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Why Have Religious Zionists Perpetrated Acts of Violence in Hebron Post-2005?

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Abstract

Why have Religious Zionists perpetrated acts of violence in Hebron post-2005? Israel's disengagement from Gaza and the northern West Bank settlements in 2005 caused the Religious Zionist settler movement to rethink the status of their struggle, leading to increased settler conflict throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the ongoing, multi-generational persistence of Religious Zionist theology in vibrant segments of the Israeli settler community. Particularly in Hebron, the fallout from Israel's withdrawal from Gaza aroused a strong sense of betrayal and distrust among Religious Zionists in the region who evidently believed strategic realignment was imperative at a time when the ongoing project of Religious Zionism was challenged on the basis of its founding principle – that is, Jewish biblical right to total settlement throughout the Occupied Territories. Disengagement thus symbolized the direct opposite of everything the original Religious Zionist movement had set out to achieve vis-à-vis the continual expansion of Zionist control throughout the Occupied Territories through the agency of actions such as settlement. Israel's withdrawal from Gaza in the summer of 2005, by this logic, represents a failure – an antithesis – of what they believed to be the true path of Religious Zionism, or a deep-rooted conviction that settlers were carrying out the divine will of the Holy Land. In short, I attempt to describe and interpret why the consequences of this approach were particularly acute in Hebron, where settler conflict increased dramatically in the post-2005 period.

Keywords

Religious Zionism, Secular Zionism, Hebron, Occupied Territories, Holy Land.

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1. Introduction

I argue that Religious Zionists in Hebron increasingly carried out acts of violence following Israel's disengagement from Gaza and the northern West Bank settlements in 2005 due to the threatened status of their struggle, leading to the ongoing, multi-generational persistence of Religious Zionist theology in vibrant segments of the Israeli settler community. I differentiate throughout this report between Secular and Religious Zionism based on the attitudes of key actors and groups towards Israeli political authorities during the period of withdrawal and its aftermath, predominantly emphasizing the latter with regard to its ideology, timing, and conduct, while largely leaving undone the targets of religious settler conflict. I contend, moreover, given the magnitude and complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with respect to Ariel Sharon's 2005 disengagement order, that this more compartmentalized approach makes for a better report.

Broadly speaking, Zionism – like any ideology – has developed to such an extent that it is difficult to define without invading the space of any one of its multiple strains – e.g. Religious Zionism, Political Zionism, Secular-Cultural Zionism, Labor-Socialist Zionism, and so forth. I thus broadly define Religious Zionism as a disparate belief system built and reified on the basis of "Eretz Yisrael," or Jewish biblical endowment to the greater "Land of Israel," whose followers tend to maintain a characteristically uncompromising position towards both the Israeli political arena and the local Palestinian population (Pedahzur 2012, p. 24). While I pay lip service throughout this report to the three other significant traditions, I focus solely on the role of Religious Zionists following Prime Minister Sharon's disengagement order (Pedahzur 2012, p. 28). I argue that because religion can permeate all contours of human behavior and decision making, explaining the role of religion in conflict requires an analysis of its impact at critical junctures, such as the post-2005 disengagement period (Hassner 2011, p. 12).

In the southern West Bank city of Hebron, the fallout from Israel's disengagement from Gaza aroused a strong sense of betrayal and distrust among Religious Zionist organizations in the region who evidently believed strategic realignment was imperative at a time when the ongoing project of Religious Zionism was challenged on the basis of its founding principle: Jewish biblical right to total settlement throughout the Occupied Territories (Rynhold & Waxman 2008, p. 16). Disengagement thus symbolized the direct opposite of everything the original Religious Zionist movement had set out to achieve vis-à-vis the continual expansion of Jewish control throughout the territories through the agency of actions such as settlement (Rynhold & Waxman 2008, 16). Israel's withdrawal from Gaza in the summer of 2005, by this logic, represents a failure – an antithesis – of what they believed to be the "true" path of Religious Zionism, or a deep-rooted conviction that settlers were carrying out the divine will of the Holy Land.

In addition, since Israel's decisive military victory in the 1967 Six-Day War, settlement expansion has increasingly circumvented international law, particularly Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the transfer of parts of the Occupying Power's own civilian population into the territory it occupies (The Geneva Convention 2010). Furthermore, the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions, the United Nations Secretary-General, the UN Security Council, General

Assembly, and the International Court of Justice have each deemed the proliferation of settlements to be illegal (The Geneva Convention 2010). Given these international bulwarks' condemnation in conjunction with the vast structural changes of Prime Minister Sharon's disengagement order, I argue that the inability of the Religious Zionist movement to reconcile its ambition to occupy greater Israel with the Israeli government's contradictory political action led to successive stages of hostility as the movement itself had to grapple with its constrained position relative to recent political developments, which effectually rebuffed their biblical claim to total settlement throughout the West Bank territories.

More puzzling, however, as a matter of statistical anomaly, is the escalation in Religious Zionist settler conflict that occurred following the Israeli government's disengagement from Gaza in 2005 and the reported upsurge during this period across the "Green Line" in Hebron. That notwithstanding, I acknowledge that single events, such as the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948, the 1967 Six-Day War and its aftermath, the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the Oslo Accords, and the Gaza Disengagement Plan, as considerable and atypical as they may be, are but plausible catalysts – and thus compelling heuristics – for describing and interpreting group behavior. Single events do not, however, wholly explain the behavior of Religious Zionist organizations across time, despite providing telling episodes of transformation that point to slight and sufficient changes in settler conduct. Therefore, it is an evolution of ideology, timing, and conduct, stimulated by acute grievances and the agency of captivating leaders, that ultimately motivates substantial changes in group behavior.

