Unsettling the Settlement: The Ideology of Israel's Hilltop Youth

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“We experience exile and mediocrity because we do not proclaim the value and wisdom of the land of Israel. We have not rectified the sin of the biblical spies who slandered the land. And so we must do the opposite of what they did: we must tell and proclaim to the entire world the land's glory and its beauty, its holiness and its honor. Then, after all these praises, let us hope that we have expressed at least one ten-thousandth of the loveliness of that lovely land: the beauty of the light of its Torah, the exalted nature of the light of its wisdom, and the holy spirit that seethes within it.”

– Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, Erets Chefetz
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Abstract

This thesis examines the political, social and theological heritage of the Hilltop Youth, a group of radical, anti-establishment young settlers in Israel’s West Bank. In the past few years, the media has picked up on the Hilltop Youths’ violent tendencies, focusing on the political ramifications of their anti-Palestinian and anti-state actions. However, the main question the following paper addresses is not “what are the consequences of the youths’ actions?” but rather “why do the youth act as they do?” Such a question can only be answered using a multi-disciplinary approach; this thesis investigates not simply the social and political realities these youth have faced, but also how those realities have influenced the development of their unique theology.

There currently exists very little accessible information detailing the Hilltop Youths’ beliefs. Using media reports (news articles, videos and photos), I attempt to reconstruct their ideology within the context of Israeli politics and Jewish theological history. I compare the youth with the Gush Emunim – the well-known religious Zionist settler group from which the Hilltop Youth has emerged – so as to determine which aspects of the youths’ philosophy are truly innovative.

I conclude that the youth, unlike their parent generation, are seeking a present, physical redemption on the land. Upon closer investigation, it becomes clear that their “radical” beliefs are actually the logical extension of ancient Jewish messianic ideas. Moreover, certain secular events have been crucial to the development of the religious Zionist tradition to which the Hilltop Youth belong; had the youth grown up in different socio-political circumstances but with the same theological training, it is unlikely that they would have radicalized to the same extent.
Introduction

On Thursday, December 4th, 2008, radical settler youth stormed the Palestinian neighborhoods of Hebron in response to the evacuation of a nearby Jewish home of disputed legal status. The youth burned the property of, shot at, and physically assaulted Palestinians at random, injuring over 15 people (Karon and Klein: 2008). Although it seems like a course of action only extremists would find appealing, this type of violence has, unfortunately, become the norm on the hilltops of Judea and Samaria (the biblical names for the territory now called the West Bank). Hundreds of young settlers¹ – most of whom grew up in the religious settlements east of the green line – have made it clear that the law of the State of Israel is not their own. Dubbed the Hilltop Youth, these kids have demonstrated that they will live where they please and act as they please, with little to no regard for those who disagree with or impede their way of life.

For obvious political and security reasons, the Israeli government does not approve of these youths’ lifestyles. First, the existence of the Hilltop Youth is problematic in the case of a two-state solution, as they live in illegal outposts that act as obstacles to the establishment of a Palestinian state. Furthermore, the youth are virulently racist. They believe that Eretz Yisrael (the land of Israel) belongs to the Jews, and any Arab claim to the land is not only false, but also malicious. They are unafraid of (and unrepentant about) committing atrocities against the Palestinian residents of the West Bank, as the above incident demonstrates. However, the Israeli government and the Israeli Defense Forces have been unable to permanently destroy any of the Hilltop Youth’s outposts, let alone disarm the youth themselves. As the press has closely documented over the past several years, the youth are able to mount an impressive defense against state forces; when IDF soldiers arrive to evacuate an outpost, the youngsters retaliate first.

¹ Various sources indicate that the Hilltop Youth range in age from approximately 13 to 30.
by physically resisting the evacuation, and later by burning Palestinian fields, defacing Palestinian property, and threatening Palestinians’ physical safety. This tactic is aptly called the “price tag” policy – every state action that works counter to the youths’ goals comes at a great cost. Fueled by religious fervor, these young settlers believe they must settle as much of the land as possible, no matter what that may require of them.

*Why do these youth act as they do?* The following thesis will provide some potential answers to this question. I will argue that the youth are seeking a present, physical redemption on the land – not a future, spiritual redemption dependent upon the coming of the messiah at the end of days – but as radical as this conception may seem, their beliefs are actually the logical continuation of Jewish messianic trends that began in pre-Roman Palestine. Ironically, it was the establishment of the secular Israeli state that made these theological shifts towards land-based redemption possible in the first place. Moreover, their radicalization must be viewed as at least partly the product of the socio-political realities of their childhoods; in many ways, Gush Emunim members (including the rabbinical leadership) have – whether knowingly or unknowingly – conditioned the youth to behave as they have.

The settlements in which most of the youth grew up adhered to the ideology of Gush Emunim2 (translation: the Bloc of the Faithful), a religious Zionist movement committed to the creation and maintenance of Jewish settlements in the so-called “disputed territories.” According to traditional Gush beliefs, violence is not an appropriate method of contesting disagreeable state

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2 Gush Emunim does not represent every settlement in the West Bank. In fact, many settlements today exist due to government subsidized housing plans in communities just east of the Green Line, and thus are populated by mostly non-ideological settlers who were attracted by the settlements’ convenience. The religious Zionist settlers who are affiliated with Gush Emunim live almost entirely in the settlements that are farthest east (and therefore closest to most of the major Palestinian cities). According to one estimate, as of 2004 Gush Emunim was supported by 40% of the settlers and administrated 50 settlements (Reuveny 2004). For a demographic analysis of the West Bank, see Michael Feige’s *Settling in the Heart*, p. 34-35.
actions. Nor should the Palestinian inhabitants of Judea and Samaria be subjected to excessive and often arbitrary hostility. Gush Emunim has always preferred to advocate for the settlements using political representation and public relations campaigns, which has allowed them to receive substantial state funding and defense-related resources over the last several decades. Moreover, members of Gush Emunim have often been lauded by the larger Israeli society (particularly those on the right) for their pioneering work; today’s Hilltop Youth, on the other hand, are almost unanimously disparaged.

What has happened to the youth of the hills? What do they believe, and what has made them veer from their parent ideology? These are extremely difficult questions to tackle, as very little scholarly work has been conducted about the Hilltop Youth and the youth themselves—having no centralized organizational structure or leadership—have provided the public with scant information regarding their beliefs and ideals. However, these questions are also necessary to answer if the Israeli, Palestinian and international communities are to appropriately and effectively engage with these militant youngsters. As the escalating events of recent years have revealed, the Hilltop Youth are a formidable group that will have to be reckoned with if the peace process is to continue successfully. The following pages represent my attempt at providing some much-needed answers.

Using news reports that document some of the youths’ actions and statements, I have pieced together the Hilltop Youth theology, albeit a generalized and perhaps simplified version thereof. I employed a variety of sources with a range of perspectives, including Israeli and international (i.e. The Jerusalem Post and The New York Times), left wing and right wing (i.e. Haaretz and Yediot Aharonot), official and unofficial (i.e. IDF statements and YouTube video clips). Except for cases in which I am using a direct quote, I have also tried to identify my sources’ potential biases and political motives, as there exist many strong opinions regarding this
politically and religiously loaded issue. It is clear that the youths’ beliefs were informed by the beliefs of the Gush Emunim; since most of the youth were raised in Gush-affiliated settlements, I have termed the Gush Emunim of the 80s, 90s and 00s the “parent generation” for the sake of this analysis. However, as will soon become evident, the Hilltop Youth adhere to a theology that is far more aggressive and reclusive, and far less optimistic and community-based than is Gush theology. As I mentioned already, the Hilltop Youth have no problem with violently confronting whomever they believe to be impeding their plans; unlike the residents of the more mainstream Gush settlements, they do not view the state as a holy entity. Additionally, the youngsters have made significant alterations to the messianism of their parents, focusing instead on a biblically informed understanding of the redemptive power of the land.

The reasons behind their change in ideology cannot be limited to the theological, though. There are clearly sociological, psychological and political influences on their behavior and belief-structure that must be taken into account. As I will demonstrate, the Hilltop Youth are not as radical as they may initially seem. The path from the communitarian, spiritual Zionism of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook in the early 20th century to the violent anti-establishmentarianism of the Hilltop Youth is actually a logical historical progression; various socio-political factors over the last century have impacted the theological descendents of Kook, creating the necessary conditions for these ideological alterations to occur. Moreover, the youths’ “radical” theology is not as novel as one might think. Their land-centric views are a version of a much older, biblically rooted land theology that was all but discarded after the massive losses of the Bar Kokhba revolt. Now that they have “returned” to the land, the youth can plausibly discard centuries of rabbinic tradition (which was created in exile and intended mainly for Jews in exile) in favor of the older biblical conception of the Land. Finally, the conditions of the youths’ upbringings – they lived
in settlements near “enemy” (Palestinian) territory – and the paranoid effects of constant vigilance must also be accounted for.

In the next section, I will outline the political and religious heritage of the Hilltop Youth by examining their “parent generation,” the Gush Emunim. From there I will do a close reading of the many news sources I noted above in order to better understand who these youngsters are, what they believe, and what their goals are. Finally, I will delineate the circumstances of, and potential reasons behind, the emergence of the Hilltop Youth. Although one study is clearly insufficient to fully understand the complexity of such an ideology, I hope this thesis will provide other scholars with a substantive starting point for further analyses.
The History of Gush Emunim

Modern political Zionism – a concept born of centuries of exile, landlessness and oppression – is essentially the belief in Jews’ right to self-determination in a sovereign Jewish homeland. Since the original political Zionist movement was mainly secular in nature, it did not demand that the Jewish homeland be established in present-day Israel. However, the historical, biblical, spiritual and emotional ties of the Jewish people to that specific tract of land were and are undeniable. For centuries Jews had yearned for the return to their ancient homeland. This notion was inextricably bound with the belief in the coming of the messianic age: when all the exiles were gathered again in Israel, rabbinic tradition claimed, the messiah would come and herald the age of redemption. Thus, despite the fact that the immigrants to Palestine in the early 20th century were mainly secular nationalists, they had to reconcile their beliefs with the Jewish religion from the very beginning.

