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The Dialectic between Confrontation and Commitment: Religious-Zionism and the Settlement Project

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Abstract: Religious Zionists have been the driving force behind the settlement project in Israel for the past 40 years. They often see settling in the Greater Land of Israel as a messianic activity. It might be thought that when state policy clashes with radical messianic movements, the result would be violent, bloody confrontations. This study seeks to explain why this has not been the case in Israel despite the dismantling of settlements in the Sinai and Gaza and the controversial Oslo process. Although there has been turmoil and resistance, most religious Zionists have refrained from serious violence. We suggest that a "theological-normative balance" prevents all-out de-legitimation of the state and life-threatening violence against it.

INTRODUCTION

The settlement project in Judea and Samaria (The West Bank) and until 2005 in the Gaza Strip has surely been the most contentious issue in Israeli politics for decades. One specific sector of Israeli society spearheaded the project: the religious Zionists. What began as a small movement of religious zealots, today numbers close to 400,000 Jewish settlers. Notably, all the peace plans offered by Israel in the past 15 years have one thing in common: the majority of the settlers in the "large settlement blocs" will remain where they are; they and the land they occupy will be annexed to the State of Israel. Although at present the settler population includes traditionalist, secular, and Haredi

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(ultra-Orthodox) Jews, the hub and powerhouse behind the settlement project continues to be the religious Zionist camp.

In this article, we focus on the conflicted, often contradictory policies of religious Zionist settlers toward the government and its institution particularly during the Yamit (Sinai) evacuation in 1982 and the disengagement from Gush Katif (Gaza Strip) in 2005. What makes religious Zionists settlers unique in Israeli society is their being committed to the state because it possesses, in their eyes, profound religious significance, while, at the same time, believing that they are obliged to disobey state law when it restricts the building of settlements and *a fortiori* when it orders their dismantling.

We propose an explanation for religious Zionist conflicted thought and behavior, which we call a "normative-theological balance." We argue that this "balance" is inherent in the religious Zionist worldview. Despite its absolute opposition to the state's "sinful" behavior in evacuating settlements, the commitment to Israel as *the* religious vehicle leading to Redemption prevents them from adopting a policy of mass religious defiance. The dual commitment to the state's holiness and to the Greater Land of Israel produces an uneasy but usually pacific standoff. Frustrated Messianic beliefs which *prima facie* might lead to violent, anti-system politics has, in the Israeli case managed (at least until now) to avert major religion-state confrontations.

First, we shall follow the settlement project in its early years when disobedience became a central issue. We then take up the two main cases of evacuation (from Sinai in 1982 and from the Gaza Strip in 2005) — regularly calling attention to the tendency of the religious settlers to shy away from serious, life-threatening violence.

THE SETTLEMENT PROJECT'S FORMATIVE YEARS: GUSH EMUNIM'S CONFRONTATION WITH THE STATE

Gush Emunim (the Bloc of the Faithful), the religious Zionist movement that championed the settlement project, has been studied extensively, both from the "inside" by its participants (Harnoi 1994; Segal 1987; Shafat 1995), and from the "outside" by its (mainly) academic detractors (Ra'anan 1980; Rubinstein 1982; 2000, chap. 7; Sprinzak 1981; 1986, chap. 8; 1993; 1998; 1999; Tal 1987; Aran 1987; Don Yehiya 1987; Lustick 1988; 1993; Naor 2001; Zertal and Eldar 2007; Gorenberg 2006; Herriot 2009, chap. 3; Taub 2007; Fischer 2007; Feige 2009;

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Wilcox 2011; Dalsheim 2011; Inbari 2012; Pedahzur 2012; Shachor 2015).

Academic researchers, especially of the first generation of study (from 1970's to the early 2000s) were mostly critical of the settlement project (Ra'anan 1980; Rubinstein 1982; 2000, chap. 7; Sprinzak 1981; 1986, chap. 8; 1993; 1998; 1999; Tal 1987; Aran 1987; Tal 1987; Zertal and Eldar 2007). But in the last decade a new generation of scholars has presented the settlement project with more nuance and complexity (Fischer 2007; Feige 2009; Dalsheim 2011; Inbari 2012). Most recently, a Ph.D. thesis studying the settlement rabbis' ideology was written by scholar who is married to one of the leading rabbis in the settlements and it too highlights the complexity of settler thought (Shachor 2015). Our paper belongs to the new wave of research that tries to present the picture from the "inside" (although not as participants or even supporters of the settlement project) without taking sides in the political debate surrounding the issue. Our research differs from the important recent works of Feige (2009) and Dalsheim (2011) that are largely anthropological in character and from Inbari's (2012) that is based on psychological cognitive dissonance theory and is focused on the religious Zionist rabbinic leadership. Parallel to Shlomo Fischer's (2007) Ph.D. thesis, we concentrate on the intersection between theology and politics, mainly but not exclusively on the worldview of Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook and his disciples.

A number of different groups merged to found Gush Emunim at the start of 1974. Some were students of Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook of the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva in Jerusalem; others were "middle class" residents of the greater Tel Aviv area. Still others were members of the activist "young guard" of the National Religious Party (Harnoi 1994, chap. 1–2; Shafat 1995, chap. 1). Typically, different interpretations of the Gush are dependent upon which of these groups is seen as its major ideological source.

