

**Beyond and Despite the State:
Young Religious Settlers' Visions of Messianic Redemption**

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Abstract

This paper explores ethnographically how redemption from exile and the role of the State of Israel in the Jewish redemptive process are interpreted by religious young settler activists and elaborated into new political and social visions – both in recognized statist settlements and on unrecognized hilltops. Using a mechanistic discourse analysis, I show how memories of the Jewish diaspora are mobilized to frame the state as an instrument of exile rather than as a vector of collective salvation, allowing these young settlers to construct a central role for themselves and present alternative collective messianic visions beyond or despite the state.

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Introduction

While the religious settlement movement has long been considered as a unitary and cohesive entity, both in academic theoretical approaches and in political practice, its inner divisions and profound transformations have become increasingly obvious in recent years. The erosion of the once hegemonic statist

religious Zionist doctrine, which the now obsolete trope of Gush Emunim rested upon, leads to the emergence of alternative ideas as to what constitutes Jewish redemption and how to achieve it, as well as new practices to advance such pursuits. This paper explores ethnographically how redemption from exile and the role of the State of Israel in the Jewish redemptive process are interpreted by young settler activists and elaborated into new political and social visions – both in recognized statist settlements and on unrecognized hilltops. Using a mechanistic discourse analysis, I show how the State of Israel is framed as an instrument of exile rather than as a vector of collective salvation, allowing these young settlers to construct a central role for themselves and present alternative collective messianic visions. A better understanding of these aspirations and how they are translated into practice can help us understand the plurality of ideologies that currently coexist within the settlement movement, shaping both its internal debates and its relations with the state and other actors in Israeli society. It can also help us consider a spectrum of settler practices and beliefs about collective redemption as characteristic of different levels of disengagement from the State of Israel in its current form and essence and secular Israeli society.

Zionism, Religious Zionism and Redemption from Exile

A distinguishing feature of the literature on contemporary Jewry is that it describes Zionism as a political, cultural and spiritual revolution of momentous dimensions. Even among those scholars who differ on whether the essence of Zionism is the transformation of Jewish time by “returning the Jews into history”¹ or Jewish space by returning the Jews to the Land of Israel, the assumption that the establishment of Jewish sovereignty over the Land of Israel has redeemed Jews from long exile is often shared.²

¹ “Return into history” is a common expression in Zionist texts and in theoretical discussions on Zionism, particularly in the works of Gershom Scholem. Yosef Ben-Shlomo, “The Spiritual Universe of Gershom Scholem,” *Modern Judaism* 5/1 (1985): 21-38; David N. Myers, *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past. European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

² For an elaboration on how the Zionist foundation of the Israeli national ethos was constructed as a counterplot to the Jewish exilic narrative, Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots. Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Note that the assumption that the State of Israel constitutes a rebirth following a metaphorical exilic death is embodied in the name of one of the main Israel Studies journals in Hebrew: *Iyunim Bitkumat Israel*, Studies in the Rebirth of Israel.

This premise provides the basis for other conceptual oppositions, such as that of Israeliness and diaspora, arguing a fundamental and formative difference between the Jewish diasporic archetype and the “Promethean” modern “new Jew.”³ The idea of diaspora in Zionist texts reverberates with themes of estrangement, humiliation or insecurity.⁴ The diasporic Jew, correspondingly, is framed as weak, feminine,⁵ submissive⁶ and incomplete⁷ – a “diametric opposite” to the Israeli Sabra, a strong, active and fearless pioneer of the Land of Israel.⁸

Uncovering the roots of the redemptive power attributed to the Zionist enterprise, whose aspirations extend far beyond sheltering persecuted Jews, is a central theme of this study. There is, indeed, a tension between the almost technocratic approach to state building of secular Zionism, which some scholars oppose to irrational messianic yearning,⁹ and its promise of utopian progression away from exilic decline, which various scholars see as inherently messianic.¹⁰ The tension between intellectual pragmatism and exalted messianism also divides religious Zionist thought. On the one hand, Rabbi Isaac Jacob Reines¹¹ reduced Zionism to a rescue mission for European Jews and Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik¹²

³ David Ohana, *The Origins of Israeli Mythology. Neither Canaanites Nor Crusaders*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁴ Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*.

⁵ Tamar Mayer, “From Zero to Hero: Masculinity in Jewish Nationalism,” ed. Tamar Mayer, *Gender Ironies of Nationalism*, (London–New York: Routledge, 2012), 297-322.

⁶ Boyarin, Daniel, *Unheroic Conduct. The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*, vol. 8, (Berkeley et al.: University of California Press, 1997).

⁷ A. B. Yehoshua, “People without a Land,” *Haaretz Magazine*, May 12, 2006.

⁸ Oz Almog, *The Sabra. The Creation of the New Jew*, (Berkeley et al.: University of California Press, 2000, 77), 10-13; Yael Zerubavel, “The ‘Mythological Sabra’ and Jewish Past. Trauma, Memory, and Contested Identities,” *Israel Studies* 7/2 (2002): 115-144; Uri Ram, “National, Ethnic or Civic? Contesting Paradigms of Memory, Identity and Culture in Israel,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 19/5-6 (2000): 405-422.

⁹ Derek Jonathan Penslar, *Zionism and Technocracy. The Engineering of Jewish Settlement in Palestine, 1870-1918*, (Bloomington–Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991); Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Exile, History, and the Nationalization of Jewish Memory. Some Reflections on the Zionist Notion of History and Return,” *Journal of Levantine Studies* 3/2 (2013): 37-70.

¹⁰ Ohana, *The Origins of Israeli Mythology*.

¹¹ Rabbi Isaac Jacob Reines (1839-1915), a Lithuanian Orthodox rabbi, was a founder of the Mizrahi, one of the first movements of religious Zionism at the end of the 19th century.

¹² For a discussion of Rabbi Soloveitchik’s approach to Zionism and how it influenced various religious Zionist communities in Israel, Nehemia Stern, “First Flowering of Redemption. An Ethnographic Account of Contemporary Religious Zionism in Israel,” PhD dissertation, Emory University, 2014, 170-172.

considered it a useful but profane human undertaking. On the other hand, the most influential figure of Israeli religious Zionism, Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaCohen Kook, saw Zionism as a metaphysical transformation of the Jews, rescuing them from incomplete and disembodied spirituality in the diaspora.

While secular Zionism does not consider the Land of Israel, *in and of itself*, as inherently redemptive, the spiritual significance of the Land of Israel is central to Kookian political theology. It “has intrinsic meaning, it is connected to the Jewish people as a life-giving bond” so that “the extraordinary qualities of the Land of Israel and the extraordinary qualities of the Jewish people form two halves of a whole.”¹³ Rabbi Kook believed that secular Zionist pioneers had unwittingly jumpstarted the messianic era by answering the call of the land.¹⁴ Through the founding of a sovereign state, the land, Torah and people of Israel would bond anew to cancel the Jews’ ontological exile. In his words: while “the expectation of salvation is the force that saves exilic Judaism, the Judaism of the Land of Israel is salvation itself.”¹⁵

The two Rabbis Kook, father and son, are the main theorists of the *mamlachti*, or statist, current of religious Zionism, which imbues earthly sovereignty with divine redemptive power. By this doctrine, the State of Israel is not just the vector but the embodiment of the Jews’ salvation: it is the “pedestal of God’s throne in the world.”¹⁶ Building on his father’s philosophy, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook thus established sovereignty as “the absolute first essential”¹⁷ collective undertaking of modern times, preceding even the building of the Temple.¹⁸ The State of Israel is “inherently holy and without blemish,” he wrote,¹⁹ despite the

¹³ Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook, *Eretz Hefetz. Teachings on the Land of Israel and Its Edification*, (Jerusalem: Darom, 1930) [Hebrew].

