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RELIGIO-POLITICAL GROUPS AND THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE
PROCESS

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

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June 2009

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Degree Date: June 2009

ABSTRACT

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a quagmire of interests working against one another. In this paper, I explore the specific role of religio-political groups in the conflict. I particularly examine the ideological political and religious foundations of Gush Emunim and Hamas, paying much attention to the question of why they are attractive to people in our current era. I argue that these groups are continuously effective in opposing the current quest for a peaceful resolution to the conflict, and that they continue to grow as the result of an identity crisis brought about by factors related to globalization and the failure of secular governments in the region. The two religio-political groups I explore pose a significant barrier to a peace agreement.

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Introduction:

What is the Problem?

In 1948, the “Jewish and Democratic” state of Israel declared itself in the center of the Middle East. Before and since this historic event, Palestinians and Jews have been in conflict with one another over this small stretch of land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. Water, refugees, and economics all contribute to the mess, but the one of the most salient forces at work is religion. The conflict over the land concerns an age-old claim that the God of Israel promised the land of Palestine to His chosen people, the Jews. After years of Diaspora for the Jewish people, they found their way back to the land of Palestine and reclaimed the land as rightfully theirs, despite the presence of the Arab peoples living there. While the original Zionist vision did not necessarily require that the Jews live specifically within the boundaries of the ancient “promised land,” the religious Zionist movement since the state’s inception has pushed to expand its borders to include all of what they understand to be their ancient land.

W.J.T. Mitchell poignantly states in his article “Holy Landscape: Israel, Palestine, and the American Wilderness,” that, “The perverse logic of holy landscape seems to turn it from god’s gift into an obscene idol that demands human sacrifice.”¹ Israel/Palestine has seen more than its share of human sacrifice in this “holy land.”

¹ W.J.T. Mitchell, “Holy Landscape: Israel, Palestine, and the American Wilderness,” in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 262.

The conflict involves many people who simply want to live normal lives in a certain area of the world. However, if this were all the conflict was about, peace would be an easier pursuit. The conflict has persisted for so long because people are looking for a transcendent identity that cannot be provided through normal political processes, and as globalization seeps into Israel/Palestine while secular governments involved fail to earn the trust of their constituents, more people desperate for constancy find that this deeper meaning behind the conflict provides stability that transcends the present world. I have chosen to focus on Gush Emunim and Hamas, as I find these groups to be the most representative of this trend.

The most commonly proposed solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the two-state solution, in which the land would be divided into two independent states, one for the Jews and one for the Palestinians. A less frequently suggested resolution is the one-state solution, which proposes that Jews and Palestinians share the land with joint power and equal citizenship for everyone. Religion has often been left out of serious speculations offered by academics in the field of international relations. The religious aspects of the conflict are often considered peripheral and lacking any real influence on the peace process or absence thereof. Though the conflict and its peace process are extremely complex and thus not reducible to any one cause or solution, I contend that religio-political groups affect the conflict more than is often acknowledged.

Zionism and the Formation of the Israeli State

Zionism was not originally a particularly religious quest. In fact, Theodor Herzl, a key figure in the formation of Zionism, was not a religious Jew. Herzl, in his work *Die*

Judenstaat, commonly translated *The Jewish State*, promoted the normalization of the Jewish people through the establishment of an independent Jewish nation. This nation, according to Herzl, did not necessarily have to be in Palestine. Herzl did not work from the assumption that Palestine was the Jews' sacred land; rather he promoted the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine because the Jewish people had a historical connection to the land. For Herzl, Palestine and Argentina were the top contenders for the physical Jewish nation to be established. Palestine was preferred for nostalgic, not religious, reasons.

It is important to distinguish between Herzl's secular Zionism and modern day religious Zionism. Herzl saw the need for a Jewish state because Jews had never successfully assimilated into another nation without persecution or grief. In order for the Jews to become a normal people group, they needed to form an independent nation. The religious Zionists do not desire normalization. They see the Jewish people as intrinsically unique, a point I will address more thoroughly in chapter four; for them, the placement of the Jewish people in the land of Palestine is an inherently religious project.

Political History of the Land

A major catalyst for the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the formation of the state of Israel in 1948. However, political conflict began long before this. This piece of land has seen power struggles as far back as history records. The Canaanites, Hebrews, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans are some of the most notable parties who have fought to control the land at some point throughout history. The Ottomans controlled the land from the early 16th century until the early 20th century,

when the British took over. It is controllable that this piece of land has rarely seen long-term peace.

The British conquered the land from the Turks between 1917 and 1918 and played a major role in the inception of the modern Israeli state. The November 1917 Balfour Declaration asserted British support for the formation of a national home for the Jews. This document arose at least in part from amassing British Christian support for a Jewish state in Palestine.² Although there was some religious (Jewish) support of Zionism before this Declaration, the document spurred increased religious support for the establishment of a Jewish nation.

After many attempts to sort out how the land should be divided between Jews and Palestinians, the British handed the problem over to the United Nations in 1947. The UN drafted a partition, which was generally accepted by the Jews but rejected by the Palestinians. The 1948 War in which the Israeli state was established was the culmination of years of tension. This event solidified the crisis at the political level.

The 1967 Six Day War was another significant turning point in the conflict. This war in which Israel greatly expanded its borders influenced the rise of both Hamas and Gush Emunim. The Arab side of this war, headed primarily by then Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, experienced a great defeat. Islamists gained clout following this defeat, as the Six Day War displayed the weakness of secular Arab nationalism. The Israelis were victorious in this conflict, and Gush Emunim interpreted this success as proof of God's will being carried out in the land of Palestine. The Six Day War fueled both groups to promote more vehemently a religio-political path.

² Yaakov Ariel, "An Unexpected Alliance: Christian Zionism and its Historical Significance in Modern Judaism," *Modern Judaism* 26, no. 2 (2006): 79.

Land Concerns: Religious Legacies

Land is a crucial part of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Certain groups of both Muslims and Jews have roots in the land that they trace to the days of Abraham. Land is not simply a place to live, but encompasses great religious significance for both groups. For Jews, Israel is the Promised Land, given to Abraham by God in the book of Genesis. According to the scriptural account, when the Hebrew people were slaves in Egypt, Moses freed them and led them back to the Promised Land. The Hebrew people conquered the land according to God-given directives; the land was not a human gain, but a divine gift. The Temple, which was according to the Hebrew Scriptures the center of Jewish worship, was in Jerusalem. For the ancient Israelites, the Temple in Jerusalem served as the Axis Mundi, or the primordial center of the world both physically and spiritually.

The revered Jewish philosopher Martin Buber justified Jewish control of the land as follows,

The essential point is that Israel heard the will of the Lord of the world at the beginning of its expedition to Canaan and conquered the land in the perfect and well-founded faith that it was accomplishing His will. With however little or much right in each case the nations can accuse each other of being robbers, their charge against Israel is totally unjust for it acted under authority...No other people has ever heard and accepted the command from heaven as did the people of Israel.³

According to the self-understanding of religious Zionists, the Jewish people are unique and have special access to the will of God. The land belongs to them, not because

³ Quoted in Mitchell (2002), 281.

of military victories in the 20th century, but because God gave it to them long ago. In line with Buber's thinking above, the "regular rules" do not apply.

The first 'Aliya, or ascent of the Jewish people to Israel, took place between 1882 and 1903. The second 'Aliya lasted from 1904 to 1914. The original plan of the Zionists was to purchase the land piece by piece from the Ottoman Sultan. Lord Shaftesbury's infamous phrase touted in these 'Aliyas stated that Palestine was 'a land without a people' for 'people without a land.'⁴

Benny Morris assesses that,

For most of Palestine's impoverished, illiterate inhabitants at the end of the nineteenth century, 'nationalism' was an alien, meaningless concept. They identified themselves simultaneously as subjects of the (multinational) Ottoman Empire and as part of the (multinational) community of Islam.⁵

At least partially because the Palestinian people did not possess a strong national identity before the arising of Israel in 1948, their side of the conflict has been quite complex. The plight of the Palestinian people and the loss of the land was a cause taken up by the surrounding Arab nations. Prior to the 1980's, the Palestinian cause was closely tied with secular nationalism. Until Nasser's 1967 defeat, the Palestinian cause was woven into a quest for pan-Arabism. After the 1967 war, Palestinian nationalism was carried by Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Over the years, though, official (secular) Palestinian representation has not ultimately succeeded in unifying the people. Religio-politics began to grow on the Palestinian side of the conflict in the late 1960's, but particularly increased in the later 1980's following the first Intifada. This religious nationalism, which is tied to territory but also connected to a

⁴ Quoted in Morris (2008), 3.

⁵ Morris (2008), 5.

transnational spiritual identity, has thrived in the land in the last two and a half decades. This can be seen particularly in the 2007 takeover of the Gaza Strip by Hamas. Palestinians have had little around which to coalesce, and thus religion has stepped in to serve as an identity for the Palestinian peoples.

While Muslims do not view Palestine as “Promised Land” like the Jews, it is a religiously significant area for them as well, and on top of that, it is in the middle of the predominantly Muslim Middle East. The Islamic Revival, which in large part has corresponded with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has led to an increase in extremist Muslim desire for Islam to retain rule over this territory. According to this perspective, a Jewish state in the middle of “the Muslim world” is an abomination.

For Muslims, Jerusalem is one of the most sacred sites. Mohammed is believed to have experienced a night journey in which he traveled to Haram al-Sharif (the Temple Mount to the Jews) and from there ascended with the angel Gabriel into heaven, where he was given a vision of Allah.⁶ The Dome of the Rock was built over this spot, and al-Aqsa Mosque was erected nearby for worship. The Charter of Allah, which is the founding document of Hamas, recognizes an even deeper importance of the land, “Palestine is the navel of earth, the convergence of continents, the object of greed for the greedy, since the dawn of history.”⁷ For Hamas, Palestine is something of a primordial center of the world as well.

The Charter of Allah sees Palestine as a *waqf* land, set aside for religious purposes. The land is part of *dar al-Islam*, or the Land/House of Islam. This notion is a

⁶ Qur’an 17:1.

⁷ *The Charter of Allah: The Platform of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas)*, Article Thirty-Four.

classic piece of *Shari'a* law, and it refers to any land under the control of Islam.⁸ Once a land has come under the control of Islam, it is not to revert to non-Muslim control. Thus the explicit Jewish control of the land of Palestine is highly problematic for Hamas.