According to Gideon Aran's (1987; 1991) well-known interpretation, Gush Emunim derived mainly from the teachings of Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook. In Aran's highly critical view, Gush Emunim was part of a faith-based fundamentalist revolution that converted "religious Zionism" into a "Zionist religion." He argues that for Gush Emunim's adherents, the theological-messianic drive toward settling the Greater Land of Israel represented the deepest stratum of both Judaism and Zionism. Doubtless, the political theology of Rabbi Kook's followers was based on the contention that terrestrial political activities are the external mirror of inner, spiritual intentions (Hellinger 2008).

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Aran sees Gush Emunim as a "fundamentalist," "messianic" movement or in the terminology of Almond, Appleby and Sivan "a strong religion" (Almond, Appleby and Sivan 2003). Indeed, in the Fundamentalism Project of the University of Chicago, a number of research articles were devoted to Gush Emunim. Clearly, fundamentalist movements in different religions possess a kind of 'family resemblance': they strive to keep eschatological yearnings alive, to preserve religion in its pure form while drawing a sharp line between themselves and their adversaries (Marty and Appleby 1993, 1–9). Aran follows these characteristics closely: Gush Emunim is fundamentalist because of its messianic character, its emphasis on strict observance of Halacha, its Jewish exclusivism, and its totalizing perspective in which holiness penetrates into every area of daily life (Aran 1991). Ian Lustick (1993) follows Aran in interpreting Gush Emunim in messianic terms.

But other scholars, especially in the last decade, present a more multichrome portrait of the Gush's origins and its "on the ground" ideology. Feige states that "Gush Emunim is a religious-fundamentalist movement with a certain brand of messianism and an ultra-rightist political outlook" (Feige 2009, 5). Its shrewd practical agenda "aims primarily at creating geo-demographic facts that will prevent any territorial compromise on the part of Israeli government. As such, it raises the price Israel will need to pay — financial, moral or political — for any agreement it makes" (Feige 2009, 67). Like others, Motti Inbari identifies Gush Emunim with the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva:

> Gush Emunim was founded under the leadership of Mercaz HaRav yeshiva graduates following the crisis created by concern over the possible division of the Land of Israel. The movement was forged in a stage of cognitive dissonance in which the founders of the movement believed that enormous messianic progress had occurred following the conquest of the whole Land of Israel in 1967, although doubts also emerged due to the authorities' willingness to make territorial compromises following the Yom Kippur War. The sense of crisis sparked a process of messianic radicalization that led the rabbi and his students to move beyond activity in the world of Torah and become public figures — spiritual leaders of a mass movement that changed the face of Israeli society. The solution the rabbi found to his messianic distress lay in a process of radicalization leading to aggressive action in the public arena (Inbari 2012, 35).

And yet Inbari (2012) presents the variegated attitudes — at times radical, at others pragmatic — within Gush Emunim and the settler rabbinic

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leadership. During times of crisis — such as the evacuation of Yamit (Sinai), the exposure of the Jewish Underground, and the disengagement from Gush Katif (Gaza) — settler attitudes were hardly of one piece. Indeed, Shlomo Fischer (2007) claims that interpreting Gush Emunim as a one-size-fits-all fundamentalist movement is overly simplistic. Even Mercaz HaRav, undoubtedly a "strong" religious institution, at times fostered cooperation and compromise and adopted modern ideas about human autonomy and the participation of women in politics and society (Fischer 2007, chap.1). Moreover, Naomi Shachor (2015) has recently argued that the settler's rabbinic leadership has not been monolithic in key issues such as disobedience to government decisions to evacuate settlements and, more basically, its very perception of the religio-political standing of the State of Israel (Shachor 2015).

Avi Sagi and Dov Schwartz question the too simple identification that Aran and others make between Gush Emunim and the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva. As they rightly point out, a sizeable part of those who led the settlement project emerged from the middle class center of the veteran religious Zionist community. They did not study in the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva; neither did they develop a messianic political theology. For them the settlements represented the renewal, in religious form, of the secular pioneering tradition of the Second and Third Aliyot (waves of immigration). It was based not on messianism but on the classical Zionist program of "liberating" the land through settling it (Sagi and Schwartz 2003).

Similarly, Yoni Garb (2004a; 2004b, 344–345) points to the affinity between Gush Emunim and the "young guard" of the Religious Zionist Party (Mafdal). Although many of the founders were Mercaz HarRav students, in practice, the mantle of leadership rapidly passed onto the (non-yeshiva) activists in the field (like Benny Katzover, Yisrael Harel, Pinchas Wallerstein, and Uri Elizur). It is true, Garb concedes, that it was the students of Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda (Chanan Porat, Rabbis Levinger, Waldman, Aviner, Melamed and Bin Nun) who set down the intellectual groundwork of Gush Emunim. And yet, Garb contends that there is too much emphasis on the messianic component of Gush Emunim, which derives from the movement's exaggerated identity with Mercaz HaRav (Garb 2004b, 336). Even those who downplay the messianic-theological component of the movement like Sagi (2010) agree nevertheless that it was Mercaz HaRav students who transformed religious Zionist discourse, established the movement's messianic-mystical style and empowered rabbinic authorities.

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Gush Emunim's objective during the first Rabin government (1974–1977) was to establish settlements in Judea and Samaria even though they violated explicit government decisions. They saw the fait accompli character of the settlements as a means of leveraging the government to accept their agenda. Many openly admitted that they were committing illegal acts arguing that even if their actions were illegal, they were not illegitimate (Sprinzak 1986, 124). Moreover, even if their actions were illegal, they did not represent a breach of acceptable democratic norms. After all, civil disobedience is a common enough phenomenon in western democracies when individuals feel that a law is unjust and, as morally engaged citizens, they choose to disobey it.