¹⁴ Pinhas Polonsky, *Religious Zionism of Rav Kook*, ed. Galina Zolotusky, trans. Lise Brody, (Newton, MA: Machanaim, 2009).

¹⁵ The first section of the seminal work of Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook, *Orot [Lights]*, is entitled *Eretz Israel*. The cited passage is the last sentence of this section. See: Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook, *Orot*, (Jerusalem: HaRav Kook Institute, 1920) [Hebrew].

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁷ Zvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook cited in Richard Hoch, “Sovereignty, Sanctity and Salvation. The Theology of Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Kohen Kook and the Actions of Gush Emunim,” *Shofar* 13/1 (1994): 90-118, 102.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 103. “It is clear that establishment of sovereignty, that is, the establishment of national leadership, precedes the building of the Temple.”

¹⁹ Zvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook, cited in Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, trans. Michael Swirsky and Jonathan Chipman, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 136.

secularism of its institutions, since “any government that governs the people by the authority of the people and is not obviously against the Torah must be considered as the current Kingdom.”²⁰

Following the territorial conquests of 1967 (and with even greater fervor after the trauma of Israel’s near-defeat in 1973), Rabbi Zvi Yehuda became the spiritual leader of Gush Emunim, and statist religious Zionism formed the ideological base of the nascent Israeli settlement movement. Binding redemption with the establishment of a physical union between the Jews and the whole Biblical Land of Israel, he encouraged his students to implant themselves across Judea and Samaria, in the newly occupied West Bank,²¹ securing Jewish sovereignty over parts of the land that the state seemed unable or unwilling fully to control.²²

He soon recognized that translating mystical philosophy into a practical action plan²³ would lead to political and spiritual struggles within the state and Israeli society. He dismissed them as a basic part of what he envisioned as an unstoppable movement towards redemption. The state, he wrote, “is the highest earthly revelation of ‘Him Who returns His Presence to the World.’ All else is detail (...) that cannot blemish, not even a bit, the validity of the state’s holiness.”²⁴ As such, he insisted on unwavering faith in the state’s redemptive destiny, even as governments may undermine their goals: “of course, we shall not disconnect from the state,” he noted, “for we are beholden to its divine holiness due to our understanding that it is a heavenly manifestation,” so that even critical issues such as “the integrity of the Land of Israel and defining ‘who is a Jew’ are small details compared to the sanctification of God that is inherent in the emergence of Israeli statehood.”²⁵ Various scholars have argued that this statist political theology has burdened, “confused and paralyzed”²⁶ the settlement

²⁰ Zvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook in Yehuda Zoldan, “Patience for Redemption,” *Nekuda* 76 (1984): 22-23 [Hebrew].

²¹ Gideon Aran, *Kookism. The Roots of Gush Emunim, Jewish Settler Subculture, Zionist Theology, Contemporary Messianism*, (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2013) [Hebrew].

²² Hoch, “Sovereignty, Sanctity and Salvation.”

²³ Zvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook, “The State as the Embodiment of the Vision for Redemption,” in Id., *LeNetivot Israel. Collection of Articles*, (Bet El: MeAvnei HaMakom, 2002), 261-272 [Hebrew].

²⁴ Zvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook, *Within the Public Campaign. In the Press*, ed. Yosef Bermason, (Jerusalem: HaRav Kook Institute, 1986), 28.

²⁵ Zvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook, *Eretz HaZvi*, ed. Harel Cohen, (Bet El: Netivei Or, 2002), 81.

²⁶ Moshe Koppel, “*Mamlachtiyut* as a Tool of Oppression. On Jewish Jews and Israeli Jews in the Post-Zionist Era,” *Democratic Culture* 3 (2000): 233-247, 241.

movement over the years and impeded its ability to mobilize effectively against different Israeli governments.²⁷

The sense of helplessness of their political and spiritual leadership in the face of repeated land withdrawals has undermined the dominance of the Kookian doctrine among young religious Zionist settlers in recent years. The withdrawals have placed statist communities before a conundrum: can the State of Israel embody Jewish redemption if it relinquishes sovereignty over parts of the Land? The forced evacuation of Gush Katif (Gaza Strip settlements) during the pullout in 2005, in particular, was invoked as a critical juncture by most young settlers that I encountered in my fieldwork, altering their relationship with the state and their understanding of its meaning and role – *as well as their own* – in the unfolding of Jewish history. While Yesh'a leaders tend to invoke the Kookian distinction between the state and its government to sanction strategies of settlement institutionalization and normalization, seeking to engage different sectors of the secular Israeli public, many young religious Zionist settlers openly express doubt as to the sanctity of the State of Israel and question their relationship to it. For many, this implies renewed political and spiritual dialogue with non-Zionist publics and growing sense of detachment from the state. As I discuss in this paper, this political disengagement can manifest itself at different levels.

A second factor undermining once hegemonic Kookian messianism in the settlements is their diversification. Since 1967, more than 400,000 Israelis have moved to the West Bank.²⁸ While Gush Emunim practiced settling as an act of faith, many Israelis are in the West Bank for completely prosaic reasons: affordable housing, good education, or even reduced commuting times. In 2012, a demographic breakdown of local settlements published by Yesh'a showed that only a third of the settlers were religious Zionists.²⁹ This situation has only lately been recognized in the academic literature on settlers, which often describes *all* settlers as messianic zealots and radical fundamentalists under the long-obsolete

²⁷ Anat Roth, *Not at Any Cost. From Gush Katif to Amona, the Story behind the Struggle over the Land of Israel*, (Tel Aviv: Yedi'ot and Hemed Books, 2013) [Hebrew]; Eitan Alimi, *Between Engagement and Disengagement Politics*, (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2013) [Hebrew].

²⁸ This number does not include East Jerusalem, which is not part of the West Bank.

²⁹ One should read these figures bearing in mind that, as part of its strategy of normalization, Yesh'a has a vested interest in presenting settlements as a non-sectoral issue. See: Yesh'a Council Research Department, "Settlers in 2012. Ideological Profile," January 4, 2012, <http://www.myesha.org.il/?CategoryID=335&ArticleID=5296>.

trope of Gush Emunim.³⁰ Ethnographic studies have recently shed important light on the heterogeneity of the religious Zionist world, including in the settlements.³¹ Valuable other works have discussed the impact of American immigrants on the liberalization of settler discourse,³² complex relationships between youths living on hilltop farms and nearby settlements,³³ or the way religious philosophies inform conflict resolution parameters for ideological settlers.³⁴

The transformations of Israeli culture since the 1990s to encompass challenges to the dominant nationalist and collectivist ethos of Zionism by “competing sub-narratives”³⁵ thus affect the settlements as a “new Israeli space.”³⁶ This post-modern contest translates into a progressive detachment from the statist theology of Rabbi Kook, whose collectivist implications mirrored the socialist Zionist vision. This cultural disengagement also manifests itself in different ways. It is exemplified in the rise in influence of the neo-Hassidic theology of individual relationship with God,³⁷ but also in the emergence of hilltop groups

³⁰For critiques of this types of representation, Joyce Dalsheim, Assaf Harel, “Representing Settlers,” *Review of Middle East Studies* 43/2 (2009): 219-238; Roth, *Not at Any Cost*.

³¹ For example: Joyce Dalsheim, *Unsettling Gaza. Secular Liberalism, Radical Religion, and the Israeli Settlement Project*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Stern, “First Flowering of Redemption;” Aron Harel, “The Eternal Nation Does Not Fear a Long Road,” Rutgers University, PhD dissertation, 2015. Note that while this paper focuses on the West Bank, the religious Zionist public spans varied political and cultural contexts across Israel and provides varied ideological and theological responses to the dilemmas I discuss here. Their exploration is outside the scope of this article.

