Locating the Power of the Settler Movement

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Abstract

This article aims to locate the power of the Israeli settler movement along with analysing how the settlers direct their political influence towards the government, by tracing how Gush Emunim, (the original primary settler organisation) mutated into the Yesha Council (the settlers’ current primary organisation). It will also investigate the ‘Hilltop Youth’, the current contender to become the ‘primary settler organisation’, along with analysing the dynamic rise of Naftali Bennett’s ultra-nationalist party HaBayit HaYehudi. This internal power struggle between the Yesha Council and the Hilltop Youth will be critically assessed through a social movement perspective. The article will conclude that power ultimately still resides with the Yesha Council, despite the Hilltop Youth increasingly challenging the Council’s grip on authority.

Keywords: Israeli politics, Settlements, Gush Emunim, Yesha Council, Hilltop Youth.
Section 1 – Introduction

Settlers and their settlements have become one of the most controversial issues not just within domestic Israeli politics but also a major stumbling block for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas stated in 2012 that a freeze on settlement construction is a prerequisite for future negotiations to commence (Eldar 2012). Most academic literature focuses on the effect settlements have on the peace process, and thus misses many of the nuances of the settler movement. This article will examine the settler movement through a social movement approach and will locate the power of the movement by examining both how the movement is organised and how political influence is attained along with analysing the current power struggles within the movement. The aim is to achieve a holistic understanding of the position of the settler movement within Israeli politics and society.

Terminology – ‘Settlement’ and ‘Settlers’

Defining a ‘settlement’ is reasonably straightforward, – it is a Jewish community built on land Israel captured during the 1967 Six Day War, often categorised within the international community as ‘occupied’ or ‘disputed’ land (Taub 2010 and Gorenberg 2011). These settlements often differ greatly both in terms of infrastructure and political alignment. The large city settlements such as Efrat or Ma’ale Adumim offer all the amenities of any western city, and often have a centre to right-wing political alignment. In the January 2013 Israeli elections the results in Ma’ale Adumim reflected this centre-right alignment, Likud-Beiteinu the major centre-right party won with 42% of the vote. The ultra-nationalist HaBayit HaYehudi came 2nd with 21% and the centrist Yesh Atid came 3rd with 10%. By contrast, the far-right extremist party Otzma LeYisrael only managed to attain 5% (Ynet 2013).

A smaller category of settlements - usually located on strategic vantage points - are known as ‘outposts’. These are often just a collection of caravans and outbuildings. Many are illegal even under Israeli law as they are constructed on privately owned Palestinian land and the Supreme Court often orders the IDF – (Israel Defence Forces) to demolish them. However, since these hilltop settlements are simple structures, many are soon re-built, sometimes in a matter of hours (Sherwood 2011). Occupants of these outposts and smaller settlements are often the more extreme, more ideologically driven faction of the settler movement, as shown by their far right-wing voting patterns. The illegality of the outposts means the occupants are not registered to vote, and thus no official voting patterns can be analysed. Despite not being an outpost Yitzhar, with only 390 inhabitants is an example of a smaller category of
settlement, where Otzma LeYisrael won 72% of the vote in the January 2013 elections (Ynet 2013).

Considering that Otzma LeYisrael failed to pass the electoral threshold of 2% of national vote in order to gain representation in the Knesset, one can clearly see the extremist ideological alignment of the smaller settlements, compared to voting patterns in those settlements that are more established and have become cities (Ynet 2013).

Settlers are not a homogenous group. Within the settler movement there are three broad groups of settlers; religious-nationalists, economic settlers and Haredim (ultra-orthodox Jews). Large disparities of religious observance, economic standing and ideological commitment can be observed within these groups (Eiran and Mnookin 2005: 4).

Economic settlers are primarily concerned to improve their quality of life, often having been offered incentives to relocate from the busy Tel-Aviv area to a more open space, but still able to commute to the Tel-Aviv area for employment (Eiran and Mnookin 2005: 4). Haredim also were initially motivated not by religious commitment, but by economic incentives – the settlements enabling them to acquire low-cost housing suitable for their large families (Eiran and Mnookin 2005: 5.). These two groups total around 50% of the settlers, but this article will focus on the religious-nationalist group, as it is these who are the dominant force within the movement and occupy the preponderance of settlement leadership positions (Eiran and Mnookin 2005: 4).

Those in the religious-nationalist group believe it is a Mitzvah (biblical commandment) to populate all of Eretz Yisrael (the biblical Land of Israel) and have moved to settlements for religious and ideological reasons. Within this grouping of religious-nationalists, there has always existed a dichotomy between moderate and extreme factions. Traditionally this has been shown by some groups being willing to engage and work with the State, and those wanting to subvert it. Presently this divide exists generationally, with the older first generation settlers usually willing to engage and work with the State through organisations such as the Yesha Council, while the younger second and third generation are often more extreme in their ideological convictions and their tactics of political influence (Jones 2013).

The Primary Settler Organisation

The appellation ‘primary settler organisation’ (PSO) refers to the most representative group within the settler movement which acts as its mouthpiece to government and society more
broadly. By tracing which group is the PSO one can begin to locate where power lies within the movement.

The identity or nature of the PSO has crucially changed over time, with different factions continually challenging and competing to advance their own ideas on tactics and methods to achieve their group’s goals, but there is little dispute about ideology.

This internal division has plagued the settler movement since its inception with two clear approaches promoted; one engaging in the political process and one subverting the political process. The work of Sidney Tarrow (1997) *Power within Movement* provides a theoretical framework for examining power struggles within movements. This theory argues that a certain government policy that could potentially harm a movement creates ‘political opportunity’. This manifests itself by internal divisions, which leads to extreme factions rising to the fore, thus generating a power struggle over where power lies within a movement.

In locating where power lies within the settler movement this article will analyse three groups.

ii) Yesha Council (1980 – present)
iii) Hilltop Youth (2005 – present)

There is some overlap in these groups’ dates of operation; however there always exists one PSO. From 1974 to 1985 this was Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful) and from 1985 to now this has been the Yesha Council (Feige 2009). However, ever since the 2005 disengagement from Gaza there has arisen a more radical fundamentalist element within the settler movement that is increasingly challenging the authority of the Yesha Council. This group is known as the Hilltop Youth.

**Section 2 – Gush Emunim: Ideology and Political Influence**

Ever since the 1967 Six Day War Religious-Zionist groups have made Israeli annexation of the occupied land a prime objective. In attempting to achieve this many organisations have been endorsed all proposing different methods of achieving this objective. Gush Emunim was the original settler organisation and from its 1974 inception to its political demise in 1985 it occupied the centre-stage position.
When examining the methods and impact of Gush Emunim one has first to clarify its dates of operation, as within the academic literature surrounding it there exists a large degree of disagreement regarding the actual date of its ceasing to exist. Gush Emunim’s formal cessation occurred after several of its prominent leaders were implicated in terrorist attacks on Palestinian officials and in a planned attack on the Al-Aqsa Mosque in 1985 by a radical offshoot called the ‘Jewish Underground’ (Sprinzak 1991 and Feige 2009). This violence effectively lost Gush Emunim its credibility, severely damaging its standing within Israeli politics and wider society (Feige 2009: 25).

This section will outline the origins and ideology of Gush Emunim along with providing a detailed examination of how it utilised its political influence. It will include an in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of Gush Emunim’s methods, and with reference to the works of prominent academics in this field notably David Newman, Ehud Spinzak and Lilly Weissbrod show to what extent the group managed to realise its political objectives.

This section refers particularly to the works of David Newman (1985, 1992 and 2005) who provides a pragmatic analytical approach, because of his ability to fully engage in Gush Emunim’s theological and religious framework.

**Origins**

Gush Emunim’s origins date from immediately after June 1967 when, within six days Israel was victorious in a war involving all its immediate neighbours. A consequence of this victory was the huge amount of land conquered, with Gaza, the Golan Heights, the Sinai Peninsula and the West Bank coming under Israeli military control. Gershom Gorenberg’s book called it ‘The Accidental Empire’ (Gorenberg 2006).