Gush Emunim ideologues argued that they were doing nothing that had not been done before by secular Zionist settlers during the British Mandate period. These early settlers did not hesitate to defy the British authorities; indeed, they often flouted the policies of the established Jewish Yishuv leadership in their drive to establish new Jewish settlements (Sprinzak 1986, 125). Then as now, prohibiting settlement by the government was unacceptable on religious and moral grounds. Gershon Shafat, a prominent member of the Gush, makes clear how profoundly convinced the setters were that their actions did not in fact violate the law.

> Public opinion awakened into a synchronized chorus to uncompromisingly criticize "the fanatical" violators of the law, those who challenge "the rule of democracy in the state." Despite the venom leveled at us, there was no doubt in our hearts that we were acting in the service of the original Zionist idea…This was always the revolutionary nature of Zionism that was formed in the unfinished struggle against opponents whose names and faces no one any longer remembers (Shafat 1995, 71).

In the eyes of Gush Emunim's ideologues, authority was justifiably defied for the sake of Israel's collective good. They emphasized the difference between breaking the law for personal gain (as in illegal strikes for higher salaries) and sacrificing oneself and accepting the legal punishment in order to further the core imperative of Judaism and Zionism. Indeed, they saw themselves as model citizens. And yet, despite Gush Emunim's democratic rationalizations, their theological-halachic arguments were the decisive factor justifying their illegal activity. Ehud Sprinzak dismisses the parallel drawn by Gush Emunim leaders between their form of (what he famously calls) "illegalism" and the

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illegalism that characterized the Labor movement during the British Mandate period:

> While Gush Emunim likes to draw the parallel between their illegalism and the illegalism of the "founding fathers" of the labor movement it is not difficult to see that the confrontation in regard to the "rule of law" in [contemporary] Israel is far more profound in that its essential power draws upon Jewish Orthodox sources…What is at stake is not only the practice of illegalism that characterized the founders of the Yishuv but rather a deep conflict between two different legal systems, the positive laws of the state on the one hand and the Halachic legal system on the other (Sprinzak 1986, 126).

Moreover, as opposed to the Mandate period, Jewish citizens in Israel had the right to vote. This obliged them to accept majority decisions.

Aran is even more critical: "For the purposes of Gush Emunim there is only one law: the commands of God and His will…The right to the land is not subject to the laws of nations, for this is a right given to us by God and the Torah. And tactically, if the state's laws do not accord with Divine commandments, there is no obligation to obey them" (Aran 1987, 137).

The figure dominating the Halachic discourse regarding the Greater Land of Israel during Gush Emunim's formative years was Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook (Hoch, 1994). When the first settlements were founded in June 1974, the government dispatched Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to remove their inhabitants. Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda's defiant response was: "This entire Knesset only has power in regard to financial, economic, money matters — if the public agrees. But in the matter of uprooting us from land, we are commanded by the creator of the universe not by the Knesset" (Kook 1995, 175). At much the same time as these words were written, the settlers refused to leave Chawara, an outpost they had set up in the vicinity of Shechem (Nablus). The IDF was compelled to evacuate them by force. Present at the site, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda declared: "Just as it is impossible to coerce me to eat pork and to profane the Sabbath; you will not coerce me to move from this place" (Segal 1987, 29). In Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda's eyes, the settlements are not illegal; what is illegal is precisely the prevention of settlements: "He who hinders Jews from settling in the land commits an illegal action…These lands belong to us from the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; they are also the possession of millions of our brothers all over the world" (Kook 1995, 73–74).

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Rabbi Kook seemed to believe sincerely that the Israeli public, in its heart of hearts, supported Gush Emunim's agenda. In struggling against the government, his followers were therefore the authentic champions of Israel's democratic will. Whence this conviction derived is hard to say. Surely, not from election results or public opinion surveys. And yet, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda seems to have convinced himself that it was the government that was resisting popular will, acting undemocratically. In the summer of 1974 he declared:

> First of all: this government is for the people rather than the people being for the government. And when the government betrays the people and its homeland and its life then it is *a fortiori* true that the living, feeling people have no connection to the government at all…And we are commanded to settle and we shall settle, to the length and breadth of our homeland (Kook 1995, 29).

He did not hesitate to use even harsher words. In a letter to the army's Chief of Staff, General Mordechai Gur in May 1975 he asserts:

> Thereof I warned Moshe Dayan in the past, I must reiterate once again. *On the subject of our absolute control of the full breadth of the land, that is, Judea and Samaria there will certainly be a war among us*…The teachings of the Torah sages and our faithful rabbis deal with the war between the people of Israel and the nations of the world and let us hope that we are not forced to come to a war between the people of Israel and its failing government (Kook 1995, 35). (Emphasis added)

Prime Minister Rabin took this threat seriously. The conflict between the democratic rule of law and the allegedly superior law of the Torah seriously endangered Israeli democracy. Rabin asserted:

> I see it as one of the most serious problems of confrontation we have had to deal with. The group that calls itself Gush Emunim, as a group, an outlook and a way, is threatening the democratic way of life in the State of Israel, and confronting it must be done on all levels (cited in Zertal and Eldar 2007, 50).