Fundamentalism/Religio-Political Groups

Before going any further, I would like to address the issue of semantics when it comes to speaking about religio-political and/or fundamentalist groups. With the term 'religio-political,' I refer to groups that are first grounded in a religious worldview, and from that religious footing aspire to act politically to bring to fruition a goal directly related to their religious self-understanding. While some use the same term to refer to groups who pick up religion to aid their political motivations, I use the term only to refer to groups that are first religious, then political. The meaning and motivation behind their political aspirations can be traced to their religious roots. I loosely consider religio-political groups a subgroup of fundamentalists.

Arab Islamists prefer the term 'revivalism' to 'fundamentalism.'⁹ However, due to the prevalence of the word fundamentalism in contemporary rhetoric, it is nearly impossible to get away from using it in order to converse about this subject. Thus I will use the term, but only within the confines of the following discussion for the purpose of this paper.

⁸ Manoucher Parvin and Maurie Sommer, "Dar al-Islam: The Evolution of Muslim Territoriality and its Implications for Conflict Resolution in the Middle East," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 11, no. 1 (1980): 3.

⁹ Ziad Abu-Amr, "Critical Issues in Arab Islamic Fundamentalism" in *Religion, Ethnicity, and Self-Identity*, ed. Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Hanover, NH : University Press of New England, 1997), 35.

Fundamentalism, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, refers to “a movement or attitude stressing strict and literal adherence to a set of basic principles.”¹⁰ When people speak of religious fundamentalism, it is often assumed that fundamentalists stick to a very literal reading of a sacred text. It is impossible, however, for any religious group to go back entirely literally to its sacred texts. All texts in the major religious traditions are subject to interpretation; taken at face value, texts are inevitably self-contradictory and ambiguous. Thus most fundamentalisms “stress strict and literal adherence” to a certain *interpretation* of religious texts. Fundamentalists have in common that they tend to see others, even in their own religious tradition, as unenlightened and, often, outside the ‘will of God.’ The term ‘fundamentalism’ can encompass a wide variety of beliefs, but I find it sufficient to say that a ‘fundamentalist’ sees the world narrowly. Where a particular author uses the term fundamentalism in a way I believe is applicable to the trends in the groups I am dealing with, I will keep the author’s original term. I will qualify the author’s use of the term when I deem necessary.

Some fundamentalist groups are isolationist, while others see it as their sacred duty to involve themselves in political pursuits. It is this latter group to which I refer in this paper. The beliefs of both Gush Emunim and Hamas seem to require the groups to exert influence in society and politics. To sit back is to allow the world to move on without the important input of those who know God’s will better than others. Who better to influence politics than those who best understand the will of God? I believe certain elements of fundamentalism can be helpful in understanding Gush Emunim and Hamas.

For instance, as Raymond Grew asserts,

¹⁰ *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, s.v. “Fundamentalism.,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fundamentalism/> (accessed April 24, 2009)

Fundamentalism feeds on a community's recognition of the need to mobilize against threats to its way of life. These include but are not limited to threats to religious belief, the sacred, and the divine order...The individual's first protection against these historical forces and personal temptations is to accept a fundamental core of belief, doctrines, and behaviors from which there can be no deviation and no compromise, eliminating ambiguities that invite fatal laxity.¹¹

Both groups invoke a great religious tradition and reappropriate parts of it selectively, attaching these elements to their particular body of believers. While fundamentalism reacts against secularization, it is also a product of secularization. Grew argues that, "Modern societies tend to establish a kind of equilibrium between this autonomy of religion and the demands of secular society. Fundamentalism tends to break down that equilibrium, in part as a consequence of the very independence secularization has conferred."¹² The need to solidify one's own religious identity is brought on by the feeling of the assault of secular society.

Both groups share a couple of tenets of fundamentalism noted by Lazarus-Yafeh. The first of the two I see as important is these groups' "crude theology." Both Gush Emunim and Hamas, like Lazarus-Yafeh's fundamentalist groups, "feel that they are in a position to understand exactly the plans and deeds of God."¹³ The second feature these groups share is their general eschatological vision.¹⁴ Both Gush Emunim and Hamas are focused on the future, with Gush Emunim hoping for the Messiah and Hamas looking to establish a utopian Islamic society. Because both groups also feel they have more direct access than others do to the will of God, their actions that lead them toward their goals

¹¹ Raymond Grew, "On Seeking the Cultural Context of Fundamentalism," in *Religion, Ethnicity and Self-Identity*, ed. Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997), 21.

¹² Grew (1997), 26.

¹³ Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Contemporary Fundamentalism: Judaism, Christianity, Islam." in *Jewish Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Laurence J. Silberstein (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 50.

¹⁴ Lazarus-Yafeh (1993), 50.

are justified, whether or not they mesh with what the rest of their society or the rest of the world feel is appropriate in this age of human rights discourse.

Grew notes the following in regard to the growth of fundamentalist movements,

A fundamentalist movement then grows if it can establish and maintain its militancy while broadening its community. Evidence of commitment and power, militancy reinforces the movement's claim to be the worthy heir of its religion's great tradition.¹⁵

Grew later goes on to assert that,

The practice of fundamental communities tends to flow along the local fault lines of politics and social organization and to coalesce around conflicts, from national wars to local schools. Conflict is so important because it reifies the boundaries that construct and define community.¹⁶

Grew makes an important observation here, as he points out the significance of conflict in the formation and growth of fundamentalist movements. The presence of such deep-rooted conflict in Israel/Palestine makes fundamentalist groups ever more relevant as people crave hope. Grew argues the following crucial point about fundamentalism:

The perception of fundamentalism as a worldwide phenomenon is ours: the product of a Western, academic, and social scientific outlook rooted in a particular set of values that not only favors pluralism, tolerance, rational discourse, regular procedures for decision making and adjudication, openness, democracy and universalism but that sees these qualities as favored by certain kinds of historical change.¹⁷

Fundamentalism acts in response to a Western/secular assertion of the hegemony of these particular values. It sees this assertion as insulting and unfounded, and thus ventures to reconstruct an identity that elevates traditional and/or religious values in opposition to this Western value set. One must consider the unfairness of assuming the fundamentalist set of values is somehow inferior to values typically associated with the

¹⁵ Grew (1997), 21.

¹⁶ Grew (1997), 31.

¹⁷ Grew (1997), 33.

secularism that so often accompanies globalization, such as individualism, pluralism, relativism and tolerance.

The Intertwining of Religion, Identity and Globalization

Because of globalization and the perceived failure of the secular regimes involved in the conflict, some Israelis and Palestinians have been driven to find identity, meaning, purpose and hope in religious roots. Globalization has a three-pronged effect I find relevant to the growth of religio-political groups in this conflict. This three-pronged effect I will collectively refer to as an “identity crisis,” as a crisis of identity is the overarching result. The first effect is that globalization has caused a decline in traditional identities. This includes clan or family-based identities as well as national identities. Borders across the world have become blurred and easily crossed, thus peoples’ identities are less constrained by one’s geographical location. This fizzling of traditional identities instigates a search for new identity. The instability caused by globalization leaves persons feeling insecure and prompts them to seek solid ground.

The second effect of globalization is that it exposes people across the globe to new ideas and religions. One no longer only experiences the religion and ideas of his or her family or geographic area; rather s/he is given the opportunity to consider numerous other ideologies. Exposure to different peoples, cultures and religions via travel, internet, media, etc., causes one to examine one’s own ideology and identity. This frequently results in increased adherence to religious groups as these groups offer both a sense of belonging and stability in an ever-shifting world. Religious groups with political aspirations tend to draw people in, as these groups not only provide a metaphysical sense

of belonging but also a feeling of purpose and even a sense of control.

The third effect of globalization I consider relevant is that it often brings with it secularism. Though globalization cannot be defined as secularism, it certainly seems to carry it along wherever it goes. Thus globalization often assumes the hegemony of pluralism, tolerance and relativism. These values assault traditional religious values, and the religio-political groups in Israel/Palestine act in response to this assault by reasserting traditional values.

This three-pronged effect of globalization combines with the failure of secular governments, and thereby spurs increased commitment to religio-political identities. Pan-Arabism, touted by Nasser, showed its weakness in the Six Day War, while the Palestinian Authority cannot be considered successful in providing tangible hope for the Palestinian people. The secular Israeli government has consistently disappointed its people through the years since the state's formation. When secular governments fail, people distrust secular nationalism and rather look for other avenues to provide belonging, identity and hope.

Just Nationalism?

Though both sides of the conflict began as secular nationalist quests, the persistence of the conflict and the multiple failures of secular players involved have contributed to the rise of religio-politics. These religio-politics are a complicated web of religious nationalism as well as transnationalism. Those involved in religio-politics in Israel/Palestine certainly have a commitment to their countries; however, these groups go beyond nationalism and see themselves as part of something larger. They have added

a spiritual quest to the nationalist one, and this addition has vastly complicated the conflict.

In this paper, I discuss the importance of globalization and its contribution to the rise of religio-politics. I must point out that globalization works uniquely in Israel/Palestine because of the way in which people attach spiritual importance to this land. While globalization generally leads to a decline of nationalism and geography-based identities, it has an somewhat exceptional effect in Israel/Palestine. I do think that globalization has caused a decline in secular nationalism for reasons I delve into more deeply later. However, because of the “holy” nature of the land in this region, the transnational (religious) identities forged by people in this region remain connected to the land. Thus nationalism is not completely discarded, but is rather transcended by religio-political groups on both sides.

The conflict is obviously quite complicated, as many issues contribute to the fight. Both sides have committed seemingly unforgivable offenses against the other. I argue here that one of the most important factor in sustaining the conflict is religion, and that the aforementioned trends promote the growth of religio-politics. I am certainly not attempting to assert that everyone on both sides of the conflict is religious and interested in sustaining the conflict for purely religious reasons. There are many reasons the conflict has continued for as long as it has. However, I argue that the presence and pervasive influence of specific religio-political groups is the most salient factor in hindering the peace process, and these groups will only continue to grow within the context of globalization as they provide transcendent, stable identity where identity is hard to find.

Since the 1948 appearance of the state Israel in the land of Palestine, both the Palestinians and Israelis have been responsible for rejecting peace agreements. Both sides have at times given up opportunities to come to a viable settlement. This is not simply because the potential agreements have been excessively faulty. Enough influential groups on both sides are holding out for more than a partition plan. In this paper I will demonstrate who the most prominent of these groups are, why they are influential, and why they are growing.

Although neither side of the conflict has historically been militantly religious, newer groups have reappropriated religious ideas to fit the present situation. Religion has always been an important feature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but it is currently more than ever a prominent factor. Neither Zionism nor Palestinian nationalism began as a specifically religious quest. In more recent years, religion has come forth as a more conspicuous element of the fight. Hamas and Gush Emunim, in particular, embody the religious operations at work beneath and regularly jutting onto the surface of political proceedings.