³² Sara Ya’el Hirschhorn, *City on a Hilltop. American Jews and the Israeli Settler Movement*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

³³ Shim’i Friedman, *The Hilltop Youth. A Stage of Resistance and Counter-culture Practice*, (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017).

³⁴ Ofer Zalberg, “Israel’s National-Religious Jews and the Quest for Peace,” *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 20/4 (2015): 60; Nehemia Stern, “‘I Desire Sanctity.’ Sanctity and Separateness among Jewish Religious Zionists in Israel/Palestine,” *Anthropology of Consciousness* 26/2 (2015): 156-169; Hadas Weiss, “On Value and Values in a West Bank Settlement,” *American Ethnologist* 38/1 (2011): 36-46.

³⁵ Ram, “National, Ethnic or Civic?”

³⁶ Ariel Handel, Galit Rand, Marco Allegra, “Wine-washing. Colonization, Normalization, and the Geopolitics of Terror in the West Bank’s Settlements,” *Environment and Planning A* 47/6 (2015): 1351-1367, 1353.

³⁷ Tomer Persico, “Neo-Hasidic Revival. Expressivist Uses of Traditional Lore,” *Modern Judaism. A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience* 34/3 (2014): 287-308; Joanna Steinhardt, “American Neo-Hasids in the Land of Israel,” *Nova Religio. The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 13/4 (2010): 22-42.

who defy the bourgeois lifestyle³⁸ and the beliefs of their elders, rejecting relations with secular Israeli society.

In this article, I explore some of these trends to show that while some scholars have argued that the shift towards a more neo-liberal ideology brings the decline of collectivist messianic visions,³⁹ this is not necessarily the case. I show that as young settlers address the collective roles of the State of Israel and Israeli society and their individual responsibilities as part of the messianic destiny of Israel, they often articulate new *collective messianic visions* based on perceptions of exile and redemption that differ from the hegemonic Kookian perspective of the previous generation.

Settlements, Outposts and Hilltops

The article draws on long-form interviews and ethnographic fieldwork in the West Bank in the past three years. While all Israeli settlements are illegal under international law, Israel differentiates between “legal” communities on public land, built in coordination with the Defense Ministry, and illegal outposts built without state permits, often on private Palestinian land. Outposts are represented in local settler councils, and their legalization is advocated for by Yesh’a. Hilltops are hills seized by groups of young settlers outside settlements. They are not recognized by settler councils, though local stances towards them vary greatly. They are regularly evacuated by force.

The first section explores how young settlers living in recognized religious Zionist settlements interpret redemption from exile and seek to enact it in practice. Fourteen interviews were conducted in ‘Ofra, Itamar, Teko’a, ‘Otniel, Kfar ‘Etzion and in Alon Shvut. Important ideological distinctions exist among these communities and their ways of challenging Kookian statism thus often vary. The interviewees were political or social activists, raised in religious Zionist families and identifying as part of this public. The men had served in the military and the women in civilian service. They were aged 22 to 30 and married. Most were parents of children attending religious state schools. The second section relies on six interviews and on field notes taken on five hilltops. The term

³⁸ Michael Feige, *Settling in the Hearts. Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009).

³⁹ Stern, for example, describes contemporary religious Zionism in Israel and in the West Bank as “distinctly non-messianic.” Stern, “First Flowering of Redemption,” 10.

“hilltop youths,” widely used, is frequently a misnomer. Most residents of these hilltops are in their twenties and parents to toddlers. They live in wooden shacks or small caravans, sporadically connected to the water or power grid of settlements, with no sewer systems. While some were raised in settlements or outposts, many grew up outside the West Bank. Some of them were evacuated from the Gaza strip in 2005. Most of the men did not serve in the military. The teenagers I met planned to refuse the draft.

In my fieldwork, I sought to understand how redemption from exile and the role of the State of Israel in the Jewish redemptive process are interpreted phenomenologically by young settler activists. How is the role of State of Israel constructed by these settlers, and how is it deconstructed? Do their visions seek to disengage from state nationalism and minimize its influence on their lives, or do they seek to reframe an idealized state whose destiny encompasses their own?

Settlers beyond the State

During my first conversation with Nehara in her home in Teko’a, a settlement in Gush ‘Etzion, her eldest daughter plays in the background humming a children’s song – “the Land of Israel is beautiful and blooming.” Humming along for a few seconds, Nehara tells me that she has always liked “this time of the year” – the weeks between Passover and Independence Day.⁴⁰ “On Yom Hashoah, I would spend the day imagining myself there. In the ghetto (...) without a place to flee to. Then Yom HaZikaron... especially then.”⁴¹ Pausing her folding, she seems for a moment lost in painful thoughts, before she finally adds: “in the morning (on Independence Day), my brothers would come from yeshiva and when my dad came from prayer, he’d bless us. There was so much pride and faith (...) and this is it, we’re here, in the Land of Israel.” Later in the conversation, she sums up the experience of growing up in an ideological religious Zionist family in the settlements: “it was like living in a movie for real (...) you could get popcorn, sit on the bench at the end of our settlement and watch the redemption.” As we

⁴⁰ Jewish and civil calendars intertwine as Passover (the religious celebration of Exodus) is followed by Yom HaShoah (national Holocaust Day), and then a week later by Yom HaZikaron (national Remembrance Day for fallen soldiers and terror victims) and Israel’s Independence Day. On the phenomenological impact of this calendar, Avner Ben-Amos, Ilana Bet-El, “Holocaust Day and Memorial Day in Israeli Schools. Ceremonies, Education and History,” *Israel Studies* 4/1 (1999): 258-284.

⁴¹ Nehara grew up in a terror-stricken settlement, in the midst of the Second Intifada.

fold laundry together on a porch overlooking the desert that evening, I accept an invitation to stay over. Still processing the interview, I ask whether she believes that the state is holy. She laughs: “obviously the state is not the Messiah, it’s a bit childish to think it is.”⁴²

In my interviews with young settlers, I have often been surprised at the immediacy with which they signified departure from ideological, political, cultural Kookian frames. Though my informants saw the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel as the beginning of Jewish redemption from exile, they all doubted the State of Israel’s ability to play a further role in the redemptive process. For many, the discrepancy between actual state policies and the state’s idealized redemptive role seemed just too great to reconcile. Yoav, for example, asked rhetorically during an interview in his caravan in ‘Otniel, in the southern Hebron hills: “If the state is holy, then how did Disengagement happen to us?” before answering, “There was a political battle and we lost” and concluding, “The state is not holy, it’s a secular tool that we can use, not a religious one.”⁴³

One central way these young settlers depart from Kookian doctrine is by questioning its historical determinism. They do not believe that the simple existence state of Israel *must lead* to redemption. Rather, many of them find that it has strayed from its spiritual purposes to the point that it has become detached from its redemptive essence. This is expressed through a discursive mechanism that I qualify as *diasporization*. Symbols and images of the Jewish diaspora are mobilized to deconstruct the state’s transformative and redemptive power. Through the claim that the State of Israel resonates these images of exile, it is argued that it is in fact an embodiment of continued diasporism – and redemption must happen *beyond*.

The deconstruction of the state’s redemptive value pertains to the three tenets of Kookian theology: the Land of Israel, the Torah of Israel and the People of Israel. Israeli territorial policies in the West Bank provide endless opportunities for young settlers to claim that the state is failing at achieving a *true and intimate bond with the land*. The state’s avoidance of annexing the West Bank or the prayer ban imposed on the Temple Mount are invoked in interviews as central issues which reveal the state’s true diasporic nature through its hesitation and unwillingness to express its true might. Passivity and fear, central Zionist

⁴² Interview of the Author with Nehara, Tekoa, July 10, 2017.

