israelis and Palestinians, I argue that local communities and religious leaders should be included in parallel peace processes.

Finally, in examining how central Messianic conceptions of time among different groups of Jewish settlers relate to settlement practices in the occupied territories, this dissertation reveals the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to be as much about time as it is about space. Accordingly, this dissertation has broader implications for understanding the

contemporary role of religion and time within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the political struggles of the Middle East.

Chapter 1

The Disengagement Plan: On States of Exception, Sacred Violence and Miracles in the Gaza Strip

Introduction

> *Sometime around Purim[1] of last year, two friends stood by one of the blockades and spoke with each other – a Jew and an Arab. All of a sudden, a rain of rocket bombs began to fall around the blockade. Each one of them ran looking for cover.*
>
> *The Jew ran toward the Jewish area looking for some concrete-made wall, and the Arab – he ran as well toward the Jewish area.*
>
> *Run toward the Arab area –it is safer over there! – over there no one fires" – shouted the Jew to his Arab friend.*
>
> *"Nothing is going to help you. I will not leave you!" – screamed back the Arab."Miracles happen to you all the time! You think we do not know? I am not leaving you!!" shouted the Arab while embracing the Jew with all of his might.*
>
> *On this it is said: "Then shall they say among the nations: 'The Lord has done great things for them." (Psalms 126: 2)*
>
> From the Haggadah of Gush Katif [Schreiber 2005: 134]

In December of 2003, the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon instituted a "Disengagement Plan" that entailed the unilateral withdrawal of Israel from the Gaza Strip. The disengagement was said to transform the Gaza Strip into an autonomous political unit and prevent any future citizenship claims that Palestinians residing within the Gaza Strip might have toward Israel. The complete implementation of the plan in September of 2005 included the expulsion of Israeli settlers from their homes in the Gaza

[1] Purim is a Jewish holiday which commemorates a miraculous salvation of Jews in the ancient Persian Empire some 2400 years ago. As the most carnavalesque holiday in Jewish tradition, Purim also celebrates the reversal of worldly order.

Strip and represents a critical moment in settlers' complex relationship with the state.[2] About 8,500 Israelis lived in 21 settlements that ranged in size from four to 500 families and occupied almost a third of the territory of the Gaza Strip, also home to more than 1.5 million Palestinians (Dalsheim 2011, Zertal and Eldar 2006).

Figure 1: Map of Israeli Settlements in the Gaza Strip.[3]

Source: The Gush Katif and Northern Samaria Commemoration Center

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[2] The disengagement plan also included the dismantling of four isolated settlements in the Northern West Bank.

[3] Notice the integration of the West Bank into Israel to create a seamless geographic pattern <http://www.mkatif.org/Items/00932/posterMap.jpg>

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The first Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip were built in the early 1970s as part of the "five-fingers" plan, with the settlements and their access roads appearing like fingers on the map, fingers made to tear apart Palestinian territorial contiguity and facilitate Israeli control (Gorenberg 2006). Indeed, most Israeli settlers of the Gaza Strip understood themselves as a political vanguard of the Israeli state. Yet, for many settlers, the settlement of the Gaza Strip was first and foremost an ethical practice of great religious significance. Empowered by faith and with the Israeli state by their side, the Gaza Strip's Jewish settlers were able to build flourishing communities and successful agricultural industries, fulfilling in the process religious Commandments Dependent upon the Land of Israel. The attendant militarization of the Gaza Strip protected settlers and substantiated the national importance of their lives there. Soon, the sight of tanks, watchtowers and camouflage nets by the deep blue of the Mediterranean Sea appeared as natural as the greenhouses that sprouted on Gaza's golden dunes. Meanwhile, living under an ever intensifying state of siege, the Palestinian population of the Gaza Strip suffered from the violence of Israeli occupation.[4] Whereas Palestinians remained stateless and mostly poor, settlers, who lived beyond the internationally recognized boundaries of the Israeli state, maintained their rights as Israeli Jewish citizens and enjoyed the economic privileges of settlement life.

At the same time, the rights and privileges of settlement life were encumbered by a violent reality that included an almost daily Palestinian shelling of settlements, sniper attacks and occasional car and suicide bombs. Over the four years of the Second

[4] For anthropological works on the Palestinian realities Israeli occupation see, for example, Allen 2008; Bornstein 2009; Feldman 2007; Furani and Rabinowitz 2011; Jean-Klein 2001; Peteet 1994; Stein 2012; Swedenburg 1989.

Palestinian uprising (*Intifada*),[5] which began in September of 2001 and lasted until February 2005, close to 6,000 rockets were fired on Gaza Strip's settlements (Yefet 2005). While most of these rockets missed their targets and resulted primarily in property and emotional damage, sniper attacks and infiltration assaults did cause death. Among the most notable attacks, which were constantly cited by the settlers as proof of Palestinians' murderousness, were the ambush killing of a pregnant mother and her four daughters, ages two to 11, and an attack on a school bus by armed gunmen. In the small and intimate communities of the Gaza Strip's settlements, where almost all settlers knew or recognized each other at least by family name, when violence struck, it always struck close to home.

While damage was perpetrated and lives were tragically lost, the vast majority of attacks against settlers ended without casualties. For many settlers, the majority of them devout Jews, faith provided a source of comfort for the distress caused by Palestinian attacks. Each attack that failed to harm settlers contained the potential for being interpreted or represented as a miracle. Following the beginning of the Second Intifada, stories about miraculous survivals from Palestinian attacks spread among settlers. During the final months of the Disengagement Plan, survivors compiled these miracle stories and published them in various formats. These miracle compilations included two books entitled *Life above Nature* (Nezarim 2005) and *About Miracles* (Yefet 2005), as well as several films such as *The Last Rocket Bomb* (2005), which contained settlers' testimonies about their miraculous survival. Out of the various compilations of miracle stories, a

[5] The First Intifada lasted from December 1987 until the early 1990s with the Madrid Conference of 1991 and the Oslo Accords of 1993. More than 1,000 Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces and about 150 Israelis were killed by Palestinians (B'Tselem 2014b). More than 1,000 Israelis and 3,000 Palestinians were killed during the Second Intifada (B'Tselem 2014c).

special edition of a Passover Haggadah[6]–*the Haggadah of Gush Katif* (Harvest Bloc in Hebrew - the largest settlement bloc in the Gaza Strip) stands out in its popularity and religious significance for Jewish settlers. That Haggadah (Schreiber 2005) occupies a central role in the second part of this chapter.

When Prime Minister Sharon announced his plan for a unilateral Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip, Israeli settlers suddenly faced an unprecedented threat. With the political might of the Israeli state turning against them, they found themselves the objects of an Israeli state of exception (Benjamin 1968; Das 2006; Fassin and Pandolfi 2010; Goldstein 2007; Masco 2006; Ong 2006; Schmitt 2005; Taussig 1989).While Palestinian violence was familiar and taken for granted, the Israeli plan to destroy settlement life in the Gaza Strip appeared to settlers as an extraordinary and irrational act of violence.

For many settlers, the exceptional subjugation to military rule was more than a political problem: it also presented a religious problem. The spiritual dimensions of settlements' geopolitics are commonly framed through the rubric of Religious Zionist theologies which sanctify the Jewish settlement of the Biblical Land of Israel and imbue the Israeli state with sacred meanings. The sudden confrontation with the Israeli state facilitated an existential and spiritual crisis among many settlers who began to wonder about the religious meanings and appropriate responses to the betrayal of the Israeli state (Ravitzky 1996; Schwartz 2009). The violence of the Israeli state and the contradiction between the anticipation for a miraculous redemption and the eventual

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[6] A Haggadah is a small Jewish book that is read during the Seder, the festive meal celebrating Passover. Reading the Haggadah out loud fulfills the Torah's command to pass along the story of the miraculous redemption from Egyptian slavery from one generation to the next.

destruction of the settlements facilitated an acute spiritual and existential crisis among settlers. In this chapter I posit the 2005 unilateral Israeli "disengagement" from the Gaza Strip as an exception to a permanent Israeli state of exception. This theoretical framing allows me to articulate violent realities of miracles and their relations to promises of redemption.

Arguing that modern political concepts are "secularized theological concepts," Carl Schmitt posits the exception in jurisprudence as "analogous to the miracle in theology" (2005: 36). For Schmitt, the political exception and the theological miracle are analogous because both reveal the power of the sovereign through a suspension of the "normal" order of reality. Whereas the exceptional suspension of laws during the judicial state of exception reveals the "true" political sovereign, the exceptional suspension of natural laws during a miraculous event reveals the "true" theological sovereign: God. Like Schmitt, Walter Benjamin (1968) thinks theologically about the political possibilities of states of exception. However, contra Schmitt, Benjamin argues that the state of exception has become a normal rule of life. Benjamin calls for a true state of exception that liberates the present from ideologies of history (such as progress, universalism, etc.) and their violent practices. This liberated present is a flitting image of the past that only occurs during moments of danger, but nonetheless allows recognition of the appropriation of past and tradition for political purposes. Because the state of exception has become the rule, every moment is a moment of danger for Benjamin, and therefore contains the power to interrupt the flow of time and temporarily redeem past and present from ideological chains.

The miracles experienced and recounted by Jewish settlers in the Gaza Strip are

inextricably tied to the violence of states of exception and therefore correspond to both Schmitt's and Benjamin's ideas. Miracle stories addressed the problem of theodicy—the problem of evil in the presence of a loving God. They maintained symbolic order in reaction to a problem of meaning, provided hope in a time of great danger and strengthened settlers' resolve against the threats of both Palestinian and state violence. The stories represent Palestinian attacks and their inability to harm settlers as signs of divine intervention and therefore reveal the divine providence of the true sovereign in opposition to the Israeli sovereign through the sanctification of Palestinian violence and its ineffectiveness. The ability of miracle stories to make theological sense of a world gone awry was predicated upon a concealment of paramount conditions of their emergence, such as the violence of Israeli settlement and military occupation and the relative technological disadvantage of Palestinian weaponry.

Based upon fieldwork conducted in the Gaza Strip during the final three months of its Israeli settlements, this chapter discusses the Disengagement Plan and its influence upon settlers. In the first part of the chapter I describe settlers' reactions to the Disengagement Plan, their attempts to thwart it and the existential and religious crisis that emerged as a result of the violent actions of the state as well as Palestinian violence. In the second part of the chapter I explain how miracle stories were used to reconcile tensions between political realities and religious meanings. I do not intend to equate miracle tales with the lived experiences of settlers, but to illustrate how in bestowing coherence on violence, miracle stories during the Disengagement Plan commit symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1977) and operate as integral cultural elements of states of exception. I suggest that an examination of states of exception and miracles in the lives of settlers

reveals that they are not merely structurally analogous (as Schmitt observes), but are intimately interlaced, signifying and reinforcing each other, their similarities allowing states of exception to appear as miracles. Thus, I argue that miracles should be understood not only as a religious phenomenon, but also as political phenomenon that is inextricably tied to violent realities and promises of redemption.

An Israeli Exception to the Rule

Since its establishment in 1948, Israel has existed in a permanent state of exception. This is not only an anthropological statement about the existential realities of life in the state of Israel, but also a plain legal fact. In 1945, during the British rule over Palestine, the British Mandate government enacted various emergency regulations as part of a new fighting strategy against militant Jewish underground organizations (*The Palestine Gazette* 1945). The incipient state of Israel adopted much of the British Mandate's laws along with its emergency regulations, thus ratifying a temporary and paradoxical legal sphere within which laws can be suspended in the name of law, and the basic civil rights of citizens may be suspended to protect democracy (Agamben 2005). Every year since 1948, the Israeli parliament votes to re-extend these temporary emergency regulations in order to maintain a permanent state of exception (Sagiv 2007).

Emergency laws grant immense power to the state, but were rarely applied against Israel's Jewish citizens. Instead, this state power was used primarily against Arab populations, both in Israel and the Occupied Territories. As a result, two distinct spheres of law exist in the space of Israel and Palestine: one which grants most of Israel's Jewish citizens the right to live their lives democratically, and another which is based upon

emergency regulations and laws, used almost exclusively to control Palestinian and Arab populations. For example, until 1966, emergency regulations were used to legalize military rule over Israel's Arab citizens (Berda 2012). After the Israeli victory in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, emergency regulations were used extensively in the Occupied Territories and primarily against Palestinians to provide Israel with the legal authority "to demolish and seal hundreds of houses, deport residents, administratively detain thousands of persons, and impose closures and curfews on towns and villages" (B'Tselem 2010). These normalized and mass-scale uses of emergency regulations mark the Disengagement Plan as an Israeli exception to the permanent state of exception: the might of the Israeli state was turned against a large group of its own Jewish citizens instead of Palestinians.

I entered the Gaza Strip for the first time at the end of May 2005 to conduct ethnographic research as an undergraduate anthropology major at UC Berkeley. By that time, the settlers' struggle against the Disengagement Plan was reaching its peak. Finding a place to stay at one of Gaza Strip's settlements was therefore a challenging task. Vacant houses and rooms became a rare and expensive commodity for outsiders. Apartments and rooms were provided free of charge to opponents of the Disengagement Plan or, conversely, rented to media personnel willing to pay three or four times the market value. Luckily, I was able to find a place in the form of a small vacation hut at *Midreshet Hadarom* (Hebrew: מדרשת הדרום*, lit.* the Southern Seminary), close to the beach and less than a mile from Neve Dekalim, the largest settlement in the Gaza Strip. In Israel, the term *Midrasha* commonly refers to religious schools for females. Like many other Midrashot, Midreshet Hadarom provided Israeli citizens who did not serve in the military

due to health reasons or religious grounds with an opportunity to participate in Israeli national service programs. Partially a religious school, military base, and a vacation rental, Midreshet Hadarom epitomized the coupling of settlements and the military.[7] However, by the time I arrived there, the place hosted only the soldiers who guarded it and one journalist whom I never met. Empty, quiet and unkempt, the place presaged the bleak future of the settlements in the Gaza Strip.

Jewish presence in the Gaza Strip area has ancient roots that extend to the modern age. According to tradition, the Biblical Patriarchs Abraham and Yitzhak lived in the vicinity of Gaza. Later, following the conquest of the Promised Land, the area was part of the territory of the Yehuda Tribe. Jews lived in the area even after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, but their presence increased mostly in the 19th and 20th centuries. In 1929, the British authorities ordered Jews to leave the Gaza Strip following Arab-Jewish riots that resulted in the deaths of more than 130 Jews (Cohen 2013).

In 1946, 11 Jewish settlements were erected on land purchased by the Israeli National Fund to ensure Zionist control of the Negev desert in the south. One of these settlements was Kfar Darom (Hebrew: כפר דרום, lit. South Village), which was located a few miles south of the city of Gaza. In 1948, after three months of fighting between Jewish and Arab forces, Kfar Darom was abandoned and destroyed by Egyptian forces. In 1970, a *Nahal* (Hebrew: נח"ל, the acronym for Pioneering Fighting Youth) Platoon returned to the original location of Kfar Darom and established a small military base (Gorenberg 2006). Kfar Darom was one of the first Israeli settlements built in the Gaza Strip in the early 1970s as part of the "five-fingers" plan, forming the middle finger. The

[7] The intermingling of military and civilian life is a common characteristic of Israeli life. Even Tel Aviv, for example, contains a large military base at its heart, and it is common to see soldiers with weapons on the streets of Israel.

Israeli settlements in the Northern Sinai Peninsula created the first finger. The second finger was made from the settlements of Gush Katif. The settlements at the northern Gaza Strip comprised the fifth finger. The first finger was "severed" in 1982 during the forced evacuation of the Israeli settlements as part of the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty. The remaining ones were shattered in 2005.

In 1988, Yitzhak Rabin, the Defense Secretary at the time, authorized the establishment of Kfar Darom as a Torah oriented civilian settlement. Sixty-five families and about 400 people lived in Kfar Darom. The settlement was technically located outside of Gush Katif, the largest settlement bloc in the Gaza Strip. Nevertheless, due to strong communal ties with the people of Gush Katif, it was commonly viewed and described by settlers as part of it. In addition, the term "Gush Katif" is still being used as a vernacular reference to all of the Israeli settlements of the Gaza Strip.

Nathaniel, a soft-spoken person with thick plastic-rimmed glasses, lived in Kfar Darom for 14 years. He used to work as a teacher at the Torah and Land Institute in Kfar Darom. The Institute conducted research and practice of Religious Laws Dependent on the Land of Israel, and is known for its agricultural innovations, such as insect-free kosher vegetables. Nathaniel talked at length about why he chose to live in Kfar Darom (06/16/2005):

> My grandfather was a famous cantor in Poland. He used to tell me, "I did not come to Eretz Ysrael to be a cantor; I came here to settle the land through agriculture." This saying is inscribed deeply into my consciousness.... I was attracted to this place because of the connection between Judaism and agriculture. I see them as one integrated whole.... You see, we teach the pupils that Eretz Israel is a special land. Here, fruits are more than just plants; they require special attention and order. For example the *Shmita* (Hebrew: שמיטה, lit. release), when every seventh year you leave the growth untouched, there is no ownership of the fruits. This is the most special year; it's like the Shabbat. Then there are donations and giving a tithe of your harvest to the poor…. If you look at agricultural fields

> in Eretz Israel, you will see order, and it tells you this is a special land. We teach our students that the land and the fruits are special. They have values like helping your friends, faith, and Torah study and learning in general. It is more than just simple work and living... An entire value system grows out of this land.

Not all the settlers in the Gaza Strip were attracted to the place because of religious values. The settlements in the northern Gaza Strip, for example, were home to many secular Israelis who lived there because of the shorter commute to larger Israeli towns and the possibility of enjoying a higher standard of living (evidenced by some luxurious houses). Still, within Gush Katif, most of the settlers were religiously motivated.

Much bigger in size than Kfar Darom was the settlement of Neve Dekalim (Hebrew: נוה דקלים, lit: Oasis of Palms), where 500 families used to live. Founded in 1983, Neve Dekalim was the largest of Gaza Strip's settlements. With several synagogues, yeshivas, schools, a clinic, a regional library, a small zoo, an industrial zone and commercial center, Neve Dekalim was often referred to as the capital of Gush Katif. Shmuel lived in Neve Dekalim for 24 years. Strongly built, he gazed straight into my eyes, and spoke with a commanding voice. He studied at Merkaz HaRav and in 1981 moved to Neve Dekalim from Jerusalem after several students from the Yeshiva were chosen to join and lead the new religious community. He taught at the local Yeshiva for 12 years and then became a manager of a local factory that employed people with disabilities.

I asked him to expand upon his reasons for moving to Neve Dekalim (06/21/2005). “I am here because I wanted to follow God's command and settle the land of Israel,” he answered authoritatively and went on:

> and because I was sent by Am Israel to be here. These are the most important and determining factors. Now, of course, after you do that, and live for 25 years with a group of people, at a specific society inside a house, obviously you feel connected to the place. If I will be thrown away from here, God forbid, I do not know what will be more painful: losing my home or the blasphemous act of a Jewish government whose main goal should be the settlement of Eretz Israel, but decides to expel Jews from the Eretz Israel.

"And how did you feel when you first heard about Sharon's Plan?" I inquired. "I don't know, it seemed imaginary. I did not pay attention to it." Shmuel took a long, morose pause, and I pushed further: "it looked imaginary because it came from Sharon himself, or because it seemed like typical political rhetoric?" "A combination of both," he answered. "I don't know. Anyhow, I never believed secular politicians. If something does not have deep foundations, it blows away in the wind."

First Reactions

In January of 2003, following the collapse of the National Unity Government[8], Ariel Sharon won the Israeli General Elections. Despite Israel's repeated military campaigns and the rapid construction of a massive wall and other security barriers in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, suicide bombings and other forms of Palestinian violence did not stop. Feeling disillusioned by the repeated failure of numerous peace and cease-fire initiatives, many Israelis decided it was best for the country to have a strong militant leader. At the same time, candidate Sharon's repeated announcements about his willingness to make "painful concessions" and his commitment to the Bush Administration's "roadmap" for peace, which was aimed at establishing a Palestinian

[8] The National Unity Government was headed by Ariel Sharon but comprised by both right and left political parties who joined forces in the context of the Second Intifada. However, in September of 2012 the Labor party withdrew from the government due to internal rifts along with external disagreements over economic and defense policies. Several months later, Prime Minister Sharon dissolved the Knesset and announced early elections.

state that exists peacefully alongside Israel, convinced many Leftist voters that his hawkish but pragmatic way offered the most viable political option.

When PM Sharon announced in December 2003 his plan for unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip, many Israelis did not take his speech seriously. After all, during the primaries of his right-wing Likud party at the end of 2002, he opposed the leader of the Labor party, who ran on a platform of unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and declared that the first settlement that needs to be dismantled is the isolated settlement of Netzarim (Hebrew: נצרים) in the Gaza Strip. In response, Sharon, who was often nicknamed "the Godfather of the settlements," announced that the fate of Netzarim is like the fate of Tel-Aviv, that is, non-negotiable.

"When I first heard about the plan about a year and a half ago," said Jacob, "I did not quite understand what was going on" (07/13/2005). Born in the US, Jacob served in the US military until he was placed with his division in Germany, where he experienced anti-Semitism. In 1972 he migrated to Israel and, following his marriage in 1979, moved to the Gaza Strip believing that a settlement would be an ideal place to further "explore his Jewish roots." Like many other residents of Gush Katif, he did not fully comprehend what was about to happen. "No one knew what was going on," he said. "[Sharon] always said during his election campaign that he might make painful concessions, but no one expected that he would do something like that. No one expected anything like that.... Now I feel as if I were diagnosed with cancer and keep waiting for a cure to be found."

With slogans such as "We love you Sharon, but vote against [the Disengagement Plan]," the first protests were characterized by an affectionate attitude toward Sharon. As time passed, and the seriousness of the situation began to register, settlers' affectionate

attitude was substituted by a more aggressive approach, with anti-Sharon slogans such as "Sharon is tearing the nation apart" (Hebrew: שרון קורע את העם), underlining the unity of nation and land. After several long months of confusion, settlers and their supporters began to organize an unprecedented struggle. In a successful marketing campaign inspired by the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, they appropriated the orange color of the Gush Katif Regional Council flag and managed to associate the orange color with their struggle. In Gush Katif, almost everyone wore orange clothes, bracelets or ribbons.

Countering the massive presence of orange colors in public spaces, white and blue ribbons began to appear in multitudes within the internationally recognized boundaries of Israel. Placed on vehicles, signposts, doors or street lights, to name a few examples, these ribbons mirrored the colors of the Israeli national flag. Construing the settlement enterprise in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as a deviation from the Zionist settlement ethos, the white and blue ribbons indicated Zionist support of the Disengagement Plan. As this Zionist rationale goes, Israel is first and foremost a national home for Jews and the maintenance of a Jewish majority is a necessary condition for the perpetuation of a Jewish democracy. However, Israel maintains military control over millions of Palestinian and prevents from them equal rights and political sovereignty. The disengagement was said to transform the Gaza Strip into an autonomous political unit and prevent any future citizenship claims that Palestinians residing within the Gaza Strip might have toward Israel. In the final months of the Disengagement Plan, wearing an orange ornament became a transgressive act that marked an emerging rupture between settlers and the state: soldiers who wore orange ribbons or bracelets were prosecuted,

and members of the Knesset were not allowed to wear orange-colored shirts during parliamentary meetings.

Figure 2: "Human-Chain." Gush Katif, August 2005. Photo by Author.

Settlers realized they were losing public support and, as another popular slogan went, they attempted to "settle in the hearts" of as many Israelis as possible. Mass demonstrations and prayer rallies were orchestrated. Car convoys with orange flags and ribbons drove across Israel. Young and old engaged in door-to-door visitations and tried to convince more Israelis to join their struggle. Brochures and bumper stickers were printed. Films and media articles warning against the hazardous consequences of the plan were widely circulated. One of the most notable activities included the creation of "a human chain" of more than 100,000 people who held hands on the sides of the roads connecting Gush Katif to Jerusalem, an act of social solidarity that was aimed at illustrating the organic unity of the Biblical Land of Israel.

The dissemination of messages of national unity became central components of settlers' struggle. "The eternal nation does not fear a long road" (Hebrew: עם הנצח לא מפחד

מדרך ארוכה) is a catchphrase and a song that became popular among settlers during that period. It instilled hope through an emphasis on the antiquity of Jewish People and their ability to relentlessly march along in unison on the road toward redemption regardless of numerous historical obstacles. "A Jew does not expel a Jew" (Hebrew: יהודי לא מגרש יהודי), which was also composed into a popular song, suggested that the Disengagement Plan was a non-Jewish act. But it could also be interpreted as legitimizing the expulsion of non-Jews by Jews, an interpretation that quickly caught on among disengagement supporters to point at settlers' chauvinism.

The people of Gush Katif fought first and foremost for the survival of their own communities and homes. While supporting the larger struggle, they also attempted to differentiate themselves, choosing a rather naive slogan: "I have love, and it shall win" (Hebrew: יש בי אהבה והיא תנצח). However, the mass-media tended to focus, for example, on road-blockage activities by disengagement opponents. Eventually, on July 13, 2005, the Gaza Strip's settlements turned into closed military zones. Only residents of local settlements, journalists, or people who acquired a special permit could enter the area after showing their newly issued ID to soldiers at one of several newly constructed blockades. I continuously had to negotiate with the newly established Permit Center to receive and renew my entrance permit. I repeatedly sent them my rental receipt from Midreshset Hadarom, a copy of my student ID and an official letter from U.C. Berkeley, which stated the academic purpose of my presence and requested "Israeli security personnel" to assist me in my research endeavors. In order to enter the Gaza Strip I was required to show my Israeli ID to soldiers at several roadblocks within Israel as well.

In reaction to the governmental decree turning the Gaza Strip into a closed military zone, the Yesha Council[9] declared July 18 to be a *Yom P'kuda* (Hebrew: יום פקודה), a Day of Judgment in Jewish tradition. Within the context of the disengagement, the religious meaning of P'kuda was also interlaced with the military meaning of the word P'kuda: a command. Drawing from the military experience of many of its members, the Yesha Council organized a three-day long demonstration during which tens of thousands were to march into the Gaza Strip to unite with and save their "heroic brothers." In an act of solidarity with the Yesha Council's cause, Mordechai Eliyahu and Avraham Shapira—the two former Sephardic and Ashkenazi Presidents of the Israeli Rabbinical Council[10] and the most respected leaders of Religious Zionism—issued a joint statement calling "all Jewish brothers" to join "their mighty brothers in Gush Katif, to remove the siege, to cancel the expulsion, and to raise up families for settlement in the area" cited at Yosef 2005). Hundreds of buses were hired to transport participants without vehicles across Israel to make their way to the gravesite of Rabbi Israel Abu Hatzeira, the Baba Sali,[11] at the Southern Negev Desert town of Netivot, where a pre-march rally was to take place. The site was selected due to its relative proximity to the Gaza Strip as well as because of its religious significance (see Bilu and Ben Ari 1992). I attended this rally (described below), which marked the defeat of the anti-disengagement struggle.

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[9] Yesha Council (Hebrew: יש"ע, lit. salvation, the acronym for Judea, Samaria and Gaza) is the political organization that unites the settlements' regional councils.
[10] The Israeli Rabbinical Council is the legally recognized supreme religious authority for the Jewish people in Israel.
[11] Rabbi Abu Hatzeira was a Sephardic rabbi of Moroccan descent who was famous for his miraculous kabalistic powers. His gravesite is now a popular religious pilgrimage site.

The "Siege" at Kfar Maimon

Tuesday, July 19, 2005, 12th of Tamuz, 5765

"Good morning *Ne'emaney Eretz Israel* (Hebrew: נאמני ארץ ישראל, lit. loyalist/faithful of the Land of Israel). The dictator Ariel Sharon and his expulsion forces have ordered the dismantling of our camp. I ask everyone to wake up, get up, and start blocking the road with vehicles."

Figure 3: Morning at the camp site outside Kfar Maimon, July 19th, 2005. Photo by author.

As I opened my eyes, I heard the nearby sounds of laughter responding to this melodramatic public announcement and discovered that the first morning rays of the desert sun had turned my blue-colored tent wall into a theater of shadows. An increasing number of flickering human shadows began to surround my tent. Feeling like one of the prisoners in Plato's allegory of the cave and with less than two hours of sleep under my belt, I was not ready to emerge to the outside world and face the light. The dramatic

events of the previous day and night had left me drained. Clearly, I was not as resilient and motivated as the massive crowd of tens of thousands of people, young and old, who had shared the same laborious experience with faithful dedication. Five days ago the Gaza Strip became a closed military zone. Fearing that the planned march would disrupt and, at worse, prevent Gaza's evacuation altogether, the Israeli government instructed its security forces to prevent demonstrators from reaching Netivot: hundreds of buses were stopped by Israeli police and ordered to turn back toward their origin points. In some cases the police confiscated bus drivers' licenses before buses could even leave their stations (ACRI 2005).

In response, the Yesha Council issued an emergency statement blaming the "tyrannical behavior of the Sharon clan" for crossing a "red line" of democratic principles and called the public to arrive at the demonstration site "by car, by train and by foot." Echoing the Council's complaint, the Association of Civil Rights in Israel, filed a complaint demanding that police forces allow all demonstrators to arrive at the rally without any interruption (ACRI 2005).

In its annual report about the state of human rights in Israel, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel dedicated a small section to the anti-disengagement rally at Netivot:

> The attempt to prevent a group of citizens from moving from one city in Israel to the next – only because of the fear that some or all participants will move from that place to another faraway place where it is feared they will violate public order – is not only an illegal act, but also constitutes a blatant and disproportionate violation of the human right of movement. [ACRI 2005: 40]

In the months preceding the implementation of the Disengagement Plan, Israeli authorities attempted to reduce political opposition, sometimes through measures that conflicted with democratic principles. For example, several protestors in Israel were put under administrative arrest, juveniles were detained and denied legal representation prior

to their court appearances, and deliberations over the continuation of detentions were conducted on a collective basis instead of allowing for the examination of individual charges (ACRI 2005).

The “engagement” rally was planned to start at 4:00 pm. A large stage was constructed to house the Yesha Council's politicians together with some of the most admired and influential Israeli Rabbis. The Baba Sali's gravesite yard was divided into two separate gendered areas. Dozens of small stands selling food, drinks, orange anti-disengagement stickers, flags and T-shirts as well as religious books, cassettes and CDs were set in place. Numerous photographers toured the site looking for photogenic figures and scenes. However, due to the prevention steps taken by the Israeli security forces, only a few thousand disengagement opponents had made it to Netivot by four o'clock. For a short while it seemed as if the Israeli government had just secured a victory over the implementation of the Disengagement Plan; the most important anti-disengagement activity was about to end on a very anticlimactic note.

In spite of the police efforts, the masses started to arrive. Teenagers for the most part, but also entire families made it to Netivot by foot, public transportation and private cars. A steady trickle of people flowed to the rally site from the surrounding agricultural fields. By seven o’clock, the place was packed with tens of thousands of demonstrators. At ten o'clock, after all of the speeches were concluded, the crowd started to make its way toward Kfar Maimon, a religious settlement within the internationally recognized boundaries of Israel. Kfar Maimon was planned to be the first station along the three-day march toward the Gaza Strip. The procession was led by a group of prominent rabbis holding a large Torah. Specially written for this occasion, this Torah was to be placed in

the main synagogue of Neve Dekalim. And so, in complete darkness, led by a group of rabbis holding a Torah, a few miles-long, orange-colored column of people with backpacks, flashlights, musical instruments and Israeli flags made its way along the dark desert road. On both sides of the road, thousands of soldiers and policemen wearing blue and green uniforms delimited the demonstrators' movement with their own bodies, functioning as a live human shield.

Figure 4: The March to Kfar Maimon, a "human shield" of soldiers. July 18th, 2005. Photo by Author.

For half an hour the procession progressed uninterrupted. The marchers' spirits were high. Groups of young and old demonstrators sang popular anti-disengagement songs and slogans such as "A Jew does not expel a Jew" or "The eternal nation does not fear a long road." After thirty minutes the march reached a sudden stop. Numerous

security forces and riot control trucks blocked the road. TV news vans, both national and international, parked at the sides in preparation for the live broadcast of a violent collision between the disengagement opponents and the Israeli security forces. As the darkness was broken by the fragmentary illuminations of camera flashes and the blue of police siren-lights, thousands of novice soldiers could be seen gathering in the nearby fields to prevent any demonstrators from leaving the main road.

At the front of the procession, the leaders of the Yesha Council pleaded with the Israeli Police Chief to allow the procession to continue uninterrupted or risk bloodshed. In the meanwhile, the thousands of wayfarers who were unaware of the roadblock continued to move forward and created a continuous massive push on the people in the front of the procession. The high-spirited songs were now replaced by screams of anger, pain and frustration: "*Medinat Mishtara, Medinat Mishtara*" (Hebrew: מדינת משטרה, lit. police state) was the dominating angry chant along with "policeman, soldier, refuse your orders!" When the pressure on the front rows increased, and it seemed as if the crushing of human bodies was imminent, loud shouts were heard: "We breached the chain! We breached the chain! Quickly, through the gap!" Young soldiers stood idly by as the masses started to diverge from the main road and pour into the nearby stony field. The field itself was now fenced by thousands of soldiers and policemen who held each other tightly, their hands clasped and arms interlocked.

Realizing they were still surrounded by the security forces, most demonstrators decided to take advantage of the pause and rest. However, all across the outskirts of the field, small groups attempted to run through the lines of soldiers. The sounds of military commanders issuing orders such as "Don't let go of your hands!" "Stand strong!" or

"Don't reply!" mixed with the frustrated, antagonizing yells of demonstrators. Some attempted to establish an emphatic sense of national kinship with the soldiers with proclamations such as "You are my brother and I love you, please don't to this to family," while others, who were plainly outraged, screamed at the soldiers: "Traitors!" or "Robots, where is your Jewish soul?" The soldiers just lowered their heads, attempting to avoid both the accusing gazes of the demonstrators and the onslaught of camera flashes. The starry night sky, the rocky field, the dusty desert air, and the two Israeli masses facing each other created an entirely surreal scene, which unfolded as if taken from a big budget film about medieval warfare. After two hours of negotiations, sometime after midnight, the Yesha Council reached an agreement and the procession was allowed to continue toward Kfar Maimon. Again, the general mood was one of victorious exhilaration as the tens of thousands made their way to the camp, crossed the desert with packs on their backs, singing Israeli and Jewish songs of hope and deliverance.

As the shadows of bodies marching through the night metamorphosed into the shadows of the early morning camp grounds, the sound of hovering helicopters convinced me that it was time to leave the tent even as my body craved more sleep. Amidst the massive campsite, thousands of people were occupied with their morning prayers while others dismantled their tents or waited in the bathroom lines. Meanwhile, multitudes of soldiers began to surround the camp. "Quickly, quickly," urged the public announcer, "move into the *Moshav* (Hebrew: מושב, lit. settlement) before the gates are closed! It's alright to move while wearing praying shawls and Tefillin.[12] Do not confront the soldiers and play into the hands of the tyrant-dictator Sharon." As the tens of

[12] Also known as phylacteries, tefillin are two sets of small black leather boxes (holding parchment inscribed with verses from the Torah), which are used by practicing Jews during weekday morning prayers.

thousands slowly made their way into the small settlement across the road, and with the public announcer continuously urging the crowd to take their belongings and move at a faster pace, the Israeli police began to surround the perimeters of the place with barbed wires. Thousands of soldiers and policemen took positions along the boundaries of the Kfar Maimon.

Figure 5: Kfar Maimon, July 20th, 2005. Photo by author.

The following three days are widely known among settlers as the "siege of Kfar Maimon." In fact, people were able to enter and leave the premises of the Moshav, but only as slow and steady flow of individuals, never as a big group. The Yesha Council's leadership explained time and again to the crowd and mass media representatives that the march has just been temporarily postponed and promised that soon enough the masses shall progress toward Gush Katif. In the meanwhile, some demonstrators listened to Torah lessons and political speeches that were conducted underneath large, shaded nets.

Others passed the time touring the area and interacted with the security forces, urging them, for instance, to abandon their positions, while many merely rested underneath available shaded spots. The portable restrooms overflowed by noon, and the sanitary conditions rapidly worsened. Luckily, the local residents of Kfar Maimon opened their houses to the masses and provided free access to basic amenities. At night, their front lawns were packed with mainly teenagers[13] in sleeping bags.

Young families with infants and the elderly were naturally the first to leave and escape the scathing heat. With each passing moment, the number of people dwindled. Every few hours, public announcers informed the crowd about the forthcoming continuation of the march, while the Yesha Council's leaders and other rabbis reemphasized the importance of national unity, non-violence and democratic dissent. Several hundred young men performed a mock military march and repeatedly chanted "left, right, left, the commander I simply can't! [obey commands]" There were numerous occasions of circle dancing, some ecstatic and loud, others slow and contemplative, all exhibiting a religiously appropriate separation of sexes. Eventually, the Yesha Council leaders decided to avoid the possibility of a violent confrontation with the Israeli security forces, the masses heeded the call for non-violence, and victory was reframed with tropes such as "resilience," "commitment," "unity," "faith" and "love." After spending three days in the hot desert sun, the "siege" was over and the several thousand remaining demonstrators just left. The siege at Kfar Maimon was a decisive point in the battle over the implementation of PM Sharon's Disengagement Plan: it signaled the victory of the state over the settlers.

[13] The rally took place during the summer while many teenagers were on vacation from school.

Living in a Closed Military Zone

After the initiation of the military closure of the Gaza Strip and the failure of the massive anti-disengagement rally, the general mood among the Gaza Strip's Jewish settlers took a sharp turn for the worse. The prevailing sentiments were anger and humiliation. “We are being treated just like Arabs by our own government,” was a common reaction to the new, disturbing reality. Ahuva, a delicate woman of Yemeni descent, settled in the Gaza Strip during the early 1970s. She sought a social setting where she could live a communal and religious lifestyle while enjoying the “serene biblical landscape” (08/03/2005). She met her spouse there, Michael, a British Jew who after graduating from Cambridge University decided to settle in the Gaza Strip as part of a personal journey aimed at ending the “the doubts and moral ambiguities that dominated” his life then. Like many other settlers, Ahuva and Michael were frustrated with the military closure: “I could have never imagined that I would need to exhibit a special card and gain permission from soldiers to access my own home,” said Ahuva, her eyes revealing a comprehension of a world quickly falling apart. “Did you see this?” asked Michael, the unique mixture of his Yemenite and English accent becoming more pronounced as his anger ruptured through his ingrained etiquette of composure. “The card is not even from the state,” he continued, “it is from the military! Is this the state of Israel?”

In addition to the newly constructed blockades in Gush Katif, military and police roadblocks were set up along Israeli routes leading to the Gaza Strip. Settlers waited in long car lines at the entrance to *Kissufim* (Hebrew: כיסופים, lit. yearning/craving), the main road of Gush Katif. The Kissufim checkpoint transformed into a site of daily

confrontation between residents and security forces regulating the movement of Israeli citizens in and out of Gush Katif. “Do you have any idea how annoying this is?” (07/26/2005) complained Nathaniel and continued to described his new routine:

> Every time I have to leave I say to myself “don't get annoyed,” but it's hard. Why should I be interrogated when all I want is to go out, and why does it have to take so long? I told a police officer, that in the UK, if he was in charge of one of the fast-lane toll booths he would have been fired.... One day I was in a hurry and asked the police officer why it takes so long, and why he has to check my ID when I leave. He told me that he is doing this because he has a uniform. I called him a Nazi. I worked with Germans. I know how they are.

I asked him if he really thinks that the analogy between the Third Reich and the current situation is appropriate. “No, no, no” he responded immediately, “I really don't think that it is the same, but I get so annoyed.”

Figure 6: Showing ID to soldiers at one of the newly constructed checkpoints. August 2005. Photo by author.

For many settlers, the Israeli military is commonly conceived of as an institution with religious value because it protects the Israeli state and Jewish lives. Correspondingly, the exceptional subjugation to military rule was more than a political problem: It also presented a religious problem. The sudden confrontation with the Israeli

state facilitated an existential and spiritual crisis among many settlers who began to wonder about the religious meanings and appropriate responses to the betrayal of the Israeli state and its military (Inbari 2007). For example, should Religious Zionist soldiers participate in the evacuation of settlements?

I first met Dana at the end of May of 2005, at her workplace, the municipal building of Gush Katif. She was wearing a long-sleeved, orange T-shirt and a spiraling orange lining ornamenting her dark-blue headscarf. Dana settled in Neve Dekalim in the early 1980s. A mother to a son who was preparing to become a military officer in the months preceding the implementation of the Disengagement Plan, Dana shared (05/31/2005) with me the dilemmas she and her son faced as his unit was practicing the forthcoming evacuation of Israeli settlements:

> My son told me that they teach them how to separate babies from their mothers! He told me that he feels he is about to collapse. I wanted to be strong for him, but I could not stop crying. I told him that he must be strong and act according to his own conscience. He said not to worry….he will do what his heart tells him to do. In the worst case he will be sent to a military prison for a while, but this is just unbelievable. My own son will sit in jail for conscientious objection.

Producing distressing discrepancies between the religious and political dimensions of settlement life, the unexpected reality of the Disengagement Plan obliged settlers to choose, for example, between loyalty to the community and loyalty to the Israeli state and military. Such unsettling dichotomies were difficult to reconcile and produced much existential angst.

The acute tensions between religious meanings and political realities were revealed, for instance, in the theological dilemma concerning the appropriate use of the *Hallel* (praise) prayer. Hallel is a collection of psalms (113-118) praising God's grace, mercy and divine providence in ordinary and extraordinary times. This prayer is recited

and sung in joyous occasions, such as Passover. Since the establishment of the Israeli state, many Jewish communities—especially those associated with religious Zionism—have recited the prayer on Israel's Independence Day as well. However, the Disengagement Plan exposed to the settlers the Israeli state as an agent of destruction rather than salvation. Rabbi Shmuel Tal, one of the most influential spiritual, yet radical leaders of Gaza Strip's settlers, instructed his students to stop praying Hallel during Independence Day, thereby practically desacralizing the Israeli state.

The perplexing sense of incongruity between religion and politics served to further exacerbate the precarious conditions of Gaza Strip's settlers. With each passing day, with each failed attempt at thwarting PM Sharon's plan, the incomprehensible end of settlement life continued to relentlessly transform into an ominous possibility. Many exhibited their religious conviction and communal unity and announced publicly that the disengagement shall not come to pass. I asked Dana about this public denial of the future. "It reminds me of a joke," she responded bitterly, "a guy falls down from the top of a skyscraper. As he falls down, one of the people staring outside the windows asks him if he is all right, and he replies, 'so far, so good'."

The unsustainable optimism displayed by settlers was also used to maintain a sense of normalcy. It operated as a performance of hope for the sake of hope, as a desperate declaration of denial aimed at fostering sanity. "You talk to people and on the outside everything appears to be normal," added Dana, "but deep inside, everyone is panicking." Despite public decelerations of hopeful certainty, many began to meet with private assessors to get an overall estimation of their property value and to secure financial compensation from the state. "Our pain would not have been so great if we were

treated with respect by the state," explained Dana, pointing at the endless amount of paperwork awaiting her as she attempted to quantify and translate her life into the language of bureaucracy. I asked if this is not a form of collusion with the Disengagement Plan. "What am I supposed to do?" was her response. "I keep hoping that nothing would happen. I pray for it every day, but I have a family to take care of, kids to feed. Who knows, soon we might be homeless. This is time for pragmatism not escapism. I am not going to file the papers, though. I just want property estimation before it is too late."

Nathaniel was very upset about the ways in which the people of Gush Katif were treated by the state and the public (06/16/2005):

> Some people say that Gush Katif is like Yamit, which is not true.[14] Others say that this is like moving to a new apartment. How can they say that? People have invested the best years of their lives in this place, and now they are treated like dogs.... Do you think that I have the emotional and physical strength to start an agricultural business all over again? I am over sixty. I am not thirty anymore.... Now they force me to fill out tons of paperwork. I have to think of millions of details without knowing what is going to happen. I barely have the strength for that.

Some of the documents settlers were required to produce included school diplomas or phone bills more than fifteen years old. "I am not contacting [the disengagement authority responsible for compensating settlers]," announced Shmuel (06/21/2005). "Their money is polluted. However, if we leave, I say have no sentiments and take as much you can from them. Even cheat if you can." Referring to those settlers who refuse to contact disengagement authorities, Nathaniel declared, "You just cannot

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[14] Yamit was in Israeli settlement in Sinai that was evacuated in 1982 as part of the Peace agreement with Egypt. There are several important differences between the Evacuation of Sinai and Gush Katif. First, most of the settlements in Sinai were relatively new, with the oldest being 12 years old, while many of Gush Katif settlements had existed for more than two decades. Second, the process leading to the evacuation of Yamit was longer than the Disengagement Plan, was part of a peace process and was thus seen as more rational when compared to the unilateralism of the Disengagement Plan. Third, most of Gush Katif's settlers were religious, while the vast majority of Sinai's settlers were secular.

put it inside their heads—with Sharon, all the prayers in the world would not help, he will not move even one meter, and on the day of evacuation they will find themselves with nothing."

Like many settlers, Ahuva felt betrayed by the state : "A big part of our struggle has to do with our treatment as human beings. If all of this disengagement thing would have taken longer and would have been more organized, many problems would have been solved" (08/03/2005). "Part of the problem," said the US-born Jacob (07/13/2005), "is that people feel they are being treated disrespectfully. Instead of acknowledging our contribution to the security of the state and conduct a special ceremony or something like that, we are being treated like cockroaches." "Let me tell you something," said Shmuel (06/21/2005), "most of the problems would have been solved if Gush Katif would have moved as one unit. Instead, they break the community apart. Lots of people will never recover from this event. I am strong, but I talk to people and I am telling you, dozens of families will be destroyed. I don't even want to repeat the things I hear from people here."

The political and personal problem of collusion with the bureaucratic apparatus of the Disengagement Plan was also a religious problem since the disengagement was largely perceived by pious settlers as a divine trial. It was understood as aimed at rousing contemplation about one's position in life, and consequently, to induce new spiritual understanding of one's own responsibility and mission in this world. The examination occurred on several levels: the connectedness of individual and community with God, the relationship with the Israeli state and with human beings, communal social bonds, and ones' familial relationships.

Shmuel told me (06/21/2005) about the influence of the Disengagement Plan on his extended family:

> Almost everyone call us and ask us how we are doing, or if we need any help. But one family from a Kibbutz did not call us since hearing about the Disengagement Plan. We used to talk a lot on the phone, but now nothing. I know that they support the Plan, but why can't they call us and ask us how we are doing? They must know how hard all of this for us. It just showed us that we had very little in common.

Nathaniel referred (06/16/2005) to his relationship with secular and liberal Israelis:

> What connects [a secular Israeli Jew] to me? Tel Aviv is like New York. Everything mixes, and I want to keep myself as special. If I can do that, then great, but things are changing now. The Left is forcing on me where to live. He [a secular and liberal Israeli Jew] tells me that this is not Eretz Israel. How can you tell me what is Eretz Israel? I don't tell you. We cannot avoid the future. This game of positions will be decided soon.

Coupled with daily attacks from the Palestinian side, the perplexing sense of incongruity between political realities and religious meanings served to further exacerbate the precarious conditions of Gaza Strip's settlers. During this period of peril and uncertainty about the settlements' future, the hope for a miraculous salvation from disengagement provided a much-needed comfort.

On Miracles

The Hebrew word for miracle, "*nes*," (Hebrew: נס) appears in the Bible primarily to denote a sign or a flag. For instance, "He will hold up a signal (nes) to the nations and assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth" (Isaiah 11:12). Sometimes *nes* appears as a sign that is used in times of danger, as in the following excerpt: "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a seraph figure and mount it on a standard (nes). And if anyone who is bitten looks at it, he shall

recover'" (Numbers 21:8). Later, in Rabbinic literature, *nes* acquired its current denotation, emerging almost exclusively as a sign of divine revelation and providence. At the same time, Talmudic sages also ruled that a person must "not rely upon miracles" (Pesachim 64b), for the need for a miracle arises in times of great troubles, and life is too sacred to be passively left to transcendental mercy. As can be seen from these examples, within Judaism, miracles of divine providence are intimately intertwined with crisis. Therefore, miracles can also be signs of crisis and exigencies.

At the most elementary level, Jewish traditions distinguish between two types of miracles: hidden and revealing. Whereas hidden miracles are those daily natural events whose ordinary occurrence conceals their wondrous and divine essence, revealing miracles are extraordinary occurrences that defy the normative scheme of reality and are therefore attributed to the power of God to alter the course of nature. To illustrate: in their daily prayers, practicing Jews remember and thank God for the hidden miracles of life such as the rain that falls, the wonders of nature, and so forth (Isaacs 1997; Merzbach 2009). Correspondingly, on several holidays, Jews ritually recall and integrate into the present the memory of revealing miracles. During Hanukkah, for example, Jews commemorate their emancipation from Hellenic rule and the subsequent miraculous purification of the Holy Temple (Connerton 1989). Given that hidden miracles are associated with the natural and that revealed miracles are associated with the supernatural, hidden miracles are constantly revealed to the faithful, whereas revealed miracles remain hidden, their absence a sign of their extraordinary possibility, their presence a sign of calamity and salvation.

The concurrence of salvation and calamity is deeply ingrained in Judaism. As a case in point, *Tisha B'Av*, the saddest day in Jewish tradition, is a day of fasting and mourning to commemorate the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem. Yet Tisha B'Av is also known as the birthday of the Messiah, a gleam of hope yet to come amidst despair. The hope for miraculous salvation garnered additional strength among settlers from the relatively few casualties given the thousands of Palestinian attacks. Each attack failing to hurt settlers could be potentially interpreted as a miracle deserving commemoration. With Palestinian attacks against settlers continuing as usual and with the possible end of settlement life drawing near, the need for miracles grew strong and was fulfilled on an almost daily basis to someone, somewhere, in Gush Katif. Continuous with the Jewish folk tradition of telling stories of hope and redemption in times of calamity (Eliach 1982), miracle stories bloomed among Gaza Strip's settlers.

Several weeks prior to their forced eviction (08/03/2005), I talked to Ahuva and Michael about the effects of violence on their lives. "More than five thousands rocket bombs were fired on us," said Michael, "it is an average of about five rocket bombs per family and this is exactly the amount of rockets that landed around our house. I guess we are just an average family," he joked and explained that no one was hurt and that three of the rockets "didn't even explode." I wanted to know if they experienced any miracles. "Too many," answered Ahuva and laughed. "Four years ago we drove by [the Palestinian city] Khan Yunis," recalled Michael. "It was during the summer vacation so there is always an increase in stone throwing because the [Palestinian] kids are out of school. A stone passed through the open window, exactly where [Ahuva's] head had been just a second before, and came out the other side without causing any damage."

I inquired further about their experiences of violence and Ahuva elaborated on the effects of the routine shelling:

> So many miracles occurred here that a stranger would never understand, but the young kids and the teens are really scared. They are scared to play out in the yard and they wet their beds. A psychologist here said that 50 percent of them are post-traumatic, but this is nonsense. How can they be post-traumatic if they are in the midst of the trauma? I went to the family doctor; I don't know what I had. I couldn't fall asleep…. The doctor tells me, "Ahuva, do you want me to give you some pills?" I said, "Why? Do I have some kind of a psychological problem?" He tells me, "what is wrong with you Ahuva? Eighty percent of the people here take these pills. I hand them out like candy. Otherwise people will not function anymore.

Ahuva laughed. "I thought that he was joking, but he told me 'Ahuva, I am serious; people can no longer cope with all of this mental stress'." Medication was used by settlers to ease troubling thoughts and to numb pains, but did not provide sufficient solace to spiritual anxieties. This was to be found in the realm of faith.

On June 26, 2005, thousands of people gathered in front of the synagogue in Neve Dekalim and participated in a massive anti-disengagement prayer rally.[15] Marking the religious significance of the event, silver trumpets and rams' horns (*Shofar*) were ceremoniously blown, their sounds aimed to open the gates of heaven above. Rabbi Shmuel Tal (who instructed his students to stop praying Hallel during Independence Day) began to weep uncontrollably on the podium and many in the crowd joined him in tears. In contrast, Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu (the former Sephardic President of the Israeli Rabbinical Council) displayed an optimistic sense of religious conviction and announced repeatedly that the disengagement "shall not be at all." He then declared he was contributing money to a special fund established to help local farmers sow next year's crops in Gush Katif. Due to his powerful religious status and because his words echoed

[15] This was one of several such mass prayer rallies. The largest one took place by the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem only a few days before the forceful evictions began.

those of the biblical prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 20:32), Rabbi Eliyahu's announcement was perceived by many people as an authoritative promise. Many settlers continued to believe and hope until the last moment that the disengagement would be miraculously prevented. Matching Rabi Eliyahu's religious conviction, they planted new crops and poured concrete into golden dunes with the intention of building new settlements.

Figure 7: Anti-disengagement rally. Neve Dekalim, June 26, 2005. Photo by Author.

The expectation of a miraculous thwarting of the disengagement became a prevalent source of comfort amidst growing despair. After all, settlers were experiencing miracles in multitudes. And, as many settlers hoped, if Palestinian violence miraculously failed to hurt them, if God's grace upon them was repeatedly revealed, then redemption should also miraculously arise out of the torment of the Disengagement Plan. Jacob was among those who witnessed a miracle and was saved. However, when I first saw him, he was not doing well at all. The state of the flag hoisted at the open

clearing next to his unkempt house spoke louder than the sad state of his withered garden. “You know what this is?” he asked me somberly. “The American flag,” I answered. “Yes,” he continued, “but it is flown upside down, you know, this is an official sign of distress.” Joshua had had it with the Israeli state. “I am an American in distress,” he added.

Figure 8: "I am an American in distress." Photo by author.

Interestingly, the forced eviction of Israeli settlers was originally scheduled to begin on June 24, 2005, a date which coincided with the Hebrew calendar's 17 of Tamuz. The 17 of Tamuz is a Jewish day of commemoration and fasting, marking the beginning of three weeks of mourning over national calamities. However, because the Israeli state was not logistically ready to implement the final plan, the expulsion was postponed to August 15, a day after Tisha B’Av. Therefore, in the last weeks leading to their expulsion, settlers of the Gaza Strip mourned past disasters with an ever-growing apprehension of the approaching one. I asked Jacob about this interesting synchronization of dates (07/13/2005). “Make no mistake,” he assured me, “there is nothing coincidental about this.” I inquired further, wanting to know if he was referring to divine causation.

"No," he declared, "these are the actions of a human being…. Sharon is a destroyer; this is what he knows best—destruction." His words echoed a large sign by the road leading to his settlement. It read "Nebuchadnezzar, Titus, Sharon," equating PM Sharon with the besiegers and destroyers of ancient Jerusalem and the Holy Temples.

While skeptical of metaphysical explanations of the disengagement, Jacob had a miracle story to share: "I was eating in the kitchen when a rocket exploded outside the house, right over there. The sound of the explosion was enormously loud. I nearly choked on my sandwich. My neighbor went outside while wearing his tefillin to see what is going on because, you know, I am his neighbor. Now, the rockets usually fall in a series, one after the other. As he went outside, another rocket fell right there and a metal shard flew to his forehead and hit his tefillin. It destroyed the tefillin, but he was not hurt. Not even a scratch."

An examination of Jacob's account reveals several theological themes that can be found in many settlers' miracle stories. First, the neighbor was aware of the possibility of sustaining injuries from further incoming rockets. Hence, the neighbor risked his own life to ascertain whether Joshua and his family were unharmed or in need of immediate assistance. This is more than plain good neighborliness: it is an indication of a belief system that places communal wellbeing over the existential needs of the individual in times of crisis. Moreover, the neighbor interrupted his morning prayer, alluding to the elementary Jewish dictum that perceives life as the ultimate value: all religious rules can potentially be broken to prevent death.[16] Furthermore, because of his uncompromising faith, the neighbor is courageous enough to expose himself to danger. This exhibition of

[16] There are, of course, exceptions: murder, incest and idolatry.

religious fortitude is reciprocated by a divine intervention. Preventing death while acting and symbolizing an instrument of faith, the teffilin saved the neighbor's life. The lesson therefore is quite clear: uncompromising faith and social solidarity are necessary conditions of salvation.

The Haggadah of Gush Katif

> *I was sitting at my usual place in the Yeshiva*[17] *and studied the Gemarah.*[18]
>
> *During that hour I was all alone at the beit midrash,*[19] *everyone already went to the dining hall to eat lunch, and I stayed to conclude the study of the commentaries I was unable to understand.*
>
> *Suddenly I felt the need to stand up, leave my place and walk somewhere else. I did not know why, and I did not want to stop the Torah study. There is also a value in staying in one place, but this need was stronger than me.*
>
> *I took the Gemarah with me, and went to study at the beit midrash library, the gemarah still in my hand. I did not need to wait too long in order to understand why this happened to me.*
>
> *A second after I entered the library a missile landed at the place I was sitting before. The bench was shattered to little pieces and the shards scattered everywhere.*
>
> *I understood during that hour that my thoughts were also at God's hands during that hour. When he wants to save someone, he plants in him the right thought in the head. Thoughts of life.* [Schreiber 2005:122]

About five months before the destruction of Gush Katif, a special edition of a Passover Haggadah, *The Haggadah of Gush Katif* (Schreiber 2005), was published by the Torah and Land Institute in the settlement of Kfar Darom in the Gaza Strip. It was

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[17] Yeshiva is a traditional Jewish educational institution.

[18] Gemarah is the second part of the Talmud, the main rabbinical text of Jewish laws and their commentaries.

[19] Beit Midrash is a Jewish study hall.

meant to gather funds for the anti-disengagement struggle and to strengthen the spirits of the settlers. Within a few days of its publication, all 10,000 copies were completely sold out, and almost all of Gaza Strip's settlers had a copy at home (Besheva 2005). More than 130 pages long, the Passover Haggadah opens with specially written letters of blessing and encouragement from some of the most prominent rabbis in Israel, including a total of seven presidents of the Israeli Rabbinical Council. The traditional ritualized section of the Haggadah begins after the rabbis' letters and is followed by a series of short essays written by settlement rabbis and public leaders. In it, for example, Tzvi Hendel, a local settler, a member of the Israeli Parliament at the time and the former Head of Gaza's Regional Council, explains, "when the nation of Israel sees the power of divine action in this world, it is instilled with might, spirit and faith" (98). He adds that even during these times of crisis, God is continuously revealed to the settlers: "day by day, hour by hour, appearing with each rocket bomb which does not kill, and revealed with every Qassam missile that does not destroy, and only those who lack faith and are blind cannot see all of this" (99).