The remainder of this paper proceeds in four parts. I begin with a review of

relevant literature on the topic, which I have ordered according to their respective explanations of the post-2005 disengagement period and its implications for the Religious Zionist movement in Hebron. The two groupings are "Political Participation" and "Extra-parliamentary." The works in each of these groups make important contributions and provide commanding insights but nonetheless fall short at pivotal stages. Therefore, they cannot account for the Hebron correlation that I endeavor to draw in this article. The "Extra-parliamentary" group, for example, provides apt examinations of the Religious Zionist groups themselves, including their rise historically, but fail to treat Hebron as a contentious fault line in the settler psyche after 2005. I hope, in due course, to redirect the study away from narrow preoccupations with the political arena and insufficient settler group descriptions, and onto the much broader range of cases in which religion can be found not only to be the result of political mechanisms but also changing organizational norms and practices. For these reasons, I include two theoretical models in the "Argument" section of this report to assist in analyzing Religious Zionist settler conflict in Hebron post-2005.

In part three of this paper, I argue that Israel's disengagement from Gaza and the northern West Bank settlements in 2005 threatened the ideological status of the Religious Zionist settler movement, leading them to rethink the status of their struggle. This reflection led to the persistence of Religious Zionist theology in robust segments of the Israeli settler community. The independent variable that explains this trend is the political policy of disengagement, carried out in the summer of 2005 by the Sharon-led Knesset. The causal mechanism accounting for the resulting retaliatory conflict is the Religious Zionist

movement's threatened ideological status post-disengagement, since they arguably construed the event as an act of "betrayal" that essentially eliminated their ability to control greater Israel through total settlement. This ideological desire for settler expansion, despite contradictory actions spearheaded by the state, leads to a dependent variable: Religious Zionist settler conflict in the post-2005 period across the "Green Line" in Hebron. At the same time, I can only hope to draw this causal narrative on the basis of refinement by including an analysis of both the political arena and the local settler groups in and around Hebron themselves to arrive at the novel claim that settler conflict in Hebron escalated in the post-2005 period due to the Religious Zionist community's perception of crisis in response to the implementation of the Gaza disengagement plan.

The fourth section of this paper presents evidence to support this argument. It includes information gathered from settlement monitors, case studies, and personal testimonies. In an effort to draw attention away from the current preoccupation with political mechanisms and cursory descriptions of settler organizations, I draw evidence primarily from empirical data gathered in the months and years following the Gaza disengagement order to argue that the threatened status of the Religious Zionist settler community directly led to increased conflict in Hebron post-2005. That notwithstanding, even if particular incidents of conflict correlate consistently with the timing of withdrawal, such a correlation provides no evidence of causation. I thus propose two means of venturing towards causality: (1) analyzing extensive empirical data and (2) evaluating statements made by decision makers in the initial period after disengagement (Hassner 2011, p. 501).

The fifth and final section of this paper concludes with a path forward for future scholarship. By exploring the pervasive effects of religious identity on the manifold ways in which religion can shape conflict, I hope to redirect the focus of the study of religion as it concerns settler conflict away from narrow descriptions of dispute loosely associated with the political arena or religious scripts and practices and onto more nuanced ground based on historically-contingent periods of social and political transformation. Nevertheless, future scholarship can amend the analysis I provide in this article in three significant ways: (1) by providing relevant, up-to-date quantitative assessments of Religious Zionist conflict in neighboring townships after 2005; (2) by widening the analysis to examine the role of local Palestinians in Heron post-2005; and (3) by gathering more conclusive qualitative information pertaining to Religious Zionist settler conflict throughout Hebron historically to provide a more expansive causal narrative concerning the implications of the Gaza disengagement order.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

In this section, I review existing literature related to settler conflict in Israel and the Palestinian territories. Previous publications on the topic have focused largely on political participation and burgeoning social movements outside the political system but have largely undervalued the implications of the post-2005 period for the Religious Zionist movement in Hebron (Peleg 2015, p. 143). Some scholars have scrutinized the internal rift within the Religious Zionist camp, or the incompatibility of Religious Zionist ideology with unfolding empirical reality.

Others have treated critical junctures as fundamental catalysts or signposts for religious aggression (Pedahzur 2012, p. 32). However, comparatively few scholars have focused specifically on Religious Zionist settler conflict in Hebron following Prime Minister Sharon's disengagement order in 2005.

This review covers eleven works published on the subject predominantly in the past decade. Five analyze political participation in terms of policy formulation under the grouping, "Political Participation," and six focus on extra-parliamentary actors and groups. Of this second group, dubbed "Extra-parliamentary," I distinguish between works pertaining to the internal conduct of Religious Zionist groups generally and those examining the case study of Hebron specifically.

Each of these works make important contributions, although they fall short in multiple, important ways. The reports found in the "Political Participation" group, for example, are effective in their image of ideological transformation at the state level but fail to answer why the 2005 disengagement order posed significant challenges for the Religious Zionist movement, since it emphasizes explanations emanating predominantly from the political arena. In the case of the six scholars featured in the group "Extra-parliamentary," half fail to treat Hebron as an acute and highly-divisive fault line in the settler psyche after 2005. In short, the decision to include or exclude certain events and empirical realities can transform the conclusions that are drawn (Crenshaw 2008, p. 144). I strive to fill these gaps by interpreting a historically-contingent, evidentiary, causal narrative of Religious Zionist settler conflict occurring in and around Hebron during the post-2005 period. However, to tell this story with a sense of precision, I rely significantly on the contributions of these scholars,

including insights from both inside and outside the Israeli political arena, in order to analyze and assess Religious Zionist settler conflict occurring in Hebron after 2005. I thus provide a causal analysis of escalating conflict in Hebron in the period after the implementation of Prime Minister Sharon's disengagement policy.

2.2. *Political Participation*

The question all five works in this section endeavor to ask is how the radical right in Israel gained access to the political system in terms of party representation, policy formulation, and leadership status. While each of these scholars analyze different historical thresholds and moments of socio-political transformation, they all generally cohere around the same argument: that the "radical right" in Israel – namely fundamental Zionist theology, messianic Religious Zionism, and the populist right – achieved political "success" to the extent that it exercises significant influence over the Israeli political agenda today (Peleg 2015, p. 146). These arguments are of significant import for my purposes since, in addition to highlighting Israel's disengagement from Gaza as a period of crisis for the Religious Zionist settler community, I also suggest that the Israeli political arena is and continues to be a propitious venue for maintaining the legitimacy of the movement itself. Thus, an examination of political participation is well warranted.