⁴³ Interview of the A. with Yoav, ‘Otniel, January 4, 2018.

perceptions of exilic Jewish experience, are used to *diasporize* the state's character. "The fact that the State of Israel didn't annex Judea and Samaria⁴⁴ yesterday, it's not acceptable," denounces Yoav, a teacher at the 'Otniel Yeshiva, "it's like we're still little Jews, so unsure of ourselves, so contained by our fear of others."

Places and mindsets that embody the exilic lifestyle – such as the shtetl and ultra-Orthodoxy – are brought up in conversation to legitimize the claim that the state cannot really embody the redemption of Jews from exile since it is really reenacting the exile. This is exemplified in the following extracts from conversations with David, an informal educator and the owner of a small factory, and Yehuda, a tour guide for Jewish sites in East Jerusalem. Both of them were raised in Itamar, in the north of the West Bank:

If we pray on the Temple Mount, the Arabs will go crazy, they say. If we annex, the Arabs will go crazy and the UN too. Let them go crazy! What, I mean... are we still in the shtetl? The government of Israel is afraid of what the goyim⁴⁵ will say if the Jews stand up?! [David]⁴⁶

People say we're dangerous because we want to take some sort of responsibility to change things here, but it's dangerous to do nothing. It's like we turned Haredi⁴⁷ and we're suddenly waiting for the end of days (...) I don't presume to know where history is going, I know where I want it to go. So I'm taking responsibility, here and now (...) Jews shouldn't have to be scared to be here, it's the capital of the State of Israel. [Yehuda]⁴⁸

Ultra-Orthodox Jews, detested figures in secular Zionist lore, are not evoked here just as a nemesis to modern pioneerism in the Land of Israel, but also as symbols of resistance to religious Zionist messianic activism. In contrast to them, who continue – even as they live in Israel – to perceive themselves in spiritual exile

⁴⁴ The Biblical name of the area that is internationally defined today as the West Bank.

⁴⁵ The word *goyim* is a standard term for non-Jews in Hebrew.

⁴⁶ Interview of the A. with David, Itamar, June 22, 2017.

⁴⁷ The Hebrew word *haredi* is a term for ultra-Orthodox Jews.

⁴⁸ Interview of the A. with Yehuda, standing over archeological digs in East Jerusalem, April 6, 2017.

and wait for the advent of messianic days,⁴⁹ and contrary to the state – which they perceive as equally diasporic – these young settlers present themselves as fearless and demand to shape the land to achieve their pursuits.

The state's redemptive value for Judaism is deconstructed by arguing that it lacks will and power to cater for *the spiritual renewal of the Torah* itself. While the State of Israel saved the Jews physically, the proponents of this view contend, it also perpetuates their metaphysical exile through their practice of diasporic Judaism, and as such cannot embody the redemption. This longing for a physically anchored Israeli Judaism accompanies a trend of renewed interest and engagement of the young religious Zionist public in Temple activism in recent years,⁵⁰ as a growing number of religious Zionist rabbis break from the Kookian doctrine on this issue, encouraging their students to ascend the Temple Mount.⁵¹ "Zionism has succeeded, the people of Israel are not dispersed," says Nehara, explaining the transition from her statist upbringing to Temple Mount activism. But "the Torah in exile, that's another story that continues, it's much more tragic."⁵²

For many, the fact that the Torah remained an essentially diasporic artifact explains why most Israeli Jews have remained secular, impeding progress towards collective redemption. "The Torah, it's like a heavy brick that we've carried on our backs for 2000 years," elaborates Yoav in 'Otniel, "but it's alive! Except that, since what happened with the Temple, it's a dead brick."⁵³ The perpetuation of this spiritually diasporic Judaism, outside the course of Jewish history, thus, is threatening to make it "irrelevant" and "too heavy" for most Jews. "We can't discuss if something makes sense or not, or if we should change the way we think about things. There is no Sanhedrin! We're stuck with the brick," he laments.

⁴⁹ For further discussion of ultra-Orthodox perceptions of exile and life in modern Israel, Joyce Dalsheim, "Exile at Home. A Matter of Being out of Place," *Anthropology Today* 33/6 (2017): 11-15.

⁵⁰ Per the numbers of the settler organization "Yeraeh," which encourages Jews to ascend the Temple Mount and publishes weekly statistics, 29,939 Jews ascended in 2018 – most of them young settlers – compared to 5,658 in 2009.

⁵¹ Rabbi Zvi Yehuda did not prioritize a Third Temple. He also forbade the ascending of the Mount. On evolving practices at the site, Meyer, Gedalia, Hanoach Messner, "Entering the Temple Mount Precincts in Halacha and Jewish History," *Hakirah* 10 (2010).

⁵² Interview of the A. with Nehara, Teko'a, July 10, 2017.

⁵³ Interview of the A. with Yoav, 'Otniel, January 4, 2018.

On the Mount, crowds of young settlers signal their spiritual longing for a Judaism that is embodied in space, occasioning frictions with Muslim authorities, who impose a ban on Jewish prayer at the site, and the police. Criticizing the submissiveness of the state, the settlers claim to be the authentic successors of the Zionist enterprise whose actions are advancing a true redeeming of the Torah from exile. The Temple Mount is then presented in interviews as a generational struggle that befits the heirs of Gush Emunim. “You know about the story of Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda in Sebastia? Now there are half a million people in Judea and Samaria,” says Hgaï, a military officer from ‘Otniel, “if you’d gone to my grandpa as a little yid and asked him if he would see the Jewish state, he’d have laughed. What Jewish state? (...) We’re here. It’s the same story. (...) Maybe I won’t, but my sons will pray in the Temple.”⁵⁴

The negation of the state’s redemptive value for the people of Israel completes the deconstruction of the Kookian triad and revolves around the claim that it does not offer alternatives to the diasporic identities imposed on the Jews by exile. The state, my informants contend, perpetuates ahistorical Jewish identities. As expressed by Yoav in ‘Otniel:

For the past 2000 years, others have told us who we are. The Christians said we’re Israel in the flesh, the Muslims said we’re sinners. (...) Now that Israel has returned to its land, we can say who we are by ourselves, but (...) we’re not showing who we are, we’re still stuck in time (...) What does it mean to be a Jew here? (...) The State of Israel has no clue where it’s going or what for.⁵⁵

By contrast, my informants sought to assert territorialized and historicized identities that reinforced their claim to the land. This was exemplified to me during a visit at David’s small factory in Itamar, which proudly brands its produce as “Hebrew labor.” This term effectively means that the factory does not employ non-Jews. It also echoes the way early Zionist pioneers designated their work, as pointed out by one of his employees, a young man from a nearby hilltop whose tee-shirt proclaims “we don’t work with enemies.” I ask David why he does not say “Jewish labor.” He cringes: the term “sounds scary” to him, hinting at its resonance with modern memories of forced labor.⁵⁶ “I like the

⁵⁴ Interview of the A. with Hgaï, Jerusalem, March 28, 2018.

⁵⁵ Interview of the A. with Yoav, ‘Otniel, January 4, 2018.

⁵⁶ Walk-along Interview of the A. with David, Itamar, June 22, 2017.

word ‘Hebrew’ better than ‘Jew,’” he explains, “I’m a native, back in my homeland, for some reason we don’t want to say that we act like we’re squatters.” To David, a technological young man constantly checking his cellphone, the term “Hebrew” rather than merely evoke the past, looks toward a Jewish future in the land. “What about ‘Israeli labor?’” I ask. “It doesn’t say who we are,” he objects. “Not all Israelis are Jews. Not all Jews live in Israel. We’re *Jews of the Land of Israel*, here, that’s what it means.”