This begs the question: if the original political Zionists were secular and unconcerned with messianic notions, why did they choose to settle in Eretz Yisrael? On the one hand, in doing so they could draw from a much larger base of support – namely, religious Jews who believed in the innate holiness of the land. But as Baruch Kimmerling has pointed out, their choice “turned the Zionist project into... an essentially religious project, which was not able to disconnect itself from its original identity as a quasi-messianic movement” (Masalha 2007: 136). Even today, Israeli political leaders often draw upon the long-standing spiritual and emotional

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3 Here I am discussing specifically 19th and early 20th century Zionist thought; to label the Jewish yearning for the land that existed before the 19th century “Zionism” would be somewhat misleading, as that yearning rarely resulted in immigration and had very little to do with Jewish political life.
4 Eretz Yisrael is the term religious Jews would have used; Israel (the political entity) did not yet exist.
relationship between the Jews and the land in order to justify their territorial ideologies.\(^5\)

Moreover, since the founding of the state of Israel the successes of the Israeli army have been read, by religious and secular Jews alike, as signs of divine support and protection (Masalha 2007: 137). Whether or not the majority of early Israelis saw themselves as messianists, their return to the land and their belief in a Jewish revival echoed centuries-old messianic tropes.

The meeting of these two land-centric ideologies – the secular desire for a Jewish nation and the traditional messianic desire for the “ingathering of the exiles” to the land at the end of the ages – resulted in the theology of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), the first Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Palestine under the British Mandate. From the time he emigrated from Lithuania to Ottoman Palestine in 1904, Kook worked hard to build bridges between the new secular Zionist Yishuv (community of settlements) and the religious Jews who had been living on the land for years.\(^6\) He believed that the secular Zionists were unwitting agents of the divine plan to bring about the messianic age. By building Jewish settlements and establishing the conditions necessary to end the millennia-long Jewish exile, they were laying the groundwork for redemption.\(^7\) Kook’s theology allowed for the existence of a *religious* Zionism that was based on biblical prophecy, but that depended upon *secular* activity for its realization. Thus, settling in the land – a political action in the eyes of the secular Zionists – became a *mitzvah*, a religious obligation.

\(^5\) For example, the rightist Likud Party relies heavily on the rhetoric of Jewish “chosenness” and the sacredness of the land (Mezvinsky 1999: 14).

\(^6\) Since Kook immigrated to Palestine after the advent of political Zionism (when secular Jews began arriving in large numbers) and not before (when only certain ultra-religious Jews made *aliyah*), it can be inferred that Kook identified with political Zionism as well as Orthodox Judaism. As we will see, this is reflected in his theology.

\(^7\) Kook’s understandings of redemption and of the messiah are left fairly vague in his writings. Redemption, for Kook, begins with the ingathering of the exiles, but beyond that he does not specify what the messianic era entails.
Although Kook believed that he was experiencing the birth pangs of the messianic age, he claimed that the messiah would come gradually and in stages. His son and spiritual successor, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook (1891-1982), condensed this timeframe, making the redemption of the Jewish people a much more imminent prospect (Ravitsky 1993: 82). He also took his father’s beliefs to their logical conclusion: he tore down the barriers between the theological and the political, identifying the contemporary state of Israel and all its actions as holy and “sanctifying...the sociopolitical structure” (Ravitsky 1993: 83). With the imminence of the end of times in mind, Zvi Yehuda stressed the need for actively aiding in the process of redemption, and claimed that “part of this redemption is the conquest and settlement of the land. This is dictated by divine politics, and no earthly politics can supercede it” (Ravitsky 1994: 131). Thus, the need to establish Jewish sovereignty over the entire land was of immediate importance.

Just as the advent of a secular, political phenomenon (political Zionism) allowed for the elder Kook’s theological innovations, the establishment of the state of Israel in 1947 allowed for the younger Kook’s much more active, statist theology. In 1967, Israeli territorial gains in the West Bank led to yet another development in this Kookist lineage: the formal creation and expansion of the Gush Emunim. As the head of the Merkaz HaRav Yeshiva in Jerusalem, Kook the younger had hundreds of devoted followers. Many were listening when, in a speech given on Israeli Independence Day in 19678 he asked, “Where is our Hebron – aren’t we forgetting it? Where is our Shechem, and our Jericho, where are they – forgotten?...Every region and every piece of soil that belong to God’s land – are we allowed to forsake even one millimeter of it?” (Feige 2009: 39). Three weeks later,9 after the decisive Israeli victory over Egypt, Jordan and Syria, his words gained prophetic importance: the Israelis had captured Jerusalem, Shechem,
Jericho and Hebron. His followers built settlements in the newly conquered territories, and in 1974 Gush Emunim was officially founded based upon the theologies of the Rabbis Kook.

The original Gush Emunim settlements in Judea, Samaria, Gaza and the Sinai — and the settlements of the subsequent several decades — received support from almost all sectors of Israeli society. Secular and religious nationalists alike appreciated the moves the Gush adherents were making; as a result of this, and since the Gush Emunim mission benefited the aims of the Israeli government, the movement received substantial financial assistance. The settlements initially comprised mostly young, native-born, Ashkenazi, well educated (better so, in fact, than the broader Israeli public), orthodox Jews (Weisburd 1989: 21). They saw themselves as inheriting the pioneering ethos of their secular settling forbears, the Labor Zionists, a sentiment that only furthered their popularity, especially among Israel’s founding generation (Goldman 2009: 286). It was also to the benefit of their public image that they were not, in general, ritually focused; their religiosity was manifested in but one precept: continued settlement (Schnall 1985: 21).

The Gush Emunim settlers of the latter half of the 20th century recognized the power of political representation. Their belief in the inherent holiness of the state — taken from the theology of Z. Y. Kook — engendered their involvement in government affairs for the benefit of the settlement project (and therefore for the benefit of God’s plan). Furthermore, since the state was sacred, the settlers employed only nonviolent methods of disobedience and protestation in response to government sanctions that they felt worked counter to their goals (Sprinzak 1993: 471). The settlers also knew that in order to have political influence, they had to curry public

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10 It is important to note that since the beginning of the settlement project Gush members have referred to the West Bank as Judea and Samaria (the biblical names for the region). Several scholars of Gush Emunim have discussed the ways in which the settlers attempted to recreate the biblical landscape in Eretz Yisrael; for more examples, see chapter 2 of Settling in the Hearts (Feige 2009).
favor; they deliberately cultivated a public image of being good, loyal, Israeli Jews. For example, they established besder yeshivot — religious schools that simultaneously trained students to fight in the Israeli Defense Forces — and the graduates of these institutions were widely seen as the best-trained, most enthusiastic soldiers. As the other major group of ultra-religious Jews in Israel (the Haredim) refused to fight in the army, Gush Emunim adherents appeared even more patriotic by comparison. The members of Gush Emunim further cultivated an Israeli image through their modern, secular choice of dress, only outwardly identifying themselves as religious by wearing knitted skullcaps (Mezvinsky 1999: 68).

Throughout Gush Emunim’s early history, the Palestinians of the West Bank were viewed as only mildly problematic. According to the Torah, “gerim” (non-Jews living in the land) should be treated with tolerance as long as they follow the law; in general the early Gush settlers stuck to such a policy. But tolerance did not mean respect since, as Michael Feige has pointed out, they also “reproduced the old Zionist stand that has strong orientalist undertones — that the arrival of Jewish settlement benefits the Arab natives, so the natives should be thankful” (Feige 2009: 117). Because of this mentality, most of the settlements originally had only minimal security barriers — there were no fences, no metal detectors, no security cameras, and no armed patrolmen. Changing social and political circumstances in the late 20th century led the settlers to see their Palestinian neighbors differently. An increase in Palestinian and Arab violence12 — both domestically and internationally, and often focused particularly on settlers in the West Bank — led to growing fear, resentment and even hatred of Palestinians among the Gush followers (Sprinzak

11 At this point in Israel’s history, the politically dominant class of secular Jews often looked down upon religious Jews, particularly as many religious Israelis refused to join the army. Thus, Gush Emunim’s program can be seen partly as an effort to prove that they were just as Israeli as their secular counterparts.

12 Although Gush Emunim members have generally been unable or unwilling to recognize their complicity in this violence, it is important to acknowledge that the settlers’ very presence in the West Bank played a key role in provoking the violent Palestinian response.
1993: 473). Moreover, the Israeli government was unable to adequately defend them in the face of continuing terrorism. Far from discouraging the settlers, the violence prompted them to take the law into their own hands. A study done at the end of the 1980s showed that 76% of settlers supported the use of vigilante violence (Weisburd 1989: 70). It should be noted, however, that their use of violence was intended to be defensive and retaliatory; they saw themselves as stepping in where the government was unable to fulfill its duty, and the government reinforced that belief by turning the other cheek when acts of vigilante violence occurred.

Changes in the demographic composition of the movement also affected the Gush lifestyle. Throughout the 80s and 90s, Gush Emunim members worked hard to recruit new settlers not only from Israeli ranks, but from the Diaspora community, as well. Although for obvious reasons they preferred to recruit those who adhered to a similar theology, they justified having non-ideological settlers in their midst because of their belief that any Jew, intentionally or not, can aid in heralding the messianic age by settling in the land (Weisburd 1989: 54-55). In fact, a fair number of Jews from the U.S. and from Western Europe were enticed by the way of life the settlements promised; in these communities (called yishuvim keli ibati'im, communal settlements) the new immigrants could identify as Jewish pioneers while maintaining a bourgeois, middle-class lifestyle. Unlike the standard kibbutz settlements, this model of community allowed residents to live near cities, commute to work, and own property privately (a fact particularly important for those raised with Western, consumer values), yet these settlements also maintained a strong communitarian ethos (Troen 2003: 229, Schnall 1985: 19).

Gush Emunim no longer formally exists, but its adherents remain in the settlements of the West Bank and most continue to live by Z. Y. Kook’s doctrine – thus, I will continue to refer to them as Gush Emunim in the following pages. Jewish sovereignty over every piece of the West Bank is still viewed as the center of their struggle; yet without the type of public support
they received in years past, the settlers’ activism has largely been limited to the defense of existing settlements, rather than continued building projects. In line with Z. Y. Kook’s theology, the settlers believe that they are sanctifying the land by inhabiting it (Mezvinsky 1999: 67). The leading rabbis of the movement maintain that the settlers are aiding in the process of redemption; it is unclear to what extent the ideological settlers continue to believe in the imminence of the messiah, although their fervor suggests that this belief has not waned appreciably. The settlers have also maintained religious lifestyles while identifying in many ways with the broader Israeli culture.