Chronologically, Ami Pedahzur's publication concerning the rise of the far right in the Israeli political arena demonstrates how "messianism" and mysticism were powerfully injected into the psyche of the young generation of Religious Zionists (Pedahzur 2012, p. 39). For Pedahzur, the Israeli political map was shaped and shifted by a growing belief

among the youth in divine intervention, which, along with the Yom Kippur war and its aftermath (1973), propelled the rise of Religious Zionists with quickly accumulating political capital. However, it should be noted that, while Pedahzur is apt to point to the post-1973 period as one of exacerbated interest in the Religious Zionist settler project, he acknowledges that Zionism as a religious ideology and nationalist movement dates back much further, demonstrating its emergence in the late 19th century as a national revival movement in reaction to anti-Semitic and exclusionary movements in Europe (Pedahzur 2012, p. 43).

Second, in Zealotry and Vengeance, Samuel Peleg examines the political, social, and structural factors that engendered the rise of religiously motivated violence in a secular state, including a commanding analysis of the internal conduct and activism of the early messianic Zionist movement. By profiling the rise of the messianic component within Religious Zionism – from the implementation of fundamental policies to religious-educational networks in which geographical nationalism was conveyed as the highest form of religious virtue to the eventual assassination of Yitzhak Rabin (1995) – Peleg argues that cycles of violence are likely to increase due to the extreme state of mind of (some) Religious Zionists.

Third, Anat Roth's noteworthy study of the 2013 general elections in Israel reveals a surprising political moment for Habayit Hayehudi, which won twelve seats and became the fourth largest Knesset party. Roth argues that the party's success derives from its leadership's ability to voice anxieties and concerns emanating from Israel's 2005 disengagement plan with Gaza, a particularly informative finding given its treatment of a policy directive as a catalyst for large-scale social transformation (Pedahzur 2012, p. 54).

Fourth, Rubin's article concerning the political behavior of religious groups operating in democracies makes the case for how and why various religious groups establish different attitudes towards the state over the same issues and across time and space. By carefully analyzing two systemic elements – the communitarian notion of civil society and the concept of divided loyalty, which he uses to explain the tension of religious groups operating in democratic regimes – Rubin proceeds to apply this framework to the case of Religious Zionism in Israel (Rubin 2014, p. 37).

Last, Shmuel Sandler's rich investigation of the political processes and contextual factors contributing to the national resurgence of religious radicalism in Israel, including a look at the two main doctrines of Religious Zionism, the instrumental and the "redemptionist," is cogent for its argument that the tradition of political accommodation with religious parties in Israel fostered their participation in government coalitions and thus mobilized a large portion of the religious sector to support the actions of the state.

In short, with the notable exception of Sandler's "political accommodation" approach, readers might assume from these works that the attitude of the Religious Zionist movement towards the state is one of characteristic hostility. On the one hand, Roth and Rubin suggest as much, arguing that access to the political system in terms of policy formulation contributes significantly to the attitude of Religious Zionists towards the political arena. Still, Pedahzur, Peleg, and Sandler provide more plausible narratives of the Religious Zionist movement's engagement with the state both historically and in the last decade, highlighting the political, social, and structural factors that influenced episodes of increased hostility. Consequently, these authors offer effective studies of ideological

transformation at the state level, but, for the most part and despite perhaps Roth, fall short in their treatment of the post-2005 disengagement period and the significant challenges it posed for the Religious Zionist movement and its central authority.

2.3 Extra-parliamentary

A second approach highlights the role of internal dynamics, leadership structure, ideological status, and the overall conduct of religious groups and movements to explain increases in settler violence. The works in this group argue that the mechanized, internal behavior of Religious Zionist organizations changes over time, thereby prioritizing transformative moments in the socio-political psyche that can arguably be said to have given rise to increased settler conflict. I distinguish in this section between (1) works pertaining to extra-parliamentary actors and groups generally and (2) works articulating the experience of Religious Zionist aggression in Hebron specifically.

First, Gideon Aran's grand investigation of the origins and principles of Gush Emunim in the latter half of the 1970's is effective in its analysis of the group in real time, as they gained political access and expanded their violent settler tactic across the West Bank. By impressively highlighting how Gush Emunim was essentially born out of an internal dispute within the Religious Zionist camp, Aran scrutinizes the renewed appeal of Kookism, a methodology for Religious Zionists to remain religious believers in a secular, nationalist movement and loyal citizens of a secular state (Aran 2015, p. 135).

Second, Gross' examination of the attitudes of Religious Zionists towards the Middle East peace process is enriching for its concept of a dominant trend within the movement which can arguably be said to

have exerted direct influence on Jewish public discourse and notions of peace settlement (Gross 2013, p. 179).

Third, Motti Inbari's striking analysis of messianic Religious Zionism is important for its exploration of Kookism as a viable political theology that incorporates and constrains the state to a large extent – seemingly picking up where Aran left off – and also for its focus on the particularly dangerous period post-2005 when the feeling of crisis among the Religious Zionist settler movement increasingly led to violent conflict.

Fourth, Newman's in depth examination of Gush Emunim and the greater settler movement on Israeli politics and society provides a gripping account of the 2005 disengagement order and subsequent settler anxieties and thereby suggests a failure on the part of Gush Emunim historically in response to a growing consensus within Israeli society that a two-state solution is likely to come to pass (Newman 2005, p. 204).

Two articles within this approach look specifically at Hebron. The first, by Michael Feige, describes the gulf that lies between what he considers "metaphorical Hebron" and "actual Hebron" – between Hebron as a symbolic center and Hebron as a poor development town home to 70,000 Palestinians and multiple, essentially noncontiguous Jewish enclaves (Feige 2001, p. 331).