In his analyses of contentious political processes, Charles Tilly observes that the phenomenological exploration of the identity of social actors helps understand their relations since identity and self-boundaries become part of the stories people tell to alter social and political relations.⁵⁷ By activating an identity boundary between Israelis and Hebrews (“*Jews of the Land of Israel*”), David claims an identity that exists politically and culturally *beyond the State of Israel* and the classical religious Zionist world – but not in opposition to it. Other informants activated a parallel boundary by referring to themselves as “the young settlement” movement. By this, they meant a generational movement of idealistic young settlers whose aspirations were unbridled by the statist ideology of Gush Emunim. Yet, no matter how clearly constructed in thoughts and enunciated in words, this ideological detachment does not translate into acts of political disengagement:⁵⁸ these young settlers are law-abiding Israeli citizens who educate their young children in state-run religious Zionist schools where the Kookian political theology is still dominant, serve in the military and participate in Israeli elections.

Throughout the interviews, the discourse of the young settlers interviewed and cited in this section was rendered cohesive by three aspects. First, they all shared suspicion toward and a sense of detachment from the political arm of the settlement movement, the Yesh’a Council. Their rejection was accompanied by claims that the leadership of Yesh’a was too institutionalized to defend their interests. Second, they expressed a common understanding that the State of Israel is limited as a vector to achieve divine collective redemption in the collective religious Zionist sense. This conception was reinforced by doubts about the way

⁵⁷ For a discussion of the development of Tilly’s understanding of actors, agency, culture, and social construction, John Krinsky, Ann Mische, “Formations and Formalisms. Charles Tilly and the Paradox of the Actor,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 39 (2013): 1-26; Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 21-22, 84-85.

⁵⁸ It translates into acts of cultural disengagement by altering prayer wordings, refraining from saying specific blessings or challenging the obligation to rejoice on Independence Day.

to advance on the deterministic Kookian path to redemption and about their generational role. Third, all of them sought to *diasporize* the State of Israel, seeing it as an instrument of exile so as to deconstruct its redemptive role and legitimize their own visions and undertakings taking place beyond the state's real or perceived limitations, which one of my informants poetically termed "fragments of exile."⁵⁹

Two groups based on such alternative approaches can be contrasted: those that wish radically to transform the state to seek collective messianic redemption through renewed engagement with a new political construct, and those who seek to minimize state structures so as to achieve messianic redemption through collective disengagement. Offering an alternative to a state that has been dismissed as diasporic, they allow these settlers to claim a central role in the Jewish redemptive process – continuing and adapting the revolution induced by the Zionist enterprise beyond the limitations imposed by its embodiment into the State of Israel.

The first group can be described as *post-nationalistic*. These visionaries seek to appease the diasporic echoes of the present by normalizing the situation of the Jews in the land through mutual understandings with its other inhabitants.⁶⁰ Hagai, for example, affirms: "I don't want checkpoints, I'm also against the occupation. I want annexation, I want coexistence."⁶¹ As indicated by the interviews with Yoav and Hagai from 'Otniel, Nehara in Teko'a, or Shimi and Elish'a, both of them educators at the religious boarding school in Kfar 'Etzion, they seem to emerge in places that have been deeply influenced by neo-Hasidic thought and where the past religious Zionist taboo on studying Hasidic literature has long been broken.⁶²

⁵⁹ Interview of the A. with Ohad, 'Ofra, Decembre 15, 2016.

⁶⁰ Yifat Gutman, *Memory Activism. Reimagining the Past for the Future in Israel-Palestine*, (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2017).

⁶¹ Interview of the A. with Hagai, Jerusalem, March 28, 2018.

⁶² These visions follow the guidance of prominent spiritual leaders. In Teko'a, the late Rabbi Froman, a founder of Gush Emunim, sought a spirituality that would cross national and religious boundary lines. Many of the educators in Kfar 'Etzion are students of Rabbi Froman. It is also one of the birthplaces of the "Two States, One Homeland" initiative, advocating for peace through a Jewish-Arab confederation. 'Otniel is influenced by the support of one of the head rabbis of the yeshiva for an Abrahamic Confederation, a solution based on mutual recognition between Jews and Muslims on the basis of their common belief in God and belonging to the land.

These visions are linked by a belief that Israeli Jews must overcome statist Zionism – their normalization *as a people* through the establishment of a sovereign state – so as to achieve normalization through the inherent redemptive qualities of the Land of Israel, by blending in with its cultural and historical realities. As such, they stress the need for cooperation – and even fusion – with others, on the basis of their presence in the land, beyond the particularistic nationalism of secular Zionists and the narrative of absolute Jewish self-determination of the Kookian approach. Though these visions are sometimes designated as religious conflict resolution initiatives,⁶³ one must note that the young settlers who advocate for them seek not just physical peace but a metaphysical redemption through the restoration of harmony in the world.

Why did Oslo fail? It's because it was signed in Oslo and not in Hebron or Jerusalem (...) We need a vision that's from here, it needs to speak our language, that's made for us, our cultures, Jewish and Arab culture. (...) Oslo spoke the language of Europe, it's not ours. (...) Look, my own brother is an atheist that lives in Berlin. Most of the time, I feel more connected to the Palestinians that are around us than to him.⁶⁴

The path of this mystical collective undertaking is both similar and contradictory to that preconized by the Kookian doctrine. On the one hand, it is by the fusion of Jews and non-Jews – uniting opposites, an important concept in Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook's messianic philosophy⁶⁵ – that divine redemption is advanced. On the other hand, furthering this redemption is only possible by rejecting the Kookian attitude of reverence towards a centralized State of Israel whose destinies merge with those of the entire Jewish collective. “This is the vision of the prophets, ‘the wolf will dwell with the lamb’, ‘My house will be a house of prayer for all peoples,’ and now that we have the State of Israel, we must work for it,” illustrates Elisha.⁶⁶ This does not imply that Jewish particularism is abandoned in favor of a fused regional cultural identity. On the contrary, it is claimed as the basis of a fusion based on common Abrahamic memory, returning the Jews to their territorial and spiritual origin and finally redeeming them from their exile.

⁶³ Ofer Zalzburg, “Israel's National-Religious Jews and the Quest for Peace,” *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 20/4 (2015): 60.

⁶⁴ Interview of the A. with Yoav, ‘Otniel, July 15, 2017.

⁶⁵ Isaac Abraham Kook, *Orot Hakodesh I*, (Jerusalem: Rabbi Kook Institute, 2002), 179.

⁶⁶ Interview of the A. with Elisha, Jerusalem, April 6, 2017.

While these visions build on a more individualistic tenor in neo-Hasidic theology, detaching from the statist ideal of redemption through the state of Israel, their interpretation of redemption is decidedly collective. Religious redemption is achieved by weakening one's nationalist engagement. However, the idea is not to disconnect from the State of Israel but rather radically to transform it. This is expressed through Yoav's description of his debates at the yeshiva about practical aspects of his detachment "There is this ongoing discussion that we are having at the synagogue. Should we bless the state because it is 'the first flowering of our redemption' or so that it 'will be the first flowering of our redemption'?" he notes, signally, that he desires an evolution rather than a rupture.⁶⁷ He adds, "Right now, I'm not so sure that the State of Israel is really the beginning of redemption. I want it to be, yes! But I don't know."

As such, one should not read these visions as attempts to minimize the state. Indeed, the political construct resulting from the fusion – whether a confederation or another form of government – is envisioned in centric terms that very much echo the idealism of statist political theology. "You say theocracy, I say Kingdom of Israel. The Knesset will not just be a place of corruption, like you see now, it will be like an assembly of priests that serve... like it's supposed to be," describes Elisha.⁶⁸ Resonating the neo-Hasidic philosophy of Rabbi Froman, these young settlers assert that while the Zionist enterprise has jumpstarted the redemptive process, it must be achieved beyond the limitations of state nationalism. It is by refraining from becoming "a nation amongst the nations" that the Jews can simultaneously appease and remember their diasporic experiences: they can then avoid forcing a reenactment of these experiences upon others, fully freeing themselves from exile. As such, though the State of Israel is denied a further role in the Jewish redemptive process, the Palestinians are recognized as having some level of agency in it.