The settlers also continue to be politically involved. They are governed by the Yesha\(^3\) Council – elected officials from the settlements of Judea and Samaria – and most still believe that the state is holy (Feige 2009: 29). Thus, despite the increasing amount of resistance they are facing from the government, Gush adherents are generally careful to preserve a meticulous public image and have refrained from excessive violence (both towards Palestinians and towards soldiers who have been ordered to evacuate outposts). As Yesha Council head Dani Dayan stated in 2009, “we prefer to work in coordination with the government,” employing tactics such as protests and political lobbying (Lazaroff 2009). Gideon Aran, a scholar of Gush Emunim, has aptly described their approach:

“Gush Emunim is aware of the value of public relations and excels in use of the mass media; the activists are not camera shy. The movement’s campaigns receive extensive press coverage, and numerous forums are available for expression of its views. The Israeli public is extensively exposed to scenes of settlers ascending the hills of Judea and Samaria. Television viewers can recite Gush Emunim slogans by heart and are almost intimately acquainted with the movement’s spokesmen and activists, settlements, and institutions” (Appleby 2009: 25-26).

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\(^3\)Yesha is an acronym for Yehuda, Shomron and ‘Aza (Judea, Samaria and Gaza).
In the past year members of the settlements have even taken their public relations fight to the Internet, editing the rhetoric of Wikipedia entries (such as “Israel” and “Palestine”) in order to represent the religious Zionist viewpoint (Hasson 2010). Since Gush Emunim and the Yesha Council have never shied away from the media, their adherents’ religious convictions and political ideals are not difficult for outsiders to ascertain.
Who are the Hilltop Youth?

Turning now to the Hilltop Youth – the younger "generation," as I have termed them – we must be more creative in searching for the substance of their beliefs. Whereas mainstream ideological settler organizations such as the Yesha Council distribute their own informational material, the Hilltop Youth do not. This is due to several reasons: first, although members of the Hilltop Youth identify as such, the term was first used by outside media sources to identify a phenomenon that, until that point, had no name. The fact that these youth adopted their given moniker proves they see themselves as a collective, and the members of the disparate outposts do often act in collaboration when one of the outposts feels threatened. However, the Hilltop Youth have no defined organizational structure. They evolved somewhat organically (albeit with certain role models in mind), and what ties them together is their common ideology and tactics. With no governing body to outline an agenda or distribute information, the Hilltop Youth can only be examined through media coverage, including news articles, interviews, and videos, paying close attention to potential sources of bias.

Before turning to those sources, it is important to note that the lack of information published by the Hilltop Youth is telling in and of itself: groups with explicitly political goals are generally organized around charismatic leaders and organizations, and they attempt to reach their ends through the use of media, political activism and public persuasion. The Hilltop Youth, as I will demonstrate later, engage in political activity of a sort, but they cannot be termed a political group. Their mission is clearly not one of engaging potential followers or supporters, or even of reforming society as a whole, but rather one of pursuing their beliefs to the fullest extent. As one self-identified Hilltop Youth explained, "We are totally non-political. We don't read newspapers;

14 By generation I do not mean a literal genetic generation (i.e. parents and children), but rather an evolution of the ideals of the original movement.
we do not know where the Green Line lies. The land does not belong to anyone.\textsuperscript{15} She returns love to whoever gives her love” (Feige 2010: 240-241). This is a motif among the youth that emerges again and again, and with which the following analysis will repeatedly grapple.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, Gush Emunim settlers saw their mission as a return to and re-appropriation of the land of Israel as it is represented in the Bible. Unlike their parent generation, the Hilltop Youth do not attempt to recreate a literal version of the biblical land or to inhabit particularly “holy” places. They are not as discriminating in choosing a location in which to erect an outpost; they settle wherever they can – often near a larger established settlement – naming their outposts not after the locations’ supposed biblical names but rather after their friends who have passed away, the nearest large settlement, or even simply a number (e.g. “Hill 26”) (Friedman 2003). Throughout the interviews of the youth that have been conducted, the Hilltop Youth also seem to prefer using the term “Eretz Yisrael” (the Land of Israel) than either “Yesha” or “Judea and Samaria.”

These facts reflect their broader understanding of their relationship to the land. Yedidya Slonim, a youth from the outpost Shvut Ami, said, “We feel that we own the land, that God gave it to us. We feel that this is what we have to do. We have to build the land of Israel and each of us has to do the most he can do” (video: “Outposts Won’t Dismantle”). It is the land as a whole that they are attached to – not just the West Bank – and that they believe is their inheritance. For the Hilltop Youth, every piece of the land of Israel is important and therefore must have a strong Jewish presence. One youth explained to a reporter, “They can drag us away a hundred times and we’ll come back. And if the army wants to stay and guard it, then we win, because if the

\textsuperscript{15} Because of the youths’ generally violent relationships with their Palestinian neighbors and their belief in the land as their divine inheritance (both of which will be discussed later on), it can be assumed that this young settler did not mean “anyone” literally. Rather, “anyone” most likely refers to any individual Jew.
Israeli army is here, the land is being occupied by Jews” (Finer 2008). Their aim in settling the land is clearly motivated, at least in part, by a sense of religious duty to ensure every part of Israel is inhabited (or at least controlled) by Jews.

Furthermore, their relationship with the land is rooted in a desire for authenticity in the form of ruggedness and hard work, which is demonstrated by their yearning to “step out of the settlement” (Feige 2010: 238). One young settler explained that his mission is “to work the land, to harvest olives, to ride freely on horses...all the space is ours; that is the idea of the hills.” The youths’ understanding of their role is constructed in opposition to the actions and lifestyles of their parent generation. The same settler who expressed a desire to step out of, or “not hide inside,” the settlements claimed “that is the trend of a salvation that is not exilic”; in other words, salvation is ensured through working the land actively (one might say “authentically”), not living in the comparatively comfortable established settlements. It is important to note, however, that at least some of the Hilltop Youth do not physically work the land, although their lives still maintain an element of ruggedness and frontier independence.

That sentiment begs the question: what do these outposts actually look like? Looking at media representations – pictures and videos – of the outposts demonstrates their simplicity. Shvut Ami is merely a tarp thrown over a few posts, which is presumably where the three youth who live there sleep at night (video: “Outpost Won’t Dismantle”). The only other object of note is an Israeli flag. Other outposts are similarly constituted: truck containers, stone and plywood are common materials used to create a home, and some youth live in pre-existing caves or out in the open (Feige 2010; video: “Outposts Vow to Fight”). The interiors of these homes are equally spartan: one article notes that “the settlers sleep five to a room, men separately from women, with only thin mattresses between them and the earthen floor. Decor consists of bumper stickers with slogans such as ‘Hebrew labor’ and ‘No Arabs, no terror attacks.’” A few tattered Jewish
Bibles sit on a lone shelf” (Finer 2008). It should be noted, however, that the term “home” is probably misleading; it implies a sense of permanency that most outpost residents do not experience. Because of the constant threat of evacuation or demolition, outposts are generally created to be moveable or easily rebuilt. A few articles mention the presence of synagogues, but even those are created in an impermanent fashion.

The Hilltop Youth include both men and women (or, in many cases, boys and girls), although most seem to subscribe to strict religious codes regarding the separation of the two genders. There are noticeably more men among their ranks, however, which is evident when examining video footage of the youth (no comprehensive surveys have been conducted that would provide exact demographic numbers). Many outposts are all male, a few are mixed in gender – most notably those with families such as Maoz Esther, which houses several young men as well as one woman and her child (video: “Outpost Destroyed Again”) – but I was unable to find any records of all female outposts. The outposts range in population from one to several dozens, tending towards the smaller end of the spectrum.

As Michael Feige, an anthropologist who spent some time with a few of the Hilltop Youth, points out, “The display of a ritualistic version of peaceful familial or communal life is not part of the show that the youth of the hills present to the nearby Palestinians and the Israeli public. Rather than children, laundry, and Torah classes, the new outposts present frightening dogs guarding their perimeter” (Feige 2010: 244). Regardless of whether or not Feige’s assertion that all outposts have “frightening dogs” is correct, his analysis serves to reinforce the fact that these outposts are not stable, peaceful, familial places. The youth live lives of instability, sacrifice, and hard work, of which many of them are clearly proud. One young settler named

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16 Videos distributed by Arutz Sheva, a major settler news source, do not show any dogs, perhaps for obvious political reasons; however, records of soldiers getting bitten by dogs corroborate Feige’s claim (Greenberg 2008).
Malchiel even claimed, "There's nothing we can do about it, the Land of Israel is obtained through misery" (Novick 2010). When a reporter asked another Hilltop Youth member, "How much are you prepared to sacrifice for the land of Israel?" his answer was definitive: he would be willing to sacrifice his life (McAllester 2009).

The youths' singular stress on the land—a "turning to God through the land," as Avi Lazar of Chovat Gilad described it (video: "Outposts Vow to Fight"), and a desire to be connected with the land in life and, if necessary, in death—indicates a diversion from their parent generation's religious beliefs. Very little in the way of messianic language is used by these youngsters, thus the land appears to be an end in and of itself, not only a means to an end (although it may be a means, as well). The Gush Emunim holiness trifecta of Land-Nation-Torah is still there, but the land has taken ultimate precedence. Even Torah, at times, seems to play second fiddle to the land; one youth named Landsberg said, "The fact that there are youths who sit in school and study all day at this time — that is what isn't right. That they don't come expand our borders and strengthen our connection to the land of Israel. Anyone who learns as usual—he's the one who needs a therapeutic framework!" (Miskin 2008). This is clearly in contrast with Gush Emunim's belief in the importance of a high level of education.