Indeed, in his autobiography, Rabin did not mince words. He called Gush Emunim "a cancer in the body of Israeli democracy" (Rabin 1996, *Pinkas Sherut* (Service Record) 547 Cited in Zertal and Eldar 2007, 128). But Rabin's position did not represent the views of all his government ministers. Not a few supported the Gush, such as the ministers of the National

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Religious Party — the "parent" party of Gush Emunim — and even senior Labor Party ministers such as Foreign Minister Yigal Alon and Minister of Defense, Shimon Peres. High-ranking officers in the IDF, including the Chief of Staff Mordechai Gur evinced a warm and sympathetic attitude toward the settlers although they avoided saying as much explicitly. Therefore, Gush Emunim activists could justify their demands by referring to government complicity, even if it came in the form of a wink and a nod.

Government support for the establishment of settlements like Ma'aleh Adumim and Elkanah also vindicated the Gush's belief that without (at least tacit) official collusion the settler movement would not have thrived as it did. In breaking the law, they were only doing what the government would have done, was it not so weak. Dan Be'eri wrote:

> And what shall we do when the government does not go in the right direction…For this there is ready answer: "We are strengthening the government"…creating facts on the ground, on the border of coercing the political system….The action on the ground, even when it was characterized by a clash with the authorities, was perceived by the activists, in all sincerity, as the carrying out of the secret wishes of the government that only "weakness" prevents it from fulfilling (cited by Aran 1987, 553).

The political reversal of 1977 that brought the Likud to power thoroughly changed the relations between Gush Emunim and the government. The Gush was now a partner to the policies of the Likud that had committed itself to settling all of the Land of Israel. Although the Likud's motives were national, historic, and security-related while Gush Emunim's driving force was religious and messianic, a genuine partnership developed between them (Na'or 2001).

A central figure in this Likud-Gush Emunim partnership was Agriculture Minister Ariel Sharon. More than anyone else in Begin's government he was responsible for settling Judea and Samaria. His nickname, the "bulldozer," was well-earned: although his motives were surely not religious, he energized the settlement project. In cooperation with the Gush, he worked to cover Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) with Jewish settlements. From only 20 settlements with a population of 6,000 in 1977, in four years of Likud government, 35 new settlements were founded with about 17,000 residents. In 1992, when Rabin returned as Prime Minister, there were already more than 100,000 settlers in the West Bank (Taub 2007, 73).

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SETTLER RESTRAINT IN MOMENTS OF CRISIS: THE YAMIT AND GAZA EVACUATIONS

Setting aside the turmoil over the Oslo process, two major crises pitted religious Zionist settlers against the Israeli government. Both involved the evacuation of settlements that were located beyond the 1967 "green line": the Yamit region in the Sinai and the Gush Katif settlements in the Gaza Strip. In both cases, the settler leadership prepared in earnest to prevent the evacuation. In both cases, predictions of massive disobedience, of violent even bloody clashes between settlers and the defense forces, were quite common. However, these predictions proved exaggerated. Although very hard-pressed, the settler religious-political leadership, for the most part, acted with restraint. The source of this restraint is our central theme.

The Struggle against Evacuating Yamit (1978–1982)

The Camp David accords between Israel and Egypt in 1978 set the stage for a major confrontation between the settlers and the government. The agreement included Israel's retreat from the Sinai Peninsula and the evacuation of the Jewish settlers in the Yamit area. As soon as details of the negotiated deal became known, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook reacted with typical intensity. Referring to the verse "May God give his people strength, may God bless his people with peace" (Psalms 29:11) Rabbi Kook proclaimed that: "only out of giving strength to his people will they be blessed with peace. Therefore, talk of peace that does not derive from the strength given to his people, out of authentic inner power, faith, knowledge, and holy wisdom, is a crippled peace, neither complete nor real" (Kook 1995, 49).

The retreat from the Sinai, to be completed by September 1982, meant the evacuation of 16 Jewish settlements, most notably the town of Yamit. In the late 1981 elections, the newly founded Tehiya (Revival) party dedicated to preventing the retreat won only three Knesset seats. Tehiya's constituency was comprised of disgruntled far-right Likud voters and Gush Emunim stalwarts. Understandably, the government spokesman claimed that the people had overwhelmingly expressed support for the Camp David agreements. On the other side, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda and his students were crushed. For the most part, the rabbi remained silent. Prior to the elections, as noted above, the rabbi was convinced that the majority of

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the people supported the Greater Land of Israel. After the elections, he lamented that "the people are not with us" (Segal 1987, 40). Fischer understands Rabbi Kook's conception as a kind of popular Rousseauist "general will" in favor of settlement. The election shattered this faith (Fisher 2007, 322–325).

At the end of 1981, the "Movement to Stop the Retreat from Sinai" was established. Although it was composed of both secular and religious Jews, Gush Emunim's Uri Elizur stood at its head flanked by other central figures of the Gush. Most of the Sinai settlers were secular and had no sympathy for religious zealotry; hence, it was Gush Emunim that assumed the pivotal role in the attempt to prevent Yamit's evacuation. They lobbied Knesset members, cultivated public opinion, and even — provocatively — founded a new settlement in the Yamit region. Religious trappings such as teaching Torah classes and holding public prayer meetings colored the nature of the resistance. The struggle between the secular and security-centered Begin government and the messianic-religious activism of the Gush revealed the chasm between the erstwhile allies (Na'or 2001, 285).

In the last stages of the Yamit drama, the Stop the Retreat movement supporters fortified themselves inside the Yamit area. Despite some passive sympathy from "fellow travelers," the movement saw itself as the vanguard protecting authentic Israeli interests. Much to their chagrin, support from the general public was weak (Aran 1985). According to Aran, as the "zero hour" approached protests grew more intense and the religious-mystical character of the anti-retreat forces became ever more dominant. The Yamit region became so profoundly "sanctified by the movement's religious activists that it lost its concrete substantiality. The territory was transformed from an earthly reality into a high spiritual essence" (Aran 1985, 42).