In July 1967 (only a month after the end of the Six Day War) Hanan Porat and his family were the first to settle the newly conquered land, rebuilding Kfar Etzion, a previous Jewish settlement that came under Arab control in 1948 (Weissbrod 1982: 266). This seemingly insignificant movement of a small number of settlers across the Green Line (the 1949 Armistice demarcation that held until 1967 and became the de-facto border) (Library of Congress Library Studies 2013) exhibited to the rest of society that people could, and should settle the land (Kershner 2011).

Porat along with Rabbi Moshe Levinger who spearheaded Jewish settlement in Hebron, formed a splinter group of the National Religious Party (NRP) that achieved official
recognition in 1974 as Gush Emunim (Weissbrod 1982: 266). It was the Labour government’s proposed territorial compromise after the 1973 Yom Kippur War that worried the settlers and mobilised them into political action leading to the creation of Gush Emunim (Taub 2011: 53).

**Ideology**

The ideology of Gush Emunim was shaped strongly by the teachings of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook. Known usually as Rav Kook, he saw the settling of Eretz Yisrael as a mitzvah, which would lead to the redemption of the Jewish people, and the coming of the Messiah (Sprinzak 1991: 45). Rav Kook was the father of Religious Zionism, which sees Eretz Yisrael as intrinsically sacred, as it was promised to the Jewish People by God. This biblical attachment to the land is the primary tenet of Religious Zionist ideology (Newman 2005: 194). Rav Kook died before the State was founded in 1948, but his son Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook promulgated his father’s teachings, encouraging people to settle Eretz Yisrael. At the Yeshiva (a Jewish educational institution) ‘Merkaz Harav’ in Jerusalem, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook taught his hundreds of followers that Israel’s 1967 victory was a miracle and clear evidence that they were living in a Messianic age (Sprinzak 1991: 45). Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook became the spiritual figurehead for Gush Emunim and Religious Zionism more generally, and his views on territorial maximisation, whereby “each grain of soil was declared holy in a fundamental sense” (Sprinzak 1991: 45) inspired settler leaders to work actively to annex the captured land. Gush Emunim saw themselves as ‘New Zionists’, settling the land now vouchsafed to them as a result of what they saw as a military miracle, just as in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries early Zionist Chalutzim (pioneers) had come to Eretz Yisrael to escape the pogroms in Eastern Europe.

**Methods of Political Influence**

David Newman’s (2005) ‘three modes of behaviour’ is adopted and expanded upon throughout this section to show how Gush Emunim achieved and utilised its political influence. Newman identifies three strands to Gush Emunim’s modus operandi that together influenced Israeli politics. Thus Gush Emunim became:

a) a protest movement
b) a political movement
c) a settlement movement
Gush Emunim thus gained considerable influence both politically and in society more broadly. The extent to which each mode was effective in exerting political influence will be analysed in this section.

a) **Gush Emunim as a Protest Movement**

From its creation, one of the most visible ways in which Gush Emunim used its political influence was to organise large scale protests and marches. This tactic had two simultaneous objectives. Firstly, they demonstrated opposition to governmental policy of withdrawing from any part of the occupied territories. Secondly these marches, which often occurred on important dates such as *Yom Ha’atzmaut* (Independence Day), were intended to “show force against the government and to gain the sympathy of the general public” (Shafat 1995) - or as expressed by Feige (2009) to cause a “settling in the hearts of society”

Gush Emunim was a flexible protest movement, being particularly effective at mobilising tens of thousands of supporters in a relatively short time. It was therefore ready to react to any anti-settler discourse that might be occurring in the ‘corridors of power’ (Newman 2005: 200).

Along with peaceful mass protests and rallies, Gush Emunim’s protests often spilled over into violence. This violence was the basis of the splinter organisation, the Jewish Underground, which targeted the left-wing group Peace Now, murdering Emil Greenzweig in 1983 (Newman 2005: 202). Crucially this violence was rabbinically sanctioned and acted as a catalyst for further violence (Taub 2010).

Gush Emunim was clearly successful as a protest movement. The activism, enthusiasm and commitment of its protesters was unparalleled and facilitated extensive support (Newman 2005). This unmatched commitment was driven by their belief that their role was to fulfil God’s commandment by settling the whole of *Eretz Yisrael*. This motivation is deeply entrenched in the psyche of the settlers, who live in close family units and send their children to religious state schools and often to national religious youth movement *Bnei Akiva* and frequently later to a *hesder yeshiva* (religious learning institution which combines Torah study with military service). This enthusiasm and motivation particularly of the young for the cause was harnessed successfully by the leaders of Gush Emunim, enabling effective mobilisation of protesters at any given time. In Gush Emunim’s early years, this harnessing
of the settlers’ enthusiasm enabled spontaneous protests to occur, which was the most effective way to exert political influence against the then left-wing Labour government (Don-Yehiya 1987).

b) Gush Emunim as a Political Movement

Despite Gush Emunim never formally adopting a codified structure its leaders managed to infiltrate a huge network of public sector institutions (Newman 2005: 203). The major mode of political engagement which Gush Emunim members utilised to achieve their goals was standing for Knesset in various religious political parties which share a common ideology with Gush Emunim (Newman 2005).

Of all the political parties with which Gush Emunim affiliated, Mafdal, The National Religious Party (NRP) was the one it favoured. Gush Emunim’s presence within the NRP grew substantially through the late 1970s with Rabbi Haim Druckman, a senior activist, being elected 2nd on the NRP list to the 1977 Knesset (Sprinzak 1991: 77). The growing number of Gush Emunim activists such as Hanan Porat, Shaul Yahalom, Zvi Handel and Yitzhak Levi - who became NRP Members of Knesset meant that Gush Emunim achieved a growing and disproportionate influence within the Knesset. (Newman 2005).

Other Gush Emunim activists chose to participate in more fringe political parties. Hanan Porat, despite later running for NRP, was elected along with Gershon Shafat in 1981 through Techiya (Aronoff 1984: 76). Techiya’s fervent support for Gush Emunim was portrayed when all the “Techiya Knesset members went in 1985 to Arab Hebron to demonstrate their support for the squatters of Gush Emunim in direct defiance of army orders” (Sprinzak 1991: 205).

For Gush Emunim it was attractive to have activists in a variety of political parties. This allowed a greater scale of influence which would increase the amount of support for the settler movement within the Knesset, the heart of central government. Furthermore, having activists in different parties created a greater sense of political credibility, as one could not categorise Gush Emunim with one religious party but a range of centre-right parties. From 1977 onwards Gush Emunim harnessed this strong influence within the Knesset to pressure the governments of the day to pursue a pro-settlement policy.
Another mode of behaviour utilised by Gush Emunim has been “the practical and tangible dimension of achieving political objectives” (Newman 2005). This is the process of actually building settlements along with encouraging a sizeable population to live in the ‘Greater Land of Israel’. Encouraging the movement of Jewish Israelis to settlement areas had the effect of increasing the legitimacy of those who already resided there (Feige 2009: 35-36).

In its early years Gush Emunim was able to successfully transform its ideology (of settling Eretz Yisrael) into action by (building settlements). Its commitment to the construction of settlements regardless of government opposition was well demonstrated by the establishment of Elon Moreh in Samaria. Elon Moreh was the biblical name for Nabulus (a Palestinian city), which was a target site for Gush Emunim to construct a Gari’in (a nucleus for a future settlement) (Sprinzak 1991: 48). In attempts to set up a Gari’in, an organisation known as the Elon Moreh Group was established, led by Menachem Felix and Benny Katzover. Early attempts to settle Elon Moreh were strongly opposed by Prime Ministers Golda Meir and Yitzchak Rabin. However, after eight attempts to settle Elon Moreh, permission was granted in 1979 by Prime Minister Menachem Begin (Taub 2010: 58-59). Begin subsequently stated “there will be many more Elon Moreh’s” (Begin 1977), a clear signal of the settlement policy that would be adopted by Begin’s Likud Government.

Elon Moreh is a useful example to show how Gush Emunim’s persistence and commitment to settle the land became a strong political force. The Elon Moreh example highlighted the ability of Gush Emunim to take advantage of the political divisions which plague wider Israeli politics.