Zionism is not the final destination. (...) The Arabs are a mirror for us. If we were alone in this land, our nationalist pride might have become so overwhelming that we wouldn't be able to become "a light unto the nations" (...) They're sort of reminding us of what it is to be in exile, so we can't be tempted to return to the diaspora by behaving towards them the way people behaved towards us in the diaspora.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Interview of the A. with Yoav, 'Otniel, January 4, 2018.

⁶⁸ Interview of the A. with Elisha, Jerusalem, April 6, 2017.

⁶⁹ Interview of the A. with Nehara, Teko'a, July 10, 2017.

These visions can be contrasted with those defended by other young settlers such as Ohad, a military officer raised in 'Ofra, Batya, a bride counsellor and the wife of a rabbi in Alon Shvut, and David in Itamar. While the first corpus sought a redemption of the collective, they seek individual redemption for Jews in the land through the minimization of state structures – a vision that largely echoes conservative libertarian models. “If the state doesn’t have solutions, then it shouldn’t stop us from living our lives freely,” asserts David, in what sounds like a radical privatization of the settlement enterprise. If the State of Israel does not have the will or the strength to realize its collective redemptive role, individuals must be given the freedom to realize their own purpose undisturbed. In the words of Ohad:

I want things so that “Each man will sit under his vine and fig tree.” This is the gathering of a holy people in its land. (...) The state is a tool. It’s secular. That’s fine, it’s not a problem if it doesn’t meddle in our lives. (...) When the fight is right, the people of Israel will rally behind the same flag.⁷⁰

By their rejection of an idealized state with central, potentially coercive government, these visions diverge from both secular and statist religious Zionism. Specifically, they challenge the core Kookian premise that collective redemption *must necessarily be obtained through* the State of Israel. “I’m not buying redemption with lights from the sky, and the Messiah suddenly coming to Israel, that supernatural description (...) ‘we live in the beginning of the redemptive era,⁷¹ that I do believe,” says Batya.⁷² She explains, “We live in abundance, without horrible diseases, we’re not hungry.⁷³ The State of Israel has done good for the Jews (...) and Rabbi Kook, with all due respect, got a bit carried away.”

It is not by creating their own state that Jews can overcome exile, contend these settlers, but rather by becoming free of state constraints. “When you lived in France, you had to make yourself small, so as not to provoke,” she says, referring to this researcher’s origin, and continues: “In exile, the Jews are the minority. In

⁷⁰ Interview of the A. with Ohad, 'Ofra, December 15, 2016.

⁷¹ She uses the Aramaic term “Atchalta DiGeula” (אתחלתא דגאולה).

⁷² Interview of the A. with Batya, Alon Shvut, March 8, 2017.

⁷³ I interpret this as a loose reference to Maimonides’ natural redemption vision, invoked to validate her assertion that the redemptive era has started.

the State of Israel, you're free, you can be any kind of Jew. But it's an illusion. And we see this clearly in Judea and Samaria!" She takes in a deep breath and elaborates about how the state denies the freedom she conceives as transformative for Jews: "If you live in Judea and Samaria, the state will tell you where you can live, where you can drive, and if you allow it, what you can think. That's not redemption."

By contrast to statist religious Zionists, these young settlers are thus very adamant in their criticism of the State of Israel – since any exercise of its authority inherently perpetuates their exilic situation. By disengaging and freeing themselves from these state structures, taking on a modernized and technologized Hebrew identity – they contend – Jews will individually undergo a transformation that can eventually redeem them from an exile of oppression at the hands of others. Messianic times, in these visions, will then be reached as this freedom is claimed collectively by Jews reintegrating their "natural place" in the Land of Israel. "Freedom and roots, that's opposites for most people. For Jews, it's different. We can only reach the Land of Israel if we're free," sums up Ohad.⁷⁴ Strongly drawing on romanticized and idealized representations of the Biblical past, these visions also completely omit the presence of the Palestinians as a potential spoiler of the Jews' idyllic freedom. The idea that Jews must also display unbridled force to retain complete domination over the land and its inhabitants, overcoming "the fragments of exile" by claiming an exclusive relationship with the land and subduing others, is always implicit.

Settling despite the State

While the settlers of the first section of this article seek to transform but continue the Zionist enterprise, the young informants encountered and observed on West Bank hilltops loudly proclaim a rupture. Their sense of detachment from statist religious Zionism is translated into acts of political disengagement that set them apart from (and sometimes in opposition to) other settler communities. As in the previous section, in this part I discuss how memories and images of the Jewish exilic past permeate narratives and structure interpretations of exile and redemption from exile among hilltop settlers. I discuss two major differences between their discourse and that of the first section.

⁷⁴ Interview of the A. with Ohad, 'Ofra, December 15, 2016.

First, hilltop settlers do not subscribe to the Zionist idea of a redemption entirely and completely led by man. As such, they do not believe that they can bring the redemption about, no matter how radical their attempts. Second, while the informants of the previous section saw the State of Israel as profoundly Jewish but sought to overcome its limitations, the hilltop critic is much more radical. In hilltop settler discourse, the state is not simply criticized as exilic but as foreign – and its actions are equated with those of the Jews’ persecutors in the diaspora. As such, these settlers’ aspirations are expressed not simply beyond but *despite the state*. While various authors see the hilltop lifestyle as a radical privatization of the settlement enterprise, I argue that neither their detachment from statist collectivist messianism nor their rejection of the State of Israel and secular Israeli culture implies a disengagement from messianism or collectivism. Rather, their visions involve both delimiting the State of Israel as we know it today and the rise of a new power which will open the way for divine redemption.

The first distinction became apparent in my very first visit to an illegal hilltop established a few hundred meters outside a settlement in the north of the West Bank. Meeting with No’a and Hodaya, both in their late teens, in their small hut, I asked whether they thought that their actions on the hill were advancing the redemption.⁷⁵ No’a answers: “We are worshiping God and doing His command, living a life of Torah, and believe that this is what will bring the redemption.” Hodaya adds: “You’re thinking of it backwards! (...) if we do the commandments, eventually redemption will come. It’s not the other way, like we’d be here in order to advance redemption.” Similarly, the other residents on the hill affirm total faith and submission to God, awaiting redemption at His will – an interpretation of redemption that negates their agency in the process and is much closer to ultra-Orthodoxy than to Zionist doctrines.⁷⁶ “What’s wrong with the Haredim?” No’a insists, underscoring her rupture with statist religious Zionist world further. “They kept the Torah in exile, they’re the reason we’re here.”

Even those hilltop settlers who believe that the return of the majority of the Jews to the Land of Israel marks the beginning of the Jewish redemptive era (a key religious Zionist premise) express doubts as to their ability to shape the land so as to set the stage for the arrival of the Messiah. But their diasporic interpretation of redemption, based on the expectation of divine intervention upon the return of

⁷⁵ The following exchange is reported from field notes, Binyamin Hills, January 16, 2019.