Hagemann, on the other hand, focuses on the concept of "emotion work" in the Religious Zionist community in Hebron. He concludes that emotions surrounding the Religious Zionist project are both elicited and regulated in the political process to defend territorial claims. Through comprehensive definitions of emotional geographies, emotional regulation, and emotional work, the article systematically analyzes the multi-faceted interests of

settlers and their strategy for establishing attachment to the Occupied Territories. I regard this second article as useful for psychological framing purposes but less so as an authoritative source on settler activity in Hebron. The first argument, presented by Feige, however, has more explanatory power given my interest in the post-2005 period as a catalyst for heightened settler conflict in Hebron, although it fails to engage the question of sacred space, which I believe is crucial to the Hebron dilemma and should not be overlooked. In short, both of these accounts are rather cursory and warrant supplementary scholarship.

The works in this section are impressive for their nuanced analysis of specific groups – Aran and Newman's edifying analyses of Gush Emunim come to mind – as well as their examination of these groups as operating within a greater ideological space, complete with shifting strategies and modes of conduct across time. Where these scholars fall short, however, is in their neglect of recent trends and increased political action for settlement expansion, which should lead them (especially Aran and Newman) to rethink their indictment of Gush Emunim as an utter failure. Rather, though somewhat stalled by international pressures and stalemate, the Religious Zionist movement has, since 2005, redeemed a quite vigorous stance both internally and with regard to the political arena. Current realities, I think, would probably have these scholars reassessing their conclusions.

2.4. Recommendations for Future Scholarship

In short, this review examined eleven books and articles on the subject published predominantly in the past decade with a few historical accounts dating back slightly further. Five analyzed the political

participation of Religious Zionist groups with a specific focus on legislative action, and six considered extra-parliamentary actors and groups from the standpoint of their shifting attitude towards the state. I described two groups in particular: (1) "Political Participation" and (2) "Extra-parliamentary." Both provide considerable ground for further research. The poignant studies covered in "Political Participation," for example, are plausible in their image of ideological transformation at the state level but are ill-equipped to answer the question of why the 2005 disengagement policy with Gaza posed significant challenges for the Religious Zionist movement. This limitation is due to their emphasis on explanations emanating predominantly from the political arena. Of the six scholars featured in the "Extra-parliamentary" group, moreover, half fail to treat Hebron as a highly-contentious fault line in the settler psyche in the period after 2005. In short, the notable successes of this review include Aran's comprehensive analysis of Kookism and Newman's noteworthy study of Gush Emunim. These are the most thorough, expansive, and nuanced analyses I have come across to date. However, this review is not without its setbacks, including inadequate scholarly output on the case study of Hebron, as well as the implications of the post-2005 period for escalating Religious Zionist settler conflict throughout the region.

In what follows, I strive to fill these gaps. I begin by drawing upon two theoretical accounts to situate my claim that pronounced anxiety and a unique sense of "betrayal" among Religious Zionists after the Gaza withdrawal in 2005 directly led to increased settler conflict in Hebron. I then turn to a discussion of the mechanisms that can justifiably be said to have led to pronounced Religious Zionist settler conflict, including an analysis of the manner in which elements of the Gaza withdrawal

engendered feelings of vulnerability, constraint, and outrage among the Religious Zionist settler community. Furthermore, I offer a descriptive account of protest action in the months following Israel's disengagement from Gaza, including the transfer of these actions in the Hebron region. Using a broad range of settlement monitors, case studies, and personal testimonies, I proceed to demonstrate that attitudes, once they become salient, lead to particular behaviors at pivotal junctures in time. My argument therefore rests on fluctuations in conduct – defined on ideological grounds and occurring in response to significant periods of change (e.g. timing) – stemming from the post-2005 disengagement period, and based largely on the grievances of the settlers themselves. I conclude with a path forward for future scholarship on the topic by suggesting that the religious dimension – narrowly defined and historically-contingent – should be prioritized at all costs.

3. Argument

3.1. Introduction

In this section, I argue that Israel's disengagement from Gaza and the northern West Bank settlements in 2005 caused the Religious Zionist settler movement to rethink the status of their struggle, thus leading to increased settler conflict throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the ongoing, multi-generational persistence of Religious Zionist theology in vibrant segments of the Israeli settler community. Because Prime Minister Sharon's disengagement policy was (1) construed as an act of "betrayal" among Religious Zionists, especially in Hebron, and (2) constrained their belief system to the extent that it curtailed unmitigated settlement expansion, I thus argue in this

section that the threatened status of the Religious Zionist movement directly led to increased conflict in Hebron.

To demonstrate the above, I show how the restructuring of attitudes by Religious Zionist settlers in and around Hebron following the enactment of the Likud-led coalition government's disengagement order caused, or is directly correlated with, the escalation of conflict in Hebron. I provide an explanation of (1) how certain beliefs become salient, (2) how these beliefs structure attitudes about what is and is not suitable forms of religious practice, and (3) how these attitudes lead to particular behaviors. However, by focusing on ideology, timing, and conduct only, I emphasize the causes of religious conflict occurring over time but neglect (1) the effects of religion on the targets of violence and (2) the effects of religion on the vast majority of conflicts.

I build my argument on the post-disengagement period and its aftermath by analyzing episodes of settler conflict carried out by those who support Religious Zionist theology. The independent variable that explains the salience of violent behavior is the political policy of disengagement, carried out in the summer of 2005 by the Sharon-led Knesset. The causal mechanism accounting for the resulting retaliatory conflict – the restructuring of attitudes – is the Religious Zionist movement's threatened status and feeling of betrayal post-disengagement, since it effectually rebuffed their claim to total settlement throughout the region (Eretz Yisrael). This religious-ideological desire for settlement expansion, despite the contradictory actions of the state, leads to a dependent variable – Religious Zionist settler conflict in the post-2005 period across the "Green Line" in Hebron, where the sharpest battle lines in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have long been drawn.