Given all of the factors briefly discussed above, I propose that religio-political groups in Israel/Palestine will continue to grow rather than fade away in the event of a peace agreement. Any possible peace agreement in this region requires compromise from both the Israeli and Palestinian sides. In this paper, I focus particularly on the roles of Gush Emunim and Hamas in influencing politics and thereby impeding any viable peace process. The essential ideologies of the majority of these religio-political groups in Israel/Palestine are not compatible with compromise, and thus a sustainable peace agreement looks implausible in light of the growth and influence of these two groups.

I am not attempting to set these two groups in direct comparison to one another, even though I will point out a few similarities throughout this paper that I find critical in understanding why these groups are salient in the context of globalization. I am also not saying that everyone on both sides of the conflict thinks the way these religio-political groups do. These are subgroups, but they are subgroups with considerable support and influence. They are currently significant and gaining support because of their relevance to the lives of people living in Israel/Palestine.

I have one final disclaimer regarding my treatment of Hamas in this paper. I have dealt with Hamas through the lens of a large amount of literature I have read on the subject in English. I am aware, however, of a growing understanding of Hamas in Arabic writing as a flexible group that is willing to make concessions in negotiating peace with Israel. I do acknowledge some of the flexibility of Hamas in this paper; I do not, however, take into account much of the Arabic literature dealing with this matter. Thus my treatment of Hamas may in fact reflect a biased view of the organization. As a very recent New York Times article reveals, Khaled Meshal, the current leader of Hamas does in fact verbally state that Hamas will accept a peace agreement in which Israel exists within the 1967 borders.¹⁸ This may reflect a new trend emerging for Hamas, but because the English literature has not dealt extensively with this new development, I do not take this into account in my discussion of Hamas.

My intention in this paper is not to offer a way out, a solution to the problem. My role in writing this is to discern what exists on the ground and to speculate about the

¹⁸ “Transcript: Interview with Khaled Meshal of Hamas,” *New York Times on the Web*, 9 May 2009, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/05/world/middleeast/05Meshal-transcript.html>> (14 May 2009).

future. Certainly, this will strike one as pessimistic. This might be so, as though there may be grounds for optimism, I do not endeavor to venture that way. I venture in this paper only to evaluate a very specific barrier to peace.

Chapter One:

Identity Crisis

Globalization is important to the growth of religio-political groups because it instigates an identity crisis, which in turn causes persons to seek new identities to replace old self-understanding. There are three major ways in which this happens. First, globalization causes a decline in traditional identities as borders between spaces dissolve and people are not confined to particular geographical locations. Because of this, nationalism as an identity has in many ways become obsolete. Second, globalization exposes people to other cultures, religions and ideologies. One is forced to see “others” and thereby examine oneself. Finally, globalization often promotes secular values such as relativism, pluralism and tolerance. The assumed supremacy of these values calls traditional values into question. For many, religio-political identity is a reaction against this perceived assault on traditional values. Following this three-pronged identity crisis, new religio-political identities become relevant as they offer belonging, stability and hope through a meta-physical orientation.

What is Globalization?

Globalization is a concept with multiple connotations. One may think of the ever-increasing access to technology that allows one to attain an endless amount of information, for instance, a woman conducting international business on her iPhone in airports in New York and Amsterdam on her way to Mumbai, or a Ugandan boy searching Google in Kampala to find the latest sports statistics for his favorite Italian soccer team. One may also think of the spread of cultures. Consider the fact that one can take a yoga class and eat Moroccan food for dinner on the same day in Denver, Colorado. These factors certainly contribute to the fuzzy concept of globalization, but can they define it? Jan Aart Scholte's discussion of globalization is helpful in delineating this complex concept. In an attempt to encompass all of the elements of globalization, Scholte defines it as deterritorialization, or the spread of supraterritoriality.¹⁹ Globalization involves the breakdown of traditional boundaries and categories of identity. Formerly "local" ideas, religions and customs spread through media, increased technology and increased travel, and are integrated and adapted by new groups of people or individuals. Identity can be chosen, religious identity included, and *is* chosen because options are available. Within this context, religio-political groups that simultaneously adapt to and resist the globalized world have experienced tremendous growth as they provide identity, belonging and a transcendent vision of how the world could, and should, be.

Manuel Castells offers the following remarks regarding globalization:

¹⁹ Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd Ed. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 15.

This new form of social organization, in its pervasive globality, is diffusing throughout the world, as industrial capitalism and its twin enemy, industrial statism, did in the twentieth century, shaking institutions, transforming cultures, creating wealth and inducing poverty, spurring greed, innovation, and hope, while simultaneously imposing hardship and instilling despair. It is indeed, brave or not, a new world.²⁰

Castells makes an important observation that globalization is both constructive and destructive. Normative remarks about the movement as a whole are meaningless, as globalization entails vast amounts of change, both positive and negative. Castells remarks in the same breath as above that, “Our world, and our lives, are being shaped by the conflicting trends of globalization and identity.”²¹ He is partially right here. Globalization certainly causes an identity crisis as it knocks down long-standing boundaries. However, globalization also forges the way for new constructions of identities, and thus it is misleading to say that globalization and identity *conflict*. Identity must simply be reworked in the context of the new world in which we reside.

Scholte posits that, while globalization is deterritorialization, it also promotes *reterritorialization*. He argues that deterritorialization makes way for relationships (human or other) unattached to territorial logic (i.e., the world as a single space). However, this movement from old attachments to nation-states and other territorial boundaries leads to a search for new ways of identifying. He offers the rise of micro-nations (Kurds) and region-nations (Pan-Arabism) as ways of reterritorializing in order to maintain identity. He also gives examples of non-territorial identities that have grown in recent times, such as identities based on race, class, gender and religion.²² While globalization makes way for improvements in communication, access to health care or

²⁰ Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 1-2.

²¹ Castells (2004), 1.

²² Scholte (2005), 227-230.

other services, and enhanced opportunities for many who would otherwise lack such, globalization also increases volatility and thereby decreases stability. In other words, some benefit from globalization while others generally experience its negative consequences. Either way, globalization leads to new forms of identity for all. Some find identity in the global market and similar spaces, while others desire something “more.” Many turn to religion as a way of finding stability and giving meaning to it all.

Understanding Identity

It is important to first explore the concept of identity itself before theorizing about its connection to religion, globalization, and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Castells gives three basic forms of identity.²³ The first is what he terms legitimizing identity, in which identity is established by the dominant system in order to justify or validate its existence and ideals. For instance, in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s concept of Empire, the dominating ideal must pervade the identities of the people who constitute the empire.²⁴ The Empire *imposes* identity. Nationalism, although quite different from the identity associated with Empire, is another example of legitimizing identity. For example, in the United States, ideas of freedom and democracy are vehemently promoted, particularly in this era of the Iraq war, in order to establish greater commitment to the US and thus, in a way, legitimate the efforts in Iraq.

The second form of identity Castells offers is that of *resistance identity*. Resistance identity is forged by those who are somehow diminished by the system of which they are a part. Due to this marginalization, they choose to form identities that

²³ Castells (2004), 8-11.

²⁴ See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

reject the system in some way. This can be manifested ideologically and politically. This is certainly an option that has often been chosen by religious groups. Instead of assimilating or, alternatively, walking the difficult balance between assimilation and resistance, these religious groups retreat and isolate themselves. Two examples of this type of reaction are the Amish and Hasidic Jews.

Castells' final form of identity is project identity. Project identity is forged by those who desire to redefine their position in society and thus could potentially come from the same pool as those who form a resistance identity. The difference, however, is that those who form project identities seek to *renovate* the system of which they are part, rather than simply resisting. I demonstrate through a look at the role of Gush Emunim and Hamas in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that religious groups that have formed project identities rather than resistance identities have experienced proliferation in the context of globalization.

Globalization + Failure of Secular Regimes = Identity Crisis

Sudhir Kakar asserts that, "as modernization picks up pace, individuals will increasingly seek membership in groups with absolute value systems and with little tolerance for deviation from their norms."²⁵ Globalization, according to Kakar, causes four major crises. The first is loss of traditional roles and values. The second is helplessness, or an inability to find support from the global world. The third is humiliation, caused by the "homogenizing and hegemonizing impact of modernization

²⁵ Sudhir Kakar, *The Colors of Violence: Cultural Identities, Religion, and Conflict* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 143.

and globalization.”²⁶ The final effect of globalization, according to Kakar, is lowered self-worth. All of these are caused by the global values of individualism, equality, reason and liberty. While these values can certainly have positive effects, they also at times assault traditional values and thereby leave people grasping to maintain some semblance of self-identity.

Kakar states that, “in bringing together people in closer proximity, the processes of globalization paradoxically increase the self-consciousness which separates and differentiates.”²⁷ As people come in contact with other ways of thinking and believing, self-examination occurs and differentiation results. Kakar argues that, “cultural identity, like its individual counterpart, is an unconscious human acquirement which becomes consciously salient only when there is a perceived threat to its integrity.”²⁸ Thus as globalization assaults identity, it also creates even more need for ascertaining identity.

Secular nationalist regimes in both the Arab World (Nasser’s Pan-Arabism and Arafat’s P.L.O.) and in Israel have experienced many setbacks and, in some cases, have entirely failed to provide lasting identity for their constituents. The proximity of the “other” has spurred the search for identity, as many Jews feel the need to differentiate themselves from the Arabs (as well as the secular world) as the chosen people. Many Palestinian Muslims, in the wake of the influx of Jews, grasp for their own identity as the true children of God. A clash of revelations is at work here, and the presence of the other’s revelation calls for the solidification of one’s own revelation.²⁹

²⁶ Kakar (1996), 145-147.

²⁷ Kakar (1996), 147.

²⁸ Kakar (1996), 150.

²⁹ I owe credit for the phrase “clash of revelations” to Carl Raschke.

Manochehr Dorraj argues the connection between identity and the resurgence of religion as follows,

Since the thrust toward homogenization of culture negates the individuality of human existence, then the promise of religious salvation and deliverance is also an attempt to save the individual essence, his/her personhood, his/her soul.³⁰

People crave identity. I will not attempt here to speculate on why this is the case, but suffice it to say that human beings have a tendency to desire an understanding of what life is ultimately “about” and to place themselves within that transcendent context. As globalization creates shifting sand, driving people from national and other traditional identities, people search for solid ground on which to stand.

³⁰ Manochehr Dorraj, “The Crisis of Modernity and Religious Revivalism: A Comparative Study of Islamic Fundamentalism, Jewish Fundamentalism and Liberation Theology,” *Social Compass* 46, no. 2 (1999): 226.

Chapter 2:

Religio-Political Groups- A Solution to the Crisis

It is no secret that religion has experienced revival in recent times. Although the secularization hypothesis predicted a decline of religion, the opposite has occurred. Religion has resurged and adapted, making itself both a relevant and powerful force in the global world.