Of the 5,300 Yamit setters — most of whom were secular — only 70 were willing to fight against the evacuation (Segal 1999, 23). The vast majority of secular settlers were anxious to cut a favorable reparations deal with the government and leave. Many among the religious understood that they were fighting a lost cause and yet, they believed that a serious show of resistance would discourage any future attempts to evacuate parts of the West Bank.

Hence, civil disobedience was rife: for example, activists penetrated into the Yamit area even though it had been designated a sealed-off militarily zone (Weissman 1990, 271–272). Many (especially religious) voices called for government orders to be disobeyed. This was virtually

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unprecedented in Israeli history: a mutiny against the sovereign decisions of the elected Knesset. And it was not a slim majority who supported evacuation: an overwhelming majority of Knesset members, crossing party lines, were in support. Many resistors began hoarding food in preparation for a long siege. Strategies of defiance were worked out. At the margins, even talk of collective suicide was heard.

Chanan Porat, probably the best known representative of Gush Emunim proclaimed: "the decision to uproot settlements has no moral validity at all. We will oppose its implementation with all our might. I hereby begin a campaign of signatures on a petition that will obligate its signatories to protect the Sinai settlements when they are called upon to do so" (Segal 1987, 41). Militancy grew as evacuation neared. Uri Elizur later confessed that preventing the evacuation was so critical that giving up one's life (*Mesirat Nefesh*) was justified. Resorting to force against the army was also considered but Rabbis Tau and Zuckerman (of the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva), forbad all use of violence (Segal 1987, 121–132). And yet, shortly before the evacuation, a conference that included most of the major religious Zionist rabbis issued a "Torah judgment" (*Da'at Torah*) declaring that severing a part of the Land of Israel and handing it over to foreigners is the gravest of sins and uprooting a Jewish settlement is an intolerable decree which cannot be accepted. Among those who advocated resistance, some also called upon soldiers to disobey direct orders and refuse to evacuate Yamit.

In a 1982 demonstration against the barrier the army had set up to prevent infiltration into Yamit, the protesters, some of whom wore yellow stars, were addressed by Yamit's rabbi, Yisrael Ariel He proclaimed: "Disobey orders! No mortal has the moral right to command Jewish soldiers to evacuate Jewish settlers from the Holy Land…We will not raise a hand against you, forbid it, in no case, in no way, in no place. And therefore I say to you: Disobey the orders" (Weissman 1990, 263).

In contrast to those who advocated disobedience, Rabbi Yaacov Ariel, the head of Yamit's yeshiva argued that it was futile to confront the State of Israel. Indeed, he instructed his students to continue studying Torah until the moment of the evacuation. He declared: "Only the blind believe in the possibility of resistance of a few thousand people against the entire state and a powerful army…Let us hope that blood will not be spilt here. Not of a soldier, not of a policeman and not of a settler" (Segal 1999, 196). A few years later in an interview with Haggai Segal, Rabbi Ariel presented an even more reasoned position against disobedience:

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> If we are permitted to fight against the soldiers, the leftist are permitted to do so as well. We must explain the subject of accepting authority (*Marut*) to the students so that they know where the border lies…There are subjects where Halacha does not permit flexibility, but the moment of "no choice" must be minimized as far as possible. Denying authority is a national and spiritual danger. The State of Israel is the vehicle chosen by Divine Providence to settle the land, and the disintegration of this vehicle is a national and spiritual danger (Segal 1999, 197–198).

In the course of Yamit's evacuation, about 3,000 demonstrators organized to resist the IDF forces. They fought the army from Yamit's roof-tops. The struggle was focused especially on two roofs. Crowded onto each roof were a few hundred resisters. A group of students led by Tzachi Hanegbi (later a Minister in a number of governments) barricaded themselves atop a monument to fallen soldiers. The protesters had collected tires, sandbags, and metal rods; confronting them were thousands of soldiers (Weissman 1990, 333). When the moment of evacuation came, violence was sporadic, more melodramatic than real. To be sure, certain violent acts did occur as the soldiers attempted to climb up ladders to the roofs where the opponents of the evacuation had congregated. The violence that did occur included throwing of objects — even metal objects — at the soldiers. At times, there was hand-to-hand combat. But real danger to life and limb, danger of violent bloodshed, was minimal (Segal 1999, 209).

Critically, the level of violence was far less than what the media had anticipated. Given the prophecies of doom, the actual evacuation — with a few exceptions — was not very aggressive. Neither did the IDF face mass disobedience in its ranks. Although tens of thousands of soldiers took part in the evacuation, only a handful asked to be excused from participating. Below, we will attempt to explain this relative lack of violence through the prism of what we call the "theological-normative balance."

As Motti Inbari (2012, chap. 2) clearly demonstrates, the vast majority of messianic Zionist rabbis facing the collapse of their struggle to stop the evacuation adopted moderate stances. Religious energy, they proclaimed, should turn toward educating the nation about the importance of the Land of Israel, toward "settling in the hearts" of the Jewish people.

Notably, the evacuation of Yamit has not left a lasting scar on Israeli consciousness (comparable to that of the dismantling of Gush Katif or, of course, the tragic outcome of the Oslo process). Michael Feige (2009, chap.10) attributes this relative temperance to the fact that the evacuation was part of a critical peace treaty with a major Arab country — a

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treaty that has held, despite tribulations, for some 35 years. Moreover, the question as to whether the Sinai constituted a true part of the Land of Israel remained, for many, an open one.