More than 40 miracle tales are included in the Gush Katif Haggadah, the vast majority involving representations of Palestinian violence not as genuinely Palestinian, but as vehicles that expose divine providence. Marked as religious events important enough to be recalled during Passover celebration, tales of Palestinian violence and its inability to harm settlers appear alongside the founding miracles of Judaism, thus connecting present realities in the Gaza Strip with calamities and miracles of the great mythical past. Palestinian violence is therefore sanctified not only because of its mere

inclusion in the Haggadah,[20] but also because it is interpreted and represented as a sign of divine revelation. Indeed, it could be argued that the object of sanctification is the miraculous inability of Palestinian violence to hurt settlers, rather than the violence itself. However, Palestinian violence acquires sacred meaning in a dialectical relation to its effects—its destructive power as opposed to its lack of harm upon the settlers. Violence and its effects complement each other dialectically in the stories to create a miraculous sign that reveals the ultimate cause of everything: God.

Violence is never fixed: it is enmeshed in endless processes of signification that endow it with multiple meanings. It is always in flux, shifting and moving across space, time and person as it is being transformed through acts of bestowal, reception and dissemination (Feldman 1991; Valentine 1996). Yet, the power of the miraculous signs revealed to settlers lies precisely in their ability to create a singular meaning and shroud competing explanations for violence. In the following stories, as those appearing before them, the unsettling spiritual incongruity between the political and religious dimensions of settlers' lives receives a comforting and self-legitimating explanation when God is revealed for instance as a result of an explosion and through the aim of a Palestinian attack.

A Baby's Cry

> *I know that many great miracles happen to the general public, but I want to tell about a personal miracle that happened to me. After this miracle I realized that I was also a part of Am Israel. That even for me personally, God performs miracles, and that maybe he loves me like all of his sons and daughters?*
>
> *This story happened on just an ordinary day, I was washing dishes in the kitchen, my husband was at work, and our little baby was silently sleeping in her room.*

[20] Combined with the blessings of many of Israel's most prominent rabbis, the inclusion of these stories also fulfilled a religious requirement to recognize and bless for miracles that occurred for the Jewish people.

> *Various thoughts passed through my head during that hour. I cannot remember what I was thinking about exactly during those minutes of dishwashing.*
>
> *Suddenly, the baby began to move uncomfortably in her room, I waited a little to see if she needs anything or if she is only changing position in her bed. But she did not stop and began to cry. I approach her without knowing that at this moment she is saving my life.*
>
> *I picked her up and tried to calm her, but she did not want to calm down, she probably knew why, because moments later, a Qassam rocket landed in the kitchen exactly where I was washing the dishes.*
>
> *The whole house shook and the kitchen fell entirely apart, but I remained completely unharmed with the baby in my arms.*
>
> *Now I was also crying along with my baby. A cry of joy. I witnessed with my own senses how our father in the sky guards me in a personal manner…*
>
> [Schreiber 2005:126]

A new mother is spiritually lost: she is uncertain of God's love for her. Her wandering thoughts remain unmemorable, their ephemeral quality point to the ordinariness of the moment but also hint at a lack of meaning waiting to be miraculously fulfilled. She is in the midst of domestic work and does not approach the baby at the first signs of the approaching change. Yet, when her baby cries out for her, she attends to her motherly duties, reciprocating a mother-baby bonding of a sacred kind. The explosion transforms natural infant behavior into a supernatural act, and as a baby's cry becomes a divine call, an ordinary day turns exceptional. Out of despair comes physical and spiritual salvation, and cosmic order is miraculously restored. Dialectically complementing each other, Palestinian violence and a baby's cry mark an event to be recalled alongside the founding miracles of Jewish tradition.

A True Sniper

> *On that morning, covered in Tefillin and praying shawls, several dozen worshipers prayed at the synagogue. They prayed standing up when all of a sudden the sound of a rocket making its way to the settlement was heard. No one knew where the rocket was about to strike. Everyone put their trust in God, who until this morning has kept them safe in a most wondrous manner.*

> *They also knew that the military cannot be completely trusted. The soldiers and the commanders on the ground do everything within their power…. They identify the Palestinians that shoot at them and ask permission to annihilate these murderers. However, they do not receive an "authorization to fire" due to the fear of hurting Palestinian civilians located next to the murderers.*
>
> *They aimed their prayers toward the creator, prayed that he would continue to shine his grace upon them, as it was until this morning. Yet, this morning they witnessed a most wondrous miracle.*
>
> *The rocket was aimed directly at the synagogue and exactly during the hour of prayer.*
>
> *When the worshipers heard the sound of the approaching rocket, they all hid beneath the heavy desks and behind any possible hiding place. And they immediately heard a great explosion. The entire synagogue was filled with black smoke and pieces of mortar. However, no screams of pain were heard.*
>
> *What happened?*
>
> *Every ceiling contains a very strong beam. This beam connects the ceiling to the walls. Because this is the place that is supposed to carry the weight of the entire ceiling, much concrete and strong iron is placed there.*
>
> *The rocket hit this beam directly and of course was unable to penetrate. It bounced backward, like someone playing ball, and hit the lawn next to the synagogue. No one was standing there, of course.*
>
> *This kind of accurate strike is extremely rare. There is no sniper that can aim like that except for the creator.* [Schreiber 2005:114-115]

Unlike "A Baby's Cry," this tale involves a community of believers. And, resembling Jacob's story, the miracle occurs while religious worship is performed. Teffilin, praying shawls, true spiritual intentionality and the materiality of a sacred space all combine to confer readers with the human conditions of miraculous redemption. Violence erupts and divine providence is revealed in the midst of the central daily prayer of Judaism, the *Amidah*, just as the community of worshipers thank God for the hidden miracles of life, their wondrous nature incarnated in daily realities. In God they must trust, for the Israeli state privileges the lives of enemies over the safety of its own people. Adhering to gentile ethics of war, the Israeli state has lost its inner spirit, values and roots. In God they trust, yet they must not rely upon miracles. They respond appropriately

in the most pragmatic manner and hide for their lives. But God's aim is true; his accuracy a miraculous sign of divine grace.

Making sense of violence, "A True Sniper" epitomizes the symbolic qualities of miracles among Gaza Strip's settlers. Palestinian violence and its inability to harm settlers is likened to God's aim, becoming a sacred sign with an extraordinarily singular meaning—divine providence—which triumphs over other explanations of the violent event. The radical technological disadvantage of Palestinian weaponry disappears in these stories, reducing the likelihood of interpreting the violent event as a sign of mere coincidence. Palestinian suffering is ignored as well, and as the violent realities of Israeli settlement and occupation are rendered invisible, Palestinian violence becomes apolitical and acquires a metaphysical meaning. This allows the framing of the event in religious terms, assists the elimination of moral uncertainties, justifies and strengthens settlers' cause, and hinders thoughts about violence evincing a sign divine wrath or lack of providence. Through the disruption of unsettling relations between cause, effect and meanings of violence, these miracles erase settlers' implication in their own predicaments, their spiritual virtues thus borne out of violent signs of true sovereign love.

Conclusion

The stories offered a theological solution to a problem of violence through a miraculous concealment of political realities of violence. The settlers' miracles are both hidden and revealing and correspond to both Walter Benjamin's (1968) and Carl Schmitt's (2005) ideas of the state of exception. In comparing the theological miracle to the judicial state of exception, Schmitt conceived of miracles akin to the revealing type. Resting upon vertical ideas of power—whether divine transcendence or political

hierarchy—Schmitt's notion of the miracle is conceived as a temporary suspension of law that reveals and affirms the extraordinary presence and power of the true sovereign (Strong 2005:xx). In contrast, Benjamin's idea of the exception as the rule evokes hidden miracles: it is an ordinary, permanent and immanent presence of an extraordinary force. The daily violence experienced by settlers corresponds to a Benjaminian state of exception that has become the norm, while the disengagement corresponds to a Schmittian exception to settlers' rule.

The miracle tales normalized a continuous state of exception, allowing it to become a comforting rule of settlers' lives, while countering the exceptional threat of the Israeli sovereign through a signification of the all-powerful one. The stories arrest the meanings of violence and summon God to prevent moments of danger from becoming moments of critical reflection and recognition that can bring about a real state of exception in the Benjaminian sense—a freedom, if only a fleeting one, from ideological chains. With signs of divine providence emerging out of daily violence, the extraordinary threat of the disengagement became legible, facilitating its cultural assimilation without causing a breakdown of meaning. In doing so, miracle stories empowered settlers against disempowering circumstances and simultaneously hindered settlers from recognizing the historical conditions of Palestinian and their own suffering. As daily violence and its instances of increased danger transformed into signs of righteousness, life of violence turned into life of miracles, and states of exception became the miraculous rule of settlers' lives, bestowing them with redemptive hope in the face of the Schmittian miracle of the Israeli sovereign.

Miracle stories emerged out of states of exception both normalized and exceptional and permitted violence to proliferate in familiar and optimistic realms of understanding. They operated as theological explicative tools, delineating a clear cosmic hierarchy and demarcating the boundaries and the relations between the redemptive force of above and the destructive forces below. Through a concealment of violent conditions of their emergence, such as Israeli settlement and occupation, they rendered a chaotic reality intelligible, thus helping to placate anxieties about the meaning of violence, while creating a complementary expectation for a forthcoming redemption from the politics of the Israeli state.

Insofar as the Disengagement Plan revealed to settlers the Israeli state as an oppressive political sovereign, miracle tales revealed God as the only sovereign that truly matters. Whereas the Disengagement Plan ruptured an affinity between the political actions and religious meanings of the Israeli state, miracle tales intervened to theologically mend spiritual inconsistencies through the affirmation of supernatural interventions in the natural order. Normalizing daily violence through its sanctification and making sense of the exceptional exigencies of the moment, the stories also made miraculous deliverance from the geopolitics of the Israeli state appear as immanent as the Disengagement Plan itself, consequently perpetuating a misrecognition of violence. In moral opposition to the heretic actions of the Israeli state, the settlers appear in these stories as brave and deserted protagonists, equipped without much beside their uncompromising faith. For this they were to be rewarded at the time of greatest need.

On August 15, 2005, five months after the publication of the Haggadah, tens of thousands of Israeli soldiers and police forces surrounded Gaza Strip's settlements. In the following days, thousands upon thousands of black-uniformed Israeli security forces escorted settlers who agreed to leave peacefully and forcefully evicted those who refused. Hundreds of teenagers, many arriving from the West Bank, barricaded themselves inside the settlements' synagogues. Dressed in orange-colored clothing, they sat on the floors, tightly grasping each other's hands, singing Jewish songs of jubilation, sobbing and praying to God for one final miracle. Emphasizing the uttermost religious importance of national Jewish unity, settler leadership repeatedly expressed the need for non-violent resistance. Eventually, settlers tore pieces of their clothes in a Jewish act of bereavement and were removed from the synagogues without exceptional resistance.

Jacob refused to willingly leave his home. "I will tell them I do not recognize their legal authority," he informed me in our last conversation (08/07/2005), before he stopped returning my calls. A big man, I believe it took more than a few soldiers to carry him out. Dana was afraid of the trauma that might be caused to her family and the Israeli soldiers charged with the task of evicting her family. "These poor soldiers are too dear to me to allow them to uproot me from my home," she said. Dana left with her family following the end of the Ninth of Av, a night before the final day. Ahuva and Nathaniel decided to remain in their home and have the soldiers escort them out, as did Shmuel and his family. Yet Shmuel left feeling betrayed, convinced that the Disengagement Plan signified the beginning of a new stage in a long struggle over the national character of the state. Empowered by a sense of historical continuity that emerges from time immemorial and stretches into eternity, he believed the Disengagement Plan was a formative but a

temporary crisis and that eventually, he or his future kin would return Gush Katif (06/21/2005):

> You know how the saying goes, you might win the battle, but we will win the war. Look at you secular people. What do you do? You marry late; you have one, two, maximum three kids and then half of you divorce. Me, thank God, I have six kids, may they all be healthy. My brother in law has eight. Look around the neighborhood, see how blessed we are. All we have to do is simply wait for nature to do its job. We will be the majority because you are a species under the threat of extinction.

Along with Jacob and thousands of other Israeli settlers, Ahuva, Nathaniel, Shmuel and their families were loaded on buses and sent out to dozens of locations around Israel. The tightly threaded social fabric of the Gaza Strip's settlements was torn apart by the Israeli state. Some live in temporary housing until this day.

Figure 9: The Israeli destruction of the settlements. Photo by author.

By September 11, 2005, Israel completed its withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, and all settlements were bulldozed to the ground. The only structures left standing were

settlement synagogues. In a last minute decision, the Israeli cabinet voted against the destruction of the synagogues. It was decided it would be better if the synagogues were destroyed by non-Jews. Paper signs in Hebrew, English and Arabic stating "A Holy Site" were then put on the structures. By September 12, all the synagogues were vandalized by Palestinians. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon blamed the Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas for his failure to exercise control.

The powerful tension between the expectation for miraculous redemption and the destruction brought about by the Disengagement Plan facilitated a profound crisis among many settlers. Today, the religiously motivated settler population is divided along theological lines that define the religious status of the Israeli state and its relations to the redemption of Jewish people. In 2008, former settlers from the Gaza Strip established the Gush Katif museum in Jerusalem. Among numerous books, photographs, films, sand bottles, street signs and other artifacts commemorating settlers' life in Gush Katif, a Hanukkah menorah stands out in its exceptional form and metallic structure. This nine-brunched candelabrum was built by a Gaza Strip settler killed by a side-bomb planted on the southern security fence of Gush Katif. During each of the eight days of Hanukkah, the menorah candles are lit, their flickering flames shine light upon the remains of Palestinian missiles and rocket bombs that miraculously failed to harm settlers.

The Disengagement Plan was said to be a security move and not a political one. However, it had dire political consequences and was tragically followed by more violence and suffering. On January 2006, Hamas won the first Palestinian democratic elections. A unity government was established with the secular Fatah party. In June 2007, Hamas violently took over the Gaza Strip and since then the Gaza Strip and the West

Bank have turned into two separate political entities, one ruled by a militant Muslim organization and the other by a secular party, leaving the Palestinian society further torn apart by geographic boundaries and ideological lines. As of 2015, Israel still maintains control over most of the Gaza Strip's borders, severely delimiting flows of cash, commodities and human beings. Since the conclusion of the Disengagement Plan, more than 5,000 Palestinians from the Gaza Strip have been killed as a result of Israeli military attacks, many more have been injured and countless have lost their homes (B'Tselem 2014c, 2014d, 2014e; Ma'an 2015). Thousands upon thousands of rockets and mortar shells have been fired from the Gaza Strip toward citizens living within the internationally recognized boundaries of Israel, most of them failing to harm due to the relative technological disadvantage of Palestinian weaponry. Yet dozens of Israelis have been killed and injured, and the sounds of explosions and missile alarms have become the means through which most Israelis get to know Palestinians.

Similarly to miracle stories among settlers, the Disengagement Plan contained a promise for a better future to Israelis living within the internationally recognized boundaries of the state. It offered a geopolitical solution to a problem of meaning, albeit a Zionist one: the maintenance of a Jewish democracy. Echoing the settlers' miracles, it entailed a state of exception that appeared in the guise of a miraculous (geopolitical) redemption: a sudden unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip. Yet, the deep spiritual ties of many Jews to the Gaza Strip and the Biblical Land of Israel cannot be severed through geopolitics. Nor can the deep ties of Palestinians to the West Bank and 1948 Palestine. Critically, Israel and the Gaza Strip cannot be politically separated by any

unilateral means. Far from disengaging from each other, violence still connects Israel and the Gaza Strip, perhaps more strongly than ever before.

If states of exception and miracles are not merely analogous as Schmitt observed and can be intimately intertwined, as the Disengagement Plan tragically demonstrates, then miracles may also be conceived as a political phenomenon. These political forms of miracles could hence be understood as intrinsically tied to violence and the arrest of its multiple meanings via triumphant signs that produce hope and point to a better future. Likewise, if miracles contain an exceptional semiotic ability to produce a comforting sense of order out of violence, then indeed, one should not rely upon miracles, for the signs they reveal may be powerful instruments of violence concealed. Finally, if states of exception have also become the rule, as Walter Benjamin observed, then miracles may also be quotidian parts of our lives, their powerful symbolic qualities providing comfort and hope in the face of violence they normalize and sustain.

I left the Gaza Strip on the August 11, 2005 after soldiers politely took over my little hut at Midreshset Hadarom. I watched the final days of the expulsion on the TV screen. I returned to Gush Katif a week later, this time with an entry permit for the purpose of collecting abandoned animals. The sight of the destruction was incomprehensible, apocalyptic—ruins upon ruins. A week later I returned to the US, and I never resumed contact with the people I met in the Gaza Strip. On January 4, 2006, a few months after the Disengagement Plan, PM Sharon suffered a hemorrhagic stroke and fell into coma. He did not regain consciousness and died eight years later in 2014. Rabbi Avraham Shapira passed away in 2007 and Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu passed away in June 2010, just as I began my dissertation fieldwork in the West Bank. The death of these

two Ashkenazi and Sephardic rabbis left the Religious Zionist public without a unifying leader of their stature.

By the time I began my dissertation fieldwork in 2011, the unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip had already turned into an important event in the life of settlers and the region.[21] Rather than illustrating the dangers of unilateral geopolitics, Hamas control of the Gaza Strip and the resultant increase in rocket attacks against Israeli populations, even north of Tel-Aviv, from there transformed the Disengagement Plan into an event that symbolizes the dangers of territorial withdrawals.[22] In that regard, the settler loss during the struggle over Gush Katif signified a settler victory in the larger battle over the future of the settlements in the West Bank.

Nevertheless, the destruction of Gush Katif served to further divide the settlers along ideological lines that relate to their attitudes toward the state. Most of them concluded that the best course of action should include a change from within the state through deeper integration within its institutions. Thus, some of the teenagers who barricaded themselves inside Gush Katif's synagogues are now officers in the Israeli military. But there are also those who became disillusioned with the state and settler leadership and attempt to undermine the rule of the state and fight for the establishment of a true Jewish sovereignty in Eretz Israel (see chapter 6). And so, when I began my dissertation fieldwork, the ideological variances within the settler population became larger than ever before. Still, regardless of differences, religiously motivated settlers

[21] In February 2006, thousands of Israeli security forces confronted more than a thousand of demonstrators, mostly teenagers, who attempted to prevent the destruction of nine houses at Amona, a settlement outpost in the West Bank. As if functioning to vent out unrealized forces of aggression from the Disengagement Plan, this confrontation resulted in the injuries of hundreds of demonstrators and 45 policemen (Roth 2014:472-477). The violence in Amona indicates of the unfulfilled violent potential of the Disengagement Plan.

[22] This attitude was also strengthened by the 2000 Israeli unilateral withdrawal from Southern Lebanon, which was followed up by Hezbollah rockets attacks against Israeli population centers.

remain generally united in understanding themselves as embodiments of the national return from exile foretold by the Hebrew prophets and perceive this return as signifying the advent of redemption. The next chapter tells a story of a double return: the return of the Jewish people from exile into the Biblical Promised Land and to a land lost in the 1948 war

Chapter 2

"Utopia! Forget about it":

On Gush Etzion and the Rise of an Elite Religious Zionist Settlement

Introduction

Settlers are often categorized into two main groups: economic and ideological. Economic settlers settle in the West Bank because of economic benefits, while ideological settlers are religiously or politically committed to the settlement enterprise. However, on the ground, it is sometimes difficult to clearly distinguish between economic and ideological settlers. For example, some so-called ideological settlers benefit economically from their choice of life, while some economic settlers attribute and gain political and religious values from their life there. Alon Shvut (Hebrew: אלון שבות, lit. oak of return), the settlement in which I lived for 18 months, testifies to the intermingling of these social forces. Alon Shvut was settled for ideological reasons by people who aspired to resettle Gush Etzion— (Hebrew: גוש עציון, lit. Etzion Bloc) — in order to fulfill deeply cherished political and religious values. Nevertheless, these principles and emotional dispositions were to be reciprocated by appropriate material conditions. Unlike many other settlements, which began with tents on hills, Alon Shvut from its early days was predestined to be a settlement where high ideals were to be matched by high living standards.

This chapter introduces the Etzion Settlement Bloc in the West Bank and focuses on Alon Shvut, one of the more elite Religious Zionist settlements. It also tells the story of the Yeshivat Har Etzion, the religious study institution from which Alon Shvut was

born. I show how the notion of return, both real and imagined, lead to the establishment of Alon Shvut: the first West Bank settlement to be built on land without Jewish presence in 1948. In addition, I suggest that as a settlement that demonstrates the inseparability of ideological and economic forces in Religious Zionist settlement realities, Alon Shvut can be viewed as model of the successful institutionalization of settlement life and the messianic phenomena.

Figure 10: Alon Shvut, view from the south. Photo by author.

I moved to Alon Shvut during a period of a ten-month 'settlement freeze' that lasted from November of 2009 to September 2010. The 'freeze' was initiated by PM Netanyahu in response to calls from international leaders that included US President Obama and the UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon, who consider the settlements to be a major illegal impediment to the two-state solution. They urged PM Netanyahu to demonstrate his commitment to the peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as stated in the Roadmap for Peace and the 2007 Annapolis Peace Conference aimed at reviving the peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The freeze did not include the halting of construction in Jerusalem in areas located beyond the Green Line, nor the halting of construction that was already underway. The freezing frustrated many

settlers, especially young families looking to move into new homes. But the freeze came and went, ending during Sukkot, one of three Jewish holidays celebrating biblical pilgrimage to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. During the week of Sukkot Jews traditionally build, eat and sleep in temporary huts. This practice recollects the Israelite journey in the desert, a journey from slavery to independence through miracles, wars and conquest. On the days preceding Sukkot, the sounds of hammers dominated Alon Shvut, a religious labor ostensibly disconnected from the political realm.

Addressing the UN General Assembly, President Obama announced that "Israel's settlements moratorium has made a difference on the ground…. [W]e believe that the moratorium should be extended" (cited at Lee 2010). "The negotiations will continue as long as the settlement remains frozen," declared Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority (cited at Haaretz.com 2010). Israeli diplomats claimed the Palestinians purposefully waited until the last month of the freeze before finally agreeing to initiate direct peace talks. Referring to these issues, King Abdullah II of Jordan told Jon Stewart, the Daily Show host, that "if we fail, expect another war by the end of the year, and more wars in the region over the coming years" (cited at Jpost.com 2010). The freeze never continued, and peace talks did not resume. "He knows what he is doing," said Mordechai about PM Netanyahu, "he showed the world that Abbas does not want peace [...] If you give them land and control, you get terror in return." The latter position has become a truism among many Israelis following the Disengagement Plan and the ascension of Hamas to power. "There will be no peace in my lifetime or yours," moaned Sarah.

For 18 months I lived in the home of Sarah and Mordechai, an elderly couple who has been open and kind toward me. They have five kids, and close to 30 grandchildren and great grandchildren—probably more by now. A retired teacher, Sarah loves theater and travel. With long black hair often hidden beneath a fancy hat, light blue eyes, finely carved facial features distinguished by high cheek bones, and a penchant for elegant dresses, she carries herself quite regally. While Sarah always dresses elegantly in public, Mordechai, an electric engineer, dresses simply and commonly wears sandals, cargo pants and a blue buttoned worker's shirt, its top usually unbuttoned during hot days, exposing long and gray chest hair that matches his horseshoe mustache.

Mordechai speaks very fast, swallows his words when excited and constantly tells inappropriate jokes, a practice which makes Sarah grin in annoyance more often than amusement. She complains he is too messy and tends to repeat his jokes, which can indeed be a bit inappropriate at times, and not only for those with religious sensibilities of modesty. His whimsical tales do manage to surprise her once in a while. "I plan to give Sarah a birthday present she'll never forget," he told me one beautiful spring day (04/14/2011), as the three of us sat outside at their spacious patio, enjoying the crispy mountainous air along with oatmeal cookies, crispy nuts, dried fruits and cold tea. Sarah has just finished telling me about the surprise birthday party she threw for Mordechai's last year. "He was shocked," she said in an overly pleased tone, and Mordechai nodded meekly but slipped a mischievous smile at my direction as his mind quickly conjured a response. "I'll write you a note with words of love you never heard before" he teased her in a soft, innocent tone. Oh, really?" she replied skeptically. "Yes," he confirmed, "I'll leave a note: "I've gone out with a nice 18-year-old woman. Goodbye!'" We all laughed,

and Sarah added laughing, “if this what you want, go for it.” “Thank you,” he replied, “I will.”

Sarah cleans and cooks a lot; it keeps her mind busy, she explained. She is sharp of wit and highly sensitive to the point of existing in a state of an almost constant vigilance. She worries a lot, about the future of Judaism, the state, and the settlements, but her anxieties cannot be separated these days from her old age. She suffers regularly from pains in the joints, and had several bad cases of the flu throughout my time with them. They live alone in their spacious, two-story house, now that their kids have grown up and dispersed across Israel and all the way back to South Africa. Their social lives are eventful nonetheless, and their house is often full of guests, especially during weekends and holidays, sometimes to the point that there are not enough beds for everyone, so mattresses have to be used. Their house is located in the old neighborhood by the northeastern edge of the settlement, next to the fence separating the settlement from beautiful agricultural fields that are also the site of recurring clashes between settlers and Palestinians that remain mostly hidden from both sight and consciousness of the people of Alon Shvut.

I resided in their oldest son’s former living unit on the bottom floor. My living unit had a private entrance, but the sliding wooden door separating my space from theirs did not block the sounds of their voices or prevent them from using the sliding door once in a while to enter my unit uninvited. “As long as you don’t smoke inside, you can do whatever you want,” Sarah informed me when I signed the lease at the end of May 2010. Although Orthodox, they are religiously tolerant like many people in Alon Shvut. “You know you don’t have to wear a kippah here, no one minds and besides, many people have

family members who do not observe commandments," said Sarah (06/18/2010) when she first saw me walking around the settlement with a kippah on my head.

My living unit sized about 30 square meters and was rather comfortable. I did not have much control over its interior design. Dark oak furniture, two heavy carpets and the huge 6'x5', brownish oil paintings of Exodus, which hung above my bed (and had an uncanny resemblance to Gustave Courbet's *The Origin of the World*), endowed my place with quite a romantic aura. An elephant gun on the wall and a safari Pith helmet would have completed the scene for me, but I settled for a crocheted Kippah, the classic settler look.

Figure 11: My bedroom. Photo by Author.

Gush Etzion: The Beginning

My settlement was built by the site of the ancient Battle of Beth Zachariah, where the Maccabeans fought the Greek forces of Seleucid Empire in 162 BCE. It is also located by the ancient Route of the Patriarchs—a path which followed the imaginary line of this hilly region's watershed. Along with the countless nomads, pilgrims, merchants, refugees and armies that have marched upon it throughout history, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are said to have traveled it, too. These days, Alon Shvut stands adjacent to Kfar Etzion (Hebrew: כפר עציון, lit. Etzion village). Kfar Etzion, a religious Kibbutz, was the highest of the four settlements built south of Jerusalem prior to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. This placement was strategically aimed at creating a settlement bloc—Gush Etzion—that would protect Jerusalem from Arab invasion.

Gush Etzion was first settled in 1927 by a small group of devout Yemenite Jews from Jerusalem. Their settlement was built 21 kilometers south of Jerusalem, on the stony Judean hills of Mount Hebron, by the main road between Jerusalem and Hebron. They named their new home Migdal Eder[1] in reference to the place where the Messiah is set to appear according to an old Jewish tradition.[2] The land was purchased from Arabs by *Zichron David* (Hebrew: זיכרון דוד, lit. Remembrance of David), a Jewish company founded by Yitzhak Greenwald, a passionate Orthodox man with a religious vision. The company was dedicated to the purchase and settlement of the land between Jerusalem and Hebron, an area devoid of Jewish communities. Members vowed to buy land in order to

[1] Migdal Eder is the biblical name of a location by Bethlehem, where Jacob the Patriarch camped following the burial of Rachel, who died tragically while giving birth to their youngest son, Benjamin (Genesis 35:21).
[2] Yonatan Ben Uziel

allow pious Jews to live there and thus assist the fulfillment of the agricultural commandments that were associated with the advent of redemption (Ben Yaakov 1986).[3]

Migdal Eder was conveniently positioned near a water hole and a small British police station. A fortified Russian Monastery was located above the settlement upon a hill to the west. The settlers set up a small synagogue and a mikveh (Hebrew: מקוה, lit: purification pool) by the water hole, and each new family built a small hut, made of wood or tin, amounting to 15 homes in total. The settling of Migdal Eder was rather sporadic and unorganized; people often joined the settlement only to leave shortly thereafter. Living there was not easy. Soon after its creation, the settlers were fined by the British authorities for building homes without governmental authorization. There were other difficulties as well. For example, the British authorities denied their access to the water hole, and except for the family of Ya'akov Rosenblum, who was the partner of Yitzhak Greenwald in Zichron David and the manager of the settlement, the settlers had no prior agricultural training. They planted vines and fruit trees without properly preparing the land, did not have appropriate equipment and lacked the necessary funds for the maintenance of a farm. Still, a few cows, goats, sheep and chickens were purchased, their products sold in the Jerusalem market. A small vine plot also flourished, and with the help of local Arabs, the son of Ya'akov Rosenblum was able to herd a flock of 250 sheep (Ben Yaakov 1986).

Nevertheless, the living conditions in Migdal Eder remained rough, and the settlers almost perished in the Great Snow Storm of the winter of 1927. Their rickety shacks failed to weather the storm, and at least one roof was blown away by the strong winds. Everyone crowded under the roof of the central wooden shack, which was better

[3] The history of Migdal Eder is taken from Ben Yaakov (1986).

built than the rest of structures. The snow kept piling up and the main road became inaccessible. Unaccustomed and unprepared for such severe weather conditions, the people of Migdal Eder were trapped without sufficient food and firewood.[4] Fortunately for them, a group of Arabs came to their rescue from Beit Ummar, a village located southwest of the settlement. They brought firewood, fuel, pita bread, tea, dried figs and other rations, saving the settlers from death by hunger and hypothermia. A few days later, Jews from Hebron managed to break their way through the snow with the assistance of a mule and provide the people of Migdal Eder with much needed supplies (Ben Yaakov 1986).

Financial troubles arrived as well. Several members of Zichron David engaged in improper handling of funds and property for personal gain. Likewise, the larger Zionist institutions, which were dedicated to the creation of a secular Jewish sovereignty in Palestine, refused to provide monetary assistance to this independent and religious settlement initiative. People kept on leaving Migdal Eder, and fewer came to replace them. By August of 1929 fewer than ten people lived there. These included Yaakov Rosenblum and his family, one of the original Yemenite settlers, two Yeshiva students from Jerusalem, and an old American woman who came to die in the Holy Land and chose Migdal Eder as her final home. On Friday morning, August 23, Yaakov Rosenblum was working with Arab partners on the construction of a road to Beit Fajjar, an Arab village located to the South east of Migdal Eder. He did not pay much attention to rumors from Jerusalem about bloodshed between Jews and Muslim. Yet, his Arab co-workers and a local British policeman convinced him to leave the area and seek safety.

[4] It is very likely that the police station remained unmanned during the storm.

Yaakov and the remaining settlers locked themselves inside the main shack, but quickly sought sanctuary in the Russian Monastery after noticing a crowd of Arabs making its way toward them. Soon after, About 25 members of the Abu-Ayash and Braryat families of Beit Ummar arrived to the Monastery. They informed the settlers that Arabs from Beit Fajjar intend to kill them all and urged them to leave the area. Under the cover of darkness, the Arab guardians led them safely through the mountains to their village. They sheltered at the homes of their rescuers and from there wrote letters in Arabic, English, Hebrew and Yiddish asking for rescue. In the meanwhile, Migdal Eder was looted and destroyed. Yet the flock of sheep was saved by Arab friends who returned it to Yaakov Rosenblum in Jerusalem (Ben Yaakov 1986).

The end of Migdal Eder was not as tragic as the fate of the Jewish community of Hebron. Sixty-six Jews died in the Hebron Massacre of 1929, and dozens more were injured on the Shabbat following the destruction of Migdal Eder. Synagogues were desecrated by Arabs, homes were looted and property ruined. The attackers used axes, knives, pitchforks, iron rods and other found objects. There are many horrible tales from that day. A baker was burned alive and a pharmacist was stabbed in the eyes, his daughter raped and wife's hands cut off. The British police stood aside and only intervened by firing live ammunition after feeling threatened, at which point the Arab mob dispersed. More than 200 of Hebron's Jewish residents were saved by Arabs who hid them in their groves, homes and shelters and in some cases risked their own lives to protect their Jewish neighbors (Cohen 2013). And so, with the specter of death, destruction and a few examples of co-existence between Jews and Arabs, the Jewish settlement of Gush Etzion ended after two years. It was, however, merely the first attempt. More would follow.

The area was resettled in 1935, this time with the financial aid of *El-Ha'har* company (Hebrew: ההר אל, lit. to the mountain/God of mountain) owned by the religious businessman Shmuel Tzvi Holtzman. Holtz means tree in German, and the small settlement was called Kfar Etzion, a combination of the Hebrew word for tree (עץ) and Zion. Following another round of riots in 1936, the place was abandoned. In 1943 Kfar Etzion was resettled yet again, this time by the Avraham group, a religious-Zionist movement comprised of many Eastern European Jews. The settlement effort lasted until 1948.

On November 29, 1947, following the UN General Assembly adoption of the plan for the partition of Palestine, the Etzion Settlement Bloc remained outside the boundaries of the proposed Jewish state. When Arab leaders rejected the UN partition plan, war erupted and the Etzion settlement bloc was put under Arab siege. As a result of heavy attacks and casualties, the remaining Jewish fighters at Kfar Etzion raised a white flag and surrendered. They were killed by Arab fighters, and only four survived. On the next day, May 14, 1948, a day before the British Mandate over Palestine was set to expire, David Ben Gurion, the first Israeli Prime Minister declared "the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz-Israel, to be known as the State of Israel." Henceforth the fall of Kfar Etzion was consolidated with the rise of the Israeli state.

Kfar Etzion was resettled again in 1967, and Hanan Porat, commonly referred to as the "first settler," was an instrumental figure in its resettlement. At the age of five he was evacuated to Jerusalem with the rest of the women and children of Kfar Etzion. In September of 1967, after participating in the Israeli conquest of the Old City of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, Hanan Porat was already a heroic soldier, a paratrooper in the

famous 66th Battalion that conquered the Old City of Jerusalem from Jordan. Soon after the war ended, he led a small group of friends who included some of Kfar Etzion's widows and orphans to the ruins of their former homes. They received a special authorization from Levi Eshkol, the Israeli Prime Minister, to pray there during the Ten Terrible Days leading to Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement. Hanan Porat stayed there, fulfilling a central role in the resettlement of Kfar Etzion, the first Israeli settlement in the West Bank (Ohana 2002). Today, about 70,000 mostly observant settlers live in Gush Etzion in approximately 20 settlements that range in size from a fast growing city of 30,000 people to small outposts of a few families.

Alon Shvut is the first Israeli settlement built after 1967 on plots of land without Jewish presence during 1948. It is named after an ancient oak tree that grows on a hill overlooking the road between Hebron and Jerusalem, not far from Kfar Etzion. The tree is rich with foliage and has a naturally splintered trunk comprised of two heavy stems that seem to grow almost directly out of the ground but are connected at their base. Before the area was excessively developed and covered by blankets of asphalt, concrete, stone and iron, the tree was the only identifiable landmark noticeable from the mountainous slopes of Jerusalem. After the fall of the Gush Etzion, the families of the fallen fighters would gather on memorial days, looked at the tree from afar and prayed to return there one day.

They named the tree the “Lone Oak,” a discursive act that projected the settlers’ deep yearning to regain what has been lost upon the tree, now conceived as abandoned and in need of reunification with its natural partners. The tree, of course, was never alone in the manner they imagined. The people of Khirbeit Zakhariyya, a neighboring

Palestinian village, also attribute important meanings to the tree, seeing it as marking the grave of the biblical prophet Zachariah. Today, the Lone Oak marks the emblem of the Gush Etzion Regional Council, and its image symbolizes a double return: the return of the Jewish people from exile into the Biblical Promised Land and that of Kfar Etzion orphans and widows to the land of their former homes. Because many of Gush Etzion settlements are built on land without recent Jewish presence, the Lone Oak signifies a return that is both real and imagined. This return, however, is exclusively Jewish, a return that that does not account for Palestinian national yearning to return to their lost land (Ohana 2002).

Gush Etzion: The Present Day

Migdal Eder is long gone now. A small plant nursery and souvenir shop operates where it used to be. At the end of 2010, a kiosk was opened next to the nursery. It sells snacks, sodas, phone calling cards, hookahs, cigarettes, alcoholic beverages and lottery tickets, which attract primarily Palestinians who hope for a lucky strike out of unfortunate life of poverty. The alcoholic beverages attract mainly soldiers and teenagers from the nearby settlements. A group of concerned parents protested the opening of the kiosk and warned against its corruptive effects, such as the exposure to controlled substances and Palestinians. The kiosk still stands strong.

Behind the nursery and the kiosk, a vineyard stretches northwest and meets the parking lot of the newly built Gush Etzion Winery's restaurant. On the opposite side of the road to the southwest, at the foot of the hill upon which the Russian Monastery stood, a large commercial center now stands. The commercial center increased dramatically in

size during 2010. In addition to a gas station and a garage that operated as the main business attractions of this area, the newly constructed section includes among other commercial outlets, a rather upscale bakery, a small branch of a famous health food chain, an optical store and a large supermarket, where Israelis and Palestinians shop side by side (see chapter four).

The road leading northwest connects to three nearby Israeli settlements that form the ideological nucleus of Gush Etzion: Alon Shvut, Kfar Eztion and Bat-Ayin, the homes of about 5,000 Jewish settlers of quite diverse theological orientations. If Alon Shvut represents settlers' bourgeois life style and elitism, and if Kfar Etzion remains an icon of the Zionist pioneering ethos, Bat Ayin is a symbol of settler anti-establishment and even violence. Almost all of Bat Ayin's residents are Ba'aley Teshuva (Hebrew: בעלי תשובה, lit. masters of return), secular Jews that turned to Orthodox Judaism. They are Hasidic Jews who follow the mystical and spiritual teaching of the 18th century Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov (Hebrew: הבעל שם טוב, lit. master of good name), who emphasized the fostering of personal relations between the individual, God and fellow human beings as opposed to focusing solely on the intricacies of Jewish Law.

Bat Ayin is the home of many artists and is generally known as a hawkish settlement. Its residents do not use German-made products, only Jews are allowed to work there, and the place remains fenceless to express faith, courage and the religious inadequacy of physically demarcating the boundaries of the Jewish presence in Eretz Israel. In 2009 a Palestinian from a nearby village murdered a 13-year-old boy with an axe and injured a seven-year-old. The place also gave birth to the Bat Ayin Underground, which planned to blow up a Palestinian girls' school in East Jerusalem.

Figure 12: Map of Alon Shvut and its immediate vicinities. Source: Google Maps

The Gush Etzion junction is located down the road to the southeast. A flat roundabout occupies the center of the junction, large enough to serve as a helicopter landing pad. Armored Israeli security vehicles often park at its center. The road that goes to the southeast reaches another Israeli settlement - Migdal Oz - and continues to Beit Fajjar. Once a small Palestinian village, Beit Fajjar grew into a small town of more than 10,000 people. With more than 130 stone production factories, Beit Fajjar operates as a central hub of the Palestinian stone industry. Most of its residents work there and do not interact much with Israeli settlers. The enmity between Beit Fajjar and Gush Etzion extends to the present.

North of Migdal Oz and Beit Fajar is the religious settlement Efrat, which, due to its size, has acquired the separate status of a regional council. About 10,000 people live

there. In addition to the typical red-roofed settlement housing, it hosts several tall buildings, also with red roofs, many synagogues, religious schools, commercial centers and a burger joint. It is an elongated and sinuous settlement that spreads all the way to the southern outskirts of the Palestinian city Bethlehem.

Opposite Efrat, to the West, across the main road, other smaller religious settlements are located. Neve Daniel, the highest settlement in the West Bank and Elazar, which used to be an agricultural settlement and now keeps on expanding and nearing Alon Shvut. Further to the east, on the other side of a beautiful valley, close to the northwestern boundaries of Alon Shvut, lies Rosh Tzurim, with its new terraced houses that stretch down the slope of the valley. Both Elazar and Neve Daniel have their own little outposts, where mainly younger settlers live, safely removed from the bourgeois concerns of their host settlements and enjoying the silence, simplicity and serenity of life in nature. The outposts and their access roads also allow the creation of a continuous Jewish presence. Within and around the urban mesh of Gush Etzion's settlements, dozens of Palestinian towns, villages, agricultural fields, land and houses exist. They are connected by an underdeveloped road system rarely traveled by settlers.

The Gush Etzion junction is situated midway between Jerusalem and Hebron, now connected by Highway 60. It is the longest and most traveled road in the West Bank. The road coils from Be'er Sheva, the capital of the Israeli south, and up through the hills of Judea. It dissolves into Jerusalem, reemerges from it toward Samaria, and as it nears the biblical Mounts of Blessing and Curse in the north, it escapes the West Bank. Over the years, the highway's route and appearance were altered in architectural attempts at reducing violent frictions between Jewish and Palestinian populations while also

maintaining or even upgrading the quality of Israeli life. It now bypasses those Palestinian population centers identified as hostile, and hosts checkpoints that regulate Palestinian movement. Monumental walls were erected, electronic fences planted, military watchtowers were raised, bridges constructed, and long tunnels were carved into mountain sides in order to protect Israeli passengers from stones, Molotov cocktails, explosive cars, side bombs, and sniper attacks.

Regardless of all the security bypasses, Highway 60 still passes through several Palestinian villages, sometimes bisecting them, sometimes reconstituting itself as their main road. It curves and demarcates Beit Ummar from the east, which is now enclosed by three Israeli settlements and a refugee camp to the east, and has grown into a crowded and underdeveloped town of more than 13,000 Palestinians. A tall and grey Israeli watchtower made from reinforced concrete stands at the main entrance of the town along Highway 60, its ominous presence a humiliating reminder of Palestinian subjugation to Jewish neighbors who were once upon a time friends in need. A multilingual, red sign is attached to a concrete post by the watchtower and informs visitors in Arabic, English and Hebrew that entry to the area is prohibited to Israeli citizens and constitutes a violation of Israeli laws. Palestinian teenagers regularly throw rocks of varying sizes at passing settler cars or at the Israeli soldiers that guard the area and regulate the flow of people in and out of Beit Ummar. Every once in a while, settlers would be seriously injured by a large stone thrown at their speeding car, and more often, young Palestinians would be injured by Israeli security forces. Some have died.

"Beit Ummar is a very troubled place," said a Palestinian peace (07/03/2013) activist who has recently left it because of disagreements with some of the locals and still

bears a grudge against the place and its people. “The young people of Beit Ummar do not respect the elders anymore … Why should they?” He went on, “people feel suffocated, they don’t have too many things to be proud of. No job, money or places to go to, people are jealous of those who succeed, everyone fights with each other… it is a sick place and its main sickness is the occupation.” International activists also come there to participate in regular demonstrations against the Israeli occupation. In the meanwhile, the people of Beit Ummar remain stuck in wretched conditions that only seem to deteriorate over time. The rock throwing and demonstrations usually result in a barrage of tear gas that lingers and burns the lungs sometimes days after the confrontation ends.

There are bus stations at the sides of the Gush Etzion junction. The stations also serve hitchhikers. Hitchhiking is a common mode of transportation among settlers, both young and old, although mostly young. Buses do operate on a regular basis, about twice per hour during peak hours, but they often stop at several settlements along their route, which can prolong travel time quite significantly. With Israeli cars constantly stopping to pick up hitchhikers at the bus stations, hitchhiking is a potentially quicker method of transportation, and, although it is very risky, it remains the most popular method of transportation. In 2005, three settlers were killed and several more were injured as a result of a Palestinian drive-by shooting at the Gush Etzion Bus Station. Several more were stabbed with knives throughout the years. On June 12, 2014, three Israeli teenagers were kidnapped by Palestinians while catching a ride from the local bus stop. They were murdered in the car, and unconfirmed rumors describe a hideous crime scene of dissected body parts scattered in a rocky field, evidence left to be consumed by nature and its creatures of pray.

Soon after, several Israelis kidnapped a 14-year-old Palestinian boy from East Jerusalem and burned him alive. These heinous crimes marked the beginning of another round of bloodshed between Israelis and Palestinians. It included a barrage of rockets from the Gaza Strip on Israeli population centers, and an Israeli military incursion and massive bombardment of the Gaza Strip, which resulted in dozens of dead Israelis and close to 2,000 dead Palestinians. In November of 2014, a young Israeli woman was stabbed to death by a Palestinian at a bus stop near the entrance of Alon Shvut. Yet, settlers continue to hitchhike as usual. The inability of the public transportation system to fulfil the needs of the local population contributes to this practice. Hitchhiking is also an ideological act of self-confidence: it is a declaration of deep connection to the place and a refusal to surrender to fear.

With a fast driver and without traffic delays, travel time by car from the junction to the southern edge of Jerusalem can last as little as 20 minutes, or twice and thrice as long in a bus. During Fridays, before the Shabbat begins and travel becomes a prohibited activity according to halakhic laws, the bus stops are packed with settlers carrying large bags and backpacks. If necessary, they squeeze quite efficiently into small cars, women and the old usually sit in the front, but if room is not available, it is possible to see males and females share the intimate space of the backseat in practical defiance of Orthodox norms of modesty that limit physical contact between the two sexes. On the Shabbat, the vast majority of the traffic on Highway 60 consists of Israeli security and Palestinian vehicles.

Armored buses are used for routes that run south of the junction. They are installed with enhanced security measures such as bulletproof glass and protective layers

of metal, which dim and sometimes block the view inside and outside the bus. Trash tends to accumulate and decompose between the protective layers of glass or metal. The buses are mostly used by settlers and soldiers. Palestinians are legally permitted to ride these buses. However, they are required to hold a valid entry permit and present it at specific checkpoints when crossing into Israel. Since Israel does not grant entry permits to most Palestinians, they very rarely use the Israeli buses, which pass speedily through checkpoints that only permit the passage of Israeli citizens or Palestinians from East Jerusalem (who, unlike West Bank Palestinians, hold the status of permanent residents of the state of Israel). Because security measures are generally not as strict when entering the West Bank from Israel, Palestinians who do chose to use Israeli public transportation are more likely to use the buses that run from Jerusalem to the Gush Etzion junction.

Israeli soldiers stand next to small concrete barriers at the sidewalk and guard the bus stations. They sometimes stop Palestinians' vehicles for inspection and are ordered to distance Palestinians from the stations. Thus, while Palestinians can legally ride the bus, there is a de-facto separation between settlers and Palestinians. They do, however, share many roads, including Highway 60. With the relative Israeli easement of Palestinian movement restrictions, those residing under Palestinian jurisdiction get to use Highway 60, too. The highway mainly consists of two lanes, contains maybe two or three traffic lights on its West Bank path and sharply illustrates why the area is sometimes referred to as "the Wild West." The road is a vigilante zone where lawlessness manifests itself in countless forms as national and personal anxieties find their motorized alleviation in a host of logic-defying accelerations, stunts, and just plain stupid driving. I repeatedly

witnessed trucks, school buses, military vehicles or simple family cars speed on the wrong side of the road without any care for basic traffic laws.

In 2011, the Gush Etzion Regional Council began a road traffic safety campaign and positioned large bilingual signs at the sides of the road. With white and blood-red fonts over black background, Hebrew on top and Arabic on the bottom, and the white drawing of road center lines separating the two languages, the signs emphasize the shared humanity and close religious ties of settlers and Palestinians. They also subversively serve to highlight the political fact of inequality, since the road in these signs becomes a sign of coexistence disconnected from life at its sides: "You shall not kill!," "On the road there is a shared language," "Making peace on the road" and "On the road everyone is equal."

Sometimes when I drove on the highway,[5] my body tensed in a disciplined manner when I noticed Palestinian vehicles heading toward me. All that technically protected me was the thin white line in the middle of the road. Paint—that's all it really is. But even though so many people ignore this thin white line, when the moment of truth arrives, almost everyone seems to possess an existential knowledge about the correct side and the proper actions one must take.

The Creation of Yeshivat Har Etzion

"How soon after the war did you move here?" I asked Mordechai and Sarah as we sat around their small rounded kitchen table during one dinnertime (09/19/2011). "One year," replied Mordechai. Sarah challenged Mordechai: "a year? More, no?" "Exactly one year," he answered authoritatively, "At *Chol Hamoed* of Sukkot." Chol Hamoed

[5] For a comparative analysis of Palestinian driving experience see Bishara 2015.

(Hebrew: המועד חול) is the Hebrew term for the intermediate period of a holiday, in this case, Sukkot. “Oh, so you moved here four years after Alon Shvut was built?” I asked, realizing he was talking about the 1973 War rather than the 1967 one. “I was a personal assistant of Moshkovitz,” he explained.” Moshe Moshkovitz, “Moshko” as he is often called, was a former member of Mesuot Yitzhak, a religious settlement, one of the four Gush Etzion settlements lost during the 1948 War. Gush Etzion was conquered on June 7, the third day of the 1967 War. Moshko immediately set a plan to resettle Gush Etzion with as many Jews as possible. He planned to build a yeshiva, which would form the heart of a settlement that would serve as a local center for other future settlements. He was in charge primarily of managing the financial apparatus associated with the settlement of Gush Etzion, acted as the manager of the yeshiva and efficiently pulled many political strings to fulfill his settlement vision (Reichner 2008).

“So you say you worked here from the beginning?” I continued my inquiry. “There was a Yeshiva here first,” said Sarah. “Yes,” I said in an attempt to show my ignorance had limits as well, “the Yeshiva of Hanan Porat and Rabbi Amital.” “Yes,” said Mordechai, eager to continue his tale about the yeshiva which gave birth to Alon Shvut and became one of the leading Religious Zionist educational institutions, “Moshkovitz made contact with the Rabbis, with Rabbi Amital, a Holocaust survivor, a captain in the military, a rabbi, a teacher in Israel like no other.”

Rabbi Yehuda Amital was the main reason I chose to live in Alon Shvut. He was born in 1925 in Transylvania and in 1943 was deported by the Nazis to a Romanian labor camp. His father was sent to a labor camp in Austria but, a few months before the war, fell ill and was killed at the hospital, most likely after being injected with gasoline. His

grandmother, mother and brother were murdered in Auschwitz upon their arrival, and his sister died immediately after the liberation of Auschwitz. He migrated to British-ruled Palestine in December 1944 and joined the *Haganah* (Hebrew: הגנה, lit. the Defense), the largest Zionist paramilitary group. He fought against British forces and later against Arab troops in the 1948 War. He saw himself as a disciple of HaRav Kook, but his opinion on the question of redemption changed throughout his life, until in 1988 he eventually established *Meimad* (Hebrew: מימד, lit. dimension, the Hebrew acronym of Jewish State, Democratic State), a Religious Zionist political party that supported the two-state solution, and served as a government minister following the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin (Inbari 2014). He was worried about the future: "In a Jewish country there must be a Jewish majority, and this is diminishing with time…. How long could we hold on without giving the Arabs the right to vote?" (Amital 2005). However, while he was one of the most important and respected figures in the Religious Zionist world, his politics were never adopted by the majority of settlers (see chapter three).

One of Rabbi Amital's major contributions to Jewish history and Israeli politics was his formulation of the idea of *hesder* yeshivas. Hesder yeshivas combine advanced Torah study with military service in order to provide young religious students the intellectual and spiritual tools necessary to find ideological and practical balance between piety and life in the predominantly secular army. In doing this, the yeshiva could foster the growth of religious leadership that is deeply immersed in Zionist ideals and deeply versed in the ways of the Torah. During those days, the Religious Zionist public suffered from feelings of inferiority in relation to both the Zionist and ultra-Orthodox publics. Most of the Zionist pioneers were devout seculars, and ultra-Orthodox viewed Religious

Zionist engagement with the secular world as an infringement upon the sacred ideal of uninterrupted Torah study. Religious Zionists were neither Zionist enough nor religious enough. For Rabbi Amital, the refusal to interrupt Torah study for the pragmatic demands of the moment devaluated the Torah. Recalling a classic Hasidic tale, he would often tell students that if someone is so deeply immersed in Torah study until he no longer hears the cry of baby, then something is deeply wrong with his study, for piety cannot be disconnected from empathy and social responsibility.

Another important contribution of Rabbi Amital's to the yeshiva world was the emphasis on the study of the entire bible, rather than focusing primarily on the Torah. Traditionally, Jewish Orthodoxy engaged almost exclusively with the study of the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, and their rabbinical commentaries, the Oral Torah. Even though they contain many precepts, the rest of the books in the Bible are not considered to be part of the religiously binding corpus of Jewish Law. It was actually Zionism, with its conflicting relations to Judaism, which devalued the Oral Law and placed the Hebrew Bible at the center of its national ethos of state building.[6] In turning the bible into an important part of yeshiva study, Rabbi Amital built another practical bridge between Zionist and Orthodox ideologies.

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[6] Zionist migration was politically construed as a return back in time to the glorious days of the First Temple (destroyed according to tradition in 586 BC) and the Second Temple (destroyed in 70 CE). For example, the Prophets, the second main division of the Hebrew Bible, acquired a privileged position within Zionism, which sanctified the state as the political fulfillment of the Biblical prophecies of national return. The Declaration of Independence declares the state of Israel "will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel."

Similarly, traditional values of Jewish holidays were erased and acquired new Zionist meanings suitable to a secular project of state building. The holiday Shavuot, for example, was traditionally celebrated according to the Oral Law, which designates it as the day the Torah was given to Am Israel on Mount Sinai. However, until the present day, secular people celebrate Shavuot (Hebrew: שבועות, lit. Weeks) as an agricultural festival that showcases the fruits of physical labor, as stated in Numbers 28:26: "On the day of the first fruits, your Feast of Weeks, when you bring an offering of new grain to the Lord, you shall observe a sacred occasion"

Hanan Porat was also involved in the establishment of the Yeshiva. Like Moshko, he thought the settlement of Gush Etzion should be done in a way that increases Torah study and its presence in Israel. Shortly after the war he approached Rabbi Amital and offered to become the head of the Yeshivah. Rabbi Amital was enthusiastic about the idea and spoke passionately about the miraculous results of the war and the need to act upon it through practical means. A few days later, he met with Moshko, who offered him to take charge of educational matters while he would take care of financial management. He agreed under the condition that he rather than Moshko would determine the spirit of the yeshiva.

Rabbi Amital also met with one of his new students, Yoel Bin Nun, who later became a rabbi. Like Hanan Porat, Yoel Bin Nun was a student of Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kookat Merkaz HaRav. He was impressed by the passionate pragmatism of Rabbi Amital. The conflicting demands of Yeshiva study and military service were not easily resolved by Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, who sometimes recommended military service at the expense of Torah study and sometimes recommended otherwise. Although Rabbi Amital was deeply connected to the writings of Rabbi Kook-the-father, he differed from Kook-the-son's ambiguous attitude toward military service. Rabbi Amital saw the tensions between religious and social duties as a troubling reflection of those existing within the Israeli society. He therefore thought the existence hesder yeshivas could offer a pragmatic way to resolve a conflict that would unite a society strained by the opposing forces of religious and secular values (Reichner 2008).

Yaakov Medan, who later became a rabbi too, joined the Yeshiva as well. In Rabbi Amital he discovered the simplicity and honesty that he was unaccustomed to

before. Unlike many rabbis, Rabbi Amital did not claim to have the answers to all of the questions and recognized his own mistakes, shortfalls and the need to continue the never-ending, arduous task of self-improvement. He demanded the same from his students. He also did not refrain from criticizing the Torah world, especially yeshiva study, which according to his opinion often occurred in disconnection from social realities. Yaakov Medan hadn't encountered such rabbinical figures before. Years later Rabbi Medan would become the head of the Yeshiva and, along with Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun, would take a central role in the educational approach known as the "Bible revolution." In addition to reading the Hebrew Bible as a sacred book, the approach includes intellectual engagement with archeological and historical records that correspond to biblical periods, a critical approach that delves into contradictions between the literal meanings of biblical text and its interpretations by Jewish sages and an examination of the Bible as a literary artifact that gives rise to unique literary forms and questions.

More than 30 students formed the first cohort (November 1968) of Yeshivat Har Etzion (Hebrew:ישיבת הר עציון, lit. Etzion Mountain Yeshiva), the first hesder yeshiva in the West Bank. Today there are 68 hesder yeshivas in Israel, including the West Bank. Their students partake in a five-year-long program that includes 18 month of military service, which usually begins during the second year of study. Because Yeshivat Har Etzion is located beyond the Green Line, the army required the first students to complete four months of military training at a boot camp. Rabbi Amital saw this as a unique educational opportunity: after four months of training they would learn to better appreciate Torah study. The Yeshiva was first located at Kfar Etzion, within deserted structures that served the Jordanian legion. On June 24, 1970, the Yeshiva moved to its

new location and thereby created Alon Shvut. Rabbi Amital did not show up for the first lesson in the Yeshiva, signaling to his students that his presence was not as crucial as their role in shaping the spirit of the yeshiva. He was involved in all educational mattes, but as many of his students told me, he encouraged them to reach their own conclusions. He was not interested in creating "little Amitals"; he wanted to nurture independence of thought and personal responsibility (Reichner 2008).

In 1970, Rabbi Amital invited Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein (born 1933) to serve as the head of the Yeshiva. Rabbi Lichtenstein is the son-in-law of Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik (1903–1993). Rabbi Soloveitchik is one of the most influential figures in American Jewry and the greatest leader of 20th century modern-Orthodox Judaism. Throughout his life, Rabbi Soloveitchik has labored to reconcile Orthodox Judaism with modernity. On the one hand, he defended rabbinical authority and opposed halakhic changes and cooperation with Conservative and Reform streams of Judaism, which are known for their lenient alterations of traditional Jewish Law. On the other hand, he encouraged cooperation with secular Jews and Christians on issues of social justice and advocated Talmudic education of girls. Talmud (Hebrew: תלמוד, lit. learning/instruction) is the central text of Jewish Oral Law and is often seen in the Yeshiva world as a primary method of connecting to God. It contains primarily two types of discussions: *halakha*, which deals with legal matters and *aggadata,* which deals with folklore and ethics.[7]

[7] Rabbi Soloveitchik thought drew from existential and phenomenological philosophies and most importantly from Immanuel Kant, the 18th century philosopher. Kant argued that our experience of the world is structured by our internal mechanisms of comprehending time and space and is not a direct reflection of external reality as such. Therefore, our experience of objective phenomena, including our understanding of ethics, is a product of internal categories, and these in turn lend themselves to rational choice that could be achieved in independence of outside influence. Soloveitchik saw halakha as a conceptual system of categories that allows a person of faith to internalize the divine ways of the Torah without surrendering the intuitive and individual autonomy that is dearly needed for creative Talmudic scholarship.