Although the youth often appear more religiously observant than most of the Gush Emunim settlers, they frequently break religious (particularly rabbinic) norms. As Isabel Kershner points out and video sources corroborate, "Beards and sidelocks are longer than in the past and the fringed shawl and phylacteries normally reserved for morning prayer are now worn by some all day long" (Kershner 2009). But the youth are not afraid to rebel against accepted religious beliefs. One shocking story involving the death of a Hilltop Youth — purportedly at the hands of a Palestinian neighbor — is the perfect example of this kind of rebellion:
"A few of Ozeri’s friends and followers “snatched” his shrouded body – which was lying on a simple stretcher, rather than in a coffin – and carried it back to Hill 26, intending to defy the rabbinical decision and bury him there. In the course of moving the deceased from place to place, at one point part of his shroud was unwrapped to reveal his face – an act of disrespect for the dead that is sacrilege in Judaism" (Friedman 2003).

The youth stress religiosity, but their version of the “true” faith clashes, at times, with that of their parent generation.

As was mentioned above, many of the outposts do have synagogues and even rabbis, but the movement as a whole has no identifiable spiritual leaders. The only source of religious inspiration that has been referenced by the youth in any of the material I have found is the biblical figure of Joshua. One outpost even has a stone memorial dedicated to Joshua, which is inscribed with numerous accolades of the brave Israelite leader (Gilbert 2009). However, it seems that the movement lacks any contemporary rabbinical motivators. The youth never even refer to Z. Y. Kook in their discourse, despite the fact that most of them were raised with his theology; perhaps this can be attributed to Kook’s stress on the holiness of the state, while the Hilltop Youth do not believe the state is holy. In fact, as we will see, in their eyes the state is their enemy. As one young settler named Akiva HaCohen declared, “[people] have to decide whether they are on the side of the Torah or the state” (Kershner 2008), and the Hilltop Youth have chosen the former.

Because the parent ideology of the Hilltop Youth depends upon cooperation with and use of the state to reach certain goals, the settlements’ activities are often limited by governmental decrees and Israeli public opinion.17 The Hilltop Youth, on the other hand, feel no such

17 This is not to say that Gush Emunim settlers have not disobeyed the law in the past. However, they have done so because of the implicit agreement that the government will look the other way when the settlers act illegally (usually with self-defense in mind). Furthermore, they have almost never sought direct conflict with government officials or the IDF, as those parties have provided the settlements with many of their needs. See previous chapter for more information.
limitations. They have no direct representation in the Knesset, they are not funded by the
government and, with no organized leadership, there are no attempts on the youths’ part to
cooperate or even talk with government officials. So far out from the Green Line, the youth
interact directly with the state only through the state’s military and legal enforcement branches.
In other words, the Hilltop Youth’s contact with the state is limited to their attempts to defend
their outposts from IDF-perpetrated evacuations and demolitions. It is not surprising then that
most (if not all) of the youth feel a sense of betrayal by the state. As one young settler declared in
an Arutz Sheva video documenting the attempted removal of an outpost, “They [the soldiers]
didn’t care what was going on” (“IDF Destroys Five Outposts”) — suggesting that the soldiers are
viewed as apathetic to the plight of the settlers. Moreover, by demolishing the outposts the IDF
is clearly working counter to what these youth see to be their most important task: settling the
land. The language the youth use to describe the state and the IDF thus ranges from disdainful
to aggressive.

When soldiers arrive in order to remove an outpost, the youth resist their attempts, often
to the point of violence (e.g. “Israel Hilltop Eviction Raw Footage”). In fact, I have not found a
single account of an outpost removal in the last few years that has gone smoothly for the IDF.
The youth hit and push soldiers, throw stones, curse and yell (interestingly enough, many of the
curses they use have biblical references (Novick 2010)). As described by a participant in one of
these violent encounters:

“We went to more than ten spots . . . to intersections, Arab villages, agricultural areas.
We demonstrated, we protested, we threw stones, we blocked roads, we burned fields,
and we clashed with security forces. The days are over when the police fought us and we
sat down and took it lying down... For every evacuation, for every demolition and
destruction, for every stone moved, they will get war” (Goldman 2008).
This is, of course, nothing like the more mainstream settler response to IDF actions. During the evacuation from Gush Katif in Gaza in 2005, there was little physical resistance put up by the evacuees; the memory of that event is referred to by Hilltop Youth time and time again, suggesting that it has played a significant role in forming their ethic of resistance. Unsurprisingly, the Yesha Council, as the mouthpiece of the mainstream settler movement, currently condemns the violence used by the Hilltop Youth.

The Hilltop Youth seem to see cooperation with the state, particularly participation in the political system, as naïve and unhelpful, if not downright destructive. Despite the fact that many of them have ties to the more mainstream settlement community, which has worked within the political system for decades, the Hilltop Youth are derisive of any such allegiances. In fact, “a skullcap wearing police officer should be called ‘Mafdalnik,’” according to a guide distributed by and among some of the youth on how to curse at soldiers during evacuations (Novick 2010). Mafdal is the Hebrew term for the National Religious Party, which, until it dissolved in 2008, was best known for representing the settler movement. To use “Mafdalnik” as a curse requires a belief that there is something wrong with, perhaps even abhorrent about, those who adhere to the Mafdal ideology. It is not surprising then, that in May 2008 when the Yesha Council was negotiating (with the army) the evacuation of the Migron outpost, “young settlers crashed Yesha’s independence day celebrations…[and they] distributed leaflets accusing the Council’s leaders of ‘collaborating’ with ‘the enemy’ authorities and slashed their car tires” (International Crisis Group 2009: 9).

On the other hand, most of the Hilltop Youth display a reluctance to shed Jewish blood. As one settler claimed, “The only thing that hurts here is the confrontation with the soldiers…that’s what lies heavy on our hearts” (video: “Special Feature: Struggle and

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18 This relationship will be discussed in depth later in the paper.
Confrontation”). The confrontations occur, according to the youth, only because their rights to
the land come before all else. This provides a partial explanation for the recent phenomenon
called the “price tag” policy; either in anticipation of an outpost removal or after the fact, youth
will wreak havoc among their Palestinian neighbors by burning fields, destroying buildings, or
even injuring bystanders. A youth named Ben Yaakov explained, “The point of attacking
Palestinians at a time when Israeli soldiers are coming to expel Jews from settlements would
be...to distract and divert the Israeli army and to ‘change the balance’ – to alter the dynamic of
the conflict. That would also reduce the chances...of Jews’ killing Jews” (McAllester 2009). But
this can only be a partial explanation for the price tag violence, since it often occurs after an
evacuation has already taken place. After one evacuation, for example:

“Some 15 Palestinian houses near Hill 26, and other homes and shops in Hebron, were
attacked by unidentified vigilantes, who shattered windows, destroyed vegetable gardens,
trashed and burned a number of rooms and cars, destroyed rooftop water tanks, killed a
number of sheep, and injured two Palestinians, who required treatment in the hospital”
(Friedman 2003).

Some of the youth have openly admitted to engaging in such actions (“Settlers Riot After
Structures Razed” 2010), and many more have made statements supporting the price tag policy.

Unfortunately for their neighbors, the violence conducted by members of the Hilltop
Youth against Palestinians is not limited to this policy. Like the more mainstream settlers, the
youth act as vigilantes and “punish” Palestinians (or, in their words, Arabs) who have harmed
them or their property. In one instance, “Vandals entered the Palestinian village of Beit Fajjar in
the Gush Etzion Region and set fire to a mosque and to copies of the Koran...The vandals also
scrawled Hebrew graffiti on the mosque wall which stated ‘Revenge’ and ‘Price Tag’” (Lazaroff
2010). Unlike the vigilante acts of the more mainstream settlers, however, the youth are fairly
undiscerning when it comes to their choice of victims. Ephraim Ben Shochat of Shalhevet Ya
explained, “To us, deterrence is more important than catching the specific terrorist. We’re fighting against a nation” (Kershner 2008). Settlers even set fire to a Palestinian girls’ school—the girls were, in all likelihood, not involved in harming the youth in any way—leaving a message on a nearby wall that read “Greetings from the hilltops” (Lazaroff 2010). The “punishment” also rarely fits the crime; in a particularly extreme example, a youth named Zvi Struk (along with his unnamed friend) beat one Palestinian boy and dragged another tied to a tractor, where the boy lost consciousness. They left him in a field, naked, tied and blindfolded. This was, according to court records, due to the boys’ herding sheep near Struk’s outpost two months earlier (Glickman 2010).

The various news reports and video clips examined here can also provide insight into the youths’ relationship with the adherents to the parent ideology (that is to say, religious Zionist settlers in established communities). First and foremost, it is important to acknowledge that the line between the older “generation” and the younger “generation” is permeable. The youth at the outposts continue to receive support from some (though of course not all) of the mainstream settlers, and they often set up their new homes on hilltops adjacent to older settlements (International Crisis Group 2009: 10). Their families usually live in the settlements and it appears that most of the youth grew up in them, as well. Evyatar Slonam, for example, was “raised in a religious home in the Tzofim settlement…[and says] his parents support his activism” (Chernofsky 2009). Several well-known figures in the West Bank have implicitly or explicitly encouraged the youth, including a few radical rabbis, and some are beginning to call the Yesha Council heretical, as these kids do (Goldman 2008). Even the way in which Arutz Sheva portrays the youth—as highly moral pioneers who are sacrificing everything for the sake of Eretz Yisrael—reveals the kind of popular encouragement the youth receive among other settlers. However, their main bastion of support is in the more radical settlement communities such as Yitzhar, and
the youth seem to be much more critical of their parent ideology than the mainstream settlers are of the youths', for reasons that will be discussed further on.

Of course, not all youth that grow up in the religious Zionist settlements become members of the Hilltop Youth; many remain within the more mainstream, structured settlements. However, of those who live in the settlements, a sizeable number seem to sympathize with the youngsters in the outposts, some of whom may be their friends. A report conducted in 2009 states, “Mainstream youth gatherings continue to attract thousands, but not all those who attend appear to subscribe fully to their leaders’ statist message. Even in long-established Torah collages, many students waver between camps” (International Crisis Group 2009: 10). The “camps” mentioned in this quote refer to the statist camp – those who believe in effecting change by working within state structures – and the anti-statist camp.