Martin Marty points out that throughout history, “a vast number of humans arranged their lives by some sort of transcendent set of symbols and often through organization of religious groups devoted to them.”³¹ Identity is crucial, and religious identity has proved particularly enduring throughout history.

Why Religion?

Sudhir Kakar states that,

The rhetoric of fundamentalist politics attempts to seduce its target group with a sense of participation in a collectivity with a transcendent purpose, giving a higher value or meaning to life than would be given by any secular politics. The group addressed by the fundamentalist has the very satisfying feeling of being “chosen,” with a sense of mission connected

³¹ Martin E. Marty, “Introduction: The Role of Religion in Cultural Foundations of Ethnonationalism,” in *Religion, Ethnicity, and Self-Identity: Nations in Turmoil*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997), 2.

with a sacred purpose, sanctified by God, and superior to the adversary's mission which is not similarly blessed or is blessed by a lesser god.³²

Religion offers something that other forms of identity cannot offer, and in conflict-charged areas of the world, this is all the more salient. Due to the combined effects of globalization and the failure of secular political parties, religio-politics thrive in the presence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Hava Lazarus-Yafeh notes the following:

It seems as if modernity, instead of bringing about, as many scholars once believed, a greater resemblance between all societies, has generated only similar negative reactions in the so-called 'global village' against itself, and the 'going back to the sources' may be the answer to a deep human need for particularism and uniqueness in each civilization.³³

Religio-political groups replace old identities as they react to the homogenizing attempts of globalization. They help people to retain traditional values and a sense of uniqueness as they reappropriate traditional religious ideologies.

The Growth of Islamism

Islamism in particular has experienced a revival in relatively recent years, as the religion, in the words of John Esposito, "has reasserted itself more forcefully in both the personal and public lives of Muslim societies in a striking and sometimes dramatic manner often called the Islamic resurgence, Islamic revivalism, or Islamic Fundamentalism."³⁴ Esposito credits this resurgence to four common factors. First, there has been an identity crisis within Muslim societies. Second, the failure of the West to "come through" on its promises has left the Muslim world disillusioned. Third, a

³² Kakar (1996), 177.

³³ Lazarus-Yafeh (1993), 44-45.

³⁴ John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 162.

renewed sense of pride and power due to military and economic success has contributed to this revival. Finally, there is “a quest for a more authentic identity rooted in an Islamic past.”³⁵ All of these are factors directly or indirectly related to globalization and its identity “crisis.” Esposito has also characterized six tenets of Islamic resurgence:

1. Islam is a total way of life; religion is integral to politics, law and society.
2. The failure of Muslim societies is due to their exit from “the straight path of Islam” and the following of a western secular path.
3. Renewal of society requires a return to Islam.
4. Shari’a law should replace western-style laws.
5. Westernization is condemned, but modernization is acceptable.
6. Dedicated Muslims should lead by example, struggling against corruption and social injustice.³⁶

Though not all Islamist movements are homogenous, nor are they necessarily unwavering, it is important to understand this ideological basis on which Hamas certainly stands.

Oliver Roy notes that in the wake of globalization, “the religious community is increasingly seen as an identity group, emphasizing the ‘us and them’ approach.”³⁷ He subsequently observes that, “Religion and culture no longer have a relationship with a territory or given society...it means that religion has to define itself solely in terms of religion.”³⁸ Globalization changes Islam in particular from being a cultural expression of faith to being more or less universal. Islam is spreading around the world and is finding itself, according to Roy, expressed in either liberal or fundamentalist terms.³⁹ The

³⁵ Esposito (1988), 153.

³⁶ Esposito (1988), 160-170.

³⁷ Oliver Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 35.

³⁸ Roy (2004), 38.

³⁹ Roy (2004), 146.

fundamentalists see themselves as the preservers of true Islam, fighting for traditional values against those of secularism.

Changes in Judaism

Judaism, like Islam, has changed with globalization. Caryn Aviv and David Shneer, in their work *New Jews*, emphasize that most global Jews are at home wherever they live. They are not longing for Israel, and thus the term “Diaspora” is obsolete as it implies a longed-for homeland. The authors argue that, “Traditional Jewish texts always figured (and continue to figure) a mythic Zion as the eternal Jewish home, the place to which the Messiah would return Jews.”⁴⁰ Zion is certainly a mythical place in Judaism, and it is solely a mythical place for some Jews.⁴¹ But for many others, it is necessarily both mythical and physical. Globalization causes both post-Zionism (referring to the Jews who have moved beyond Zionism) and neo-Zionism. This second category of Jews do not see an end to the concept of Diaspora; for them, Israel is necessarily the Jewish homeland. This is integral to their faith.

Uri Ram, utilizing Benjamin Barber’s concept of “McWorld vs. Jihad,” explores this particular trend in Israel. He discusses the two-pronged effect of globalization on the country, as part of Israel universalizes, promoting neo-liberalism, and the other part of Israel particularizes, upholding neo-fundamentalism.⁴² He argues that, while Israel was founded as a Jewish and Democratic state, the country has split into camps dedicated to

⁴⁰ Caryn Aviv and David Shneer, *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 3-4.

⁴¹ See Aviv and Shneer (2005) for further discussion of this point.

⁴² Uri Ram, *The Globalization of Israel: McWorld In Tel Aviv, Jihad in Jerusalem* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 3.

one of these two qualifiers at the expense of the other. While the “post-Zionist” camp finds the Democratic element of the Israeli state to be the most salient, the Jewish identity of Israel trumps its Democratic side for the neo-Zionists.⁴³

Conflict and Religio-Politics

Conflict feeds identity, as in wars people discover distinct boundaries that help them to define themselves, particularly in opposition to an “other.” The desire to sort things (people, actions, beliefs, and so on) into categories is a mark of the human race. Samuel Peleg argues, following the thought of Mark Juergensmeyer, that,

Religious violence does not erupt solely because of political disagreements. Politics is a façade for the sociocultural cleavage. Religious violence erupts in full force when the agelong feud between order and chaos is inspired and harnessed to the political battles of the present. Thus political opposition becomes a crusade and a political dissident turns into an angel of death.⁴⁴

Peleg is correct in this assessment. Religions have historically separated the world according to a system of order and chaos.⁴⁵ Today’s religio-political groups live according to this dichotomy, interpreting political events through the lens of their world order and seeing “the other” as part of the chaos that one needs to extract from his world so that order can be maintained.

Growth of religion can be found in all corners of the globe due in large part to globalization, but the combined effect of conflict and globalization in Israel/Palestine proves particularly effective in promoting growth. While globalization toys with identity,

⁴³ Ram (2008), 6-7.

⁴⁴ Samuel Peleg, “They Shoot Prime Ministers Too, Don’t They? Religious Violence in Israel: Premises, Dynamics, and Prospects,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 20 (1997): 244.

⁴⁵ See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, (London: Routledge, 2003), for further discussion of this concept.

conflict surrounding religion and land makes the need to find a stable, even transcendent, identity all the more important.

Chapter Three:

Hamas

Hamas, an acronym for *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*, which in Arabic means Islamic Resistance Movement, is an Islamic movement dedicated to the liberation of Palestine. The organization emerged during the first Intifada in 1988 under the leadership of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin. Islamic fundamentalism in Palestine in general rose before this, however, particularly in the wake of the 1967 War. Arab failure in the Six Day War essentially destroyed Nasserism, the secular/socialist Arab nationalist promoted by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. An increase in Saudi power in the Arab world and the loss of the holy city of Jerusalem also combined to lead many disillusioned Arab peoples to find meaning and hope in Islamic fundamentalism.⁴⁶

Islamicization of the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict

James Piscatori points out that the 1967 War unified Muslims in the Arab world around a common cause and simultaneously congealed their outrage at Israel, transferring the Palestinian problem from an Arab problem to a specifically Muslim problem: “[After

⁴⁶ James Piscatori, “Islamic Fundamentalism in the Wake of the Six Day War: Religious Self-Assertion in Political Conflict,” in *Jewish Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Laurence Silberstein (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 80-83.

the 1967 War] Israel was not only in the midst of dar al-Islam, the land of believers, but was also in control of one of its sustaining centers.”⁴⁷ Israel, according to Islamist thought, is a “spearhead of Western hegemony and an alien body in the heart of the Arab world.”⁴⁸ Islamists credited the 1967 failure to a lack of Arab/Palestinian commitment to Islam and the application of its teachings.⁴⁹

Political groups with Islam as their central theme began emerging in the West Bank and Gaza in the 1970’s in contrast to the P.L.O., which had utilized Islam as only one of several components of its political philosophy.⁵⁰ Elie Rekhess argues that Islamism became very appealing to Muslims, and particularly to those in Palestine, due to the fact that,

Israel was a direct daily threat to Muslims because it had sprung up in the heart of the Muslim homeland on the dead bodies of the Muslim Palestinian people.⁵¹

Loren Lybarger observes that Islamism became “Palestinianized,” with less focus on the worldwide *umma* and more focus on the liberation of Palestine as being the first step in the worldwide Islamic revolution.⁵² Because the Islamism that came into Palestine via the Muslim Brotherhood took on the Palestinian cause, it gained a large following in the region. Lybarger states that, because of this shift, “[Islamism’s] orientations have become diffuse within the society, integrating into Palestinian nationalist sensibilities and, in so doing, transforming, and becoming transformed by,

⁴⁷ Piscatori (1993), 84.

⁴⁸ Abu-Amr, “Critical Issues in Arab Islamic Fundamentalism,” 39.

⁴⁹ Abu-Amr, “Critical Issues in Arab Islamic Fundamentalism,” 39.

⁵⁰ Elie Rekhess, “The Resurgence of Palestinian Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza” in *Jewish Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Laurence Silberstein (New York: New York University Press, 1993).

⁵¹ Rekhess (1993), 96.

⁵² Loren D. Lybarger, *Identity and Religion in Palestine: The Struggle between Islamism and Secularism in the Occupied Territories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 10.

these sensibilities."⁵³ Thus, while Islamism was "Palestinianized," the conflict was, in turn, Islamicized.