The Struggle against the Disengagement from Gaza 2004–2005

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon shocked Israeli society when, at the end of 2003, he presented his "disengagement" initiative. Sharon's program included the evacuation of all of the Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip and, in addition, four settlements in northern Samaria. Some believed that his plan derived from the dangerous vacuum created by the absence of an Israeli peace plan. It was said that the dominant attitude among Sharon's allies was that only a unilateral separation from the Palestinians could present a viable political "horizon." Others pointed to the rival "Geneva Initiative" presented by left-wing leaders in collaboration with central Palestinian figures (Waxman 2008). The more cynical attributed the initiative to the serious criminal acts of which Sharon was suspected. A major political initiative — in this view — would distract attention from Sharon's legal imbroglio (Drucker and Shelach 2005, chap. 26).

Sharon's initiative reshuffled the deck entirely. As opposed to the largely secular and pragmatic Yamit population, most residents of Gush Katif were deeply religious. Moreover, the Yamit settlements were relatively newcomers while the Gush Katif settlements included 30 year residents who had received financing and support from different Israeli governments. Not surprisingly: the Gush Katif settlers flatly refused to take part in any talk of reparations for their removal. That Sharon, the great architect of settlements in Judea and Samaria could now turn his back on his allies was nothing less than perfidy. They felt that Sharon was being coddled by a sympathetic media and by lax law enforcement despite the serious suspicion that he was guilty of corruption. Sharon, they charged, was being protected from legal prosecution (Sach 2005).

An especially fierce remark was made by Uri Elizur, a journalist, publicist, and former head of Prime Minister Netanyahu's office. He declared:

> The uprooting of a settlement is illegal and shocking, and therefore justifies refusing to obey an order, violence, and any other way a person can defend his home from which he is being evicted for political reasons. I recommend disobeying orders because what is involved is an illegal order and he who implements it will be put on trial. It is not unreasonable in my eyes that matters reach the spilling of blood (Rotenberg 2004).

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Elizur's warning was interpreted by many within religious Zionism as a rhetorical flourish. But outside religious Zionist circles, especially in the media, it was taken quite seriously: Elizur was, in effect, threatening civil war, an all-out battle between the settlers and the troops sent to evacuate them.

Settler anger intensified when Sharon fired Ministers Benny Elon and Avigdor Lieberman — opponents of the evacuation — in order to create a slim government majority supporting disengagement. Halachic prohibitions and calls for insubordination were common at the time but the most important Halachic figure calling for large-scale disobedience was the former Chief Rabbi Avraham Shapira, head of the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva. According to Rabbi Shapira, disobeying commands to evacuate settlements was a religious obligation. Beyond avoiding sinful behavior, large-scale disobedience would also force the government to give up on its evacuation plans (Trop 2004). Following in Rabbi Shapiro's footsteps, the Association of *Yesha* (acronym for Judea, Samaria, and Gaza) Rabbis published a declaration which repeated the prohibition "for any Jew to participate or aid in any way in the dismantling of the settlements or any [Jewish] property in the Land of Israel, a land which in all its breadth is our God-given patrimony" (The Association of *Yesha* Rabbis 2005).

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed distinguished between disobedience of the Left which threatened national security and was, hence, illegitimate, and disobedience of the Right that was justified because it involved no more than refusal to take part in certain political actions (Melamed 2005a). His father, Rabbi Zalman Melamed returned to the words of Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook: "In Judea and Samaria it will not happen without a war":

> Who loved the IDF more than my teacher and rabbi, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda may he rest in peace? Who loved the state more than him? And precisely because of his love for the IDF and the state, my teacher and rabbi called out to the public "Do not fear," and said "There is no way to permit what is a Torah prohibition against transferring land to Gentiles, forbid it, absolutely, for all time. *Therefore, it is incumbent upon every Torah sage in Israel, everyman in Israel's army, to prevent and delay it with all might and main and may heaven help us.*" He also declared that one must *"stand ready to sacrifice one's life against being forced to violate the Mitzvah of settling the Land of Israel which is equivalent in weight to the entire Torah."* And he said *"In Judea and Samaria it will not happen without a war…over our bodies and our limbs."* I, as his student who was privileged to study with him and to be near him for about

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> twenty-five years, know with full confidence that were Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda, may he rest in peace, here with us he would call out to every soldier and policeman and officer to disobey orders. And this out of his love for the IDF and the state (Melamed 2005b). (emphasis in the original).

Another important religious group calling for disobedience was the "Movement for Jewish Leadership." Non-rabbinical in character (Inbari 2012, chap. 6) this radical right-wing movement turned away from Mercaz HaRav's *Mamalachtiut* (sanctifying the state and working for its welfare) and toward active civil disobedience. It was founded during the struggle against the Oslo process by religious Zionists like Moshe Feiglin (later a Likud MK) and his ideological ally, Motti Karpel. Feiglin, declared: "The readiness of citizens to stake out borderlines beyond which they are not willing to play according to the system's rules, the readiness of citizens to violate, in extremely immoral situations, the system's rules…this readiness, does not destroy the state; it is the single guarantor of its existence" (Jewish Leadership 2005, 11–13). Karpel is even more radical: "The struggle is not for our homes, not for the Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip, not for the settlement in *Yesha* in general and not even for the Land of Israel. The struggle is about the character of the State of Israel: will it be a Jewish, free state or an anti-Semitic and dictatorial state" (Jewish Leadership 2005, 7–8). Even if Israel has democratic institutions, it has no right to involve itself with the question of disengagement: "A majority vote to expel entire populations is considered today a 'crime against humanity,' it is called 'ethnic cleansing'…A society for which 'uprooting' is a part of its spirit has shallow roots in the earth, and also cannot be considered a democracy" (Jewish Leadership 2005, 19).

On the moderate side of the ideological divide, key rabbinic figures persistently declared their Halachic opposition to civil disobedience. Rabbi Eli Sadan, the founder of pre-army religious seminaries, totally rejected public ideological disobedience, although he was more forgiving toward private conscientious objection. Another prominent rabbinic voice raised against disobedience was that of Rabbi Yuval Sherlow, one of the most respected among moderate Orthodox rabbis. For many, religious and secular, Rabbi Sherlow represents a courageous, humanistic brand of Judaism that does not fear expressing unconventional opinions on controversial subjects. Although it seems clear that he believed that disengagement violates Halacha, he vigorously opposed disobedience. His rational was simple enough: disobedience endangers the very fabric of public

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safety and national well-being. Hence, it is a matter of "saving lives" (*Pikuach Nefesh*) which trumps all other Torah obligations, even the Mitzvah of settling the Land of Israel (Sherlow 2010).

Despite predictions to the contrary, the disengagement from Gaza (like the Yamit evacuation) took place without life-threatening violence. To be sure, there was much passive resistance, scuffling, dragging, pushing, shoving, throwing of objects and fisticuffs, but the worst — serious injuries or fatalities — did not occur. Civil war, so often foretold, was nowhere to be seen. As Dalsheim (2011, chap. 4) demonstrates, the Gush Katif settlers were more moderate than the way the way they were perceived by the Left. Doubts and equivocations were quite common. By and large, the rabbis did not fan the flames. Although certainly not conciliatory, their pronouncements were not as bellicose as many had expected. For the most part, they did not overtly delegitimize the state and its laws. The dominant mood was one of resignation and, nevertheless, one of hope as well — the battle for Gush Katif had been lost but the larger war could still be won. Their telegenic resistance would make further evacuations less likely. There was also a prevalent sense that despite the setback, they emerged from the struggle occupying the moral high ground. They spoke of victory through unity and love.

Despite the respectful and restrained behavior of the security forces and the media's presentation of the evacuation as a complex and difficult emotional experience, many, particularly in the religious Zionist community, emerged from the trauma of eviction embittered. They believed that despite the relatively pacific and mostly legal actions of the settlers — in circumstances when violence was an understandable response — their good citizenship was unappreciated by Israeli society and underplayed by the media. Over time, this feeling festered, creating resentment and anger among the settlers — the sense of being stereotyped, even persecuted. The press and the public, they felt, failed to appreciate the enormous positive and patriotic energies that were embodied in the religious Zionist community (Roth 2014, 175–179).

THE "THEOLOGICAL-NORMATIVE BALANCE" AND RELIGIOUS ZIONIST RESTRAINT

A number of studies have been devoted to the relatively non-violent behavior of the settler majority over the course of the last 40 years. One form of explanation emphasizes the close relationships between the

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settler leadership and the political and military authorities. Although he characterizes Gush Emunim as a classic case of militant, absolutist fundamentalism, Peter Herriot (2009, 104–108) calls attention to its relatively peaceful nature. He argues that Gush Emunim chose dialogue over disobedience because he believed that it could realize more of its goals through negotiations than through violence. This was especially true when the ruling coalition was sympathetic to its aims. Thus, the settler movement preferred to pursue what we might call "balanced pragmatism" rather than to engage in unconditional religious militancy.

A different perspective is offered by David Weisburd and Chagit Lernau who studied the allegedly vigilante tendencies of the Gush Katif settlers during the evacuation from Gaza. Their research reveals that the oft-repeated prediction of bloody battles to prevent the evacuation was not borne out in fact. Resistance to the evacuation was, to be sure, dramatic and highly memorable but it remained mostly within the bounds of normative passive resistance. They write:

> We began with the question of why there was so little violence by settlers in the August 2005 withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. Our conclusion, based on scores of interviews and a survey of settlers, is that the lack of violence in the Gaza Strip was not surprising. This was not because the Gaza settlers were moderate in their beliefs. On the contrary, we have much evidence that settlers there were committed to ideas that could easily have led to violence. As we illustrated earlier, most settlers believed that uprooting settlements would prevent the messianic redemption of Israel. Most argued that those who planned the withdrawal would be judged as traitors. And most thought that evacuating settlements constituted a sin so great that a Jew should be willing to be killed rather than comply. For them, settlement evacuation was tantamount to murder or apostasy.
>
> In this sense, the settlers in Gaza were radicals whose beliefs clearly created a potential for violence. But we also found that there were values deeply internalized by the settlers that acted as counter-balancing norms. Almost two-thirds of the settlers we surveyed told us that they believed that the unity of the Jewish people and the existence of Israel were more important than the territories. The settlers also showed strong respect for democratic principles. A similar majority said that Israel as a democratic state must be tolerant of a wide range of opinions, and agreed that they should respect government decisions even if they disagree with them. In this context, it is not hard to understand the lack of violent resistance to the security forces during the withdrawal from the Gaza strip (Weisburd and Lernau 2006, 78).