Older members of the established settlements are not exempt from this trend of increasing radicalization. There is a growing rift between those who believe the methods of dissent used by Gush Emunim in the past remain appropriate and those who desire more extreme action. This is best exemplified by the changing political alliances of settlers after the disengagement from Gaza in 2005:

“In the wake of the Gaza pullout…[the NRP] veered further to the right; in the 2006 elections it campaigned on a joint ticket with extreme right-wing parties. This won it greater support in the occupied territories but cost it heavily inside Israel proper. Unable to resolve its internal disputes, it split ahead of the 2009 elections into National Union, an amalgam of far-right, pro-settler groups, and Jewish Home – New NRP, a more moderate lay faction” (International Crisis Group 2009: 18).

The Gush Katif evacuation (and the memory thereof) has clearly been a major ideological crisis not only for the youth of the outposts, but the residents of the established settlements, as well. The fear that they might be next – that their settlements could be evacuated, too – is apparent in both parties. According to a settler from Bet El, “If the state tells us to leave, some will depart
with the soldiers, some will open fire” (International Crisis Group 2009: 31). There is evidence that some members of the mainstream settlements have even participated in price tag initiatives in response to the demolition of outposts (Nir 2010). However, the majority of the Gush Emunim constituents have remained loyal to the old tactics, as “most still understand that by using force they’d be cutting the branch they’re sitting on” (International Crisis Group 2009: 32).
The Hilltop Youth: An Ideological Analysis

It is undeniable that in the case of the Hilltop Youth — or in the case of any evolving religious group — it is impossible to completely distinguish religious or theological motivations and actions from political motivations and actions. However, as I have already noted, the Hilltop Youth do not view their actions as political in nature, despite the obvious political ramifications their actions have had. Furthermore, notwithstanding the youths' lack of leaders (let alone religious leaders) and an organized governing body, an attempt at outlining their theological beliefs based on their statements and activities is necessary in order to better understand why they act as they do. The following section presents one such analysis.

First and foremost, the Hilltop Youth adhere to a land theology that appears to be more Torah-based than traditionally rabbinic. That is perhaps the most striking difference between their belief structure and that of the mainstream Gush. Similar to their parent generation, the youth display a willingness and even desire to flout authority; the youth, however, take this aversion to authority much further than the Gush Emunim adherents have, and have largely rejected the authority of the rabbinic tradition concerning the land of Israel. That is not to say that these youth have rejected all of rabbinic custom. In fact, as noted above, many of them outwardly appear to be devout, orthodox Jews sporting recognizable Jewish apparel (i.e. talit and kippah), who follow recognizable Jewish habits (i.e. separation of men and women while praying, reciting traditional Jewish prayers, and so on). Since the youth seem to place higher priority on the Bible than on the rabbis, though, they are free to pick and choose which parts of rabbinic norm and tradition they wish to follow. As I will discuss further on, many of their potential influences use rabbinic style arguments to defend their beliefs, which the youth freely
adopt. But they have abandoned many well-known rabbinic credos concerning the land to the point of sometimes offending the more mainstream religious Zionist settlers.19

Moreover, the one unifying belief among the youth is the paramount importance of the land, but rabbinic Judaism, as several scholars have pointed out (e.g. Stratton 2000: 133), does not have an explicit theology of the land. From very early on, rabbinic authorities in the Diaspora uniformly understood the catastrophe of the Bar Kokhba revolt as indicative of the problems of an active messianism (Gafni 1997: 72).20 The revolt took a massive death toll and resulted in the exile of almost all Palestinian Jews from the land. Bar Kokhba, the second century Judean rebel, had failed to defeat the Roman warriors, let alone bring about the messianic age as he had intended. This resulted in a new type of Jewish messianism: a spiritual struggle that demanded far less physical action in bringing about the messianic era (Gafni 1997: 73). In later years, this would develop into the understanding that actively encouraging the messianic process (by establishing a Jewish state in Israel, for example) was forbidden. As W.D. Davies discusses, soon after Bar Kokhba rabbinic authorities claimed that exile was a part of God’s plan; it was necessary to endure exile until He, not any human, initiated the process of redemption (Davies 1982: 50). Competition for authority in the beginning of this diaspora between the Palestinian rabbinate and the much more powerful Babylonian rabbinate engendered this belief in the superiority of exile and in the corruption inherent in inhabiting the land of Israel before the messianic age (Gafni 1997: 97). With the majority of Jews living outside of the land, it is not surprising that living in the land was demoted in (pre-messianic) theological importance, although a spiritual yearning for the land remained a strong force in the collective cultural memory.

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19 See prior section for examples, e.g. one group of youth’s ease in disregarding accepted funerary rites at the death of their friend.
20 The Bar Kokhba revolt (132-136 C.E.) was the last of the Jewish rebellions against the Roman Empire. It was led by Simon Bar Kokhba, who was acclaimed as the messiah by many Jews in Palestine at the time. Although it ultimately failed, the rebellion was initially very successful.
Here we are left with two possible understandings of the Hilltop Youth’s mission: first, if the youths’ ideology is messianic, they are bluntly rejecting the rabbinic injunction against an active messianism. This would not be entirely unexpected, as their parent ideology was heavily influenced by A.I. Kook, who saw himself and his followers as initiating the pre-messianic era. However, as I mentioned above, there is no evidence of the youth referring to Kook (father or son) or to the messiah. Since they are seemingly unafraid of public rebuke, it is perplexing why these themes – which would be so central to their lives – would not appear in statements made by Hilltop Youth. It is possible that they have simply refused to discuss these issues with reporters, and it is possible that messianism has taken the back seat to other parts of their theology. To me this seems unlikely; if they saw themselves as active participants in bringing the messianic age, their discourse would probably reflect those beliefs, whether intentionally or not.

The other potential interpretation of the youths’ beliefs is that they have forsaken the rabbinic tradition of messianism all together in favor of a more Biblical understanding of redemption. Whereas the messiah is not mentioned even once in the Bible, the words for ‘redeemer,’ ‘redeem’ and ‘redemption’ appear over 130 times (Entry for “Redemption,” Encyclopedia Judaica 2007). This distinction can be explained by looking at the biblical notion of salvation. In the Torah God, not a messianic figure, is the author of salvation, and “Only He – not the messianic king or other divine being – was the Redeemer” (ibid). Many of the youth, as I have noted above, feel that they have connected to God through the land, and thus it is possible that they see their redemption as a consequence of settling on and living securely in Eretz Yisrael, as their biblical ancestors did. It is striking that this understanding of redemption is similar to that of the sabras; the original Zionist settlers envisioned their redemption (in the form of Jewish national renewal) to be intimately connected with the land itself (Almog 2000: 41).
The way Bar Kokhba is imagined in Israel today reinforces the claim that the Hilltop Youth are seeking a present redemption, not a future redemption initiated by the messiah. From the rabbinic age until modern times, Bar Kokhba was not a frequently referenced figure in Jewish folklore. The story of the rebellion became prominent again with the birth of the modern Israeli state, and Bar Kokhba became a potent symbol of Jewish nationalism, reinforced through national culture and educational themes (Harkabi 1983:103-104). In Israel Bar Kokhba is usually remembered not as a failed messiah, but as a symbol of strong, audacious, militant Judaism. The revolt was, after all, the last great struggle for Jewish independence before the modern era.

Additionally, in Israeli culture Bar Kokhba’s downfall and the massive number of Jewish lives lost in the rebellion are rarely discussed (Harkabi 1983: 104). Thus, Yehoshefat Harkabi argues, “To admire the Bar Kokhba Rebellion is to admire rebelliousness and heroism detached of responsibility for their consequences. This is the Bar Kokhba Syndrome” (Harkabi 1983:105). In other words, the lore of Bar Kokhba serves to glorify rebellion and daring for the sake of Jewish independence – whatever the cost – in the Israeli imagination. The youths’ actions suggest that they may have also been infected by the Bar Kokhba Syndrome; they seem to envision redemption as freedom in the land. Moreover, the parallels between the youth and the revolutionaries of legend are striking: according to one Israeli children’s book, the Bar Kokhba rebels lived in “hidden caves, which are plentiful in the limestone hills of Judea...[where] they trained themselves for fighting” (Skulsky 1975: 53).21 If the Hilltop Youth are looking towards Bar Kokhba as a role model, it is most likely that they are doing so in this distinctly Israeli sense: they, like the famous failed messiah, value rebellion, Jewish independence, strength and glory; they seek a redemption of the Jewish people of the present – no matter the cost.

21 As I mentioned in the previous chapter, some of the youth of the hills also live in caves.
Regardless of whether or not the Hilltop Youth believe that they are aiding in the coming of the messiah, the events in which they are participating hold, for them, the same sort of gravitas. They believe that God is on their side, so any set back has the potential to cause existential confusion. No event reflects this fact more than the evacuation of Gush Katif, a bloc of 17 Jewish settlements in the Gaza strip. In August 2005, the Israeli army removed Gush Katif’s nearly 10,000 residents, most of whom were Gush Emunim members or sympathizers. Just as many Americans felt traumatized by the bombing of Pearl Harbor – after all, the mistaken belief that the U.S. could not be attacked on home soil was crushed – these youth feel traumatized by the evacuation of a government-sanctioned settlement. Many of the youth I quoted in the last chapter mentioned the Gaza disengagement as a major motivating factor in their actively resisting the soldiers; they clearly fear seeing that event repeated. It may be inferred that the youth interpret the evacuation of Gush Katif as a sign from God: they must reinforce their commitment to Him by taking drastic action.