3.2. Method

Consequently, my argument draws on cases pertaining to Religious Zionist settler conflict occurring in Hebron in which religion has material and not just symbolic effects, and the participants are contemporary Religious Zionist actors and organizations. To put it differently, these entities operate dependently in what I will refer to as an "ecological triad," or the intricate balance between the group (including all agents within the group), the environment in which the group interacts, and the often complex entity-environment relationships that arise over time (Most 2015, p. 24). The benefits of this framework, unlike those of Structural Functionalism, derive from its narrow applicability to multiple levels of analysis.[2] Whether our focus is on a single agent or decision maker or a group of agents making decisions (either collective or individual) or a government entity or international actor, the concept of the ecological triad suggests that we ought to analyze policy and choice processes within that entity, within the context in which it arises, and within the interrelationship between the entity and its surrounding environment (Most 2015, p. 27).

I call upon the ecological triad in my analysis of Religious Zionist settler conflict in Hebron after 2005 because it provides a plausible framework by which I can explain how certain beliefs become salient, how these beliefs structure attitudes about suitable forms of religious practice, and how these attitudes lead to particular behaviors. By this logic, the "environment" is a complex, interdependent system, which can place significant limits on human opportunities. The "environment" thus constrains the type of action a given entity can feasibly take, given the likely consequences. Therefore, the essence of the ecological triad lies in its ability to provide a phenomenological explanation of an agent or group's reaction to a given socio-political milieu (Most 2015, p. 28).

Moreover, this complex interrelationship is fundamentally based on assumptions of motivation and knowledge of the environment, rather than the logic of utility-maximizing individuals, for example. As entities within the environment survey their possible choices in each situation, the manifold elements of that environment itself – including the underwritten, historical ethos and contemporary attitudes towards each level of analysis – provide cues and scripts as to the likelihood of possible outcomes. In the case of Hebron, the insights of the ecological triad warrant an analysis of Religious Zionist settler conflict both *before* and *after* the Gaza withdrawal, thereby demonstrating how a radical transformation of attitudes leads directly to violent behavior. Therefore, I am less interested in what Religious Zionist groups and agents *think* about religion and more interested in what they do *because* of religion – that is, their conduct in relation to significant periods of perceived crisis. In what follows,

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[2] Almond's theory of Structural Functionalism, similarly, considers societal interaction through a macro-level orientation based on the social structures that can reasonably be said to shape and continually influence society, thereby arguing that societal arrangements evolve *organically*. Almond's theory of Structural Functionalism (which builds on the work of Emile Durkheim and others) addresses society in total, in terms of the function of its constituent elements, articulated by the norms, customs, traditions, and institutions which together makeup the overall functioning of the "body politic." Thus, the Structural Functionalist approach is a macro-sociological interpretation of social structures, which, in their complex interrelationships, provide an image of the political system that can be applied to the Religious Zionist movement generally. Mr. Most's theory of the "ecological triad," nonetheless, can cover more ground on more specific terms, as will be shown in the following pages.

I apply this methodology to the empirical anomaly arising from the post-disengagement period in Hebron.

In the next section, I offer evidence to support the claim that disengagement with Gaza threatened the status of the Religious Zionist movement, and led directly to increased reactionary conflict in Hebron. However, it should be noted that this ideological change continues to be a long and contested process, and regardless of the necessary and sufficient reasons that led Prime Minister Sharon and his counterparts to implement the disengagement order, one thing remains justifiably true: commitment to *Eretz Yisrael* was effectively subordinated with the implementation of the Gaza disengagement plan.[3] Then, I track the ramifications of this demotion for those segments of the Israeli settler community who, as of 2005, remained ideologically committed to that which was essentially abandoned by the Likud-led coalition government in 2005. I call upon settlement monitors, case studies, and personal testimonies to assist in the telling of this causal narrative.

4. Evidence

4.1. Introduction

In this section, I offer evidence gathered in the post-disengagement period from settlement monitors, case studies, and personal testimonies. I begin with a broad discussion of the Religious Zionist movement and proceed to show how disengagement with Gaza was perceived as a threat to the structural order of the ideology itself, thus leading to increased conflict in Hebron. I examine, in particular, the attitudes of Religious Zionists both before and after the Gaza withdrawal to offer a plausible, comparative analysis that bolsters the central argument of this report – e.g. conflict increased in Hebron post-disengagement due to the perceived ideological threat among Religious Zionists. I then consider two approaches within the movement, including their implications for future settler conflict: (1) fundamentalism and (2) secularization. Thereafter, I cast doubt on competing arguments regarding escalating conflict in Hebron post-2005. I conclude with a range of personal testimonies gathered in the initial months after disengagement, when Religious Zionist conflict was most pronounced.

On the morning of September 12, 2005, roughly two years after Prime Minister Sharon first announced his plan to pursue a policy of full-scale, unilateral disengagement, the final Israeli soldiers left Gaza, ending 38 years of Israeli military rule over the area that began with the 1967 Six-Day War. The enactment of the plan involved the evacuation of over 8,000 Israeli settlers from twenty-one settlements in Gaza and four in the West Bank (Rynhold & Waxman 2008, p. 23). It was the first time

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[3] While I focus solely on the implications of Prime Minister Sharon's disengagement order for the Religious Zionist movement, it should be noted that recent scholarship on the reasons for withdrawal in the first-place center on international pressure over settlement activity, inside-the-beltway political action, and the political-religious identity of Sharon himself. However, a combination of all three factors is, to my mind, most plausible; for example, in the months before the implementation of the

disengagement policy, Dov Weisglass, one of Sharon's closest advisors, stated: "The disengagement plan makes it possible for Israel to park conveniently in an interim situation that distances us as far as possible from political pressure." Thus, even in the rhetoric of Sharon's aids, we observe all three workings – external, international pressure, pressure from the government itself, and the pragmatic interest of Sharon to achieve a resolution in the short term, even if it meant infringing upon the Religious Zionist movement.

an Israeli government had dismantled and removed settlements in both regions, much less by a Likud-led coalition government presided over by Ariel Sharon, who until then was considered the "father of the settlements" (Rynhold & Waxman 2008, p. 26). Not to be overstated, this decision was an unprecedented political action with sweeping ramifications for the Religious Zionist movement as a social-political entity. In this way, as commitment to maintaining Jewish control over the entire "Land of Israel" waned, the Religious Zionist movement evidently felt the need to recalibrate. In what follows, I thus offer evidence to support the argument that, at least for fundamentalist segments of the Religious Zionist community, responses to their perceived threatened status were, for the most part, quite violent and contributed significantly to the multi-generational persistence of Religious Zionist, ideological commitment throughout the region. I thereby endeavor to link the Religious Zionist movement and its post-disengagement sense of alarm to increased conflict in Hebron after 2005.