To help achieve the objective of settling the land, Gush Emunim needed to restructure and put more emphasis on this area if it was going to be successful. This led to the establishment of Amana in 1977. Literally translating as ‘covenant’, Amana was the settlement construction branch of Gush Emunim, which was officially recognised by the Israeli government and therefore received backing from Israel’s Ministry of Agriculture and the Department of Rural Settlement (Sprinzak 1991: 127). This recognition of Amana by the Likud government of 1979 was a significant step for Gush Emunim, essentially meaning that settlement building was sanctioned by the government, thus bringing Gush Emunim closer to achieving its aims.
Analysing Gush Emunim’s Methods of Political Influence

In analysing the effectiveness of Gush Emunim’s methods of political influence one has to be as empirical as possible, but also be aware that an overreliance on empirical data would remove the deep emotional connection which Gush Emunim activists identified with their cause. To achieve this effective examination David Newman and Tamar Hermann’s (1992) ‘five points of a successful movement’ will be used as a basis and expanded upon. Newman and Hermann use five categories dimensions for their analysis, these are;

a) the realisation of the organisation’s objectives
b) the extent of mobilisation of members
c) the continued existence and activities of the organisation
d) the preservation of ideological purity
e) the extent to which the organisation’s message is ultimately accepted within the wider political culture

a) The Realisation of the Organisation’s Objectives
Gush Emunim’s stated objectives were to establish settlements and encourage Jews to live in the ‘Greater Land of Israel’. Gush Emunim had been relatively successful in attaining this objective with the Jewish settler population in the West Bank rising from 0 before the 1967 War to 1,182 in 1972 to 22,800 in 1983 and 111,600 in 1993 (Foundation for Middle East Peace 2010). Despite the success of branches of Gush Emunim such as Amana, there were setbacks for Gush Emunim in attaining their objective. These setbacks have mostly come in the form of various governments’ willingness to negotiate, giving ‘land for peace’, such as the withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula in 1982, which directly lead to the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt.

b) The Extent of Mobilisation of the Organisation
The organisation’s ability to mobilise support for its cause within the Religious-Zionist camp was one of the most successful aspects of Gush Emunim’s activities. Many Religious-Zionists consider the aim of settling Eretz Yisrael a mitzvah. Therefore intuitively, religious Jewish Israelis would at least be sympathetic to Gush Emunim’s cause and at most actively supporting it, whether through attending protests or relocating to Judea and Samaria (biblical name for the West Bank). However, Gush Emunim’s ability to mobilise not just the religious communities in Israel but also to some extent the secular communities is one of the
organisation’s greatest achievements. Mobilising sizeable secular support was a difficult process. This was achieved through stressing the political and militarily strategic benefits of settlements rather than solely the religious obligation to settle the land, which could have alienated some of Gush Emunim’s potential secular support (Feige 2009: 33). On the whole Gush Emunim managed to balance these two opposing poles; creating a sizeable secular support which helped the movement attempt to detach itself from an emphasis on religious fundamentalism which in turn helped increase the legitimacy of the movement.

c) **The Continued Existence and Activities of the Organisation**

As stated in the introduction, Gush Emunim as an organisation ceased to be the PSO since 1985, due to various key leaders of the group being associated with the terrorist activities of the Jewish Underground. This essentially discredited the organisation, and ultimately led to its demise from primacy.

Despite Gush Emunim as an organisation ceasing to exist, the organisations which followed are closely linked with Gush Emunim’s ideology. With various organisations such as, The Yesha Council, The Yesha Rabbi’s Forum, Zo Artzenu, and Women in Green all advocating the Gush Emunim objective of settling *Eretz Yisrael*. In particular the rise of the Yesha Council to the position of PSO will be examined in great depth throughout the third section of this article.

d) **The Preservation of the Organisation’s Ideology**

Gush Emunim’s ideological Religious-Zionist message stayed constant from the establishment of the organisation in 1974 to its political demise in 1985. Despite ideological purity remaining strong, the methods of achieving their aims altered over time. The early years of Gush Emunim saw large scale protests where violence as a means of achieving their aims was denounced. But in the mid-1980s the Jewish Underground, the extremist offshoot of Gush Emunim spearheaded the group into a more violent radical period. Gush Emunim’s ideology would later be absorbed by many other organisations and despite the modes of behaviour of these groups differing, all share a common aim; the construction of Jewish settlements over the whole of *Eretz Yisrael*. 
e) The Acceptance of the Organisation’s Message within Political Culture

Analysing whether Gush Emunim’s message has been accepted within Israeli political culture is challenging, chiefly because Israeli political culture is a complex muddle of attitudes and beliefs, without a coherent overriding theme. However, one can argue that Gush Emunim ultimately failed to persuade Israeli society to accept its message. As a largely secular society, it has not on the whole embraced the theological values of Gush Emunim. Thus since the demise of Gush Emunim in 1985 the Yesha Council has subsequently utilised more subtle methods to attempt to reach an objective which Gush Emunim never achieved, this being ‘settling in the hearts of society’ (Feige 2009).

Conclusion

Gush Emunim was the original settler organisation, whose genesis was shaped through leaders such as Rav Kook and his son Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, who advocated the biblical commandment of settling the whole of the Eretz Yisrael. This religious obligation fused with charismatic leadership and widespread support enabled Gush Emunim to be successful at influencing the political process. Gush Emunim was able to influence the political process utilising a combination of methods; political institutionalisation, protesting and settlement construction (Newman 2005). It was this combination which exerted huge amounts of pressure on the government to enact certain pro-settlement policies. Furthermore, Gush Emunim was able to achieve so much political success, due its leaders (often rabbis) harnessing the enthusiasm of the activists. It was Rabbi Tzi Yehuda Kook who spearheaded this tactic, his sermons at the Yeshivat Merkaz Harav in Jerusalem drew in thousands of supporters who were willing to put the ‘words’ of the sermon (settling the land) into ‘practice’ (constructing settlements).

Analysis of Gush Emunim’s methods of political influence was attained through an expansion of Newman and Hermann’s (1992) ‘five points of a successful movement’. The ideological message of the movement stayed fairly pure through the various periods of Gush Emunim’s existence. Furthermore one of the organisations largest victories was encouraging support for the cause with secular Israelis as well as the religious fundamentalist camp. This provided Gush Emunim greater political legitimacy as they argued they represented more of society. However, despite several successes, Gush Emunim ultimately failed in its aim to convince the secular section of Israeli society that settling the territories was in the interest of
the country. Despite a minority of religious-nationalists relocating to the West Bank, the vast majority of Israeli public remained sceptical of the long-term implications of such actions.

Gush Emunim ceased to exist during the violent period of the mid 1980s, when ironically the settler movement had most political influence. However, many other organisations now claim to represent the settler movement and influence the political process in various ways.

**Section 3 - From Gush Emunim to Yesha Council: From Messianism to Pragmatism?**

Ever since prominent leaders of Gush Emunim were implicated in the Jewish Underground’s terrorist attacks in the mid-1980s, Gush Emunim lost all credibility and thus ceased to function as the PSO (Gorenberg 2000). In an attempt to realign the movement the Yesha Council was advocated as the new PSO by the settlers. This section will examine in detail the transition from Gush Emunim to the Yesha Council, and explore whether the apparent transition from the ‘Messianism’ of Gush Emunim to the ‘pragmatism’ of the Yesha Council was genuine or purely superficial.

Additionally, in performing a critical analysis of the Yesha Council’s methods of political influence this section will utilise the dominant academic approaches propounded by Oded Haklai (2007), Michael Feige (2009) and Gadi Taub (2010). In particular this section will expand and develop Haklai’s (2007) argument that the Yesha Council has infiltrated government agencies, allowing unauthorised funnelling of state money to settlers, which was revealed in the Sasson Report (2005).

**Rise of the Yesha Council**

To grasp fully the political impact of the Yesha Council one has first to understand its structure, mechanism and objectives along with comprehending the context in which it rose to prominence from within the settler community.

The Yesha Council is an umbrella organisation representing all cities, regional and local councils within the West Bank, effectively representing 220,000 settlers (Yesha Council Website 2013). The acronym *Yesha* when written in Hebrew stands for Judea, Samaria and Gaza. Despite Israel withdrawing from Gaza in 2005 the ‘a’ still remains in the acronym, representing the hope that one day there will be a Jewish population there (Yesha Council Website 2013).
The Yesha Council is not a conventional council that holds elections for positions. Instead the 34 positions of the Council correspond to the 24 democratically elected settlement and regional mayors, the other 10 seats on the Council are appointed by the chairman and senior settlement leaders and are often leading rabbinical figures in the settler movement (Yesha Council Website 2013).