I wish to pause here and emphasize the (somewhat ironic) importance of secular, political realities in the formation of Hilltop Youth theology. I have already pointed out that the secular Zionist movement allowed for A. I. Kook’s religious Zionist revival, the establishment of the state in ’47 permitted the active theology of Z. Y. Kook, and the territorial gains of ’67 made Gush Emunim’s successes possible. Similarly, the fear and anger created by the “catastrophe” of Gush Katif – when suddenly it became clear that the state was not on the youths’ side – have been integral to the evolution of the Hilltop Youth theology. As the state is no longer protecting the settlers’ interests, there is no practical need to view it as a holy entity. The evacuation of the Gaza bloc exacerbated the pre-existing siege mentality that runs rampant in the outermost settlements; unsurprisingly, the fact that the youth grew up surrounded by uncertainty and violence predisposed them to feel threatened and alone.
The evacuation of Gush Katif may also have been the turning point for the Hilltop Youth and their particular understanding of redemption. To elaborate on this, I return to the different historical Jewish messianic beliefs discussed above. As I have noted, Jewish messianism was a rabbinic interpretation of biblical notions of redemption, and so it does not appear in the bible. Strains of messianism appeared sometime before the Jews were defeated by the Romans, as evidenced by the Dead Sea Scrolls and the biblical book of Daniel; by the time Bar Kokhba led his rebellion, the concept of the messiah was accepted broadly enough for Palestinian Jews to see Bar Kokhba in such a light. In contrast to the messianism of that era, rabbinic messianism, which arose post-Bar Kokhba, is spiritual in nature; it requires patient waiting, not active sacrifice. This was the common understanding of the messiah until the dawn of modern political Zionism and the Israeli state. At that point, the early Zionists imagined a secular, messiah-less redemption of the Jewish people in the land. Looking at A. I. Kook’s theology, we can see that it overlaps with the secular Zionist notion of redemption; he incorporated the Zionists’ land-centric ideals into the belief that the messiah was soon to come. This resulted in the active, nationalistic, messianic activities of the Gush Emunim. If Gush Katif brought to light the failure of Gush Emunim to protect the settlements, it may also have discouraged the youth from believing in the imminent messiah as their parent generation did. Since they are still in Eretz Yisrael, however, they have held on to the belief that the land brings redemption (which is, ironically, inherited from their secular, as well as their biblical, forbearers). Regardless of which of the above scenarios reflects the Hilltop Youths’ beliefs most accurately, the land-based theology of the youth finds its roots mainly in biblical literature and perhaps Israeli tradition, but not rabbinic sources, as their goals are centered on the here and now rather than on a spiritual, unknown end-time.
The Hilltop Youth’s land-theology is a fairly simple one: the protection of the land and its Jewish inhabitants comes before all else. Again, many youth express the belief that by being on the land – particularly by working on it – they are connecting with God in a personal, spiritual way. The land is thus an end in and of itself; simply by living on it, the youth experience a divine presence. The land is also a means to an end. Several of the youth have alluded to the standard Gush Emunim belief that by covering the land with Jews, they are “redeeming” the land (i.e. placing it in the hands of its rightful owners). Additionally, whereas the Gush adherents have focused almost solely on the disputed territories – and particularly on the most “holy” places therein, such as Jerusalem and Hebron – the youth seem to feel equally passionately about all parts of Israel. Although their presence is limited to the West Bank, their use of language (referring to the land they inhabit as “Eretz Yisrael” and not “Judea and Samaria”) indicates that this fact is probably not due to ideology, but rather convenience. The youth linguistically express a yearning for the entire land, not simply the land in the West Bank.

Looking closely at the Shema – a prayer recited every day by observant Jews at both morning and evening services – shows that this emphasis on the land is actually a logical reflection of biblical commandments. The Shema, taken directly from Deuteronomy, is central to Jewish liturgy and is almost entirely about the Israelites’ relationship to the land. Moses exhorts his people to follow God’s decrees “so that you may go in and occupy the good land that the Lord swore to your ancestors to give you, thrusting out all your enemies from before you, as the Lord has promised” (Deuteronomy 6:18-19 NOAB). The covenant with God is an exchange of obedience for land. For Jews outside of the land of Israel, this passage is a hopeful, spiritual

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22 This is in contrast with the community-oriented philosophy of Gush Emunim, as discussed above.
23 As noted above, the youth tend to create their outposts near established settlements where they often receive physical and material support.
exercise; it describes an ideal (living in Israel) that may someday become true again. For Jews in Israel, there is no reason why the Shema should not be read literally, as a sort of manual for action. The Deuteronomic covenant claims that the ultimate prize for compliance with God is possession of the land, and thus it is not surprising that the Hilltop Youth award it so much value.

The youths’ use of the bible to construct their land-centric theology is best represented by their idolization of the biblical figure of Joshua. Joshua is certainly one of the most violent and militant “good” characters (characters who are depicted as doing right by God) in the Old Testament. He is saddled with the responsibility of settling the entire land of Israel by removing the extant inhabitants, the Amorites and the Canaanites, from their homes. The method used here – and, it should be noted, the method dictated by God – is not one of peaceful negotiation. Joshua leads the Israelites in a bloody crusade, killing men, women, children and livestock, and burning down their towns and fields. He is described repeatedly as “strong and courageous,” shows great skills as a strategic and brutal military leader, and it is stressed that he invokes fear in the inhabitants of Canaan. These are all qualities that the Hilltop Youth seem to value and are clearly attempting to embody in their violent actions against their Palestinian neighbors and against the threat of evacuation.

One tale from the book of Joshua is particularly useful in understanding the Hilltop Youth’s theology. Before beginning on his mission of settling the land, Joshua erects a memorial at Gilgal (which is in the West Bank, interestingly enough) commemorating the miracle of God drying up the Jordan River to ease the Israelites’ crossing. Immediately after he does so, it is noted that the Amorites and Canaanites were deeply afraid of the coming army due to God’s actions on the Israelites’ behalf (Joshua 5:1 NOAB). The memorial, Joshua announces, is constructed in order to prove to following generations that God is protecting the Israeliite people
and all who stand in their way should consider themselves warned (Joshua 4:21-24 NOAB). The Hilltop Youth, like Joshua, seem to take it as their duty to invoke fear in what they see as their generation’s Amorites and Canaanites; they, however, can be free from fear as God is on their side. Additionally, the construction of the memorial at Gilgal is accompanied by the circumcision of the male Israelite, which “rolled away” from the Israelites “the disgrace of Egypt” (Joshua 5:9 NOAB). The theme of the disgrace of exile is recurrent in the youth’s discourse, as well.\(^2^4\) To be exilic is to be shamefully timid, to take orders from others, and to be subordinate to non-Jews. The parallels between the Hilltop Youth and Joshua’s army are remarkable.

The youth, at times, even refer to their Palestinian neighbors as “Canaanites” or “Amalekites,” further invoking the story of Joshua. The battle instigated by Amalek immediately after the Israelites leave Egypt establishes the Amalekites as Israel’s eternal enemy – a status that rabbinic tradition has reinforced time and time again. Under Moses’ command, Joshua valiantly defeats the assailants; after the event, Moses builds an altar, declaring, “the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation” (Exodus 17:16 NOAB). As they attacked the starving, exhausted Israelites when the latter were at their weakest, rabbinic sources say that Amalek “is the irreconcilable enemy and it is forbidden to show mercy foolishly to one wholly dedicated to the destruction of Israel” (Entry for “Amalekites,” Encyclopedia Judaica 2007).

Throughout Jewish history, many adversaries have been deemed to be descendents of Amalek, determined to see the Jews annihilated.\(^2^5\) The youth have evidently posited themselves as the

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\(^2^4\) Although the Israelites time in Egypt cannot be accurately termed an exile (as they were not in the land of Israel beforehand), the Israelites in Egypt were “exilic” in the sense that they did not have sovereignty over the land, they were subordinate to their Egyptian overseers, and were not yet in the land that God had promised Abraham. For an example of exilic language as used by the youth, see page 20.

\(^2^5\) For example, the book of Esther posits that Haman is a descendent of Agag (he is called “Haman the Agagite”) the king of the Amalekites.
heirs to Joshua's legacy, and those who are against them are not simply enemies, but *eternal*, Amalekite enemies, whom God has commanded must be defeated.

The parallels between Joshua's story and the narrative constructed by the Hilltop Youth do not end there. As the Israelites are entering the land under Joshua's command, a Canaanite prostitute named Rahab commits herself to their service, sensing that the Israelites will be the ultimate victors. I have found one particularly telling reference to Rahab in the Hilltop Youths’ discourse: in the phrasebook of curses some of the youth distributed last year, the authors suggest the use of the term "son of Rahab" as an insult. Louis Ginzburg points out that in rabbinic texts Rahab is depicted in an overall positive light, despite the fact that she was a prostitute until her conversion (Ginzburg 1968: 5). In fact, she is generally acknowledged to be the wife of Joshua and the mother of seven kings and eight prophets. According to R. K. Phillips, however, Rahab's status as a Canaanite – with whom the Israelites were forbidden to intermarry (see Deuteronomy 7:1-4) – is problematic (Phillips 1983). For the youth to use "son of Rahab" as an insult, they must have abandoned the rabbinic take on her character in favor of a more ethnocentric perspective; the Canaanites, even if they act in a way that benefits the Israelites, are essentially other. This is reflected in the youths' approach to the Palestinians – they are different because they are "Canaanite," i.e. not *ns.*

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26 These are intended to be used against IDF soldiers who are evacuating or demolishing one of the outposts. See last chapter.
27 In her book *Abandoned to Lust*, Jennifer Knust offers one explanation for the use of this type of rhetoric. Using biblical examples, Knust demonstrates how groups will protect themselves against the imposing other by using sexualized, distancing language. The fact that Rahab is both a prostitute and a Canaanite is important; it reinforces the belief that gentiles are unclean. "The book of Leviticus prefaced [sexual] prohibitions...with a warning: the people of Israel are not to 'do as they do in the land of Egypt' or 'as they do in the land of Canaan.' After listing the prohibited behaviors, Israel was warned once again: if they commit any of these abominations, they will defile the land just as the Canaanites had done" (Knust 2006: 54). The land is too holy to risk its desecration by immoral outsiders, or insiders who act similarly to outsiders.
Although their theology of the land has mainly biblical and not rabbinic roots, their views on Arabs and non-Jews in general are sanctioned by both the Bible and parts of the Talmud.

There are numerous examples of violent defense of the land in the Torah. Traditional rabbinic law, however, is more ambivalent. On the one hand, the *kanaim-pogim-bo* ("zealots may strike the offender") principle asserts:

"The zealot is a highly faithful, G-d fearing and righteous person, who is deeply concerned about the desecration of G-d's name and its devastating effect on the Jewish people. Because of his zeal for G-d, the zealot would be commended for trying to avoid the desecration of G-d's name by all means, including the killing of the perpetrator[s]."

(Farber 2007: 59; interpretation of B. Talmud, Sanhedrin 81b-82a).

The Hilltop Youth would undoubtedly describe themselves as zealots, viewing Arab inhabittance in Jewish land as a desecration of God's name. On the other hand, many well known rabbis have discussed a "Jewish revulsion toward war and its implements" (Farber 2007: 178) and violence, in rabbinic tradition, is used only as a last resort. Even the divine command to wipe out the Amalekites – which, as we have seen, is a motivating trope in the Hilltop Youths' lives – is approached extremely cautiously and with apparent unease by many of the Talmudic commentators (Sagi 1994: 328). The Hilltop Youth do not see violence as a last resort; they are willing to harm innocents (or at least those whose guilt, in the eyes of Israeli law, is highly questionable) for the sake of the land, even though there is little if any precedent for this in rabbinical literature. Moreover, the language the youth use indicates that they see themselves as pitted against "the nations of the world" (*bagoyim*), whom they must fight for the sake of the land and their redemption as God has decreed.

The youth also see materialism as the way of the nations of the world, and thus Jews who live comfortable lives and who are not willing to sacrifice that comfort for the sake of the land are deemed "exilic." The youth appear to search for "biblical" authenticity, as Michael Feige has
termed it, which entails living a rugged life of intimacy with the land, similar to how they understand the bible to be portraying the lives of their biblical ancestors. Furthermore, as I noted above, “a salvation that is not exilic”\(^{23}\) requires a willingness to disregard any authority that threatens the sanctity of the land. This has led to their theological divergence from Gush Emunim ideology in their relationship to the state; they do not believe in the inherent holiness of the Jewish state, since the government has repeatedly engaged in “land for peace” deals. Although Jewish well-being is undoubtedly important to the youth – they have not entirely abandoned the principle of the sanctity of Jewish life, despite their frequent clashes with the IDF – they view their struggle not simply as one between Jews and non-Jews but rather as one between faithful Jews and those who obstruct the youths’ mission and therefore work counter to divine will (both non-Jews and Jews). The youth do not see secular Jews as unknowing participants in the divine plan, as A.I. Kook and many of their ideological parents did, and thus they do not make any major attempts to sway public opinion to their benefit.

The unique ideology of the Hilltop Youth can be attributed to a variety of potential causes and influences. First, they are clearly influenced by the violent, anti-establishment views of the most radical settlement rabbis. Joseph Blau has pointed out the ways in which these revered figures manipulate traditional Jewish beliefs and rabbinic texts in order to justify their war-loving, often racist beliefs. Rav Shlomo Aviner, for example, said, “even if there is a peace, we must instigate wars of liberation in order to conquer additional parts of the Land of Israel” (Masalha 2007: 48). Aviner has also declared:

“[i]t is above and beyond any moral, humanistic considerations and national rights of gentiles to our land...because all ethics and justice in the hearts of man have no existence whatsoever if not for their having been drawn from the word of God. God, as the

\(^{23}\) Quote from a Hilltop Youth.
source of ethics, instructs us to ignore human ethical considerations in conquering the land" (Farber 2007: 184).

Other rabbis have endorsed this unconstrained view of violence, claiming that the Arabs, in any case, are not worth caring about; for instance, Rav Dov Lior wrote, “every intelligent person knows that wild savagery is a basic trait of the Arab personality” (188). Many of the rabbis have even asserted that a Jew who kills a non-Jew, regardless of circumstance, should be “exempt from human judgment” (Mezvinsky 1999: 71).

Perhaps the most shocking example of these modern rabbinically-sanctioned calls to violence is Rabbi Yitzhak Shapira’s recent book, *Torat Ha-Melech* (The King’s Torah). In this manual of sorts, Shapira outlines the varied circumstances under which violence against non-Jews is permissible (in his opinion, of course). He makes many provocative claims, such as: “In order to defeat the enemy, we must behave toward them in a spirit of retaliation and measure for measure” (Remez 2009). This is reflected in his public statements blaming the IDF for the youths’ price tag policy; the IDF has created this environment of hostility, Shapira asserts, and should not be surprised that the youth have responded in this way. He goes beyond merely advocating for the Hilltop Youths’ actions, though; *Torat Ha-Melech* even sanctions murdering babies if they are deemed to be a potential threat to Jewish life when they grow up.

The youth of the hills’ beliefs, however, began forming long before these radical views were publicly endorsed by Gush Emunim religious authorities. Simply taking a look at the conditions under which most of them were raised provides us with valuable information about their formative experiences. Most of the youth grew up with large families in fairly bourgeois homes in the settlements, away from the rest of Israeli society, and consistently bombarded by Palestinian violence and political spectacle (Feige 2009: 231). The constant exposure to violence on the “relatively lawless frontiers” – all of the Hilltop Youth have undoubtedly experienced Palestinian terrorism first-hand – must have limited their understanding of Palestinians to
something along the lines of "those who killed my friends and want to murder me." Moreover, they watched as the adults attempted to gain a foothold in the political system, and as time and again the state failed to sufficiently protect them from terrorist attacks. As most of the Hilltop Youth grew up post-Oslo Accords, they also witnessed the inability of the Gush leadership to prevent the state from ceding their sacred land to their sworn enemies. Finally, since the erection of the separation barrier the majority of secular settlers have forsaken the outlying settlements; this left the youth exposed only to the ideology of their religious progenitors. In 1989, David Weisburd pointed out that settlers that have close ties with Israelis outside of the settlements are usually less willing to condone extreme reactions to Palestinian violence, while those with fewer of these ties are more likely to support such "active resistance" (Weisburd 1989: 124). Weisburd may have unknowingly foreshadowed the development of the beliefs of the coming generation of settlers.

In the settlements in which most of the youth were raised, the ultimate importance of inhabiting the land and of being active members in the coming redemption – Gush Emunim ideology, as I have already noted, posited the settlers as paving the way for the messiah – was emphasized repeatedly. The youths' education revolved around this theme (Feige 2009). The primacy of settlement was encouraged not only through intentional educational activities, but through the older settlers' political activity, as well. Although Gush Emunim as a religious movement has a complex theology that extends far beyond issues of land, their political agenda has been distinctly one-note. As one scholar of Gush Emunim has pointed out, the one issue about which the NRP – the party with which most settlers identified (until the NRP's demise in 2008) – was unwilling to compromise was the concept of Greater Israel (Freedman 2009: 84). The struggle for Jewish sovereignty over the land was therefore the defining characteristic of these youths' upbringings, and it is obvious that they have internalized this message.
It should come as no shock, in that case, that the youth have grown disenchanted with traditional Gush tactics for affecting change. Gush Emunim, as I have mentioned repeatedly, has consistently relied on non-violent political actions to gain ground in their fight for the occupied territories. However, this method requires compromise. As Peter Herriot has demonstrated, “Time and again in Gush’s story the need to retain political influence has tempered the urge to go beyond the bounds of tolerance of its political allies and their electorates” (Herriot 2009: 105).

Furthermore, this approach has shown far less success in recent years than it did at the end of the 20th century, especially since the settlers have lost much of the public favor they held in years past. The 1,500 Gush-affiliated protesters during the Gaza disengagement, for example, failed to win even the national-religious popular support (International Crisis Group 2009: 4). In the words of one youth named Avraham, “The Judea and Samaria public has gotten used to being treated like shit...in the past three years, they've been killing people here like flies. There were weeks in which I was going to a funeral every day. The settlers get slaughtered, go to funerals and cry. We aren't willing to accept it” (Ettinger 2003). It seems that in the eyes of the Hilltop Youth, the time has come for new tactics if they are to succeed in their mission.

Despite the youths’ relative isolation from the rest of Israeli society, one distinctly Israeli trope — related to the above idea of ruggedness and sacrifice — can be identified in their belief system. The image of the sabras — “native-born Israelis growing, so it was said, naturally, ‘without complexes,’ in their true homeland” (Almog 2000: 4) — has remained a potent one in Israeli society since the first generation of sabras came of age. The term is a derivative of tzabar, the Hebrew word for prickly pear cactus, and it refers to native Israelis who possesses certain characteristics, including “a rough and direct way of expressing themselves, a knowledge of the land, a hatred of the Diaspora, a native sense of supremacy, a fierce Zionist idealism...youth, roughness, self-confidence, boldness, and common sense” (Almog 2000: 7-9). The sabra is thus
defined in opposition to the Jew of the Diaspora. Although I have found no evidence of the Hilltop Youth using the term sabra to describe themselves or others, they clearly see the good Jew as possessing sabra characteristics (roughness, knowledge of the land, pioneering ethic, and so on), whereas the bad Jew is “exilic.”

What does it mean to be exilic then, according to these youth? Before we answer that question, it will be useful to conceive of the Hilltop Youth not as breaking entirely in ideology from their forbearers but rather as the result of a historical continuum; they are experiencing processes that their parents were exposed to, but under different circumstances. They are the radical product of much more widespread, subtle trends within the mainstream religious settlement community. As we saw in chapter one, even Gush Emunim today does not perfectly align with the original goals and motives of the movement’s founders, and some of the Gush Emunim settlers openly support the Hilltop Youth’s activities. The following is an exploration of those trends, paying close attention to the ways in which the Hilltop Youth’s ideology can be seen as the next logical step in a long series of evolving beliefs.

Returning to the idea of exile, it is clear that for the sabra generation, the exile was one who was weak, passive, and easily subjugated. That definition has not substantially changed; however, the term has had different connotations depending upon who has employed it. It appears, in fact, that those who use the term “exilic” inevitably are called exilic by others at some point. For example, the sabras were secular, even anti-religious members of the original Zionist Left. Gush Emunim settlers, it is often noted, see themselves as being the descendents of the sabra mentality and lifestyle; they are carrying on the Israeli pioneering ethic, albeit with religious motives, since the children and grandchildren of the sabras have become (in the eyes of the settlers) far too materialistic and self-serving (Bronner 2009). Thus, those who were originally the quintessential non-exiles became exilic in the eyes of the religious Zionist Right. For the Gush
members, the secular kibbutz-soldiers who built their country embodied the gola (Diaspora) once they became passive.

Ironically, the same argument is used against the Gush Emunim settlers by the Hilltop Youth today; they look down on their ideological parents’ middle-class, bourgeois lifestyles, as well as what the youth perceive to be the Gush settlers’ repeated capitulation to the government’s wishes. The majority of the youth were raised—whether explicitly or implicitly (by the example of their parents)—to believe that the sacrifice of material goods and physical safety is often necessary to achieve one’s goals. The older settlers, after all, had sacrificed so much to establish beautiful, safe and comfortable settlements and to gain their political legitimacy. However, as Ehud Sprinzak has pointed out, while the settlements afforded the settlers stability and a sense of home, they also curtailed “their old combative, anti-establishment spirit” (Sprinzak 1999: 219). The youths’ call to action, then, is really the renewal of an older call to action. It is interesting that history seems to point to the fact that, in all probability, these youth will also someday grow soft and lose their original pioneering zeal. In any case, the youth have clearly inherited the distinctly Israeli paradigm of native/exile, as evidenced by their lifestyle and worldview.

The Hilltop Youth are also the product of evolving conceptions of the nearby Palestinians (or to use their terminology, Arabs). Although the original Gush Emunim ideology viewed Palestinians as a hindrance to their mission and not inevitable Jewish enemies, the more the Israeli public became willing to negotiate with Palestinians, the more Gush Emunim attempted to portray them as “ultimate others” (Feige 2009: 117). Over the past few decades, the effect of Palestinian terrorism on the safety of the settlements and the increasing political legitimacy given to Palestinian voices have altered the way the settlers perceive their relationship to their neighbors. The language used to describe Arabs has grown increasingly vitriolic and even
racist, with the Palestinians often posited as the Amalekites of today. Additionally, the accepted manner of interacting with Arabs has become more violent with each passing decade. Gush leaders did not initially deem settler vigilantism necessary, but for years since they have seen vigilantism as nonnegotiable. Their political approach to the Palestinians has changed, as well; in fact, the NRP chairman in 2004 advocated the “transfer” (expulsion) of the Arab population, a policy that was previously only supported by radicals like Rabbi Meir Kahane (Ruthven 2004: 162). Despite the fact that most mainstream religious settlers will not engage in such extreme actions as the price tag campaigns, the Hilltop Youths’ approach to Arab relations is not as divergent from mainstream beliefs as it might initially appear.

Paradoxically, the youths’ animosity towards the state can also be read as partly the result of evolving Gush beliefs. In traditional Gush Emunim theology, the state of Israel is holy. However, the state of Israel is not as holy as the land, the people, or the Torah of Israel, since the holiness of the state is conditional (Sprinzak 1993: 122). When the state violates God’s will, it is no longer acting with divine sanction and can therefore be disobeyed. Gush adherents have often acted counter to the establishment; but unlike the Hilltop Youth, they have always striven to work within the bounds of civil disobedience, and they have not sanctioned the use of violence against other Jews. Although we cannot credit Gush Emunim with sanctioning the Hilltop Youth’s violent tendencies, it is easy to imagine their anti-establishment attitudes influencing these youngsters. Moreover, the conditional nature of the state’s holiness means that it is possible to remain within the Gush ideological framework and yet disregard the sanctity of the state (although that is not what Yesha leaders currently endorse). Even among the more

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29 This fact suggests that the youths’ use of Joshua might also stem from their parent generation; Amalek is a notable theme in religious Zionist writings and propaganda of the past several decades, and the Bible tells of Joshua’s defeat of Amalek. To identify with Joshua is thus to identify with the man who defeated the first incarnation of the Jews’ eternal enemy.
mainstream religious settlers, many have felt betrayed by the state's willingness to cede land for peace; they have experienced "what one settler called a 'messianic shock,' shaking the ideological foundations of those who had seen the state as an instrument of divine will" (International Crisis Group 2009: 5). The more the state violates divine will, the less it will be welcomed with open arms in the settlements by anyone, let alone the Hilltop Youth.

Quite a few studies have been done on the psychology of paranoia and its effects on targeted or victimized groups. They can provide some additional insight into the reasons behind the Hilltop Youth's theology; both today and during the time period when the youth were growing up, Israel has faced increasing suspicion and hostility from western nations - particularly regarding Israeli "facts on the ground" in the occupied territories - than it had in the past. This outside pressure has been felt fairly keenly in the settlements, as the settlers have been the targets of a good part of the international criticism, which has led to increased internal criticism, as well. Such attacks, whether physical or emotional, might have resulted in greater paranoia and more radical acts of desperation on the settlers' part. As one scholar explains, "when a nation has been the continuing object of enmity, its people may be sensitized to expect hostility in the external world" (Post 1997: 57). The perceived enmity is not simply the result of current events, either; the threat of Jewish extermination in the hands of non-Jews feels tangible even three-quarters of a century after the Holocaust, especially since it has always been a major theme in Israeli national culture.\(^3\)

This paranoia may also be the result of changing Israeli conceptions of Palestinians. In many ways, the settlers' lives have become defined against the presence of the Palestinians; when

those whom a group identifies as the ultimate others begin to re-imagine themselves (or are re-
imagined by dominant social forces), the stability of the former group’s identity is challenged. As
I mentioned above, the more familiar and relatable the Palestinians have become to the Israeli
public, the more the Religious Zionists have struggled to maintain the old boundaries between
“us” and “them.” Furthermore, as Jerome Post has noted, “If suspicion is the hallmark of
paranoia, projection [the “normal tendency to presume that internal states or changes are due to
external causes”] is its fundamental mechanism” (Post 1997: 12). The settlers’ fears about the
Palestinians are often reflected in their own actions; what they attribute to the other is often more
easily attributable to themselves. For example, the youth see the Palestinians as a threat to the
well-being of the land, while the youth have actually done far more physical harm to the land (in
the form of burning Palestinian olive groves). Additionally, the youth fear the loss of innocent
Jewish lives, yet far more innocent Palestinian lives have been lost at Israeli hands than the other
way around (OCHA Special Focus 2007).

Finally, I wish to leave room for the possibility of the youths’ actions being, in part, a
result of the rebellious, radical tendencies present in many teens and young adults. Ehud
Sprinzak, in an essay detailing different types of terrorism, describes the participants in what he
calls youth counterculture terrorism as being “more involved in a cultural than political crisis of
legitimation with the democratic culture” (Sprinzak 1995: 35), which certainly seems applicable to
the Hilltop Youth. As has been discussed at length, the youth are not involved in a political
struggle as much as a religious-ideological struggle. Furthermore, Sprinzak demonstrates, youth
counterculture groups tend to reject bourgeois norms, such as “orderly family life and property
ownership” (Sprinzak 1995: 38); again, it is undeniable that these characteristics aptly describe the
Hilltop Youth mentality. Although the youths’ religious fervor has given their rebellion a unique
character, their actions nonetheless reflect the global teenage tendency to rupture cultural norms and reevaluate moral priorities.
Conclusions

I began this thesis with the claim that the Hilltop Youth are not as radical as they may initially seem. It is true that their beliefs diverge from those of the previous generation, and it is true that they are, as a whole, more disposed to engage in shocking, violent actions. However, it is the social and political manifestations of these youths' beliefs that distress the international community, not the beliefs themselves. The theology to which they adhere – the central tenet of which is a biblically informed search for a present redemption, achieved through the settlement of the land – is actually a logical next step in a long history of religious Zionist ideals. The irony of this ideology rests in the fact that without the social and political (or, rather, secular) processes to which religious Zionism has been subjected in the last century, the youth could never have developed such a perspective. In other words, the establishment of the secular Israeli state in 1947 (and the Israeli expansion into the West Bank in 1967) opened the door to messianic religious Zionist movements such as Gush Emunim, which created the appropriate environment for the development of the Hilltop Youths' religious, anti-state sentiment.

If the Israeli government wishes to continue successfully with the peace process, the opinions and desires of the youth cannot be disregarded. What do the youth want from the government? How will the youth react to any future disengagements or territorial "sacrifices"? Who is supporting them, and why? What kind of compromises, if any, will the youth agree to? What is the most efficient way of reining them in? It seems inevitable that the Hilltop Youth will fight tooth and nail for the freedom to settle wherever they please within the boundaries of Eretz Yisrael. With the divisions between secular and religious Israelis becoming more and more pronounced each year, however, armed conflict with the youth would most likely result in an internal public relations disaster for the IDF, if not civil war. But at the very least, most will agree that the rampant anti-Palestinian violence in the West Bank must be quelled as soon as possible.
It is on this note that I offer one final suggestion. If the Israeli government allows the youth to feel that they have a voice – via media exposure and government representation – there is the possibility that the Hilltop Youth will lose momentum. As I pointed out in the last chapter, the pioneering mentality of each generation of Israeli settlers (the sabras, the Gush Emunim) has waned with that generation’s incorporation into the extant socio-political structures. For example, once the Israeli public accepted Gush Emunim as an embodiment of Israeli ideals, the Gush became less radical and more bourgeois; perhaps the youth will follow this path, too, if given appropriate support. Moreover, such a move would take the battle off of the hilltops and into a political arena, which would encourage the youth to value public opinion and thus result in fewer instances of blatant anti-Palestinian crimes. This approach would need to be combined with large-scale efforts on the behalf of more moderate (yet still religious) settlers to condemn violent activities such as the “price tag” campaigns not just in word, but in action, as well. Currently the youth receive most of their physical and moral support from select mainstream settlements; if that relationship changes, it is unlikely that the youth will be able to sustain their outpost communities.

Most importantly, we need a show of responsible theology. I hope this thesis has made it clear that the dilemma the youth present is not simply about politics; in fact, they justify their actions almost solely using theology. I believe that it is imperative that someone or some group step up and engage in a meaningful and respectful theological discussion with the youth. In the last few years, the media has documented the advent of several anti-occupation groups (i.e. Rabbis for Human Rights) that have used strictly theological arguments for their position. Along the same vein, the most persuasive opponents of the Hilltop Youth will inevitably be those who take the youths’ beliefs seriously, but who offer more nuanced interpretations of the youths’ land-based theology (after all, their post-exilic biblical understanding of the land is quite compelling).
If other orthodox Jews are willing to say, "you are not wrong in seeing the land this way, but there's another way of upholding its intrinsic holiness and finding 'redemption'," I am confident that they can, at the very least, bring the Hilltop Youth back into the settlements.
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