4.2. Mapping the Settler Community

In this section, I refer to key elements of the "Extra-parliamentary" group cited in the literature review of this report, demonstrating in particular that to portray the Religious Zionist movement as purely messianic – that is, centered on territorial nationalism as the highest form of religious merit – would slightly miss the mark. Religious Zionism has always included a more politically-inclined, pragmatic aspect. For example, Religious Zionists have been more inclined to accept some important features of the contemporary moment, such as the changing status of women and the presence of secular studies departments throughout their education system and

historically have subordinated the primacy of their ideology for the overall strength and security of the state of Israel (Sandler 2005, 34). However, this commitment has been called into question in the post-disengagement period given the pronounced threat to the ideology itself and the evident sense of betrayal among the most stalwart Religious Zionists.

I shall now proceed to apply aspects of the ecological triad and the earlier analysis of catalyst-periods to the two main segments of the Religious Zionist movement – fundamentalism and secularization. I show that, because the messianic segment of the Religious Zionist community perceived the state through the prism of "redemption," they thus interpreted the aftermath of the Six-Day War (1967) in a fundamentalist manner (Sandler 2005, 34). Since then, the leadership of the Religious Zionist camp has been adamant in advancing the settlement prerogative throughout the Occupied Territories, especially in the post-disengagement period, due to the threatened status of their ideology. Given these developments, the fundamentalists' failure to halt the disengagement process has presented its most committed believers with a predicament that was, previous to 2005, essentially unforeseen. That notwithstanding, this account of the fundamentalist branch of Religious Zionism would be remiss if it failed to include a brief discussion of yet another one of its critical offshoots – Kahanism.

According to the Meir Kahane, the group's Orthodox rabbi and ultra-nationalist leader who encouraged retaliatory violence against Arabs if they attacked Jewish people themselves, "there will be a perpetual war," and biblical territory should be annexed if any violent conflict arises against the state

of Israel (Kaufman 1994, p. 5). I include this appeal to Kahanism, not because it enjoys a vibrant calling in the Israeli settler

       In the following paragraphs, I articulate the pragmatic approach to Religious Zionism before offering a diagram illustrating the particular sects of Zionism present in the West Bank circa 2006 [see Figure 1]. The Religious Zionist movement is, of course, not a monolithic enterprise – embedded within it is a more pragmatic aspect, coming largely in response to the increasingly secular trends adopted by the Israeli government. Because, in the post-disengagement period, prospects for the fundamentalist school were significantly hampered, many felt the need to abandon their religious positioning for the overall sanctity and strength of the Israeli state. To varying degrees, the same general trend can be observed today – individuals and groups adopt this pragmatic belief system largely because they prioritize the supremacy of the state of Israel at all costs, despite curtailment of the biblical legacy. The logic they call upon is actually quite simple: if the fundamentalists can be said to distrust the secular pathology of Israeli statehood as moving towards the establishment of a Jewish state, the secularists trust the political trend, however cautiously. They do not necessarily champion that trend, however, so much as they tolerate it for the betterment of the state. In fact, in places where pragmatic Religious Zionists establish settlements, available data shows conflict is far less violent than in places where individuals and groups adopt a messianic posture towards the state and their surrounding environment (Sandler 2005, p. 35).

       Moreover, it should be acknowledged that, while this report includes a thorough analysis of the two main offshoots of the Religious Zionist movement

community today, but because of its implications for settler conflict in Hebron.

– fundamentalism and secularization – there are undoubtedly others operating on varying ideological grounds and responding to other seemingly incompatible pressures. For psychological framing purposes, Figure 1 below offers a breakdown of the social distribution of settlers according to research conducted in 2006 by Peace Now, a well-known human rights advocacy group in the region (Peace Now Annual Report 2006). The graph shows a high number of traditional and secular settlers, totaling 56%, while slightly smaller percentages represent the religious and Charedic (ultra-orthodox) groups, totaling 43% (Peace Now Annual Report 2006). I limit myself in this report to examining only this latter 43%, in terms of ideology, timing, and conduct, and proceed to demonstrate the implications of this belief system in Hebron post-2005. Interestingly, the fact that, in 2006, approximately 38% of the settler population remained committed to fundamentalist Religious Zionism provides a plausible window for examining settler conflict in Hebron.
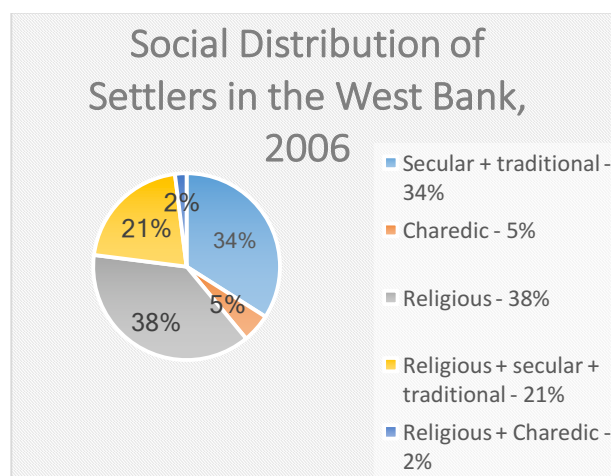

FIGURE 1 Social Distribution of Settlers in the West Bank, 2006 (Peace Now Annual Report, 2006).