Islamists attribute the Arab victory in the 1973 War to the fact that Islam, as opposed to Nasser's Arab secular nationalism, was invoked.⁵⁴ During the first Intifada, Islamic rhetoric was employed, as it was both familiar and straightforward.⁵⁵ Hamas rose up as Islamic Jihad, a predecessor to Hamas, began to weaken. Rekhess asserts that the reason for this power shift was that Hamas, unlike Islamic Jihad, chose a "long-range, gradualist Islamic strategy."⁵⁶ Hamas chose to focus not solely on rhetoric or terrorism, but on education and community development in Palestine. In the words of Rekhess, "their main objective was to win the hearts of fellow Muslims and reorient the Muslim community to the righteous religious path."⁵⁷

Ideological Foundation of Hamas: The Charter of Allah

The Charter of Allah was drafted at the time of Hamas' rise. This document outlines the main objectives and tasks of the organization. The Charter repeats the motto of the Muslim Brotherhood, "Allah is its goal, the Prophet its model, the Qur'an its Constitution, Jihad its path and death for the cause of Allah its most sublime belief."⁵⁸ The ultimate goal of Hamas at the time of its founding was "to raise the banner of Allah over

⁵³ Lybarger (2007), 12.

⁵⁴ Abu-Amr, "Critical Issues in Arab Islamic Fundamentalism," 39.

⁵⁵ Rekhess (1993), 97.

⁵⁶ Rekhess (1993), 97.

⁵⁷ Rekhess (1993), 97.

⁵⁸ *The Charter of Allah*, Article Eight.

every inch of Palestine.”⁵⁹ According to this line of thought, “Israel has no right to exist in Palestine, which is a *waqf* land to the Muslims.”⁶⁰ Peace negotiations, according to this line of thought, go against Islam and are thus undesirable.

The Charter states that,

Israel will rise and will remain erect until Islam eliminates it as it had eliminated its predecessors. The Islamic World is burning. It is incumbent upon each one of us to pour some water, little as it may be, with a view of extinguishing as much of the fire as he can, without awaiting action by the others.⁶¹

Israel is viewed as a religious and ideological assault on the Islamic world. The Charter refers to Palestine as a *waqf*, or a piece of land set apart for religious purposes, of which no part can be abandoned.⁶² The Charter quotes a hadith that records a conversation between Muhammad and his companion Ma’adh ibn Jabl:

O Ma’adh, Allah is going to grant you victory over Syria after me, from Al-Arish to the Euphrates, while its men, women, and female slaves will be dwelling there until the Day of Resurrection. Those of you who chose [to dwell in one of the plains of Syria or Palestine] will be in a state of Jihad to the Day of Resurrection.⁶³

The land of Palestine, according the Hamas’ interpretation of this hadith along with other hadiths, is something of a sacred land that will inevitably generate conflict. It is the responsibility of Muslims to fight to control the space.

Hamas is ideologically grounded in Islam, as the Charter states, “The Islamic Resistance Movement draws its guidelines from Islam; derives from it its thinking,

⁵⁹ Frank J. Trapp, “Palestine: HAMAS and Religious Extremism,” in *Religion and Politics in the Developing World: Explosive Interactions*, ed. R.G. Mainuddin (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2002), 103.

⁶⁰ Ziad Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza: Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 44-45.

⁶¹ *The Charter of Allah*, preface.

⁶² *The Charter of Allah*, Article Eleven.

⁶³ Quoted in *The Charter of Allah*, Article Thirty-Four.

interpretations and views about existence, life and humanity; refers back to it for its conduct; and is inspired by it in whatever step it takes.”⁶⁴ Hamas believes that, “only under the shadow of Islam could the members of all regions coexist in safety and security for their lives, properties and rights. In the absence of Islam, conflict arises, oppression reigns, corruption is rampant and struggles and wars prevail.”⁶⁵ Until Islam has full authority in the entire land of Palestine, there is no hope for peace as only through Islam is peace possible. The Charter poignantly draws out this point as follows:

Hamas finds itself at a period of time when Islam has waned away from the reality of life. For this reason, the checks and balances have been upset, concepts have become confused, and values have been transformed; evil has prevailed, oppression and obscurity have reigned; cowards have turned tigers, homelands have been usurped, people have been uprooted and are wandering all over the globe. The state of truth has disappeared and was replaced by the state of evil. Nothing has remained in its right place, for when Islam is removed from the scene, everything changes. These are the motives. As to the objectives: discarding the evil, crushing it and defeating it, so that truth may prevail, homelands revert [to their owners], calls for prayer be heard from their mosques, announcing the reinstatement of the Muslim state. Thus, people and things will revert to their true place.⁶⁶

A major influence behind Islamism is Sayyid Qutb, whose ideas certainly inspire the mindset of Hamas. Qutb was an Egyptian member of the Muslim Brotherhood who viewed Egyptian society as having reverted to a state of *jahiliyya*, which refers to the pre-Islamic “state of polytheistic chaos and permissiveness marked by a willful ‘ignorance’ of the one god and his ethical commandments for social organization and life conduct.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *The Charter of Allah*, Article One.

⁶⁵ *The Charter of Allah*, Article Six.

⁶⁶ *The Charter of Allah*, Article Nine.

⁶⁷ Lybarger (2007), 77.

Palestinian Islamists reappropriate this idea, as they see Israel, rather than Egypt, as representing *jahiliyya*.⁶⁸ Thus it is necessary to re-Islamize the region.

The main objectives of Hamas since its beginnings have been to liberate Palestine from Israeli occupation, to establish an Islamic state in Palestine, and to transform society according to true Islam.⁶⁹ Mishal goes on to say, however, that one must not view the ideas and objectives of Hamas as stagnant. Rather, Hamas should be viewed as a flexible organization, fragmented within and willing to compromise to find the balance between ideals and practical gains.⁷⁰ For example, while Hamas in theory rejects any negotiations with Israel, the movement has in reality adopted the idea of a *temporary* settlement for Palestine in Gaza and the West Bank.⁷¹ This settlement, though, is always temporary, and the concession only exists as a means to eventually bringing Hamas closer to its ultimate goal.

Methods and Politics of the Movement

The violence associated with Hamas surfaced during the first Intifada, although Hamas must not be defined by this violence. Mishal calls Hamas's choice of resistance "controlled violence."⁷² While Hamas will use violence as a *means* to attain certain goals, violence is not an end in itself and is not desirable if there is another, non-violent option.⁷³ The movement offers a more integrated approach, based on ideals but not set in

⁶⁸ Lybarger (2007), 14.

⁶⁹ Shaul Mishal, "The Pragmatic Dimension of the Palestinian Hamas: A Network Perspective," *Armed Forces and Society* 29, no. 4 (2003): 569.

⁷⁰ Mishal (2003), 572-574.

⁷¹ Mishal (2003), 576.

⁷² Mishal (2003), 577.

⁷³ Mishal (2003), 577.

only one way of reaching its goals. This position contributes to its appeal to Palestinian people searching for identity.

Mosques are used as central organizations for Hamas, and the movement has four distinct wings for coordinating its activities: military activities, political activities, internal security, and Islamic preaching (*da'wa*).⁷⁴ The organization has both inside and outside leadership, with the outside leadership being organized hierarchically and the inside run much more informally. While the outside leadership gives orders, it is the decisions of the inside leaders that are, for the most part, actually followed.⁷⁵ Hamas, once again, displays its relevance to the Palestinian people.

Hamas has had mixed relations with the Palestinian Authority (PA). The organizations seem to mutually analyze participation with the other from a cost-benefit approach, with both parties avoiding full-fledged confrontation.⁷⁶ Hamas needs the power and resources that the PA can provide, and yet co-opting with the authority would compromise the vision that Hamas provides. Thus Hamas sees the PA as an instrument, and though it will not participate on the political level as an official party, Hamas endorses the political involvement of individual Hamas supporters.⁷⁷

Terror campaigns marked Hamas's activities in the 1990's. Acts of terror, however, were aimed at concrete goals. The terrorism of the 1990's actually decreased popular support for Hamas, and the Wye Memorandum under the Clinton administration called for the PA, the US and Israel to collaborate against the use of violence by Hamas.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Mishal (2003), 582.

⁷⁵ Mishal (2003), 583.

⁷⁶ Mishal (2003), 579-580.

⁷⁷ Mishal (2003), 579.

⁷⁸ Trapp (2002), 112.

Thus the movement was pragmatically forced to find different means to attain their goals.

Although the acts of terrorism by Hamas defined their activity in the 1990's, in the eyes of many, terrorism was not the only method the organization was using at the time. Hamas had an unofficial presence in the elections that were taking place in Palestine, supporting individual candidates as well as collaborating with non-Islamic movements.⁷⁹ The second PA parliamentary elections, which took place in 2006, brought about great success for Hamas, demonstrating the organization's current credibility among the Palestinian people as well as Hamas's continuing flexibility and willingness to work within the current system.

Hamas is not simply a terrorist group. Rather, Hamas has shown a vast amount of flexibility while maintaining its essential goals. Through social services and both explicit and inexplicit political involvement, Hamas has won the support of many Palestinians. This social support is seen as part and parcel of the Islamic goal in the Charter: "The Islamic Resistance Movement, while breaking its own path, will do its utmost to constitute at the same time a support to the weak, a defense to all the oppressed."⁸⁰ Hamas not only promotes a transcendent purpose in which people find identity, but it has also proved itself relevant to and aware of the day-to-day lives of the Palestinian people.

Lybarger observes that with the failure of the Oslo Process in the late 1990's, Hamas steadily gained in popularity, thus demonstrating the correlation between the failure of the secular government in Palestine and the growth of the Islamic movement.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Trapp (2002), 115.

⁸⁰ *The Charter of Allah*, Article Ten.

⁸¹ Lybarger (2007), 5.

This trend is even more observable currently. Lybarger cites a June 2004 Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research study, which shows that the approval rating for Fatah since March 2003 has remained at 28% throughout the Palestinian territories. However, Hamas' approval rating from the same time had grown from 20% to 24%, and the total Islamist backing (including Hamas, Islamic Jihad and others) had jumped from 29% to 35% overall.⁸²

In January 2006, Hamas, under the guise of an electoral list called *Change and Reform*, won elections for Palestine's legislative council. Jeremy Jones notes that these elections were among the most free and fair seen in the region.⁸³ In 2007, Hamas forcefully usurped control of the Gaza Strip. As support for Fatah, the majority in the legislative council since the mid-1990's, has diminished in recent years following an extended failure to deliver anything meaningful in the way of peace negotiations, popular backing of Hamas has increased.⁸⁴ Instead of making empty promises to negotiate a satisfactory peace agreement with Israel, Hamas shuns the notion of a peace agreement almost entirely. Hamas's social activity is vast, with one estimate allotting up to 90% of Hamas's finances to social welfare projects.⁸⁵ Hamas has successfully offered a voice other than the PA for the Palestinian people, and the organization does much to merit the support of the public.

⁸² Lybarger (2007), 74.

⁸³ Jeremy Jones, *Negotiating Change: The New Politics of the Middle East* (London: I.B. Taurus and Co., 2007), 61.

⁸⁴ Jones (2007), 59.