The Yesha Council, despite being founded in December 1980, only came to be the PSO after the demise of Gush Emunim in 1985 (Taub 2010: 76). “Gush Emunim never formally ceased to exist, but it stopped being the centre of political activity” (Taub 2010: 76).

The Council has three key objectives - firstly, providing security for the Jewish population of Yesha, secondly, improving humanitarian and municipal needs, including everything from education to quality of roads and finally, political action and advocacy (Melson 2004). This involves a “multi-pronged, concerted and coordinated effort in the battlefields, in the media, in leading political power centres and most importantly, in the hearts and minds of the Jewish people” (Melson 2004). Effectively the Yesha Council is attempting to promote the historical and strategic values of settling the territories to the wider Israeli public, something that has had mixed results and which will be analysed throughout this section.

**Ideological transition**

The Yesha Council attempted to distance itself from Gush Emunim by making some fundamental changes to the way the settler ideology is presented. In short the Yesha Council has attempted to move away from Gush Emunim’s ‘Messianism’ to an era of ‘pragmatism’.

The process of shaping the ideological transition from Gush Emunim to Yesha Council was influenced heavily by the Elon Moreh Supreme Court Case in 1979. This was “the watershed moment” for the settler movement (Taub 2010: 70). The Supreme Court ruled that the Elon Moreh settlement was illegal under Israeli law, as the land belonged to local Arabs, and thus the Jewish settlers there needed to be removed. Elon Moreh had been for the settler movement a beacon of hope, a step closer to redemption and the coming of the Messiah, thus removal of the settlement was a huge setback for the settlers. This setback was exacerbated as it was a Likud government under Menachem Begin which enforced the court’s decision. Begin himself had previously claimed, that “there will be many more Elon Moreh’s” (Begin 1977). This was for the settlers an act of betrayal, and a clear signal that despite being pro-
settlements, even right-wing governments would not support their construction if deemed illegal by the Supreme Court.

The settlers’ anger produced a fissure within the movement which now had two options; one which would subvert the political process, and one which would aim to be part of the political process. This fissure created what Sidney Tarrow (1998) describes as ‘political opportunity’ which enables fringe factions to rise to the fore of a social movement, and thus an intra-movement power struggle ensues, between the two opposing factions.

The path which aimed to subvert the political process was headed by Rabbi Meir Kahane and his Kach party; which sought annexation of all Eretz Yisrael along with the removal of all Arabs (with force if necessary) from Israel. Kach’s overtly racist nature coupled with the party’s incitement of violence which contravened Israeli electoral law subsequently led the Supreme Court to ban the party from running in elections (Sprinzak 1991: 86).

The second path which emerged was led by visionary leaders of the settler movement such as Rabbi Yisrael Ariel and Benny Katzover who recognised that no longer could the settlers rely on redemption politics to achieve their aims. Future settlements would be justified only on security grounds. This period of evaluation and assessment was crucial for the development of the Yesha Council’s ideology (Taub 2010: 75). Council leaders realised that the Israeli public would no longer accept the Messianic rhetoric of redemption. They had to focus instead on pragmatism and engaging with the Knesset and Courts, and debates about the future of settlements in a way that did not exclude those who were not strictly religiously observant. Thus the Yesha Council often promotes leaders that are not rabbis but are activists who are ideologically dedicated to the construction of settlements. The most recent Chairman of the Yesha Council Dani Dayan exemplifies this, being both a secular Jew and yet ideologically committed to the construction of settlements as shown by his leading the opposition against Netanyahu’s settlement freeze in 2010 (Prusher 2011).

**Changing Methods of Political Influence?**

In an attempt to influence government the Yesha Council adopted and adapted some of the methods which Gush Emunim had used. Continued use of coordinated protests has been the most obvious means of political influence utilised by the Council, with the protests directed at the 2005 unilateral withdrawal from Gaza being a prime example. Protests in 2005 used the colour of the Gaza strip municipality flag which was orange as a rallying point, effectively
‘painting Israel orange’. Orange ribbons were tied to vehicles, orange flags flew above houses and “in some religious schools even registers in schools were sent out on orange paper, in support of the settlers” (Newman 2005: 220).

However, although the Yesha Council continued to use some of Gush Emunim’s methods to gain political influence, there was a realisation that protests are limited in their effect, and that to obtain substantial political influence, one must transfer from external political protesting to internal political interaction. This realisation created a tactic to promote settlement construction which this article labels the ‘political network approach’.

The Political Network Approach
Knowing that close relationships are vital for achieving their political aims, the Yesha Council has spearheaded a campaign to create close ties with the political elite. This close relationship with those who hold power creates what Oded Haklai (2007) describes as “penetration of the state”. Haklai (2007) conceptualised this partnership as a ‘give and get relationship’ - essentially meaning that settler organisations would vote en masse for a certain political party, such as Likud, and thus in return the government would be sympathetic to the settler cause. The Manhigut Yehudit (Jewish Leadership Movement) is a prime example of this relationship (Haklai 2007). Manhigut Yehudit espouses a right-wing ideology based on Jewish religious values along and promotes complete annexation of the West Bank. The group aims to enlist Religious-Zionist’s into the Likud Party (Haklai 2007). By 2005 its supporters numbered 8% of the party’s members. This membership was used to pressure the upper echelon of the party to act with sympathy to the settler community (Haklai 2007).

This version of the relationship is arguably too simplistic, missing much of the nuances of the process. In reality this relationship is more complex, involving various factions which create an extensive political network, whereby the settler organisations, primarily the Yesha Council, have disproportionate ability to create and alter policy, even at the highest level. The sinews of this network creep into the political system, often penetrating the decision-making elements of government along with pertinent government departments and agencies. This network enables the Yesha Council to pressure government agencies to allocate resources to unauthorised settlements, which are illegal under Israeli law (Sasson 2005). This state infiltration leads to close personal relationships being forged, an example of which can be seen when the most recent Chairman of the Yesha Council, Dani Dayan resigned in order to work on the Netanyahu team for Likud-Beiteinu in the January 2013 elections. The outgoing
chairman stated “he will do whatever was necessary to ensure that Netanyahu takes office as Prime Minister” (Lev 2013).

This collaboration between the Yesha Council and government agencies is particularly rampant at the local level, where ‘state infiltration’ (whereby the Yesha Council has infiltrated both in terms of sympathetic personnel and importing values), within the Ministry of Construction and Housing and the Ministry of Defence is not uncommon (Haklai 2007: 727). This settler infiltration into the ‘corridors of power’ along with the unauthorised support government agencies provide settlers was uncovered in the Sasson Report in 2005. The report revealed settlements received a huge amount of unauthorised support from government agencies. Maron (2004) states that in 2001 the Israeli government spent 2.2 billion shekels in the construction and maintenance of unauthorised settlements. Additionally, the Ministry of Construction and Housing provided 200 million shekels in tax incentives to entice families to relocate to settlements (Maron 2004, Sasson 2005). This unauthorised funnelling of money to aid the development of settlements project is a “clear violation of the law” (Sasson 2005). Essentially the Yesha Council’s extensive political network manages to manipulate government agencies to provide unauthorised support for the settlers.

The regional councils which cover the West Bank are responsible for a wide range of public services such as; education and welfare (Newman 2005: 205). At this grassroots level many settler activists who are backed by the Yesha Council are employed by their regional council. This enables the settlers to “legally use public sector resources to consolidate and further promote the expansion of the existing settlement network in line with their political and ideological ambitions” (Newman 2005: 205). An example of this could be seen during the protests in 2005 against the withdrawal from Gaza, when “settler regional and local councils used their control over the education and bussing systems to transport thousands of schoolchildren and local government employees to protest against the government’s policies” (Mnookin and Eiran 2005: 21).