Furthermore, because Hebron has long been and continues to be a highly-divisive fault line in the settler psyche – home to Abraham and Sara (who reside in the Tomb of the Patriarchs/Ibrahimi Mosque) – we should expect to see a dominant, fundamentalist Religious Zionist presence throughout the southern West Bank region, given the intimate biblical significance of the Old City of Hebron itself. Additionally, we should expect to see widespread anger in the period immediately following Israel's withdrawal from Gaza since Religious Zionists themselves, as I argue, perceived a threat to their ideological status. In what follows, I consider a range of these scenarios and the relevant evidence explaining the escalation of conflict in Hebron after 2005.

Before that, however, I conclude this section by drawing attention to the ecological triad to assist in explaining the multiple levels of analysis I have engaged in this report – the state, the group, bifurcation within the group, the individual, and so forth. I demonstrate, in particular, that responses to catalyst-periods, such as the post-disengagement period, are the result of changes occurring on ideological grounds, based on the timing and conduct of key actors and groups in response to widespread social and political change. I shall now proceed to apply this emphasis on ideology and timing to the issue of conduct during the post-2005 period in Hebron, showing particularly that, because environmental aspects central to Hebron are ideologically pronounced to a greater degree than in other cities throughout the region, the primacy of fundamentalist Religious Zionism has led to increased conflict and the further, multi-generational persistence of Religious Zionism throughout the southern region. I focus narrowly on the Tel Rumeida quarter of Hebron in the 2005 aftermath, where a small number of radical, settler families live and consistently resort to violent conflict.

4.3. Settler Conflict in Hebron: The Tel Rumeida Quarter

In this section, I closely examine settlement monitors and personal testimonies gathered from a case study of the *Tel Rumeida* neighborhood in Hebron, a particularly conflict-prone section of the Old City that has consistently borne the brunt of disputes between fundamentalist Religious Zionists and the local Palestinian population. In the initial months after disengagement with Gaza, violent conflict most frequently originated with the settlement at Tel Rumeida, thus leading the Israeli political pundit, Gideon Levy, to refer to the situation as a "reign of terror" in the immediate aftermath of the Gaza withdrawal (Levy 2005). Conflict during this period included the damaging of property, the throwing of stones and even feces from settlement dwellings, and often outright violent clashes between settlers and the local Palestinian population (Levy 2005). I limit myself in this reporting to the actions of Israeli settlers specifically and neglect (1) the *targets* of religious conflict and (2) the conduct of competing, potentially conflict-prone entities either responding or initiating violent acts themselves. I contend, moreover, given the available data on the topic in relation to Hebron, that this more compartmentalized approach makes for a better report. I conclude this section with a brief look at the present reality of settlement conflict in Hebron.

For ideological framing purposes, I appeal to Ehud Sprinzak, an Israeli counterterrorism specialist and expert on far-right Jewish organizations, for his analysis of the *Ramat Yeshai* settlement (located in the Tel Rumeida neighborhood) and the changing ideological guard that occurred with the arrival of two *Kahanists*, Baruch Marzel and Noam Federman, in the mid-1980's ('Human Rights in the Occupied

Territories, 2008'). According to Sprinzak, the small number of very radical Jewish families that took up residence in Ramat Yeshai during this period led directly to the deterioration of relations between Israeli settlers and the local Palestinian population. I include this only to emphasize Hebron's ideological appeal in the settler psyche, rather than arguing that the escalation of conflict is directly tied to the arrival of the Kahanists. Indeed, violent conflict has been present in Hebron for millennia and is likely to occur well into the future. Such are the battle lines that have historically been drawn, and it should come as no surprise that the continual entrenchment of the settlement enterprise – carried out in large part by Religious Zionists – continues to damage prospects for peaceful resolve in Hebron.

In this section, I offer a brief excerpt from Gideon Levy's 2005 *Haaretz* article in which he frames the "anti-disengagement" struggle in Hebron as the critical frontline in the fundamentalist, Religious Zionist psyche. It should be noted that Levy accomplishes this task in the first person, as he walks the settlement grounds and traverses the city's multiple checkpoints – that is, as he navigates the Tel Rumeida quarter of Hebron where "about 500 Palestinian families once lived, [and] now barely 50" (Levy 2005). He writes:

> Baruch Marzel is the upstairs neighbor. From the Marzel's mobile home, right over our heads, we can hear the voice of a woman speaking on the telephone. The screensaver on his computer shows a routine photograph: a settler boy of about six or seven attacking an old Palestinian woman carrying baskets in Gross Square, adjacent to the Avraham Avinu neighborhood, as smiling soldiers look on from their post.

> Every three months a unit is replaced. The previous group was kinder than the present one maybe as a consequence of the lessons of the sensitive evacuation in Gaza (Levy 2005).

I offer this description less for its academic import and more for the personal testimony it provides into the attitudes of Religious Zionists in Hebron. In fact, events such as these are widespread and intimately linked to social-political action occurring elsewhere in the region, and, crucially, following the 2005 disengagement plan with Gaza. Therefore, extensive issues associated with settlement conflict throughout the city can be seen to escalate and become more pronounced if the "integrity" of the Religious Zionist movement is called into question. Responses to these conditions come in two critical forms: (1) fundamentalism, and (2) pragmatism (e.g. alignment with the increasing secular condition of the state). For the purposes of this article, I suggest that, given the intensity of settler conflict in Hebron post-2005, modifications of Religious Zionism's social-political direction are likely to extend towards increased clashes with both the state and the local Palestinian population. Indeed, relevant empirical data pertaining to Hebron in 2015, one of the more violent years on record, illustrates this scenario exactly (Levy 2005). Violent clashes between Religious Zionist settlers and local Palestinians remains uniquely linked to the threatened ideological status of the movement itself, beginning with Prime Minister Sharon's unilateral disengagement from Gaza in the summer of 2005.