⁸⁵ George Michael, *The Enemy of My Enemy: The Alarming Convergence of Militant Islam and the Extreme Right*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 60.

Beyond Nationalism

Palestinians have lacked cohesive leadership since the start of the conflict and, as Rekhess argues, "...the rising tide of religious feelings in the West Bank and Gaza is indicative not only of the Islamicization of the Israeli-Arab conflict, but also of the further fragmentation of the Palestinian national movement."⁸⁶ Ziad Abu-Amr takes this idea further:

The failure of other ideologies and the resulting ideological vacuum have made Islam a natural choice for the faithful who dream of restoring a historical Islamic order and for the frustrated laymen who seek solace in their religion and tradition.⁸⁷

Hamas, unlike the PA, goes beyond nationalism. Its Charter states,

Hamas regards Nationalism (Wataniyya) as part and parcel of the religious faith... While other nationalism consist of material, human and territorial considerations, the nationality of Hamas also carries, in additions to all those, the all important divine factors which lend to it its spirit and life; so much so that it connects with the origin of the spirit and the source of life and raises in the skies of the Homeland the Banner of the Lord, thus inexorably connecting earth with Heaven.⁸⁸

Hamas offers nationalism plus transcendent identity, connecting the Palestinian people to their spiritual roots in the land. They are not simply a nation, but, like the religious Zionists, understand themselves as a people with spiritual ties to Palestine.

Elie Rekhess summarizes the appeal of Islamism in Palestine as follows,

The growing strength of Islam in the West Bank and Gaza illustrates that it remains an authentic symbol of identification for Muslims in general and for Muslim Palestinians in the occupied territories in particular. It is a powerful historical, cultural, and socio-political frame of reference which cohesively binds the local Muslim society. For the Palestinians, the Islamic alternative provides both a valid explanation for a disturbing reality and a comprehensive solution deeply rooted in their religio-

⁸⁶ Rekhess (1993), 102.

⁸⁷ Abu-Amr, "Critical Issues in Arab Islamic Fundamentalism," 38.

⁸⁸ *The Charter of Allah*, Article Twelve.

political heritage. Thus, Islam offers the Palestinians a promising path for the future that is well anchored in a familiar, acceptable set of norms and values.⁸⁹

Hamas is not just another political group in Palestine. The movement is deeply rooted in a religious orientation that is very important and grounding for many Palestinians. While Palestinians grow increasingly disillusioned with their plight and the failures of the Palestinian Authority, Hamas reorients the world for Palestinians while it provides identity, belonging and hope.

⁸⁹ Rekhess (1993), 101-102.

Chapter Four:

Gush Emunim

While Hamas continues to be an obvious force on the Palestinian side of the conflict, the religio-political group I have chosen to examine on the Israeli side often lies “under the radar,” so to speak. Gush Emunim is not a concrete organization but rather permeates the conflict in a less palpable way. I argue that Gush Emunim can be held at least partially responsible for the continued presence of religious Zionism in Israeli politics, a large factor contributing to the inability of Israel to pursue more vehemently a viable peace agreement.

The Jewish or Democratic State of Israel

Israel is currently divided between Neo-Zionists and Post-Zionists. The Neo-Zionists push Zionism, generally with a religious slant, while the Post-Zionists have moved past Zionism altogether. The Post-Zionists desire that the state of Israel be a nation like any other nation, with equal rights for all citizens. This divide is a product of globalization in Israel, which leads some to embrace liberalism and others to embrace fundamentalism.⁹⁰ Uri Ram argues that, while the official stance of Zionism calls Israel

⁹⁰ Ram (2008), 3.

both “Jewish and Democratic,” the push to globalize splits these two. Some (i.e., the Neo-Zionists) tend towards the “Jewish” and others (the Post-Zionists) toward the “Democratic.”⁹¹ The tension between these two pieces of Israel’s identity are apparent even in the 1948 Israeli Proclamation of Independence, which characterizes Israel as a state for the Jews, then goes on to state the following:

The state of Israel will promote the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; will be based on the principles of liberty, justice and peace...will unfold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of religion, race or sex; will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, education and culture...⁹²

Samuel Peleg notes the striking presence of this conflict in the Law of Return, enacted in 1950. He states that,

This ambivalence in the character of the state fed on and further consolidated two competing images of Zionism: Israeli nationalism and Jewish nationalism. The former is a civic conception that recognizes a legal basis of authority and stresses the democratic nature of the state, whereas the latter emphasizes the ethnoreligious aspect of the nation and respects traditional and charismatic bases of authority.⁹³

The tension present in the birth of Israel has escalated as Neo- and Post-Zionists fight for control of the future of the state of Israel. While Post-Zionists ultimately desire peace and quality of life for Israelis and others, and thus are prepared for territorial compromise, the Neo-Zionists remain committed to the attainment of the entire *Eretz Yisrael*. Post-Zionists face roadblocks in the Israeli government, where Gush Emunim ideology continues to creep in. Peace seekers in the region also encounter barriers to the peace process in the Palestinian camp where factions cannot agree on a stance. Neo-Zionists have not yet been able to exert enough control to sway the Israeli government

⁹¹ Ram (2008), 6-7.

⁹² Peleg (1997), 229.

⁹³ Peleg (1997), 229-230.

entirely, and of course are hindered by international pressure to make peace with the Palestinians through territorial concessions. It seems the conflict is, once again, at a stalemate.

According to Israel Shahak and Norton Mezvinsky, Israelis tend to be particularly ideological, with an electoral turnout of over eighty percent.⁹⁴ Phrases like “Jewish blood” and “Gentiles” are thrown around in Israeli politics, and Palestinians are often referenced as “Arabs living in Israel.”⁹⁵ Shahak and Mezvinsky argue,

“Almost all of Israel A and a great majority of Israel B (the exception being some of the fundamentalist Jews) strongly adhere to Zionist ideology, which in belief, holds that all or at least the majority of Jews should emigrate to Palestine, which as the Land of Israel, belongs to all Jews and should be a Jewish State...it’s not all about the power of the actual religious parties, but the fact that the Zionist ideology also is found, even if less intensely, among Israel A, who makes concessions to the religious parties.”⁹⁶

Uri Ram argues that Binyamin Netanyahu, the current Prime Minister of Israel, perfectly personifies the discrepancy at work in Israeli society. He supports the free market *and* promotes the interests of national-religious Jewish settlers.⁹⁷

Laurence Silberstein, referencing Amos Oz, notes that, “[In Oz’s view] the real dispute within Israel is not about territories, security, or borders, but ‘an argument about the nature of Judaism and the image of man.’”⁹⁸ An idea central to religious Zionism that is absent from secular Zionism is the uniqueness of the Jewish people. According to religious Zionists, the Jews are not to be “normalized,” but rather are to act in accordance

⁹⁴ Israel Shahak and Norton Mezvinsky, *Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 6.

⁹⁵ Shahak and Mezvinsky (2004), 72.

⁹⁶ Shahak and Mezvinsky (2004), 6, 14. Israel A refers to the “secular” Israelis, while Israel B refers to the “religious” Israelis.

⁹⁷ Ram (2008), 162-3.

⁹⁸ Laurence J Silberstein, *Religion, Identity, Modernity: Theoretical Issues in the Study of Jewish Fundamentalism* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 15.

with their uniqueness. This informs the way religious Zionists understand their moral duties in contrast to those of the rest of humanity. Rabbi Shlomo Aviner summarized this understanding well:

From the point of view of mankind's humanistic morality we were wrong in [taking the land] from the Canaanites. There is only one catch. The command of God ordered us to be the people of the land of Israel.⁹⁹

The covenant relationship between God and His people Israel suggests a fundamental difference in the laws that apply to them versus the laws that apply to others. According to religious Zionism, Jews receive commands directly from God (revealed through scripture or through history) that override the "humanistic" laws of man.

The Hebrew Scriptures are referenced as the basis of the Jewish right to the land. In particular, Genesis 12-13 records the story of Abram (later called Abraham). God calls Abram to travel to a particular land, and in 13:14-15, God says to Abram, "Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever."¹⁰⁰ The Jewish people understand themselves to be the descendents of Abraham, as do the Muslims. However, the Jews assert that God gave the land to the descendents of Abraham's son Isaac rather than his son Ishmael as Genesis 17: 19-21 reads as follows:

God said, "No, but your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you; I

⁹⁹ Quoted in Ian S. Lustick, "Jewish Fundamentalism and the Israeli-Palestinian Impasse," in *Jewish Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Laurence J. Silberstein (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 112.

¹⁰⁰ Genesis 13:14-15, NRSV.

will bless him and make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But by covenant I will establish with Isaac...”¹⁰¹

Religious Zionists also point to God’s words in Ezekiel 36:24 as a prophecy of the state of Israel: “I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land.”¹⁰²

Kookism: The Ideological Roots of Gush Emunim

Gush Emunim, meaning “the Bloc of the Faithful,” has its roots in the teachings of the Rabbis Kook. While many other Rabbis and religious Jews (particularly ultra-orthodox) viewed the Zionist movement as heretical with its secular, humanistic goals, Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak Kook (“the Elder”), chief rabbi of Palestine before his death in 1935, supported the secular Zionist movement from a religious standpoint. Though his teachings were not aggressively political and were not employed as such until after the 1967 war, he certainly set the groundwork for the forceful political action adopted by Gush Emunim.¹⁰³

Kook the Elder reworked Kabbalah’s notion of two Messiahs to support both the secular state of Israel as well as the “redemptive” process of settling all of *Eretz Yisrael*. Gush Emunim’s ideology today rests on this Messianic idea. Zechariah 9:9 is the Biblical basis for Kabbalah’s understanding of the two Messiahs. The verse states:

¹⁰¹ Genesis 17: 19-21, NRSV.

¹⁰² Ezekiel 36:24, NRSV.

¹⁰³ Ehud Sprinzak, *Brother against Brother: Violence and Extremism in Israeli Politics from Altalena to the Rabin Assassination* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 153.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and
riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.¹⁰⁴

The teachings of Kabbalah interpret the mention of both “donkey” *and* “colt” to indicate that two Messiahs rather than only one will come to save the Jewish people. While Kabbalah states that the first Messiah will be militant and will pave the way for the second redemptive Messiah, Kook the Elder understood the first Messiah as a *collective* Messiah rather than an individual. He believed that he and his followers were this Messiah. Gush Emunim maintains this belief and sees itself and/or its leaders as this collective Messiah.¹⁰⁵

The second part of Rabbi Kook the Elder’s understanding of the collective Messiah is important as it guides the way Gush Emunim interacts with the secular state of Israel. The first Messiah in Zechariah 9:9 rides on a donkey. Kook maintained that the donkey is the unfaithful Jews, and thus the collective Messiah “rides on” them.¹⁰⁶ In other words, the secular state of Israel is the means by which Gush Emunim, the collective Messiah, paves the way for redemption through the coming of the second Messiah. The state is seen as an ignorant tool necessary for the process of redemption. Kook promoted with this the idea of the sacralization of the profane.¹⁰⁷ Secular Zionism is given legitimacy and even made sacred by religious Zionism’s use of it.¹⁰⁸ This self-

¹⁰⁴ Zechariah 9:9, NRSV.