As well as operating at a local level the ‘political network’ also operates at the national level. This enables a web of contacts to be constructed within the ‘corridors of power’, thus enabling effective lobbying. These contacts are often Members of Knesset and currently twelve Members of Knesset reside in settlements (Knesset 2013). This provides the Yesha Council “with a foothold which no other protest movement in Israel’s history had previously succeeded in attaining” (Newman 2005: 205). The Yesha Council has a close connection with
sympathetic Likud MK’s – running conferences, sometimes even in Likud headquarters, that often attract many Likud MK’s and uses these connections to expand its political goals (Somfalvi 2009).

Interestingly this political network also extends outside of the Israeli political system, with Yesha Council leaders often travelling to the USA to generate support. A long standing ally of the Yesha Council in the USA has been AIPAC (The American Israel Public Affairs Committee), who themselves are considered one of the most powerful lobby groups in the USA (Sasson 2010). Moreover the increasing financial support Israeli settlements receive from Christian Zionist groups in the USA has been cultivated by the carefully constructed links with the Yesha Council. Christian Zionists believe that all Jews should live in the Land of Israel, and thus unwavering support for Israeli territorial expansion and the building of settlements ensues (Bartholomew 2007).

Analysing Yesha Council’s Methods of Political Influence

To create continuity, the structure of analysing the methods of political influence of the Yesha Council will be the same structure which was used to analyse Gush Emunim, which is through adaptation of Herman and Newman’s (1992) ‘five points of a successful movement’. This system of analysis examines;

a) the realisation of the organisation’s objectives
b) the extent of mobilisation of members
c) the continued existence and activities of the organisation
d) the preservation of ideological purity
e) the extent to which the organisation’s message is ultimately accepted within the wider political culture

a) Realisation of the Organisation’s Objectives

The Yesha Council aims to create a single-voice speaking for all settlers. Along with promoting the interests of settlers to government, it also aims to advocate a pragmatic, non-violent, non-fundamentalist message to the wider Israeli public.

In some respects the Yesha Council has been successful in realising these objectives, especially in representing the regional municipalities to central government. Utilising its ‘political network’ the Council is able to arrange high-level meetings with the upper echelon
of government. These meetings provide the Council leaders a platform from which to portray the settler cause as one that advances Israel’s security and defence interest of Israel. A tangible success of this lobbying was the refusal of Netanyahu to renew the 10 month settlement building freeze in 2010 (Krieger 2013).

b) **The Extent of Mobilisation of the Organisation**

The extent to which the Yesha Council has been able to mobilise its members is difficult to measure. This is because the Yesha Council is not a traditional ‘movement’ in terms of recruitment of members. Instead the 24 regional and settlement heads sit on the Council, with 10 appointed prominent members of the settler movement, who all attempt to portray a united settler front to the rest of society. This structure is a toxic mix of members, some of whom are more extreme and thus more sympathetic to the radical younger settlers known as the Hilltop Youth, despite the Council officially denouncing their actions as illegal and unproductive (Yesha Council Website 2013).

The Yesha Council has attempted to create a more representative and pragmatic organisation by recruiting various high-profile leaders who are not religious, but still subscribe to the construction of settlements. Effectively, the Council is trying to transfer itself from the periphery of Israeli society into the mainstream, where more political influence can be achieved.

However, with the vast majority of its members subscribing to religious-nationalist ideas that stress the religious importance of redeeming the land the Council’s move to a more secular agenda appears to be largely superficial. In effect one could argue that the Yesha Council’s message is actually extremely similar to that of Gush Emunim, although presented in a more palatable format.

c) **The Continued Existence and Activities of the Organisation**

The Yesha Council still exists as the PSO and draws this authority chiefly because it represents all regions and cities in the West Bank (Melson 2004). However, despite its official primacy, its authority is being increasingly challenged by the younger generation of settlers known as the Hardal or Hilltop Youth. The extremist ideology and ‘price-tag’ tactics utilised by the Hilltop Youth undoubtedly undermines the Council’s authority. Furthermore, the seemingly inability to control this extremist faction reflects poorly on the Yesha Council’s authority over the settlers, which in-turn could lead to the break-up of the extensive
political network which exists. The ideology and methods of influencing the political process of the Hilltop Youth will be examined in greater detail in section four of this article.

d)  **The Preservation of Ideological Purity**

Ever since the Elon Moreh case in 1979 the Yesha Council upper echelon realised that the divine messianic message was incompatible with the democratic political process. Thus a new ideological strand was promoted, that of a pragmatic approach, with the emphasis on historical, strategic, defence reasons rather than on solely religious motives. This ideological approach which the Council espouses has remained fairly constant since the Council’s inception. However, there exists an argument as to what extent this ideology truly represents the settlers, as most still wholeheartedly believe in the redemptive power of settling *Eretz Yisrael*, and the pragmatic, pluralist agenda forwarded by the Council is purely superficial, and a means to an end.

e)  **The Acceptance of the Organisation’s Message within Political Culture**

Similarly to Gush Emunim, there is an underlying need for acceptance of the values of the settler movement. Acceptance of the movements’ values within the political elite and society more generally would allow for the Council’s objectives to be more easily met. However, for the settlers it is arguably much more complex than just annexation and settling of the land; it is in effect a whole change and re-evaluation of the values of Israeli society. Michael Feige (2009) explains this in his title of his work stating that settlers overall aim is to “settle in the hearts” (Feige 2009).

As stated earlier the Yesha Council has been successful in helping to settle the land along with representing the settler population to government. However, to some extent the Council has ultimately failed in portraying its message and values that settling the whole of *Eretz Yisrael* is of vital importance and must not ever be forsaken (Feige 2009: 247). Evidence of this can be seen with the huge setbacks for the Yesha Council and the wider settler movement which were the Oslo Accords in 1993, the building of the separation barrier in 2003 and the unilateral disengagement from Gaza in 2005. Thus it appears self-evident that the Council has failed in its attempt to export its values to society. Further analysis is needed to understand why this is the case.
The Council’s ultimate failure to ‘settle in the hearts’ is “not due to faulty decision making or an inefficient public relations mechanism, but is inherent in the situation of a fundamentalist movement in a modern, mostly secular society” (Feige 2009: 247). Essentially the problem for the Council lies with Israeli society; which on the whole hears, but is not prepared to listen to the uncompromising, one-state solution message espoused. An opinion poll by the Panels Research Institute in January 2013 found that 81.9% of Israelis think settlement construction should be the first source of budget cuts (Zeiger 2013). Another opinion poll by the S. Daniel Abraham Centre for Middle East Peace suggested that 67% of all Israelis would support a ‘two state solution’ based on the 1967 armistice lines, with mutually agreed land swaps, only 21% opposed it (Dahaf 2012). For all the Council’s successes, the inability to spread and transfer its values to a wider audience has been by far its greatest failure to date.

Conclusion
Since prominent leaders of Gush Emunim were found to be involved in the terrorist activities of the Jewish Underground in 1985, Gush Emunim lost all credibility along with its position as the PSO. As a replacement the Yesha Council was forwarded as the natural successor to Gush Emunim.

The Yesha Council shares the same settler ideology as Gush Emunim, but crucially differs in the method by which this ideology should be presented to Israeli society. The Yesha Council realised that no-longer could the settler movement rely on redemptive politics to achieve their aims, instead a more moderate, pragmatic, and strategic approach was needed. This change in presentation is manifested in the change in methods of political influence. Instead of external political protesting being the primary weapon, a more subtle approach was adopted and one which is currently used, known as the ‘political network approach’.

This political network is a large web of political contacts which the Yesha Council can utilise to penetrate state agencies. The Sasson Report (2005) showed the extent to which some government agencies had been infiltrated, with millions of shekels being funnelled to unauthorised settlements in the West Bank, something Sasson (2005) labels as “a clear violation of the law”.