⁷⁶ Dalsheim, “Exile at Home.”

the people of Israel to religion, makes the secularism of the state and the majority of Israeli society all the more problematic. To them, Zionism – which has returned the people to the Land of Israel by rebelling against divine redemption – has condemned the Jews to indefinite metaphysical exile. Yamit, for example, who lives with her new husband on an isolated hilltop in the northern West Bank, in complete rejection of Kookian philosophy, explains that by allowing secular Jews to flourish in the land, the state of Israel is actually lowering rather than raising them spiritually:

In a way, the State of Israel is allowing the people of Israel to be in a place worse than in the diaspora. It's definitely worse than under the British (...) People tell themselves, "Okay, we can live here, and we will have Israel without the other bank of the Jordan," or "I'm Israeli but I don't feel Jewish or keep the commandments," or "I don't need to fight, the army is here." And maybe, from an ethical standpoint, it's worse than the diaspora, because now the state really encourages secularization.⁷⁷

By contrast to the visions painted by the settlers of the previous sections, the hilltop settlers do not seek to achieve visions that fulfil the needs of the Jews but rather to conform to divine decrees. Their constant friction with the state thus extends far beyond a critique of the state's territorial policy into a scathing critique of its secular culture and mainstream public. And though they are conscious that they represent a tiny minority, "So what?," shrugs Elkana, a young father living in an illegal hilltop extension near a state-sanctioned settlement, "revolutions are usually started by minorities."⁷⁸ In 2015, the Shin-Bet dismantled the Revolt,⁷⁹ a radical hilltop network seeking to destabilize Israel's secular regime by generating large-scale unrest and pave the way for a religious revolution. Ro'i, a former sympathizer, reveals the extent of the group's antagonism to secular Israeli culture by describing a vision that entails imposing religion on the mainstream public to force it back in line with prophecy:

⁷⁷ Interview of the A. with Yamit, Binyamin Hills, December 27, 2018.

⁷⁸ Interview of the A. with Elkana, Tapuach West, December 28, 2017.

⁷⁹ The Revolt was a manifesto circulated amongst hilltop settlers, calling to establish a religious regime in Israel. The network that formed around this manifesto was dismantled (at least partially) in 2015, in a crackdown on hilltop groups following several "Price Tag" arson attacks against churches in Israel proper and a terror attack in the village of Duma, which killed 3 Palestinians.

The secular must return to religion, whether they want it or not. If they're doing something in the privacy of their home, okay, maybe there is no need to intervene, at least for now. But if they want to ride their car in the street on Shabbat? What exactly should be their punishment - I don't know. But we talked about this (...) Why should I need to convince them?! I want to force them. (...) It's for their own good.⁸⁰

While visions developed in the other group were also based on the centrality of Jewish spiritual redemption, none entailed imposing religious law on the secular public. Indeed, they hoped for a collective redemption derived from the natural fusion of all “opposites in the land” or the radical transformative power of freedom. In the Revolt's vision, secular Jews must either disappear or submit to the domination of an authoritarian state whose culture is different from theirs – paradoxically, a drastic return to the exilic situation. A paradox which Shaul, another sympathizer of the Revolt living on a hilltop near Yitzhar, is quick to deny though the image of the “camps” he invokes unwittingly confirms that he also understands this resonance:

It's not like we'll send people to camps if they don't comply, we won't arrest people or things like that. I think that a lot of people drive on Shabbat because everyone does it. One of the things I liked about the Revolt was that it was practical. (...) So, for example, we had this idea that we were going to block Ayalon on Friday night. At first people will get angry (...) and eventually they will stop using the road. We'll educate progressively and they'll understand.⁸¹

This hilltop vision is thus necessarily exclusive of other aspirations, even within the Jewish collective. It asserts that Jews *must* be freed and advance towards a collective interpretation of messianic redemption, even if by coercion. To achieve this, the functions of the current State of Israel must be minimized until they can be replaced by “a religious power” that will enact religious laws and “rule according to the Torah.” One should note that, contrary to Kookian Zionists, these hilltop activists do not attribute any inherent redemptive power to this new politico-religious construct. Rather, its all-encompassing authorities will ensure that Jews are worthy of redemption at God's will.

⁸⁰ Interview of the A. with Ro'i, Gush Etzion, February 13, 2019.

⁸¹ Interview of the A. with Shaul and his wife Avigail, Yizhar hills, November 24, 2017.

Their need to minimize the current government structures is clarified by the second difference noted at the beginning of this section. While the claim of the settlers of the previous section (which criticized the state as diasporic on the grounds that its character and policies did not express the transformations undergone by the Jews in the Land of Israel) also informs the hilltop context, it is reinforced by another, much more radical argument: the State of Israel is perceived as a hostile alien whose actions perpetuate in the Land of Israel the Jews' persecution in the diaspora. As for the *diasporization* described in the first section, this *alienation* is constituted by invoking exilic memories of persecutions: "We lived through expulsions and pogroms and the Shoah," says Avigail, Shaul's wife, joining the conversation, "now, there is a state. You say it's Jewish, but it's not behaving like a Jewish state. It's uprooting Jews and sending its army against us, that's not really Jewish sovereignty."

As such, the State of Israel is paradoxically rejected both as a weak exilic construct and as a coercive alien oppressor; it is thus neither Jewish nor revolutionary enough. Similarly, hilltop settlers describe themselves as exilic, in the sense that they are victims of state persecution, and territorial Jews whose strength is dedicated to conquering the land. This duality is revealed in an exchange between No'a and the young women of her hilltop about the fence enclosing the closest settlement.⁸² "This idea that we're weak and we need protecting, it's diasporic," she grimaces. "Living behind fences, as if we're in the ghetto, persecuted and about to be killed." "A fence is nice against evacuations," retorts a girl whose family was evacuated from the outpost of Amona in 2017. "It doesn't help," cuts in another one, "when they have orders, they have to destroy everything. If you're in the way... even girls, they'll beat you up."

The redemptive role that was attributed to the state by religious Zionists, they claim, must now devolve upon them, since they are truly connected to the land. In contrast to the state's modern pragmatic relationship with territory, they stress their own intimate relationship with the land, which is sanctified not only as a symbol of divine promise, but as a sort of "metaphorical womb"⁸³ from which the Jews can be reborn to their true nature – and redeemed from exile. Their vision entails Jewish redemption by the land itself, rather than by the human enterprise returning the people to Israel. "We must separate ourselves from Zionism," explains Elishev'a, a former settler of the Yitzhar hills, referring to

⁸² The following exchange is reported from field notes, Binyamin Hills, January 21, 2019.

⁸³ Ohana, *The Origins of Israeli mythology*, 19.

Kabbalistic undertones in the philosophy of Rabbi Ginzburg whose yeshiva she brands as “the most radical place in the West Bank,” evidently delighted: “It’s like the shell that’s protected the fruit, and now to taste the true taste of the fruit, you must detach it.”⁸⁴ Their deconstruction of the Zionist concept of the new Jew is truly fundamentalist. Their aspiration is not for a modern new Jew in the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people, but for a revival of the ancestral Jew – never exiled and thus free from the Jewish diasporic past.

This idealized figure is embodied through aesthetic choices such as long hair covered by large and colorful, sometimes beaded, cloths, by which hilltop women adopt a style reminiscent of “the women of Israel.” It is also put in practice by a rejection of modern technology. None of these settlers, for example, owns a smartphone or a personal computer. Finally, it is enacted by picking living arrangements that echo those of ancient Hebrews. “I’m living in a tent, like the people of Israel in the Shiloh period,”⁸⁵ says Yehonatan,⁸⁶ walking me through his dark tent erected in Area B of the West Bank, a territory where Israeli civilians are not permitted to live. The meaning of his settling there is a defiant challenge to the limitations imposed on movement as a result of modern politics and the dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Together, these strategies of archaization signify the settlers’ disengagement not only from the state but also from modern Israeli society, reviving the memory of a mythicized Biblical past⁸⁷ and signifying its symbolic continuity with their present selves. In perfect opposition to the Zionist mindset, redemption is sought by going back into the past, rather than by moving into the future.

Because they perceive connection with the land as the defining characteristic of the people of Israel, this relationship is claimed to be exclusively authentic, and the fact that others coexist with Jews on this land is abhorred. The state’s tolerance of Arab presence and Christian worship⁸⁸ on Israeli territory is interpreted as a challenge to the Jews’ absolute claim to the land. Elishev’a, for

⁸⁴ Interview of the A. with Elisheva and her husband, Hebron hills, January 1, 2019.