One plausible counterexample suggests that conflict escalated in the post-2005 period in Hebron not because of the Gaza withdrawal, but due to aspects unique to Hebron itself, such as ongoing disputes over sacred space. These scholars do not dispute the upsurge of religious vehemence and

violence, however, so much as they question the reason for the escalation of conflict in the first place. Other scholars, too, point to the particularly hostile arrangement between Religious Zionist protagonists and the political arena generally, without emphasizing Sharon's disengagement order (Levy 2005). However, a closer look at the evidence in this report suggests that (1) Religious Zionist settler conflict in the Tel Rumeida neighbor had little to do with disputes over sacred space, and (2) the political arrangement was, in fact, contested – as these scholars argue – but that this contestation was directly linked to the removal of all settlement activity from Gaza in 2005. I thus provide an analysis that extends beyond the parameters of relevant scholarly output on the topic at present.

4.4. Summing up the Evidence

Throughout this report, I have focused on the ideological aspects that explain the escalation of settler conflict in Hebron post-2005 by examining (1) the two main branches of Religious Zionism, and (2) settlement monitors, case studies, and personal testimonies. To assist in this process, I included the theoretical workings of the ecological triad in order to engage all levels of analysis – that is, the environment, the state, the group, the individual, and so forth – as well as to provide an appropriate scaffolding for demonstrating the reasons that explain the escalation in settler conflict in Hebron post-2005. I conclude with a brief synopsis of this research and a path forward for future academic scholarship on the topic.

5. Conclusion

Why have Religious Zionists perpetrated acts of violence in Hebron post-2005? Throughout this article, I have argued that Israel's disengagement from Gaza and

the northern West Bank settlements in 2005 caused the Religious Zionist settler movement to rethink the status of their struggle, thus leading to increased settler conflict throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the ongoing, multi-generational persistence of Religious Zionist theology in vibrant segments of the Israeli settler community. In part one of this article, I explained why this field of study is entirely worthwhile, given the precarious status of settlement expansion according to international law, before turning to the Hebron predicament and its implications for future settlement activity.

Next, I considered the relevant literature on the topic, which I ordered in groups according to (1) "Political Participation," and (2) "Extra-parliamentary," and then dispensed with an argument that is both novel and refined. The works in the "Political Participation" group, for example, are effective in their image of ideological transformation at the state level, but fail to answer the question of why the 2005 disengagement policy with Gaza posed significant challenges for the Religious Zionist movement itself, because of its emphasis on explanations emanating predominantly from the political arena. Of the six scholars featured in the group, "Extra-parliamentary," half fail to treat Hebron as an acute and highly-divisive fault line in the settler psyche after 2005. In short, the decision to include or exclude certain events and empirical realities can thus transform the conclusions that are drawn.

Throughout this report, I have strived to fill these gaps by interpreting a historically-contingent, evidentiary, causal narrative of Religious Zionist settler conflict occurring in and around Hebron during the post-disengagement period. On the one hand, by arguing that Israel's disengagement from Gaza and the northern West Bank settlements in 2005 threatened the

ideological status of the Religious Zionist settler movement, leading them to rethink the status of their struggle and resulting in the persistence of Religious Zionist theology in robust segments of the Israeli settler community – I thereby provide a novel argument. Alternatively, I can only hope to convey this causal narrative on the basis of refinement – that is, by including an analysis of both the political arena and the settler groups in and around Hebron themselves, in order to arrive at the novel claim that settler conflict in Hebron escalated in the post-2005 period due to the fundamentalist branch of the Religious Zionist movement's perception of crisis in response to Prime Minister Sharon's implementation of the Gaza disengagement plan. In particular, I call upon the workings of the ecological triad in order to provide a thorough assessment of multiple levels of analysis, centering on the state, the group, and the individual.

Additionally, my argument rests on the following correlates: I began with an independent variable – namely, Prime Minister Sharon's disengagement plan and its aftermath. The causal mechanism accounting for the resulting retaliatory conflict is the threatened ideological status of the Religious Zionist movement post-disengagement. This religious-ideological desire for settler expansion, then, despite contradictory actions of the state, led to a dependent variable – that is, Religious Zionist settler conflict in the post-2005 period in Hebron.

The fourth section of this paper marshals evidence gathered from settlement monitors, case studies, and personal testimonies. In an effort to draw attention away from the current preoccupation with political mechanisms and cursory descriptions of settler organizations, I draw evidence primarily from empirical data in the months and years following the Gaza

disengagement order to argue that pronounced ideological anxiety among the Religious Zionist community led to increased conflict across the "Green Line" in Hebron. Additionally, I distinguish in this section between the two main branches of Religious Zionism – fundamentalism and secularization. I then turned to a personal testimony gathered in the immediate aftermath of the withdrawal. I conclude now with a few criticisms of the argument provided in this report, as well as a path forward for future scholarship.

In short, available criticism concerning the analysis provided in this report suggests that, because I do not examine specific individuals and groups who directly experienced the disengagement process and moved on to commit violent acts in Hebron, my analysis rests on rather tenuous causal mechanisms. However, available evidence on that score is difficult to come by, and I find that causal narratives such as the one I have provided in this report – drawn on narrow analyses of ideology, timing and conduct – provide commanding insights into the anxieties and perceptions surrounding the unique period following Israel's disengagement from Gaza in 2005. As far as I am concerned, any causal narrative that provides a window into the precarious condition of Hebron is worthwhile; I thus contend that it is a sign of this article's strength that these linkages can justifiably be drawn. That said, yet another poignant criticism of this report might focus on the lack of authoritative evidence on the Hebron predicament. Indeed, evidence gathered from settlement monitors, case studies, and personal testimonies are appropriate where other sources cannot be found, but given that the sharpest fault lines in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be seen in Hebron, a more compelling evidentiary basis would greatly benefit the present work.

Future scholarship on this topic should account for the limitations indicated above. Throughout this report, I was keen to narrowly define a specific moment in time with which I could articulate episodes of settler conflict in Hebron. Moving forward, I hope to see a grander, historically-contingent report on settler conflict occurring in Hebron both prior to and after Prime Minister Sharon's disengagement order. Future scholarship should undoubtedly move beyond cursory descriptions of political action, or group action, or individual action, and onto a more holistic analysis of these aspects in interrelationship, as I have attempted to do here. Indeed, there has probably not been a more pressing time for serious scholarly output on the settlement dilemma, particularly as it concerns the great fault line that is Hebron.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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