The Yesha Council has an effective model for which to influence government. However a major stumbling block is the ascendance the Hilltop Youth, who are a radical offshoot of the main settler community, which is explored further in section four.
Section 4 - Battling for the Hilltops: Violence as a means of Political Influence

In August 2005 Prime Minister Ariel Sharon addressed the Israeli nation stating, “The day has arrived. We are beginning the most difficult and painful step of all, evacuating our communities from the Gaza Strip” (Sharon 2005). This speech and the events that it described was one of the largest contributing factors to the rise of the Hardal or Hilltop Youth. This extremist religious offshoot of the settler movement arose out of the ashes of the 2005 disengagement and the ‘failure’ of the Yesha Council to secure Jewish life in Eretz Yisrael. This section will briefly describe the genesis and structure of the Hilltop Youth, along with examining its ideology and influencing factors, including the role of rabbinic authority. This section will focus on the use of violent acts, known as a ‘Price Tag’, as a means of political influence. An analysis will provide an understanding of why violence is used, along with the consequence of such actions. Furthermore, this section will examine the power struggle between the Yesha Council and the Hilltop Youth which has developed over the last few years.

As the Hilltop Youth is a recent and growing phenomenon, limited academic literature exists in this field. However, despite this, this section will utilise the works of Ami Pedahzur and Arie Perliger Jewish Terrorism in Israel (2009) who provide a holistic and comparative approach to assessing the use of violence by the Hilltop Youth. Further academic works such as Clive Jones’ Israel’s Insurgent Citizens: Contesting the State, Demanding the Land (2013) is employed to provide a comprehensive account of the creation of the Hilltop Youth in the context of the wider settler movement. Other academic works from Dina Kraft (2007), Gadi Taub (2010) and Byman and Sachs (2012) are drawn upon throughout this section to provide an insightful analysis of the Hilltop Youth and the power struggle which exists with the Yesha Council.

Understanding the Hilltop Youth

To be able to analyse the actions of the Hilltop Youth one first must ascertain how they became such a prominent player within the settler movement.

The Hilltop Youth is not a unified organisation. However most academics agree on a set of characteristics which the Hilltop Youth conform to (Taub 2010 and Jones 2013). Firstly, the Hilltop Youth are second and third generation settlers, who have spent all their lives on settlements, constantly surrounded by (what they perceive to be hostile) Arab neighbours, and crucially they have never known any other life. Furthermore the Hilltop Youth are radical
religious-nationalists who are even more extreme than members of Gush Emunim in the 1970s. Without any charismatic leaders, guidance and direction often comes in the form of fundamentalist rabbis, who follow the extremist theological legacy of Rabbi Meir Kahane (Jones 2013: 208). Along with holding extremist religious-nationalist views many of the Hilltop Youth are economically poor, many often drop out of school and see their mission as working God’s land. The isolated outposts where the Hilltop Youth reside provide the perfect location for the Hilltop Youth to, “work the land, to harvest olives and to ride freely on horses” (Shafran 2002). This somewhat nomadic basic lifestyle which the Hilltop Youth promote is in stark contrast to the large, westernised settlement blocs of Ma’ale Adumim or Efrat. In effect the Hilltop Youth are attempting to re-define Zionism and re-define the settler movement, portraying themselves as the new religious chaluzim (pioneers) settling their God given land, similar to that of the original chaluzim at the turn of the 20th Century.

The Genesis of the Hilltop Youth
Much disagreement exists within the academic literature concerning the ascendance of the Hilltop Youth. Various theoretical approaches have been put forward in an attempt to explain the rise of the Hilltop Youth. Such as Hanna Tranas who in his work ‘The Wild Wild West Bank’ (2012) simultaneously synthesises the theories of; Ted Gurr (1970) who forwards the notion of relative deprivation; Pedahzur et al’s (1999) who argues that de-legitimisation leads to radicalisation which leads to violence, along with Sprinzak (1981) who promotes the ‘iceberg model’ to understand the roots of political violence. However, this section will focus on the most influential factors concerning the ascendance of the Hilltop Youth, which are the effects of the 2005 disengagement from Gaza and of extremist rabbinical authority.

The disengagement from Gaza was the crucial ‘tipping point’ in the evolution of the Hilltop Youth. It cemented the notion that not only is the government (even right wing ones) not trustworthy, but the disengagement also showed the weakness and the perceived frailty of the older generation of settlers. The disengagement left the young highly enthusiastic settlers feeling angry and betrayed by their elders. The Yesha Council was hailed by the Hilltop Youth as the pinnacle of this weakness, as the Council’s methods of political integration ultimately failed to prevent the withdrawal. The Council is considered by the Hilltop Youth a bourgeoisie puppet arm of the government, in effect collaborators with the ‘enemy’, which is the state (Taub 2010: 127). For the Hilltop Youth, the Council failed not just to prevent the withdrawal, but the whole political integration approach which the Council promoted was
perceived to have been unsuccessful. The Hilltop Youth surmised that integrating into the political system was futile and would not help them achieve their objective. Thus action was needed – such as the creation of unauthorised outposts on isolated hilltops, creating ‘facts on the ground’. Furthermore, the disengagement provided the Hilltop Youth ‘political opportunity’ (Tarrow 1998). This ‘political opportunity’ was harnessed by the Hilltop Youth who used the withdrawal as a rallying point for their ascendance within the settler movement. Essentially the failure of the Council led to a surge in support for the Hilltop Youth with many young settlers creating self-contained unauthorised hilltop outposts often built on private Palestinian land (Pedahzur and Perlinger 2009). These hilltop outposts are a breeding ground for extremism, and their isolated location surrounded by Arab towns often acts as a catalyst to settler violence; known as ‘Price Tagging’ (Kraft 2007: 33).

**Ideology of the Hilltop Youth: Rabbinical Influence**

As the Hilltop Youth is not a unified organisation it does not subscribe to a single clear ideology. However their views are essentially a more extreme mutated version of the classic settler ideology originally promoted by Gush Emunim.

Rav Kook the spiritual father of Gush Emunim saw the state as essentially holy, and thus all its agencies and institutions are also holy, such as the government and military. Furthermore Rav Kook also saw classical Zionism as sacred as this secular movement brought about the creation of the State of Israel. However, the Hilltop Youth are not committed to this view, and alternatively subscribe to the extremist anti-democratic legacy of Rabbi Meir Kahane. In an essay published by Kahane entitled *Hillel Hashem* (desecration of God’s name) published in 1976, he argued the redundancy of secular Zionism, as for Kahane it was God who provided the State of Israel rather than the secular Zionists (Jones 2013).

One can draw a direct link between the Kahanist legacy and the theological basis of the Hilltop Youth. Kahanism’s view of violence as a “cleansing process, one that has set the Jewish people free” (Jones 2013: 208) is subscribed to by the Hilltop Youth, shown by their callous use of violence. The attempt to rekindle the Kahanist theological legacy can be seen by the order from a group of radical rabbis to kill Yair Neveh (the military officer in charge of the West Bank) under the *Din Moser* ruling in Jewish Law. This is an extreme ruling that argues that Naveh was a *Moser* (someone who informs about a Jew to a non-Jewish authority) (Kraft 2007: 33). The extreme *Din Moser* ruling was also used to rabbinically
sanction the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in 1994 (Eldar and Zertal 2007: 243). Two of the most controversial of these extremist rabbis are Yizhak Shapira and Yosef Elitzur who in their book *The Law of the King* describe a situation when it is permitted for Jews to kill gentiles (Gorenberg 2011: 119). Shapira and Elitzur’s work essentially argues that “Jews are permitted to kill anyone from the opposing side who poses a threat, even in an indirect way” (Gorenberg 2011: 119). This extremist, no-compromise interpretation of *Halacha* (Jewish Law), informed by radical rabbis in the theological legacy of Rabbi Meir Kahane leads to violent ‘price-tag’ attacks carried out by the Hilltop Youth (Byman and Sachs 2012 and Jones 2013).

**Understanding the ‘Price-Tag’**

To analyse the Hilltop Youth’s use of violence it is helpful to construct a suitable definition of this type of settler violence, known as a ‘price-tag’ attack. B’Tselem, the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories defines a ‘price tag’ attack as an “act of violence aimed at the Palestinian population and / or Israeli security forces”. However these attacks often do not occur in a vacuum but occur often in response to “actions by Israeli authorities that are perceived as harming the settlement enterprise, or follow Palestinian violence against settlers” (B’Tselem 2010). Essentially one can argue that understanding settler violent is relatively simple; the extremist religious ideology coupled with the rabbinical sanctioning of violence leads to ‘price-tag’ attacks.