⁸⁵ Part of the Biblical period between the entry of the Israelites into the Land of Canaan and the building of the First Temple, when the Tabernacle’s location in Shiloh made that town central for Israelite worship (as becomes apparent from Joshua, 18:1, or Samuel I, 3:21).

⁸⁶ The following exchange is reported from field notes, Yizhar Hills, November 24, 2017.

⁸⁷ Nehemia Stern, “The Social life of the Samson Saga in Israeli Religious Zionist Rabbinic Discourse” *Culture and Religion* 19/2 (2018): 177-200.

⁸⁸ While Muslim worship is opposed on mostly political grounds, I have noted that Christian worship is resisted in religious terms, as idolatry, and specifically detested.

example, describes her connection with the land in almost erotic terms and denounces its parallel use by Arabs as a desecration:

The land is part of us and we're a part of it. It's so intimate that sometimes I see Arabs planting trees, touching the soil, they're putting their seeds into the land, and I feel violated. It's stronger than me, I feel like they're raping me (...) I have this physical sense of illness. Hebron, of all places, the city of our forefathers and mothers, where the land gave birth to us, and they're planting their seeds.

In order for the Jews to be reborn of the land of Israel into their ancestral selves, others must leave the redemptive Jewish space. Constant friction with the Palestinians is interpreted as a sign of the complete need to exclude them from the Land of Israel. Violence against the non-Jews on the land thus receives value in the redemptive process: in order to free themselves from exile, the Jews must express their true territorial nature and rid the land of its other inhabitants. "We've been groomed into good Jews, disconnected from our animal nature," says Shaul, noting that the state is "once again preferring submissive Jews to free ones."⁸⁹ In order to achieve redemption, the Jews must express their true nature, "and taking revenge," he insists, "is a natural instinct." As such, while hilltop settlers also seek to integrate a Jewish collective identity spirituality into the Israeli space, in sharp contrast with the visions explored in the first section, hilltop redemptive ambitions are profoundly exclusive and entail erasing other memories, aspirations – and physical existence. The presence of others in the land – secular Jews, statist Jews, Christian pilgrims, or Palestinians – is a constant reminder that history has moved forth since the Biblical era. It must be removed to fulfil a messianic vision that can only be achieved despite the intruders.

Conclusions: "The Product of this Generation in this Land"

Despite the very strong differences between the visions proposed by the two groups, they form together an important corpus of alternative to the statist religious Zionist political theology that once characterized the Israeli settlement movement. They derive from the beliefs and practices of a settler generation that has fostered doubts about the worldview of its elders. Far from the efforts of Yesh'a to normalize and urbanize settlements, this paper has explored alternative

⁸⁹ Interview of the A. with Shaul and his wife Avigail, Yizhar hills, November 24, 2017.

(and often contradictory) collective visions of a new generation of religious and idealistic settlers who seek not only the rebirth of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel, but that of Judaism itself. This spiritual pursuit, which gives rise to dreams of either exclusion or fusion with other aspirations in the land, is shared by settlers across this paper's two ethnographic sections.

A key difference between the settlers cited in the two sections pertains to their vision of what constitutes redemption. The first group claims a central role in the Jewish redemptive process, framing the state as an instrument of exilic Judaism so as to shape Jewish destinies beyond its limitations. Doing so, they frame themselves as the true heirs of the Zionist enterprise, which they demand to reinterpret in light of interpretations of redemption that are territorialized in the Land of Israel but not in the State of Israel in its current form and essence, entitling them to leadership towards alternative collective visions *beyond the state*. The second role dismisses the state not merely as an instrument but as a reenactment of Jewish exile in the Land of Israel and an instrument of Jewish persecution. The settlers thus seek a Jewish identity that is both free from exile and removed from the modernity inherent in Zionism, a radically fundamentalist identity, and to impose their redemptive vision by force, through the erasure of other histories and aspirations in the land, *despite* the State of Israel.

While various authors have approached the transformations of the religious Zionist public through its theological sources and ideological production⁹⁰ and through an economical perspective,⁹¹ this paper has explored specifically how redemption from exile and the role of the State of Israel in the Jewish redemptive process are interpreted phenomenologically by young settler activists and elaborated into political and social visions that largely depart from statist religious Zionism. I have shown how memories of the Jewish diaspora are mobilized as discursive objects to frame the State of Israel as an instrument of exile rather than as a vector of collective salvation, allowing these young settlers to assign themselves a central role in the Jewish redemptive process. Their visions

⁹⁰ Eliezer Don-Yehiya, "Messianism and Politics. The Ideological Transformation of Religious Zionism," *Israel Studies* 19/2 (2014): 239-263; Motti Inbari, *Messianic Religious Zionism Confronts Israeli Territorial Compromises*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Dov Schwartz, *Religious-Zionism. History and Ideology*, (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009); Stern, "First Flowering of Redemption."

⁹¹ Nissim Leon, "The Transformation of Israel's Religious Zionist Middle Class," *The Journal of Israeli History* 29/1 (2010): 61-78.

thus seek to detach the State of Israel from the process of Jewish redemption. I argue that this disengagement is not simply political but is often also accompanied by a scathing critique of secular culture in Israel, which is embodied in significant trends of disengagement from secular Israeli society.

Further, exploring whether these visions seek to minimize or rather maximize the influence of collective political constructs on the lives of Jews in the Land of Israel, I have argued that neither their disconnection of the state from the Jewish redemptive process in rejection of statist religious Zionism, nor their proximity with neo-Hasidic philosophies, inherently imply that they are distancing themselves from redemptive messianism or even collectivist ideals. Indeed, while some authors have understood the emergence of new visions as driven by the disenchantment with the redemptive promise of the early settlement days,⁹² I understand their aspirations as signals of the vitality of these messianic hopes, which are reinterpreted and infused with new meanings by a new generation of settlers – questioning the dichotomy established by Zionist thinkers and their scholars between exile, which is associated with the diaspora, and the State of Israel, which embodies collective redemption. In the words of one of my informants, these visions constitute “the product of this generation in this land.”

The ethnographic approach of this paper has often highlighted the fact that seemingly irresolvable theoretical oppositions are often resolved through creative arrangements in daily practice. A hilltop couple described to me having inscribed the bride’s right to celebrate Israeli Independence Day in their wedding contract out of respect for her parents. This despite their shared rejection of the institutions and policies of the State of Israel. She had reciprocated by allowing the groom yearly pilgrimage to the tomb of Rabbi Nahman of Breslov, the reviver of Hassidic mysticism, in Ukraine. This, despite their shared belief that Jews should not absent themselves from the Land of Israel. The ability of the young settler interviewed in this paper to navigate different theological and ideological frameworks despite (and perhaps for) their inherent contradiction may be the most obvious manifestation of neo-liberal influence on young religious Zionist settler publics.

One should not be tempted, as such, to see the settlers of the two sections as mutual opposites. Despite the difference in their beliefs and aspirations, they should be considered as expressing different levels of political, societal and

⁹² Ram, “National, Ethnic or Civic?”; Stern, “First Flowering of Redemption.”

cultural disengagement. The boundaries between them are flexible and do not suffice to sever them from each other. They signal points of reference on a spectrum rather than rupture lines. Competing for resources and influence over the settler public, the settlers of the two sections are also bound together by various activist endeavors (such as Temple Mount activism) and by deep social and economic ties. Throughout my fieldwork, I paid attention to dynamics of integration and exclusion of hilltop settlers in settlement communities. Though it cannot be denied that many statist communities fear the influence of the hilltop lifestyle on their youths, and sometimes exclude their children who have taken it on, it is today almost impossible to find ideological homogeneity in settler communities across the West Bank.

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