Rabbi Soloveitchik's most important contribution to Talmudic study was the development and formulation of the Brisk method, which shifted the focus of Talmudic study from textual to conceptual analysis: from approaching the Talmud in search of practical solutions to problems that arise in daily life, to a more theoretical orientation invested in understanding the law as an ideal system. Instead of focusing on the flow and content of the text, the Brisk method focuses on the conclusions and the resulting positions that arise from them. Rather than asking why the text is constructed in a specific way, and thus attempting to understand transcendental reasoning to no avail, the Brisk method looks at the ramifications of the text, at how the law operates through its own internal logic and the conceptual categories that underlie the law. Today, the Brisk method is a highly regarded approach to Talmudic study. Rabbi Soloveitchik continued to develop the Brisk method, further identifying the conceptual categories underlying the Law and also applied them to other areas of the Talmud that were rarely studied. Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, who earned a PhD in English Literature at Harvard University, took the Rav's approach to yet another level of conceptual analysis and abstraction (Landes 2010).

Rabbi Amital thought that a religious figure with the stature of Rabbi Lichtenstein could not be offered a lesser position than heading the Yeshiva, while Rabbi Lichtenstein was impressed by Amital's generosity, but insisted he would join under condition of serving as the head of the Yeshiva along with Rabbi Amital. They started an exceptionally successful partnership that lasted over four decades. Both are humble and generous in character but complement each other harmoniously in their temperament and pedagogical styles. Rabbi Amital had only four years of formal education, whereas Rabbi

Lichtenstein is a Doctor of Philosophy. One is succinct and passionate and the other is wordy and calculated. They sometimes agree not to agree, and when difference of opinion occurs on matters that require a clear resolution, they agreed that the one who cared most about the issue would have his way. This simple and honest attitude worked to the benefit of the students of Yeshivat Har Etzion, who were exposed to differing educational models (Reichner 2008).[8] The exposure to different educational models, the engagement with secular forms of knowledge and the high standards of religious erudition, all contributed to the transformation of Yeshivat Har Etzion to one of the leading Religious Zionist yeshivot.

The Rise of Alon Shvut

The first time I was in Rabbi Amital's physical presence was when he was lowered into his grave, his skinny and lifeless body wrapped in traditional grave clothes. He passed away less than two months after I moved to Alon Shvut, on June 9, 2010, the 27th of Sivan, the ninth month of the Hebrew year. "Did you see him while he was still alive?" Mordechai asked me about Rabbi Amital (09/19/11). "No," I began to answer, but Sarah interrupted our conversation, "Are you not hungry anymore?" "I am good, thank you," I responded politely. "I will wash your plate; do you want to eat salad?" "No, thank

[8] One example of the divergent positions of the two Rabbis involves a well-known halakhic question about saving the life of a gentile - a non-Jewish person - during the Shabbat, an act that will violate religious prohibitions on conducting various labors during the sacred day. According to a common halakhic argumentation, one is required to save the life of gentle during the Shabbat in order to promote the ways of peace or to prevent enmity by gentile observers. But what happens if a gentile needs to be saved during the Shabbat on a deserted island where there is no other gentile to make peace with or observe the incident? Both Rabbis follow the logic of the halakha and argue that life must be saved, but offer different explanations. For Rabbi Lichtenstein, saving life is a universal moral imperative, but one must also repent for violating the Sabbath. For Rabbi Amital, saving life is doing God's will so there is no need to repent (Brill 2006).

you, thank you." She heaved a heavy sigh of ironic self-frustration, "I always think there is not enough and am left with too much."

"So you were here right from the beginning?" I reinitiated the former conversation. Mordechai swallowed the food first, "Yes, we came for a visit, I was still a soldier in the Six Days War [the Israeli name for the 1967 War], I got a permit to visit Gush Etzion, we went to the Yellow Hill." "Where is the Yellow Hill?" I forgot and needed to be reminded. "Where the regional council and the communal center are." "Ah, okay." "There used to be a military post of the Gush Etzion people there, we saw the tree, we went on the hill and saw the view, the visibility was wonderful that day, and I told Sarah, 'here we shall build our home,' and what did you answer?" he addressed Sarah excitedly, but she remained silent, so he answered instead: "Utopia! Forget about it." Sarah looked at Mordechai plainly and asked, "Why don't you eat the potatoes?" "I ate already," he blurted out, "two; it's enough!"

At the beginning of 1968, a governmental committee in charge of the 1967 territories decided to create a communal center in the middle of Gush Etzion: Alon Shvut. One hundred and twenty-five acres of land and additional land reserves for future development were allocated for 300 housing units, field school, a religious high school with a music department, a regional grammar school, an absorption center for young immigrants, a commercial center, industrial zone, grocery store, kindergarten, synagogue, Mikveh (purification pool), health clinic and a communal cultural center among other amenities. During the first two years after the governmental decision to settle Alon Shvut, only 14 homes were built, all comprising premade housing units made from thin construction material not suitable for the weather conditions in an altitude of 971 meters.

Esther and Yoel Bin Nun were among the first settlers of Alon Shvut. Esther was evacuated from Kfar Etzion when she was two years old. Her consciousness was molded around the loss of Gush Etzion, a lack resulting in an intense desire to return there one day. "We are usually happy people and don't complain much," said Yoel Bin Nun in a newspaper interview in 1970 (Dolev 1970:62). He showed the journalist the interior of his new home, pointed at the long cracks stretching from the ceiling across all the way to the floor, the moldy stains and the wet spots. The first leak began with the first rain, he complained. "The truth is that we feel quite desperate about this construction. Alon Shvut is supposed to stand as a regional center of splendor. We feel we fell into a trap."

Moshko expanded in the newspaper article on the housing problems:

> "We demanded conventional housing units and provided several reasons. First, we are speaking about potential settlers from all avenues of society here and immigrants from wealthy countries (רווחה ארצות)…. They will abandon established homes at the center of the *Eretz* and outside of state, and it is only fair they will find here appropriate housing. The regional center will rise to the height of 971 meters above sea level and will be the highest settlement point in the *Eretz*. It requires housing units that can withstand the harsh weather conditions and not some experimental construction that hasn't been tested yet in this area. Besides, it should only be appropriate to account for the emotional component of those who settle in this place. They don't arrive to Gush Etzion because they feel bad in the current habitat but out of aspiration to resettle the Gush and strengthen its population and never leave again. Pre-made housing units do not befit this aspiration." [Dolev 1970:62]

Moshko's rationale encapsulates the internal tension between the ideological and economic elements of Alon Shvut. The settlers arrived there for undeniable ideological reasons, aspiring to resettle the Gush and to fulfill deeply cherished political and religious values, which were reciprocated by appropriate material conditions.

"At first," Sarah said, recalling the story of their home while we sat on the spacious patio located on the second level of their house (08/03/2011), "we were only permitted to build along the natural topography of the area; it was hilly and we couldn't

shave the land. We had to climb over here." "There was a cave here, where the wall is," added Mordechai pointing down toward my room, "the kids used to play inside." "Which cave?" I asked. "The Arabs that were here…." I did not wait for him to finish: "Did they dig it or was it natural?" "I think they dug it, they used to put their working tools there; there used to be an orchard here. "Ehh," Sarah wanted to say something, but Mordechai continued: "We started to build and then an Arab came, his land was taken over for security reasons, for the settlement, he said he got paid enough." Mordechai's speech accelerated to the point of almost-incomprehensibility as he spoke about the acquisition.

Sarah did not give up, "my son built a home," she began as soon as Mordechai stopped to catch his breath, but he was not finished just yet:

> Listen, and then what—I asked him if he wants me to pay him the difference for his field for a realistic price. He said "yes, yes," he and his brother said yes. "Will you sell me this plot of land across the fence?" He was the owner of both plots. "If you sell me this I will pay the difference for the other land." He was happy. They translated this to his mother in Arabic. She heard this, fell flat on the ground, lay there with two outstretched hands: "you do not sell land to the *Yahud*. Kill me!" She did not allow them; she did not permit them.

"But they could not get back this land, right?" I asked unable to mask my disturbance. "No," he said, "it was already under construction. They either got a replacement area or…." Sarah noticed my concern and interjected, "they didn't even live in this area, you know they didn't live in some of the places, all the places that are settled here. They didn't live here." Like Sarah and Mordechai, many settlers constantly emphasize that in contrast to the Zionist return to Eretz Israel, their return to the biblical heartland did not result in the forced displacement of Palestinians. However, they tend to deny their own role in the dispossession of Palestinian land and remain mostly

disconnected from the impact of settlements upon Palestinian plight (chapters three and four).

Alon Shvut and Yeshivat HaGush: The Present Day

The premade housing units disappeared by the end of the 1970s, and Alon Shvut now matches the splendor envisioned by Yoel Bin Nun and Moshko. It is a gorgeous and spacious settlement. With an elevation of almost 1,000 meters, the air there "is as clear as wine, and the scent of pines is carried on the breeze of twilight" (Shemer 1967). Its beautiful houses are built with pale limestone, which glows with a golden hue during the magic hours of dusk and dawn. The red roofs of many of the houses invoke the feeling of the Swiss countryside. There are several public gardens, approachable by narrow footpaths that wind amongst landscaped rosemary bushes, oak, palm and pine trees, lush vines and a few bomb shelters covered with cheerful children's murals.

It is home to about 700 families. I could not get exact statistics about the number of residents, even when I inquired at the settlement office. "Kids grow old and leave, and others are born. We count the families," I was told. "Many want to return and raise a family here, but the demand for housing far outstrips the available units," I was informed at the office. I asked Mordechai and Sarah about the population of Alon Shvut. Mordeachi said that there are more than 700 families because there are many young families that rent living units, just like me. "Are you considered a couple or a family of seven?" I pushed further. "I think we are a couple," said Sarah. "Mordechai, are we a couple?" she asked smiling. Mordechai did not answer.

Alon Shvut contains two neighborhoods - the old and the new one, which was built in 2000. Each neighborhood has its own synagogue, with the new one more massive in size and divided into a larger Ashkenazi synagogue and a smaller Sephardic one, in reflection of the Ashkenazi majority in the settlement. The two neighborhoods are partially separated by a wide road. “A river runs between them,“ mused one of my interlocutors in reference to the differences between the two neighborhoods. The old neighborhood, Giv’at Ha’etz (Hebrew: גבעת העץ, lit. the tree hill) is home to mostly early settlers, who were first associated with the Yeshiva. They are older now and can also be roughly characterized by a more liberal attitude toward the appropriate conduct of piety. They, of course, see these differences as a question of pragmatism rather than proper religiosity.

Figure 13: The Old synagogue, Alon Shvut. Photo by author.

Figure 14: Lost and Found. The Old Synagogue, Alon Shvut. Photo by author.

The new neighborhood, Giv'at Ha'bracha (Hebrew: גבעת הברכה, lit. The blessing hill), is generally comprised by immigrants, primarily from the US. Their religious attitudes tend to be more conservative than the people of the old neighborhood, especially on such matters as the interaction between the sexes. The differences can be seen, for example, in attitudes toward the relation between males and females. "When we were young," said Sarah, "and attended the activities of *Bnei Akivah* (Hebrew: בני עקיבא, lit. Sons of Akivah, the largest Religious Zionist youth movement), we used to hold hands while dancing the *Horah* (Hebrew: הורה, a circle dance first made popular among Zionist pioneers), even when we were teenagers. It was naïve and pure. Now there are parents here who want separation between boys and girls even at the kindergarten age." "They will end up raising kids who are too anxious about the other sex," she concluded.

Alon Shavut was established as a Yeshuv Kehilati (Hebrew: ישוב קהילתי, lit. communal settlement), the first of its kind across both sides of the Green Line. A communal settlement allows residents to decide who will join their settlement in order to allow the fostering of a community that shares similar ideals. At the same time, unlike in kibbutzim, its members handle their professional and financial matters independently. The designation of Alon Shvut as a communal settlement is of special linguistic relevance because of ideological undertones embedded in the language. The Hebrew language contains two sets of words denoting the act of settlement. The verb *hityashvut* (Hebrew: התיישבות, lit. settlement) and the noun *mityashev* (Hebrew: מתנחל,lit. settler) point to secular settlement activities within the 1949 Arab-Israeli Armistice lines and carry a sense of moral legitimacy. In contrast, the verb *hitnachlut* (Hebrew: התנחלות, Lit. settlement) and the noun *mitnachel* (Hebrew: מתנחל, lit. settler) point to Jewish settlement in the territories conquered by Israel after the 1967 War and connote moral and legal illegitimacy among many secular and Left-leaning Israelis who opposed the post-1967 settlement enterprise. The people of Alon Shvut sometimes refer to themselves as *mityashvim* to connote their connection the pre-state Zionist settlement enterprise. And sometimes, when wishing to connote their connection to post-'67 religious-Zionist settlement, they refer to Alon Shvut as a *hitnachlut*.[9]

Alon Shvut has a small outpost of its own, Giv'at Hachish (Hebrew: גבעת החי"ש), named after a clandestine Zionist field unit that fought in the area during the 1948 War. About 50 families live in Giv'at Hachish, mostly in small, static caravans. Their small

[9] The word *hitnachlut* stems from the root *ne'cha'la* (Hebrew: נחלה), which literally means inheritance, heritage or possession. Correspondingly, the word *nechala* appears in the Hebrew Bible and refers primarily to the inheritance and possession of the Biblical Land of Israel (Gorenberg 2006; Dalsheim 2011).

synagogue is located inside a stationary caravan as well. Mainly young couples dwell there along with several families of Peruvian migrants who arrived from a small village in the Andes. They converted to Judaism after their community pastor discovered the truth of Judaism and urged them to embark with him on a journey toward redemption in Zion. The inhabitants of Giv'at Hachish are removed in space and time from the contemporary living conditions of Alon Shvut and serve as a living monument to the pioneering spirit of the past.

As is often the case with communities that wish to balance shared interests and the need to constantly grow, Alon Shvut has grown to the point that its social fabric is strained by the conflicting aspirations of its population. These range from questions of proper religious conduct to an increasing desire of parents to send their kids to private educational systems, where they have greater influence over the curriculum and codes of conduct. When it comes to internal unity, Alon Shvut has a bad reputation within Gush Etzion. "The best indicator for the unity of a settlement is the *minyan* (Hebrew: מניין, Lit. number/count)," explained a resident of the old neighbourhood. Jewish Law prefers that prayers would be conducted communally, and minyan is the group of male adults required for the performance of public prayer.[10] "In the beginning there was just one minyan; now I don't count anymore." Electronic boards are installed at the entrances of the synagogues. They list the various *minyanim* (plural of *minyan*) available for each one of the three daily prayers and allow people to pick and choose the most convenient time of prayer. "It's all because of the Americans," muttered a resident of the old neighborhood. "They don't understand the meaning of community." Alon Shvut, however, was settled by Americans since its inception in 1970.

[10] In some non-Orthodox streams of Judaism, females also count in the minyan.

Alon Shvut has grown to become one of the more elite Religious Zionist settlements. In addition to highly developed public amenities, such as playgrounds, medical centers and well maintained roads, it is the home of university professors, politicians, prominent rabbis and judges, including a recently appointed Israeli Supreme Court judge. It is also the home of several important educational and religious institutions. Not far from the entrance to the Old Neighborhood stands the *Tzomet* (Hebrew: צומת, Lit. crossroads) Research Institution. It reconciles Jewish laws with technological advancements in order to allow professionals, such as medical doctors, to perform their duties in compliance to halakha. Another well-known religious institution is the Herzog College, which is physically and ideologically connected to the Yeshiva and grants Bachelor and Master of Education degrees.[11]

[11] In 1997, the Yeshiva opened at the settlement of Migdal Oz, across the other side of Highway 60, a Beith Midrash (Herbrew: בית מדרש, lit. House of learning) for women, where 130 students partake in advance Torah study, no longer seen as an exclusive domain of male religiously. The Migdal Oz seminary for women is headed by Esti Rosenberg, who advances the pedagogical visions of her father, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein and her grandfather, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik.

Figure 15: Yeshivat Har Etzion. Photo by author.

These days, Yeshivat Har Etzion is commonly referred to as "Yeshivat HaGush," the Yeshiva of the Bloc, a testimony of its centrality and unique status as the yeshiva that gave birth to Alon Shvut and the newly built Gush Etzion. It also forms the spiritual heart of Alon Shvut, but in an ambiguous way. Even though most of its Rabbis and workers live in the settlement, it comprises an almost independent social unit that seems to float above the internal rifts of the settlement. Four Rabbis head the yeshiva these days. Together they represent a variety of political opinions and pedagogical positions toward Torah study and indicate the possibility of religious plurality and joint communal leadership within the world of Jewish Orthodoxy.

Yeshivat HaGush is a target of mounting criticism from within Religious Zionist circles. On the one hand, it is criticized for its central role in the 'bible revolution' and its relatively liberal attitude, as seen for example in its employment of Palestinian workers,

who perform mostly maintenance tasks. On the other hand, it is criticized for being too 'brainy,' for not focusing enough, for example, on Hasidic teachings, and even for encouraging its students to learn from secular and non-Jewish thought. Walking the labyrinthine halls of the Yeshiva, you could sometimes hear students comparing Plato's thought to Maimonides. In their rooms, it is also common to find works by classic and even postmodern philosophers.[12] The students tend to study hard, their sacred educational task aimed at enriching their understanding of the Torah and increasing its social presence, even through an engagement with secular or non-Jewish texts in an emotionally and intellectually challenging effort to find the relevance of the Torah in all walks of life.

Following Moshko's vision of reciprocating spiritual splendor with material wealth, the Yeshiva boasts lush and wide lawns, decorated flower gardens and a grandiose main structure that showcases elaborate architectural elements that draw from the geometry of the Star of David. The funds came mainly from private donors. Not all of the Yeshiva students and alumni were happy about what they considered to be an excessive display of richness unsuitable for the modest ways of the Torah. Some of them even boycotted the inauguration ceremony of the new structure. The goldfish pond by one of the entrances was a special source of concern for Rabbi Lichtenstein, but he yielded to Rabbi Amital, who explained this issue was of great importance for Moshko (Reichner 2008). Like the goldfish pond, Alon Shvut has become a settlement whose appearance does not easily correspond to religious ideals of modesty, an island of tranquility within an epicenter of controversy.

[12] The Yeshiva hosts the largest yeshiva library in Israel, with more than 70,000 titles that included ancient and sacred Jewish manuscripts along with publications from university press houses and popular fiction.

Conclusion

Late in the evenings, I would often stroll through the entwining paths of Alon Shvut, cross through its luscious gardens, seep in the clear air, and feel the tingling scent of the seasonal blossom, cherishing an almost incomprehensible civilian serenity in the midst of military occupation. The sounds of nature and crickets would be sometimes interrupted by the voice of the muezzin wailing to Allah from a Palestinian village far enough from the eyes. Piano tunes would emerge from one home, the harmonious melodies of a family praying after dinner emanating from another. At the yeshiva, students from South Africa gather at one of the side halls and sing Jewish songs in a cappella style. A stylish student is wearing a pink buttoned-up shirt and a purple crochet kippah. Prayer books and expensive sets of teffilin are left out on marble seating along with worn-out kippahs, where they can stay untouched for days. At the entrance to the Beith Midrash, a young student sits on a school chair with a long and cumbersome M-16 rifle resting on his knees. Inside, students bury their heads deep into books, drawn into pages of black on white holy letters. I would often feel jealous of their sacred dedication, wishing I could also draw such spiritual meanings from the books at my university's library.

Outside, Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun caries grocery bags back to his home. Rabbi Yaakov Medan flashes by on his bicycle, helmet over kippah, long white beard flopping in the wind, hand gun hard fastened to his belt. Here is Rabbi Lichtenstein, striding slowly to his home after a long day at the Yeshiva. He moved here from Jerusalem in 2006, the daily commute becoming too hard for him. Sacred books underneath one hand, the other wrapped in a white cast. An old man, he fell. "Shalom," I would always greet

him, feeling humbled when he would reply, “Shalom.” I would often extend my walk to the settlement perimeters, along its fences and barbed wires, making way when necessary to a security vehicle, to a couple holding hands, or yeshiva students jogging alone or in groups. The military calls. Sometimes I would try to take no notice of it all, to clear my mind and just breathe. Sometimes I would feel like falling flat on the ground, unable to contain an irreconcilable sense of sorrow and belonging.

Alon Shvut was born out of a religious institution that incarnated the triumphant spirit that swept over both secular and religious Zionists following the 1967 Israeli victory and the conquest of the biblical heartland. Some of its first settlers envisioned their new home as a double return: a religious return from exile to the heart of the Promised Land and a political return to a land lost a day before the establishment of the state, and even prior to that, to the first settlement days of Migdal Eder. This double return, both real and imagined, has its economic benefits as well. It allows settlers to live in a religious community of relatively well-to-do people that is buttressed by highly developed amenities. But they live there not only because of economic comfort; they live there also to fulfil Zionist and religious values: the extension of Israeli sovereignty through Jewish settlement of the biblical heartland of Eretz Israel. However, as exemplified by Mordechai and Sarah, the discursive efforts of its residents to connect the settlement to Zionist and Jewish histories point not only to their deep emotional and spiritual ties to the place, but also to the gap between the difficult settlement conditions of the past and the bourgeois comforts of the present.

The story of Alon Shvut and its creation by Yeshivat HaGush cannot be separated from the history of Gush Etzion. Together they demonstrate the inseparability of

ideological and economic forces that also operate in many Religious Zionist settlements in the West Bank. In addition, as the first settlement to be built after 1967 on plots of land without substantial Jewish presence during 1948, Alon Shvut both set a precedent and acted as an emblem of success for other settlements. Like Alon Shvut, other Religious Zionist settlements were imagined as a return to the biblical cradle of Jewish civilization, a return that excludes the parallel Palestinian hopes of return and sovereignty. Yet, as a settlement with a history that is intimately entwined with the establishment of the state, the residents of Alon Shvut often see themselves as different from other settlers. This particular sense of identity and its religious and political relation to the state is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

"A Blessed Deviation": Redemption and the Israeli State

Introduction

As the former chapter illustrated, Alon Shvut and Gush Etzion were settled by people who wanted to fulfill deeply held political and religious values. Although each settlement in the West Bank has its unique players and particular history, the central religious value that underlies the Religious Zionist settlement project at large is that of redemption. In the Hebrew Bible, the term redemption, *Geula* (Hebrew: גאולה), means a restoration to a former status. Hence, land can be redeemed, for example, from a foreign ownership (Leviticus 25) and a person can be redeemed from harm's way (Genesis 48:16). The act of restoration to a former status implies an act of rescue, of liberation, of salvation; and indeed the idea of redemption as an act of salvation constitutes one of the most central tenants of Jewish faith (Schweid 1985).

Redemption in Judaism exists on both individual and national levels. Individual salvation is an internal act of spiritual perfection that can be achieved through Torah study and the observance of God's commandments. This personal possibility of spiritual redemption exists regardless of the constraints of one's earthly existence. In contrast, national redemption contains an inseparable earthly dimension, with Exodus and the kingdoms of David and Solomon serving as its primary models. Jews pray several times each day for national redemption: for the ingathering of exiles, for the reestablishment of a Jewish sovereignty governed by the laws of the Torah, the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem and the appearance of a savior, the messiah (Hebrew: משיח, lit. the anointed)

from the bloodline of King David, who will reestablish God's kingdom on earth and usher in a new spiritual age of justice and peace.

Jewish tradition contains multiple and often contradictory interpretations of the idea of national redemption. For example, what are the relations between redemption and the actions of human beings? Is redemption dependent upon the pious deeds of Jews or is it promised in advance for a specific age? Will redemption appear gradually or as a sudden event? Will it manifest itself in the political form of national emancipation from exile and foreign rule or will it involve a supernatural change of cosmological orders?[1] In general, the concept of redemption as a sudden transcendental event is associated with ultra-Orthodox (*Haredi*) Jews, while redemption as a process that is revealed within history is associated with Religious Zionism. The former is characterized by a passive anticipation of complete and whole redemption that shall arrive as a reward for true piety, whereas the latter emphasizes (in addition to piety) the importance of human action within the natural realm as a means for the gradual fulfillment of redemption (Ravitzky 1997).

The establishment of the state of Israel is perceived among Religious Zionists as a central historical event with deep religious meanings. After the founding of the Israeli state, its two chief rabbis composed the "prayer for the welfare of the state": this prayer forms the Israeli replacement for the 'prayer for the welfare of government' (Hebrew:

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[1] To illustrate, Maimonides set the belief in the Messiah as one of the thirteen principles of Jewish faith, but explained that the Messianic era will not involve a radical change in natural order nor will the Messiah exhibit miraculous powers. In doing this, Maimonides provided a theological rationale for the conception of national redemption in correspondence to the laws of nature rather than a supernatural end of time. In contrast, Rabbi Isaac ben Judah Abrabanel, the great Jewish thinker who lived during the 1492 expulsion of the Jewish community from Spain, believed and yearned for a radical change in worldly order. Since Jewish tradition contains such contrasting positions, any attempt to define the meaning and form of redemption reflects an ideological process of selection and elimination from multiple religious sources (Ravitzky 1997).

תפילה לשלום מלכויות), which was read by Jews during exile and requested God to protect and guide the rulers of the nation among whom they dwelled. Today, Religious Zionist read the prayer for the state during the Shabbat and holyday services. It refers to the state as "the first flowering of redemption," a theological position that has been one of the main fault lines between Religious Zionists and Haredi Jews. Unlike Religious Zionists, Haredi Jews do not conceive the secular state as a manifestation of redemption and tend to understand this era as a time of spiritual exile from the pious essence of Judaism. They live in Galut within Eretz Israel, for exile is not only a matter of physical displacement and lack of sovereignty, but also a state of absence, evidence of an imperfect world and the desire for its amendment and replacement (Raz-Krakotzkin 2007).

The Religious Zionist position on the Israeli state and its relation to redemption exists along two theological poles. The first is associated with the more modern-Orthodox Mizrahi[2] Religious Zionist organization that was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines (1839 – 1915) as well as with Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik (1903 – 1993). This position conceives Jewish national awakening in instrumental terms. The rise of Zionism was as an act of divine providence that allowed Jews to return to Eretz Israel, establish their own independent sovereignty and fulfill, for example, halakhic commandments such as agricultural and judicial practices that pertain specifically to Eretz Israel. Thus, the return to the land and the eventual establishment of the Israeli state contain deep religious meaning, but do not necessarily attest to the redemptive qualities of this age and the Israeli state. After all, the existential problems of the Jews have not been solved yet: anti-Semitism still exists and the state itself is not

[2] Not to be confused with 'mizarhi' as an ethnic identity. Both terms mean "eastern" in Hebrew, but the name of the Religious Zionist organization stems from the Hebrew acronym of Merkaz Ruhani: spiritual center (Hebrew: מרכז רוחני).

governed by the laws of the Torah. Still, as a political institution that allows for Jewish self-governance in Eretz Israel, the state is religiously important because it contains the potential to provide for the national and religious development of the Jewish people (Schwartz 1997).

The second position, the messianic one, is associated with HaRav Kook (1865-1935) and his son Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook (1891 – 1982). Informed by Kabbalistic traditions, history is viewed in teleological terms as a dialectical spiraling forward of the forces of good and evil, light and darkness, of creation and destruction, which move history toward its promised redemptive end. Thus, Rabbi Kook-the-son saw "the Holocaust as the rooting out of a debased Jewish culture, the culture of exile." In his words, the Holocaust was "a deeply hidden, internal, divine act of purification, [to rid us] of the impurity [of exile]... a cruel divine surgery aimed at bringing [the Jews] to the Land of Israel against their will" (Cited in Ravitzky 1996: 127). The metaphysical meaning that was attributed to the Holocaust by the younger Rabbi Kook meant it had to be complimented by a positive event of tremendous proportions. And as history panned out, the genocide was followed by the creation of the Israeli state, which could no longer be seen in earthly historical terms, for only a wonder of the greatest kind could give reason for the Jewish catastrophe. And so, in the theology of Rabbi Kook-the-son and his followers, the Israeli state is sanctified and elevated as "the pedestal of God's throne in this world"[3] (cited in Ravitzky 1996:127).This form of messianism can be therefore defined as a religious devotion toward redemption as a telological historical process.

[3] The notion of the state as "the pedestal of God's throne in this world" was originally envisioned by HaRav Kook, who passed away before the Second World War and the establishment of the state of Israel. It was later used by his son and his students at yeshivat Merkaz HaRav, those who would also become the leaders of Gush Emunim.

Within contemporary Religious Zionist circles, it is typical to find some degree of amalgamation of the instrumental and the messianic positions, along with secular forms of national attachment to state and territory as means and places of refuge, survival, and material and cultural growth (Schwartz 1997). Therefore, although Eretz Israel is perceived as sacred land, during the Disengagement Plan the vast majority of Religious Zionist rabbis expressed the importance of obeying military orders and following the law of the state; the importance of the state and the centrality of national unity overcame the value of the land. It is important to note, however, that the obedience to the state during the Disengagement Plan does not reflect only religious dispositions, but as discussed in chapter one, it also reflected an acceptance that the struggle was lost. By now, the Disengagement Plan is perceived by settlers and many Israelis as a fatal mistake. Nevertheless, despite the actions of the state, many settlers in Gush Etzion tie the state to redemption, but also understand redemption through a religious prism of political realities: Jews have been gathering from exile to become free people in Eretz Israel, and it is the existence of the Israeli state that allows them to exercise their national sovereignty.

In addition, settlers in Gush Etzion, and especially within Alon Shvut, see their presence in the West Bank as different from that of many other settlements because their political story begins prior to 1967 and goes back to 1948 and before. With the 'return' to Gush Etzion forming an integral part of the Israeli national ethos, they understand themselves as an internal part of the state: they *are* the state. Yet, unlike political forms of nationalism and sovereignty, which tie people and land through language, ethnic sense of kinship and shared history, like all devout Jews, their sense of a Jewish nation emerges

from a belief in the monotheistic bond between God and his Chosen People, destined to redeem the world.

This chapter examines the meanings of redemption in relation to the state among settlers and illustrates their complicated and sometimes contradictory set of relations to the state. I use the example of Rabbi Hanan Porat (1943 – 2011) to illustrate the predominating messianic approach toward the redemption among Religious Zionist settlers. Yet, in Alon Shvut, many settlers often publicly invoke the instrumental position toward redemption rather than the messianic one. I argue that this use of instrumental explanations is tied their attempt to present themselves as respected citizens of the state and align themselves more closely with it. This denial of messianism is exemplary of a larger set of complex relationships with the state. To further point out these ambiguities, I discuss a celebration of Israel's Independence Day at Alon Shvut. The state was celebrated but the event also included a valorization of settlement acts that were carried out against the state. And so, I touch upon two questions that emerge from this event. First, how can settlement acts that are carried out against the rule of the state coexist with the religious and political importance settlers attribute to the state? Second, how can settlers yearn for peace without seeing their own role in preventing it from emerging? I offer some possible explanations that are tied on the one hand to settlers' identification with the state, and, on the other hand, to their fear of peace as related to territorial withdrawals.

Rabbi Hanan Porat and the Metaphysics of Redemption

Shabbat, March 26, 2011, 21st of Adar Beit, 5771

He was dying. Walking the short distance from his front row seat to the podium of the small Sephardic synagogue of Neve Daniel in Gush Etzion was an obviously arduous task, but he refused to be helped and slowly staggered toward the stage. On regular days, Hanan Porat would normally wear a light-blue buttoned shirt, khaki pants or jeans and biblical sandals, his clothes reflecting a sense of fashion rooted in the Zionist pioneering days. He usually dressed up casually, roll up his sleeves and walk around with an open collar, whether inside or outside the synagogue. He had an innate disregard for formalities and preferred to be addressed by his name without the 'rabbi' honorific.

Hanan Porat loved wearing sandals on his bare feet, and, after he was elected to the Knesset in 1981, he was quite annoyed when the parliament tried to make socks an obligatory component of its members' dress code. Recently, however, his sandals were often replaced by slippers, the wooly and warm type. The socks were there, too. This chilly Saturday evening he wore a sweater over his white Shabbat shirt. An orange-colored silicon wristband adorned his left hand. He has been wearing the wristband for more than five years now, ever since the failed struggle against the Disengagement Plan. Many attributed his terminal illness to his reaction to? the destruction of Gush Katif.

The tumor spreading through his brain made speech difficult. He struggled to properly enunciate words and finish sentences without having to stop and breathe. Once in a while he would chock, as if on the verge of breaking down and crying. His right eye was half-shut, swelling and wetness diminishing its piercing brightness. Yet, his vision was not dimmed for he saw the light of redemption. Throughout his life, he learned and

lived the writings of HaRav Kook, immersing himself in HaRav's *Light of Redemption*, *The Lights of Holiness* and *The Lights of Repentance*. HaRav Kook had mystical experiences in the sensual form of sight, as opposed, for example, to hearing voices; and Hanan Porat saw lights too, sacred luminous sparks, even now, with a terminal disease that should have shrouded him in darkness. He always spoke about lights, brilliant ones—lights that emanated from a source that is higher than the bright skies, lights that were not simply a medium of experiencing the world, but constituted the ultimate goal and source of life. In addition to the books and numerous articles he wrote, he published his thoughts and poems in the weekly pamphlet he edited, entitled, of course, *Lights* (Hebrew: אורות).

He would often tell listeners about one of his earliest childhood memories of meeting a watchman at Kfar Etzion:

> There used to be a large spotlight on top of one of the houses. One night I climbed up and asked the watchman to use the spotlight. I aimed the light at the surrounding Arab villages: Beit Umar, Tsurif, Beit Fajar and all the other villages. All of a sudden I got scared and told the watchmen: "they are so many and we are so few!" "This is true," replied the watchman, "but they have darkness and we have light!" [Besheva 2003, Huberman 2013:07]

Hanan Porat saw the light and refused to simply follow it; he carried it with him and acted as a radiant beacon that illuminated the road toward redemption and carried with him the entire settlement enterprise. "The tragedy is," said Meir, one of his friends at Kfar Etzion (11/25/2011), "that Hanan was also blinded by the light… if he really wanted to bring redemption his priorities must go beyond Jewish redemption of Israel… He had refused to see his responsibility to… achieving social justice for all inhabitants of the land."

He had no hatred for Palestinians and felt connected to their love of the land, to their national conviction, to what he saw as their modest and simple ways. But he thought that if only they could give up their false national aspirations, accept the truth of Jewish national return, and be willing to live, for example, as permanent residents under Jewish sovereignty their life would be much better; he never truly saw how his actions brought suffering. His vision also never wavered in the face of a settlement reality that polarized Israeli society. Hanan Porat was a fearless and optimistic man—probably too optimistic.

During the Jewish holiday of Purim in 1994, just after Baruch Goldstein, a Hebron settler, murdered 29 Palestinians at the Cave the Patriarchs, Hanan was approached by a journalist, and his immediate reaction was "Happy Purim." Defending his immediate response, he explained that "Happy Purim" is a customary blessing for the holiday, one that was said even when one's friend is murdered. He also condemned the terrible actions of Baruch Goldstein, but the "Happy Purim" remark accompanied him for the rest of his life among his opponents on the left (Huberman 2013).

Hanan Porat was present at numerous critical crossroads of Israeli history, and his exceptional life story parallels that of the state. As a child he lived through the fall of Gush Etzion in 1948 a day before the declaration of Israel's independence. In 1967 he took part in the conquest of Old Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. Soon after, he initiated the return to Kfar Etzion and the establishment of Yeshivat HaGush and Alon Shvut, which led to the expansion of more settlements in Gush Etzion. He fought in the 1973 Yom Kippur War and was seriously injured when a mortar shell hit him but failed to explode. He took a central role in the creation of Gush Emunim and later in the Yesha Council. He participated in the repeated settlement efforts of Elon Moreh and opposed

the withdrawal from Sinai. He became a Knesset member (1981-1984, 1988-1999) and resisted the destruction of Gush Katif to no avail. He also fathered 11 children. He was a man of great charisma, full of conviction and overflowing with contagious passion. Few individuals in recent times influenced Israeli and Palestinian history as much as Hanan Porat.

Back at the Sephardic synagogue in Neve Daniel, he leaned with his arms on the podium to support his weight. Once in a while his hands would rise up in excited but weary movements. With the microphone amplifying his raspy breathing, he spoke about one of his favorite topics: the light of redemption. His lesson was based on a famous passage from the Jerusalem Talmud[4] that compares redemption to the Morning Star.[5] It emerges slowly from the eastern horizon as a spot of radiance in the darkest of night, its luminance reaching its peak just before it is washed out by the light of the rising sun. Akin to the Morning Star, the redemption of Israel arrives little by little, a point of light that emerges out of darkness and guides, protects and prepares Israel and rest of the nations to eventually see the light of the divine.

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[4] The Talmud consists of two layers: the Mishna (Hebrew: מישנה. lit. to review or study by repetition/secondary) and the Gemara (Hebrew: גמרה, lit. to study/complete). The Mishna contains the 63 tractates of the Oral Law as systematically compiled into six order (Hebrew: סדרים) and codified by Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi (Hebrew: יהודה הנשיא. Lit, Judah the Prince) beginning at the end of the 2nd century CE. The Gemara contains rabbinical commentaries and analysis of the laws of the Mishna, and is commonly referred to simply as the Talmud.

There are two versions of the Talmud, the Babylonian and the Jerusalem Talmud, also known as Talmud Eretz Israel. The Mishna of the two is almost identical, but the Gemara is different in style as well in content. Unlike the Aramaic language of the Babylonian, the Jerusalem Gemara is written mainly in Palestinian Aramaic of the Galilei region. It also contains longer narratives and debates, whereas the Babylonian Talmud contains more multilayered and complex arguments. The Babylonian Talmud is longer and considered to be the more authoritative of the two because Babylonia (present-day Iraq) was the center of Jewish life during Talmudic times until the Medieval period.

[5] Hanan Porat felt a strong connection to the Jerusalem Talmud. It contained in his eyes the spirit of Eretz Israel, as exemplified, for instance, in the section dedicated to the Agricultural Commandments Dependent on Eertz Israel that is not included in the Babylonian version.

The road to redemption is not a highway, he explained. The complications encountered along the way should not be understood as withdrawals from redemption, but as redemption revealed through withdrawals. The weak ones doubt the reality of redemption, pointing, for instance, to the destruction of Gush Katif. Indeed, people experienced great crisis and despair. However, there is no retreat from redemption. Redemption that arrives little by little contains such torments within its larger and complete historical movement. He offered a classic example of a modernist philosophy of history as progress and portrayed the redemption of Israel as a slow process rather than a sudden event, as a cosmological drama materialized in the earthly domains of life and death. For him, the road to redemption is replete with hardships. Yet, these hardships function as dialectal counterparts within the totality of progression toward historical consummation. Pain, suffering and loss embody advancement on the road while affirming its undeniable existence, too. Everything that happens within human history is a reflection of divine will, and tragedies therefore have metaphysical meanings as well: they serve a purpose, they make redemption happen.

Hanan Porat was a student of Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook at Merkaz HaRav, and like him did not believe in simple causality, but in the teleology, in the purpose, of every aspect of life. This philosophy of history has underlined the theology of Gush Emunim and the early Religious Zionist settlement days. Reacting to the national moroseness that followed the heavy casualties during the 1973 war, the settlers of Gush Emunim saw it as dialectically related to the national euphoria of 1967. They understood the 1967 victory as miraculous proof for a revealed end, as proof that redemption was just a step a way, that history as we know it is reaching its end, that any moment now a messianic figure

shall reveal itself and lead the People toward a new era of spiritual perfection and global harmony.

The messianic optimism of Hanan Porat is illustrative of the larger Religious Zionist settler population. However, unlike ideas that stand out for their clarity, personal aspects of life do not lend themselves too easily to clearly demarcated categories of experiences. Tensions always exist between the ideal perceptions and their manifestation within reality, some beliefs change over time, conflicts of opinions emerge and people can behave in ways that contradict the beliefs they cherish and protect. In Alon Shvut, for example, many settlers prefer to use instrumental rationales when explaining their understanding of redemption. Consider the case of Rabbi Cohen.

Redemption Instead of Messianism

I moved to Alon Shvut in June 9, 2010, about three weeks before the 17th of Tammuz, when *Bein Hametzarim* (Hebrew: בין המצרים. Lit, between the straits) began. The 17th of Tamuz [6] is the second of four fasts that commemorate the destruction of the Temple and Jewish exile. It is a day of a minor fast that lasts from dawn to shortly after dusk. I decided to take upon myself the ascetic task of a minor fast, but failed to wake up in time for the Morning Prayer, drank a small cup of coffee and took a few large sips of orange juice because I was tired, hungry and thirsty. Feeling guilty immediately afterwards, I wore my *tzitzit* (Hebrew: ציצית) - the ritual fringes that are attached to a four

[6] As discussed in chapter one, Bein Hametzarim is a three-week period of mourning over national calamities that culminate on the Ninth of Av, the saddest day in Jewish tradition. According to the Mishna, five disasters took place on the 17th of Tamuz. These include the breaking of the two tablets of the Ten Commandments by Moses on Mount Sinai following the Israelites' Golden Calf sin and the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem, which led to the placement of an idol in the Temple and its eventual destruction.

corner poncho-like garment worn by Orthodox males underneath their shirts - and put my kippah on.[7]

I decided to explore the settlement and see if there are any special activities due to the nature of this day and made my way to the Yeshiva. It was a very hot day and people walked purposefully along the comforting coolness of the shadows. The playgrounds, normally bustling with kids, remained desolate. The grocery store was open but bare of customers. I did not see anyone I knew at the Yeshiva, which was also relatively empty, and made my way to the library, where I read a bit from the sacred writings of Foucault, but the place closed earlier than usual because of the fast. I took the opportunity to read newspaper clippings that were attached to signboards at the hall connecting Hertzog College with the Yeshiva. They were filled with news articles about the aftermath of the Disengagement Plan, which occurred five years earlier at the end of Bein Hametzarim. "The most severe human rights injury in the history of the state - five years after the event that changed the face of the state, the harsh report specifies the list of failures," read one headline of an article that discussed the conclusions of an official inquiry committee

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[7] During the Morning Prayer service, the fringes are connected to the larger prayer shawl known as the *tallit* (Hebrew: טלית), which is worn by like a cape in a draping manner over the shoulders and sometimes over the head. The latter garment is known as the *tallit gadol* (Hebrew: טלית קטן, lit, large tallit) and the former one as *tallit katan* (Hebrew: טלית קטן, lit. small tallit) and is also referred to as *Arba Knafot* (Hebrew: ארבע כנפות, lit. four corners). Wearing the tallit fulfils the commandment set forth in Numbers (15:37-41):

> The Lord said to Moses as follows: Speak to the Israelite people and instruct them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout the ages; let them attach a cord of blue to the fringe at each corner. That shall be your fringe; look at it and recall all the commandments of the Lord and observe them, so that you do not follow your heart and eyes in your lustful urge. Thus you shall be reminded to observe all My commandments and to be holy to your God. I the Lord am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I, the Lord your God.

The tzitzit commandment connects the act of seeing to remembrance. Wearing the tallit katan symbolically transforms clothing into an extension of the body, with the fringes functioning as a mnemonic device that allows a person to overcome illicit lust through the evocation of God and sacred command. The decision to wear the fringes in or out is tied to the religious tradition as well to the individual performance of identity, to the decision to externalize or internalize religiosity (Landes 2010).

that investigated the treatment of the evacuees (Alon, Porsher and Strenlicht 2010). "1,400 families in temporary sites - Gush Katif's evacuees are not surprised by the report: 18% of them are unemployed, and half require psychiatric treatment," read another (Klein and Porsher 2010).

While I was reading the newspaper clips, Rabbi Cohen passed by. He is a teacher at Hertzog College and the Yeshiva and was one of my main interlocutors. "Shalom," he greeted me. "Shalom," I replied. He asked how I was doing, and I stated proudly that I am fasting. "You chose a bad day to fast," he joked in reference to the hot weather. Feeling as though he could see through my boastful dishonesty, I responded in awkward self-defense that I had no choice in the matter. He then told me that his six-year-old son asked him why Nebuchadnezzar did not destroy the Temple during winter, thus making fast a much easier activity. I smiled, and he went on: "You know, in Ashkenazi communities in the Galut, people would jokingly bless each other '*Toiv Hurban*,' which mean good destruction." "Well then, good destruction," I blessed him jovially. He then invited me to his home to have something small to break the fast. We parted ways, and I returned to my place and drank a sip of water, maybe two.

Later in the evening (06/29/2010), sitting by the Cohens' kitchen table, I felt hungry and impatient. My sense of subtlety was hurt by my flawed fasting, and I decided to go straight to the point: "are you messianic?" After a short moment of contemplation, Rabbi Cohen answered succinctly, "I am not messianic, but I believe in redemption." I decided to persue this issue a bit later. There were more pressing matters of subsistence at hand. The smell of freshly baked pastries nearly overwhelmed my nose and, on the plates in front of me, beautiful chocolate balls lay next to shiny pieces of sliced vegetables. I

could easily swallow them whole, slices and balls, but everyone except for one disgruntled-looking boy sat stoically around the table. He was feeling sick, and even though he was not required to fast because of his young age, he fasted nonetheless and suffered from bad nausea.

The Cohens have a large living room. Brown is the dominating color. A large library occupies most of its walls. The golden insignias and general brownish uniformity of the books' covers disclosed their religious content, the ancient leather-like colors reflecting religious books' aesthetics of antiquity. A few colorful spots on the shelves did reveal the existence of non-religious literature: poems, fiction and some larger coffee table books. We sat around a square table in the kitchen: Rabbi Cohen, his wife Yifat, three of their kids (two girls, a sick boy) and I. I tried to amend my heavy-handed icebreaker and remarked that the food smells delicious. The older of the two girls explained that baking helps them tolerate the last hours of the fast, and I wondered how they manage to fast, being so close to the food. After reciting the blessing for the food, we began to eat. First we started with a cup of hot tea. It is better on the stomach that way. Then it was time to eat. I chewed, swallowed and rejoiced. The boy soon left the table, without having much to eat. I learned that last year he was teased for not fasting, and this year he wanted to prove his adulthood. With chocolate balls, buns, croissants and cucumbers now safely stored in my stomach, I felt a tinge of shame for being unable to properly uphold an ascetic task that was fulfilled by a sick boy a third of my age.

We discussed my research, and Yifat recommended that I study head scarves, that there is a whole debate about how to wear, what to wear, the proper styles and so on, but Rabbi Cohen told her that this is not my research topic, that I compare different groups of

settlers, not fashion choices. "But how can you study this place, where everyone is so different from each other?" asked the older girl. I answered that it is just a matter of perspective, that people here have more in common with each other than they tend to realize. She seemed unconvinced by my answer. Eventually, we returned to the topic of redemption and messianism. Rabbi Cohen explained that for him the term messianism connotes mystical zealotry. He believes in redemption as the ingathering of exiles and the creation of Jewish sovereignty in Eretz Israel, but opposes religious explanations that rely on mystical readings of reality. For him, the term *messianism* is associated with mitnachlim, and he is a mityashev.[8] He lives in Alon Shvut because he is a Religious Zionist, not because he believes it will hasten the arrival of the Messiah. "But don't you believe in the Messiah?" I asked, somewhat confused. "Doesn't the belief in the Messiah form one of the central tenants of Jewish faith?" "Yes," he answered, "I do," but did not continue his explanation. I could see he was feeling uneasy talking about this subject. Perhaps he has internalized much of the secular critiques of settlers and disliked the messianic stigma; perhaps he was trying to represent a pragmatic worldview, and perhaps he thought I would not understand the complexity of his position, that I lacked the necessary religious knowledge and experience.

Yifat noticed the tension and intervened. "I believe in the Messiah," she said authoritatively. "It is a source of hope, of endless optimism, even in the darkest moments. It is a force that strengthened Jewish communities throughout the ages."

"But what does it mean for you to believe in the coming of the Messiah?" I pushed further, and she expounded:

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[8] As discussed in the former chapter, the term *mitnachel* is associated with the post-1967 Religious Zionist settlement enterprise in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and carries with it a stigma of moral illegitimacy. The term *mityashev* is associated with the pre-1967 Zionist settlement.

> I believe that one day we shall live in a better world, in a reality that is more spiritually connected to God. That one day we will be part of an ethical society that will allow the emergence of a just leader. But who knows when this will happen. No one can tell for certain…. All we can say that these are days of redemption, but we cannot take them for granted, and we should cherish the fact that we are free people.

I sought further clarification: "So why are these days the days of redemption?" "The undeniable fact is that we returned to Eretz Israel from all across the world, and we have a state of our own. We are free people at last, and this is a blessed deviation in Jewish history." Yifat's explanation reflects the instrumental position toward redemption that is emphasized by many people in Alon Shvut. They do understand this age as a redemptive one and see the state as the "first flowering of redemption," but these religious meanings are often explained through concrete historical and political facts rather than, for example, solely through the dialectical metaphysics of history. Following the settlement project of Gush Emunim, messianism is commonly conceived these days in the vernacular as an active mystical act of "hastening the end," while redemption is associated with a more passive and rational yearning toward a just future. They therefore publicly downplay their own messianic beliefs because they are invested in aligning themselves more closely with the state and in being perceived as its respected citizens. This behavior constitutes an attempt to distance themselves from the negative connotation of messianism within Israel and abroad, and ignore the ways in which the settlements are implicated in a military occupation and endanger the maintenance of a Jewish majority within democratic Israel.

In addition to their religious beliefs, the settlers of Alon Shvut have other good reasons to value the state. A large number of individuals are employed by the state and its institutions. There are judges and university professors and military commanders and the

hesder yeshiva too. They also see their presence in the West Bank as different from that of many other settlements because their political story begins prior to 1967, going back to before 1948. Rabbi Cohen, for example, tries to disassociate himself from the mitnachlim and sees himself as a mityashev even though Alon Shvut is located beyond the Green Line, beyond the internationally recognized boundaries of the state. Many people in Alon Shvut similarly disavow their mitnachel label. As far as they are concerned, they are messengers of the state and fulfil its Zionist ideals.[9]

This identification with the state is quite merited. All of Israel's Prime Ministers since the late Yitzhak Rabin declared that any peace agreement with the Palestinian Authority would include Gush Etzion within the boundaries of Israel. In accordance, although they may worry about the prospects of territorial withdrawals from the West Bank, they are not personally threatened by it and feel quite confident about the future of the place. As a case in point, during the 2010 festive celebrations of Alon Shvut's fortieth anniversary, a "time capsule" was buried in the ground on the lawn by the main synagogue in the Old Neighborhood. It carries colorful drawings from the preschoolers of the present to the preschoolers of Alon Shvut in 2050. "The truth is," Rabbi Cohen told me one evening after the Shabbat prayer, "that it looks like a tombstone." He is right. The capsule is covered by a flat and grey concrete plate that resembles those found in cemeteries. It emits an air of eeriness, making the celebratory display of confidence in the settlement's future and its umbilical connection to the state appear as an ominous foreboding—a self-assured provocation of fate in the face of a reality that undermines the taken-for-granted future of the state.

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[9] As explained in chapter two, this disavowal of the mitnachel identity is also tied to the definition of Alon Shvut as a "yeshuv kehilati."

The people of Alon Shvut pride themselves on their rational and nuanced worldview, which confronts the complexities that may emerge from the contradictions between the secular and religious domains of life. You would be hard-pressed, for example, to find someone who does not subscribe to the theory of evolution or think the world is only 6,000 years old, but this does not prevents the belief in divine providence. The Torah is eternal, it carries truth for each generation, but must be understood as emerging in the context of different times, when people lacked scientific and modern forms of knowledge. The story of creation is therefore true, when one understands it as a general explanation for the creation of the world, and sees the idea of "a day," for instance, as connoting a stage in creation rather than an actual, 24-hour period of time.

In valuing Judaism as a religion of reason, people in Alon Shvut often denounce Kabbalah - Jewish mysticism – for being an irrational deviation from the rational essence of Judaism. "There is a big gap in my knowledge," admitted Rabbi Cohen, "and it has to do with Kabbalah. I hardly know anything about it." He sees the engagement with mysticism as an irrational fascination with esoteric knowledge that takes away from the "beauty and depth of the Torah." Sarah was more blatant: "This is [Kabbalah] just superstitious nonsense…. Hocus Pocus."

Alon Shvut is a settlement that is not always understood as a settlement per-se because of its particular history and because its people believe they are more rational and less mystical than other settlers. It is a settlement with settlers who see themselves as an authentic embodiment of state, as its faithful vanguard, but who nevertheless exhibit contradictory sets of relations to the state. Consider, for example, the Independence Day of 2011, a day with deep political and religious meanings.

Celebrating Independence Day

Monday, May 9, 2011, 4-5th of Iyar, 5771

About two thousand people gathered at the grounds behind the settlement's new synagogue. Light projectors covered the synagogue's limestone in a radiant blue cloak that was complimented by the white garments worn by the crowd, combining in a visual of the national colors of the Israel. Many of the attendees returned earlier from military cemeteries and commemoration ceremonies. It was twilight now, between Israel's Memorial Day and Independence Day, and the Israeli flag was still waving at half-mast.

The declaration of Israel's independence occurred one day after the fall of Gush Etzion on May 14, 1948. The Hebrew date of Gush Etzion's destruction marks Israel's Memorial Day, which is immediately followed by Independence Day.[10] This ceremony was therefore an event of great political and religious importance. It commemorated and celebrated the fall and the return to Gush Etzion and the establishment of the Israeli state, the "first flowering of redemption." Yet, this event also exhibited a rather inconsistent set of relations to the state. The state was celebrated, and this was clearly a form of self-celebration, but one that was also included a valorization of settlement acts that were carried out against the authority of the state. In addition, the ceremony entailed performances that exhibited a deep yearning for peace, a yearning that is intimately tied to the goal of redemption, but appears to be disconnected from the impact of settlement realities upon the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

[10] The Israeli Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day occurs a week after the end of Passover, the Jewish holiday that recounts the miraculous release of ancient Israelites from bondage in the land of Egypt and their transformation into a nation. The Israeli Memorial Day occurs a week after Holocaust Day, and its end marks the beginning of Israel's Day of Independence. This continuum of events creates a national narrative that begins with Biblical enslavement and redemption, skips over more than 2,000 years of Galut, leads to the Holocaust as a tragic conclusion of life in exile, continues to the heroic sacrifices of Zionist fighters and culminates with Jewish independence in the form of the Israeli State, the political epitome of Jewish salvation.

The two presenters stood on top of a stone stage, behind wooden podiums decorated with long Israeli flags. One was an older man in his early sixties, clean shaven with silvery glasses and curly grey hair. The second was a local high school student of Ethiopian descent, with long black locks that fell from a knot at the back of her head and rested below her shoulders. The presenters stared intently at the white sheets of papers in front of them as if avoiding the sight of the rather impolite crowd would muffle their disrespectful sounds of continuous chatter. "We stand here at this hour of twilight, between Memorial Day and the 63rd Independence Day of the state of Israel," declared the older presenter while raising in front of his face his white sheet of paper as if to block the vista in front of him. Perhaps he was simply shortsighted. Kids shouted, parents talked and people moved around, sometimes crossing in front of the main stage, which was only the height of three low, stone stairs. "We bring into Independence Day a small dash of sorrow from Memorial Day, the day of the sorrowful road to independence." A young teenager by my side laughed out loud. He was having an excited conversation with his friends. They were not paying much attention to the event even though they would later participate with dozens more teenagers in an elaborate dance performance involving the waving of Israeli flags.

"The day of bereavement pathways and the marble gravestones of the military cemeteries," continued the older presenter. The younger presenter momentarily lifted her head from the podium only to quickly lower it back to its former position as an inappropriate smile of embarrassment appeared on her face. "It is one day of the year in which memory is draped in the sounds of the siren,[11] which strikes every ear. And, for the

[11] During the two Israeli national days of commemoration -- "Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day" and Memorial Day -- loud sirens howl, traffic and pedestrian movement stop and people stand up in somber

rest of the days of the year, it resonates in the chambers of the heart." He concluded his section and the younger presenter read: "The relation between war, memory and song is an ancient one." She then went on to introduce a musical performance by local teenagers. The ceremony continued with more musical and theatrical performances; poems were read; beacons where lit; the names "parents," "brothers," and "sons" of the settlement "who gave their life for the sanctity of God, People and land," were screened on the synagogue's wall; the *Yizkor* Prayer (Hebrew: יזכור, lit. remembrance) was read[12]; a short religious sermon was delivered; and then it was finally time to raise the flag and usher in Israel's Independence Day.

Three women who immigrated from Peru, Latvia and France, all residents of Giv'at Hachish, Alon Shvut's little outpost, were called to raise the flag. The crowd stood up, the drums rolled loud and the trumpet blew the ceremonial tune along with a few discordant notes. Yet, somehow, by the time the ceremonious melody reached its conclusion, the flag was still stuck at half-mast. Tense silence engulfed the crowd. A teenage boy was sent to help. The flag was raised slightly, but then it was again lowered further down. Some people began to whisper anxiously. A man next to me uttered a worried "no!" Again, the flag was raised a bit higher, and the crowd reacted with sporadic handclapping and a few yells of encouragement. The flag, however, was

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silence. The siren lasts for a minute during Memorial Day and for two minutes during "Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day."

[12] *Yizkor* is one of the most famous prayers, known to both secular and religious Israelis due to its central role in national commemoration ceremonies. This prayer requests God to remember the dead, for human life and memory are finite while God is eternal. It has various versions, some, for example, begin with "May Am Israel remember […]" instead of "May God remember […]" The question of whether to include God in official state ceremonies has been a source of contention between secular and religious Israelis. The one cited at this ceremony began with God, but then also included "may Am Israel remember" to combine both religious and secular versions. It did, however, end with a request from God to end war and bloodshed, and for the nations of the world to realize that the truth is that Jewish people have not come to this world to increase enmity, conflict, crisis and jealousy, but only to know and recognize the eternal God.

exceptionally stubborn and refused to reach the top of the mast. Realizing this may take a while, the older presenter requested the crowd to sit down and then mused somewhat cynically: "we hope that by the end of the ceremony we will be able to find a person who can raise the flag to the top of the mast. The mast has become taller over the year, and we continue [with the ceremony]."

Figure 16: Celebrating Independence Day 2011. Photo by Author.

The presenters moved on, and a high school senior then took the podium and gave a short sermon: "… on the one hand, we thank God for all the miracles he did and does for us… nothing is taken for granted. On the other hand, we must understand that we are still at the beginning of the road … we must pray and hope… for complete redemption." Next came the moment many in the audience were eagerly awaiting: a mass performance of about a hundred of Alon Shvut's kindergartners. It was a sweet and heartwarming sight. The little ones sang in squeaky voices and danced jovially to the sounds of "I Was Born for Peace," a classic Israeli children's tune about the fundamental yearning for

peace, a yearning that is nonetheless passive in its nature, as if peace is something you wait for to happen rather than something you accomplish:

> *"I was born into the melodies*
> *and into the songs of all the states*
> *born to the language and also the place*
> *to the few and the many that shall reach a hand for peace.*
> *I was born for peace, may it come*
> *I was born for peace may it arrive*
> *I was born for peace may it appear*
> *I want, I already want to be within it."*

The crowd was exuberant as another young generation of Israelis was being socialized into a vision of peace that suppresses Israel's complicity in enabling its absence.

After the little ones finished their performance, it was time for a short film about the history of Giv'at Hachish. It began with the ancient history of the place and moved on to describe the battles of 1948, the fall of Gush Etzion and its conquest in 1967. It then moved to 1998 and the establishment of the outpost. A member of Alon Shvut who was involved in the establishment of the outpost expounded upon the contemporary history of Giv'at Hachish: "… almost 13 years ago, Netanyahu is at Wye River Plantation for deliberation over Oslo B,[13] Zambish[14] calls and says, if you do not ascend now… on Sunday the Americans will assess the situation with satellite imagery. This is the timetable…. Our goal," continued the committee member, "was to ascend at the end of the Shabbat… this was the last date, and we planned everything to the little details,

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[13] The Wye Plantation is the US site of 1998 peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority set to transfer Palestinian responsibility and control over territories in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

[14] Zambish is the legendary chief member of Amana (Hebrew: אמנה. Lit, treaty/covenant), an organization that was founded in 1978 by Gush Emunim "with the primary goal of developing communities in Judea, Samaria, The Golan Heights, The Galilee, The Negev and Gush Katif. This goal includes not only the establishment of communities and their supportive industries and social services but their continued maintenance and development" (Amana 2014).

everything was ready already on Friday, plumbing, electricity, … the people who were to come at the end of Shabbat to fix the fence, the families… at the end of Shabbat we operated the entire system."

In the background, old film footage depicted the overnight covert construction of Zionist settlements during the pre-state era, as if the establishment of Giv'at Hachish against the authority of the state paralleled the pre-state settlement activity that was carried out in opposition to the British rule of the land. "We even checked when the moon sets so we could work in darkness." He then went on to describe the sophistry of the operation, the green and red stick-lights, the white marking ribbons, the precision and complete planning of it all. "… by three, four in the morning, everything was ready… at four o'clock in the morning we called the families … On Sunday, until the military woke up, after the Shabbat, by noon, one o'clock, they started to realize what was happening, but we were already in Hachish." "They" are the military and the Israeli state authorities, and "we" is the settlers who established the outposts. *Fait accompli*, facts on the grounds: this is how you make history, and this is how many settlements were established; they were first illegal, to be later legalized by the state.

The film continued with the nostalgic tales of the local residents. The beauty of the place, the challenging conditions of underdevelopment, the pioneering spirit, how the place slowly grew and developed: the paved road, more trailers, and more territory. Then, Davidi Perl (the son of Rabbi Perl, the settlement Rabbi), who would later rise in political power to become the head of Gush Etzion's Regional Council, elaborated upon the efforts to expand Giv'at Hachish: "… we added to the five originals more than thirty caravans… we worked mostly at night, a month, two, three months, night after night…

there was police here, which searched for us, along with the military… sometimes they arrested, sometimes they stopped the work, but we persisted until one bright morning there were about 40 trailers on the hill here, and the rest is history, look what we have here today." Clearly, Davidi Pearl felt very comfortable admitting that the outpost was established under the cover of darkness and in opposition to the rule of the state. In fact, he took pride in it, and this was apparently a tale suitable for an Independence Day ceremony.

The film concluded with the narrator blessing the state and the people of Alon Shvut. Residents of Giv'at Hachish and their kids joined him. An older woman spoke in Spanish: "…I yearn that everyone will have the strength of 1948 during the establishment of the state, we must continue with this strength so that Alon Shvut will grow and strengthen as a settlement and will defend the state of Israel…" Little kids wished everyone a "happy holiday," waved little Israeli flags, and the film was over. The ceremony continued for another 25 minutes or so, with more songs and dances, including a short performance by the pupils of *Shalva*, the Association for Mentally & Physically Challenged Children, which is located in Alon Shvut, along with another performance that revolved around a settler dressed as Theodor Herzl. The national anthem was sang, numerous Israeli flags were waved, some with orange ribbons around their poles in commemoration of Gush Katif. Finally, the presenter wished "complete redemption and happy holiday," and it all ended with a short firework display.

After the ceremony was over, I went to the synagogue and prayed the *arvit*[15] with Rabbi Cohen and his son. It was an especially melodic and festive service. We said

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[15] The *arvit* (Hebrew: ערבית. Lit, of the evening), also known as *ma'ariv* (Hebrew: מעריב), is the Jewish evening prayer. It was my favorite prayer of the day. It is shorter than the Morning Prayer, the *shakharit*

Hallel and blessed the state, "the first flowering of redemption," and sang from Psalms 118, "This is the day that the Lord has made, let us exult and rejoice on it." The shofar was blown, we joyously chanted "for next year, in Jerusalem, the rebuilt," expressing the deep desire for the rebuilding of the Holy Temple, sometime in the future, when the time is right. We also sang to the tune of the national anthem the Song of the Ascent (Hebrew: שיר המעלות), which speaks of the Messiah and concludes with the most famous of Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Faith: "I believe with a full heart in the coming of the Messiah, and even though he may tarry, I will wait for him on any day that he may come."

Lingering Questions

Two pressing questions lingered in my mind after Independence Day. How can the state be valorized but its authority disregarded as exemplified by the film about Giv'at Hachish? And, how can the yearning for peace occupy such a central role without being

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(Hebrew: שחרית, lit. of the morning), and unlike the *mincha* (Hebrew: מינחה. lit. present), the afternoon service, which may offer spiritual solace in the midst of a working day, it signaled for me the approaching end of another long day. Whereas the shakharit can last almost an hour, the mincha and arvit are shorter, lasting about 15 minutes and even less. On Mondays and Thursdays, the shakharit also includes a small section of the Torah portion of the week. The old sages did not want Jews to go for three days without hearing a section from the Torah and divided it into 54 weekly portions of various lengths, which are further divided into seven sections.

The Torah is also read on the Sabbath and Holidays. Its removal from the Ark is considered to be the highlight of the morning service. Written in a laborious process by hand, and as only document that contains God's words alone, the Torah is the holiest object in Judaism. When the Torah is taken out, the congregation sings "for from Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the word of God from Jerusalem" (Isiah 2:3). It is carried around the synagogue by the person who leads the service, and the congregants stand and kiss the Torah, usually indirectly with the hands. The sacredness of the event does not prevent some people from engaging in small talks, but this usually occurs at the back of the synagogue. I would sit at the back of the synagogue in the old neighborhood, the only place where seats were not allocated in advance, at the beginning of the year. Often times, because of constant murmurings, I could hardly hear the weekly sermon that discusses a topic from the weekly Torah portion and often connects it to contemporary events. I guess some of the sermons were a bit repetitive for more than a few congregants. Moreover, there are those who are gifted with oratory skills and those who are not. "This is the best time to catch a nap," remarked Rabbi Cohen.

translated into critical self-questioning of the role of the settlement movement in the absence of peace?

"I did not like the film," one resident told me (05/12/2011), "I don't like it when people take the law into their own hands. I believe in democracy. We have to act in accordance with the law." "What are you going to do about it?" I asked. "I do not know," he replied, "there is nothing much I can do. These are not the values I teach my kids … It is just a film at the end of the day. I think most people here are law-abiding citizens." I asked Rabbi Cohen about the film. "I thought it was actually quite funny. You shouldn't take it too seriously. It contained many inside jokes," he explained, insinuating I lacked the necessary knowledge to pass judgment on this issue. Rabbi Cohen is right: the film was also an internal critique, addressed by the people of Giv'at Hachish to their larger and well-to-do patron settlement, which has lost its pioneering spirit to a bourgeoisie sense of contentment.[16] "But don't you think the humorous elements of the film operate to legitimize illegal actions against the state?" I responded. "I did not think about it in this way," was his answer. "There may be something in what you say." Rabbi Cohen is a knowledgeable man, but like many people in Alon Shvut, his knowledge somehow finds its limits when it comes to the question of law in these parts of the Holy Land.

In general, the people of Alon Shvut are educated and well versed in current aspects of Israeli life. Their behavior differs from the fundamentalist stigma that is often

[16] Some of the internal jokes in the film pertain, for example, to the problem of stray dogs. Residents of Alon Shvut complain about the number of stray dogs that wander around Giv'at Hachish. Some have even made it all the way to the center of Alon Shvut, where they leave their smelly marks, bark at kids, chase people, and there have even been a few cases of dogs attacking local residents. The settlement email lists prohibit political discussions, but dogs have become a hot political issue in Alon Shvut, with dog lovers and those who fear them unleashing angry emails at each other, driving neighbors apart and creating unexpected alliances. Some publicly went against the demonization of the entire dog population, while others bemoaned the legal limits to shooting dogs. The controversy reached the level of the settlement rabbis and the regional council. Stray dogs, however, remain a serious, unresolved problem to this day.

attached to settlers. Far from rejecting modernity, they embrace and integrate it in into their daily lives and belief system. Many are not afraid to consume non-religious, contemporary cultural products, yet they do so with a more conscious, critical eye toward the influence of liberal and secular worldviews. True, as discussed in the former chapter, there is a stronger push within the settlement, especially from residents of the new neighborhood, to better demarcate secular and religious aspects of life, especially when it comes to norms of modesty and proper conduct between males and females, sometimes even at the kindergarten age. Still, most houses host televisions sets and internet connections, and kids and teenagers follow secular popular culture, from American hip-hop to Israeli folk music. And as Rabbi Cohen illustrates, they do not shy away from employing secular techniques of knowledge for the examination of sacred texts. But, when it comes to tensions that arise between settlement acts and the authority of the state, they conveniently prefer not to know. Those who do know laws of the state and the land in these parts either ignore the problem of illegality or simply assume that the law is deficient, that it is politicized to fit the liberal and secular worldviews of those in positions of power, both inside and outside the boundaries of the state.

And what about peace, which is the one of the goals of the redemptive process? How, for example, can the people of Alon Shvut see themselves as agents of peace without being aware of their own role in preventing it from emerging? Clearly, the performance of "I Was Born For Peace" during the Independence Day ceremony was a denial of the perception of settlements as an obstacle to peace. They truly see themselves as peaceful people, who unlike a minority of radical settlers over there (see chapter six), not here, bear no hatred toward Palestinians. And even though many do fear Palestinians,

they believe they are being peaceful toward them nonetheless (the topic of the next chapter). As a case in point, Palestinians do enter the settlement boundaries and some even assist in its construction, but they think the opposite case would have likely resulted in a Palestinian attempt at their life. Many settlers yearn for peace, but perhaps just as Jews' deep messianic yearning throughout the ages resulted in an overwhelmingly passive approach toward the fulfillment of the messianic ideal, so, too, does the deep yearning for peace permit the perception of peace as an exalted ideal disconnected from reality.

The fact that peace is politically tied to the loss of land and home makes its realization less desirable, even though more than few people in Alon Shvut told me that they would leave their homes for peace, taking an ideological position far removed from the geopolitical reality of the place, which is set to remain part of Israel in any future agreement. And there is also the fear of peace: that it will bring more terror, an understandable concern indeed, along with the fear that peace will result in internal Jewish conflicts. As one of the more hawkish residents of Alon Shvut blatantly told me, "peace is our biggest danger. We need an outside threat, or we will crumble from the inside […] The Palestinians also need us to be their enemy. They are nothing without us." The yearning for peace may therefore signify the possibility of its renunciation, for while peace forms a cherished ideal, it also forms a dangerous condition better left symbolically present and politically unrealized.

The Middle East is changing fast, Arab regimes rise and fall, and with each passing day the settlements turn slowly into unmovable facts. Like other Israelis, many settlers believe the conflict with the Palestinians will continue for a long time, and that

the settlements, like the military, protect the rest of Israel from Palestinian violence. Some hope that Palestinians will eventually settle for limited political sovereignty in small territories and small geopolitical enclaves, and that most of the West Bank would be annexed to Israel. They believe that an increased Jewish population growth (through greater birth rate and immigration) along with decreased Palestinian population growth (through lower birth rate and emigration) will eventually solve the so-called demographic problem and permit the maintenance of a Jewish majority over the entire space of Israel/Palestine, with the exclusion of Gaza, for now. As far as they are concerned, this demographic trend, along with increased Palestinian personal rights and limited national rights, will permit Jewish control of land and enable Palestinians to live better off than most of the Arabs in the neighboring states. A smaller number (see chapter six) hopes that the Palestinians will either leave willingly or forcefully, like in 1948. [17]

And so, although influential rabbinical figures like Rabbi Lichtenstein, Rabbi Bin-Nun and the late Rabbi Amital have publically expressed their support for the two-state solution, the vast majority of people in Alon Shvut vote for political parties that oppose it (Knesset 2009, 2013). The realm of ideas, of theology, of philosophy, of leaders does not necessarily correspond to the experiences and actions of the more ordinary folks. It seems that for people in Alon Shvut, as in other settlements, the idea of losing Jewish majority or the damage to the democratic character of the state is not as threatening as the idea of a Palestinian state. The threat of the latter feels much more palpable, while the former prospects are already a regular part of their daily lives (see the next chapter), normalized and rationalized through the perception of themselves as a peaceful Jewish minority in

[17] These positions are not specific only to settlers, but also reflect those of the Israeli political Right-Wing, which supports the settlement enterprise and tends to oppose the idea of a Palestinian state.

the midst of a hostile Arab world, in Judea and Samaria and beyond. If only the Arabs could be as peaceful as they are.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the meanings of redemption and its relation to the state among Religious Zionists settlers and suggested they exist along two interrelated poles: instrumental and messianic. The intermingling of these two positions results in a complicated and sometimes contradictory set of relations to the state. For example, on the one hand, the state is understood as "the first flowering of redemption," an object of sanctification and admiration. On the other hand, the failure of the state to fulfil its redemptive function may allow for actions that undermine its authority. As the film about Giv'at Hachish demonstrates, when the state places obstacles to the construction of settlements, when the state limits the expansion of Jewish sovereignty, it becomes permissible to undermine the rule of its law. Therefore, Davidi Perl, who is a relatively high-ranking official of the state, saw no problem in publicly admitting he took part in the construction of Giv'at Hachish in opposition to the actions of the Israeli security forces. After all, as discussed in the introduction, this is how many settlements began: they were first illegal only to be legalized later by the state.

The testimony of Davidi Perl reflects the broader attitude of many settlers. They are not simply an internal part of the state; they are the state, and they shape it in their own image. The celebration of the state is also a form of self-glorification, and when the state fails to fulfil its functional ideals, actions can be taken to correct its misguided path and allow the realization of its redemptive goal. Nevertheless, these corrections to the

path of the state, these adjustments on the road to complete redemption, can only occur little by little, gently, never through big jumps, never through messianic acts of historical rupture that may endanger the stability of the state. This attitude reflects a denial of the ways in which the settlements entangle Israel in a military occupation that endangers the maintenance of a Jewish majority in a democratic state. Within Alon Shvut, this denial of the harmful impact of the settlements corresponds to settlers' disavowal of their own messianism. After all, as an emblem of the successful institutionalization of religiously motivated settlement life, Alon Shvut materializes the normalization of messianism: the normalization of the religiously informed historical revolution that settlements brought about to Israeli society and the region. However, settlers in Alon Shvut value Judaism as a religion of reason and are invested in being respected citizens of the state. Some even do not consider themselves to be settlers (*mitnachlim*) at all. Therefore, they often disassociate themselves from what they perceive to be the mystical and irrational tendencies of other settlers. As Rabbi Cohen said, he is not messianic, but he believes in redemption.

Like people in Alon Shvut, many Religious Zionist settlers do not understand themselves as messianic in the sense that outsiders often perceive them. That is, they do believe in the Messiah, but they no longer seek a sudden historical revolution or expect wondrous changes in the fabric of reality. The Zionist revolution of Judaism that facilitated the rise of Religious Zionism is already a historical fact. Likewise, the messianic passion of Gush Emunim is long gone by now, replaced by the comforts of bourgeoisie life and a sense of security about the future.[18] In practice, then, the

[18] In chapter six I discuss settlements that exist outside settlements blocks, where fear of future evacuation is a prominent element of their lives.

messianism of settlers in Alon Shvut can be understood as messianism turned ordinary, contented, self-assured and somewhat unaware of itself; a far cry from the messianic excitement of Gush Emunim. Yet, this is how a successful revolution looks like and this is how redemption looks like for those settlers who settled down, for redemption is a divine process that corresponds to the laws of nature and human action, and, one small step at a time, it shall be eventually completed, for the journey has already began.

Hanan Porat, the embodiment of the ideal settler, believed that more settlements would bring redemption and thus peace, for in creating unchangeable facts on the ground, they would bring forth a final recognition of the undeniable sacred bond between People and land, a recognition of spiritual merits that would usher in new political possibilities. In his last television interview (Channel One 2011), he was asked, "How do you want Hanan Porat to be remembered?" "I wanted to be good," he confessed, "I wanted to be good. What else is there to say?" Like him, like most of us, settlers see themselves as good people, or at least try to be good. However, in contrast to those who worry about the future of Israel and fear that the time for peace with Palestinians is running out, they believe that time is on their side. The road to redemption may follow a very difficult path, but the eternal nation does not fear a long road.

Chapter 4

"Invisible Arabs": Seeing Palestinians without Seeing Them

Introduction

Alon Shvut is surrounded by fences of varying levels of technological sophistication. The edges of the new neighborhoods are marked by tall fences with hard metal wire. The old neighborhood used to be surrounded by a simple chain link fence made from a soft metal that can be bent or ripped without much effort. The fence next to my unit indeed had a large hole in it. When I asked Mordechai if he was not troubled by this security breach he explained that the local kids use it as a shortcut, and besides, security forces patrol the perimeter at night, and the entire perimeter of the settlement is covered by cameras with infrared capabilities. Their house had been broken into four times, but not since the security cameras were installed a couple of years ago. "The Palestinians know," I was told. The old fence was eventually replaced by a newer one, and the hole no longer exists.

Figure 17: The Old Fence and the Hole. Photo by author.

There are two main entrances to the settlement, the “old” and the “new.” Both host an electric gate and a security booth with an armed guard who operates the gate and supervises the flow of people and vehicles. The gates are closed during Shabbat and High Holidays. During these sacred days, there is no entering or leaving by car; no one drives inside the settlement except for emergency vehicles or in emergency situations. On all other days, early in the morning, dozens of Palestinian workers wait outside the gates, where local contractors collect their identification cards and leave them in the hands of the security guard. They get their identification cards back when leaving the settlement. Most of these laborers work construction jobs and, according to the settlement’s regulation, must be constantly supervised by an armed guard. These armed guards tend to be local settlers looking for extra income. They usually sit on a chair outside the construction site, reading a book or solving crossword puzzles, without paying much attention to the Palestinian workers.

With unemployment levels reaching almost 25% in the West Bank, those few Palestinians who work at settlements or Israeli industrial zones located beyond the Green Line are considered to be privileged, even though the Palestinian Authority made it a crime to work in the settlements -- a symbolic act, as the law has not been enforced. At least 20,000 Palestinians are employed by Israelis in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and, at least in theory, they are entitled to the benefits of Israeli labor laws and receive much higher wages than those paid by Palestinian employers (Abdalla 2014).

Several Palestinians are regular workers in Alon Shvut. Almost all of them come from Khirbet Zakariyya, a nearby Palestinian village. They tend to work inside the Yeshiva, in maintenance jobs. There are also a couple of Palestinian workers from the

same village at the local grocery store. These regular laborers do not go through the same security procedures as the rest of the Palestinian laborers and are not supervised by armed guards. They are treated respectfully by their employers and customers and feel quite confident about their status. On Fridays, before the Shabbat, when they are excited about the approaching day off from work, and as longer lines form by the cash registers, they can be heard joking and bantering with the customers. They even poke fun at Orthodox modesty norms -- "please, be orderly, a separate line for women and a separate line for men!" – or make politically tinged jokes using puns -- "those on the Left will benefit from faster service." The customers seem to enjoy their humor.

Generally speaking, the people of Alon Shvut perceive themselves as rational and liberal people and pride themselves on their good relationships with Palestinians, especially those from Khirbeit Zakariyya. They use these relationships as an example of coexistence between settlers and Palestinians, a coexistence, however, that is predicated upon the willingness of Palestinians to acknowledge the right of Jews to live on this land. Thus, this coexistence is more imagined then real. For example, only a very small portion of the settlement's residents has ever been inside Khirbeit Zakariyya, even though it is located fewer than 500 meters from the northern edge of the settlement. Some do not even know that Khirbeit Zakariyya is the name of the nearby Palestinian village. Settlers do come into regular daily contact with Palestinians at a much higher frequency than the vast majority of Jewish Israelis. This contact occurs inside settlements, on the roads, especially on Highway 60, at the gas station, the garage, or at one of the new supermarkets that services settlers and Palestinians alike. However, settlers generally do not make a special effort to reach out to Palestinians. In Alon Shvut, as in other

settlements, they remain aloof from the Palestinian plight and live their lives mostly disconnected from the violent realities of the occupation outside the settlement boundaries, unless these involve injury to or the loss of Jewish lives.

This chapter examines settlers' perceptions of Palestinians.[1] I delve into the impact of a new supermarket where settlers and Palestinians shop side by side. The opening of the supermarket resulted in increased settler demand for Arabic language courses and strengthened their general perception that coexistence is becoming a reality. At the same time, the increased presence of Palestinians and the fear of Jewish-Arab romantic relationships resulted in rabbinical opposition to the employment of Palestinians at the supermarket. In order to show how Palestinians remain invisible to most settlers, I examine an internal settler debate that emerged as a result of the new supermarket and then depict some of the occupation realities that exist immediately outside the settlement bounds but remain unnoticed by most settlers. To demonstrate the latter point, I examine the reactions of a few settlers who did become aware of Palestinian hardships and argue that Palestinians are not really "seen" by most settlers. Palestinians remain at the fringes of settler consciousness, always present as a natural part of the local landscape, but not fully recognized as human beings deserving the same care and political rights enjoyed by settlers. This chapter therefore probes the tensions between the visible and the invisible (see, for example, Bishara 2015; Feldman 2008; Herzfeld 2014; Latour 2010; Martin Carter 2010; Scott 1998) and shows how Palestinians are rendered invisible by settlers as well as how this invisibility is undermined by changing realities that bring settlers and Palestinian into closer contact.

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[1] I discuss here mainly settlers of Gush Etzion, especially Alon Shvut and Kfar Etzion, and with the exception of the settlement of Bat-Ayin. In Chapter 6 I explore the more hostile attitudes toward Palestinians that characterize the population of the more isolated settlements of the North-East West Bank.

The Opening of the Rami-Levi Supermarket

Just one day after I arrived in Alon Shvut, a large supermarket opened at the retail center located at the Gush Etzion junction. This supermarket is part of a chain renowned in Israel for its cheap prices and quality products, and is named after the owner of the chain, Rami Levi. Not just a plain indicator of capitalism and progress, the opening of Rami-Levi signified the transformation of Gush Etzion into an urban center equal in status to those located on the other side of the Green Line, further normalizing the daily life of Jews living amidst hundreds of thousands of stateless Palestinians. While acknowledging the negative financial impact of the supermarket upon local grocery stores, many settlers expressed great delight in the opportunity to enjoy a Jerusalem-type shopping experience right outside their settlements' electronic gates.

However, most settlers did not expect the large Palestinian presence at the supermarket and its immediate surroundings. As Yifat told me (07/05/2010),

> This is very unexpected, seeing all these Arabs. Don't get me wrong, we are used to shopping with Arabs, we always go to the supermarket in Jerusalem, or the Jerusalem mall, where many Arabs hang out. But these are Israeli Arabs. Over here it is very different. They are not Israeli, and all of a sudden there are many of them here. No security, no checkpoints. It came out of nowhere…. but don't get me wrong, I think this is a good thing, just so unexpected.

Rami-Levi employs dozens of Palestinian workers. While many of these workers engage in manual labor --cleaning, unloading, stocking, packing and organizing products – others handle the cash registers, sell bakery goods and even man the butcher shop. The latter position is far from being obvious. Too many past encounters between armed Jewish settlers and Palestinians holding butcher knives have ended with the shedding of human blood rather than a kosher, if bloody, commercial transaction. On top of that, Palestinians come to shop at the supermarket from the Bethlehem area in the North all the

way to the Hebron area in the South. The supermarket's parking lot offers a palette of car license plates: black for Israeli military; red for Israeli police; yellow for Israeli cars; white for those issued by the Palestinian Authority; and green for Palestinian public vehicles.

When the store first opened, most of the Palestinian shoppers were quite wealthy, a fact easily discernible from their luxury cars. Now, more "middle class" Palestinians experience the joys of shopping with Jews at a large modern supermarket. Old models of Citroen, Peugeot and Subaru join the others at the parking lot. Many Palestinian shoppers dress up for the occasion. Men sometimes wear nice suits and strong colognes, and women wearing hijabs tend to cover their exposed face with a thick layer of very bright makeup. Excitement and even concern on the faces of certain shoppers identify them as first-timers. On the other hand, I have also seen some poor Palestinian workers waiting outside, dressed in dirty working clothes and stuffed into a beat-up minivan.

The supermarket is marked as a Jewish space, with the only bilingual Arabic-Hebrew sign appearing next to the fast-lane: "no more than ten items." Order must be preserved and friction reduced. Product descriptions appear only in Hebrew and images of the Western Wall and Jerusalem decorate the store's high walls, along with quotations from Psalms (137:5-6): "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither; let my tongue stick to my palate if I cease to think of you, if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory even at my happiest hour." These language and cultural barriers, however, do not prevent Palestinians from shopping at the market. "The place is very beautiful and has great a selection of products," one Palestinian told me, "but it is more expensive than our stores."

"So why do so many Palestinians shop there?" "To tell you the truth, I think it is simply because they want to live like settlers."

Generally, settlers were quite happy and proud of this new development. Many do not believe in nor desire the geopolitical demarcation of the Holy Land and this supermarket clearly exemplifies the possibility of coexistence. Economic freedom and growth acquire a messianic-like aura, possessing the revolutionary power to finally bring about peace. But there is also the issue of security. "There is no way I am going to shop there; I am not that crazy. You just wait until the first terror attack," I was told by one settler. "But don't you think that the Palestinian shoppers act as a human shield, ensuring that no attack will occur there?" I asked. The response was quick and decisive. "Don't be silly, the better reason for an attack there. The Hamas and the Islamic Jihad do not want Muslims and Jews shopping together."

Opposition to the supermarket also came from Rabbi Perl, the Chief Rabbi of Alon Shvut and Gush Etzion[2], who expressed concern about "the matter of assimilation": "The place employs Arabs and Jews together and relations have been established lately between men and women. The place should pay slightly higher salaries and hire Jewish workers [only]" (Baruch 2010). Assimilation is a major concern within Judaism. Judaism is an exclusive religion that safeguards its boundaries and does not easily welcome outsiders into its ranks. This sense of exclusiveness, combined with the notion of chosenness, of being God's chosen people, has contributed throughout the ages to the Jewish problem of difference, as well as anti-Semitism. The standards for *giyur* (Hebrew:

[2] This official title means he is in charge of a wide range of local issues such as signing marriage certificates, attending weddings and funerals, giving Torah lessons on Shabbat and holidays or providing religious consultation on personal matters. This status, however, reflects political power rather than religious authority.

גיור), conversion to Judaism, are a topic of intense religious and political debate in Israel. Among the Orthodox population, Religious Zionists, for the most part, advocate more lenient standards, while the ultra-Orthodox insist on highly stringent standards. Both of these groups ground their arguments in the halakha.

Although the fear of assimilation is understandable, I personally found Rabbi Perl's statement to be problematic and even offensive: I felt as if I were being discriminated against just because I was a Jewish male. When I watched Arab women shop at the supermarket my mind was often flooded with forbidden thoughts. Why is it that only Jewish women are suspected of being sexually attracted to the enemy? And what does Rabbi Perl's warning reveal about Jewish masculinity? If Jewish women would rather "establish relations" with poor and stateless Palestinian workers instead of settlers, there must be some serious failures in the religious educational system. And what about the two Palestinians who work at Alon Shvut's grocery store? The Rabbi buys there, too. He must have seen them. After all, the store is rather small, and they are rather big. Perhaps he was just trying to help small businesses?

I asked Rabbi Cohen and Yifat about Rabbi Perl's statement (07/08/2010). They suggested he might be trying to protect local businesses, but then Yifat said, "This is a real problem. I already saw this happening yesterday, Arab workers hitting on Jewish women." I pressed further, "but why not worry about Jewish males hitting on Arab women?" "Because Arab women will not hit on Jewish men, and Jewish men will not flirt with an Arab woman," she explained. "For an Arab man to go out with a Jewish woman is a move up," added Rabbi Cohen, "and Arab women remain absent from the public sphere. They veil, they lack education, and they definitely do not contact Jewish

men." I persisted, "but what does it say about Jewish masculinity if those who received traditional upbringing prefer to go out with an Arab man?" "They are troubled girls," I was told by Yifat, "many of them come from a difficult background, and the Arab men are older and experienced in these things."

It is permissible for Muslims to marry Jewish women, and some of my Palestinian interlocutors told me proudly about Jewish women who married Palestinians and now live in their villages. Nonetheless, Arab-Jewish couples constitute a tiny fraction of Jewish intermarriage cases. About one million immigrants from the Former Soviet Union arrived in Israel since the late 1980s. More than 300,000 of them are non-Jews according to the state-endorsed Orthodox standards, a status that results in numerous cases of Jewish intermarriage and is often considered to be a serious demographic problem in light of the state efforts to maintain a Jewish majority vis-a-vis the Palestinian population (Kravel-Tovi 2014). Rabbi Perl's warning points not only to Jewish fears of assimilation through intermarriage, but also to anxieties about the misplaced presence of Palestinians. They appeared all of a sudden in a place where they do not belong.

"This is just plain nonsense," remarked Sarah when I told her about Rabbi Perl's statement (07/05/2010). "Doesn't he have better things to complain about?" She and Mordechai were enthusiastic about shopping with Palestinians. "This is an opportunity to show those Leftists how settlers and Arabs get along," contended Mordechai, highlighting the essential role of the Israeli political Left as the internal Israeli challengers to settlers. He then shared a recent shopping experience: "I saw an Arab woman going around with two *Challah* breads, I asked her 'what is this for?' She did not

understand me, so I asked her husband and he said, 'well of course, it is for the Shabbat!'"

"Will shopping bring about peaceful cohabitation?" "Just wait and see, it will get messy here soon, very soon." This was the baker's opinion. "Who will cause the troubles, Palestinians or Jews?" I inquired. "The settlers, the settlers." I could not determine if the baker was Jewish or not.

At the nearby junction, there was one demonstration of a few dozen Palestinians and peace activists against Rami-Levi as "the symbol of the occupation." There have also been a few cases of arguments involving pushing and shoving, but nothing more serious. And despite persistently vocal opposition, especially from Rabbi Perl, settlers and Palestinians continue to shop together. Quite interestingly, the increased contact between the two populations resulted in an increased desire by settlers to learn Arabic.

The Arabic Course

Alon Shvut's bulletin board is a relic from the golden age of pre-virtual communal intimacy. It is positioned right in front of the grocery store, at the center of the old neighborhood. Although the grocery store has suffered economically from the opening of Rami-Levi, the bulletin board stands strong against the forces of progress. Its plastic cover encases dozens of notices that reveal much about life in a religious community strained by the inherent social need to grow and expand. "Seasonal rainfall: 48%." "A Jewish meditation course for women." "Money was found outside my house and will be returned to the person who can state the exact amount." "Buy Green Heating

Oil and save money while saving the environment." "We are organizing a group for a discounted purchase of Glock 19C pistols. Good for small hands."

Four months after Rami-Levi opened, I noticed an advertisement about an Arabic language course in the settlement of Efrat. Riddled with spelling mistakes betraying the writer as a non-native Hebrew speaker, the advertisement was filled with tempting promises. An intimate learning environment, a strong emphasis on local Palestinian dialect, 30 academic hours, and an experienced teacher who designed this course especially for security and diplomatic personnel. Fast and pragmatic learning. The price was quite affordable, too. The prospects of studying Arabic with settlers excited me: I would get to expand local ties, immerse myself in new ethnographic experiences, and I could finally relearn Arabic, the first foreign language I studied and the first one I managed to unlearn.

The classroom turned out to be the living room of the person who posted the advertisement, a very nice fellow from South Africa. The environment was not as intimate as I had imagined, but quite inviting nonetheless. Covered by a large reddish fabric, three tables were joined to create a conference-like table large enough to sit ten people. A black mug filled with pencils was placed in the middle of the assembled furniture. A writing board was placed next to one table-end. At every session, the kitchen counters in the back were laid out with coffee, tea, juices, pretzels, and delicious chocolate biscuits, but these biscuits sadly disappeared halfway through the course.

Examining the white and blue binders containing the course material, I heard the very nice fellow from South Africa telling another settler, "since the opening of Rami-Levi many people ask me to start running Arabic courses." I wondered silently why

settlers were interested in learning Arabic. Does the demand for Arabic language courses have to do with security, with a desire to have a sense of control during precarious shopping? Did it signify a deep yearning for coexistence?

Ben, a tall muscular man, with long frizzy hair, thick beard and a large woolen kippah lives at a small settlement outpost. He has worked alongside many Palestinians. Together they excavated an archaeological site dating to an ancient period of Jewish sovereignty about 2,000 years ago. He enjoyed working with them and wanted to converse with them in their own language so that he would gain a better understanding of Palestinian life. Jonathan, a yeshiva student, regretted not being able to communicate with his Arab neighbors across the road. He believes that Israelis must learn Arabic if there is ever to be peace.

Lisa, a behavioral therapist who recently emigrated from the US, felt nervous sometimes. She wanted to know what they were talking about when she passed next to them in the grocery aisles. I suggested it would be wiser and easier to just learn how to scream "help me!" in Arabic; that way she could also be aided by good Palestinians in times of trouble. The teacher, who was not a settler like the rest of us, corrected me and informed us that if we are ever attacked by terrorists, the best verbal defense is the immediate and flawless citation of the Sura Al-Fatiha, the opening chapter of the Holy Quran.

Tovah, a petite woman in her mid-forties, is an artist and a mother of six. She paints pictures of large Palestinian trucks – the 18-wheelers. One time she painted an open field with many beautiful trucks. Suddenly she saw several Palestinian women running toward her, screaming at the top of their lungs, fists raised in anger. It turned out

that for some strange reason they thought she was painting maps of their land, planning to dispossess them. Tovah did not want to repeat that experience again. Yakir owns a gas station. He has employed Palestinians for more than two decades. Unlike the rest of us, he only enrolled to enrich his vocabulary and work on his grammar. I told my eight course-mates that I am an anthropologist studying settlers and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and that learning Arabic with them was a good professional move.

We did not only study spoken Arabic. We all functioned to one degree or another as Orientalists, enriching each other with our limited and biased knowledge of Arabic cultures, trying to understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the prism of the Arab language. Consider the following discussion (01/04/2011):

> Yakir: The difference between us and the Arabs, really, you see it every day, is the issue of patience. Look what happened to us in Egypt. They enslaved us for a long time, we had patience, no?
>
> Tovah: We waited for 400 years for salvation.
>
> Yakir: Yes, you understand? The Six Day War, we did it, but if we have war for sixty days, all of a sudden it becomes difficult for us. They think for a long term. He (the Palestinian) starts the (agricultural) terrace, he doesn't know when he will finish it, but he begins, everyday he adds one stone; his son will finish it for him. But we on the other hand (interrupted)
>
> Jonathan: Well, it is related to our exile.
>
> Yakir: Yes, I am sure of it.
>
> Jonathan: The difference has to do with the fact that we are a wandering nation, we cannot sit still (interrupted)
>
> Yakir: We wandered. Wandered.
>
> Tovah: They think in terms of hundreds and thousands of years.
>
> Assaf: But they moved a lot as well.
>
> Ben: You mean they were nomads? Not all of them were Bedouins.

Assaf: I mean recently too, among Palestinians, there was a massive exchange of population, there was the Naqba, ehh, people moved.

Jonathan: Ahh, the refugees?

Assaf: Yes, and (interrupted)

Yakir: You know how much they are connected to the land? They are willing to die for it.

Ben: Some people kept the keys of their old homes.

Assaf: But like the Palestinian *Sumud*,[3] we are doing this today, we are not moving, and the Palestinians, even if they do not have the power, they hold fast to the land, and we also have this, we are not moving, we hold to the land.

Teacher: *Sumud* is not precisely about holding fast to the land, it is about persistence, to hold on, to persist with strength, perseverance, not to fall down, not to surrender, to hold on forever […] It is more about time, it is about eternity, the root of the word, SMD, for example, is eternity, it also one of the names of God in Islam, who is eternal, it is more about time and less about place.

Assaf: And we have 'the eternal nation does not fear a long road.'

Lisa: But how many of us are really not afraid?

Assaf: Right.

Yakir: If the meaning of Sumud is eternity, this is worrying. They used to tell us in the military officers' school to take out a snorkel. Do you know why a snorkel?

Teacher: Because they will throw us to the sea?

Yakir: Yes, I mean, if someone throws you to the sea, you take out a snorkel, and after a week it will be over. I don't think though that this is what they mean.

Teacher: They mean not to surrender, that is what they mean. We don't feel it, but for them, IDF always applies pressure on them, they are constantly within (interrupted)

Yakir: We do feel it, when it is calm (interrupted)

Teacher: We don't feel it.

Yakir: Why not?

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[3] *Sumud*, steadfastness in Arabic, is a Palestinian ideology and political strategy that emerged as the result of the Israeli occupation: from the forces of oppression on the one hand, and resistance on the other.

Teacher: Because we are not there. When you are there you (interrupted)

Ben: We are there more than most people.

Yakir: When it is quiet, it means that IDF puts pressure on them, [so] you feel the calmness.

This short segment illustrates how the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is perceived by settlers as more than a conflict about territory. It is also a conflict about time, about the ability of the two nations to imagine and act toward a future that transcends the perceptual constraints of the present. From this temporal vantage point, which contracts the political realities of the present into a critical but passing occurrence within the long frame of Jewish history, the Palestinians are understood as the stronger side, yet only insofar as Israeli national resolve is hampered by the shallow historical consciousness and shortsightedness of those who oppose the settlement enterprise.[4]

The teacher became the representative of all Israeli non-settlers. He and the students conflicted over the meaning of the collective Israeli identity, each side claiming authority over the meaning of "we" and "us," over the proper ethical path for Israeli society and the causes of its internal discontent and existential insecurity. Irrespective of differences, the "we" and "us" were constructed against "them" and "they," against the Palestinians, who are perceived by settlers as immensely stronger than how they appear within a political context. Like the settlers, but unlike the impatient non-settler Israeli society, they also have time on their side, they too have eternity.

Throughout the course, an ambivalent set of relations to Palestinians was evident. Fear: because of national enmity and violence. From the Jewish perspective, Arabs, both

[4] This position is not unique to settlers alone but reflects the general attitude of the Israeli Right-Wing. The particularity of the settlers' political position stems from the daily experiences of increased contact with Palestinians compared to most Israelis, as well as from the role of Jewish tradition as a religious prism through which political realities are discerned and interpreted.

Muslim and Christian, appropriated Jewish history and its tenets of faith, subverted and reclaimed them as their own, denying in the process the sacred truth of the Jewish past and longed-for future. Attraction: because of spiritual and geographic feelings of kinship premised on a shared belief in the patriarchy of Abraham, the holiness of the Land, and God's oneness. Because Palestinians are believed to embody territorial knowledge that Jews aspire to regain after losing it two thousand years ago. Because on an individual level Palestinians are understood as noble savages with an unwavering sense of national cause, whereas Israelis are divided in their national hopes.

Ambivalences aside, everyone agreed that efforts must be made by settlers to form personal relations with Palestinians and that learning Arabic was a way of learning the language of the land and therefore connecting to its other inhabitants. Rami-Levi, more than anything else, incarnated for them the possibility of coexistence. It was "a beautiful thing," "a source of hope," and "peace made real." "Until some asshole will come and blow it up," said Yakir, "and it will happen eventually." I asked how coexistence can emerge when forces of separation operate on both sides. Many settlers want control over all of Eretz Israel while many Palestinians see settlers and the settlements as the metastasis that spreads over their land and slowly ruins their personal lives and national hopes. My favorite explanation came from Ben (01/04/2011): "you need to understand that people do not live within ideology all the time. Reality is the strongest force and sooner or later, people will have to acknowledge that no one is going to go anywhere, that we are destined to live together." Yakir disagreed: "Yes, but the reality is that we will be fighting each other for a long time."

In the final meeting (01/12/2011) we imitated an Arab celebration (*hafla*). Due to monetary and modesty restrictions, no belly dancers performed. Nonetheless, we were served coffee and tea in a traditional "made in china" ceramic set, and there was plenty of kosher baklava, knafeh and other Arabic sweets dripping with honey and sugar. Our teacher brought a small boombox, tambourines and a darbuka, and we sang Arabic songs over and over again. Reading from bi-lingual musical handouts, we sang out loud, enjoying the new aural flavors of Arabic music. The communal singing, the blasting boombox and the tambourines, combined with sugar overload, brought about in me an unexpected state of national pride. "I have an idea!" I announced with excitement, "Let's sing the Israeli national anthem in Arabic!" Not waiting to be led, I stood up, and clapping my hands I began singing the *Hatikva* (Hebrew: התקווה, lit. the Hope) in broken Arabic: "In the Jewish heart, a Jewish spirit still sings." Silence. I sat down as fast as I stood up.

The crowd's favorite was Dalida's "*Kilma Helwa*," popularly known as "*Helwa Ya Baladi*" (Beautiful, O country of mine)." Dalida, an Egyptian-born singer who spent most of her life away from Egypt was a musical revolutionary who managed to combine and oscillate along many genres of music. She suffered much heartbreak, and so did some of those who loved her. Her ex-husband and two former lovers committed suicide. In 1987 she took her own life as well. "Kilma Helwa" is about a lost lover, about Egypt, the most beautiful love, an impossible love. We all sang alongside Dalida: "my hope was always, my country, that one day I shall return to you, my country, and will stay by your side forever."

These were the days of the "Arab Spring," days of hopes and fears about geopolitical changes. The surrounding turmoil generally served to further engender Israeli perceptions of isolation and entrapment. In the words of Ehud Barak, the former Israeli prime minister and IDF Chief of Staff, many Israelis see themselves as living within "a villa in the jungle"—that irrespective of the occupation and internal tensions, Israel is a democratic island of stability and progress in a troubled and backward region. Yet, for people of faith, such geopolitical changes may carry spiritual meanings. As a member of the Yesha Council explained, using the classic messianic rhetoric of Gush Emunim, "The world around us is storming and raging, in such an accelerating rhythm of events, one year weighs as much as eternity. These signs clearly point out that final redemption is nearer then ever.... Each stone you build your house with, also builds the Holy Temple."[5]

Rabbi Menachem Froman, a settler known for his dovish opinions and relentless attempts at bringing peace to the region, had a different perspective on the revolutionary potential of the moment:

> We need to understand that we are part of the Middle-East, and all that is happening now, with People forcing their will on their governments, is a reflection of a mighty spirit of peace. And we too, in Israel and Palestine, can dictate the peaceful way to our political leaders. This thought is almost as preposterous as the thought about the Egyptian people toppling Mubarak.[6]

However, the possibility for a peaceful change that shall arrive from below, from the common people instead of politicians, is constantly undermined by fears, especially the fear of contact with the other, the Palestinian.

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[5] Gershon Mesika, at "The Settlement Vision First Conference," Yakir, 01/27/2011
[6] Rabbi Menachem Froman, at "Melodies of Peace – The Establishment of Eretz Shalom" Tel Aviv, 02/25/2011

An Exchange of Messages: Fears and Internal Discontents

The Arabic course ended, followed by another one, the Middle East remained politically unstable, and many settlers continued to get excited about Rami-Levi until, in July 2011, rumors spread about an affair between a Jewish cash-register worker and a Palestinian bagger. After the discovery of the affair, the Jewish cashier resigned and, according to rumors, the Palestinian worker fled to Jordan. But this was not the end of the public affair.

Rabbi Perl, who had warned of such relationships, was interviewed for the Israeli Channel 2 TV station (2011) and explained the dangers of inter-religious passion:

> You need to understand the method. There are cashiers, secretaries, they sit by the cash-register, behind them there are, ehhh, baggers. And these baggers sit on her tail, from behind…. So he brings her a present, they talk, he encourages her, suddenly there's a click. A relation of love is created and we know that love has no boundaries…. It is against the Torah…. We met with Rami Levi, I explained to him the issue…. I asked that there be no baggers together with the girls.... We must safeguard the sanctity of Am Israel….

Noah was upset by the rabbinical opposition to Rami-Levi and its Palestinian workers. He lives in a settlement outpost in Gush Etzion. He is a 40-year-old father of four and himself a child of the settlements, the son of parents who played an important role in the Jewish settlement of Hebron and its surrounding area. With an impressive big, bushy beard and a large, woolen kippah, he has the look of a stereotypical fundamentalist settler. However, rather than seeing the presence of Palestinians as a problem, Noah believes that the opposition to Rami-Levi is the external manifestation of Jewish insecurity. He wrote me a long email on this issue and its relation to the fear of assimilation and of contact with Palestinians:[7]

[7] This is an abbreviated version of the original personal email correspondence. 08/03/2011

> *…The fear of assimilation is a primordial gene and it is important to understand it since it remains hidden from the eye and the consciousness. It drives the wheels of the conflict, hostility and alienation, almost unnoticed, from "below"… A dear Jew, a smart student, told me a few weeks ago that the war between us and the Arabs must continue because it will prevent assimilation…*
>
> *The rabbinical reaction to the love story… was clearly led by fear. "To distance the Arab workers from the Jewish cashiers." Every Jew who keeps the laws of purity knows that this is indeed a solution, but a bad solution nonetheless, for distancing creates attraction and interest, distancing strengthens the eyes and the gaze. It is clear that distance does not provide a solution to a fundamental problem, because its root is fear, and is it difficult to exchange looks from afar? Is it difficult to exchange emails, phone numbers and facebook at the end of the working day? …*
>
> *So what is the cure? "Like cures like:" the strengthening of Jewish education, the empowerment of the Jewish identity and Jewish soul, which seeks warmth, and as HaRav Kook, his memory be blessed, said, "seeks the freedom to be religious." There are no helpful easy solutions in the form of geographic distancing. These may even worsen the situation.*

For a short while, just after the affair broke out, the Palestinian baggers disappeared after being replaced by kippah-wearing, Jewish, male baggers. However, Palestinians soon returned to man the strategic position, and some now operate the cash registers, too.

This, however, was not the end of it. Rabbi Perl's incessant resistance to the presence of Palestinians at Rami-Levi resulted in an exceptional public contestation of his authority. On the weekend after his interview was televised (08/05/2011), anonymous notes were hung on the signboard by the grocery and even within the synagogues. Their large and bold headline quoted Genesis 23:4, "**I am a resident alien among you**." The Hebrew words for 'resident alien' are *Ger* (Hebrew: גר, lit. alien/stranger) and *Toshav* (Hebrew: תושב, lit. resident). *Ger Toshav* denotes the halakhic status of a gentile who lives within Eretz Israel. The note commences with a personal tale of religious origin, which soon joins with the Biblical tale of national origin:

> *Ever since my soul has adhered to our sacred Torah, it revealed to me the grace which forms its law: it originated from Abraham the Hebrew, our great father, who stood at the entrance of the tent, in the heat of the day, and requests the Ger Toshav to lean beneath the shadow of the tree, a hospitality that acquitted the sons of his sons, who are marked by shyness, modesty, and above all, acts of loving kindness.*

The author of the note refers to an event from Genesis 18, during which Abraham proves to be hospitable to three strangers, angels according to Jewish tradition, and as a result, he and Sarah are blessed with a son, Isaac. The note continues,

> *The Torah should be worthy, for it teaches grace, that those who receive it would be people of grace and truth who endow the world with the most exalted blessing, which is Shalom, the name and signature of the Torah giver.*
>
> *This is the moral of the Torah* - ***You too must befriend the Ger, for you were Gerim*** *[plural of Ger] – only those who experienced on their flesh the hatred toward the Ger, the hostility toward the Ger, the contention of the Ger, can open up toward the love of the Ger, to solidarity with the stranger and the acceptance of the other. Ever since the days of Egypt, through the great and difficult exiles, the Jew has experienced in the flesh the fact of being a foreign object, Ger and not Toshav, the other deserving of ridicule, mark and humiliation.*

The command to befriend the Ger appears in Deuteronomy 10:19: "You too must befriend the Ger, for you were Gerim in the land of Egypt."

> ***You too must befriend the Ger, for you were Gerim*** *– and how wonderful it is to me, painfully wonderful, that upon our return to our land, the memory of our being Gerim and not Toshavim [plural of Toshav] has completely disappeared, our national experience as ridiculed strangers has completely disappeared. And instead of the memory that should have fostered love, came the power that has resulted in the tightening of the heart – just like Pharaoh during his days.*
>
> *For Gerim and strangers live among us, yes, this is a fact – we are no longer the stranger, but now it is the Arab, the Palestinian, the other, he is the Ger, thus the morality of the Torah commands us to remember* ***for you were Gerim****, and open up; and avoid the natural hatred of the stranger, and restrain the natural animosity to the other, and above all, to not fall to the entrapment of a tightened heart of the great ruler who dwells in the land - for whom its Gerim and Toshavim are slaves; when he desires he employs them and when he desires he lays them off even though they are blameless.*

Comparing settler rule over Palestinians to the cruel rule of Pharaoh over the Israelites, the author not only hints that the future of settlers might result in complete ruin, but also chastises them for failing to internalize the ethical essence of the Torah. The laws of the Torah instruct Jews to fulfill God's commandments in order to transcend natural human urges and ascend to higher spiritual heights, and therefore those who are unable to control their natural urges, those who are unable to overcome fear and hatred, fail in their Jewish task.

> *How painful it is, that those who carry the scepter of the Torah, who dwell upon the codes of Jewish Law, tighten their heart, dim their memory, and order with hubris-filled vanity upon the other, the Ger who lives among us, to pack its belongings as a public, and return to its 'residency area,' and there, only there, may the stranger earn a living, without the fear of desecrating our great and strong holy name.*

The note concludes in an even more specific tone that leaves no room to doubt it was addressing Rabbi Perl:

> *Written with pain following the "Da'at Torah" of the great Torah sages of Gush Etzion, on the laying off of the other workers, the strangers - the Arabs - from Rami-Levi -*
>
> ***When there is a desecration of God's name, the Rabbi is not paid respect.***
>
> *--Resident of the Gush for Thirty years.*

Da'at Torah (Hebrew: דעת תורה, lit, knowledge of the Torah) is a religious concept that authorizes rabbis, by virtue of their knowledge of the Torah, to rule upon extra-halachic matters affecting everyday life. It is a common practice within Haredi Judaism. The anonymous writer addressed Rabbi Perl's invocation of the Torah when calling for the firing of the Palestinian workers at Rami-Levi. This harsh public critique of Rabbi Perl transgressed communal norms that shield knowledge of internal divisions from outsiders.

Rabbi Perl did not remain silent though. He struck back with a note of his own:

"To the resident of the Gush for Thirty years" - who does not identify himself!

I read your words, and indeed I am ashamed that after thirty years in the Gush, a man stands and write words of contempt, and in the name of the Torah publicly falsifies the living words of God in public and dares to accuse us with "blasphemy," for which there is no remorse but in death, as it is said in the Gemara [yom 86] on "the sin of blasphemy!" Indeed, it is not customary to reply to anonymous letters, but also not to bestow respect upon these…

Rabbi Perl accuses the anonymous letter-writer of cowardice, the falsification of the Torah and cites the Gemara to illustrate that he was accused of a crime whose only expiation is death. Indeed, blasphemy is one of the worst sins, but Jewish tradition contains various positions on blasphemy, on its various forms and the question of repentance.

All of the quotes about the love of gerim do not pertain at all to our relations to Arabs, who are hostile toward us, and do not admit at all that they are living in our land, that we supposedly plundered it. Am Israel brought them all of modernity and advanced technology, from the flow of water to homes, to electric wires and modern agriculture, for we brought them up out of dirt. If you accuse us of hatred and the tightening of the heart for them – your words are empty. Your pain is phony from within, principally wrong. And it increases confrontation and hatred within our camp. (Ger toshav is a gentile who has accepted the Seven Noahide Laws out of faith in the Holy One, blessed be He, and we are ordered to accept him, on the condition that he does not support terrorists and terror and admits our ownership of the land).

Judaism is a religion of many laws. There are 613 laws in the Torah alone, and thousands more in the Oral Law. In Jewish tradition, non-Jews are bound by the Seven Noahide Laws, which are assumed to date to the time of Noah, the most righteous gentile. The Seven Noahide Laws set a religious standard by which the morality of non-Jews is assessed and contain six negative commands and a positive one: 1) no blasphemy, 2) no idolatry, 3) no illicit intercourse, 4) no murder or suicide, 5) no theft, 6) no eating of meat that was severed from a living

animal, and 7) the obligation to set up courts of law insuring social justice and the fulfillment of the other six laws. Nevertheless, each law has its own extensions and various interpretations, and therefore there are in practice more than seven laws that gentiles are expected to observe (Lichtenstein 1981).

According to the Halakha (b. avod 64b), a gentile can become a Ger Toshav upon fulfilling the Seven Noahide laws and accepting Jewish rule. A Ger Toshav lacks national rights but possesses the same personal rights as Jews. These days, some settlers believe that giving Ger Toshav status to Palestinians is the best solution to the conflict, after Israel annexes Judea and Samaria. Since as part of their Muslim faith most Palestinians already fulfill the Seven Noahide Laws, they only need to give up their national aspirations and accept Jewish rule in the land, and then they shall benefit from a Ger Toshav status. But, clearly, Palestinians will not erase their collective identity and give up their national aspirations, a reality which Rabbi Perl addressed along with an accusation of Palestinian violation of the murder prohibition.

> *As for the issue of employing those young ones, who knew about the relations between the daughter of Israel and their friend, and remained silent about it – should they be rewarded for it?! Would you give your daughter to the Arab out of your phony love of the Ger? We are trying to stand against this surge, which strikes us once in a while, in all of the land, and here you stand, no shame, and throw at us accusations of blasphemy. Shame on you! I am afraid that the publication of your letter hurts the entire public, and even more so, it desecrates the honor of all the dead of Gush Etzion from 1948 and onward, who fell as martyrs in Gush Etzion, the parents and grandparents of those who make a living working at the Yeshuvim.*[8]*And you continue living in this holy place, and my question is therefore, what have you here?!*

Undoubtedly, the contrast between the style and content of the two notes is striking. For example, whereas the anonymous writer attempts to engender identification

[8] *Yeshuvim* (Hebrew: ישובים) is the plural form of *Yeshuv*, a term that usually denotea Israeli settlements that were established before 1967.

between the Jewish past and the Palestinian present, Rabbi Perl's note does not even acknowledge Palestinian identity and discursively erases it through his exclusive use of the term "Arabs" when referring to Palestinians, a common linguistic practice among settlers and many Israelis.[9]

Interestingly, the authors of both notes employ the discourse of Jewish tradition to establish authority and validate their arguments. This similarity illustrates how Jewish tradition forms the main source of legitimacy as well as how tradition forms the subject of continuous examination, debate and negotiation regarding its accurate interpretation. The first letter invokes tradition to promote a Jewish ethic of compassion toward the other, while the second invokes tradition to promote a Jewish ethic of separatism (to put it mildly). Together, the notes represent the political positions and emotional dispositions of their authors and point to the capacity of religion to contain divergent positions on matters that touch at the heart of the human experience: the relations between self and other, and in this case, the relations between Jews and non-Jews, between settlers and Palestinians.

The notes were removed within a couple of days, but the contentious exchange reached the press: "A storm over an affair between a Jewish cashier and a Palestinian bagger," read the headline of an online news site (Breiner 2011a). I thought that once this exchange had reached the national news, there would be a public uproar within the

[9] As this view goes, Palestinian identity is an invented one, a recent phenomenon created as a result of Zionism and against it. While Zionism and Religious Zionism are acknowledged as recent historical developments, they are understood as the natural extension of Judaism and Jewish identity. Some even see Palestinian national identity as a manifestation of a Muslim and Arab scheme that functions to delegitimize the Israeli state and Jewish ties to the land, a natural extension of deep-seated hatred and envy of Jews. However, as Hillel Cohen, the Israeli historian explains (2013), as much as Zionism shaped Palestinian nationalism by forcing it to confront Zionist nationalism, the latter was also shaped by the former, which turned Jewish solidarity in the face of a common Arab enemy into one of the central components of the Zionist ethos within Eretz Israel.

settlement, or at least the beginnings of a meaningful internal debate about settler-Palestinian relations. I was wrong. The quotidian forces in Alon Shvut are stronger than any temporary headline. “The mass media looks for a story when there is none,” one settler told me. “So someone disagreed with Rabbi Perl, there is nothing special about that.” “This is not a religious matter. It is all about politics,” said another. “Davidi Perl is going to run for council, so his father is helping him out, taking a popular hardline position against Arabs.” “You should pay less attention to Rabbi Perl,” advised Mordechai while working in his garden, and went on to discuss the ingenious agricultural talents of Arabs.

Hoping to find thoughtful consideration of the compassionate message of the first note, I approached Rabbi Cohen and Yifat (08/11/2011), but Rabbi Cohen had not even heard about the notes. Yifat informed him of Rabbi Perl’s response, how he wrote that the anonymous writer should be ashamed, and Rabbi Cohen’s facial reaction revealed his concern. He said that had he known about it, he would have said something because “Rami-Levi is a good phenomenon,” and that “mixing religion with politics” is a recipe for trouble. He was careful, however, not to say anything negative about Rabbi Perl. Yifat explained that “no one talks about it,” that “people don't really care,” and “just because he is the Rabbi of the settlement doesn't mean much.” I responded that while this is correct, while people don’t really talk about it, and while Rabbi Perl’s status may not mean much to people here, he is still “the face of the settlement” and was even heard on a prime-time television show, so people should care.

Now Yifat’s face turned solemn. She had no idea this had made it to the news. “This is not fair,” she complained, “for a year now the place is an example of

coexistence," with "Jews and Arabs shopping together, and telling jokes, and helping each other, and then something like that happens, and people talk about it as if it is the norm." She also wondered what utility it serves writing about things people don't really discuss. I explained that sometimes the things we do not discuss, the things we deny and disavow, reveal much more about us than what we talk about. Her face turned even more solemn. Although most people in Alon Shvut perceive themselves as relatively liberal subjects and bear no overt hatred toward Palestinians, they, like many settlers, remain generally aloof from Palestinians' plight, living their lives disconnected from the violent realities of the occupation outside the settlement boundaries, other than of Palestinian attacks on Jews. Quite often, they are completely unaware of what happens immediately beyond the settlement's bounds.

Land Dispute and the Women in Green

Netzer (Hebrew: נצר. Lit, scion) is the name given by Women in Green to the stretch of land between Alon Shvut and Elazar, a nearby settlement. Headed by two women, Nadia Matar and Yehudit Katsover, Women in Green is a "right-wing Grassroots movement devoted to the ideal of Greater Israel." It focuses on "preventing Arab takeover of state land and strengthening the Jewish people's possession of the land" (Jerusalem Post 2011). In response to the Israeli-sanctioned Ottoman Law from 1858, which states that any land that was not orderly registered or cultivated for ten years is considered state land, Women in Green plant groves and vineyards to mark Jewish presence and the lack of Palestinian cultivation. "Each small plot of land matters,"

Yehudit told me, "and we safeguard the land for the state. It is a matter of Jewish sovereignty."

Netzer is a site of planting wars between Women in Green and Palestinians aided by international organizations and the Palestinian Authority, each side uprooting the other's saplings and planting their own, marked by encasings of different colors, although there have been occurrences of confusion with the wrong saplings mistakenly uprooted. Saplings, thin pipes for drizzle irrigation and nylon sheets that protect against the evaporation of water, are the weapons of this planting war. Money plays a role as well, and Women in Green receives funding from local donations as well as tax-exempt donations from the US.

On Friday, January 20, 2011, during *Tu Bishvat*, a halakhic agricultural date known as "the New Year of the Trees," Women in Green organized a large planting festival in Netzer. It was one of their most successful events. More than two hundred people arrived, many of them from Jerusalem and other places on the other side of the Green Line. Rabbi Perl was there too and spoke about the fulfillment of Zionist ideals and the commandment to settle Eretz Israel. A Knesset Member was present as well, Prof. Arieh Eldad, who declared,

> We are here on the Path of the Patriarchs and we remember Abraham our father. We remember the struggle for this land; a struggle that did not start today. Jews who came to the Land of Israel always encountered those who do not want Jews here. We will not give up, and we will not be discouraged nor scared. Not by their demography. Not by their wealth. If Jews will build and plant everywhere in the land, we shall overcome.

Classic Israeli tunes played in the background—"Am Israel lives, Am Israel lives"—an accordionist strolled about to further liven up the atmosphere, Israeli flags

waved ceremoniously in the wind, donations for the "redemption of the land of Israel through planting" were collected, and excited kids and older folks all dug holes, placed olive saplings in the ground, tied them to a supporting stick, and covered them with earth. It was Friday, a short day, and soon after finishing with their planting, people began to leave for home in order to prepare for the Shabbat. However, one small group of younger participants stayed behind, and began to plant in a field that was far removed from the main event.

All of a sudden, Nadya began shouting, "quick, the Arabs are here, someone pushed Ori, come everyone." I began running with a few more people toward the remote field, camera in hand, Nadya not far behind, but when I arrived there I found many Jews and a lone angry Palestinian from Al Khader[10] who is the owner of plots of land in the area. A policeman from the *Yasam* (Hebrew: יס"מ) - the Special Patrol Unit which specializes in riots and crowd control - was already there, as well as a kippah-wearing reserve service officer and two more reserve soldiers. The policeman wanted to kick me away, but the reserve officer told him, "Why? Let him stay, it is okay for him to photograph." I asked the officer if these are state lands or private Palestinian lands, and he confessed that he didn't know, but it didn't matter because Women in Green were not authorized to plant there. "This is what they always do," he said about Women in Green. "They create trouble and conflict to present themselves as frontline warriors."

The policeman and officer tried to contact the Gush Etzion DCO,[11] one of the local offices of the Civilian Administration, which is the governing body in the West

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[10] Al Khader is a Palestinian town near Bethlehem.

[11] DCO stands for the District Coordination Liaison Offices of the Civilian Administration. The Civilian Administration is part of the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), which is a unit in the Defense Ministry of Israel. The Civilian Administration is responsible for all the administrative

Bank. They did not receive any answer and were left alone to handle the situation. Settlers, young and old, continued to dig the earth. The officer tried to calm down the Palestinian, who requested him to bring more police forces to stop the planting. Songs still played in the background: "good people in the middle of the road, very good people." More Jews arrived, more digging, the Palestinian became more frustrated, and so did the officer, who continuously tried to reach the DCO. An Israeli woman approached the officer: "I want to see that everything is okay with you, because you are supposed to be guarding us, but you are protecting the Arabs." The policeman requested that the Palestinian move away from the crowd of the settlers.

"Enough," pleaded the Palestinian, "make them go away, enough, enough!" "I am waiting for my orders," explained the officer. "This is my land," shouted the Palestinian, "this is my work, for one, two, three, four, five generations," he counted with his hand. "Do you have a certificate?" asked the policeman. The Palestinian showed him a paper which proved to be a former complaint against settlers but not a certificate. He will bring it on Sunday, he said. An older, grey-haired woman approached the Palestinian and started screaming at him in English, "Go away! Murderer! Go away! This is our land!" The Palestinian screamed back at her, both waving their arms angrily. The officer ran to the woman and asked her to go away. "I don't care," she uttered in broken Hebrew with a heavy English accent. "If you can't protect us, then I am not going to listen to you. This is our land, our land, I don't want to hear all the time about Arabs, and Palestinians, and to do what they want, they murder us!" The officer requested that she go away, and she

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matters in the West Bank, especially in places designated as Area C in the Oslo accords. It is also in charge of coordination with the Palestinian Authority and supervises among other things Palestinian entry permits and approval of settlement construction.

eventually left, muttering to herself; Shabbat was fast approaching after all. In the meantime, Nadya had also disappeared.

Two more soldiers from the Border Police arrived at the scene.[12] They panted heavily, looking like they had just been running. “We heard there is an Arab riot,” they told the officer, looking confused by the lack of Arabs. “There is no riot,” the officer informed them, “the Palestinians are quiet; it is the Jews that cause trouble.” “This is what happens,“ he complained to me,

> miscommunication is created and at the end someone gets shot. That’s what happened yesterday, someone did not stop at an improvised check point, probably by mistake, by the time he reached the second blockade, he was already identified as a possible terrorist, and was shot in the head.

“Why can’t you do anything?” I asked the officer. He remained silent and then confessed, “I was ordered to keep things under control and not to do anything. As a citizen of this country, and as a soldier, I am telling you that this is too much. They do what they want here. I am ashamed to be Jewish.” He tried yet again to reach his commander on the phone, but to no avail. Meanwhile, an older Palestinian arrived - keffiyeh, hunched back, walking cane. He held a crumpled piece of paper in his hand. No good, it was another old complaint. “We need information from the DCO,” explained the policeman, who began to look frustrated too and finally addressed me. “So who do you think is the rioter here?” “The Jews,” I answered. “Well you are wrong because according to law it is easier to deal with the Arabs as a minority than with Jews. To get [the settlers] out, we need a military decree.”

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[12] Partly police, partly military unit, the notorious Border Police are feared and admired for their efficient use of brute force. The unit also serves as a model of ethnic diversity, containing high numbers of Ethiopian Jews, Bedouins, Druze and migrants from the former Soviet Union.

The Palestinian protested again to the officer, “This is our land.” “I don’t know whose land it is,” responded the policeman.” “So you say this is Jewish land?” questioned the Palestinian in annoyance. “I don’t know, I need the DCO to tell me.”

“The court said this is our land,” argued the Palestinian.” I don’t know,” repeated the policeman, “I need the DCO to tell me to who this land belongs to and then, no problem, I can do something, but now there is nothing I can do.” After a short pause, the policeman moaned, “How can I decide who is right or wrong?[…] Believe me, if we could declare a closed military zone and say ‘no one enters’, then no one enters. And this is the best way.”

“So why doesn’t the military declare a closed military zone?” I probed. “There is a problem with all of the land in the territories,“ explained the policeman,

> because there is no registration, there is nothing. On the basic level, all land is state land, unless someone comes and brings in a written authorization, and then it is his land, the state will bring it back to him. The first to bring authorizations are the Ottomans.

He did not answer my original question, but I followed up on his line of argument, “What happens with families who have this land even before the time of the Ottomans?” “Then it is a problem.”

The remaining Jews left soon after, and so did I, but the confrontations at “Netzer” continued throughout my fieldwork. Eventually, the activities of Women in Green facilitated a 2014 designation of several plots of land between Alon Shvut and Elazar as state land. Palestinians have appealed to the Israeli court against their loss of land while Women in Green moved to focus their efforts on a different location in Gush Etzion. A few hours after the Tu Bishvat planting event, I attended a Shabbat dinner at Giv’at Hachish, in a house located no more than 200 meters from the place of the

confrontation. I asked my hosts if they had heard about the messiness in Netzer earlier that day. Their response was "where is Netzer?" Like them, many people in Alon Shvut are ignorant of the contentious realities immediately outside the settlement's bounds.

The DCO

The Gush Etzion DCO is located less than 300 meters from Alon Shvut. DCO stands for the District Coordination Liaison Offices of the Civilian Administration. The Civilian Administration is responsible for all the administrative matters in the West Bank, especially in places designated as Area C in the Oslo Accords.[13] It is also in charge of coordination with the Palestinian Authority and supervises among other things Palestinian entry permits and approval of settlement construction. Throughout the week, it is flooded with Palestinians requesting permits of different kinds, including permits to work in settlements or in Israel. These work permits are much needed and very hard to get, and some well-connected Palestinians, who are somehow able to facilitate the issuing of such permits, sell them for several hundred dollars per month.

There are also permits for worshipers who wish to attend Friday prayer services at Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. There are a variety of permits relating to medical needs: a permit to visit a family member who is hospitalized in an Israel, a special permit to escort a patient in an ambulance and a regular one for escorting a patient by other means, permits for emergency staff and ambulance drivers, permits for physicians. There are permits for weddings. There are permits for peace activities. There are permits to those

[13] The 1993 Oslo Accords between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) divided the West Bank and the Gaza Strip into three categories: Area A, with full civil and security control of the Palestinian Authority (PA); Area B, with civil control of the PA and security control of Israel; and Area C, with civil and security control of Israel.

who wish to go to Gaza. There are permits for commerce and for studying in universities. There are permits for farmers who wish to work their land if access to the land had been cut off because of its proximity to a settlement, or if the land is in the "seam zone"—the area between the separation barrier and the boundary of the West Bank, an area that Israelis and tourists can freely enter and leave. There are different permits for "permanent farmers" in the seam zone, and just plain "farmers in the seam zone." There are about a hundred different categories of permits, a regime that emerged in the wake of the 1990's Oslo peace agreements, the following Intifada and the construction of the separation barrier, and which regulates Palestinian crossing into Israel, including East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and in some cases even movement within the West Bank (Levinson 2011).

The permit regime constitutes the heart of the bureaucratic apparatus of the Israeli occupation. It is headed by the Civilian Administration, realized by its different liaison offices on the ground and is complexly comprised of various administrative bodies, including the Defense Ministry, Ministry of Interior, the Labor Ministry, the Manufacturers Association of Israel, the Israeli Police, the Border Police, the military courts and the *Shabak* (the General Secret Service; Hebrew: שב"כ), to name a few (Berda 2012). I was told by Palestinians that the Shabak uses the permit regime to recruit informers, especially those who were denied entrance due to "security reasons." They were offered permits in return for information.

This security apparatus creates uncertainty in Palestinian life, deprives Palestinians of the power to make decisions about basic life necessities, induces in them fear and desperation, and adds to the suffering that stems from the violence of the military occupation (Berda 2012). It is a bureaucratic system whose underlying logic

seems to be confusion and inefficiency. Palestinians spend a significant amount time attempting to obtain permits, and often remain helpless in the face of a system that makes no sense. Throughout my fieldwork, I visited various offices of the Civilian Administration, including the Gush Etzion DCO, trying to assist Palestinian interlocutors and to understand a system that seems to defy common logic, even to me, an Israeli native well acquainted with Israeli culture.

Only a small number of settlers are aware of these Palestinian exigencies. Meir is one of the few settlers who is an exception to this rule of disconnection. White-haired and with a short, pointy beard, he has been living in Kfar Etzion for close to 40 years now, ever since he immigrated from the US. He makes constant efforts to get to know and befriend his Palestinian neighbors. It started a few years ago, when he decided to ignore cultural norms and pick up Palestinian hitchhikers in his car. He began visiting their villages, learning their life stories, their fears and hopes, and ever since has been constantly engaged in attempts to bring Palestinians and settlers together.

I first met Meir at a meeting between settlers and Palestinians that took place by the Lone Oak. Eliraz, a younger settler from Kfar Etzion was there, too, along with Mahmood from Khirbeit Zakariyya, and Nabil, a Palestinian from Beit Ummar. Meir explained how the tree became a sign of hope, a symbol of return. Musa explained that the tree is believed to mark the grave of the biblical prophet Zakariyya, who has a sacred status in Islam as well as in Judaism. Nabil then explained that the tree is also important to him for personal reasons. His grandfather was killed underneath its shadow, on January 14, 1948, while participating in the attack on Gush Etzion, just before the Israeli declaration of Independence. The image of the tree shifted immediately in front our eyes,

its naturally splintered trunk transformed into a symbol of opposing yet deeply connected narratives of loss and yearning.

Deeply affected by Nabil's tale, Meir wrote about his new understanding of the tree on Facebook[14]:

> This lone tree stands in the center of Gush Etzion and carries memories of the past and hope for the future. The tree for me is a place of meeting, a meeting of past and present… Of peoples, and People who, like the roots of this tree share a common soil, but are inter-tangled, breeding two distinct trunks. Yes, two distinct People can live together and out of our past, the common and entangled past, CAN create rich foliage reaching towards the heavens. May the memories of those whose sole desire was to live and develop on this Land drive us to fulfill that dream of LIFE.

In his pursuit of better understanding of Palestinian life, Meir visited the Gush Etzion DCL for the first time and wrote a report about his experience there:

A Typical Day for Palestinians..waiting..waiting...

March 15, 2011

> *Today I went to Matak Etzion…It is the District Civil Liaison (DCL) of the Bethlehem region located in Gush Etzion in the West Bank. First it just seems like a drab waiting room... with decent chairs for sitting...and two very unappealing "turnstiles" like the type used for mob control.*
>
> *….I saw no military people or Israeli civilians, just Palestinians, quietly waiting..waiting..It was a waiting room, wasn't it?? … Minutes passed… No one showed. No doors opened. The turnstile stood still…The office was supposed to close in about 45 minutes. There were about 20 people in the room...waiting… I later found out that the normal rate is about 15 people or so an hour. At that rate it should not have been a problem. During the next 10-15 minutes no one was called to pass through the turnstile. I told my "source" that at this rate he might not make it in by 17:00. What will happen then?? He said that whoever hasn't made it in will be sent home..(This after waiting 2 hours, 3 hours AND more!!)*
>
> *Outside I saw a cigarette-smoking woman with a mobile phone held against her ear... She was talking Hebrew. This was Shlomit, of Machsom Watch[15] who comes*

[14] This post was published on May, 9, 2014, but Meir also mentioned in his post the original meeting with Nabil by the Lone Oak, a meeting which transformed his understanding of the symbolic meanings of the tree.

once a week for a couple of hours to record how the DCL office is handling its "clients" and to try to help who she can.

She was particularly stressed over two cases: One, a man arrived in the early afternoon from Bethlehem, at about 13:00 after obtaining approval for his seven year old daughter to enter Israel for medical treatment at Hadassah hospital. The approval came from the Medical Unit at the main Civil Authority offices in Beit El.[16] *His appointment at Hadassah was set for 17:00. A taxi was waiting for him.*

The second case was a man who also had spent hours trying to get permits for himself and two daughters whose medical treatment is only next week. Again the real work was done beforehand, via the Medical Unit in Beit El and the hospital. Getting the permit was supposed to be a technicality, a mere formality. At about 16:40 he was out.. smiling.. thanking Shlomit for her care and her help. His story too, was one of waiting, bureaucratic obstacles that seem to sprout up like mushrooms.. in new and varying forms without prior notification.

....I was a bit overwhelmed knowing that what I was seeing was really the norm. Tens of people waiting for hours....and a few cases of an anxious family member trying to deal with the medical needs of a dear one waiting tensely- their most basic needs and feelings being ignored... As 17:00 was approaching I reentered the waiting room. A few people had made it through the revolving gate… About 3 or 4 made it through in the 45 minutes I was there. Then I heard the voice of a clerk, coming over the intercom... "OK... Everyone can go home now." Everyone quietly departed.. Eyes were dreary...faces weary… And I heard here and there a whispered curse in Arabic, the glowing remnants of bad feeling that would fester inside as hours were lost...and the "journey" in DCL Land would have to start again next week.

One man was determined to enter. He was told to come. He waited hours and was expected. "Your name is Bashir?" said the voice over the intercom. "Yes!" "OK… Then come tomorrow at 8:30 (before normal reception hours) and you will be taken care of." That sounded quite good to me… But another man on the way out said "Yes, I know that line. It is the same story all the time."

....Outside Shlomit was still at work. A few Palestinians were in the inner chamber. They had made it through the turnstile before 17:00 but were also being sent out empty handed. The first one leaving was a woman who proclaimed "The computers were shut down at 16:45. They won't take care of us"… And so… Those…people... Who after waiting 4-6 hours… made it through the revolved gate were sent home with the good wishes to return next week.

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[15] Machsom (Hebrew: מחסום. Lit, blockade) Watch is a volunteer organization of noon-settler Israeli women who observe, document and report on the daily dynamics of the occupation and attempt to ease the frustrations and hardships of Palestinians by offering assistance (Machsom Watch 2014).
[16] The central office of the Civilian Administration is located in Beit El.

> *I type this in English..(it flows better for me)..but it is not meant for Anglo Saxon ears. It is meant for us.*

Meir posted this report on his Facebook page and sent it to people at Gush Etzion. "What were the reactions?" I asked (03/28/2015). He replied:

> Some people say that this is a problem, but also say that the Civilian Administration is an inefficient body that places bureaucratic hurdles on us.... Others say this is not about the occupation, that there is a problem with bureaucracy in general. That it's like waiting in the hospital or at the offices of the Ministry of Interior… Some say this is just wrong, but people generally don't want to take responsibility.

While many people in Gush Etzion claim not to hate Palestinians and believe that Gush Etzion exemplifies the possibility of Arab-Israeli coexistence, they remain disconnected from the impact of the military occupation upon Palestinian life. When they are confronted with these realities, they often engage in various forms of rationalization aimed on the one hand at erasing the particularities of the Palestinian experiences of the occupation, and on the other, at reducing their own culpability. After all, the recognition of these realities would attest to settlers' implication in Palestinian suffering, and as discussed in the former chapter, they see themselves as morally conscious human beings as well as law-abiding citizens of the state.

The Case of Khirbeit Zakariyya: A Permanent Building Freeze

The small Palestinian village of Khirbeit Zakariyya is nestled in the midst of Gush Etzion. The fact that some of its residents are employed at local institutions allows settlers to imagine Gush Etzion as a model of coexistence. The reality, however, is not as idyllic as many settlers imagine. The people of Khirbeit Zakariyya live in crowded housing conditions and lack basic amenities, while the surrounding settlements continue to grow and flourish, though not at the speed desired by the settlers. In March of 2010,

several months after the beginning of the settlement building freeze, Eliraz wrote to Gushpanka (Hebrew: גושפנקא, lit. seal of approval), the local newspaper of Gush Etzion, about the double meanings of the 'building freeze':

The Building Freeze[17]

The Israeli Government instituted a draconian building freeze on the Gush Etzion settlements (for about a year). Do we now understand what our Arab neighbors in Gush Etzion feel after being "frozen" for 40 years?!!

Invisible Arabs

We usually only see them out of the side of our eyes as they walk the sides of the road or serve us at the gas station, or in the maintenance departments of our institutions.

We may notice them as they work their fields, and buy produce that they sell during the harvest season, again, on the side of the road.

***They are our "invisible people"**, perhaps for "good reasons"- the fear and language barrier.*

We are often very polite to them when we see them at work, and sometimes they have benefited from us in time of serious need. But most of us never try to make real contact with them. We don't stop to offer them a ride, even if we see them trudging along in inclement weather and we don't know or care how they live their daily lives.

A few tens of Arab families live right in the middle of the Etzion Bloc, between the settlements of Kfar Etzion, Alon Shvut and Rosh Tzurim. Most of them live in Khirbeit Zakariyya*, a site traditionally identified with the burial spot of Zachariah, the Prophet of Ancient Israel who is also revered as such in Islamic tradition. "Our" famous Lone Oak in the center of the Bloc is his "waqf".*

Ever since our return to the Hills of Etzion in 1967, organized and legal construction has been forbidden by our authorities. The residents of the village, not being confrontational, continue to live crowded in their original homes, some of which stand 100 years and more. They are not even allowed to build proper infrastructure for plumbing.

From experience, anyone who happens along is happily received in the Abrahamic tradition of hospitality. Visitors can see the mosque with the truncated

[17] Gushpanka, March 2011

minaret, whose completion has not been approved by our Civil Authority. ***I, as a believing man (yes, in the same G~d as they) find myself ashamed.***

Children who marry and want to remain in the village are forced to share one room for parents AND children. Others must leave to Bethlehem.

Some of the roofs are made of tin and asbestos, walls wet and with mildew. The construction of a kindergarten has been halted and more classrooms for the local school are not authorized. So, the older kids have to go to the distant school in Beit Fajjar where they are exposed to Palestinian Authority propaganda. The local school, while proudly Palestinian, is free of propaganda that demonizes Israel.

I can imagine the cynical smile that must be crossing the lips of some readers: "Why did Gushpanka (the regional council magazine) publish a left wing article… "

We returned here based on our faith and historical connections both ancient and modern:

Ancient from the time of the Patriarchs, the early settlement of Joshua, the Kings, through the return after the first exile.

Modern: The repeated attempts to settle this area in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s until Gush Etzion was overrun in 1948.

With this return we have an obligation and responsibility to all the residents of these "Hills of Etzion" To all the residents: Jew and non-Jew alike.

During the past months there have been a number of meetings of Jewish and Arab residents of our region. Some centered on getting to know each other better and to learn about our cultures and religions. Other discussions centered on the difficulties and hardships, on feelings and dreams. Together we prayed for rain.. and the rain did come.

We believe that these initial steps are our obligation and privilege and can bring hope to both populations and maybe, just maybe, Peace may rise from Etzion.

The response of Shaul Goldstein, the Gush Etzion Regional Council chairman was published underneath Eliraz's letter:

Regional Council Chairman Shaul Goldstein comments to Gushpanka that he has been trying to advance an official urban development program for the village. Goldstein has told Gushpanka that the program would legalize the housing and future building of homes for the children of the village. Normal infrastructure would be built. He also wants to develop employment opportunities such as agricultural tourism that would be particularly suitable for the villagers.

> *Goldstein says this program could give a humanitarian solution to the hardship that now pervades Khirbeit Zakariyya. It would also prevent future illegal construction in the agricultural fields in the area. However, the program is in its initial stage and the process could be long.*

As illustrated in the former chapter, settlers are able to find quick and efficient methods of increasing settlement expansion even in opposition to the authority of the state. However, when it comes to developing Khirbeit Zakariyya, the rule of law and bureaucracy somehow become unsurmountable obstacles.

On July 3, 2011, Chairman Shaul Goldstein, Eliraz and other local settlers attended the wedding of the son of Mohammed Ibrahim, the Mukhtar[18] of Khirbeit Zakariyya. The next day, Makor Rishon (Hebrew: מקור ראשון, lit. first source/first origin), the leading Israeli Religious Zionist newspaper, published two pictures from the event. The bottom photograph shows a female settler dancing among Palestinian women. Surrounded by smiling Palestinian women, her back is turned to the camera, face unseen, hands raised up, frozen in jovial movement. In the top photo, Shaul Goldstein and Mohammad Ibrahim are raised on the shoulders of invisible men, their hands clasped together, Mohammad Ibrahim looking directly at Shaul, while Shaul is looking directly at the camera, smiling. The headline reads "a mixed wedding."

A couple of days after the wedding, early in the morning of Tuesday, July 5, dozens of Israeli security forces and a demolition vehicle arrived at a Palestinian house located in the midst of a Palestinian agricultural field, less than a hundred meters below the fence of the new neighborhood of Alon Shvut. The location of the house on the slope of the terraced valley kept it outside the direct line of sight of the settlers inside the settlement. The house belonged to a relative of people living in Khirbeit Zakariyya.

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[18] Mukhtar is the title of head of the village or community in many Arab societies.

"They told us, 'get out, get out' now," said the father of the family who lost its home to me and Meir. "We told them 'give us half an hour, we need to take our things out'... They said if we don't exit now they will destroy it upon us …That they will kill us… even the floor is destroyed now... what can I do now?" "Allah saw what happened," added his wife, but people in Alon Shvut did not see it. I asked Rabbi Cohen if he heard about the house demolition that took place less than a hundred meters from his home. He did not, and he wasn't the only one.

A week later, Gushpanka published a small item on the destruction of the Palestinian house. In it, Shaul Goldstein commends the Civilian Administration for the continuation of the enforcement policy toward illegal Arab construction," and states that "even though this is just a minor activity, it is nonetheless an important tool of deterrence in the fight against the takeover of state land in Gush Etzion." Meir decided to write to Gushpanka and protest the destruction of the home. His letter was published the following month in a "talkback" section. A response from Nadya Matar and Yehudit Katsover of Women in Green was published on the top of the page, next to a green "thumbs-up" icon. Meir's piece was placed below, next to a red "thumbs-down" icon. [19]The green-colored headline for Women in Green's piece was "Give them no quarter" (Hebrew: לא תחנם), words that cite a passage from Deuteronomy 7 [20] and refer to a group of halakhic prohibitions regarding non-Jewish existence in Eretz Israel. The red-colored

[19] Gushpanka, 08/12/2011 page 14

[20] "When the Lord your God brings you to the land that you are about to enter and possess, and He dislodges many nations before you—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, seven nations much larger than you— and the Lord your God delivers them to you and you defeat them, you must doom them to destruction: grant them no terms and give them no quarter "(Deuteronomy 7:1-2).

headline for Meir's reaction piece was "To walk 'the Path of the Patriarchs.'" A statement of prohibition printed in green, and a positive directive printed in red.

The Women in Green's reaction piece commends the Civilian Administration and the Regional council for "safeguarding state lands" and for "the destruction of the illegal house an Arab built on the Path of the Patriarchs, less than a 100 meters from the fences of Alon Shvut." They express their hope that "more illegal houses that the Arabs built would be destroyed" and that this would begin to correct the selective enforcement that was practiced until now." They then quote Wikipedia:

> *Research conducted in 2011 and information published by the Civilian Administration in 2011 show selective enforcement actually in favor of the Arabs. 25% of the Jewish structures set for destruction by the court were actually destroyed. As opposed to illegal Arab construction where only 13% of those structures set to be destroyed by the court were actually destroyed.*

I searched but did not find the Wikipedia source discussed above nor was I able to gain details about 2011 – The Civilian Administration does not publish much information. However, according to information provided by the Israeli State Attorney, from 2005 to 2010, about 800 Israeli structures were destroyed, which amount to 31% of construction considered illegal by Israeli law. During the same period, about 1,000 Palestinians structures were destroyed, which amount to 21% of illegal Palestinian construction (Grossman 2011; Glickman 2011). Indeed, percentage-wise, fewer Palestinian houses were destroyed, but more Palestinians houses are considered to be illegal under Israeli law.

Since the Oslo accords, Israel maintains full control over planning and building authority in Area C, which encompasses about 60% of the West Bank, and severely limits Palestinian settlement, construction and development in this area. The Civilian Administration prohibits Palestinians from building on about 70% of Area C, for various

reasons that range from state land and natural parks to Firing Zones. In the rest of Area C land, the Civilian Administration imposes severe restrictions and "has avoided approving any master plan at all for over 90% of the villages located entirely within Area C," leaving Palestinians with very slim prospects of receiving building permits (B'Tselem 2013b).

The reaction piece continues:

> *We must remember that Eretz Israel is not real estate - no one has the right to give it up. On the contrary, we must inherit and settle it…. If the administration would not have destroyed the house, within a short while the Arabs would have constructed more and more houses until the place would have been transformed into an entire village, with the sole purpose of stealing from Am Israel the land reserves that are dedicated for the development of the Jewish settlements…. "And you shall take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have assigned the land to you to possess."* [Number 33:53]

According to Women In Green, Eretz Israel is not an alienable real estate, but only because its true landlord has given it to His people to possess for themselves while dispossessing the Palestinians, whose main purpose would seem to be the dispossession of land from Jews (rather than, for example, simply living their own lives). Yet, this reaction piece is not so much about the political and religious value of house demolitions as much as it serves as a recruitment call for Women in Green, who regardless of the unwavering commitment of their leaders, Yehudit and Nadya, their good ties with politicians and their savvy use of the mass-media, have been unable to increase their ranks in a substantial manner. Rabbi Perl, for example, has used his Shabbat sermons several times to encourage people to join Women in Green's activities, but to no avail. I have attended many of their events, and the number of participants is no more than a few dozen people on average, often far fewer. This is a decrease from their glory days during

the Disengagement Plan, when their call to action would have summoned dozens upon dozens of young settlers from the surrounding settlements. Now, they seem to attract mostly older participants, with some of their most loyal followers being well over the pension age. Recent immigrants also seem to have affection for the two leaders.

Meir's reaction piece touches upon the problem of illegal construction and addresses the problem of settler responsibility toward Palestinians[21]:

> *A few days after the people of the council danced at the wedding of the son of the Mukhtar of Khirbeit Zakariyya, a house of another family was destroyed at the margins of the village as a result of the council's pressure…. The house is defined as 'illegal' and indeed its status is debated in court, and for some reason, it was important to destroy the house now….The house was built on a private agricultural area of the family…. Since the liberation of Gush Etzion, the families…. are not permitted to build a room or renovate a roof and even more so to build a new house (or to upgrade a goat pen) for the kids who grow and marry. Every construction is "illegal!" There is no hopeful horizon for construction based upon organized planning that would enable a sufficient development of their private lands….We returned to our home, and most of us see Israel as the sovereign here, as the landlord. The landlord is first and foremost a human being with responsibility. How do we face our responsibility for all those people who live under our rule?....*

Conclusion

Toward the end of 2011, the people of Khirbeit Zakariyya suffered from several violent settler attacks. Stones were thrown at them by a gang of kids that probably came from the nearby settlement of Bat-Ayin; car windows were smashed; saplings were uprooted from their fields; someone sprayed "death to Arabs" at the entrance of one of the homes; and a child of the village was caught by two older settlers who sprayed his eyes with pepper spray, almost blinding him. No one was captured nor prosecuted by the Israeli security forces. In response to this violence, in December 25, 2011, during the

[21] Gushpanka, 08/12/2011 page 14.

Jewish Holiday of Hanukkah, the Jewish Festival of Lights, a group of local settlers visited the people of Khirbeit Zakariyya to show solidarity with their cause and to protest the latest attacks.

On that night, it was cold and rainy. A heavy fog enwrapped the small village. Because it has almost no lights, it was difficult identifying the road that leads to its center. The meeting took place in the illegally built school, the rain hitting its asbestos roof, creating a constant tapping noise in the background. About 30 people crowded inside, half settlers and half Palestinians, with all sitting in a circle around the room. It was a rather optimistic event, and the crowd sang together a bilingual version of a Hanukkah song: "We came to chase away the darkness… Every one of us is a small light, but together we are a mighty light. Move away darkness!" "We have a saying in Arabic," said one of the Palestinians, "a close neighbor is better than a brother who is far way… but I am sorry to tell you, there are many people among you and us who don't want peace, they just want war… I have kids, you have kids, why can't we live together?"

Everyone spoke in turn, settlers and Palestinians. Eliraz recounted the violent attacks. "How come no one said anything about it?" one Jewish woman asked angrily. "People spoke out," explained Eliraz, "but too little, and not loud enough." "The rain is a blessing," said another Palestinian, "but maybe Allah is crying, too, because brothers are killing brothers […] We must speak out together, this is the only way to bring peace." "I have five kids," said another, "I don't have room for everyone. We all sleep together in a small room." "I think there is something subversive about this meeting," mused a young settler, "about Jews and Arabs settlers and Palestinians speaking, because we are taught

to see differences, about who is right and who is in charge… Peace does not come from above, from politicians. It comes from below."

"To tell you the truth," confessed one Jewish woman, "I am a bit ashamed to sit here. I hope that all of the things that we fight for as Jews — house, state, livelihood — I hope we could fight for everyone who sits here, Palestinians and Jews, and I am ashamed because we haven't managed to do so." Another Jewish woman also expressed shame: "I've been living here for 18 years… and passed through this place thousands of times without entering… and then I thought how come no one showed us what is going on here, and then I realized that—enough! I am a grown up." Meir told her that it took him 38 years to enter Khirbeit Zakariyya. A Jewish couple explained that they brought their kids here because they want to educate them about coexistence. Yet another Jewish woman talked about shame, about seeing all the dozens of school buses for the Israeli kids while the Palestinian kids walk in the hot sun and in the cold rain to school. "My kids always ask me," summed up one Palestinian, "'father, how come Alon Shvut is so pretty?'"

In the last few years, several Israeli and international politicians visited Khirbeit Zakariyya, some of them quite powerful, such as Tony Blair, the former British Prime Minister and the official Envoy of the Quartet on the Middle East. Along with continuous pressure from local settlers like Eliraz and Meir, this resulted in a September 2012 official authorization to build 300 housing units. However, as of 2015, Khirbeit Zakariyya remains underdeveloped, its people living in crowded conditions, the asbestos roof covers the small "illegal" structure of the local school, and the unfinished mosque with its truncated minaret still stands at the center of the village — a religious monument

to the vast disparities between settlers and Palestinians, even those deemed to be friendly toward settlers.

Human beings do not usually perceive themselves as "bad," and settlers are not any different. Many settlers in Gush Etzion express empathy for the Palestinians and their plight, even as they remain uninformed about it. However, the distance between this uninformed empathy and taking responsibility through action is a wide one. The gaps between reality, its perceptions and action are maintained by a myriad of self-justifications that range from theological rationalizations ("but this is our land"), through security rationalizations ("but they are here to get us"), and cultural and political rationalizations ("but they are doing much better than most Arabs. Look at Syria!"). Palestinians therefore are not really "seen" by most settlers. They remain at the fringes of consciousness, always present as a natural part of the local landscape, but not fully present as human beings deserving the same care and political rights enjoyed by settlers. Their incomplete presence is completed in settlers' imaginations through the ambivalence of fear and attraction. This ambivalence allows but also resists the possibility of seeing them as equals, turning Palestinians into bearers of an unstated moral condition of the settlement project.

However, the changing realities on the ground, such as the opening of Rami-Levi, challenge the ability of settlers to render Palestinians invisible. From this perspective, the Rami-Levi phenomenon responds to the deep yearning of many settlers in Gush Etzion (with the exception, for instance, of Women in Green) for recognition of their ethical worthiness, that they are peaceful human beings who just want to get along with Palestinians. Rami-Levi does manifest the potential for coexistence but at the same time

stabilizes political inequlities, strengthening the perception of settlers that coexistence is a present reality rather than inciting them to take the action necessary for achieving more equal coexistence.

Regardless of the ambivalences and the political inequalities of the present, seeing settlers and Palestinians shop side by side, waiting in the same line, and even arguing over who comes first, reveals how the future could look with the two peoples sharing the same space and coexisting as equals under one law. There are, of course, those who fear such a future, whether because of assimilation, a fear of the Arab, or a fear of sharing Eretz Israel with another people. But there are also settlers who desire to work jointly with Palestinians toward a better future, one shaped by the people below rather than by politicians above, one where Palestinians may gain the same rights as settlers. This is the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 5

"Go to Pharaoh": On Rabbi Froman, Eretz Shalom and the Role of Jewish Mysticism in Religious Peacemaking Attempts between Settlers and Palestinians

Introduction

Wednesday, August 4, 2010, 24th of Av, 5770

It was noontime on a scorching summer day, and we, a small group of settlers and Palestinians, sat in circle underneath the comforting shade of a large fig tree by a water fountain packed with Palestinian children. It was the first time I attended such a meeting. It was organized by Noah, a settler from a nearby outpost, and Said, a resident of Husan, the local Palestinian village. They met a year before during a joint Israeli-Palestinian demonstration against the separation barrier. Only eight of us attended this meeting, three settlers, including myself, and five Palestinians, all males. I was hoping more settlers would arrive, but these were working hours in the middle of the week, and, unlike many Palestinians, most settlers have regular jobs; those who were free were probably busy with their kids, who were off on summer vacation. And then there was also the issue of, well, settlers meeting with Palestinians, two populations with seemingly opposing national projects; why should they meet?

"Let's talk about the personal meanings of fast, you about Ramadan and we about Ninth of Av," suggested Noah. It was a week before the Muslim month of Ramadan, about a week after the Ninth of Av, and everyone agreed this was a good topic of discussion, our conversation carried out in broken Hebrew and Arabic. "When we get to know each other, this is how we make peace," added Noah. "Before I knew Said, I did

not think about how easy it is for me to drive to Jerusalem, to just cross the checkpoint, but now I think about rights, and how you deserve the same rights, human ones."

"The fast is God's test of a person," explained Said. He is a tall, 40-year-old father of five children who sat in Israeli jail for five years after participating in the first Intifada. "God sees if a rich person has it in his heart to give to poor people; it is a test of good and evil." "We had Ninth of Av about a week ago," recalled Noah, "and if you don't have to deal with the lower things, you can deal with higher things, with God, with the *Mitzvot* [Hebew: מצוות, lit. commandments], with what you call the *Sharia* [...] you can think about justice." "When I fast it helps me not to think about myself, to leave myself," explained Aminadav, a massively built settler, who also lives in a local outpost, "and think about other things, purer things, hmm, like justice too." "When we fast," said Fadi, a 20-year-old Palestinian, "we have to donate to the poor in order for the fast to be good." "We fast so the rich people will feel how it is to be poor," explained Mustapha, an older, grey-haired Palestinian in his mid-fifties. "This is the most important meaning […] without food and water, it makes a rich person feel the poor within the heart."

I noticed the Palestinians tended to talk about the ethical relations between fast, wealth and poverty. They used the discussion to point to their own material conditions, probably in contrast to settlers' relative wealth, while Noah and Aminadav connected the fast to the idea of justice and rights. Both sides talked about the experiences of lack and difference, but whereas the Palestinians related it to the daily challenges of subsistence, the settlers' comments pointed to a consciousness of a privileged existence, to an ethical problem that stemmed from an acknowledgment of political difference of power in

comparison to Palestinians. Perhaps their talk about justice was also a way of acknowledging responsibility for Palestinian conditions.

By the time my turn arrived, I felt guilty for embracing my settler identity so thoroughly. The kippah weighed heavy on my head. Noah knew about my anthropological mission—I revealed it to him before the meeting—but as far as he was concerned, I was a settler from Alon Shvut, and if I wanted to join the activity, I had to live up to my settler identity. However, as far as the Palestinians were concerned, I was just another settler, and in many ways they were right – I was a kippah-wearing and politically privileged Israeli from a well-to-do nearby settlement.

And now I had to talk about what fasting meant to me, even though my personal attempts at fasting so far showcased the power of nature over culture, the triumph of craving over self-discipline. Not wanting to further entangle myself in webs of deception, I decided to evade talking about my personal experiences of fasting and pursue the topic of justice. I mentioned how "our prophets talked about justice and comradery and equality, but they were not always popular, the people called them crazy, and we need to think about truth: is it what the majority says or the minority?"

I felt relieved when Noah decided to follow up on this:

> I think that many people don't talk about peace because they are afraid they are alone, that they are a minority…. Often times, what drives people is not the thought itself, but the question "am I with everyone or am I alone?" If they are with everyone, they prefer to say different things, just so they won't stand out alone. It takes real courage to say something unpopular, to say something that not everyone says, like talking about peace. Like here, we are talking about peace, about justice, about rights.

We were not really talking about rights though, at least not directly. The term justice was mentioned several times, but we did not elaborate on its meanings, about its political manifestations. It was always in the background, though, the big unsaid was

constantly present, for these were settlers and Palestinians, the people that live at the heart of the conflict and know it more than anyone else. They were political unequals trying to establish a connection through religious experiences that transcend the constraints of political realities and the familiar language of the conflict.

"It is like the hand of God," replied Said to Noah. He stretched out his arm, opened the palm of his hand, and went on, "when all of us are together, working with each other. Like one family. Ramadan is about family too." "Before I met Palestinians," confessed Noah, "I thought that Palestinians only throw stones, because I did not know the person, I did not know the holidays. When you get to know about the person, you can become closer, become friends." "It is about respect," said Mustapha. "That's right," agreed Noah. "We have a saying, 'a human being looks into your eyes, and God looks into the heart.'" "That's right," it was now Said who was in agreement. "That's why we should have bigger meetings, and bring families. "Yes," said Aminadav, "[bringing] families is a good idea, it can be a powerful thing." "When you bring families together," continued Said, "when your kids play with my kids, it gives you hope, it instills hope in your heart and gives you the strength to carry on." "Families are more real," added Aminadav, suggesting that the involvement of families in such meetings is a better way of knowing the other. "You stop looking back," said Fadi, pointing out the heavy burden that past violence places upon present realities. "Kids are the future," was my addition. "The next generation," Noah followed up.

"One of the things that Rabbi Froman says," said Noah about his closet spiritual mentor, "is that the land, the land, belongs to God. If we, if a man says 'the land belongs to me,' he has vanity." "Yes," concurred Mustapha, "it is written in the Quran that the

land belongs to God." "If we remember that the land belongs to God," repeated Noah, "it will be easier for us to make peace, to become closer." The conversation continued with a quick discussion of the Five Pillars of Islam, and then some similarities between Judaism and Islam, such as dietary rules, the centrality of daily prayers, charity, and the belief in the same one God and no other. When we reached the topic of sin, Mustapha told us about a religious person, "a Jew with kippah and a beard," who owes him money for a construction job. Noah and Mustapha exchanged phone numbers and Noah promised to attempt to help on that issue.

Soon after, we all left the fountain and moved to the house of Said's brother, where Noah's wife and children joined us. We gathered in a small living hall, its walls covered with an ornamented, pinkish wallpaper and decorated with golden calligraphy of Qur'anic verses along with two large framed embroideries of serene lake scenes of green and blue, which seemed like windows to some far away land. The room was packed: settlers and Palestinians; women, men and children; Jews and Muslims. I discussed sport and politics with Fadi and did not follow the rest of the conversations around the room. There was a lot of chitchatting throughout, and laughter too.

We ate cold watermelon, drank sweet juice, sipped bitter coffee and smoked cigarettes, even though the children were around—no one seemed to care much. The sight of settlers and Palestinian sharing the same small space congenially seemed so normal I was constantly tempted to forget the abnormality of the situation. But this meeting was a rarity, a small and fleeting rapture of a reality in which forces of separation, of fear and hatred, drive two peoples apart and against each other. Is this what

peace looks like, could look like, or is it but a mere visage, like the embroidery pieces on the wall, an attractive representation of a reality too foreign to this place?

This chapter moves away from the bourgeoisie comforts of settler life, away from the self-perceived pragmatism and political moderation of settlements such Alon Shvut, and into the fringes of contemporary settlement life. It discusses Jewish mysticism and its influence upon Rabbi Menachem Froman, a settler and, without contradiction, a peacemaker. In addition, it elaborates on the case of a new settler peace movement, *Eretz Shalom* (Hebrew: ארץ שלום, lit. Land of Peace), which is inspired by Rabbi Froman and attempts to overcome the political realities of the conflict through religion. In doing this, this chapter illustrates the intermingling of religion and politics in contemporary settlement realities through an examination of religious peacemaking activities that go against the political grain.

As argued by Rachel Elior (1997), mysticism is often employed as a derogatory term that is associated with irrationally. Similarly, religiously motivated settlers are often depicted as fundamentalists whose mystical beliefs form an antithesis to liberal values of freedom and equality (Aran 1991; Feige 2009; Inbari 2007; Lustick 1988). Nevertheless, countering such popular and academic perceptions, I use the examples of Rabbi Froman and his mystical theology along with the more quotidian religious basis of Eretz Shalom and their Palestinian partners to show how religion can operate at different levels as a force of peace. I thus argue that religion can propel settlers to take responsibility for their centrality within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and that rather than simply constituting an irrational phenomenon, mysticism can unsettle binary political distinctions and reveal the humanity of the enemy.

Rabbi Froman's Vision of Peace

Rabbi Froman (1945 – 2013) was one of the most exceptional and politically radical Israeli peacemakers of this age. He was a student of Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook at Merkaz HaRav Yeshiva, a former paratrooper who participated in the conquest of the Old City of Jerusalem in 1967 and among the first members of Gush Emunim, just like Rabbi Hanan Porat (see chapters two and three). The two were in fact very close friends, *Havruta* (Hebrew: חברותא, lit. companionship) pairs, which means they studied Torah together. Having studied the Torah intimately with him, Rabbi Froman knew Hanan Porat like no one else. And, like Hanan Porat, Rabbi Froman too was dying of cancer, and would pass away at the age of 68; and he, too, was definitely often misunderstood. However, while Hanan Porat embodied the ideal settler, Rabbi Froman was considered throughout most of his life to be an odd settler, "a funny one," even though he functioned as the chief rabbi of the Knesset for a while, a biographical fact that is often forgotten by his opponents. "Rabbi Froman is representative only of himself, and no one else," Rabbi Cohen informed me when I told him I intend to write about Rabbi Froman.

While Hanan Porat was one of the main leaders of Gush Emunim and its ideological and political offshoots, Rabbi Froman left Gush Emunim after the discovery of the "Jewish Underground" in the early 1980s, which was comprised of several settlers, conducted terror attacks against Palestinians and planned to detonate the Dome of the Rock on Temple Mount. While Hanan Porat looked like an everyday man—clean-shaven and plainly dressed—Rabbi Froman, with his long, white beard, stood out in public. He would usually wear the traditional Orthodox garb, a white shirt and a black suit, and

during religious celebrations he would dress in a white robe and a white *shtreimel* fur hat.[1] Unlike Hanan Porat, who was a handsome man, Rabbi Froman would often joke about his stereotypically Jewish appearance—his big, long nose regularly forming the main butt of his puns.[2]

Rabbi Froman dedicated his life to peace, which may seem strange indeed: a settler and a peace activist. He was the Chief Rabbi of Tekoa, a mixed settlement of religious and secular people in eastern Gush Etzion, and the birthplace, according to tradition, of the biblical prophet Amos, who preached for social justice: "but let justice well up like water, righteousness like an unfailing stream" (Amos 5:24). Rabbi Froman did not settle in the West Bank only for political reasons – to extend Jewish sovereignty beyond the Green Line – but out of religious romanticism, out of true love of the land, a love that enabled him to recognize the basic equality of all of its inhabitants - Israelis and Palestinians, Jews, Muslim and Christians - under God.

A man full of ostensible contradictions, he supported the establishment of a Palestinian state, but was opposed to the evacuation of settlements. He moved to Gush Katif during the Disengagement Plan out of solidarity with the local settlers, but, at the same time, he offered to remain a resident in a future Palestinian state. He was willing to stay and live as a Jewish minority under Palestinian sovereignty, [3]a minority that would ensure the existence of Palestinian democracy and would act as a bridge for peace between two states that share the same land, share the same space, but with permeable

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[1] A shtreimel is a fur hat worn by many Haredi men during holidays and the Shabbat.
[2] My observations are based upon data collected throughout fieldwork. I attended Rabbi Froman's weekly Kabbalah lessons where he also discussed his mystically informed peace vision, befriended some of his family members and students and conducted participant observation in several of his peacemaking activities, one of which is discussed in the next chapter.
[3] This position can be arguely perceived as a post-Zionist stance.

borders that permit freedom of movement. Rather than seeing settlements as an obstacle for peace, he would often say, "the settlers could be the fingers of the Israeli hand held out for peace." The idea of fingers did not reflect for him a means of tearing apart Palestinian territorial contiguity and facilitating Israeli control, but instead represented contact and sensitivity.

Rabbi Froman adhered to the ideal of the wholeness of the land. He did not seek the establishment of Jewish control over the maximal amount of territory, but rather the possibility of Israelis and Palestinians inhabiting the same land with parallel political rights. It is impossible to throw to the Palestinians small pieces of land, he would argue, and expect them to vanish from sight in their small, fragmented state. They, too, belong to the land, the whole of it. As far as he was concerned, the widely accepted political formula of land for peace was a secular fantasy entailing the symbolic disappearance of Palestinians beyond geopolitical boundaries, beyond concrete barriers, beyond consciousness.

He thought that the political Left expresses a modern and Western worldview, while the notion of a Whole Eretz Israel expresses a primitive and traditional worldview, and therefore people on the Left look upon it from above with feelings of superiority. This condescending vantage point is also the reason why Western powers accept the Leftist plans for peace, why they feel an attraction to plans entailing geopolitical partition and cultural separation. But he, as "a primitive religious Jew," as he would refer to himself, a Jew with deep spiritual ties to the Holy Land, could testify that the connection between the people of the Whole Eretz Israel and the Palestinians has a greater potential than meets the eye (Froman 2014:136). Many Palestinians are also religious, or at least

connected to religious tradition, nation and land. What stops the connection between the two, settlers and Palestinians, is the hatred for the other, and the fear of the other. He offered no detailed geopolitical solution to the concrete problems facing people on both sides of the conflict, but insisted that the potential for this primary and primal connection exists and must be fulfilled.

He was a man of action who believed that peace must be acted out not through separation but through the pursuit of connection, especially with those deemed the enemy, no matter how despicable they may appear. Therefore, he established close ties with many Palestinians. One of them was the late Yassir Arafat, the President of the Palestinian National Authority. After President Arafat passed away, Rabbi Froman wrote a letter to the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas:

> *For the past few years I customarily send the noble Palestinian nation blessings for the occasion of the Feast of the Sacrifice through the Palestinian President, my brother Yassir Arafat. I remember my last conversation with him, close to his death, when he answered me with emotion: "You are my brother!" and of course it is possible to explain his emotion, that he wanted to tell me, close to his death, that the two nations – the Israelis and the Palestinians – are brothers, that if the fate of one improves so does the fate of its double.*
>
> *… From the difficult experience of the shared history of the two nations – the Israel nation and the Palestinian nation – we can learn one important thing – between two brothers – when one's fate is bad, the fate is also bad of the second. Only when it is good for one, it will be, with God's help, good for its double. Little Jewish children know the famous story (the* hadith [The prophetic traditions of Muhammed]*) of the man who came to the head of the Jewish Sages and asked him to teach him the principle of the Jewish religion while he was standing on one foot (in one sentence). The Sage taught him, "Love your neighbor exactly how you would love yourself."*
>
> *Allah the Exalted established the Palestinian nation as our neighbor. Therefore, from this hadith, which summarized the main principle of our religion, it's possible to learn that just as Jews have obtained a free and thriving state from Allah the Exalted, respected in the world, and just as we obtained from Allah the Exalted a state with Jerusalem as its capital, our neighbor will also obtain a state with its capital as Jerusalem...*[Froman 2005]

As this letter illustrates, unlike many Israelis, especially on the political Right, Rabbi Froman recognized the existence of a Palestinian nation and supported the establishment of a Palestinian state. At the center of his notion of peace was the idea that in addition to its territorial, economic and national dimensions, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is religious at its core, and therefore, as much as religion acts a force of violence, it can also act as a force of peace that brings the two people together rather than driving them apart. He would repeatedly argue that without a religious, spiritual basis, the quest for peace will not succeed.

Accordingly, he repeatedly met with spiritual and political leaders from across the world: from the Dalai Lama to President Erdogan of Turkey. He also conducted numerous meetings with senior members of the Hamas, a religious movement designated a terrorist organization by the US, EU and Israel, meeting, for instance, with the late Hamas leader and movement founder, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin (who was later assassinated by Israel). Rabbi Froman often recalled how, referring to the Oslo Accords, Sheikh Yassin told him that "your heretics and our heretics reached an agreement to suppress religion," and "you and me can reach peace in five minutes." While admitting the latter comment was a typical Middle Eastern exaggeration, Rabbi Froman would nevertheless contend that the important underlying sentiment was that religion cannot be ignored and can in fact be used to bring the two nations together (Etinger 2006; Makover-Belikov 2010).

His ideas caused many people in the settlement movement to oppose him. He, his wife Hadassah and their ten children were constantly ridiculed, sometimes harassed by other settlers, even labeled traitors, and his ideas were often waved off and disregarded as

delusions of a mentally ill person. Doubting the sanity of others, he fondly adopted this stigma, embraced insanity, and clung to the freedoms of imagination, viewing the transgression of societal norms as a creative necessity in a violent reality enabled by restricted visions of peace. In doing this, he drew upon Hassidic Kabbalistic traditions, which informed and provided legitimacy to his peacemaking activities.

Hassidism and Kabbalah: A Brief Background

Rabbi Froman's notion of peace stemmed from life lived in the midst of the conflict as well as from a religious worldview that draws upon Jewish Hassidic traditions, especially the mystical ones, those belonging to the realm of Kabbalah. Therefore, before discussing the Kabbalistic foundations of Rabbi Froman's notion of peace, a quick review of Hassidism and kabbalah is first required.

Hassidism is a Jewish religious renewal movement that emerged in Eastern Europe during the 18th century. The founder of the Hassidic movement was Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov (Hebrew: הבעל שם טוב, lit. Master of Good Name), who emphasized the fostering of personal relations between the individual, God and fellow human beings as opposed to focusing solely on the intricacies of Jewish Law. Prayer became the central means through which an individual could reach a closer connection with God, and those who were unable to achieve this spiritual intimacy, could be assisted by the *tzaddik* (Hebrew: צדיק, lit. the righteous one), the Rabbi, a charismatic leader who acted as a mediator between the common people and the divine truth (Elior 2014).

The Ba'al Shem Tov and his followers rebelled against the assumption that Talmudic learning is the principle means of recognition in the eyes of both God and

human beings. The Hassidic movement faced strong opposition from within the world of Jewish Orthodoxy. The opponents of Hassidism, the *Mitnagdim* (Hebrew: מתנגדים), came primarily from the Lithuanian branch of Jewish Orthodoxy, which was led by the Vilna Gaon, (Hebrew: הגאון מוילנה, lit. the Genius of Vilnius), one of the greatest Talmudic scholars, who emphasized the importance of laborious and ascetic Torah study and conduct. He was especially wary of the Hassidic adoration of the tzaddik, who was often celebrated by Hassidic followers for possessing redemptive and miraculous powers, a practice which was seen by the Vilna Gaon as irrational, delusional and dangerously reminiscent of false Messianinism (Bartal 2005; Elior 2014). As will be discussed later in this chapter, these historical tensions continue to resonate today.

The most severe theological objection to Hassidism targeted their interpretation of divine immanence, of the idea that "there is no place that is empty of him," that God was present everywhere and could to be identified with mundane reality, even that which is impure. Hassidic rabbis preached that human beings could encounter God within the concrete actions of the world: while eating, having sexual intercourse and even when conducting economic transactions. The glorious presence of the transcendent could be joyfully distilled out of the here and the now through a sincere movement of the heart—through inner intent, *kavanna* (Hebrew: כוונה), purposeful attention to the sacred, hidden content of outer forms. Kavanna became important especially during prayer, which became a vehicle for encountering the divine and advancing redemption, both personal and cosmic, upon earth as well as in higher realms of existence (Weiner 1992).

Hassidic teachings rely upon ideas found within the Jewish mystical tradition of hidden truths, often called in Hebrew *Chochmat Ha'Nistar* (חכמת הנסתר), the hidden

wisdom. Jewish mystical tradition is also known as Kabbalah, which means, "reception," or "that which is being received," as compared to, for instance, Halakha, which can be translated as "the path that one travels." The teachings of Kabbalists,[4] of those who possess knowledge of Kabbalah, comprise a diversified body of knowledge that stretches across centuries and continents. Nevertheless, they all share the intention of revealing hidden matters, to provide instructions concerning the meanings and powers that reside beneath language, texts, laws and customs. They aim to offer explanations to sacred realities that lay concealed beyond the everyday appearances, beyond daily practices, and thus illustrate that there is a more profound significance to that which meets the eyes. Hassidism made Kabbalah more accessible to the Jewish masses (Elior 1997; Idel 2000; Scholem 1995).

In contrast to the ordinary religious experience, one of the unique characteristics of Kabbalah, as a Jewish form of mysticism, is the denial of the ability of ordinary language to convey truths. Language, on its surface, belongs to the realm of the revealed. Yet, in symbolizing reality, it points both to the limits of linguistic communication and to the existence of a deeper spiritual realm of understanding and experiencing the world and the divine. As written in the opening of Genesis, the act of creation was an act of speaking, a communicative act of articulation. Therefore, one of the basic premises of Kabbalah is that clues to creation and the essence of the Creator are found within the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, the language of the Torah. According to the Kabbalistic worldview, letters are not merely symbols; they are structures, vehicles and expressions of divine speech, which encompasses all that there is (Scholem 1995).

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[4] It is important to note that not all Kabbalists are mystics, but many Jews with mystical inclinations find fertile ground within Kabbalah.

Yet words and language are only clues since they already constitute a differentiated expression of deeper divine ideas, impulses and powers that lie beyond the domain of structured form. Therefore, some Kabbalists play and reconfigure words, contemplate the silences within the voice or dwell on the empty spaces between letters, because while language offers a connection to God, its true meaning remains hidden. Plain language conceals more than it reveals. It is thus understandable why an uneasy set of relationships exists between Jewish mysticism and the religious establishment. The religious establishment depends upon the social maintenance of the uncontested truth of words, texts and laws, while mysticism, in its emphasis on the hidden aspects of reality as opposed to the revealed ones, undermines the stability of literal meanings and with it the foundations of social order (Ben Yosef 2012; Scholem 1965).

The study of Kabbalah has accordingly been traditionally restricted to those with vast knowledge of the Torah and who are old enough to have both the intellectual and emotional maturity required for an engagement with the secret side of Jewish tradition. However, since the beginning of the 20th century, the dissemination of Kabbalah has increased drastically. HaRav Kook, for example, saw the overriding of the prohibition on the public study of the Kabbalah and its dissemination as an imperative of the Messianic times. He believed the dissemination of the Kabbalah was necessitated by the reunification of Am Israel with Eretz Israel and contained the potential to deliver Judaism from the dangers of secularism (Garb 2009). Today, with the global rise of interest in spirituality, as manifested for example in the rise of “new-age” movements, the study of the Kabbalah has gained popularity within Judaism, even among secular, non-Orthodox

circles as well as outside of Judaism (as manifested, for instance, by the flourishing of various centers for the study of Kabbalah across the globe).

The main literary work of the Kabbalah is the Zohar (Hebrew: זוהר, lit. the Book of Radiance/Splendor). According to tradition, the Zohar was written by Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yohai during the 2nd century CE, although most academics agree that it was written in the late thirteenth century (Dan 2006; Liebes 1993). Much of the narrative of the Zohar revolves around the experiences of a group of disciples that follows Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yohai and his son Eleazar, who wander the Holy Land. Their discussion contains celestial codes that refer to secrets of the divine realm and primarily to the interrelations of the s*efirot* (Hebrew: ספירות, lit counting/enumeration). As creative forms, contents and notions of divine energy that operate between God and this world, the ten sefirot constitute the most basic and familiar kabalistic model. They are used to assist the conceptualization of how finite and imperfect reality is being constantly created out of the infinite, divine light of God: the light of the *ein sof* (Hebrew: אין סוף, lit. endless/infinite).

The ten sefirot are the ten divine emanations of God and creation, which also operate within the soul and comprise the basis of the natural world as well. In general, the Zohar illustrates how everything reflects something else. The words of the Torah reflect the structure and emanations of the divine world. The human body and soul, which emanate from the divine realm, are reflected within the sefirot, which reflect the dynamic processes of creation and the properties of the creator, which are reflected in turn within biblical figures, religious rituals and so on and on. Through this parallelism, even mundane activities can be connected to heavenly realms, with proper knowledge of the

functioning of the sefirot enabling the *shefa* (Hebrew: שפע, lit. abundance) - the creative flow of divine light, of divine goodness - to reach down from higher plains of existence and bestow grace and mercy upon the inhabitants of earth.

Since everything is a reflection of something else according to the Kabbalistic principle of parallelism, the Zohar uses the human body as a paradigm for examining the mysteries and paradoxes of creation: the coexistence of the ultimate unification of the One with the endless pluralities of creation; the materialization of the immaterial; the presence of the supernatural within the natural. The sefirot, which are ordered as dialectical oppositions, become analogous to the various human parts and exhibit feminine and masculine qualities. For instance, *chesed* (חסד, lit. grace), the right side of the sefirot, the giving impulse of bestowal, is masculine, and the left side, *gevurah* (גבורה, lit. judgment) is a restrictive feminine quality. Together they represent the complimentary and opposing coexistence of Yes and No, of affirmation and negation. The Zohar thus treats creation as an erotic process that emerges from the gendered tensions within the sefirot. The unifying mediation of these dialectical oppositions is the goal of human beings upon earth, for all is reflection of all, and what happens above also depends on what takes place bellow. In this way, the thoughts and actions of human beings are endowed with powers that extend far beyond the constraints of the physical universe: these are powers that allow the spiritual mending of a shattered world that came to being as a result of a creative catastrophe (Weiner 1992).

This Kabbalistic theosophy, which sets the unification of oppositions as the goal of redemption, occupies a central position in the thought of HaRav Kook. He too believed that all of being emerges from one source and yearns to reach it, that the dynamic

oppositions and differences that structure creation reflect the truth of God. Yet, from the perspective of the ultimate unity of God, these oppositions do not contradict each other. They are mere appearances, a natural product of the limited consciousness of those who cannot comprehend reality from the position of the all-encompassing One. God is contained within everything, but everything is but a limited expression of God. The world is composed of conflicts and contradictions, and human beings attempt to reconcile the binary contradictions of life that cannot exist without each other, such as the inter-dependent coexistence of the negative and the positive, the dependency of the notion of good upon bad and vice versa. But, these oppositions stem from one source, where all exists in unity and there is no need to reconcile and settle differences (Rosenak 2013).

HaRav Kook applied these mystical metaphysics to all aspect of life, like the relation between the particular and the universal, the personal and the national, Jews and gentiles, revealed and hidden, form and content, sin and virtue, sacred and profane. This perspective allowed him to recognize the fundamental significance of differences, seeing, for instance, sacredness within the secular Zionist endeavor, or finding truths within non-Jewish philosophical thought (like the Hegelian dialectics of history). Kabbalah played an important role in in the collaboration of Orthodox Jews with the Zionist secular enterprise. Rabbi Froman extended these mystical metaphysics to the relations with Palestinians.

The Role of Kabbalah in Rabbi Froman's Vision of Peace

Rabbi Froman's thought draws much from the Kabbalstic theosophy of the sefirot and from HaRav Kook's metaphysical outlook. These metaphysics guided his vision of

earthly politics and provided him with a mystical worldview that recognized the importance of the Other, in this case, the Palestinians, with whom he wished to share the land as political equals. For example, the gendered dynamics of the sefirot where translated by him into the relations between conquest and land. He saw conquest as a masculine value of expansion and control. Land, in contrast, represented for him the feminine value of restriction and reception. He understood the important task of this age as a movement away from masculine values toward feminine ones, a movement from the conquest of land to the love of the land. He argued that this movement from masculine rule over place to feminine love of place is the condition that would allow Israelis and Palestinians -two people similar in their love of land but different in their national aspirations - share the same space peacefully (Froman 2014).

In addition, Rabbi Froman was highly influenced by the Hassidic teaching of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1772- 1810), the great grandson of the Ba'al Shem Tov, whose followers today comprise one of the two largest streams of contemporary Hassidism, alongside Chabad Hassidism. According to Rabbi Nachman, peace, *shalom* (Hebrew: שלום), is the ability to bring oppositions together, to make them meet. "Shalom," which is also one of the Hebrew names of God, also means unity or wholeness. The notion of divine unity is therefore also reflected linguistically, and peace, according to Rabbi Nachman, is the ability to bring together and unify oppositions, to connect the left and right axes of creation, to connect male and female, the sefirot of chesed and gevurah, of mercy and judgment.

To illustrate Rabbi Nachman's notion of peace, Rabbi Froman would repeatedly employ the Breslov Hassidic practice of hand clapping during prayer. Hand clapping is

performance that uses the body imaginatively in order to go beyond the constraints of the intellect. The hands become akin to a pair of wings that enable the soul to elevate to higher realms. The right hand is representative of the sefirat chesed, of giving and infinite bestowal, while the left hand is representative of the sefirat gevurah, of constraint and limitation. When the two meet, restriction is bestowed upon with grace and transforms a limited and flitting carnality into a deeper and endless spiritual movement of the heart toward the eternal. The hands then separate, only to meet again and again in an effort to elevate the soul higher and higher. Rabbi Froman would employ the hand clapping movement outside the context of prayer to illustrate that peace is found within the meeting of opposites, which cannot exist without each other and must become unified even while differentiated.

It is thus that Rabbi Froman would meet with Palestinian leaders, even those viewed by Israelis as despicable terrorists. In doing this, he was influenced by another teaching of Rabbi Nachman, who in turn was influenced by the sixteenth century Jewish mystic Isaac Luria, known as the Holy Ari (1534 – 1572). The Lurianic myth of creation greatly influenced the shaping of Kabbalah in the following centuries. According to this vision of creation, in the beginning there was only God, who was the universe, and there was nothing else. Since God occupied all that there is and there was no possibility for the existence of anything else, God contracts himself in order to open up a space within Himself and bring about creation. This first stage of creation is known as *tsimtsum* (Hebrew: צמצום, lit. withdrawal/contraction). Then, God reenters the formed space, but only partially, in the form of a line of light, a charge of godly energy, which slowly takes the shape and structure of emanations, bringing into existence the sefirot, which are

conceived as vessels that contain pure divine essence(Dan 2006; Elior 1997; Scholem 1965; Weiner 1992). This second stage is known as *hitpashtut* (Hebrew: התפשטות, lit. expansion).

However, the vessels cannot contain the limitless flow of light and a catastrophe occurs. The seven lower vessels break, their shards fall down and their essence, the light, known as holy sparks, return upward toward the divine source. Some of the holy sparks become entangled with the shattered husks, the *klipot* (Hebrew: קליפות). The holy sparks, which are in exile from their source, yearn to be reunited with the divine so that perfection may be restored. The primary task of human beings is the "uplifting of the sparks," the *tikkun* (Herbrew: תיקון, lit. mending), the repairing of a shattered world in order to bring about redemption. The sparks, which are contained within all forms of creation, must be separated from their imprisonment within their shells, and this can be achieved through the commitment and observance of the *mitzvot* (commandments), through the proper kavanna (inner intent). Thus, mundane practices, such as eating or working the land, can become redemptive acts when conducted in a religiously committed manner. Yet, the holy sparks are held captive by the klipot, the evil powers of nonbeing that drive their sustenance from the divine energy of the sparks. Therefore, the tikkun, the redemption of the imprisoned sparks, also involves an ascension into dark powers that rival the power of light. These are the evil forces of the *sitra achra,* (Hebrew: סיטרא אחרא), the other side (Dan 2006; Elior 1997; Scholem 1965; Weiner 1992).

Similarly, when Rabbi Froman would meet with Hamas leaders, for example, he understood this as an encounter with the forces of the sitra achra. For him, mystical life required a constant negotiation with darkness. He would often describe his peace-related

activities as an attempt to hug darkness, to enwrap oneself with darkness and embrace it, in an act of compassion, in order to encounter, examine and release the sparks of holiness that are entrapped within darkness, within evil powers. There was no possibility of uplifting the divine sparks, the act of tikkun, without entering and knowing darkness from within. In order to make peace, he explained, you have to become your enemy, if only temporarily, you have to know the enemy from the inside. This encounter with the enemy, in this case with Hamas leaders, for him contained the power to transform a murderous energy into a force of peace. The intimacy of meeting with the enemy was an encounter that was metaphysically dangerous, but contained a redemptive potential of releasing light out of darkness.

When meeting with the Hamas, Rabbi Froman relied upon a teaching of Rabbi Nachman that engages with the encounter between Moses and Pharaoh (Mark 2009). In the book of Exodus (chapters 7-10), God repeatedly orders Moses to "go to Pharaoh" and request him to "let my people go." Pharaoh refuses but Moses returns to him again and again. For Rabbi Nachamn, this encounter between Moses and Pharaoh becomes paradigmatic of the encounter between the tzaddik and the void, an encounter with the dark empty space that opened up following the first stage of creation (the tsimtsum), mostly devoid of light, devoid of language, devoid of the divine speech of creation. The tsimtsum created a reality in which, from the perspective of human perception, God is seemingly amiss. The use of wisdom, intellect and speech for the search of God within the void is destined for failure as God cannot be met in the void through these forms of human experience.

In his meeting with Hamas leaders, Rabbi Froman saw himself as the tzaddik who must repeatedly "go to Pharaoh." His meetings thus occurred on two interrelated levels of experience: a linguistic one and one beyond language. Language was of the upmost importance. It allowed him to discuss and emphasize similarities across religious and national differences and thus break the ice before reaching political matters, which did indeed produce results: for example, in a 2008 composition of a ceasefire agreement that was endorsed by Hamas but ignored by Israeli authorities (IPCRI 2008). At the same time, the meeting contained a spiritual element that surpassed language, its metaphysics of redemption coming into being through simple human contact: the shaking of the hands, a touch of hand upon a shoulder, a hug, or just the plain fact of physical proximity between two enemies that agree to relate to each other.

After the discovery of his terminal disease toward the end of 2010, Rabbi Froman began teaching weekly Kabbalah lessons at the small, tin-roofed synagogue in the settlement Tekoa B in eastern Gush Etzion. The lessons always began and ended with live musical performances and often included dancing that aimed to elevate the souls of the participants higher and higher, above the constraints of reason and into the unfathomable realm of speechless holiness. Even as he was dying, his body shrunken and twisted in pain, bright eyes sunken and surrounded with black circles of withering flesh, skin frighteningly pale, a glorious white beard now dwindled and short, even then, when he was carried around crouched in a wheelchair, upon hearing the sound of music, he would somehow find the powers to stand up, and surrounded by his students he would dance to the melody, tears of pain, happiness and divine exaltation in his eyes, only to collapse powerlessly shortly after.

Figure 18: Kabbalah lesson with Rabbi Froman, Tekoa B, 2011. Photo by author.

He was also highly influenced by another teaching of Rabbi Nachman, which emphasized the centrality of faithful acts of madness in enabling the imaginative faculties to reach higher forms of understanding and encountering hidden aspects of God (Mark 2009). He would often laugh manically and out of context, making some people blush in embarrassment. Sometimes, in the middle of prayer, after, for example, the blessing for the eternal kingdom of God, he would suddenly scream in English "God save the king! God save the king!" At other times, he would repeatedly yell "Shalom! Shalom!" from the top of his lungs, in a croaky voice, and would urge everyone to join his screaming and clap their hands enthusiastically until the palms could bear it no longer. All of this behavior was in concert with his willingness to meet with Palestinians,

even with Hamas leaders. He was "a crazy man," people would constantly say. There was no need to whisper it, because he took pride in the fact of his craziness.

Eretz Shalom: Rabbi Froman's Peace Movement

Rabbi Froman wished other settlers would follow his way and eventually, in 2010, after more than two decades of incessant peace activities, Eretz Shalom, a settler movement, was established in order to materialize his vision of peace.[5] In Hebrew, Eretz Shalom means "Land of Peace," but it also means "Land of God",[6] just as in Islam, *Salam*, peace, is one of the names of Allah. Headed by Noah, this movement seeks to bring about peace "from below," through meetings between settlers and Palestinians that would foster good "neighborly relations." Rather than constituting solely a cause for friction, the geographic proximity between settlers and Palestinian is understood by these settlers as containing a unique potential for local forms of cooperation - from commerce to faith-based encounters - that rely upon shared values such as love of the land and shared religious beliefs. These, in turn, are believed to increase settler recognition of the Palestinian political condition, foster a sense of local responsibility among settlers, facilitate Palestinian recognition of settlers' deep ties to the land and help the creation of a new community of settlers and Palestinians—one that finds a way to cohabit the same space regardless of differences, regardless of mutually exclusive claims to the entire land from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea.

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[5] Rabbi Froman served as the spiritual leader of Eretz Shalom. That is, he did not get involved in the internal dynamics of the movement or instruct its members how to act. Sometimes, however, he would participate in peacemaking activities that were organized by Eretz Shalom, especially if these included prominent religious leaders.

[6] See, for example, the Babylonian Talmud, Derekh Eretz Zutta, Chapter of Peace.

The underlying rationale of Eretz Shalom stands in opposition to the common political formula of "Land for Peace," which is based on UN Security Council Resolution 242 and sets the basic condition for Arab-Israeli peace negations: Israel withdraws from Arab territories it conquered in return for the termination of belligerence. The geopolitical premise of Eretz Shalom is that there would be no more Israeli territorial withdrawals, that the settlements are here to stay. This of course is a reflection of settler desire: they want to stay where they are.

"The reality is that no one is going to go away," argues Noah (08/24/2010). "The idea that Palestinians can suddenly disappear or move somewhere else belongs to the past as much as the idea of settlements disappearing like in the Gaza Strip. Too much energy is being futilely spent on changing the unchangeable. Instead, we must accept reality and invest energy in making it better." "What would you say to people that argue that you don't belong here?" I inquired. "There are many people who think that you live on stolen Palestinian land." "Before I built my house here," he explained, "I checked the maps to see that that land belongs to no one." "But you are an exception," I answered. "So many settlements were built on Palestinian land. And many would argue that all of Judea and Samaria is Palestinian land." "This is one of the main problems, of the sins that we are here to change," was his response. "We are too obsessed with taking control over the land instead of realizing that there is enough land for everyone. We have to stop thinking about the land in terms of ownership and start thinking about it in terms of belonging."

The conceptual shift from territorial notions of ownership to territorial notions of belonging occupies a central position in the movement's agenda and also echoes Rabbi Froman's idea that the important task of this age as a movement away from masculine

values of conquest toward feminine ones: a movement from the conquest of land to the love of the land. “I always say that I twice belong to this place,” says Noah (06/07/2011). “I was born here, this is my home. In addition, my tradition ties me to this place. But the Palestinians are also here, they belong to this land as much as I do, and they are here to stay. We have to find a way to live together as equals, but this will not happen before we recognize each other on a basic human level.”

Ronen is a 24-year-old settler who lives in an outpost north of the settlement of Efrat. He has long blond hair that is tied in a loose knot and his large crochet kippah rests nonchalantly on the back of his head. He works in construction, studies Arabic and wishes to create an “alternative to the current discourse which is controlled by the elites from the Left” (12/30/2010). Like other settlers, Ronen is upset that the notion of peace is associated in Israel only with the political Left. One of the slogans of Eretz Shalom is “reaching out with a strong right hand for peace.” This slogan is informed by Kabbalah. The union of left and right illustrates the Kabbalistic idea of redemption as tied to the unification of opposites and reflects the yearning of settlers to influence Israeli political discourse through its infusion with traditional Jewish ideas.

“The Left is disconnected from tradition,” said Ronen, echoing a common settler perspective that construes the Left as the internal competitor. “They adhere to secular values, they see Palestinians as the only ones who belong here, so it is easier for them to tell us to go away.” Ronen participated in several meetings between settlers and Palestinians and felt that “there is something deeper in those meetings than many of the meetings” that occurs between Palestinians and Israelis from the political Left. “I was born here,” he stated authoritatively, “and I believe that dwelling here is part of a

religious commandment, that this is sacred land, and all the regular clichés." But he also believes that "the heart of the conflict is also the heart of the solution. This is not an ideology, but a daily reality I try to practice. I try to know my Palestinian neighbors, to learn about their lives and become a friend. I connect to the idea of reaching out with a strong right hand for peace," he added. "This encapsulates both the spiritual and earthly elements of Eretz Shalom, that when meeting Palestinians we have to be compassionate but strong, to unite mercy and judgment." In these meetings he found the means not only to fulfill collective ideals but also more personal ones. "I like to think that I am representing the interests of all settlers," he explained, "but the truth is that this is part of my personal journey to understand the meaning of being Jewish."

David is a psychologist from Bat-Ayin who draws upon Kabbalistic conceptions of the soul in his psychoanalytic therapy. He attended interfaith meetings before he joined Eretz Shalom and recalls a formative moment from one of these encounters (02/07/2011):

> I was sitting with two Palestinians, and one of them [a female] asked me, "why do you reside here in Gush Etzion?" And I said, "I am going to tell you something that maybe you are not going to like. When I am here, I can imagine that King David walked along these hills, and it does something to me." I told her that I live 100 meters from an ancient road with purification pools that served pilgrims to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. A few kilometers away there are caves where Jewish fighters hid from the Romans who wanted to kill them…. Some say that Zionism is colonialism, but when the French came to Algeria there was no French history there; when the British came to South Africa, they had no history there. I returned to my home. We came here because we feel a deep connection to this place; it is sacred to us and we do not want to leave it. And what did she answer? "Listen, we are enemies, but I understand your language, it is a language I understand. Your Leftists, I don't understand their language. They come here, and they tell me I am alright, that I am good, and I feel nice, but I do not understand the language." We talked about the connection to the land, about how this is also the home of Arabs, that it is sacred to both of us and there is something fundamentally deep in Palestinians that also characterizes settlers. We are attached to this place in ways that secular people don't understand.

Noah, Ronen and David are all influenced by Hassidism and their activities in Eretz Shalom reflect not only their political desire to end the conflict, but also a spiritual desire to partake in the redemptive unification of opposites through encounters with Palestinians that aim to bring the two sides closer together. Nevertheless, although they are influenced by the Hassidic tradition, they do not necessarily characterize themselves as Hassidic Jews. In this they reflect a religious phenomenon that is often called neo-Hassidism, defined by Israeli scholar of religion Tomer Persico (2014) as "the deliberate and conscious attempt to draw inspiration, tools and cultural capital from early Hassidic texts and practices in order to bring about a contemporary spiritual revival" (287). In the last two decades, in a somewhat belated response to the advent of post-modernity, more and more Religious Zionists became attracted to Hassidism and began to question, for example, all-encompassing and collectivist notions of redemption in search for more personal ones.[7] These changes manifest themselves in a younger settler counter-culture with strong ties to Hassidic mystical traditions.

Nevertheless, as if echoing the historical tensions between the mitngadim and the Hassidim, the neo-Hassidic phenomenon receives opposition from within the modern-Orthodox Religious Zionist camp. While Hassidism is seen as internal to Judaism, neo-Hassidism is perceived as a reflection of excessive individualism, which is driven by an impatient desire for immediate spiritual satisfaction that undermines religious authority

[7] Neo-Hassidism is a religious reaction to post-modernity. However, rather than simply bringing about the complete breakdown of religious values, neo-Hassidic orientations emphasize the great religious freedom that emerges out of postmodernism. One of the main Religious Zionist figures to engage theologically with postmodernism though conceptual tools driven from the Hassidic tradition was the late Rabbi Shimon Gershon Rosenberg (1949 – 2007). Rabbi Rosenberg, who was also a friend of Rabbi Froman, believed that the post-modern turn provided the opportunity to consciously choose to observe religious law. The mindful choice to believe and follow the law epitomized for him the essence of true religiosity, a liberty of faith that is far removed from mechanized and automated religious adherence and permits the growing of new forms of mystical spirituality that reach closer to the realm of the divine (Persico 2014).

and serious erudition. Instead of studying the Gemara, for example, many of the neo-Hassidics divert their religious interests and energies to the domain of the arts where God may be encountered beyond the sacred text: to music, painting, sculpture, film, theatre and more.[8] Yeshivat HaGush - which is characterized by ties to the academic world and emphasizes the Brisk method of Talmudic study - is one of the main Religious Zionists institutions to criticize neo-Hassidic influences within the yeshiva world.

The contemporary Religious Zionist conflict over the status of neo-Hassidism carries over to Eretz Shalom as well. Their notion of peace as emerging from the people, from the land, is seen by many as a reproduction of a disconnection between mysticism and reality. "I also believe in peace between us and the Arabs," was Mordechai's response when I told him about the movement, "but first the Messiah will have to arrive," he concluded. "Rabbi Froman has some beautiful ideas," was Rabbi Cohen's diplomatic reaction, "but I don't think they are realistic." Other settlers were less diplomatic and referred to Rabbi Froman's "mental health." Most of the opposition to Eretz Shalom targeted the idea that Jews could live as a minority in a Palestinian state. "They will be slaughtered the moment the IDF withdraws," summarizes this position. Nevertheless, Eretz Shalom also attracted settlers who are not neo-Hassidic, who are older and do not know the geopolitical solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but still believe that peace can emerge from the relations between settlers and Palestinians.

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[8] However, the Vilna Gaon was well immersed in Kabbalah, and the struggle against the Hassidim was therefore about the place of Hassidim within the world of Jewish Orthodoxy rather than the religious legitimacy of Kabbalah itself. The opposition to neo-Hassidim stems from the perception of Kabbalah as a reflection of irrational tendencies that deviate from the rational essence of the halakha. Furthermore, the Religious Zionist conflict over neo-Hassidim revolves primarily around its proper place within the yeshiva world rather than the legitimacy of Kabbalah as a central Jewish tradition (Ross 2014). Neo-Hassidism continues to exert its influence upon Religious Zionism, which from its early days was shaped by the contrasting forces of the Mizrahi movement's modern-Orthodoxy and the mystical thought of HaRav Kook.

Yosef, for example, lives in a settlement at the northern West Bank. Married with four kids, he has conflicting relations with the observance of the commandments, and recently removed his kippah in a public expression of religious doubt. "The ground conditions create reality," he explains (01/23/2011),

> the relations between people create reality…. I have no opinion about one state-, two state-, three state-solutions, I believe in a simple meeting between people. If it will succeed, it will lead to a better reality. I know that there is a lot of hatred amongst us, among them; we see it all the time. I come from this background, I used to hate Arabs; we are all people with a very powerful national orientation, not to say racist, and with this we should live, because this is my nation, my reality. I don't know where all of this would lead, but I feel it makes a difference…. We talked about what is in our hearts, neighbors. The importance resides in the existence of these meetings; this is what we need to do; there are problems with meetings with women, but this is what we need to do. There is no magical solution; we need to face reality.

The Settler-Palestinian Dialogue Group

I joined the activities of Eretz Shalom early on during fieldwork. While my interactions with settlers were mired in ethical dilemmas, in the case of Eretz Shalom my involvement was also informed by a more conscious desire for self-identification. I was attracted to the idea of settlers and Palestinians making peace; to the hopeful possibility of radical change in the tragic human realities of the Holy Land; to the idea of Jewish settlers, the embodiment of Palestinian national enemy, redeeming themselves, Israel and Judaism from the violence of the occupation. I was attracted to all of these and more and thus began to hang out with Noah and his settler and Palestinian friends. During these activities I got to know Nabil, a 35-year-old Palestinian from Beit Ummar, a crowded and underdeveloped town of more than 13,000 people encased by three Israeli settlements and a refugee camp. Nabil's grandfather was killed next the Lone Oak, on January 14,

1948, just before the Israeli declaration of Independence. “My grandfather died in the war,” he explains, “but I was always raised to seek peace, to look for the common humanity of all of us…. Yes, settlers and soldiers too.” This, of course, does not detract from his condemnation of the Israeli occupation and the settlements “that are built on our stolen land.”

Nabil, Noah and I participated in a dialogue meeting between settlers and Palestinians. I was one of eight settlers who met with eight Palestinians over a period of seven months. Some people left and others joined, but Nabil was there throughout the year, and so was I. He was one of the unofficial leaders of the Palestinian group and kept emphasizing the political aspect of the conflict throughout the meetings, much to the annoyance of several settlers who were interested in discussing faith-based possibilities of cooperation. He came to seek political recognition and did not wish to find the shared humanity of settlers and Palestinians. He already knew that. He felt comfortable in his own skin and desired solely to be the political equal of settlers. He often expressed this desire through an imitative performance of imagined political power. For example, when several settlers told him that they support the establishment of a Palestinian state and wish to live there as Palestinian citizens, he announced in response that their applications for Palestinian citizenship would be examined on an individual basis, much to the annoyance of the settlers who expected their declarations to be met with deep gratitude.

Still, Nabil kept insisting on the importance of meeting in spite - and precisely because - of political realities. His home was always open to friends, even settlers. This is no simple position to take. Whereas a couple of settlers in our group received anonymous threatening phone calls because of their collaboration with Palestinians, they nonetheless

enjoyed democratic rights and the protection of Israeli law. For the Palestinian members of the group, the political reality was and remains precarious. Their participation in the dialogue meetings could be perceived by other Palestinians as a severe form of collaboration with the enemy: as acceptance of the normality of settlement realities and the loss of Palestinian land. In accordance, authorizations for these meetings had to be received from the highest-ranking Palestinian officials. Still, one Palestinian was arrested and interrogated by the Mukhabarat, the Palestinian Secret Police. He was released after two days and said he was treated well.

The dialogue meetings, which occurred in places under Palestinian control, sometimes took place over a weekend. They were quite intense. Even the Israeli and Palestinians moderators and translators who guided these meetings lost their professional composure several times. Yet, the powerful connection between settlers and Palestinians was undeniable. The two groups shared similar values and meanings, such as respect for elders, the importance of the family unit, the love of the land, and similar monotheistic beliefs. “I sometimes feel that I have more in common with [the Palestinians] than with secular Israelis,” announced David. “We are very similar,” summarized Nabil. “We believe in many of the same things, but also want the same things, which is part of the problem. We need to learn to share the same place as equals.”

The dialogue meetings also exposed internal rifts within the two groups. For example, settlers disagree about the desired political resolutions of the conflict. Some within the settler group echoed Rabbi Froman’s position and viewed the two-state solution with a Jewish minority in Palestine as an ideal situation, while others emphasized the intricate bi-national composition of the Israeli-Palestinian space and

imagined a regional confederation that included the Palestinian populations of the Jordanian Kingdom as well. Then there were those who said the conflict cannot be resolved anytime soon, and therefore the best that can be currently achieved is the building of mutual trust, good neighborly relations and the alleviation of Palestinian suffering through removal of movement restrictions and legal obstacles such as limitations on construction and access to land. Within the Palestinian group there were disagreements about the political demands to the settlers: should the meetings aim to achieve political resolution or is getting to know each other a good enough start on the long road toward peace? The dialogue meetings lasted for seven months, until they ended on a somewhat sour note.

During the last meeting (07/08/2011) Noah had an idea. Before going to bed, we should all engage in some role-playing and perform what we have learned about each other during the last year. Influenced by the teachings of Rabbi Nachman and inspired by Rabbi Froman, he desired to overcome the limits of language and political discourse through performance that would enable us to embody and feel the other. However, it was already past ten at night on a very long Friday, and all of us were exhausted, both settlers and Palestinians. Some behaved as if not hearing Noah's idea, and a few others moved uncomfortably at the thought of another group activity.

Noah had an easier time enticing the five new participants who were younger than the rest. The new participants, three settlers and two Palestinians, were in their early twenties and appeared to still be high on the events of the day, which included intense discussions about the occupation, the Nakba, Palestinian terror and Jewish ties to the land. Noah eventually got most of us sitting in a circle. A few people did manage to

sneak away in the meantime, including the Palestinian moderator. About ten of us stayed in the room, with a slight advantage of numbers to the settlers. Noah reached his hands into a plastic bag. One hand emerged holding a red and white checkered *Kaffiye*, Jordanian style, and the other hand came out holding a large white woolen Kippah, Hebron style. We would each get to play the role of the other, he explained, and using the headwear as means of getting into our character, we would talk about our difficulties and pains, settlers as Palestinians, Palestinians as settlers.

With the kaffiye wrapped around his head and a naturally occurring beard of impressive proportions decorating his face, Noah looked like a respected member of the Hamas, or was it the Islamic Jihad? We could not agree on his Islamic politics, but we all agreed he looked good in the kaffiye. Noah pretended to be "Ibrahim," an old Palestinian farmer who lived to see most of his land being taken away by the thieves from the hills. One of his sons and three of his grandsons were arrested by the occupation forces, and with every year that passes he is left with less land and less life. Ibrahim remembers how the land was covered with green grapevines as far as the eye could see, before the stain of walls and red roofs. He still believes in peace though, for he is a man of faith, and one day, with God's help, there will be peace in this land. Noah's performance was interrupted several times for the sake of translation. Nasir, who also spoke Hebrew, echoed Noah's concluding words in Arabic, and the Palestinians nodded in approval of this performance.

It was Musa's turn now. We all laughed when he tilted the large kippah over his forehead. His eyes narrowed down and a twisted grimace appeared as he got himself into character. Musa transformed into "Shlomo." Shlomo has a very nice home. He loves his

wife and kids, so he needs a big home. He is a man of faith, and every day when he wakes up he goes to wash his face. He also likes to brush his teeth in the shower. Musa pretended to wash his face, brush his teeth, clean his armpits, and wash his hair. Shlomo also has a dog, a big clean dog. The dog takes showers too, and then there is the car, which is also clean, because Shlomo washes it every day. We laughed throughout Musa's comic show, but this laughter also voiced an increased anxiety among the settlers: it was clear Musa was constructing his settler identity in opposition to the Palestinian experience of lack of access to water rather than performing the difficulties of settler life. Musa did not get to complete his performance because at some point Noah interrupted in order to explain again the purpose of this activity.

Yehuda was the next one to perform. He performed Palestinian suffering from a different angle, emphasizing the problems of health, military blockades and medical access, throwing in some Arabic expressions to authenticate his character. After Yehuda finished his performance, Nabil declared that he would be the next one to perform a settler. Nabil, who took a rather hardline political stance throughout most of the meetings, was annoyed with what he considered to be too much talking that lacked concrete results. At the beginning he had some hope about the possibility of reaching new political ground, but now he felt that his participation in this dialogue project served to support the occupation through the normalization of Palestinian relations with settlers.

Earlier in the afternoon Nabil gave us an ultimatum: tomorrow morning the settlers will have to draft a simple text that clearly expresses their support of equal Palestinian rights, the immediate end of the occupation, and the establishment of a Palestinian state along the 1967 boundaries. The settlers were not happy with the

demand. It was the Shabbat, after all, a sacred time when writing is prohibited. And in any case, most of them did not desire to engage in a geopolitical discourse since it was not the right time yet. They mostly desired to know the Other better and gain Palestinian recognition of their own suffering and justified fears.

Nabil decided to go international and gave an unforgettable performance in English. He was Alexei, an atheist immigrant from the Soviet Union who came to Israel looking for a better life. Alexei knew nothing about Israel but acquired a certification that proves that one of his grandfathers was Jewish, and thus was granted Israeli citizenship. Alexei joined the military, and, after discovering his faith, became Jewish and moved to a settlement so that he could live on the land of his ancestors. However, Alexei dies all of a sudden, and because the religious authorities decide he was not really Jewish after all, he ends up being buried outside the cemetery, next to the cemetery's fence.

Nadav, one of the new Jewish participants, stared at me in bewilderment. He wasn't the only one. Almost all of the settlers looked stunned, unable to reconcile the unexpected gap between the surprisingly sophisticated social critique and the inability of the Palestinians to empathize with settlers' suffering without turning their performance into a political critique of the hypocrisies of settler and Israeli realities. Or was it merely a political refusal to empathize with settlers? Several weeks after this meeting, I asked Nabil why he and Musa did not perform settlers with more empathy. "We performed settlers the way we know them," was his short answer.

On the following Shabbat morning, the two groups conducted separate meetings. The settlers' meeting was unpleasant, defined by arguments and anger among the participants. Some claimed the idea of drafting a legalistic text about geopolitical

boundaries is a replication of the same problematic political discourse they are trying to oppose. Others said that the Palestinians are clearly not ready for peace as exemplified by their alarming inability to empathize with settlers' suffering and fears. And, some argued we should cede and provide Nabil the object of his desire, and through the paradoxical affirmation of his ultimatum, move beyond the constraints of political language, thus allowing him to return to his village with written proof of his power as an agent of change.

Written by the translator, the end result was an ambiguous text, a cacophony of ideas that recognized Palestinian suffering and the urgent need for equal rights, but lacked a definitive description of the political manifestation of this recognition. Nabil was furious, and at some point Yehuda decided to pose a parallel ultimatum to the Palestinians: "Do you want peace now or peace here?" He thus construed peace as a problem of time in opposition to space, as a problem of progress that was dependent upon Palestinian willingness to patiently wait until the ground conditions would allow the emergence of peace from below, from the local people themselves rather than from politicians. This was the last of the bi-national meetings between the two groups, an unhappy but expected conclusion to a journey that felt historical, aimless and meaningful.

Recognition was the main theme to emerge from the meetings. The moderators also contributed to this presence through a conception of peace as an ideal of mutual recognition. Indeed, both settlers and Palestinians desired to be recognized by the other side. Yet their objects of desire were quite different. Settlers desired Palestinian recognition of similarity and construed peace as contingent upon the mutual recognition of fear and suffering. The Palestinians were willing to reciprocate insofar as the settlers

were willing to recognize the Palestinian desire for political equality as the basis of mutual recognition. In short, whereas the Palestinians desired political recognition of equality, the settlers desired recognition of existential sameness.

The Palestinians did not seek from settlers a confirmation of their shared humanity. They were comfortable with their sense of self. Quite the contrary, the settlers were the ones fixated upon the recognition of sameness and desired Palestinian affirmation of their own humanity. However, the Palestinians felt that the mere political fact of their participation in the dialogue project should satisfy the settlers' desire for the Palestinian recognition of sameness. As far as the Palestinians were concerned, through their rejection of geopolitical dialogue, the settlers failed to recognize the political condition that underlines the Palestinian desire for recognition. They failed to recognize the humanity of the Palestinians. And so, the Palestinians rejected Noah's attempt at enticing them into a performance of sameness, and through their own performance of essential political differences, performed to settlers their own inhumanity, that is, the inhumanity of settlers and Palestinians who refuse to see each other as equals.

Nevertheless, this somber analysis of the encounter fails to express the ethnographic truth of the matter because the encounter also occurred beyond the constraints of a dialogue group. During breaks, between the emotionally intense dialogue sessions, Palestinians and settlers could not seem to get enough of each other. It was as if the structured meetings pushed the two groups to dig deeper into their national identities. They would not stop talking, laughing, touching and embracing one another. Palestinians, for example, teased settlers about the staleness of the kosher food that was bought in advance for the settlers, while settlers teased the Palestinians back for having lost the art

of hummus-making to Israelis. All was taken with good humor, and all agreed that the kosher hummus that was served for dinner was an exceptionally bad one. Palestinians taught settlers Arabic, while settlers taught Palestinians how to say blessings for the food. They compared Jewish and Muslim beliefs in search for spiritual commonalities, showed pictures of their families and homes and exchanged stories about loss and pain, for members of both sides have lost loved ones in the bloody conflict. Musa revealed to Yehuda that he has "Jewish blood," that his family converted to Islam centuries ago and still takes pride in its Jewish heritage; Yehuda told him that when he hears the call of Muezzin he feels as if it addresses and urges him to learn from Muslims how to better express his longing for God.

Throughout the meetings, some stayed up almost until morning, talking to each other in broken Arabic, Hebrew and English, intimately sharing personal details from their lives. Others left the parameters of the meeting grounds and took a nightly stroll. One time, Yosef and Salim snuck out at night and drove to a pub in Jerusalem. Yosef, who was already struggling with his religiosity, found the perfect opportunity to break the religious violation against driving during the Shabbat, while Salim, who violated the Muslim prohibition of alcohol consumption, felt comfortable enough with Yosef to reveal that his own religiosity was not as strict as he expressed during the dialogue session. They both drank too much and missed the morning session.

The European manager of the project[9] was utterly surprised by the unexpected affection displayed during the breaks. He had organized dozens of dialogue groups between Israelis and Palestinians. Yet he had never witnessed such an immediate bond

[9] The project was a local initiative that was funded by a European organization, which paid for accommodation and food.

between Israelis and Palestinians, Muslims and Jews. This was the first time his organization funded any event involving Jewish settlers. There were legal obstacles to funding settler-related projects, and there was also the ostensibly obvious problem of utility: what would be the point of bringing together Jewish settlers and Palestinians for the purpose of peace?

Some of the settlers and Palestinians that participated in the dialogue group continue to maintain ties. Musa, for instance, visited Yehuda at his settlement. Not wanting to subject Musa to the settlement's security checks, Yehuda covertly brought his visitor to the settlement's bounds, and a terrified Musa found himself yet again wearing a large kippah, this time at a settlement's synagogue. Similarly, Noah confronted Israeli soldiers during a demonstration against the destruction of Palestinian houses. Nabil, who continued to demand political recognition from Jewish settlers, went on to participate in other activities of Eretz Shalom. And, Nadav said that he emerged transformed from this meeting, having discovered the "transparent walls" that block his perceptions of Palestinians.

Eretz Shalom: More Examples of "Peace from Below"

Eretz Shalom aimed to promote peace "from below," from the people themselves instead of politicians, and in September of 2011, it organized a conference that took place in the settlement of Ofra, north of Jerusalem. More than 150 settlers attended this event, mostly young people in their early twenties. They divided into small groups and came up with various ideas for cooperation with Palestinians. These included an interfaith convention; the publication of a bi-monthly periodical in Arabic and Hebrew that would

foster dialogue between settlers and Palestinians; the creation of an internet platform in different languages that would serve as a platform for sharing ideas on peace; shared prayer groups; organization of cultural events, such as music and sports; subsidized teaching of Arabic to Jews and Hebrew to Palestinians as an extra-curricular activity; joint ecological projects that would benefit both settlers and Palestinians, such as garbage disposal and water purification; establishing a joint fund for economic cooperation; and the creation of a joint committee on road safety (Eretz Shalom 2014).

Many of these activities did not materialize. For example, a joint fund for economic cooperation was never established. Likewise, the plans for a multi-lingual internet platform or subsidized lessons of Arabic and Hebrew failed to occur. Lack of funds was a major problem: the movement was simply unable to gather enough money. Many local and international organizations do not invest in settler-related initiatives out of a political desire not to sustain the Israeli occupation. Private donors were also worried about the public implications of being associated with settlers. In addition, while some settlers were attracted to the idea of meeting with Palestinians, others opposed the establishment of a Palestinian state and therefore could not fully identify with the movement.

Politics where thus the biggest obstacle to a religiously informed vision of peace: the political implications of cooperation with Palestinians, that is, the establishment of a Palestinian state, worried many settlers, while Palestinians were worried that in meeting with settlers they were acting to normalize the occupation. I met dozens of Palestinians who worked jointly with Eretz Shalom and in doing so took a great risk, for collaboration with settlers is considered a collaboration against the Palestinian national cause. For

example, in 2012 Said dedicated a small plot of his land to organic crops to sell along with settlers to raise funds for Eretz Shalom. For several months Palestinians and settlers met there, worked the land, planted seeds, brought their kids to play together and prayed jointly, but after Said received threats of imprisonment from Palestinian officials, these activities stopped, much to Said's displeasure; he announced, "I am willing to go to jail for peace." He has four kids he has to feed, though, and his friends - settlers and Palestinians - persuaded him against this notion of martyrdom.

Still, throughout my fieldwork, I participated in and observed many other activities of Eretz Shalom. One of these activities was a joint prayer for rain that occurred by a dried-out fountain next to the Palestinian village Al Walaja, not far from an IDF checkpoint. Al-Walaja is locate at the southern slopes of Jerusalem, northwest of Bethlehem, mostly in an area conquered by Israel in 1967, but later annexed as part of the municipal territory of Greater Jerusalem. A security barrier is now being built around the village. The original route of the security barrier was supposed to surround the village almost completely, actually keeping it within the Israeli side but leaving it only one accesses road, separating its approximately 2,500 residents from the remains of their agricultural lands. The current route is less restrictive than the original one, allowing relatively more freedom of movement, but still separates people from the land.

Regardless of the political realities of Al-Walaja, with the permission of the governor of Bethlehem, its residents participated in a shared prayer for rain. The winter of 2010 was an especially dry one, and Thursday, November 11 felt like a hot summer day. Rabbi Froman was there along with other rabbis and several members of Eretz Shalom who helped organize the event. They were joined by Christian priests, Muslim

Qadis, Palestinians officials and other Palestinians who came from al-Walaja and the Bethlehem area. There were also dozens of media people who flocked to the place to document a rather unordinary sight of religious cooperation across political lines.

Noah stood by the dried-out reservoir, the murky water at its bottom covered by large patches of green algae and floating trash. Surrounded by photographers and with Palestinians at his side, he called out loud, "We are about to begin a prayer from all of those who believe in one God. We have seven years with little rain […] we joined together, Jews and Muslims, because we know that it is written in the Quran and the Bible that the land belongs to God." He pointed up and down with his hand when he said "God" and "Land." A few moments later, the governor of Bethlehem spoke; at his side were Rabbi Froman, in a white robe and with tefillin on his head and arm, along with several Qadis. "We are now going to pray," said the governor, "Muslim, Jews and Christians, all will conduct their own separate service […] but our voice is one voice, and it may reach God, *Inshallah* [...] We ask God to help us and bless us with rain."

About two dozen Jewish men gathered around the dry reservoir; a small group of women gathered at its other side. They all fasted in preparation for this prayer for rain and passionately read from Psalms: "A song of ascents. Out of the depths I call You, O Lord. Lord, listen to my cry; let Your ears be attentive to my plea for mercy. If You keep account of sins, O Lord, Lord, who will survive?" (Pslams 130:1-3). The Hebrew Bible unequivocally ties rainfall with rewards and punishments for Jewish conduct, and the bodies of the praying Jews wavered, their voices trembled in awe, and their hands stretched outward in gestures that displayed penitence and sincere kavanna (inner intent and sincerity). The service ended with a song that is traditionally performed during times

of repentance: “May this time be an hour of mercy and a time of acceptancee before You.” Above them, on a plateau by the reservoir, dozens of Palestinians watched curiously as the Jews prayed. When it ended, the Muslims organized in two orderly rows that contrasted the relative messiness of the Jewish service. They began praying for rain, and Rabbi Froman stood at their side, joining their call, “Allahu Akbar!” God is great!

After the Muslim prayer ended, Rabbi Froman and the governor ceremoniously planted seeds of wheat in the dry earth. An Arab reporter asked Rabbi Froman, “On whose land do you stand?” Rabbi Froman smiled, “On the land of God,” he answered. “On the land of peace.” He added in Arabic, “the name of God is Shalom. But who rules here? The governor.” He laughed and reached out his arm to touch the governor. “Are you willing to live in a Palestinian state?” inquired the reporter. “Of course,” replied the rabbi, “and I said it before, but now is not the opportunity, now we are just asking to live. What does it mean to live? It means rainfall.” He pointed to the sky and told the interviewer, “Look up, interview [the sky], look up.” He held the reporters hand, the one that held the microphone, and lifted it up in the direction of the clear, blue, November sky. “It’s dry,” said the reporter. “It’s dry,” repeated Rabbi Froman, “dry.”

The reporters kept surrounding Rabbi Froman, trying to make him talk about the politics of this event. He kept dodging their questions, always returning to the religious significance of the event: “I believe that when God sees his children working together, rain will fall, and peace may come with it.” “God likes unity, and when people make unity on the earth it is very good, and Allah likes this kind of life,” the Mufti of Bethlehem told the reporters. ”Allah wants people not to quarrel with each other because

of religion. Because Allah sent religion to make peace, not to make war. We hope that God will be happy."

As I left the place, I heard the soft sounds of a strangely familiar tune emanating from the direction of the fountain. By the shadows of a graffiti-covered, stone wall, next to a small spring canal, I noticed a Palestinian teenager and a young settler taking refuge from the heat. The Palestinian played a rounded-string instrument, the oud. The settler rested his body on an adjacent wall, and with eyes closed, he listened silently to the melody of the young Palestinian musician. The lush sounds of the oud mixed with the gentle sounds of trickling water. It sounded so familiar, sweet and sad, but I couldn't recognize it, and then it suddenly dawned upon me: he was playing the Israeli national anthem, "The Hope."

The Football Game and the Tensions between Religion and Politics

The attempt to break through the harsh political domain of the conflict formed one of the challenges of Eretz Shalom, and one of the most notable of such attempts was a football game. On Friday morning, January 28, 2011, the 23rd of Shvat, 5771, settlers and Palestinians met for a historical sport match at the settlement of Efrat. Ten Palestinians from Bethlehem and Hussan, a town west of Bethlehem, played against a team of ten settlers. A Turkish referee oversaw the game, and a famous Arab-Israeli sports broadcaster served both as the broadcaster and the translator. Noah invited me to join the settler team but I refused politely, explaining that I am better at more physically demanding sports like Ping-Pong and bowling and do not wish to hurt the national cause. The settlement rabbi, Shlomo Riskin, was there and expressed his deep regret about his

physical inability to join the game, but confessed that this is to the benefit of both teams. He added that "the conflict among us saddens me a lot; it is not between us, it is a conflict between politicians, but it saddens me very much because we are all the sons of Abraham […] we all live together […] Therefore this game is important, historical."

Rabbi Froman was there, too. He held up a big white balloon with the word "war" written upon it in Hebrew and Arabic. He then invited the captains of the two teams to pop the balloon of "hate, fear and war" with needles, but not before he confessed that he dreamt last night that "the Palestinian team would win ten to zero […] but whoever wins today would be Shalom, for Shalom is God, Salam would win," and added in Arabic, "Salam HuAkbar," God is great, Peace is great. A representative of the Palestinian Authority talked about the "importance of just peace, the importance of establishing a Palestinian state next to the Israeli one," expressed his support for this game because "such games represent peace and love," and said a blessing that "good neighborliness should dwell upon this place." Then Rabbi Froman was invited to take the honorary kick-off, kicking a ball covered with the words "war," "terror", and "hate." He requested the players to kick the ball throughout the game "strongly!"

The event was not publicized in advance. Noah explained that he wanted to keep it low-key because he was worried that Women in Green would arrive and interrupt the game, and he wished for a welcoming atmosphere for the Palestinians. The game thus occurred in front of a small audience of about 50 people, mostly settlers. For forty minutes (divided into two halves), the players ran and kicked the ball on a brown field covered with small patches of grass that managed to survive the drought. The Palestinian team had the clear advantage. They were in better shape, more organized, with greater

technical abilities. They controlled the game throughout. They ended up defeating the settlers six to three. Trophies were given to both teams at the end, but Rabbi Froman, who sat down next to a folding table and studied the writing of Rabbi Nachman during the game, did not stay until the end. He collapsed and was taken to the hospital.

Figure 19: The Football Game. Efrat, January 2011. Photo by author.

The cultural reality in the Holy Land is one of ethnic separation: the vast majority of Israelis and Palestinians rarely meet beyond the violent constraints of the conflict. Most Israelis remain oblivious of Palestinian life and meet them either during their military service or while consuming goods. For example, eating humus at an Arab restaurant is perhaps one of the most popular Israeli pastimes during which the Palestinian is met as the service provider, an encounter that reinforces cultural hierarchies. While football is the most popular sport in Israel, and while the Israeli Football Association does contain several Arab-Israeli teams, games between Israelis and

Palestinians living in the occupied territories remain a rarity. The football game organized by Eretz Shalom was therefore a rare event indeed.

Said was happy about the football match and said that the game "gives hope to our kids that they may live in peace." Yet, when Nabil heard about the game, he was quite angry and told me that "the game was a step too far," that "playing football inside a settlement normalizes the occupation […] as if Palestinians and settlers are equal." As for myself, I was ambivalent at the time about the meaning of the game. Did the game signify a triumph of human desire for peace over violent realities, or did it constitute a reinforcement of the same realities it aimed to overcome? I think now that both of these meanings coexist. It was an encounter that humanized both sides as much as it was an exceptional event that normalized the fact of political inequality. At the end of the day, both teams returned to their homes, to the same realities of privilege and lack. Yet the encounter contained a glim of hope, for they met as human beings, as equals for a change. Even if it lasted just a fleeting moment, it was nevertheless a powerful moment laden with the possibility of a better future.

The tension between the political dimensions of the conflict and the desire to transcend them, sometimes through their disavowal, defines the activities of Eretz Shalom. Clearly, how can meetings between Palestinians and settlers be devoid of political significance? Indeed, the various informal encounters—the dialogue group, the shared prayer for rain, the football match—were political events of the upmost kind. At the same time, the political dimensions of the conflict were subverted by the mere existence of such events. Settlers and Palestinians were brought together in a setting where religion transforms from a force that increases enmity through the legitimization of

territorial rule and political differences into a force that enables the expression of humanity through the affirmation of deeply shared values.

Conclusion

Rabbi Froman and of Eretz Shalom demonstrate how rather than simply reproducing hatred and violence, religion can also propel settlers to take responsibility for their centrality within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, even as they derive personal meanings from these encounters. Indeed, they have no intention of leaving Judea and Samaria. As Noah puts it, they do not own the land, but they belong there twice, by virtue of both religion and birth, for more settlers are born each day into a reality they did not originally create. Yet, unlike the vast majority of settlers and other Israelis, the settlers of Eretz Shalom search for new ways of changing the sociopolitical disparities between settlers and Palestinians. These "new ways" are based upon the traditional ways of the people of the Holy Land. Thus, although the activities of Eretz Shalom are characterized by a constant attempt to deny the political essence of the movement, in using religion to overcome politics, they also point to the disavowal of another important element of the conflict: the ameliorative potential of religion to also bring people together rather than only driving them apart. As Rabbi Froman and Eretz Shalom demonstrate, religion can operate at different levels – from mystical theology to a more quotidian religious basis – to bring settlers and Palestinians together.

Although not all of these settlers agree upon the geopolitical solution to the conflict, they all engage closely with the contentious realities of the here and the now. However, in opposition to Palestinain political exigencies, their relation to the future

reflects patient qualities: peace is a long process. This position was exemplified by Yehuda, who opposed "peace now" to "peace here," and therefore construed peace as a problem of time in opposition to space, as a problem of historical progress. Similarly, Rabbi Froman used to say, "slowly, slowly with peace." He understood peace as religious ideal of wholeness and unity rather than partition, one that is intrinsically tied to the redemptive aim of the messianic mission. Seeing peace as a spiritual utopia, he warned against the hastening of the end, thus offering a political-theological stance that subverts both the messianic urgency that typified Gush Emunim and the political imperative of the Israeli liberal left.

During fieldwork I encountered dozens of Jewish settlers and Palestinians who attempt to forge relations that are based upon mutual recognition and a shared desire to bring about political equality. In acting to reshape the political and religious norms of their own societies, these people also express a desire that outsiders will recognize the political value of their own traditions. Local ways of knowing and experiencing the world matter because they shape as much as they are reshaped by concrete realities, and, in the Holy Land, religion clearly matters. This simple fact seems to unfortunately evade the mostly secular, powerful decision-makers, who tend to approach religion as a problem instead of also recognizing its ameliorative potential in their search for solutions for the conflict. Therefore, even as these events were fraught with political tensions, the ability of Rabbi Froman and Eretz Shalom to act closely with Palestinians - in spite and because of their settler identity – is of great importance. It illustrates how their religious beliefs, which are sometimes characterized as the antithesis to the liberal values of freedom and equality, may operate to attain the same values they are assumed to oppose.

From this perspective, it is equally important to notice how mysticism - a phenomenon that has become synonymous with irrationally - corresponds to an increased settler awareness of Palestinians. This awareness propels them to seek contact with Palestinians across differences in peacemaking efforts that call into question assumptions about the nature of the conflict, such as the assumed unavoidable hostility between settlers and Palestinian. The mystical worldview provided Rabbi Froman, for example, with metaphysical rationales and behavior guides for his insistent meetings with Hamas leaders. Following Rabbi Nachman's "go to Pharaoh," he searched for sparks of holiness within the enemy in an attempt to redeem self, other and a shattered world that allowed the establishment of a human bond between adversaries. Therefore, the mystical aspiration to surpass reason in search for divine truths facilitated peacemaking activities that occurred within the earthly domain. Likewise, more than a few members of Eretz Shalom are influenced by Hassidic traditions and by Rabbi Froman's mystical teachings, and see the encounter with Palestinians not only as a political necessity, but also as a personally meaningful religious task that relates to the redemptive unification of opposites. This role of mysticism can be contrasted in turn with the general disconnection from Palestinian realities that characterizes settlements such as Alon Shvut, where Judaism is valued as a religion of reason and neo-Hassidism occupies an uneasy position, seen as both internal to Judaism and a threat to serious erudition.

In this chapter I attempted to demonstrate how emerging faith-based encounters between settlers and Palestinians reproduce some of the basic assumptions about the sociopolitical dynamics of the conflict, while also challenging some of the prevailing ideas about the relations between settlers and Palestinians, most notably the complete

incommensurability of national aspirations. In addition, I illustrated the role of religion in peacemaking attempts that go against the political grain and argued that rather than simply constituting an unrealistic and irrational phenomenon, mysticism can reveal the humanity of the enemy and can unsettle binary political distinctions that contribute to the perpetuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, as always, there is no easy solution. In the following chapter, I discuss the role of Jewish mysticism in acts of settler violence against Palestinians.

Chapter 6

"Breaking the Shell": Religious Violence and Anti-Statist Positions among Settlers

Introduction

On August 31, 2010, the eve of yet another round of peace talks, four Jewish settlers rode Highway 60 south toward their settlement. Shortly after passing the road leading to Hebron – the City of the Patriarchs – they were ambushed and shot to death by Palestinians. Two of the victims, the parents of six, were pregnant with a seventh child. The other female victim was the mother to a single child following many years of fertility treatments. Her husband volunteered at a religious medical organization that identifies and treats the dead following "tragic incidents." He found his dead wife inside the bullet-ridden, white station wagon while on duty. The 25-year-old male victim was recently married. His young widow was pregnant with their first and last child. All murdered for a cause, their death feeding a growing violence and suffering of people in this land.

Around noon the following day, the 25-kilometer stretch of Highway 60 connecting Alon Shvut to the victims' homes was temporarily modified. Dozens of checkpoints appeared, deserted military posts were manned, and hundreds of Israeli soldiers took positions on roadsides, adjacent hills, fields and buildings. Military traffic was drastically increased, and Palestinian vehicles disappeared completely from the main road, only to be seen slowly accumulating beyond military blockades separating their local roads from the highway. More than one thousand mourners attended a quadruple funeral service of national significance, forming a long convoy armed with enough privately owned weapons to protect itself without the need of additional assistance.

Having failed to protect Israeli citizens the former evening, Israeli security forces still had to maintain order and display sovereignty through a spectacular performance of presence.

Tragedies of this kind are always appropriated from the private domain when given social meanings. “In the building of Jerusalem and Israel we shall be consulted, and all enemies shall know they cannot defeat us,” is one related example from the funeral service. But such rhetoric was mostly drowned by an excess of sorrow: a husband begging his dead wife not to leave him alone. The communal rabbi confronting God for bringing six orphans into this world. The contagious sobbing of hundreds of people. At some point I began to explore the outskirts of the funeral. Emanating from large loud speakers, the eulogies continued to follow me. At the back of the empty communal center I saw a lone middle-aged man. Black bearded, light-colored crochet kippah and a short-sleeved flannel shirt--the classic look. Seated on a small school chair, an M-16 rifle laying beside him on the ground, he silently wept.

The four dead were to be buried at three different cemeteries, and when the large service broke into smaller funeral processions, people were forced to choose one burial site over the other. I decided to follow the large procession heading north toward Jerusalem, which was also the direction of the nearest gas station. With hundreds of cars parked at the roadsides, a traffic jam was to be expected. Not waiting for the mess to coalesce, I quickly escaped the area and drove toward Hebron’s gas station where I filled up before heading back. It was busy around the spot where the four were murdered. Policemen and soldiers tried to regulate traffic. Some funeral attendees improvised a monument out of stones, flowers and small Israeli flags. Security forces guarded entrances to neighboring Palestinian areas, preventing Jewish troublemakers from

instigating conflicts with the local Arab population. I continued driving back to see what was going on at the procession's point of origin and found the place empty except for hitchhikers trying to catch a ride south. Returning north to the place of the attack I saw that the funeral procession had already left during my 15-minute absence. Several groups of soldiers still patrolled the nearby hills. Aside from that, a relative calmness. I parked the car.

Two units of security forces remained in the area: the border police and the Nahal.[1] All of a sudden I heard loud, hurried voices coming from the communication devices of the Border Police. Nahal soldiers began running down the slopes toward the road. Inspecting my surroundings, I suddenly saw two thick columns of smoke rising to the north, the closest one no more than 300 meters ahead. The smoke signaled a "Price Tag" (Hebrew: תג מחיר), the euphemism given to violent actions of vandalism and revenge carried out by radical settlers in response to Palestinian and state violence against settlers. These violent acts were named "Price Tag" in reference to the graffiti writings that often appear in the locations of the attack. I began running up the road.

Hardly keeping up with the Nahal soldiers, I passed a traffic blockade made out of concrete cubes and continued running up the dusty road into the Palestinian area. A brushfire in the terraced olive grove to the left produced a lot of smoke. Several smoking charred circles to the right marked a failed arson attempt. A young settler was being dragged by Border Policemen out of the olive grove ahead. Beyond the grove, Nahal

[1] Unlike the Border Police, the 50th Battalion of the Nahal (the Hebrew acronym for Pioneering Fighting Youth) is less varied in its ethnic composition, and most of its soldiers arrive from secular settlements and Kibbutzim traditionally known for their Leftist orientations. The Nahal was established in the early years of the Israeli state for the purpose of realizing a socialist-Zionist settlement ideology. Nahal groups would camp in territories lacking Jewish populace, their military camps eventually naturalized and transformed into civilian communities. Over the years this national task was mostly taken over by Religious Zionist settlers.

soldiers slowly climbed yet another hill toward a small settler "outpost" of tin houses. Next to the olive grove and outside the patio of a flat-roofed, two-story building, a mixed group of Israeli soldiers and Palestinian women was forming. Three settlers walked down the road in my direction, smiling in satisfaction as they passed the soldiers. I wanted to get closer.

Inside the olive grove the soldiers finally rejoined a larger group. Their commander, a red-headed major, began debriefing them. I was about to pass them when the major commanded me to stop: "Where do you think you are going?" "Over there," I pointed my finger. "What business do you have there?" "I am an anthropology student, doing research on settlers. I am not going to cause any trouble," I assured him, thinking I should have left my kippah in the car. "You are not supposed to be here; do you have a journalist or a photojournalist card?" "I can show you my student card if you don't believe me," I responded with a smile. He did not smile. Red-faced, sweaty and still heavily breathing from physical effort, he yelled at me, "Get out of here now!" "I promise you I am only here to look," I said trying to appear as empathetic as possible. I gently laid my hand on his shoulder. "Don't touch me, get your hand off me," he barked and recoiled in disgust. Last try. "I am sorry, but I am really a student, a doctoral student." "Well, I am a doctor too," he threw back at me, "now get the hell out of my sight. You!" he yelled at one of the smallest soldiers in the group, "take him and escort him all the way down. Make sure he does not come back."

The soldier grabbed me by the shirt and shoved me out of the olive grove. Shortly after he apologized: "Don't take it personally, but kippah-wearers are not too popular

here at this moment, if you know what I mean." The kippah stayed on my head until I passed the last checkpoint out of the occupied territories.

Figure 20: Price Tag, Halhul, September 2010. Photo by author.

Violence sustains the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Sometimes it makes its symbolic appearance known through language in moments of anger, frustration or when one feels secure enough to reveal inner thought. For example, I was told by some Palestinians that "Jews worship money," while some Israelis argue that "Arabs only understand force." Violence has structural qualities as well (Farmer 2004), which are often made possible through the symbolic realm of law that authorizes unequal access to resources, movement restrictions, the construction walls, barriers, land confiscation and the general denial of political rights. These structural forms of violence hurt Palestinians far more than settlers. And then there is violence in its simplest and most immediate form: the sudden eruption of destruction and acts of hatred. This violence cannot be separated from the symbolic

realm, which endows it with meanings and gives reason to sacred acts of settler and Palestinian violence.

Religiously motivated settlers are often condemned for the structural violence of territorial expansion and the direct physical violence against Palestinians (Dalsheim and Harel 2009). In addition, they have come to represent the violent Other of the liberal humanistic subject. As Mahmood Mamdani (2004) notes, "The violence of the settler and the suicide bomber, more than any other, has come to define the contemporary work of terrorism and counter-terrorism" (1). In the former chapters I have attempted to unsettle such popular conceptions of religiously motivated settlers as irrational, fanatic and intrinsically violent through depiction and analysis of internal cultural variances within the settler population. However, in this chapter I finally probe the problem of settler violence, explain the sociocultural context from which it emerges, investigate its meanings and show how religion is used to both justify and condemn it.

This chapter examines Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh and his influence upon settlers colloquially known as the "hilltop youth." The hilltop youth are a group of settlers who live in isolated outposts[2] in the midst of the Palestinian population. The destruction brought about during the Disengagement Plan forms a central component of their ideological consciousness, and some find it hard to accept what they perceive as the general secular leniency of the state. Unlike Rabbi Froman (see chapter five), Rabbi Ginsburgh conceptualized a mystical theology that opposes the Israeli state and Palestinians. I relate this mystical theology to settler acts of violence and vandalism known as "Price Tag" and argue that this violence should also be understood in relation

[2] The term outpost has varying legal meanings, yet in its vernacular form, the term refers to small and relatively undeveloped settlements that were often established without official governmental authorization and at a relative distance from nearby settlements.

to a religious disenchantment with the Jewish qualities of the Israeli state. After examining the relations between Rabbi Ginsburgh and settler violence and anti-statist positions, this chapter delves into a chain of events that followed the destruction of a settlement outpost. The destruction of the outpost led to Price Tag acts that included the desecration of a Palestinian mosque. Rabbi Froman and members of Eretz Shalom visited the Palestinian village where the attack took place and condemned the violence. I use the latter example to show how religion can overcome enmities, but at the same time show the proliferation of Rabbi Ginsburgh's ideas into the heart of the settler Religious Zionist establishment.

As Marc Gopin (2002), the scholar of religion, diplomacy and conflict resolution explains, the role of religion in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of its most widely recognized aspects: from Hamas and Islamic Jihad suicide bombers to the 1995 assassination of the Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, by a Religious Zionist. However, Gopin also notes the lack of attempts to integrate the local cultural values of the people who form the heart of the conflict (both Jews and Arabs) into peacemaking processes. Similarly, R. Scott Appleby[3] (2000) argues that although religion often inspires and exacerbates violent conflicts, it can also be expected to contribute to peaceful conflict resolution. Rabbi Froman and his followers provide a concrete example of the peaceful potential of religion. Yet, these settlers constitute a rather small minority within the neo-Hassidic counter-culture of settlement life. In this chapter I follow up upon the ideas of Gopin and Appelby and offer ethnographically grounded pathways for understanding the power of religion as a force of both violence and peace. In doing so, I

[3] Appleby, a professor of history and a scholar of global religion, is one of the main founders of the fundamentalist project, which ties religious violence to an opposition to modernity.

argue that in spite of Ginsburgh's influence and theological orientation, the search for solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should also include religion because it constitutes an important cultural realm through which violent ideas and practices can be changed, and through which peaceful behavior can be fostered.

On Rabbi Ginsburgh's Theology of Violence

Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh was born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1944 to secular parents of liberal Zionist orientations (Gal Einai 2014; Inbari 2009:131). At the age of 14 he became religious, and, later, while studying mathematics and philosophy at the University of Chicago and Yeshiva University, he became interested in Kabbalah, seeing divine truths within mathematical orders and enigmas, a fact that is manifested in his development and application of precise and structured Kabbalistic models. In 1965 he migrated to Israel and began his affiliation with Chabad Hassidism.[4]

Chabad was founded in 1755 by Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi. The leaders of Chabad are known as the Rebbes and the movement had seven of them, the last one being Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994). Starting with the fifth of the seven Rebbes, Rabbi Shalom DovBer Schneersohn (1860-1920), Chabad Hassidim became preoccupied with the idea that they were living in the days of the Messiah and could hasten redemption through their actions. They set about a sacred mission to awaken religious awareness among secular Jews and thus purify the world and prepare it for the day of redemption. To accomplish this goal, Chabad emissaries moved to the farthest

[4] Rabbi Ginsburgh lives in Kfar Chabad, on the western side of the Green Line. However, he serves as the president of a yeshiva in a settlement mostly associated with violence against Palestinians. I discuss this settlement and yeshiva later in the chapter.

corners of the globe, their proselytizing undertaking becoming the most recognizable face of Hassidism (Friedman and Heilman 2010).

Over time, Chabad Hassidim became convinced that the seventh Rebbe was the Messiah incarnate. However, his death left a leadership vacuum in the movement with profound theological implications. There are those who believe that the Rebbe is still alive and those who believe he shall return from the dead, although most of the followers accept the fact of his death and continue in their scared mission of preparing the world for redemption. Herein enters Rabbi Ginsburgh. Some of his followers believe that he is the eighth Rebbe and even that he incarnates the spirit of the Messiah; that he may be the Messiah. As one of his students writes, "There is something messianic about him – and this is remarked by all those who come to contact him – there is something messianic about Rabbi Ginsburgh. Something out of this world" (Roitman 2011).

Although Rabbi Ginsburgh does not declare himself explicitly as the Messiah, he is the head of *Derech-Chaim* (Hebrew: דרך חיים. lit. Way of Life), a religious movement with an unequivocal goal: to transform Israel into a Jewish monarchy; that is, to establish within Eretz Israel a Jewish society and state that follow the law of the Torah. The movement seeks to make Rabbi Ginsburgh the president of this Jewish state and fulfill the Deuteronomy (17:15) command to "set a king upon yourself" (Derech Hamelech 2014:8-9). Thus, as President, Rabbi Ginsburgh's role would be analogous to that of a king, which is another way of saying a Messiah, for in Jewish tradition the messiah is a king, "the anointed one."

Due to his messianic aspirations to become a president, a king of Israel, Rabbi Ginsburgh has uneasy relations with Chabad. Many see his activities as undermining the

sacred status of the seventh Rebbe.[5] Still, he is widely acknowledged as one of the most creative and prolific Jewish thinkers of this generation, a Jewish mystic who is occupied with conceptualizing the relevance of Kabbalah to all aspects of life: from science and politics to psychology and the arts. He has authored close to one hundred books that bring together the messianic politics and theological intellectualism of Chabad, the gleeful spiritually of Breslev Hassidism and an extreme form of settlement ideology that sanctions violence against enemies of the Jews.

Rabbi Ginsburgh first entered public consciousness in 1994, when he published an article entitled "Baruch Ha'Gever" (Hebrew: ברוך הגבר. Lit, Blessed is the Man). In this article he explains why the murderous acts of Baruch Goldstein, a settler who in 1994 killed 29 Palestinians at the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, may be considered a sacred act of martyrdom. He sees revenge as "the heart of the matter" (Ginsburgh 1995:28). Revenge, argues Rabbi Ginsburgh, is a natural act that connects self to the natural world, to God's presence within nature. Revenge relates to the natural world because it is a spontaneous expression of the self, an act of self-sacrifice that emerges from within the irrational depths of the soul.[6] Revenge brings about a harmonious unity of man, soul and

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[5] Rabbi Ginsburgh's attitude toward the Rebbe is complex. On the most simple level, rather than identifying him as The Messiah, Rabbi Ginsburgh sees him more as a messianic model. For him, the current debates about the status of the Rebbe reflect a consciousness that belong to the former age. The Rebbe "cleared the stage" (tsimtsum) in order to allow a greater creative awakening.

[6] Rabbi Ginsburgh relies upon Chabad mysticism but also renews it (Fischer 2005). In Chabad mysticism, "divinity is conceived as a dialectical process comprising an entity and its opposite simultaneously": emanation and contraction, ascent and decent, annihilation and embodiment, unity and plurality, being and nothingness and so forth (Elior 1992:25). Each pole of every opposition contains and brings about its opposite. According to Chabad's mysticism, spirit is revealed within matter, while matter is realized when raised to level of the spirit. The mission of human beings is the annihilation of ego and desire before God through the insertion of spirituality into desire and mundane deeds (Drob 2000). Thus, the redemptive task of this messianic age is the fostering of a consciousness that understands that the material world is God and contained within God. This can be achieved through the mystically informed observance of the commandments, which permits Jews to release self and world from their materiality, to spiritualize them and bring about their reincorporation within God.

nature. It is an act through which an individual identifies completely with the collective and thus transcends selfishness, acquiring purity of intention (Fischer 2005).

Thus, Rabbi Ginsburgh construes revenge as "above and beyond all rational calculations …a natural spontaneous reaction… a law of nature." The revenger "joins 'the ecological flows' within reality, his 'true being' and the world meet… revenge is a natural reaction that exists within all of nature and this revenge was felt as a pure Jewish one… (1995: 27-33). The arguments laid out by Rabbi Ginsburgh are complex and multilayered, and at the end of the article he even admits that it is possible to make the opposite argument against the massacre committed by Baruch Goldstein. Regardless, in "Baruch Ha'Gever" he lays down the foundation for a theology that emphasizes the sacredness of violent acts of revenge based on the presence of the divine within nature.

In 2009, Rabbi Ginsburgh made national and international headlines following the publication of *Torat Hamelech* (Hebrew: תורת המלך. Lit, The King's Torah), a halakhic book that discusses Jewish rules of war in these times of redemption. The book was authored by Rabbi Yitzhak Shapirah and Rabbi Yosef Elitzur, two of Rabbi Ginzburgh's close followers. The book argues that, for example, "There is justification for killing babies if it is clear that they will grow up to harm us, and in such a situation they may be harmed deliberately, and not only during combat with adults" (Elitzur and Shapira

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In Rabbi Ginsburgh's thought, during the messianic age, material substance is not nullified through its spiritualization but rather reveals itself as a divinely created essence that reflects the nature of the Creator. It is the materiality of nature itself—such as the actual corporeal work of bodily pleasure and pain or the physical features of land and plants—that contributes to the awareness of God. The material substance of this world "softens up," so to speak, thus allowing the ultimate substance of God to be perceived through it. This is especially true within Eretz Israel, which forms the spatial "partner" of the messianic age. Rather than emphasizing the nullification of the material through its spiritualization according to Chabad, Rabbi Ginsburgh celebrates the presence of divine substance within the material world. From this perspective, his mystical thought resembles that of HaRav Kook, who perceived, for example, Eretz Israel as a sacred entity in itself (Fischer 2005).

2010:207). Although the book states at the beginning that the killing of gentiles is not allowed, it proceeds through Kabbalisticly informed halakhic rationale to argue when it is indeed permissible and warranted to kill gentiles. That is, there is a qualitative difference in the essence of the two, Jews and gentiles. In the opening pages of the book, Rabbi Ginsburgh expresses his support of the book and legitimizes its content.

Torat Hamelech received much opposition from the general public, the Israeli legal establishment as well as from within the world of Jewish Orthodoxy. The Israeli mass media condemned the book, and several public demonstrations were organized to protest it. Rabbi Yitzhak Shapirah was arrested in the middle of the night, and copies of the book were seized. Rabbi Ginsburgh and other rabbis who expressed their support of the book were summoned for police investigation, an act which led in some cases to large demonstrations and subsequent arrests of individuals who objected to "the attack against great Torah sages." Eventually, the criminal investigation against the authors of the book was closed due to lack of sufficient evidence for establishing a criminal incitement for racism. "The book is written in a general way. Abstract and un-concrete, it lacks a call to commit acts of violence," explained the State Attorney (Zarchin 2012).

The actions of the state against these rabbis resulted in public debate about the limits of halakhic discourse, with many rabbis arguing that regardless of the halakhic content of the book and its violent message, it is important to maintain religious expression free from the constrains of the secular legal system. At the same time, many Religious Zionists publically condemned the book on several grounds. Rabbi Yaakov Meidan of Yeshivat HaGush said the book should be burnt and its authors prohibited from teaching halakha because people who read the book might be encouraged to commit

acts of violence (Polak 2010). Some criticized the book for its halakhic errors and deviation from accepted religious principles (Finkelstain 2010). Others pointed out the basic moral blindness that underlies the authors' legitimization of gentile-killing, a blindness that also led them to commit serious halakhic mistakes (Ariel 2010).

Rabbi Ginsburgh's theology conceives the connection with nature as a connection with God; highlights the essential difference between the souls of Jews and on-Jews; emphasizes the spiritual centrality of irrational spontaneity within a murderous act; and construes revenge as a sacred task that can touch the innermost essence of the soul, therefore connecting the self with the divine (Persico 2014b). This theological binding of nature, violence and the divine finds deep resonance among many settlers with neo-Hassidic orientations who live in small outposts in the midst of areas densely populated by Palestinians.

Yitzhar and its Outposts

The Hassidic-oriented settlement of Yitzhar (Hebrew: יצהר) was stablished in 1983. With a population of about 1,000 people, Yitzhar is located in the northern West Bank, about five kilometers south of Nablus (Biblical Shechem) and is widely considered to be the most extreme right-wing religious settlement in the West Bank. It is one of four settlements in this area of Samaria, known as Gav Ha'har (Hebrew: גב ההר. lit. Back of the Mountain), which is located east of the West Bank's watershed. Unlike the settlement of Gush Etzion, where Jews form a clear majority, Yitzhar is nestled in an area densely populated by Palestinians. This demographic reality characterizes the four main

settlements of Gav Ha'har, and corresponds to a generally more hawkish political orientation in comparison to Gush Etzion.

Whereas in Gush Etzion the Palestinians remain at the fringes of consciousness, existing primarily as a natural part of the local landscape, for many settlers in Gav Ha'Har, Palestinians are fully present as an ominous and unnatural part of the land. They are fully cognizant of Palestinian presence and regard it as a constant existential threat, as a foreign seed that undermines the organic unity of Jewish People and sacred Land. The existence of a Rami-Levi supermarket in this area is not a practical possibility. The settlers here are more hostile and fearful of Palestinians, who are generally not allowed to enter or come near the settlement bounds, even if their lands are located nearby.

Yitzhar and its vicinities form a site of constant, violent clashes between settlers and neighboring Palestinians. These include the murder of two residents of Yitzhar in 1998, the stabbing of a nine-year-old Jewish child and the torching of settler houses and fields. But Yitzhar is also the settlement most associated with violence against Palestinians. For example, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in 2011 settlers from Yitzhar carried out 70 attacks against Palestinians. Dozens of Palestinians were injured, hundreds of trees damages and cars torched (OCHA 2012).

Another major point of difference between Yitzhar and the settlements of Gush Etzion (excluding the settlement of Bat-Ayin, which was founded by Rabbi Ginsburgh) is the attitude toward the Israeli state, which is related in turn to the uncertain future of the place. The settlements of Gav Ha'Har would have to be evacuated in the case of a two-state solution. The threats posed by both Palestinians and evacuation create a constant

state of anxiety that is negated through close communal ties and a more intense interweaving of religious perspectives and daily matters. Unlike Alon Shvut, Kfar Etzion and Efrat, Yitzhar is not a Religious Zionist settlement. It is a settlement closer to ultra-Orthodox religiosity, and its members do not sanctify the Israeli state. Some even openly oppose it, especially for failing to enact more force against Palestinians and for limiting house construction and settlement expansion. The anti-Palestinian dispositions and the opposition to the Israeli state increase in intensity as one moves towards the eight outposts that surround the settlement.

The outposts of Yitzhar are the homes of younger settlers who are associated with the "hilltop youth" phenomenon. "Hilltop youth" is a colloquial term that refers to settlers who live in small and isolated outposts that are often illegal even under Israeli law. Not all of these settlers are young, and not all of these outposts are built on hilltops, but the term does capture the romantic and religious desire of these settlers to connect to nature and depart from the organized structures of power that characterize the older and more established settlements. These outposts are often the consequence of private initiatives of individuals and small groups that act without the financial support of the Israeli government and in opposition to the general plans of regional settlement councils.

These outposts are located amidst areas heavily populated by Palestinians, and their houses are spaced out to achieve more freedom and land control. In contrast to the well-developed, concrete-filled, red-roofed and fence-bounded settlements, their houses are simply built, often by their own inhabitants, in a manner that blends in with the surrounding environment. Like the hippie movement of the 1960s and the more contemporary New Age movement, these younger settlers seek more intimate and

authentic religious experiences and draw on Hassidic tradition as a spiritual means of connecting to self, place and God. Some, for instance, engage in organic farming or dress in a manner that combines imagined biblical clothing with new age/Central Asian fashion: shawls, vests, wide pants, home-made woolen shirts and the like (Fischer 2005).

The hilltop youth phenomenon is connected to neo-Hassidism and grew in opposition to the urbanized and conventionalized lifestyle of the older settler generation (Fischer 2007b). Rabbi Froman and his followers demonstrate how the neo-Hassidic occupation with mystical forms of spiritual self-fulfillment results in a desire to know Palestinians and make peace with them. Yet Rabbi Froman and his followers constitute a rather small minority within the neo-Hassidic counter-culture of settlement life. Many settlers who live in outposts and draw upon Hassidic tradition in their search for more authentic forms of spiritual fulfillment feel a closer connection to the teachings of Rabbi Ginsburgh.

Rabbi Ginsburgh is interested in creating a contemporary Jewish consciousness that is disconnected from the secular influences of Zionism (Tamari 2014). Unlike HaRav Kook, who saw redemption as predicated upon cooperation between secular and religious Jews, Rabbi Ginsburgh sees Zionism and its secular orientations as a corruptive force, an unholy *klipa* (Hebrew: קליפה. Lit, husk/shell). *Klipa* is a Kabalistic term for impure and wicked forces that imprison and feed upon the sparks of the divine light. The separation of the holy sparks from their husks is the essence of redemption. Rabbi Ginsburgh uses the nut and its shells as a parable of the Jewish return to Zion. The klipot reflect an outward concealment of a sacred inner truth. Like the nutshell, a klipa was required at first for the protection of the fledgling Jewish sovereignty. Now, however, Zionism and

its secular offshoots operate to imprison, contaminate and suffocate the pure seed from which the true Jewish sovereignty must spring forth (Ginsburgh 2005). The shell must be broken. Through its false principles, Zionism created a separation within Jewish unity, casting many Jews into spiritual exile. In contrast to Religious Zionist thought, which advocates cooperation with, and integration within Zionism , Rabbi Ginsburgh's mysticism construes Zionism as a malignant force that should be actively opposed and destroyed.

Itzik lives in one of Yitzhar's outposts, opposes the Israeli state and see Palestinians as the enemy who must be cast away from the Holy Land. He is a tall man in his late twenties, with a full black beard and long sidelocks. When I first met him (05/19/2011), he wore a grey flat-cap, which complimented a dark unbuttoned woolen vest worn over white, black-striped tzizit — a contemporary retro-style with a Hassidic edge. He has been living there for more than ten years and is one of the first residents of this outpost. "Why do you live here?" I asked Itzik. "I live here because this is the Jewish thing to do," he answered. "But what is so special about this place?" I inquired. "Look around," he said, and pointed at the striking view outside his wooden patio, at the green mountain slope. "Look up," he continued, "look down at the lush earth, breathe in the crisp air, look at the blue of the sky, this is all sacred, after two thousand years I can live here, you can feel the divine presence all around you."

"But why in an outpost," I pushed further, "why not in a larger settlement or on the other side of the Green Line?" "A person who comes to live in a settlement, especially in a hardcore one, especially in an outpost like this one, always has to face existential questions," explains Itzik, (05/19/2011).

> Why do I live with Arabs? Why do I drive to empty the garbage? Why is my house illegal and I am spending money on it even though it might be destroyed? I have to deal with those questions on a daily basis, and it reminds me the purpose of my existence, something that many other settlers have forgotten. They are busy with making a living instead of simply living.

For Itzik, living in an outpost such as this one allows him not only to connect to God through nature, but also materializes the possibility of developing an active awareness of the privilege and responsibility of being Jewish. I requested to hear more about the similarities and differences between settlements and outposts like Itzik's, and he elaborated further:

> The outposts are a microcosmic example of the settlements as much as the settlements are a microcosmic example of Israeli society. Israeli society is an ideological society. Most people are very nationalistic. They love the nation. They believe that this is our land, not the Arabs', and this is how [the Zionist enterprise] started. But, slowly people become bourgeois, because it is also needed, it's normal. And this is what happened to the settlements, too, after 40 years…. The outposts are trying to do what the settlements did before and the Zionist pioneers before them. And just as the settlements see themselves as the continuation of the Zionist enterprise, and there are those who oppose the settlements because they endanger the Zionist project itself, the outposts continue the Religious Zionist settlements. But, (the outposts) receive opposition from within Religious Zionism because they endanger the Religious Zionist settlement. But our starting point is different from theirs.

"Can you talk more about the difference?" I requested. "I don't see myself as a continuation of Zionism," he answered, "but as something deeper with more roots."

> I don't see myself as a property of Zionism, and settlers do it, they want to be included within Zionism, and they beg, but get a spit in the face, see what happened in Gush Katif.... Religious Zionism is characterized by the refusal to reach a real confrontation with the state…. During the disengagement, Religious Zionism revealed its whole pathetic being. People spoke about the importance of democracy, about the importance of not refusing (military) orders, people were told not to cut the fences of Kfar Maimon and confront the state. If you struggle with your identity and see yourself as the leader of Israeli society, you have to make sacrifices.... If you are going to struggle, struggle, if not, then leave, this is what they didn't get.

Itzik sat in jail for three weeks during the Disengagement Plan. He was suspected of an attempt to organize violent demonstrations but was released, and no charges were filed against him. He reflects the disillusionment of many outpost dwellers with both the Israeli state and Religious Zionism, especially following the Disengagement Plan. As they see it, Zionism acts against the interest of the Jewish people. It bows down to secular values, erases the religious meaning of life in this age and place and partakes in the destruction of Jewish life in Judea and Samaria, the biblical cradle of Jewish civilization. In collaborating so closely with Zionist institutions, Religious Zionism is seen as colluding against Judaism itself. Still, as Itzik himself admitted, the road to his outpost was paved by the state. "They have the responsibility of taking care of people," he commented, pointing out an internal contradiction in the actions of the state toward illegal outposts, a contradiction that reflects for him the essence of the Zionist paradox: to be Jewish without fully committing to Jewish life by following the laws of the Torah and fully supporting the settlement of the land.

Itzik defines himself as a post-Zionist and believes that his attitude reflects an unavoidable historical process (05/19/2011):

> Zionism is disintegrating. It is crumbling down. It may be hard to pinpoint the precise moment that brings about the finale collapse, it is hard to tell in advance, but looking backward, an anthropologist will say, "This is it"…. From the beginning Zionism was based on an anti-Jewish attitude, it was influenced by European nationalism and tried to erase Jewish tradition and make it political, to be like the rest of the nations…. Then, in 1948 there was a conquest. Hundreds of Arab villages were destroyed, hundreds of thousands of residents were expelled, and I say, "Great, good, this is how it should be these days," but Israel won't do it. They tell us, "We are on the right side of history, our story begins in '48, but you are from '67, you are very problematic." And we haven't done to Palestinians a fraction of what was done in '48. And the same thing happens among settlers themselves, they want the conventional hug of the Israeli state, they want to be loved by the consensus, just as Israel wants the global hug. The settlers say, "we

> are okay, we are legal, but those crazies on the hills, they are problematic." I find this attitude to be ridiculous, disingenuous.

Indeed, Zionism was never fully secular, and religion permeates all aspects of Israeli life. It influences, for example, the calendrical structure of the year, basic questions of citizenship, such as who is allowed to migrate to Israel and, of course, the relations between Jews and Arabs. Nevertheless, Itzik is right in pointing out the secular inclinations of Zionism, and especially the manner in which central theological conceptions such as "nation" and "redemption" were politicized and secularized in the Enlightenment-influenced attempt of Zionism to recreate the Jewish people, to erase their fact of difference and make them a normal nation like all others. In self-identifying as post-Zionist, Itzik echoes the theological position of Rabbi Ginsburgh toward Zionism and the Israeli state.

The Virtues of Violence

Rabbi Ginsburgh's admirers on the hilltops lack his theological knowledge and sophistication. A few admitted to me that they did not even read *Torat Hamelech*, but that it is nonetheless a very important book because it is the first to tackle the problem of fighting an enemy that uses its own civilian population for its strategic advantage. They added that the book fills in a big halakhic lacuna and should therefore be criticized only on halakhic grounds. Yet, many of them find it hard to concentrate during the long yeshiva lessons and prefer to be outside, in nature, free of disciplining pressure of religious institutions. Some arrive from difficult socio-economic backgrounds, and few have family members who were murdered by Palestinians. They came of age during the Disengagement Plan and their ideological bearings emerged in the context of state

violence and general disappointment with the state. They thus grew out of violence, have become familiar with it and express themselves through it.

They like the thrill that comes with danger, with physical confrontation, and in Rabbi Ginsburgh's mystical teachings they find legitimation for their physical drives and violent deeds.[7] When they throw stones at Palestinians or at soldiers who come to destroy their homes, when they burn a Palestinian field, when they desecrate a mosque or when they attack Palestinians, they believe they are fulfilling a religious task of the outmost political importance: revenge. Samson, the Biblical hero, serves as their ethical model. Samson's words, uttered while he was humiliated and blind, was composed into one of their most popular songs: "O Lord God! Please remember me, and give me strength just this once, O God, to take revenge on the Philistines, if only for one of my two eyes" (Judges 16:28). They are the frontline guardians of sacred nation and land, Jewish fighters whose religious righteousness is measured and confirmed by the amount of opposition they receive from Zionist institutions.

Yet, the gravity of their task does not mean they cannot have some fun in the process. The religiosity of these young settlers demonstrates a recent form of religious syncretism known as a HaBaKuk, an acronym for Chabad, Breslov, Kook, Carlebach. They do not abide by rabbinical authority, but they see Rabbi Ginsburgh as a great tsaddik with messianic potential. They find mystical explanations of the redemptive qualities of this age and place within the writings of HaRav Kook and feel inspired by the music and stories of Rabbi Moshe Carlebach (1925 – 1994), the most famous Hassidic

[7] They are also influenced by the ultra-nationalistic teachings of the late Rabbi Meir Kahane (1932-1990). Rabbi Kahane was the founder of the Jewish Defense League (JDL), which was named a terrorist group by the FBI. He also founded Kach (Hebrew: כך), the Israeli ultranationalist political organization that has been declared by the Israeli government, the US, UN and EU as a terrorist organization. Rabbi Kahane advocated, for example, the forceful deportation of Palestinians.

songwriter of this age who used song and melody to infuse the religious experience with spiritual intimacy.[8] In Breslov Hassidism[9] they also find a much-needed source of optimism. To be Jewish is to overcome desperation and discover happiness within all aspects of existence, especially within those dark regions of the soul that seem antithetical to joy, like violence.

Menashe has many stories about violent encounters with Palestinians. Highly admired by his peers, he is one of the most famous faces of the hilltop youth and has been arrested several times even though he had just celebrated his twentieth birthday. He is a strong, muscular man, who wears his tzitzit on top of his flannel shirt. Similar to his long sidelocks, the visible presence of the tzitzit signifies a sense of pride and fearlessness about his Jewish identity, one that is especially required when living amongst the enemy. His small wooden home is located at the outskirts of one of Yitzhar's outpost. It is a very modest home, with a tiny kitchen, a small living room and a bedroom that has barely enough room for one single bed. He has no TV, and his bookcase contains only religious books, most of them looking brand new and unused. He is a bachelor but wants to get married—nature and Jewish duty call—so he and his close friend are building a bigger home at a nearby outpost. Like his current one, the new home is built without any authorization on Palestinian land as he himself proudly acknowledges. The new home will have a better view.

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[8] Rabbi Carlebach's powerful influence upon contemporary practices of Jewish religiosity is illustrated, for example, in the "Carlebach Minyan," a prayer service that uses his melodies for liturgy and is practiced once in a while even in the non-Hassidic prayer services at Alon Shvut.

[9] They also engage in one of the religious practices most associated with Breslov's Hassidism: *hitbodedut* (Hebrew: התבודדות. lit. self-seclusion). Hitbodedut is a spiritual practice of establishing close relations with God through informal and intimate revelation of matters of the heart that is conducted in private settings, preferably in nature. Hitbodedut involves different religious techniques of mediations that include, for instance, the attempt to nullify the self through concentration on God's presence alone.

He told me that he likes being close to nature, so I asked him why there is so much junk around his home: an old vehicle, tires, heaps of broken construction woods, metal wires and more. “We like to recycle,” he explained (01/19/2011), “and these will come in handy if the Yasam[10] will come here and try to destroy the home.” “Can you really stop them?” I asked. “No, we cannot, but we give them a good fight, we block the road and they have to climb up the hill, and we throw stones at them and roll burning tires. They (the security forces) always get the job done, but you should see how they look.” He laughed as he recalled the strained and agitated looks of the faces of the Yasam forces. “I don’t hate them,” he emphasized. “It is good that we have Yasam, but they should be busy destroying Arab homes, not Jewish ones.” An unmanned guard post is located nearby. Soldiers are not welcome.

His home was built next to an olive grove. Many of the trees were cut down and large patches of ground bore dark scorch marks. “The Arabs like to come near, and we have to chase them away, so it is easier to just cut down the trees. Now they don’t come here that often,” he told me as a matter of fact. I asked him if he is not afraid of living so close to the Palestinians, and he admitted that he is very afraid: “I sleep with an axe under the pillow.” He showed me a one-handed axe. “Why not a gun?” I inquired. “I don’t have one. I didn’t serve in the military so I did not get a license.” He can, however, get hold of a gun if necessary. After Palestinians injured a local settler and burned a field, Menashe and his friends retaliated:

> We were ten, they were hundreds, we ran in their narrow streets, everything is crowded there, we started shouting, screaming, laughing, it was crazy, and we fired the guns in the air, and everyone began to run away, we entered a house, and when [the Palestinian inhabitants] ran outside, we started shooting inside, on the walls, the pictures, furniture, everything, we destroyed it.

[10] The Israeli Police Special Patrol Unit.

The attack described by Menashe is unique because it was carried out in public. Most of these "Price Tag" acts of violence are carried out covertly by smaller groups of two to three individuals, often in the middle of the night.

Price Tag Violence

"Price Tag" is an economic euphemism for settler violence aimed at maintaining a "balance" of terror. This term was originally used to describe acts of violence and vandalism carried out against Palestinians in response to Palestinian or state violence against Jewish settlers. However, in the last few years, Price Tag attacks have extended to include targets such as Israeli security forces and Christian and Muslim places of worship within the internationally recognized boundaries of Israel, not just in the territories occupied by Israel in 1967.

The logic of Price Tag violence is of retaliation and its method is of arbitrariness. "We know that the army is much stronger than us," admits Menashe (01/19/2011). "We are few, but we know how to cause trouble, how to make them work hard. They cannot anticipate where we will strike, and they have to think twice before they hurt us." The arbitrariness of Price Tags points to a religious rationale (though within a capitalist logic of mercantile exchange) that aims to reveal the organic connectivity of all aspects of life in the Holy Land, often through the scapegoating of Palestinians. For example, when a mosque within the internationally recognized boundaries of Israel is vandalized in response to the demolishing of a settlement home, geopolitical boundaries are blurred and the unity of the land is highlighted in a violent act that marks the Palestinians as a dangerously close outsider.

The vast majority of Price Tag perpetrators prefer to use the term *Arvut Hadadit* (Hebrew: ערבות הדדית. lit, mutual accountability). Arvut hadadit is a deeply ingrained Jewish value that construes all Jews as responsible for one another, and even more so in times of war, when the lives of individuals may be sacrificed for the greater good. In opposition to the economic connotations of Price Tag, the idea of arvut hadadit instills acts of violence with a religious sense of ethical responsibility. 'Price Tag,' however, gained wider popularity in the mass media and public discourse. With small numbers and limited means, the perpetrators chose to capitalize upon the unintended popularity of the term. Consequently, Palestinians and other "enemies" are more likely to find the words "Price Tag" sprayed on their burnt mosques, homes or cars as opposed to "arvut hadadit." "Besides," I was told half-jokingly by Menashe, "the term *price tag* is shorter than 'arvut hadadit' and time is of the essence when you're there." "We try to be creative," said another tagger, "but it's hard." Sometimes the term 'Price Tag' is accompanied by "happy holiday" or 'shout-outs' to arrested friends or IDF commanders. Revenge is a sacred act that nonetheless allows for humorous forms of self-expression. As Hassidic traditions teach, religious labor can be instilled with joy.

The years following the 2009-10 'settlement freeze' (see chapters three and four) were characterized by a drastic increase in settler violence against Palestinians. In 2011, settler violence appeared for the first time on the US State Department's list of "terrorist incidents."[11] Until not too long ago, Israel's internal security service (the Shabak) conceptualized Price Tag as spontaneous acts of revenge. Now, according to the Shabak, these are well-planned operations of no more than a few hundred people that are

[11] See U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator For Counterterrorism," Country Reports on Terrorism 2011 Report"

organized into smaller terror cells. These terror cells are said to employ professional methods such as reconnaissance missions and the compartmentalization of knowledge and identities. Thus, the Shabak recommended defining Price Tag violence as an act of terror. However, this recommendation was rejected by the Israeli security cabinet. Price Tag violence is now defined as an illegal assembly, an act that provides greater means of legal enforcement, but does not equate Jewish violence to that perpetrated by Arabs.

Speaking about the rationale of Price Tag methods, a fledgling terrorist explained (01/19/2011), "They need to understand that we can be as crazy as the Arabs." "I am a terrorist and I am proud of it," declared Menashe. The 'terrorist' label serves to endow these young settlers' violent acts with an aura of importance, increasing their symbolic capital while further substantiating the political significance of their religious acts of revenge. With a big grin of amusement and satisfaction on his face, Menashe summed it up (01/19/2011): "One of us sprays a mosque, and then Obama gets a phone call in the middle of the night. It makes us the most important graffiti artists in the world."

Itzik holds a different opinion. He thinks that all the talk about terrorism is an exaggeration that serves to demonize the hilltop youth. "Price Tag is an esoteric phenomenon," he argued (05/19/2011). "It is a dispute over territory with national aspects, and people fight with each other when they argue over land… It is war…" He frames the Price Tag acts as a continuation of reprisal attacks that were once sanctioned by the Israeli state, like those committed by the IDF's 101 Special Forces unit headed by Ariel Sharon. "It's like in Qibiya," he said, referencing the 1953 IDF attack that left about 60 Arab civilians dead, including women and children (Morris 2000:176). "The main difference is that we don't cause as much damage as in the past, and our actions are

considered to be illegal under the state law, but I consider my actions legal under the law of the kingdom to come." Although Itzik tried to devaluate the significance of Price Tag and although he used historical and political analogies to explain its logic, in talking about "reprisal attacks" instead of revenge and referring to "the law of the kingdom to come," he demonstrated that religion forms the primary source of legitimation for these acts.

Itzik and Menashe, like other hilltop settlers, think that the denunciation of the violent acts reflects the hypocrisy of the Zionist and Religious Zionist establishments. Like Zionist actions of the past, they retaliate against Arab violence. And, just like Zionists and Religious Zionists used to, they establish Jewish settlements in the midst of Arab populations. In addition, they think their actions reflect the inner will of the Jewish people, who wish for Palestinians to disappear. While some Jews wish the Palestinians would disappear from sight beyond concrete walls and barbed wires, they wish the Palestinians would disappear into one of the surrounding Arabs states. They don't like Arabs, to put it mildly. "I hate Arabs," announced Itzik (05/19/2011).

> I see them as an enemy, but when I come to interaction with them, it is not from a place of demonization, it is a place of fear…. If an Arab pharmacist helps me, I say thank you, I don't want him to be here, but on a personal level I will treat him with respect, while I oppose his collective rights. It is a paternalistic attitude maybe, but as a whole I have to see Arabs as a collective and not as individuals, because that is the problem: they see themselves as a nation and there is room for only one nation in this land.

They want the Arabs gone, but they also need them, for now, because they occupy a central position in their own identity. They are an enemy that gives meaning to their existence. "I don't want them here," said Menashe (12/08/2011), "but I am also afraid of the day they would be gone; there would be no more fun to have. Who would we curse

and blind with our lights on the road? Life will become very boring. There would be no one to fight." He began to laugh, and then added, "I will very likely just die."

A similar approach characterizes their attitude toward the Messiah. They believe their action advance redemption and reflect the desire of all devout Jews: the creation of a Torah-oriented sovereignty with a righteous king at its head. Yet, they are also wary of this yearned-for day. "The messiah that we want will never arrive, and the Messiah that will arrive is not who we want," mused Itzik (05/19/2011). "The Messiah is going to be a normal human being just like us," he explained. "He is going to go to the restroom, just like us, with similar bodily desire… so while I yearn for him to arrive, I am afraid of the great disappointment." "I want the Messiah to arrive," announced Menashe (12/08/2011), "but I fear the day of his arrival." "What do you mean?" "It is very simple and logical," was his response. "I will lose all sense of purpose. There will be nothing left for me to do, and this thought is quite depressing." He said this with a slight smile on his face, seriousness complimented but also destabilized by humor. "So what about Rabbi Ginsburgh?" I inquired, "What role does he play in your vision?" "In the meanwhile," he replied, "he is the best thing we have. He is the only one in this age who can be a righteous leader."

The explicit messianism of these settlers is accompanied by fears not only of its failure, but also of its realization. These are often personal fears of an existential nature: boredom, disappointment, emptiness. In general, they are part of a post-modern religious generation that places importance in individual fulfillment and self-expression in addition to collective commitment. They have no antinomian anxieties about a redeemed world where halakhic laws are annulled, but fear more the practicalities of redemption as

revealed within earthly politics. They fear the future they desire, but strive to overcome their fears. It is an anxious messianism and this anxiousness cannot be separated from the experiences of marginalization of a population that feels it is being prosecuted even by other religiously motivated settlers.

More than a few of them see Rabbi Ginsburgh as the best leader there is until a better one would arrive. He incarnates for them the practical possibility of a religious revolution, but one that does not seem too final as to deprive meaning from their struggle. While they admire him greatly, they also try not to valorize him too much, for he is, at the end of the day, a human being just like they; and they are masters of themselves who do not succumb to the absolute authority of anyone. "Once I heard Rabbi Ginsburgh saying that the pomegranate has exactly 613 seeds [paralleling the 613 Jewish Mitzvoth]," recalled Itzik (12/08/2011). "So we have a joke that says that when he goes to the market he buys only pomegranates with 613 seeds."

Menashe sees Rabbi Ginsburgh as "a strange man." "It is hard to communicate with him," said Menashe, "hard to understand him" (12/08/2011). But this is part of the allure of Rabbi Ginsburgh, part of his mystical charm, which attests to the depth of his thought, knowledge and power. He is just a man, but an extraordinary man, the best candidate for a king, in a meanwhile, and his admirers believe that price tag actions assist the materialization of his vision of a true Jewish sovereignty [12] Consider, for example, the events surrounding the 2011 destruction of Ramat-Migron, a satellite outpost of Migron, which is a small settlement that was located 14 kilometers north of Jerusalem.

[12] It is important to note that Rabbi Ginsburgh claims not to advocate violence, but rather the development of a new consciousness.

The Destruction of Migron

The Migron outpost (nine miles north of Jerusalem) started in 1999 as a freight container on a hilloverlooking Highway 60. During the early days of the Second Palestinian Intifada a cellular radio tower was added to assist military communication. Soon after, caravans emerged next to the tower, with settlers voluntarily safeguarding both tower and land. Assisted by different state agencies, Migron became the home of about forty families. Nonetheless, in 2011 the Supreme Court ordered the state to dismantle Migron because it was built on private Palestinian Land. In the meanwhile, Defense Minister Ehud Barak ordered the speedy demolition of three homes that were built and inhabited in the preceding two years.

Figure 21: Support Rally. Migron, August 2011. Photo by author.

Many settlers who wished to align themselves with the Israeli state saw the legal entanglement of little Migron as possibly undermining the validity of the settlement enterprise. Consequently, aside from legal action, the order to displace Jewish families and to surrender land to the hands of the enemies was met mostly with vocal opposition. Still, several hundred settlers attended a support rally at Migron (08/30/2011). Speaking in front of a crowd of mostly young mothers and their toddlers, the Regional Rabbi of Samaria unraveled some of the confounding dimensions of these times:

> This is a struggle for all or nothing. There are positive forces that build and contribute.... Forces of unification. And there are forces of expulsion, destruction and freezing. Forces that stem from academia, from the legal system, from all of these bodies that come from above and are unfamiliar, incapable and lack the will to go down to the ground level. From above they determine what will be. These forces, and I am saying this with great pain, are joined by good people…. They do not realize that they are being led by the same negative forces, and this is what the struggle is about, it is about who rules.

Ramat-Migron is the smaller satellite outpost of Migron: a smaller outpost of a larger outpost. Unlike neighboring Migron, Ramat-Migron is not the kind of place to raise a family. Yet, Ramat-Migron is an exciting place for teenagers who desire to protest the bourgeois lifestyle of their parents' generation through an adventurous demonstration of religious devotion. Ramat-Migron awakens during the hot summer months in the form of several scattered room-sized wood and tin structures, an outdoor kitchen and hammocks that hang from the entwined branches of ancient olive trees. The outpost attracts mostly male teenagers who are not afraid to confront the hardships of the weather, the Palestinians or Israeli security forces. Aside from operating as a disobedience summer camp, Ramat-Migron serves an important strategic role. It was used to divert attention from the neighboring Migron, functioning as an easy target that allows the Israeli security forces to maintain a semblance of sovereignty in the area. Over

the last few years, Ramat-Migron was demolished and rebuilt too many times to keep track. Dozens of teenagers were arrested only to be quickly released in what has become by now a well-rehearsed performance of a conflict between adolescent settlers and the Israeli state.

"Urgent! The forces of destruction are marching toward Ramat-Migron accompanied by a large tractor. Come everyone!" (06/29/2011). I'd been receiving such text messages on my cell phone throughout summer of 2011. By the time I arrived Ramat-Migron laid in ruins again. A young settler was being pushed down on the hot, asphalt road by several policemen in black uniforms, his large earth-colored, woolen kippah held tight with handcuffed hands. Too young to grow a beard; old enough to be man. "The road is blocked!" declared a Yasam policeman. "Where are you headed to?" he asked. I lied, naming a nearby settlement, and he allowed me to continue and drive along.

My kippah helped to get me pass the police, but now I had to tuck it into my back pocket. It was too small and thin for the likes of the inhabitants of Ramat-Migron, designating me as too statist and not pious enough. The secular anthropologist had a better chance of gaining access at such a sensitive moment. The Yasam left the area. Long brown tracts of piled earth led to heaps of wood, mattresses, papers and other remnants of the temporary homes of Ramat-Migron. However, the infrastructure remained untouched: the kitchen and the hammocks were still intact. A small group of teenage girls rested beneath the shade of a large olive tree, listening to the teachings of a young and very pregnant mother. A white mule grazed nearby. The boys were scattered around the site, about 20 teenagers and three adults in their early twenties.

Two junior scouts approached me, asking to identify the newspaper I worked for. Knowing the mass media is conceived as part of the "forces of destruction," I proudly identified myself as an anthropologist who studies the native population, mentioned Itzki and Menashe and was permitted to wander around and do my thing. This was a pleasant improvement over a similar encounter that occurred a year before and ended with me running away from stones being thrown at me.

The boys were clearly exhausted, but the intense heat and the recent clash with the Israeli security forces provided a perfect opportunity for the physical expression of their religious ardor. One by one they began to slowly descend a rugged and shrubby slope in the direction of a stone-fenced plot about 300 meters away. Nothing grew at this Palestinian plot aside from three olive trees and dried, golden weeds. This was clearly not a good place for Palestinians to work the land. Prepared in advance for such an occasion, a cache of brand-new wooden plates and beams lay behind the stone fence, right next to its opening. Mounting the heavy plates on their backs, the boys began to silently climb back, bodies bent forward, arms spread wide to the sides in a posture resembling a crucifixion. Long wooden beams were mounted on the mule. Within 15 minutes, the cache was nearly emptied.

Looking around, I suddenly noticed a thick column of smoke rising from another field behind me. The smoke signaled a "Price Tag." I was about to walk to the burning field when I spotted strange movements to my side, no more than 100 meters away.: a face camouflaged with a bright-colored shirt wrapped around a head; a poncho-like praying shawl worn on a muscular upper male body, tied at the sides to facilitate ease of movement. Running in low, long strides, this guy was impressively fast and agile. He

slowed down before casually entering the land plot in front of me, ducking and disappearing behind the stone fence. Smoke began to rise. Soon after, a stocky settler emerged from the smoke like a Jewish Clark Kent. Bright T-shirt covering his fit body, the last wooden beam resting on his shoulder, bright yellow flames raging behind him. Ramat-Migron was rebuilt again by sunset.

A month later, and less than a week after the support rally, the three Migron houses targeted by the Defense Minister were demolished in the middle of the night. A force sizing about 1,500 security personnel was utilized to accomplish this task. The military misled inhabitants of the surrounding settlements, informing them that the unusual concentration of forces was merely a preparedness drill for expected Palestinian riots. Arab porters were humiliatingly employed to empty the houses from their main contents, further deepening the rift between the Israeli state and an ever-growing numbers of settlers. “They got what they deserve,” said a resident of Ramat-Migron in reference to the people of Migron (09/06/2011). “They are too statist, too obedient, and they learn nothing,” he finished. Standing in front of the ruined houses, another settler told me, “I know this sounds horrible, but aside from the tragedy of the three families, this is actually good for us, you know, these houses can save the rest of Migron.”

Within hours following the destruction of the three Migron houses, a mosque was vandalized at the Palestinian village Qusra near Nablus. Tires were set ablaze on the bottom floor. “Mohammad is a Pig” and “Migron = Social Justice” were sprayed on its outside walls, a black Star of David adding a final touch. A day later, several vehicles inside a military base near Migron were vandalized. Tires slashed, windows smashed, engine cables torn, sugar poured into gas tanks and, among a wide assortments of other

slogans, “Price Tag” and “Ramat-Migron” were sprayed on the vehicles and nearby structures. The vast majority of settler leaders condemn Price Tag actions, but the unparalleled Price Tag acts against the military produced an equally unparalleled widespread condemnation: “These immoral actions stand against the spirit of Judaism”; “Individuals cannot take the law into their own hands”[13]; “Price Tag endangers the settlements in Judea and Samaria” (Breiner 2011b).

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu instructed the Justice Minister to assemble a special task force that would explore possible ways of legalizing illegal settlement houses, including those built on privately owned Palestinian land. However, in September 2012 Migron was fully evacuated and its families relocated to a nearby location. Ramat-Migron still stands, and falls, and stands again.

Rabbi Froman and Eretz Shalom visit Migron and Qusra

A day after the Price Tag at Qusra (09/06/2011), I joined Rabbi Froman and members of Eretz Shalom who visited Migron to protest the destruction of the three homes. Rabbi Froman stood next to the ruins of the three homes with Rabbi Elyakim Levanon, the Regional Rabbi of Samaria, next to him and declared, “The interest of the Israeli state is to build, not to destroy, to build, to connect, to help this love between, here, the left hand and the right hand, to connect them, to connect them.” He approached the ruined home, bent down to the ground, and kissed the fractured foundations: “Here,” he said — referring to the spot where the ruined house and the land connected — is “the line of love.”

[13] Rabbi Elyakim Levanon, Migron, 09/06/2011.

Referring to the Price Tag, Rabbi Levanon said it "hurts our existence, our holding of the land… I call … to the public who may assume that this is the way to save the state and the nation, do not destroy… do not hurt property, not Arab property, and mosques." "We came here to bring shalom," explained Rabbi Froman. "First, shalom among us, within the nation, but shalom is undividable, out of the shalom among us… shalom for human beings will flow, to our neighbors, to far away nations, we came to the eretz [land] to bring shalom." Rabbi Levanon returned to the issue of the Price Tag and addressed those who encourage "the young people who commit these actions," insisting that "the deeds done outside the laws of the Torah shall not succeed." Rabbi Ginsburgh was not mentioned by name, but it was clear about whom Rabbi Levanon was talking.

After the short visit at Migron, I joined Rabbi Froman and Eretz Shalom onto Qusra to condemn the Price Tag violence and to emphasize with the strong monotheistic connection between Jews and Muslims. A week earlier, Rabbi Froman visited Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the Palestinian National Authority. The Rabbi delivered his Eid Al-Fitr (The Muslim holiday that marks the end of Ramadan) greetings and expressed his support for President Abbas' efforts to gain U.N. recognition of Palestinian statehood.

The people of Qusra know settlers primarily through daily experiences of oppression and dispossession. Consequently, many were not keen on having settlers enter their village. To make matters more complicated, the Israeli security forces insisted on escorting the settlers into the village, thereby further highlighting the coupling of settlers with the violence of military occupation. Some members of Eretz Shalom began to negotiate with military officers while others turned to Palestinians to invoke religious kinship: "You are the sons of Ishmael and we are the sons of Yitzhak… We have the

same father, Ibrahim... As Jewish people of faith, we are ashamed of those who did this… They have no part in God." After several minutes of negotiations, the Israeli security forces agreed to remain on the outskirts of the village, and we drove into Qusra escorted by several photographers, cameramen and journalists.

Hundreds of Palestinians surrounded the mosque. The atmosphere was quite tense, the people of Qusra were visibly angered, some were shouting out loud and pointing fingers at us. With the kippah on my head, I felt vulnerable and accused. I saw Noah, surrounded by dozens of Palestinians, trying to explain why he came to Qusra. A local Palestinian translated his words: "I am ashamed of this act… we are all the sons of Abraham… he is crying above that we make peace… it is time for us to join hands together for one God."

Noah could not talk for long because Palestinian officials began to deliver short speeches from the staircase of the mosque. A representative of the Palestinian Authority described the damage "to the house of God" as "a great disaster to people of faith." Rabbi Froman was then given permission to speak to the crowd. He stood on top of the stairs, a large white, woolen kippah on his head and tefillin worn on his forehead and right hand as he often did while meeting with Palestinians representatives.[14] He tightly held the hand of the Palestinian official next to him and began with a Muslim preamble: "bismi-llahi r-raḥmani r-raḥim (In the name of God, most Gracious, most Compassionate)." He then joked in Hebrew and asked if anyone spoke Arabic, but his face quickly turned serious again as he uttered the Takbir (the term for the Arabic phrase "God is the greatest") out

[14] The teffilin functioned as a visible sign of Jewish religiosity and enacted a Deuteronomy command that relates to war: "And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the Lord's name is proclaimed over you, and they shall stand in fear of you" (28:10). Rabbi Froman was engaged in a Holy War set to redeem self, nation and other.

loud, “Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!,” his voice intensifying with each sacred call, inviting — perhaps obligating — the crowd to respond. And indeed, the tension was suddenly broken as most of the crowd immediately reciprocated the religious calling of the Rabbi. “Allahu Akbar!,” they called back. “Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!” It was a remarkable occurrence. A Jewish settler—the embodiment of Israeli occupation, the personified enemy of Palestinian national aspirations — stood atop the stairway of a mosque desecrated by Jewish settlers. On the wall below him, a black Star of David scrawled by the attackers along with a Hebrew obscenity against the Prophet Muhammad added to the exceptional nature of the event.

At the same time, the religious bond between the Rabbi and the crowd appeared almost natural. In that moment of religious communication, Rabbi Froman’s status as a settler did not seem to matter. He revealed himself to be a messenger of peace, for peace is also the name of God: Shalom and As-Salam. Political differences that at first seemed irrevocable and irreconcilable were now temporarily suspended by a deeply shared ethical understanding of mortal unity under one God.

Figure 22: Rabbi Froman (fourth from the left) In Qusra, September, 2011. Photo by Author.

Rabbi Froman continued his address in Hebrew, his words translated into Arabic by a Palestinian official at his side, their hand clasped tightly together all along. Conjuring Islamic concepts of spiritual importance, he explained,

> There are many problems in the world. The devil has many messengers. And we, like you, when you go to Mecca, we take a stone and throw it at the devil…. God who sent the prophet will punish those who did it, because he who hurts the honor of the prophets hurts the honor of God. Whoever damaged the bottom floor of the mosque, committed an act that is forbidden according to our Sharia…. One of our greatest prohibitions is hurting the house of God.... God will punish him.... God will burn him. But I do not tell God what to do, I tell the Israeli government to take all of the Israeli Shabak…and catch those who did this horrible thing and punish them severely…to throw him out of this land…. This land is a land of peace, you have a beautiful name for this land, 'land of peace,' the land of God is land of peace. Shalom is … God in both Hebrew and Arabic… Last week I met the President, President Abu-Mazen, we spoke for an hour, and I came to him with other settles… and we both said that we need to work for peace for all the human beings that live in the land of peace. But to make peace is not only to hug and do like that (he placed his hand on the chest of the Palestinian official next to him), but to cast the criminals away, to cast them away…. There are many problems...the devil has many messengers, but Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!

The crowd reciprocated yet again, loudly. The speeches continued, both Jews and Muslims stood atop the stairs and condemned the violence, but I was too overwhelmed by the events of the day to properly process what was happening around me. I just wandered aimlessly around the mosque, engulfed in thoughts, trying to make sense of what just happened—the Takbir kept repeatedly echoing back in my brain: "Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!" A Palestinian teenager approached me, shook my hand and in broken Hebrew told me that he is "tired of war," that "we have to make peace, "that we are "brothers." He was impressed by Rabbi Froman's speech and said he never saw anything like that, that he never thought that settlers could want peace and wanted to know more about Eretz Shalom, wanted to meet settlers like that. I gave him

Noah's phone number and then realized that everyone had already left Qusra. I bid him farewell, quickly entered my car and drove away.

As I made my way out of the village, I noticed a Palestinian boy standing at the side of the road by the entrance to the village. He held something behind his back: a stone. I slowed down and stopped my car next to him. He seemed surprised. I looked at him and said "As-Salaam-Alaikum"—peace be unto you. "Wa alaikum As-Salam," he replied, letting the stone drop to the ground.

True, the occupation did not end in Qusra that day. Violence continued unabated. Just two and a half weeks later, residents of Qusra and settlers from the nearby Esh Kodesh outpost (Hebrew: אש קודש.lit, Sacred Fire) clashed violently. The Israeli military intervened and Essam Kamal Abed Badran Oudah, 35, a father of seven, was shot dead. During the same day, Asher Palmer, 25, and Yehonatan, his infant son, were killed in the West Bank as a result of stones thrown at their car by Palestinians. On that same day, across the ocean, President Abbas took to the podium at the U.N. General Assembly to request recognition of a Palestinian state.

Thousands attended the funeral of Asher and Yehonatan Palmer in Hebron. Some called for revenge, but Asher's older brother, a settler of one of Tekoah's outposts, insisted that he does not seek revenge. On the contrary, he wanted to meet and get to know Palestinians. Me and Nabil visited him at his home and expressed our condolences. They both agreed that settlers and Palestinians must find new ways to overcome enmity and act together toward peace, one that comes from the people below and not only from politicians. They continued to meet until Nabil left Palestine to study in a university in a faraway land.

Yeshivat Od Yosef Chai and the Settler Attack on an IDF Military Base

There were more Price Tag acts throughout 2011. Olive trees were cut down, Muslim cemeteries were desecrated, "death to traitors" was sprayed next to the home of a leftist peace activist, and other mosques were vandalized. This cycle of violence reached a climax on Tuesday, December 13, when following an attempt to destroy houses at Yitzhar's outposts, a West Bank Israeli military base located about 15 Kilometers northwest of Yitzhar was invaded by several dozen Israeli rioters who burned tires, vandalized military vehicles, scattered nails at the entrance to the base and hit the Brigade Commander with a large stone in addition to setting road blocks and throwing stones at Palestinians cars. The wide-ranging Israeli consensus was that this time the hilltop youth had crossed a "red line." Harsh condemnations came from all around: from settler leadership to left-wing politicians. Several settlers were arrested, placed under house arrest or given restraining orders to keep them away from the West Bank.

Two days later, on Thursday, December 15, the 19th of Kislev, 5772, I visited the Od Yosef Chai Yeshiva in Yitzhar (Hebrew: עוד יוסף חי, Lit. Joseph still lives). Od Yoseph Chai is a special place. Established in 1982, it was originally located in Nablus, by Joseph's Tomb, a site traditionally marked as the resting place of the Biblical Patriarch Joseph and his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe. In October 2000, during the Second Intifada, IDF withdrew from Nablus, Joseph's Tomb was vandalized and burnt and the Yeshiva moved to its new location in Yitzhar, about five kilometers south of Nablus.

Unlike other yeshivot, which tend to reside at center of a settlement, Od Yosef Chai is located about half a kilometer north of the Yitzhar, on top of a small hill, close to the southern edges of the nearby Palestinian village of Asiriya Al Kabaliya. Square-shaped, built from sandy-colored stones and with a dry moat delineating its northwestern side, it resembles a fortress more than a religious institution. The bottom section of the Yeshiva looked like a construction site - state funding had stopped. It was dark outside, and the weak light emanating from Tungsten light bulbs colored the interior in sickly yellowish tones. Plastic tubes, electric wires and metal poles protruded out of bare concrete, casting a mesh of skeletal shadows. Nervous and anxious to observe and participate in the forthcoming celebration, I took the stairway leading to the main floor above.

Tonight was the Chabad's Holy Day of Holidays, its Day of Redemption, known simply as "Yat Kislev," the 19th day of the ninth month of the ecclesiastical Hebrew year. This Hassidic holiday commemorates the miraculous release of the Ba-al Tanya, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad, from a Russian prison in 1798. All Jews were welcomed to a celebration that included a modest feast (mostly soup, bread and humus) with wine, music, dance and, for those who could hang in there, Torah study until the early morning hours. The sermons of Rabbi Yitzhak Ginsburgh, the president of the Yeshiva, are long, monotonous and saturated with esoteric terms. He usually brings in a small note scrabbled with a few words - a kabbalistic method of tsimtsum, of condensed thought – and then proceeds to elaborate for hours upon the ideas contained within the small note.

Although lacking the knowledge and sophistry of Rabbi Ginsburgh, the students of Od Yoseph Chai are associated more than any other group with acts of violence against Palestinians and are known for their staunch opposition to the secular qualities of the Israeli state. *Torat Hamelech* (2010), the inflammatory text, was written by two rabbis in this yeshiva, Yiyzhak Shapirah and Yosef Elitzur. Tonight was a night of celebration, of Jewish unity across differences, and I was a welcomed guest, but I felt uneasy about my medium-sized, crochet kippah, which marked me as a Religious Zionist in an anti-Zionist place. I decided to cover it with a beanie hat. At the entrance, two young settlers, with large woolen kippahs, shabby beards and very long sidelocks smiled courteously and handed me a newly released addendum to *Torat Hamelech*.

The event tonight was exceptional not only because of the religious significance of the day, but also because it followed a violent confrontation with the state that resulted in the arrest of several students from the yeshiva. The road leading to Yitzhar showed the marks of violence: burn marks on the road, piles of stones and barbed wires. My car almost collided with an improvised roadblock that was set up next to a sharp turn. However, back at the yeshiva, the party was just getting started, and the main hall was already quite crowded, hot and sweaty. There were at least 200 people inside, including an unknown number of women that remained in the ladies section, which was separated by wooden, mesh screens. Rabbi Ginsburgh sat on a stage in front of the Torah Ark at a table covered with white cloth, a bottle of alcohol to his right, a water pitcher at his left, a big screen by his side: the event was broadcasted live on the internet. Like Chabad, Rabbi Ginsburgh is engaged in the dissemination of the Torah through technological means and has, for example, four different blogs.

Figure 23: Rabbi Ginsburgh, Od Yosef Chai Yeshiva, Yitzhar, December 2011. Photo by Author.

He began with a discussion of the conceptual and etymological relations between 'arrest' and 'redemption,' explaining that redemption is akin to birth, a painful yet creative process that emerges out of different types of arrests: external and internal, physical and spiritual, with physical arrests enabling a release from internal arrests of the soul. This discussion continued for about 15 minutes, and then the celebration began with the famous Yat Kislev Hymn: "He redeems me unharmed" (Hebrew: פדה בשלום נפשי). This hymn refers to the words uttered by the first Rebbe as he was announced about his release from jail:

> He redeems me unharmed from the battle against me; it is as though many are on my side. God who has reigned from the first, who will have no successor, hears and humbles those who have no fear of God. Selah. He harmed his ally, he broke his pact; his talk was smoother than butter, yet his mind was on war; his words were more soothing than oil, yet they were drawn swords. Cast your burden on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous man collapse. For You, O God, will bring them down to the nethermost Pit— those murderous,

> treacherous men; they shall not live out half their days; but I trust in You. [Pslams 55:19-24]

The hymn began softly, gently, until it reached the last line, "but I trust in you," and then, in the traditional Chabad manner, it got louder and louder. More people began to encircle Rabbi Ginsburgh, their tsaddik, dancing, jumping, whistling screaming, and singing in ecstasy, "but I trust in you," "but I trust in you," again, and again and again. Rabbi Ginsburgh sat on his chair all alone, his black Orthodox attire contrasting the typical Od Yoseph Chai's HaBaKuK look of long Hassidic sidelocks, large woolen kippahs and cargo pants that mingled with the guests' velvet and crochet kippahs, black fedora hats and long dark pants. He sang along, moved his upper body slowly to the music, back and forth, sometimes nodding his head or raising his arm, just like the last Chabad Rebbe used to do, his voice and bodily gestures serving to increase the ecstatic movement and chanting of the surrounding disciples. The ecstatic song and dance continued for more than 15 minutes: "but I trust in you," "but I trust in you."

I stepped outside to the yard, which was also full of people. Not everyone had the patience to listen to the Rabbi's sermon. There were mostly teenagers around, talking and laughing. A few practiced hurling stones with a slingshot, others played with a football, some smoked cigarettes. I handed out about four or five cigarettes and then saw Menashe smoking a cigarette in a corner. He looked very tired. The events of the last few days had clearly taken their toll. He described to me the events of the previous night (12/15/2011):

> The soldiers came from behind, from the direction of the Arab village, they took over the house I am building now and turned it into their command post… I was

> told "there are Blacks[15] in your house, they are taking it over," and I am shaking with fear, and I ran there but I realized they are destroying another home. I don't know why they did not destroy mine, I have authorization from the settlement but not from the state, so maybe that is the reason… Anyway, they do what they want, and there is nothing you can do to stop them. There were Yasam all around, hundreds of them, they came in a huge convoy of five rows, and everyone were afraid, because we knew we were going to get it this time, and what were we to do, there were insane amount of Yasam, I never saw such a thing, except for in Gush Katif, and all of this for what, for a house that costs maybe 40,000 shekels [about $10,000]? Well, from their point of view they are right; if I was in their place, I would do the same thing, bring a mass of soldiers, I understand them, but I hate them. They destroyed [the house] without resistance, nothing. They came, threw the person from his home, evacuated his stuff [using] Arab porters.
>
> "Why Arabs?" I asked.
>
> Jews won't do it and it is cheaper, too; they take everything out, the oven, the refrigerator. There was a goat pen there, and they freed all the goats, and we yelled at them: "Are you stoned!? What are you doing?" So they tied the goats to a tree… Really, this was one of the scariest things, and now there are many restriction orders. I am so afraid—think, they deport you from Judea and Samaria, what will you do? I am relatively calm now, but for three days we were on alert here, everyone was awake, you know, to help, you drive people around from here to there, and the Shabak records everything.

Menashe did not seem calm at all. He spoke in a fast, almost manic manner. I asked him what happened at the military base. "It wasn't us," he replied to my surprise, it was Merkaz." "You mean Merkaz HaRav?" I responded in astonishment when he uttered the name of the most famous Religious Zionist yeshiva, "I thought they were supposed to be statist?" "A bus came from Merkaz," he explained,

> and they drove to the military base to cause some mess, but they took it too far, someone raised a block at the brigade commander and his driver, a bunch of people from Merkaz, our guys would not do [that]—we would mess things up, but we would not dare attack a brigade commander. One time my neighbor threw a big stone at a commander, and he was placed on house arrest for two years, it's a nightmare, everyone knows, like there are some things you don't mess with, like, now what, the people of Merkaz did all the mess and now we take all the heat.… They really annoyed me: they came here, 50 people. Now we are in charge of this area, we are supposed to organize people, tell them where to go and so forth, and [these people from Merkaz] start whining "why should I go there, it's too far," they start making faces; [so] you are the commander and no one is listening to

[15] The term refers to the black uniforms of the Yasam unit.

> you. I mean, they would not do anything, just annoy us—I mean, 50 people come to help you, and only ten of them are into it, the rest {he makes a fart sound}. The first night they did not want to do anything, did not want to throw even one stone at a military jeep, and then, one night without sleep, and they just go crazy.

We smoked another cigarette, and another one, and then I saw Itzik, looking exhausted as well. "It was a difficult night and day," he told me. "How are things in Alon Shvut?" he asked. "All is calm," I answered, "as usual." "You know you live with fascists, right? They and their sacred state." It was clear he was very upset. "How are you?" I responded. "It's tough," he confessed, "there is lots of pressure." I told him that I heard that the people of Merkaz HaRav rioted at the military base. "Good, so you know about it," (12/15/2011) he began.

> This is something we are debating among ourselves, should we take it outside (to the press) or take the blame? Everyone now is talking about the hilltop youth, and I just want to inflate this balloon…. As always, people look for easy answers, an easy target, they need a scapegoat…. I was just debating with several rabbis: should we take this issue outside, and one of the moderate ones said, "take it out without saying the name, just say something along the lines of 'deep within the mainstream," and the rabbi who was more extreme said "no, we will not do what is being done to us." Although I don't think it is the right analogy, I am not saying it is him, the other, I don't say he is not right, I say "you (the Israeli public) are not right and you cannot save your own skin by dirtying other people."

We continued to talk for two more minutes, with Itzik continuing to express his disdain of Religious Zionist politics of redemption, their desire to be loved by the Zionist mainstream. I then stepped inside and bought five of Rabbi Ginsburgh's books that were on sale for the bargain price of five for 100 shekels ($25). I tried to concentrate on his sermon but could not follow his words; the content was just too complicated for me, and he spoke in a low, hushed voice in his slight English accent, so I just watched him from afar. "The Angel" is his nickname. It bespeaks of his outwardly demeanor as much as his pale features, to his white hair and beard that appear even brighter in contrast to his black Orthodox attire. I suddenly felt suffocated, scared by the man, and stepped outside again.

I smoked another cigarette, said goodbye to Itzik and Menashe and left soon after, eager to return to the serenity of Alon Shvut.

Conclusion

Although Religious Zionsim, Gush Emunim and settlers were never homogenic entities and contained inner tensions and dilemmas from their early days,[16] Merkaz HaRav remains the flagship yeshiva of Religious Zionism. This unique status of the yeshiva is evidenced by the annual visit of the Prime Minister during Jerusalem Day, a national holiday that commemorates Israel's conquest and control of the Old City following the 1967 war. On May 31, during the 2011 Jerusalem Day, half a year before the rioting at the military base, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke to the students of the Yeshiva:

> …Nothing is more important to you than the Torah of Israel, and Am Israel and Eretz Israel, the heart of which is Jerusalem, the capital of Israel. I see your role, as those who occupy the seat of this glorious yeshiva, as a double role. On the one hand: to study Torah and grow in it. On the other hand, and not less important: to teach Torah and enrich the Am in which you live - our Am. If I may say so, I see you as a Torah commando unit (Hebrew: סיירת). There are a few here that were or will be in other commando units, but you are a commando unit of the Torah. And, similarly to the military role of the commando unit, which goes ahead of the camp, you go ahead of the camp, to light its way. But if I can give advice, from personal experience: always maintain contact….with the camp, because a pioneer who does not have a camp behind him becomes lost in the desert, and if he is connected to the camp he is the source of great power. And you, all of you… you maintain — and I am certain you will continue to maintain — contact with all of Am Israel, with the great camp… [Netanyahu 2011]

[16] One of the most important changes in Religious Zionism is the emergence of the Hardal phenomenon. *Hardal* (Hebrew: חרדל) is the Hebrew acronym of national-Haredi (Hebrew: חרדי-לאומי). The Hardal phenomenon steamed from an ideological split within Merkaz Harav and is characterized by strict observance of Jewish laws, especially on questions of modesty, separation between sexes and the intermingling of secular ideas and texts with religious study. In this regard, Hardal Jews are much closer to the ultra-Orthodox ways of Haredi Jews. However, some Hardal Jews sanctify the state and its symbols even as they oppose its profane ways, while others (like in Yitzhar) oppose the state openly. Regardless of these differences, all streams of Hardal differ from ultra-Orthodoxy in seeing this age and the return to Eretz Israel as part of the redemptive process.

In days following my visit to Od Yosepg Chai, I told almost everyone I knew in Alon Shvut about my recent discovery: the attack on the military base was not committed by the hilltop youth, but by students of Merkaz HaRav, the institutional heart of Religious Zionism. People refused to believe me. Rabbi Cohen advised that I should not take everything that I am being told at face value, that I should be aware that people have their own interests. Mordechai and Sarah said that this does not make any sense and were worried that I was spending too much time investigating a group of radical settlers that does not represent the rest of the Religius Zionist camp. One interlocutor admitted that "this is possible, because the Merkaz HaRav of today is not what it used to be in the past ... Religious Zionism is less centralized these days."

About two weeks later, the Israeli mass media announced that a police investigation revealed that about 40 of rioters at the military base came from Merkaz HaRav and arrived by a bus that left from the yeshiva. One student was arrested. Disassociating Merkaz HaRav form the attack, a spokesperson of the Yeshiva announced, "'If the acts that are associated with person were committed, they are opposed to the line of the yeshiva, which educates to respect the institutions of the state and love of the land. As for the bus, the yeshiva did not order a bus and we do not know any students who were on the bus'" (Levinson 2014).

The fact that the rioters had come out of Merkaz HaRav illustrates how anti-Zionist ideas like those espoused by Rabbi Ginsburgh manage to slowly proliferate even into the mainstream of Religious Zionism. The riot was not an exceptional action of a lone individual. It was an act committed by a large group of people. Merkaz HaRav signifies more than any other Religious Zionist institution the vision of HaRav Kook; it

not only sought the cooperation of religious and secular Jews, but saw within Zionism a source of wisdom and truth.

The proliferation of anti-statist attitudes among national religious settlers is a result of the tension that exists between the desire to join forces with Zionism and the inability to reconcile this desire with what is perceived as the non-Jewish actions of the state, such as the destruction of Jewish homes. Among a growing number of younger settlers, it becomes harder to rationalize and legitimize the actions of the state. The destruction brought about during the Disengagement Plan forms a central component of their ideological consciousness and some find it hard to accept what they perceive as an overall secular leniency of the state. Perhaps, they assume, Zionism has completed its historical mission just as Rabbi Ginsburgh argues, and the time has come to part ways with Zionism—perhaps even break Zionism apart from the inside, to rectify the state, save its Jewish soul and thus move on to the next stage of redemption.

This radical position does not appear out of nowhere. It is seeded deeply within the theological orientations and actions of Gush Emunim. From its early days, Gush Emunim acted with the support of the state; when this support failed to arrive, it repeatedly sought to establish facts on the ground, in the name of the state, of course. The younger generation was raised on the heroic ethos of Gush Emunim, which is comprised of tales of personal and collective sacrifices that led to the establishment of settlements. Not surprisingly, there are those who are fed up with the complacency that characterizes the contemporary qualities of settlers' bourgeois lives, a complacency that is sometime conceived as a betrayal of the same values they were taught to uphold.

The hilltop youth phenomenon therefore reflects a rebellion against the institutionalization of Religious Zionist settlement life. These younger settlers withdraw from the mainstream-settlement establishment and seek more authentic ways of experiencing and expressing their religiosity. Within isolated outposts they find new possibilities of connecting to self, place and God. The landscape becomes the source of spiritual empowerment, the ground from which sacred meanings grow and the divine within nature can be immediately encountered without the mediation of religious institutions of power. One does not have to be an erudite student of the Torah in order to feel a religious sense of self-worth and fulfillment.

Their separation from the normative comforts of settlement life and proximity to Palestinian populations constitute an essential element of their identity. As elaborated upon repeatedly in the writings of Rabbi Ginsburgh, Zionism is seen as the internal Other that has transgressed its protective function and has now become a corruptive force that secularizes Judaism and erases the sacred meanings of life in this time and place. The Palestinians are the external Other. They are perceived not as individuals but as a collective entity, as a metaphysical enemy set about to harm the sacred bond between People and Land. Zionism and the Palestinians provide meaning to these settlers, and it is therefore not surprising that the messianic desire to annihilate the two is accompanied by a great fear about the materialization of this desire. Similarly, Rabbi Ginsburgh is seen as a potential messianic leader that incarnates the practical possibility of a religious revolution, but one that does not seem too final as to end their struggle.

These younger settlers see themselves as a Jewish vanguard that carries out the redemptive mission that began with Zionism, was followed by Religious Zionism and

was abandoned by both Zionism and Religious Zionism. In their eyes, they constitute a marginalized minority that is demonized because it forces the wider public to confront the paradoxical facts of its existence: acceptance of the Zionist claim to Judaism and its tolerance of Palestinians. Price Tag violence is therefore a religious act with political significance. When these settlers harm Palestinians, they engage in a religious act: revenge. As Rabbi Ginsburgh explained in *Baruch HaGever* (1995), a connection with nature can also be a connection with God. And so, similar to the spiritually laden encounter with the landscape, the spontanious immediacy of violence—the carnality of revenge—allows the inner Jewish soul to encounter the presence of the divine within the brutal here and the now. While they do not fully understand Rabbi Ginsburgh, they do know that their "crazy" actions are religiously legitimate.

As a religious act of self-expression and fulfillment, Price Tag violence clearly also serves a political function. For example, the arbitrary desecration of places of worship in response to state or Palestinian violence against settlers is aimed to further radicalize the conflict. This radicalization is not achieved only through violent incitement aimed at fomenting hatred and fear, but also through a violent increase of religious meanings. This is one of the main reasons the Israeli authorities fear Price Tag so much: they are worried the conflict will transform into an uncontrollable religious war that surpasses the geopolitical boundaries of the Israeli-Palestine conflict. However - and this is where the Price Taggers are partially right - the conflict was always religious. How can a conflict involving Jews, Muslims and Christians in the Holy Land be not religious?

Indeed, the conflict has crucial political and economic dimensions. However, from the perspective of many inhabitants of this land, this conflict is religious, too. After

all, it occurs in a place already overabundant with religious meaning. This symbolic overabundance is what the Price Taggers capitalize on – their violence operates to create an excess of religious meaning that could no longer be contained by the secular mechanisms of Israeli politics. In their religiously informed violence they thus pose an invitation for retaliation that touches upon the heart of the Zionist problem: can the religious dimensions of Judaism and the conflict be controlled by secular politics? As the realities of the place demonstrate, the answer is clearly a negative one. The line between the religious and the secular has been blurred long ago, ever since Zionism rose in the 19th century as a national liberation movement that sought to politicize Judaism on the basis of Jewish religion.

The thought of religious dominance over the political sphere is a frightening one, especially for those with secular and liberal worldviews. Yet religion is a powerful force that cannot be completely contained through political means. It consists of the power of language, of symbolic meanings, of lived experiences. This is what Rabbi Ginsburgh's racist mystical theology engages with; this is what the Price Taggers attempt to communicate, and this is also what Rabbi Froman demonstrated when he visited Qusra. In presenting himself as a Jewish messenger of Peace, in uttering the Takrib from the top of the stairs of a mosque desecrated by Jewish settlers just like he is, Rabbi Froman revealed that religion can overcome great hostility. True, it was but a small incident, a tiny rupture in an endless cycle of violence, but it was an important act nonetheless: it was laden with the unfulfilled promise of a non-hostile relationship between Israelis and Palestinians, between Christians, Muslims and Jews.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be understood in separation from its political realities. Yet, its religious elements deserve careful attention because they form a central reality in the lives of many inhabitants of the Holy Land. As we seek to find appropriate explanations and solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we should not ignore religion: it can be a central force of violence as much as it can be a potential source of peace.

Conclusion

Encountering Violence

There are many advantages to doing anthropology close to home as there are many disadvantages, not the least of which is the problem of being too close to home, which too often did not feel like home. Sometimes I felt a powerful sense of belonging to the people and the place I was studying while at other times I felt like a stranger, alienated and far removed from both settlers and Palestinians. These ambivalent feelings and the attempt to balance the professional and national sides of my personality turned out to be one of the greatest challenges of my fieldwork.

On March 11, 2011, during a stormy Shabbat eve, five Jews were murdered inside their house in Itamar, one of the four Gav HaHar Israeli settlements near Nablus: mother, father, and three children, the youngest only three-months-old, killed with butcher knives while asleep. I drove there at the end of the Shabbat only to find myself waiting by the settlement's gate with swarms of photographers and journalists, all hoping to capture a glimpse of horror. In a socially minded act of compassion, the settlement was declared a closed military zone to protect the privacy of the local community.

As young soldiers prevented the mass media from entering the settlement, the growing frustration of the press became easily apparent. Each approaching car encountered a desperate attack of blinding camera flashes. Absolutely nothing of value captured, especially when compared to the graphic sights inside the red-roofed house now turned into a temporary mortuary. To prevent the violation of the Shabbat, the bodies remained inside the house, the crime scene hardly touched. Although all Jewish laws can be potentially broken to save a life, this was no such case. Death had already

taken life away and left, climbing over the fence on its way in and out of the settlement, leaving two pairs of boot marks on the ground.

"This is very annoying—why are we waiting here for anyway? They should let us inside," complained one photographer who assumed I was his professional kin. "Well, they do need to protect the privacy of the community," I replied, in denial of my own unmet curiosity. "Did you see the photos from inside the house?" he asked me. I shook my head "no." "I am telling you, I've seen a lot of shit in my career, but this stuff is really difficult to see. Makes me wanna rip off the heads of these fucking animals. How could a human being butcher babies like that?" I did not answer and just kept shaking my head.

A day later the photos from the crime scene were available on the Internet. Some family members gave their consent after being told that publication of these photos serves the national cause by exposing the true face of the Palestinian partners for peace. The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided not to make official use of the photos. As a result, the photos were available at unaffiliated websites associated mainly with the Israeli political Right. Blood. A kid thrown on the floor amidst toys. A baby laying in a red-stained bed, next to her dead father, his head turned away from her. Faces and wounds digitally blurred to protect the sanctity of the dead.

Several days later I up picked Nabil from his village. We took the back dirt road, evading Israeli military checkpoints that were put in place following the Itamar murders. Dinning at a local Arab restaurant, we savored the tenderness of lamb meat. I listened quietly as he told me about settlers rioting at the entrance to his village following the news of the murder. On the wall to my left a yellowing collage of photos depicted memorable moments in the life of the restaurant. About a dozen explicit photos were

dedicated to the slaughtering of sheep at the restaurant's entrance. A long knife, the stunned glazed eyes of tied animals, smiling kids and adults, excited movements frozen in time, streams of blood flowing down the stairs to form a large red pool.

I thought about Mustapha, who occasionally bombards my Facebook homepage with images of human carnage featuring torn and mutilated bodies of Arabs. The immediate impulse was to attribute this behavior to a cultural fetish of gore, to a social infatuation with the public display of death in all of its glorious horror. I asked Mustapha why he keeps posting all these horrible photos, pointing out the aesthetic violence of his virtual practice. “I know that many of my friends don't like it, but I cannot help it—it fascinates me,” he told me. “I understand,” I said, “still, why do you have to show it to everyone?” “It's only in the last few years,” he answered. “Me and my best friend worked in the garden, and a soldier shot him in the head. Why did he have to shoot him in the head?” “I don't know, maybe it was a mistake,” I mumbled in response. He went on. “His head exploded all over me like a watermelon,” his arms quickly moved around and away from his head, demonstrating an explosion. “Ever since that day I cannot help it. I just want to see stuff like that. I show it to others too. It is strange, I know.”

The lamb meet was mostly gone by now, plates bearing only bones and soft vegetable pieces floating in an oily salad juice. Coffee, cigarettes and sweets were next. Belts unbuckled, we discussed the murder, the blissful collage of animal slaughter by my side. Nabil insisted the murderers could not be Palestinian. No Palestinian organization took responsibility for this act, and, in any case, no Palestinian is capable of committing such an inhumane act. It doesn't make sense. Palestinians do not kill babies and children. It is against Muslim religion, it is against the national interest. I was getting annoyed yet

chose diplomacy nevertheless. We kill babies and children, too, with warplanes, tanks, bullets, bombs. We use lenses and screens and tend to keep the mess away from us. Palestinians also kill babies and children with explosives, guns and knives. Human beings kill and do horrible things all the time everywhere. We do bad things, we do good things; we are capable of both. This line of argument did not work. Nabil kept on insisting no Palestinian was involved.

We drove back to Nabil's home. As soon as we entered, Nabil's sisters approached us and began talking in a fast and impassioned manner. I tried to follow their words, upset by the insufficiency of my poor Arabic skills. His mother stepped out of the kitchen, warmly smiling at me. His father laid on the couch by the television, heavily and loudly breathing through an oxygen mask. A golden ornamented Quran by his side, he watched the news. Outside on the patio by their garden, one of the younger brothers smoked a cigarette.

It is an old house, much older than the settlement homes I am used to visiting. The walls, furniture, paintings, decorative pieces—all keepers of memories. A black and white portrait of a youthful grandfather hangs above the TV. A thin, dark and long mustache adorns his serious expression. He was younger than Nabil when he died in the fighting leading to Israel's deceleration of independence. Hanging from the door frame of the parent's sleeping room, a large and rusting iron key dangles from a metallic chain, standing out amongst smaller and newly designed keys. It is a key to another house in the village, not a “key of return”; Palestinians were expelled from their homes in areas Israel conquered in 1948, but not so much in territories conquered in 1967. A small PLO flag emerges from a vase resting on the corner table, next to a picture of proud Nabil wearing

his college gown and cap. With a satisfied look Nabil informed me: “I told you so! It was no Palestinian who did it. They just announced it on the [Palestinian] news. It was a Thai worker who wasn't paid!”

Tens of thousands attended the victims' burial at the Mount of Rest in Jerusalem. The Shabbat on which the killing occurred marked the weekly Torah portion dealing with the procedures of sacrificial offerings - the fairly famous opening chapters of Leviticus. Like other religions, sacrifice occupies a central position in Jewish consciousness, not only in terms of ritualized forms of worship, but also as an existential manner of identification with the sacrificial victim itself. This identification ranges from conceptions of martyrdom, of death for a higher cause, to a negation of internal violence and its attribution to outsiders (Halbertal 2015). Quite expectedly, the horrible murder was framed in many eulogies as a sacrificial act, with death used to distinguish between the pure and the polluted, the holy and the unholy, us and them, a violent reality ordered and given a metaphysical meaning. Not a senseless tragedy, but a meaningful event, suffering that shall bring forth a better national future.

Constituting a single voice of dissent, one relative mourned:

> All the slogans about Torah and settlement, the Land of Israel and the Jewish people try to make us forget the simple and painful truth: you are gone. You are gone, and no slogan will bring you back. Above all, this funeral must be a private event....You are not a symbol or a national event. Your life had a purpose of its own, and your horrid death must not render life into a vehicle.

These words, however, only entered the hearts of those few who could accept such blasphemy. In contrast, at a special governmental meeting following the murder it was agreed upon that the expansion of settlement construction would be a necessary response. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, nationally revered for his oratory skills,

announced bluntly, "'They murder, we build'," tying settlement construction with violence as a relationship of crime and its punishment (Ynet 2011). Another interesting opposition to this moral political logic came from Rabbi Yitzhak Shapirah of Yeshivat Od Yosef Chai in Yitzhar, one of the authors of *Torat Hamelech*: "'We are in a state of war.... In times like these, to talk about the construction of homes as a retaliation to the murder is flattery [to terror], it is an insult to bloodshed'" (Shapirah 2011)

A week after the murder, at the end of the initial seven days of mourning, Jews celebrated Purim. Purim commemorates a rather bloody story about a miraculous salvation of the Jewish people in the ancient Persian Empire some 2,400 years ago. The story is recorded in the Biblical Book of Esther, yet God is not mentioned even once. Nonetheless, Purim is about the reversal of worldly order, about miraculous revelation through natural events, about blessing through curse, about creation through destruction. A great celebration took place at Itamar. Thousands of visitors came to strengthen the community, joining a festival of costumes, music, alcohol, food and dance. Young kids dressed as animals, soldiers, knights and clowns, joined hands in an ecstatic circular dance. Jovially they repeatedly sang a traditional Purim song, "We shall reverse and we shall reverse, until the Jews shall control their enemies," eventually reaching the unavoidable rendition: "and we shall reverse, until the Jews shall control the Arabs."

A month later, just in time for Passover, it was announced to the public that the killers were captured: two 18- and 19 year-old Palestinians from the village neighboring Itamar. They expressed no remorse and proclaimed the honor of their actions, dedicating the killing to the national Palestinian cause. Israeli newspapers displayed huge pictures of the two, large headlines stating "The Faces of Evil" and "Monsters." The irregular size of

the headlines and pictures stood in contrast to the regular appearance of the two—no resemblance to the classic Osama, Sadam or the devilish Sheik looks. As hard as I tried, I could not see evil reflected in their faces. Maybe this is the reason for the large pictures and headlines, to properly orient the perplexed and naive ones.

Since Passover, Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Day came and went. And so did the "Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Terrorism Remembrance Day" and Independence Day as well. Our triumphs, their catastrophes. Luckily, Israeli Independence Day is determined by the Hebrew calendar whereas the Palestinian Nakba Day relies upon the Gregorian Calendar: May 15. And so, the two remain mostly unsynchronized, yet never too far away from each other.

On Nakba Day I drove along Highway 60 noting the incredible military presence and the almost non-existent presence of Palestinian vehicles. On the sides of the road, at the entrances to Palestinian areas, Israeli soldiers engaged Palestinian demonstrators, the average age of both groups older than usual. This was no ordinary day, after all. Columns of smoke rose up in the sky, sounds of firearms and explosions heard all around. A day later, all was back to normal. Blockades removed, traffic renewed, Jews and Arabs shopping together at Rami-Levi, middle-aged Palestinians waiting by Alon Shvut's gate, handing over their ID cards to guards before moving on to build more settlement homes.

I left Alon Shvut on the first day of 2012, feeing a mixture of sadness and relief. I had almost grown used to the calmness of the settlement, enjoyed meaningful relations with more than a few of its residents and felt especially close to Sarah and Mordechai, who even suggested I should date one of their nieces just before I left (I did, but it did not work out). At the same time, fieldwork had left me emotionally drained, unable to

process and assimilate an overabundance of experiences and meanings. My condition, however, differed from that of the residents of Alon Shvut. They are used to living in a militarized zone, used to not acknowledging inequality. One my last conversations with Rabbi Cohen summed up this settlement reality: "I feel a bit sorry for you," he revealed. "Why?" I asked. "Not much has happened during your time with us," he explained, "do you have enough to write about?"

Summary: Terrains both Charted and Uncharted

Ethnographic writing always involves a methodological process of selection and elimination that aims to order the discordances of the ethnographic encounter (Clifford 1986). This I already knew, but I did not realize how arbitrary this methodological process can be or the degree to which elimination may overcome selection. Choosing what to write about is not only a product of theoretical orientations and narrative structure, but also the result of emotional dispositions, many of which remain unknown. Some encounters are too intimate to recall, others remain inchoate and do not easily lend themselves to description, and then there are those occurrences and topics that may simply open up questions that cannot be addressed without radical deviation from the central themes being described and analyzed. This dissertation therefore only begins to unravel the complexities of my fieldwork, while attesting to the unfinished nature of ethnographic fieldwork and writing.

For example, I do not discuss gender dynamics among Jewish settlers. There are important debates among settlers about the proper expression of female religiosity or the religious status of homosexuals. In addition, there are the masculine qualities of the

settler identity, which like the larger Zionist collective identity, are shaped by the protracted realities of a violent conflict with Palestinian and Arab states. Likewise, I do not examine the dynamics of Jewish ethnicity such as the place of Mizrahi Jews within a dominantly Ashkenazi settlement enterprise (Dalsheim 2008). I also do not delve into the economic mechanisms of settlement expansion (Weiss 2011) or the parallel role of American Jewish migrants (Hirschhorn 2012). While these omissions reflect the limits of the information I accumulated and thus also attest to my theoretical interests, there are other omissions that reflect the limits of my narration abilities. I do not discuss, for instance, important settlements like the ultra-Orthodox but non-Zionist settlement of Beitar-Elit or the neo-Hassidic Bat-Ayin settlement, which is nestled deep within Gush Etzion but considered its internal Other due to the hawkish politics of its residents. I also do not write about ethnographic encounters at contested sites like Temple Mount or the Old City of Hebron, and there are many characters and events that did not make it into the dissertation.

The biggest shortfall of this dissertation may be the lack of a wider comparative framework. For example, I do not provide enough comparison between pre-1967 and post-1967 Israeli settlement activities. In addition, I do not compare the Israeli case to other settler movements across place and time (e.g. Lustick 1993). What, for instance, are the relations between the Israeli settler movement and those in Zimbabwe, French Algeria, Australia or the US (Wolfe 1999)? Is the Religious Zionist settlement movement an example of settler-colonialism and, if not, what are the differences? Likewise, I do not situate the peacemaking attempts between settlers and Palestinians in the wider context of reconciliation processes in other war-ridden places. In the near future, I intend to build

upon the findings of this dissertation, expand the scope of my research and provide a more encompassing comparative analysis that situates settlers within a wider global and historical perspective.

However, the aim of this dissertation was to provide a primary ethnographic source from which comparisons may be drawn. In addition, I was concerned with writing in a way that makes ethnographic knowledge accessible to broader audiences. This decision included legibility choices, such as avoiding the use academic jargon, as well as refraining as much as possible from integrating conceptual categories that were extracted from other ethnographic contexts. I did not want to risk the possibility of obscuring particular histories, traditions and lived experiences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through abstraction of the ethnographic narrative. This move, I argue, constitutes an important theoretical contribution, one that pertains to the realm of storytelling. The sharing of stories is one of the most fundamental human ways of creating personal and social meanings. Since stories reflect and influence our perceptions and ways of acting in the world, they contain political qualities (Jackson 2002). This dissertation therefore practices engaged anthropology through a mode of storytelling that moves beyond hegemonic categories of narration that set and frame scholarly and public understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, all of which limit the possibilities of understanding the present and thus imagining and acting toward a different future.

One of my primary goals herein was to offer a comparative analysis of differences and similarities among Jewish settlers as a means of creating ethnographic pathways for better understanding settlers and the settlement regime, and thus the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. All religiously motivated settlers are united by a religiously-informed national

identity that emerges from a belief in the monotheistic bond between God, his Chosen People and the sacred land. They also attribute metaphysical meanings to events in history such as the Jewish "return" to the Holy Land and the establishment of the Israeli state, although they differ in their present attitudes toward the state. Furthermore, all settlements constitute a part of a larger national project aimed at Judaizing the occupied territories, yet each settlement has its own particular history, actors and communal characteristics.

Consider, for example, some of the differences between Alon Shvut and Yitzhar. Alon Shvut is a statist settlement while the residents of Yitzhar have more tenuous relations with the state, and some, especially in the surrounding outposts, hold anti-statist attitudes, seeing the state as bowing down to secular values instead of Jewish ones. These differences cannot be separated from the demographic and geographic realities of these two settlements. As a central part of a large settlement bloc, Alon Shvut is located in an area where Jews form a majority, while Yitzhar is nestled in an area densely populated by Palestinians. In one settlement people feel secure about their future because they are expected to remain part of the Israeli state while the other settlement is likely to be dismantled if a Palestinian state would be established in the West Bank.

Yet, as demonstrated in chapter three, even in a statist settlement like Alon Shvut, the identification with the state can coexist with the public expression of support in settlement activities that are carried out in opposition to the rule of the state. This contradictory attitude toward the state is also reflected in the attitude of the state toward settlers. The state funds the construction of access roads and basic infrastructure like water and sewage lines to the outposts of Yitzhar, even though some of the housing

construction there is considered illegal even under Israeli law. These realities point to the uneasy and complicated set of relations of settlers and the settlement enterprise to the Israeli state. The state is both a religiously meaningful source of admiration and contempt, an agent of support as well as destruction.

These complicated relations were evidenced most acutely by the Disengagement Plan, which by now had become a momentous event in the history of the settlements, Israel and the region. The Disengagement Plan was supposed to signify the triumph of the Israeli state over the settlement regime and set a precedent for future territorial withdrawals from the West Bank. However, rather than serving to illustrate the dangers of unilateral geopolitical moves, the violent aftermath of the Disengagement Plan strengthened the Israeli public perception that territorial withdrawals result in more Palestinian violence and that there is no Palestinian partner for peace. As Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced couple of days prior to his reelection in March 2015, "'anyone who is going to establish a Palestinian state, anyone who is going to evacuate territories today, is simply giving a base for attacks to radical Islam against Israel'" (McLaughlin 2015). From this perspective, the Disengagement Plan actually secured the future of the larger settlement enterprise in the West Bank.

Nevertheless, in positioning the state against settlers, the Disengagement Plan brought about a profound crisis among settlers. In addition to the pain of losing home, communities and land, settlers faced a serious religious problem. The spiritual dimensions of settlements' geopolitics are commonly framed through the rubric of Religious Zionist theologies, which sanctify the Jewish settlement of the Biblical Land of Israel and imbue the Israeli state with sacred meanings. The sudden confrontation with the state caused

many settlers to reexamine the religious meanings and appropriate responses to the violence of the Israeli state. Some settlers decided that the best course of action should be a deeper integration into state institutions as a means of gaining greater influence on the Israeli political sphere. Others felt betrayed by the state, and, as illustrated in chapter six, some of them are now fighting for the establishment of true Jewish sovereignty in the West Bank through violent means that include Price Tag attacks.

The internal differences in the religious attitudes of settlers toward Palestinians and the Israeli state connect to the second goal of this dissertation: to reveal ethnographically the role of religion in the geopolitics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The first chapter explicates the function of miracle stories to show how Palestinian violence acquires sacred meanings. Rather than attesting, for instance, to the relations between military occupation and violence, miracle stories about Palestinian violence became an explicative tool that attest to divine providence and provided comfort in a time of great trouble. The relations between religion and geopolitics are also the topic of the second chapter, which discusses the "double return" of settlers to Gush Etzion: a religious return to the biblical homeland, as well as a political return to a place lost in the 1948 Arab Israeli War. This double return, both real and imagined, also carries economic benefits, such as highly-developed public amenities. Furthermore, as the first settlement to be built after 1967 on plots of land without Jewish presence during 1948, Alon Shvut both set a precedent and acted as an emblem of success for other settlements, signifying a successful institutionalization of settlement life. Like Alon Shvut, other Religious Zionist settlements were imagined as a return to the biblical cradle of Jewish civilization, a return that excludes the parallel Palestinian hopes of return and sovereignty.

The third chapter shows how Religious Zionist settlers in Alon Shvut employ instrumental explanations for their presence in the West Bank as a means of rejecting their identification as messianic. Some even disavow their own *mitnachel* (settler) identity. These two forms of denial are tied to their general understanding of Judaism as a religion of reason (in addition to their efforts to align more closely with the state and disassociate themselves from occupation realities that endanger the Jewish and democratic character of Israel). The fourth chapter, which reveals the contradictory sets of practices and attitudes of settlers toward Palestinians, who are not fully seen by most settlers, also delves into the relations between religion and politics by showing how Jewish tradition is evoked in order to perpetuate compassion toward Palestinians or to legitimize fear and separation. The final two chapters demonstrate the political power of religion and its capacity to contain the opposing forces of peace and violence. Rather than simply constituting an irrational and impractical phenomenon, I argue that mysticism (the same religious force behind the messianic underpinning of the Religious Zionist settlement movement) is potent with political possibilities and can unsettle political binaries as much as it can operate to entrench enmity.

In addition to showing the political power and influence of religion, my discussion of Rabbi Menachem Froman and Eretz Shalom is directed toward another goal: to reveal emerging settlement realities that remain understudied and largely absent from public and scholarly perceptions of the conflict. The settlers and Palestinians who participate in the activities of Eretz Shalom attempt to find commonalities and discover the humanity of each other across differences. Instead of waiting for politicians and diplomats to bring about peace, they decided to begin a peace process “from below,” to

start a grassroots route of reconciliation that fulfils their mutual (although different) yearnings for recognition. As exemplified in chapters three and four, many settlers yearn for peace, a yearning that remains symbolically present but unrealized in concrete ways. Many were therefore thrilled about the opening of a new supermarket in Gush Etzion where they and Palestinians shop side-by-side. Although the opening of the supermarket was fraught with many tensions, although the supermarket normalizes political inequalities and although most settlers do not really "see" Palestinians, in allowing settlers and Palestinians to temporarily share the same space in relative equality, the supermarket reveals how the future could look with the two peoples sharing the same space and coexisting as equals under law.

The future looms heavy upon the present realities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as much as the past does. Unlike the political anxieties of many Israelis and international actors, religiously motivated settlers tend to feel relatively confident about the future. This temporal position is connected to the optimism of the messianic sentiment, which is tied to a utopian orientation toward the future that builds upon a retroactive relation toward a past that may act both as a source of authority and legitimation as well as a model for things to come. Yet, there is a difference between messianism as an aspiration and messainism as a practice. Messianic practices shift the center of activity almost exclusively into the present, which becomes a temporal arena where reality is both negated and fulfilled as part of a revolutionary practice with redemptive ends.

As this dissertation shows, settlers have different ways of interpreting the past, relating to the present and acting toward the future. Take for example the settlement of

Alon Shvut, which represents the normalization of messianism. It is revolution incarnated, satisfied, complacent and self-confident as evidenced, for instance, by a time capsule that was buried next to the synagogue. No wonder then that settlers there often reject their messianic label. Not only do they want to represent themselves as respected citizens of the state and distance themselves from other settlers who they perceive to be too radical, they are also quite passive politically: many of them see the maintenance of a status-quo (that is, no annexation of the West Bank and no withdrawal from it) as the preferable course of action. This Messianism can be understood as passive, content and somewhat unaware of itself: a far cry from the messianism of the earlier religiously motivated settlement days.

The messianism of residents of Alon Shvut can be contrasted with those settlers who engage in peacemaking attempts with Palestinians. Although not all of these settlers agree upon the geopolitical solution to the conflict, they are active and engage closely with the contentious realities of the here and the now. However, their relation to the future reflects patient qualities: peace takes time. This position was exemplified, by a settler who opposed "peace now" to "peace here," and therefore construed peace as a problem of time in opposition to space, as a problem of historical progress. Similarly, Rabbi Froman used to say, "slowly, slowly with peace." He saw peace as religious ideal of wholeness and unity rather than partition, one that is intrinsically tied to the redemptive aim of the messianic mission. Seeing peace as a spiritual utopia, he warned against the hastening of the end, thus offering a political-theological stance that subverts both the messianic urgency that typified Gush Emunim and the political imperative of the Israeli liberal left.

This more active but patient form of messianism can be further contrasted with the urgency that characterizes the actions of those settlers that follow Rabbi Ginsburgh, which exhibit a heightened and anxious awareness of Palestinians and political realities. They possess a desire to bring about a messianic revolution as soon as possible, a revolution which will bring about the creation of a Jewish monarchy over the Whole Land of Israel. At the same time, they fear the materialization of their messianic aspirations not only because of a possible failure, but also because it may deprive them from a central essence of their existence. As one of these settlers told me, when the messiah will arrive and the Arabs would be gone from the land, he will have nothing left to do but to simply die. They fear the future they desire, but strive to overcome their fears. It is an anxious messianism and this anxiousness cannot be separated from the experiences of marginalization of a population that feels it is being prosecuted even by other religiously motivated settlers. As these examples demonstrate, settlers' messianism exists as a plural and heterogeneous social phenomena and its temporal dimensions are deeply connected to the territorial politics of the conflict. I therefore argue that the conflict is about time as it is about space.

In addition, this dissertation expounds upon the role of time through an examination of four influential rabbinical leaders: Rabbi Amital, Rabbi Porat, Rabbi Froman and Rabbi Ginsburgh. Except for Rabbi Ginsburgh, who is still alive and well, all of these rabbis passed away during my fieldwork. Their death marked a generational change within the religiously motivated settlement movement. The romantic, nationalist and rebellious spirit that characterized the early days of Gush Emunim is long gone by now. It has been replaced largely by the bourgeois comforts of settlement life. This

institutionalization is a sign of messianic success, but it also brought about the hilltop youth phenomenon. A growing number of young settlers question the all-encompassing and collectivist notions of redemption in favor of more personal ones. These younger settlers seek more intimate and authentic religious experience and draw upon Hassidic traditions as a spiritual means of connecting to self, place and God.

The emergence of settlers who seek to realize religious ideals through individual experiences rather than solely though collective ones is one of the most important changes within Religious Zionism, one that is tied both to the advent of post-modernity and to the disenchantment with the redemptive promise of the early settlement days. Rabbi Froman and his followers demonstrate how the neo-Hassidic occupation with mystical forms of spirituality as a means of individual self-fulfillment corresponds to a shift from territorial notions of ownership to territorial notions of belonging. This neo-Hassidic worldview is tied to a desire to know Palestinians and make peace with them and undermines collective notions of us vs. them.

Yet, Rabbi Froman and his followers constitute a rather small minority within the neo-Hassidic counter-culture of settlement life. Many settlers who live in outposts and draw upon Hassidic traditions feel a closer connection to the teachings of Rabbi Ginsburgh. As Rabbi Ginsburgh explains in Baruch HaGever (1994), God may be encountered within nature. And so, similar to the spiritually laden encounter with the landscape, the immediacy of violence, its carnality, allows the inner Jewish soul to encounter the divine within the brutal here-and-now. Although most of the perpetrators of Price Tag acts do not deeply understand the mystical theology of Rabbi Ginsburgh, many believe that in addition to maintaining a balance of terror, their violent actions materialize

religious values. The religious foundations of Price Tag acts and their inflammatory potential touch the heart of the Zionist problem: can the religious dimensions of Judaism and the conflict be controlled by secular politics? As the realities of the place demonstrate, the answer is a negative one. The line between the political and the theological has been blurred long ago, ever since Zionism rose in the 19th century as a secular national liberation movement that sought to politicize Judaism on the basis of Jewish religion.

In 1926, Gershom Scholem, the great scholar of Jewish mysticism wrote about the dangers of the Zionist project and its secularization of the Jewish religion:

> The Land is a volcano. It provides lodging for the language.... [But] what will be the result of the rebirth of Hebrew? Will the abyss of the holy tongue, which we have implanted in our children, not be too wide? People here do not realize what they are doing. They think they have made Hebrew into a secular language, that they have removed its apocalyptic sting. But that is not so…. Every expression that is not simply made up but rather taken from the treasure house of well-worn words is laden with explosives…. God will not remain silent in the language in which He has been adjured so many thousands of times to come back into our lives. [Scholem 1989:59-60]

Scholem warns not only against the danger of secularizing the sacred Hebrew language, but more broadly against the dangers that lie with the Zionist simultaneous dependence upon, and rejection of, the Jewish religion as the foundational source of Zionist self-legitimation. Put simply, Zionism relies upon the Jewish religious tradition even though it attempts to disassociate itself from it. In doing so, "Zionism prepares the ground for the messianism with which it disagrees" (Raz-Krakotzkin 2002:88).

From this perspective, the Religious Zionist settlement enterprise can be understood as one solution to the internal Zionist contradiction: settlers fulfil the powerful messianic force that is disavowed by Israeli secular politics. These days,

however, the messianic passion of many settlers is diminished, having been replaced by the complacency of suburban-like living conditions. Thus, price taggers and many of the younger settlers of the hills see themselves as those who truly realize the redemptive mission that began with Zionism, was followed by Religious Zionism and was abandoned by both Zionism and Religious Zionism. Considering the past and present centrality of messianism within the violence of the conflict, my ethnographic depiction and analysis of Rabbi Froman and Eretz Shalom is perhaps the most important aspect of my research findings. It shows how settlers who acknowledge and act upon the religious underpinnings of the Israeli-Palestinian realities relate redemption to peaceful encounters with Palestinians rather than to violence and settlement expansion. This dissertation therefore provides empirically-grounded examples of the power of religion as a possible force of peace instead of violence alone.

Final Words

If the abnormal can be normalized through its routinization, then it can be easily argued that the summer of 2011 in the West Bank was rather normal. It was the other side of the Green Line that actually experienced an exceptional summer. Week after week, thousands upon thousands of Israelis took to the streets in a series of protests for social change that are already described as the largest ones in Israeli history. Joining ranks with the multitudes of Occupy protesters across the globe, Israelis protested against the skyrocketing housing prices; the concentration of wealth by the few; and the unchecked privatization of social services, natural resources and more. Enacting the difficulty of

making a home, tent “towns” were established and occupied various sites across Israeli cities, with Tel-Aviv functioning as the central tent hub.

The protesters steered clear of the traditional fault-lines dividing Israeli society. There weren't too many evocations of Jews/Arabs, religious/secular, the occupation of the West-Bank or the settlements. This silence enabled the unification and mobilization of the masses around the rallying cry, “The People! Demand! Social Justice!” Yet this silence also spoke of fundamental problems with the protest movement. How do Palestinians figure within “the people” and how far on the map does the demand for “social justice” travel? Is it tenable to speak of justice while ignoring the millions who live about an hour away from Tel-Aviv but lack liberties enjoyed by the protesters? What kind of social change can be brought about when the most socially divisive issues remain largely untouched? And, isn't the obstruction of socially divisive issues from the public eye also a useful way of actually strengthening their effects?

Many settlers met the mass protests with suspicion. “These are Leftist demonstrations camouflaged as a nonpartisan movement,” was one typical reaction, pointing out an uneasiness linked with the undefined place of settlers within the protest movement. Religiously motivated settlers have a clearly defined sense of “the people.” Moreover, they are highly engaged in socially-oriented activities such as education, welfare and communal outreach, both within and without their communities. At the same time, the vast majority of settlers vote for right-wing parties that support settlement growth, and these parties tend to uphold neoliberal ideologies. As a result, even though bearing much in common with their own social sensibilities, the anti-capitalist tone of the protest movement also hindered the participation of many settlers. As one recently

married settler told me, “We [settlers] finally have a rare opportunity to make Israel better through a social project of unification rather than separation. We could easily bring hundreds of thousands of our people to the streets. People with passion, commitment and experience, but we are just too obsessed with borders.”

The uneasiness felt by many settlers toward the mass protests was often articulated in a patronizing manner: “How badly do they really have it in Tel-Aviv?” or “Maybe they should cut down on their European vacations.” Coming from a population that brought about changes of historical proportion, such remarks also reflect feelings of seniority.

Baruch is a small-statured man in his early fifties. He recently opened a sandwich stand at the newly built commercial center in Gush Etzion. Known for his good-humored nature, Baruch is easily identified by the long brown strands of thinning hair he borrows from the right side of his head to cover an expanding baldness. His surviving hair seems to possess a rebellious will of its own. Resisting the hairpins holding it to bind the kippah with his head, the strands allow the bluish kippah to slide downward and away from its place of rest until the kippah eventually hangs by some invisible threads on the left ear. Having escaped the hairpins while liberating the top of the head from the temporary occupant, the hair is left to freely wave in an audacious defiance of gravity. “Going out to the streets and chanting and yelling is not enough,” says Baruch. “At the beginning it was just me, the tent and the hill. It was cold, rainy and muddy and the wind blew my tent away several times, but I stayed there night after night until the rest joined me.” What started thirty years ago as a single tent upon a muddy hill has transformed into a thriving religious community of two thousand people, red-roofed houses and green backyards.

Through their beliefs and actions, religiously motivated settlers have and continue to succeed in making the temporary permanent. Although the world is getting more weary and outraged by the Israeli occupation, and although Palestinians continue to seek national independence, settlers believe that time is on their side. They have already embarked upon a journey toward redemption, a journey that contains obstacles along the way, but from which there is no retreat. Their ability to position the difficulties of the present within a timeframe that begins with time immemorial and stretches to eternity contributes to their optimistic sense of national resolve. And, so, time moves on, settlements continue to slowly expand and shape the state in their own image, their growth changing not only the geopolitical landscape of the region, but the cultural one as well. As this dissertation demonstrates ethnographically, there are many changes on the ground, and these changes are fraught with possibilities, both terrible and hopeful.

In April of 2014, following confrontations between settlers and IDF soldiers in Yitzhar, the infamous Yeshivat Od Yosef Chai was closed down. Its fortress-like structure now serves as a military station for a Border Patrol unit and no longer functions as a place of religious study. Nevertheless, Price Tag attacks still continue, and the influence of Rabbi Ginsburgh continues to grow. In December of 2012, I attended a Yat Kislev (the Chabad holiday of redemption: see chapter six) celebration with Rabbi Ginsburgh. Unlike the relatively small celebration the year before at Od Yosef Chai, this time the celebration took place at the International Convention Center in Jerusalem." Thousands attended the event, which also included a large religious book fair where Rabbi Ginsburgh's recent book about the Kabbalah could be purchased at a reduced

price. Unlike his former books, which were self-published, this one was finally printed by one of Israel's largest publishing houses, Yedioth Aharonoth.

Figure 24: The last night of Rabbi Froman, Tekoa, March, 2013. Photo by author.

Rabbi Froman passed away on March 4, 2013. On his last night, dozens of his disciples and friends gathered in the backyard of his home, prayed, clapped their hands, sang his favorite songs, and then passed by his window and said their last goodbyes to the man. By then, he had already lost consciousness. I, too, passed by his windows and said "shalom" for the last time. Thousands of people came to his funeral. There were secular and religious people, settlers and Israelis from the other side of the border and Palestinians, too. "Rabbi Froman was a very spiritual man," explained one of his closest students, "but he was also a man of action who tried to realize peace within the concrete world." "He was a man of peace who lived in the future," said one Palestinian. "Maybe people here are not ready to accept his ideas, that settlers and Palestinians can make peace, but in the future everyone will understand." "I lost my Rabbi," lamented Said. "He

was the only Rabbi I had. No one can replace him." "He believed that peace is something that people make, not only politicians," explained a Palestinian partner of Eretz Shalom. "Peace will have to grow from this land, and if Israelis and Palestinians cannot make peace, maybe it would be easier for Muslim and Jews to make peace."

After the death of Rabbi Froman, the activities of Eretz Shalom slowed down. Nevertheless, Hadassah, his widow, continues to work toward peace in his place. "Our goal in this world is to erase the illusion of separation between human beings," she explained to a group of Christian, Muslim and Jewish peace activists who visited her home in June of 2014. "We have to make a small hole in the wall, and from there, change will slowly grow." In addition, new local initiatives of cooperation between settlers and Palestinians have sprung up. Settlers and Palestinians now regularly meet at a small plot of land located next to the Gush Etzion junction. These meetings, part of a new grassroots coexistence project entitled "Roots," draw together Israelis and Palestinians who engage in cultural exchange activities, including language lessons and interfaith dialogues. The goal of this project is to increase understanding across differences as a means of creating a human reality from which local solutions to the conflict may grow: "You need to understand that people do not live within ideology all the time. Reality is the strongest force and, sooner or later, people will have to acknowledge that no one is going to go anywhere, that we are destined to live together." This is what Ben, a settler, told me during the Arabic language course (chapter four). If Ben is right, than the existence of local initiatives like Eretz Shalom and the "Roots" project is critical to the future of the region more than ever.

Since the early 1990s, there have been many political attempts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but all have failed and have often resulted in more violence. The constant presence of religion amid the violent realities of the conflict reinforces a widely perceived notion of religion as a troubling problem. This attitude is demonstrated, for example, by the repeated exclusion of religious leaders from peace negotiations that engage, among other complex issues, with the political status of places of great religious importance. Elite political processes do matter greatly. However, the inclusion of local communities and religious leaders in peace processes will allow the integration of traditional values that resonate strongly with the people who live there. Room should therefore be made and support should be given for parallel peace processes that include the people who live the conflict. The simple but important truth is that peacemaking does not belong only to politicians. Considering this, doesn't the political exclusion of religion from peace processes in the Holy Land appear to be quite irrational?

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