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Despite the cogency of their arguments, as far as they go, we believe there is another critical factor — perhaps the most critical one — that averted a wide-scale mutiny on the part of the religious settler community. It goes beyond Herriot's stress on reasoned pragmatism and Weisburd and Lernau's insistence on the importance of a united, responsible, Jewish and democratic Israel in the settler's thinking. We believe that neither of them gets to the heart of settler acquiescence because they overlook the profound theological foundations that underpinned their restraint.

Developed over the years in Jerusalem's Mercaz HaRav yeshiva, this theological worldview attributes deep religious-messianic significance to the State of Israel, to its institutions and to its army. As famously formulated by Rabbi Avraham Isaac Kook, Jewish sovereignty embodies the "essential seat of God in the world" (Kook 1993, 160). Therefore, the religious community must preserve what we call a "theological-normative balance" — a dynamic balance between Israel's holiness on the one hand, and, on the other, the unavoidable fact that the state is secular in character. *Ideally*, religious commitment to the State of Israel is primary but *realistically*, the state frequently acts in ways that violate Judaism's commandments. This clash between religious duty and the legally binding nature of government decisions creates an intra-religious tension that has dogged religious Zionism since its origin more than a century ago. Balancing the two has become the movement's core dilemma. Even when government decisions have been seen as sinful, religious Zionism has been by turns cautious, flexible, pragmatic, highly principled, at times even adamant. Bestowing religious status upon the secular state prevents the growth of de-legitimation and anti-system politics. Paradoxically, religious principles restrain messianic intransigence. Countervailing powers are at play here and they create an equilibrium between obedience to Halacha on the one hand and religious loyalty to the State of Israel on the other. For our specific purposes, the sanctity of the state restrained the call for civil, political and military disobedience even when settlements were dismantled.

Given the holiness of the state and its institutions, otherwise routine bureaucratic practices such as being drafted into the army take on the sacredness of religious rituals. National symbols become religious symbols. Indeed, for many religious Zionists, settling the Land of Israel is held to be equal in importance to all the other Torah commandments combined. Jews living and flourishing in Zion becomes a religious no less than a nationalist vision. The State of Israel expresses the bond between the Jewish people and God — it is, in the oft-repeated phrase, "the beginning of salvation."

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This political theology is widespread among religious Zionists who are the driving force behind settlement project. In most yeshiva primary and high schools, in every Zionist institution of higher religious learning etc., an intensive educational effort is made to inculcate the redemptive-messianic character of the State of Israel. In other words, the discourse of loyalty is consensual while the discourse of disobedience faces significant religious hurdles.

Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook's defiant reaction to the evacuation of Yamit in 1978 was the first serious challenge to the "theological-normative balance" in religious Zionist history. Nevertheless, in the end, the balance held. Even though messianic hopes were thwarted, even though the most militant spoke of collective suicide, loyalty to the religiously sacrosanct Jewish state prevailed. Despite his threats, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda stepped back from the precipice; he did not call for a mass mutiny against the state and its institutions. And most of his students followed him. Twenty-three years later, the evacuation from Gush Katif/Gaza Strip posed an even more serious threat to the "theological-normative balance" and here too the sense of obligation to the sacrosanct state and its security prevailed. Not only, to be sure, for pragmatic reasons but because the state's welfare and safety are for religious Zionists preeminent Torah values.

Religious Zionist leaders, rabbinical and lay, are therefore taken up with the following kinds of questions: How much disobedience is justified in light of the need to preserve the state's role as the vehicle of redemption? What trade-offs are permissible when the democratic rule of law clashes with major Torah prohibitions? These questions, and others like them, represent the fulcrum of the "theological-normative balance."

No Israeli sector lives so tautly drawn between such profoundly conflicting obligations as the religious Zionists. Ultra-Orthodox Jews do not attribute religious significance to the state (indeed, it is an abomination in their eyes) and, hence, the theological-normative dilemmas with which religious Zionists struggle are foreign to them. Moreover, the ultra-Orthodox do not relate to Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) with anything like the same messianic ardor as the religious Zionists.

The position of the secular Right is also lacking in nuance and complexity when compared to the religious Zionists. Theirs is the less conflicted language of Jewish nationalism and Israeli security. The state is the realization of a millennia-old dream of returning to Zion and an expression of Jewish sovereignty. It possesses no religious standing. Although Judaism is a critical cultural-historical component in the right-wing

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Zionist narrative, it does not lay claim to their deeper loyalties or inspire their politics.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

To recapitulate: When confronting a secular state, militant religious messianism can, potentially, lead to defiant, adversarial, anti-system politics. We have attempted to show why this is not the case in the Jewish state. Although religious beliefs have often been violated by state actions, these very religious beliefs prevent mass defiance because the State of Israel is seen as a vehicle of religious salvation. Hence, religious messianic beliefs *both* encourage and discourage anti-system behavior leading to a troubled but generally pacific truce. Even though the Greater Land of Israel is a non-negotiable issue for many religious Zionists, two major evacuations have led to tumult and turmoil but not to life-threatening violence. Radical rhetoric did not, in the main, lead to radical action. In a word, until and including the dismantling of the Gush Katif/Gaza Strip settlements in 2005, the "theological-normative balance" succeeded in maintaining its hold over religious Zionist politics.

And yet, in the past decade or so, the balance has become more precarious. Fundamentalist messianic circles among the settlers find it increasingly difficult to put up with what they see as the government's timidity in the setting up settlements everywhere and without limit. The breakdown of communal discipline, the rise of vigilante hooliganism, vandalism against mosques, churches and IDF installations, even outright murderous terrorism — although still relatively marginal — may foretell an ideological paradigm shift in part of the religious Zionist camp.

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