These attacks take two main forms; one occurs when the Israeli military attempts to demolish an outpost and hundreds of Hilltop Youth gather and effectively stage a violent protest; bombarding security personnel with rocks. A second form of ‘price tag’ attack occurs when certain specific targets are identified, such as Palestinians, known members of the Israeli peace movements or even members of the Yesha Council. These attacks often consist of anything from graffiti, stone throwing, damaging of property - in particular the burning of olive trees, arson and in extreme cases assaults and shootings (Tranas 2012: 48).

Along with the severity of such attacks one also needs to ascertain their frequency. Byman and Sachs (2012) use statistics from a UN report in 2011 that states that over 300 attacks against Palestinian’s occurred in 2011 causing 100 casualties. Furthermore the frequency of such attacks is rising from “200 attacks in 2009 to 400 attacks in 2011” (UN 2011 and Byman and Sachs 2012).
These ‘price-tags’ have increased both in severity and frequency since the 2005 disengagement from Gaza, despite the actual disengagement going ahead without major violent disruption. However this was not the case with the removal of Jewish settlers from the unauthorised settlement of Amona in 2006. Around 4,000 Hilltop Youth protestors faced off against the army and police, leading to 200 people being injured (Kraft 2007: 33). Amona was a crucial ‘battle’ for the Hilltop Youth as it served as a counterbalance to the “mistake of surrender in Gaza” (Taub 2010: 154). Interestingly the violence was not just directed towards the security services but also to Members of Knesset and members of the Yesha Council who had come out to show their solidarity with the settlers. There were shouts of “collaborators”, “Nazis” and “traitors” (Taub 2010: 154) from the rooftops where the Hilltop Youth had occupied (Gorenberg 2011: 130). As Pedahzur and Perliger (2009: 136) articulate correctly, “the events at Amona reflected the trauma they had suffered in the summer of 2005 and the degree of hate that burned in their hearts towards the government.” This so-called ‘Amona Spirit’ whereby the Hilltop Youth use any means necessary to prevent an evacuation has been since used at withdrawals from Migron and Havat Gilad (Taub 2010).

The callous use of violence advocated by elements of the Hilltop Youth is promoted partly due to their disdain for democracy. Thus the state loses all authority and legitimacy (Feige 2009). Essentially the Hilltop Youth categorise themselves as a ‘law unto their own’, and thus feel that they are untouchable by the Israeli state, both in judicial and security terms. Furthermore one can argue that the Hilltop Youth have taken advantage of the grey area in Israeli law which deals with the administration of the territories. This is symbolised by the Hilltop Youth’s reckless and disingenuous regard for the law, who often can be seen breaching various laws such as drug usage, speeding and driving without due care and attention (Feige 2009: 232).

**Analysing the ‘Price-Tag’ – A Political Policy?**

The current academic literature provides two schools of thought for explaining the use of ‘price-tag’ violence. The initial, more traditional strand follows on the Kahanist tradition of violence as a means of political influence. While the second strand promoted by Carton (2011) and Tranas (2012) conceptualises price-tagging as an apolitical act of frustration that the ‘rights’ of the Hilltop Youth to settle the land are being impinged on.
The Kahanist tradition as explained earlier conceptualises violence as a legitimate form of political influence and gives rabbinical sanctions for violent attacks. This tradition can also be applied to the Hilltop Youth’s policy of ‘price-tagging’. However without a clear and unified rabbinical leadership there exists much disparity between factions therein, some more willing to engage in more violent acts than others (Jones 2013: 207).

The second, more recent strand of analysis, focuses on the studies by Carton (2011) and Tranas (2012) who both argue that the objective of a ‘price-tag’ attack is not to seek support or alter the political process per se, but a sign of frustration and anger that their ‘rights’ to settle the land are being impinged on. As Carton (2011: 18) explains the Hilltop Youth’s mission is simply “pursuing their beliefs to the fullest extent,” which is settling all of Eretz Yisrael. This simple mission statement is reflected in the simplicity of the outposts which the Hilltop Youth inhabit (Tranas 2012: 12). As one member proclaimed, “we are totally non-political. We don’t read newspapers, we do not know where the Green Line is” (Levi 2004). This self-proclaimed apolitical stance which the Hilltop Youth espouse can be further justified by the fact that there have been no attempts from them to interact and negotiate with the state, the only interaction with the state the Hilltop Youth partake in is confrontation with the military (Carton 2011: 24).

Taking a cynical view, one can argue that labelling price-tag violent acts as apolitical is naïve and grossly over simplifies the issue. Despite members of the Hilltop Youth arguing that their actions are apolitical, this does not detract from the point that their actions are inherently political. Carton (2011) argues that the price-tag attacks are nothing more than an act of frustration. This may be the case, but this frustration is ultimately aimed at the Government, which is the epicentre of the political process. Thus, intentional or not, the price-tag attacks are used by the Hilltop Youth as a method of gaining political influence.

**Struggling for Power – Hilltop Youth vs. Yesha Council**

As noted earlier one of the most fascinating developments associated with the ascendance of the Hilltop Youth is their hatred for the Yesha Council. For the Hilltop Youth the Council represents an original generation that has lost its way and been corrupted by the perceived ‘anti-Jewish’ government. The very raw nature of this hatred can be seen with the slashing of the tyres of one of the most prominent members of the established settler movement Ze’ev
Hever. Ironically he was a member of the terrorist organisation Jewish Underground (Byman and Sachs 2012). There have been similar cases of members of the established settler movement being targeted for their perceived ‘moderation’ when dealing with the State, including the Chief Rabbi of the IDF Avi Ronskly who was assaulted due to his more restrained views (Eldar and Zertal 2007: 444).

The resentment which the Hilltop Youth feel towards the Yesha Council is often reciprocated, with the most recent chairman of the latter, Dani Dayan publically denouncing the Hilltop Youth as “beyond the borders of reality” and their violent actions as “immoral and spectacularly unwise” (Krieger 2012).

It is self-evident that this extremist element exists within the settler movement, the question which then arises is do the Hilltop Youth pose a threat to the predominance of the Yesha Council as the PSO? Initially one can argue that despite the Hilltop Youth composing a relatively small proportion of the overall settler movement, their extreme violent activities create a disproportionate effect. Furthermore the inability of the Yesha Council to reign in this extremist element reflects poorly on their authority and legitimacy as the PSO. Moreover, every time a price-tag attack is committed it is effectively chipping away at the large extensive political network which the Yesha Council has established. As the Yesha Council attempt to portray the settler movement as a non-fundamentalist and non-violent project, the callous violence of the Hilltop Youth undermines this message, making it increasingly difficult for the Yesha Council to operate efficiently. Thus one could argue that the Yesha Council’s grip on power within the settler movement seems to be weakening with the ascendance of the Hilltop Youth.

A more cynical view of the power struggle which exists between the Yesha Council and the Hilltop Youth would consider both organisations sharing a common extreme ideology (Kreiger 2012). However, one organisation [the Yesha Council] is willing to be relatively patient to achieve its goals, along with recognising that engaging in the political system is the only way to achieve their objectives. Conversely, the Hilltop Youth are increasingly impatient, which consequently leads to settler violence.

However, a counter-intuitive analysis also exists. This is that the Hilltop Youth as a self-proclaimed apolitical group is not interested in the power struggle within the settler movement. For them the priority will always be fulfilling God’s will to settle the land, which
is achieved through the construction of ‘facts on the ground’, regardless of the will of local Palestinians or the Israeli State. This counter-intuitive paradigm conceptualises the Hilltop Youth as an apolitical body is arguably overly simplistic and misses the recent developments within Israeli politics. In particular the rise of Naftali Bennett’s ultra-nationalist party HaBayit HaYehudi, which became the 4th largest party gaining 12 Knesset seats in the January 2013 elections (Knesset 2013).

Naftali Bennett is a software entrepreneur and former Sayeret Matkal (Special Forces) commando who made a transition into politics after a stint as the chairman of the Yesha Council (Remnick 2013). Bennett’s ultra-nationalist party aims to re-brand the far-right of Israeli politics, with the aim to create a “bridge between the religious and the secular, the hilltop outposts of the West Bank and the start-up suburbs of the coastal plain” (Remnick 2013). Bennett’s views do not go as far as condoning settler violence but he did stir controversy when he stated that if he was tasked with demolishing settlements he would refuse (Benari 2012). Despite Bennett not being the official mouthpiece of the Hilltop Youth, his ideology somewhat mirrors that of the Hilltop Youth.