¹⁰⁵ Shahak and Mezvinsky (2004), 66-67.

¹⁰⁶ Shahak and Mezvinsky (2004), 67.

¹⁰⁷ Sprinzak (1999), 118.

¹⁰⁸ It is interesting to note here that, although Gush tends toward a literal reading of Scripture, this essential piece of their ideology requires much symbolic interpretation.

understanding as a collective Messiah explains much of the behavior of Gush Emunim since its inception; a Messiah cannot err as it is under divine guidance.¹⁰⁹

Two other important ideas that derive from the teachings of Kook the Elder are that of satanic presence and that of sanctification through touch. Kook taught that non-Jews are the manifestation of Satan here on earth.¹¹⁰ This belief leads to an understanding of the fight against non-Jews as a spiritual rather than earthly battle, and, if this idea is extended further, to kill non-Jews is to kill at least part of Satan and his presence on earth. Though this view is generally not explicitly trumpeted among Gush Emunim followers, it is the logical extension of the idea that non-Jews are Satan's presence on earth. Kook also taught that through settlement, religious Jews are sanctifying the land simply by touching it since they themselves are holy.¹¹¹ Settlement does not present an ethical dilemma for the Gush followers as they accept this teaching and thus see themselves as sanctifiers of *Eretz Yisrael*.

Shahak and Mezvinsky assert that,

[Gush Emunim followers] believe that Satan, as described in the Cabbala, is rational and well-versed in logic; they believe further that the power of Satan and of his earthly manifestation, the non-Jews, can at times only be broken by irrational action. Gush Emunim thus founded settlements on the exact days of United States Secretary of State James Baker's recurrent arrivals in Israel not merely to demonstrate Gush Emunim power but also as part of a mystical design to break the power of Satan and its American incarnation.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Shahak and Mezvinsky (2004), 66.

¹¹⁰ Shahak and Mezvinsky (2004), 66.

¹¹¹ The difficulty with this explanation is that the land of Israel is supposedly already holy, so making it holy by touching it/settling it seems redundant. It is possible that Gush Emunim views it as corrupted since Palestinians have been living on it rather than Jews, and hence there is need to sanctify it. However, I could not find a discussion of Gush Emunim's approach to this seemingly paradoxical viewpoint.

¹¹² Shahak and Mezvinsky (2004), 66.

The ideology of Rabbi Kook the Elder has important implications for how the Gush view “the other,” and in particular, the Palestinian. The “Palestinian problem” for Gush Emunim does not involve considerations of human rights. The problem rather is to figure out what their status should be living in *Eretz Yisrael*.¹¹³ How can they fit into the redemptive process that is happening? The question for Gush Emunim regarding the Palestinian people differs greatly from the “Palestinian question” debated by others.

Peleg asserts that the extremism promoted by Gush Emunim,

while regarded as meritorious by the movement...represents social irresponsibility toward the society at large. The extremists’ perceptions and ambitions serve to compare what is with what should be, but extremists do not accurately perceive their impact on society; they only conjecture the end result.¹¹⁴

Gush Emunim’s utopian vision of the future overshadows morally questionable actions in the present.

The Organization: Three Triggers

It is beneficial to speak of Gush Emunim as an ideology rather than an official organization, as the influence the Gush has exerted in Israeli society has been heavily ideological. However, the Gush did consolidate for a brief period of time. Gideon Aran has identified three triggers that contributed to the rise of Gush Emunim as an organization.¹¹⁵ The first trigger was that of the 1967 Six Day War. It was in this war that the state of Israel conquered Jerusalem as well as the territory of ancient Judea and

¹¹³ Sprinzak (1999), 126-127.

¹¹⁴ Peleg (1997), 234.

¹¹⁵ See further discussion of Gideon Aran’s three triggers in Gabriel A. Almond, R. Scott Appleby, and Emmanuel Sivan, *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 160-161.

Samaria. Students of Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook (“Kook the Younger”), the son and ideological preserver of Kook the Elder, understood this event as proof of the beginning of redemption. Ehud Sprinzak describes the sentiment surrounding this event as follows:

The God of Israel had once again showed His might. He came to the rescue of his people in their worst moment of fear and anxiety and, as in the days of old, turned an unbearable situation upside-down. In one strike He placed the whole traditional Eretz Israel- the object of prayers and yearnings for thousands of years- in the hands of His loyal servants.¹¹⁶

Though other Israelis were certainly surprised by this victory, Gush Emunim had been waiting for this. Almond, et al., note that, “for Gush Emunim not only is Eretz Yisrael sacred and the center of creation, but Judea and Samaria are its backbone with Jerusalem and, in it, the Temple Mount, at its very core.”¹¹⁷ In May of 1967 Rabbi Kook the Younger had preached a sermon encouraging his followers to support the army of Israel in order to promote the coming of the Messiah.¹¹⁸ The next month, Israel was victorious in the Six Day War. The war, according to Gush Emunim ideology, reflects the creation story, as their life in the holy land has been recreated. The holy people of Israel were now reconnected to the holy land. The return of Zion showed God’s favor and inspired this group of students to further promote the redemptive process.

This victory was crucial to the reinforcement of the ideology of the Gush. Following and reinterpreting Maimonides’ view that redemption was brought about through a series of natural events,¹¹⁹ Gush Emunim believed that human beings could speed up or slow down this redemptive process. The entire biblical land of Israel is

¹¹⁶ Sprinzak (1999), 147.

¹¹⁷ Almond, Appleby and Sivan (2003), 73.

¹¹⁸ Almond, Appleby and Sivan (2003), 140.

¹¹⁹ Sprinzak (1999), 152.

crucial in this redemptive process and, once again, drives Gush Emunim. Ian Lustick states this ideological push eloquently:

For the majority of Jewish fundamentalists, the disposition of the territories [of the West Bank and Gaza] is an explicitly religious question—whether or not the process of God’s redemption of the Jewish people, and of the world as a whole, including the advent of the Messiah himself, will

be brought to its glorious conclusion in the relatively near future, or whether it will be tragically delayed or even halted.¹²⁰

The second trigger recognized by Aran was the 1968 establishment of a settlement in Hebron by Rabbi Moshe Levinger and his followers. In the spring of 1968, Levinger led a group to celebrate Passover in the Park Hotel in Hebron, an Arab city in the West Bank. After Passover, the group stayed, despite the lack of government support and thereby, according to Almond, et al., began the settlement movement that now defines the work of Gush Emunim.¹²¹

The final trigger in the formation of Gush Emunim was the 1973 Yom Kippur War, in which Israel was nearly defeated in a surprise attack by Arab nations. This near defeat demonstrated the possibility of territorial compromise in the eyes of the Israeli government, and to the followers of Kook the Younger showed the danger of leaving a secular government with secular goals to make the decisions. Others have observed that for Gush Emunim, this near failure was a punishment for the Jewish people’s abandonment of true Judaism, and thus Gush Emunim must embody true Judaism and promote the redemption by any possible means.¹²² According to Ian Lustick, this was for

¹²⁰ Lustick (1993), 108.

¹²¹ Almond, Appleby and Sivan (2003), 141.

¹²² For further discussion of this facet of Gush Emunim’s interpretation of the 1973 War, see Dorraj (1999), 236.

Gush Emunim a reminder from God that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was not simply a human political disagreement, and thus normal ways of resolving human conflicts (i.e. compromising peace agreements) should not be considered in this situation. Again, “humanistic” laws and ways do not, according to this ideology, bind the Jewish people. Peace negotiations were a test of the faith of the Jews.¹²³ For followers of “Kookist” ideology, territorial compromise is not an option. Thus the need for settlements in the territory liable to be given away (the West Bank and Gaza) was made ever more clear. In 1974, the year following the Yom Kippur War, the name “Gush Emunim” was created, and the group was established to counter the compromising position of most secular Zionists.

Political Action

The major aim of the newly established Gush Emunim was to create new and continue existing settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. Ehud Sprinzak identifies four stages typical of Gush Emunim settlement activity:

1. A surprise establishment in the occupied territories of a temporary presence, ostensibly for “worship” purposes;
2. A rigid, highly publicized refusal to evacuate the site of religious grounds, with a generous interest expressed in a “constructive” solution for the alleviation of the “unnecessary tensions” with the army;
3. An agreement to compromise and leave the illicit settlement, provided a small yeshiva is established on the controversial site, or the rest of the intruders are allowed to stay in a nearby military camp, and,
4. The establishment, a few years later, of a permanent Jewish settlement on the site of the original initiative.¹²⁴

¹²³ Lustick (1993), 114.

¹²⁴ Sprinzak (1999), 151.

Despite their opposition to the goals of secular Zionism, Gush Emunin often worked with and influenced the secular government in furthering these settlements. This cooperation was, of course, justified through Kook the Elder's idea of the Messiahs as I described earlier. In the 1970's Gush Emunim experienced success in this collaboration as, with the Gush's influence, Shimon Peres, Defense Minister under Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, worked to open up the (formerly restricted) settlement policy of the state of Israel.¹²⁵ A 1992 article by Nadav Shraggai in *Haaretz* discusses a symposium that was organized and underwritten by the Ministry of Religion and the Ministry of Education under the Rabin administration. This symposium, funded by Israeli tax dollars, focused on the following questions: "Is autonomy for resident aliens in the Holy Land feasible?" The keynote speaker, R. Shlomo Goren, asserted that, "Autonomy is tantamount to a denial of the Jewish religion."¹²⁶

In 1977, Menachem Begin became Prime Minister and an alliance was forged between the Israeli government and Gush Emunim; this alliance has endured through the years.¹²⁷ Prime Ministers Peres and Netanyahu insinuated support for Gush Emunim in their refusals to push settlement evacuations. In 1984, Rabbi Meir Kahane, leader of the fundamentalist Kach party and a follow of much Gush Emunim ideology, was elected to the Knesset. His election generated even greater support in Israeli society for the avoidance of territorial concessions.¹²⁸ Rabbi Yehuda Amital, a Gush leader, became a minister in the Israeli government in 1995, showing the persisting intertwinement of the

¹²⁵ Shahak and Mezvinsky (2004), 55.

¹²⁶ Shahak and Mezvinsky (2004), 75.

¹²⁷ Shahak and Mezvinsky (2004), 56.

¹²⁸ Sprinzak (1999), 145-146.

Gush and the Israeli government.¹²⁹ Furthermore, numerous Gush members serve as officers in the select units of the Israeli army. This support through armed service has generated yet more public support for the group's ideology.¹³⁰ Thus, despite Gush Emunim's obvious divergence from the aims of secular Zionism, the group views working with the government as a strategic and, more importantly, *religious* duty because of Kook the Elder's influential Messianic beliefs.

In a 1999 vote, 100 of the 120 Knesset members favored Israel's preservation of all of its settlements.¹³¹ More settlers joined the Israeli army during the Oslo attempt at a peace process, then when the process failed, the number of settlers joining the army decreased. Shahak and Mezvinsky argue that this drop actually displays success on the part of Gush Emunim; the failure of the peace process concurrently forced and allowed Gush to fade into the background:

Perhaps, this development provides us with an example of what is sometimes the fate of fanaticism: the fanatic group thrives when it perceives itself to be in danger or threatened by other parts of its own society. Conversely, when faced by a society that has become unified against what is believed to be an outside threat, the fanatic group is less able to penetrate major institutions such as the army and to influence long-range policy.¹³²

Through the years, Gush Emunim has vacillated between spontaneous and organized action, displaying an ability to adapt to various political and societal situations. Both its founding and dissolution as an organized body occurred in the 1970's.¹³³ The Yesha Council emerged in 1980 out of Gush Emunim to oversee the

¹²⁹ Shahak and Mezvinsky (2004), 63.

¹³⁰ Shahak and Mezvinsky (2004), 68.

¹³¹ Shahak and Mezvinsky (2004), 78.

¹³² Shahak and Mezvinsky (2004), 95.

¹³³ Sprinzak (1999), 134.

settlements in the West Bank and Gaza.¹³⁴ Though Gush Emunim no longer exists as an organization per se, its philosophy persists in many segments of Israeli society.¹³⁵ For example, the National Religious Party finds its ideological roots in Gush Emunim and the “Kookism” on which it is based. The lack of a cohesive governing body does not limit the impact of Gush Emunim, as its followers find identity in its vision rather than its organization.

Gush Emunim has also wavered between support for and opposition to the government of Israel, depending on whether or not the state enacts policies consistent with the goals of Gush Emunim. The *territory* of Israel is more holy than the *state* even though the state is a tool for redemption.¹³⁶ Gush Emunim speaks of the state of Israel being the will of God and uses the victories in the 1967 and 1973 wars as proof for this divine will.¹³⁷ However when the state does not do what Gush Emunim perceives to be the will of God, the group opposes the state and acts independently to promote its own goals.

In the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the highly influential military rabbinate of Israel, acting in accordance with the Rabbis Kook, encouraged the soldiers to “follow in the footsteps of Joshua and to re-establish his divinely ordained conquest of the land of Israel.”¹³⁸

¹³⁴ See further discussion of this in Sprinzak (1999), 136-137.

¹³⁵ Eliezer Don-Yehiya, “Two Movements of Messianic Awakening and Their Attitude to Halacha, Nationalism, and Democracy: The Cases of Habad and Gush Emunim,” in *Tolerance, Dissent, and Democracy: Philosophical, Historical, and Halakhic Perspectives*, ed. Moshe Sokol (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 2002), 266.

¹³⁶ Sprinzak (1999), 122-123.

¹³⁷ Sprinzak (1999), 121.

¹³⁸ Shahak and Mezvinsky (2004), 64.

Menachem Begin's 1978 signing of the Camp David Accords left Gush Emunim disappointed by the Israeli government as it gave the Sinai back to Egypt and promised autonomy to the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza.¹³⁹ There have been other occasions where the Israeli government has disappointed Gush Emunim as well. The most striking example is the 2005 evacuation of the settlements in the Gaza strip. Gadi Taub describes the inability of the religious Zionists to stop the evacuation as a sign of the failure of Gush Emunim's ideology in Israeli society.¹⁴⁰ However, Gush Emunim's philosophy leaves room for failures, which are simply birth pangs before the final redemption. I argue that the ideology will continue to persist, as many people have nowhere left to turn.

While Gush Emunim is not an organized political party, the ideology persists in numerous parties present and active in Israeli government. A few examples of such parties include the National Religious Party (NRP), Likud, Tozemt, Moledet, and Yisrael Beiteinu.¹⁴¹ The Likud and Yisrael Beiteinu parties in particular have shown their strength in the most recent elections. Shahak and Mezvinsky argue that, "The worldview of Likud politicians, enthusiastically supported by followers, is basically the classic worldview of religious Jews; it has undergone significant secularization but has kept its essential qualities."¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Sprinzak (1999), 155.

¹⁴⁰ See Gadi Taub, "God's Politics in Israel's Supreme Court: The Retreat of Theology in Religious Settlers' Politics," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 6, no. 3 (2007): 289-290.

¹⁴¹ Ram (2008), 231.

¹⁴² Shahak and Mezvinsky (2004), 16.

The Movement's Success

Secular Zionism has not reached its goals of peace and security for the Jewish people. Gush Emunim's ideology offers not earthly political peace, but a greater peace that will only be attained through the coming of the Messiah. Thus from this perspective, the state of Israel should not work toward a compromised peace, but should gain as much territory as possible in order to bring the Messiah. For Gush Emunim, redemption has begun. The Holocaust indicated the "birth pangs" of the Messiah,¹⁴³ and with the 1967 victory the redemption era arrived. The duty of Gush Emunim ideological followers is to prepare the way for the Messiah through the redemption of the land.

Shahak and Mezvinsky argue that,

The Gush Emunim influence on Israeli policies can be measured by the fact that the Israeli government's policy on [the matter of the severity of crime it is to shed Jewish blood] has clearly reflected the Gush Emunim position. The Israeli government under both Labor and Likud leadership has refused to free Palestinian prisoners 'with Jewish blood on their hands' but has not hesitated to free prisoners 'with non-Jewish blood on their hands.'¹⁴⁴

The success of Gush Emunim in Israel, according to Laurence Silberstein, is due to an "invisible realm," consisting of communal settlements, Yeshivot, schools, adult education programs and short term learning centers.¹⁴⁵ Silberstein goes on to note that,

Through such apparatuses as schools, synagogues, interpretive procedures, youth movements, journals, newspapers, books, and broadcast media, the ideology of Jewish fundamentalism makes its way into the public discourse of the community. Thus Jewish fundamentalism has succeeded in shaping the public discourse within the Jewish community, particularly in Israel, in ways that are not fully recognized.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Lustick (1993), 113.

¹⁴⁴ Shahak and Mezvinsky (2004), 71-72.

¹⁴⁵ Silberstein (1993), 17.

¹⁴⁶ Silberstein (1993), 21-22.

Uri Ram rightly asserts that Neo-Zionism's connection to Israeli nationalism is a much more spiritual than nationalist quest:

The political allegiance of neo-Zionism is to an ostensible 'Jewish people,' conceived as a unique spiritual and ethnic community, rather than to Israeli nationality, in its prosaic sense of a political community defined by common citizenship...It is fed by, and in turn feeds, a high level of regional conflict and a low level of global integration.¹⁴⁷

Nationalism in Israel is uneasy, as the "secular" government has repeatedly failed to provide safety and belonging for its citizens. It has become more and more fractured and the conflict continues to rage. Gush Emunim has, in the midst of this, provided a safe haven. This haven is by no means free from conflict, but gives people a place to sort through and categorize setbacks and victories. Gush provides a transcendent identity that cannot be crushed by the goings on of the world- all can be interpreted through the Gush Emunim worldview.

Gush Emunim only existed as a cohesive group for a few years, but has exerted itself both under and above the radar, subtly influencing ways of thinking as well as overtly affecting political parties and leaders. The most recent Israeli elections demonstrate the powerful presence of right-thinking Israeli citizens. Binyamin Netanyahu, a Likud party member, and Avigdor Lieberman, a Yisrael Beitenu party member, received many votes, earning them the titles of Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, respectively. The conservative presence in Israeli politics, I argue, reflects the subtle influence of Gush Emunim thinking in the country.

Gush Emunim's ideological foundation is unmoving, and it has shown a significant ability to deal with both the presence and lack of organization and of

¹⁴⁷ Ram (2008), 232.

government support. In its call to return to Zion, in both the worldly and otherworldly meanings of the term, it has found many receptive ears. It remains a considerable obstruction to peace in the region, and will continue to do so for years to come.

Conclusion:

Barriers to Peace

The Road Map for Peace is the current attempt at Israeli-Palestinian peace. Like previous peace ventures, it, of course, espouses compromise and tolerance. It assumes acceptance by both sides of UN values, such as respect for human rights. UN imposed ethics/morality will not work with these groups, as both Gush Emunim and Hamas see their understanding of “God’s will” as overriding human law at all times. Thus a moderate agreement based on human rights principles and compromise will not work. Gush Emunim, Hamas and parties working for peace operate on completely skewed trajectories, each assuming different ethical and philosophical bases and chasing after distinctive goals. History is on both of their sides, as both groups justify and interpret events through their own religious lens.

Neither extremist group desires peace, and while current theories of how to find peace in this region assume that all parties will ascribe to the protection of basic human rights, this is not the reality on the ground. As I have demonstrated, these groups are growing and infiltrating many realms of the region. Both sides show collaboration with their respective secular governments at some points but only as a means to their own

ends. They are determined, strong, and offer hope and identity for people who have been lost in the shuffle of globalization.

Gush Emunim and Hamas continue to gain popular support as they provide identity, and because their ideologies are incompatible with the peace process, they will continue to block any peace process that tries to move forward.

Binyamin Netanyahu, a member of the conservative Likud party, was recently elected Prime Minister in the Israeli government. Avigdor Lieberman, a member of the extremely conservative religious Yisrael Beitenu party, won 15 seats in the Knesset and gained the position of Foreign Minister. Though it is not accurate to say that the right controls the Israeli government completely, as concessions must be made to satisfy the left in this democracy, the election of conservative leaders certainly reflects the disposition of the Israeli public at this moment in history. Hamas won the Palestinian parliamentary elections in January 2006 and currently controls the Gaza Strip following its full takeover of this piece of land in June 2007. Religio-political groups on both sides of the conflict are not leaving at any point in the foreseeable future.

The Road Map for Peace has not yet proven successful, and Israelis and Palestinians look for hope and identity in numerous places. My prediction is that religio-political groups will continue to grow and that they will incessantly continue the tit-for-tat battle of knocking out peace agreements. At the political level, peace prospects are dim.

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