After weeks of political jostling Bennett managed to secure HaBayit HaYehudi influential positions in the 33rd Israeli coalition government. Moreover, Bennett is now the Minister for Economy and Trade, along with his HaBayit HaYehudi running partner Uri Ariel who is the Minister for Housing and Construction (Lis and Ravid 2013). These two positions are extremely significant in regards to settlement construction.

Conclusion
The Hilltop Youth are a radical offshoot of the mainstream settler movement. Infuriated by the feeble attempts of the Yesha Council to prevent the disengagement from Gaza in 2005, a more radical ideology was promoted. This radical ideology is inherently anti-democratic and anti-establishment, shown by the callous use of violence against Israeli security personnel and innocent Palestinians. This radical ideology is influenced heavily from the theological legacy of Rabbi Meir Kahane, whose successors such as Rabbi Yizhak Shapira and Rabbi Yosef Elitzur who proclaim that any person who is against the settler movement is a legitimate target (Gorenberg 2011: 119).
A key pillar of the Hilltop Youth ideology is hatred of the older generation of settlers, in particular the Yesha Council. In the eyes of the Hilltop Youth they are collaborators with the State, and thus legitimate targets for attack. These acts of violence have become regular, and often occur when the Israeli state decides to dismantle unauthorised outposts, such as at Amona in 2006. Other forms of settler ‘price-tag’ violence occur when specific targets are identified such as Palestinians, and often occur after the Israeli authorities are perceived to have harmed the settlement project (B’Tselem 2010).

Along with the examination and analysis of the Hilltop Youth’s ideology and use of violence, this section also examined the power struggle which is occurring between the Yesha Council and the Hilltop Youth. Essentially this debate pivots on the conceptualisation of power. The Yesha Council as the PSO feels that the extremist nature of the Hilltop Youth’s violent tactics is counter-productive to “settling in the hearts of society” (Feige 2009). Conversely, the Hilltop Youth view the power struggle in an alternate paradigm; which brands power the PSO worthless and redundant.

Furthermore, the recent developments within Israeli politics in particular the rise in prominence of the ultra-nationalist party HaBayit HaYehudi and its charismatic leader Naftali Bennett creates another interesting dynamic. Despite never actually condoning the violent acts of the Hilltop Youth, Bennett is sympathetic to their cause. His support for their ideology at least is self-evident shown by his opposition to the construction of a Palestinian state. This dynamic could play out in various ways, Bennett could convince the Hilltop Youth to abandon their violent tactics, or alternatively he could end up being the mouthpiece of the Hilltop Youth within the Israeli government.

Section 5 – Conclusion

The settler movement is not a cohesive body, but instead a cohort of people and groups whose ultimate objective is the establishment of Jewish settlements over all of Eretz Yisrael. This goal has remained constant since the inception of the settler movement after the Six Day War. However, despite this underlying ideology remaining stable, the methods of achieving this have fluctuated between different organisations within the movement.

Gush Emunim was the original settler organisation and drew on the theological ideas of redemption of the land espoused by Rav Kook and Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook (Sprinzak
Through charismatic leaders such as Hanan Porat and Rabbi Moshe Levinger the Gush Emunim leadership was able to harness the enthusiasm of its followers, encouraging them to re-locate to Judea and Samaria.

Along with encouraging and facilitating the construction of settlements through the sub-organisation *Amana*, Gush Emunim was able to successfully influence the political process through a combination of; protesting, political institutionalisation and settlement construction. However, despite these methods of political influence gaining some tactical successes, the ultimate goal of ‘settling in the hearts’ of the Israeli public failed to gain full fruition, due to the majority of Israeli public being wary and unwilling to subscribe to the religious commitment that motivated Gush Emunim.

After various high-profile leaders of Gush Emunim were implicated in the terrorist attacks of the Jewish Underground in 1985 the organisation lost all credibility, and a new organisation was needed to spearhead the settler movement. With the demise of Gush Emunim a period of ‘political opportunity’ arose (Tarrow 1998). This political opportunity manifested itself in two main strands; one strand would subvert the political workings of the state, encouraging more terrorist activity, spearheaded by the radical Rabbi Meir Kahane and his *Kach* party. The second strand was the Yesha Council, a quasi-democratic body which combines all settlement heads to create a body with a unified voice for settlers. This strand became dominant, and the Yesha Council rose to the positions of PSO, a position it currently occupies.

The Yesha Council altered the presentation of the settler ideology. By promoting the strategic and historical benefits of the establishment of settlements, rather than solely the religious commitment the settler movement is deemed more acceptable.

Along with altering the presentation of the settler ideology, the Yesha Council also adopted new and resourceful methods of political influence. The most successful tactic of political influence has been the careful construction of a large ‘political network’, whereby the sinews of which are able to penetrate the mechanism of the state. Evidence of the success of this method of political influence can be seen in the 2005 Sasson report which showed millions of shekels being funnelled from government agencies such as the Ministry of Housing and Construction to support unauthorised settlements. Along with this network enabling successful lobbying at a local level, this network also applies at a national level, with prominent leaders of the Yesha Council often meeting prominent Members of Knesset.
Moreover, recently the Yesha Council has been able to construct links with the large pro-Israel support in the USA, such as AIPAC and Christian Zionist groups.

Despite various successes which the Council has achieved perhaps its largest failure was its inability to prevent the disengagement from Gaza in 2005. The disengagement caused a huge rift to emerge within the settler movement, and was one of the largest contributing factors to the rise of the Hilltop Youth. This rift created another period of ‘political opportunity’ which was seized upon by the younger generation of settlers to split from the traditional settler leadership (Tarrow 1998).

The Hilltop Youth are a collection of second and third generational settlers who feel betrayed by the older generation (Jones 2013). Despondent with the traditional settler leadership the Hilltop Youth have created their own settlement outposts on strategic vantage points. These simple structures are often constructed on private Palestinian land, and thus are illegal under Israeli law. This has caused increased tensions between both the state and the Hilltop Youth and the Yesha Council and the Hilltop Youth.

The Hilltop Youth is problematic for the Yesha Council, chiefly because the Hilltop Youth’s methods are essentially aimed at subverting the political process, rather than engaging with it. Thus as the Council is now part of the political process (through their political network approach), the Hilltop Youth is essentially working to undermine the Council.

The violence which the Hilltop Youth engages in is rabbinically sanctioned and has resulted in hundreds of injuries, including; innocent Palestinians, Israeli soldiers and members of the Yesha Council (Byman and Sachs 2012).

This article argues that the Yesha Council still remains the PSO for the wider settler movement, despite the increasing force that is the Hilltop Youth. The power struggle between the Yesha Council and the Hilltop Youth will continue to rage on until a suitable median can be attained between the two sides. This median could be found in the form of Naftali Bennett. Bennett’s ultra-nationalist party HaBayit HaYehudi aims to bring together all fragments of the settler movement, from the most extremist outposts to the urban settlement blocs (Remnick 2013). Bennett’s pro-settler ideology himself a former Chief Executive of the Yesha Council combined with his influential position in the coalition government could lead the State to act more favourably towards the settlers. If Bennett is to be a credible candidate to unite the settler movement he must first distance himself from the extremist actions of...
elements within the Hilltop Youth who do not wish to engage in any way with the Yesha Council or the State.

However, for the time being at least, the Yesha Council’s grip on power is increasingly loosening with the ascendance of the Hilltop Youth. The situation seems to be a self-perpetuating cycle. If the State takes an action that is harmful to the settler project, the Hilltop Youth retaliate with a spree of ‘price-tag’ violence. This violence, consequently weakens the power of the Yesha Council in representing the settler movement as a non-fundamentalist movement, and further isolates the Hilltop Youth.

The only solution that enables the Yesha Council to remain the PSO involves two distinct stages. Firstly, the Council must convince the settler movement that violence as a strategy is redundant and useless. Secondly, the Council must persuade the political establishment that the Hilltop Youth are a radical offshoot, who have no say in representing the settlers, and must be dealt with as the extremists that they are.

References:


