

In God's Name: Jewish Religious and Traditional Peace and Human Rights Movements in Israel and in the Occupied Territories¹

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Abstract

The peace-building activities of several dozens peace and human rights activists from Israeli-Jewish religious and traditional milieus has not received enough attention either from the Israeli and international media or in the academia. Actually, following the Six-day war and the beginning of the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, a certain number of Orthodox Israelis committed to peace and justice founded a Jewish religious peace movement called 'Oz Ve Shalom' ('Strength and Peace'). A few years later, another peace movement called 'Netivot Shalom' ('Paths of Peace') was founded by Israeli yeshiva students and young new immigrants from the United States. At the end of the 1980s, in the wake of the first Intifada, a small circle of religious and traditional Israeli rabbis committed to the respect of human rights came to the fore and, more recently, a group of Hasidic settlers inspired by the teachings of Rabbi Menahem Froman has created a peace group called 'Eretz Shalom' ('Land of Peace'). This essay, mainly based on primary sources such as periodicals, bulletins, newsletters, monographs, leaflets and other diverse material published by these movements, and on oral testimonies collected by the Author, retraces the history of these religious peace groups in a cohesive framework.

- Introduction

- 'Oz Ve Shalom,' 'Netivot Shalom' and 'Meimad': Modern Orthodox Jews and Religious Zionists for peace and justice

- 'Shomrei Mishpat/Rabbis for Human Rights': All streams of Judaism together to advance the respect of human rights

- 'Eretz Shalom': Jewish settlers building bridges to the Palestinians in the West Bank

- Conclusions - The importance of grassroots peace movements within the Israeli-Jewish religious and traditional context

¹ The movements that I will present in this paper need to be defined as 'peace movements' and not as 'pacifist movements.' For an explanation of the differences existing between these two categories, see Tamar Hermann, "Contemporary Peace Movements: Between the Hammer of Political Realism and the Anvil of Pacifism" *The Western Political Quarterly* 45/4 (1992): 869-93; Tamar Hermann, *The Israeli Peace Movement: A Shattered Dream*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 31.

² Yehuda Stolov, "Religious Narratives on Jerusalem and Their Role in Peace Building," *Religious Narratives on Jerusalem and Their Role in Peace Building: Proceedings of an Interreligious Conference Held October 20th, 2009 in Jerusalem*, (Jerusalem: Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst, 2009), 58.

³ Interview with Uriel Simon, Jerusalem, 06/28/2012, (Hebrew).

Introduction

“When people of different communities never live more than a few tens of kilometers from each other – and many times live just a few meters from each other – agreements between governments, if they are to be sustainable, cannot be the first and main step but an advanced one, which is built upon real and significant improvement in the pattern of inter-communal relations.”²

“Peace is not a matter of texts, it is a matter of hearts.”³ So I was told by Uriel Simon, professor emeritus of Bible at Bar Ilan University and among the founders of religious Zionist peace organization ‘Oz Ve Shalom.’⁴

Uriel Simon was born in Jerusalem, in 1929. His commitment to peace traces its roots back in Mandatory Palestine, where his father, Akiva Ernst Simon (Berlin, 1899 – Jerusalem, 1988), a German Jewish philosopher and educator, devoted himself to build peace and trust between Arabs and Jews.⁵ In the early 1920s, Akiva Ernst Simon was active in the ‘Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus,’ an educational center established in Frankfurt am Main by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig. When he arrived to Jerusalem, in 1928, Akiva Ernst Simon joined ‘Brit Shalom’ (‘Covenant of Peace’), a group founded in 1925 by a circle of Jewish intellectuals, whose aim was to promote peaceful coexistence and genuine cooperation between Arabs and Jews.⁶ In 1942, Akiva Ernst Simon,

² Yehuda Stolov, “Religious Narratives on Jerusalem and Their Role in Peace Building,” *Religious Narratives on Jerusalem and Their Role in Peace Building: Proceedings of an Interreligious Conference Held October 20th, 2009 in Jerusalem*, (Jerusalem: Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst, 2009), 58.

³ Interview with Uriel Simon, Jerusalem, 06/28/2012, (Hebrew).

⁴ On Uriel Simon’s conception of peace as a religious commandment, see Uriel Simon, “*Seek Peace and Pursue It*”: *Topical Issues in the Light of Bible, the Bible in the Light of Topical Issues*, (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, 2002), (Hebrew).

⁵ On Akiva Ernst Simon’s thought about the State of Israel and the relations between Arabs and Jews, see Akiva Ernst Simon, “Nationalismus, Zionismus und der jüdische-arabische Konflikt in Martin Bubers Theorie und Wirksamkeit” *Bulletin des Leo Baecks Instituts* 33 (1966): 21-84; Akiva Ernst Simon, “Are We Israelis Still Jews? The Search for Judaism in the New Society,” in *Arguments and Doctrines: A Reader of Jewish Thinking in the Aftermath of the Holocaust*, ed. Arthur A. Cohen, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1970); Akiva Ernst Simon, “The Neighbor (“re’a”) Whom We Shall Love,” in *Modern Jewish Ethics: Theory and Practice*, ed. Marvin Fox, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1975); Akiva Ernst Simon, “Religion und Staat in Israel,” in *Religion und Politik in der Gesellschaft des 20. Jahrhunderts: Ein Symposium mit israelischen und deutschen Wissenschaftlern*, eds. Semyahu Talmon and Gregor Siefer, (Bonn: Keil Verlag, 1978), 148-91.

⁶ On ‘Brit Shalom,’ see Daniel Howard Nevins, *State Building and Social Criticism: The Internal Dynamics of Brit Shalom, 1925-1933*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Shalom Ratzabi, *Between Zionism and Judaism: The Radical Circle in Brit Shalom, 1925-1933*, (Boston: Brill, 2001). For more bibliographical references on ‘Brit Shalom,’ see also Aharon Kedar’s list of

together with Martin Buber, Gershom Sholem, Judah Magnes and others, founded a political framework called 'Ihud' ('Union'), which supported the creation of a bi-national State in Palestine.⁷

The movements that I introduced above no longer exist; nevertheless there still appears to be room for an Israeli-Jewish religious and traditional peace building effort in the State of Israel and in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt).

The main aim of this paper is thus to introduce and analyze some vibrant and deeply rooted groups of modern Orthodox and traditional Israeli Jews, who are committed to peace between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs. The Israeli-Jewish religious and traditional peace and human rights movements whose history I will detail in this paper have not received enough attention either from the Israeli and international media or in the academia from the scholars who have dealt with other aspects of the history of the Israeli peace movement until today.⁸ In this respect, this paper intends to fill this gap, starting from the written sources and the oral evidences that I collected in summer 2012 from within the Israeli-Jewish religious and traditional peace movements.⁹

The peace movements that I will present and analyze in this paper were founded in different historical moments; for this reason the primary sources that I used are not homogeneous in terms of type and of timeframe. On 'Oz Ve Shalom,' 'Netivot Shalom,' 'Meimad' and 'Shomrei Mishpat/Rabbis for Human Rights,' which were founded between 1975 and 1988, I collected periodicals, bulletins, newsletters, monographs, pamphlets, leaflets and other diverse written material, which I found mainly at the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem and at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam.

publications, <http://jewishhistory.huji.ac.il/profs/HU/Jewish%20History/kedar.htm>, accessed 31 May 2013.

⁷ On 'Ihud,' see Judah Leon Magnes, *Palestine – Divided or United? The Case for a Bi-National Palestine Before the United Nations*, (Jerusalem: Ihud, 1947); Judah Leon Magnes, Martin Buber, *Arab-Jewish Unity: Testimony Before the Anglo-American Inquiry Commission for the Ihud (Union) Association*, (London: Gollancz, 1947). For a biography of Judah Magnes, see Arthur A. Goren, *Dissenter in Zion: From the Writings of Judah L. Magnes*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982). On other aspects of the history of 'Ihud' see the essays by Giulia Daniele and Marcella Simoni in this issue, respectively at pp. 1-21 and 73-100.

⁸ See Mordechai Bar-On, *In Pursuit of Peace: A History of the Israeli Peace Movement*, (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1996); Reuven Kaminer, *The Politics of Protest: The Israeli Peace Movement and the Palestinian Intifada*, (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1996); Tamar Hermann, *The Israeli Peace Movement: A Shattered Dream*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁹ Though the anthropological dimension of my research is not the focus of this paper, I would nevertheless like to briefly introduce it here. The research work that I conducted in the last year and half could be divided into three phases. First of all, I mapped and studied the main literature dealing with the Israeli peace movement on the one hand and with the connections between Judaism and human values on the other hand. Then, once I identified the Israeli religious peace groups that it could be interesting to explore in greater detail and depth, I got in touch with some of their members in order to interview them; at the same time, I collected many primary written sources. Finally, I elaborated, analyzed and combined the collected data in a synergic framework.

My analysis of 'Eretz Shalom,' which is a very recent movement established in 2009, is necessarily based on online material and on primary oral sources, which I collected in summer 2012 in Jerusalem and in some settlements in the region of Gush Eztion. All in all, the corpus of oral testimonies that I will present in the following pages is made of twenty interviews with members of these various peace movements.

This paper is organized into three chapters, each of which addresses at the same time the history, the religious-philosophical and the socio-political dimensions of the three peace movements that I intend to analyze here, namely 'Oz Ve Shalom-Netivot Shalom,' 'Shomrei Mishpat/Rabbis for Human Rights' and 'Eretz Shalom.' In conclusion, I will illustrate the value of these religious peace movements in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution and I will suggest some recommendations for further research in this regard.

'Oz Ve Shalom,' 'Netivot Shalom' and 'Meimad': Modern Orthodox Jews and Religious Zionists for peace and justice

The Jewish religious peace movement 'Oz Ve Shalom' ('Strength and Peace')¹⁰ was founded in 1975 by a small group of modern Orthodox Jews. The main aim of these "religious Zionists for strength and peace", as they used to define themselves, was "to strengthen the spiritual and moral fiber of Israeli life"¹¹ by reminding both Israeli citizens and Israel's political and religious institutions that "a Jewish State must be faithful to Jewish values and Torah principles, above all peace and justice."¹²

The foundation of the movement has to be related to the political, social and religious issues at stake at the time. As it is well-known, in 1967, following the Six day war and the Israeli conquest of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Sinai peninsula and the Golan Heights, the vast majority of Israeli Jews, regardless of their religious devotion, felt exhilarated by Israel's victory over the neighboring Arab countries. When the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and of the Gaza Strip (WBGs) began, the internal and external actors involved in the conflict came to play new roles.¹³

Immediately after the Six day war, Israeli scientist and philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz was among the first Israeli Orthodox Jews to publicly express concern and disapproval of Israel's occupation policies of WBGs. In his article published in 1983 in the Israeli daily newspaper «Haaretz» Leibowitz wrote:

¹⁰ The movement's name is taken from *Psalms* 29:11 "The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace."

¹¹ "What is Oz Ve Shalom?" *Oz Ve Shalom*, English Bulletin 1 (1982): 2.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ On the political impact of the Six Day War, see Bassam Tibi, *Conflict and War in the Middle East, 1967-1991: Regional Dynamic and the Superpowers*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993); Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Frank Brenchley, *Britain, the Six-Day War and its Aftermath*, (London: Tauris, 2005).

About 15 years ago, some two years after the Six-Day War, when the vast majority of Israelis, and even considerable sections of Diaspora Jewry, were affected by ravenous nationalist bragging and arrogance over military achievements (...), I plucked up courage to express in speeches and articles my apprehension lest the glorious victory bringing about the conquest (or the “liberation”) of the whole Eretz Israel (Palestine) and even the peninsula of Sinai, mark in the eyes of the future historian the onset of the process of Israel’s decline and collapse. It was evident to me that it is not the territories that count but the people populating them, the people we are trying to subjugate.¹⁴

After the sudden turning point of 1967, it took left-wing religious Zionists a few years to organize a well-prepared counteraction to the ultra-nationalist ideas and practices that were spreading out in the wider Jewish religious milieu in Israel. In 1974, a political messianic movement called ‘Gush Emunim’ (‘Bloc of the Faithful’) was officially founded by students of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook.¹⁵ ‘Gush Emunim’ called upon every religious Jew in Israel to move to the oPt and to settle down there, in order to fulfill the divine commandment (*mitzvah*) to conquer and settle all the land of Israel, so that the Messiah could finally come and redeem the Jewish people.¹⁶ As the founders of ‘Oz Ve

¹⁴ Yeshayahu Leibowitz, “Gaining Land but Losing Soul?,” *Haaretz*, September 16, 1983. See also Yeshayahu Leibowitz, John P. Egan, “Yeshayahu Leibowitz: Liberating Israel from the Occupied Territories” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 15/2 (1986): 102-108; Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values and the Jewish State*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992). On the biography and the thought of Yeshayahu Leibowitz, see also the documentary film Uri Rosenwaks, *Leibowitz: Faith, Country and Man*, Israel, 2012.

¹⁵ On the impact of the teachings of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook in the foundation of ‘Gush Emunim,’ see Richard Lawrence Hoch, *The Politics of Redemption: Rabbi Zvi Yehuda ha-Kohen Kook and the Origins of Gush Emunim*, (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1994).

¹⁶ On ‘Gush Emunim’ and its role in the Jewish settlement of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, see David Newman, *Jewish Settlements in the West Bank: The Role of Gush Emunim*, (Durham: University of Durham, 1982); David Newman, *The Impact of Gush Emunim: Politics and Settlements in the West Bank*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985); Ehud Sprinzak, *Gush Emunim: The Politics of Zionist Fundamentalism in Israel*, (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1986); Ian Lustick, *For the Land and for the Lord*, (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1988); Gershon Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967-1977*, (New York: Times Books, 2006); Idith Zertal, *Lords of the Land: The War Over Israel’s Settlements in the Occupied Territories, 1967-2007*, (New York: Nation Books, 2009); Michael Feige, *Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009). On the debate between ‘Oz Ve Shalom’ religious Zionists for peace and ‘Gush Emunim’ supporters, see Fred David Levine, *Territory or Peace? Religious Zionism in Conflict*, (New York: Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations, 1986); Yehezkel Landau, *Religious Zionism: Challenges and Choices*, (Jerusalem: Oz Ve Shalom Publications, 1992); Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Motti Inbari, *Messianic Religious Zionism Confronts Israeli Territorial Compromises*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Shalom' declared in the first issue of the English bulletin of this religious peace movement:

Oz Ve Shalom was founded in 1975 as a reaction to what was regarded as a misinterpretation of Torah and halakhah, and a distortion of religious Zionism, by members of Gush Emunim. In our platform, we state our belief that Jews certainly have an irrevocable right to Eretz Yisrael, the Land of Israel. However, the Palestinian Arab desire for national self-determination precludes the fulfillment of this historical and Biblical claim within the totality of the Land.¹⁷

As we can conclude from the above-mentioned quotation, the members of 'Oz Ve Shalom' did not call the Jewish right to the Land of Israel into question, but rather they insisted on the Palestinian Arabs' right to self-determination as well. Ophir Yarden, a modern Orthodox Jew who had joined the Israeli religious peace movement since his arrival to Israel from the United States at the end of the 1970s, affirmed:

I think that just as a person who defines himself as a Zionist and believes that the Jewish people have the right to a State must say: "Why should the right to self-determination cease to be relevant after Zionism?" Palestinians have the right to a State, too. For the same or for similar reasons as Jews do have this right.¹⁸

In 1982, another peace group of modern Orthodox Jews came to the fore. The movement was called 'Netivot Shalom'¹⁹ and its founders were mainly Israeli yeshiva students or new immigrants from the United States who opposed Israel's military campaign in Lebanon.²⁰ The deepest reasons of their protest against the Lebanon War of 1982 traced their roots in the Jewish law (*halakhah*), which clarified that the divine commandment of the preservation of human life (*pikuach nefesh*) must take priority over any other religious or political consideration. Since its foundation, 'Netivot Shalom' gained the blessing of two prominent Orthodox rabbis from Yeshivat Har Etzion: Rabbi Yehuda Amital and Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein.²¹

¹⁷ "What is Oz Ve Shalom?" *Oz Ve Shalom*, English Bulletin 1 (1982): 2.

¹⁸ Interview of the A. with Ophir Yarden, Jerusalem, 8 July 2012, (Hebrew).

¹⁹ The movement's name is taken from *Proverbs* 3:17 "Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace."

²⁰ Israel's military campaign in Lebanon, which began in 1982, encouraged the emergence of a widespread opposition movement within the Israeli public opinion. For an extensive analysis of the reasons, which were at the basis of this opposition movement, see Gil Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon and the United States in Vietnam*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²¹ Rabbi Yehuda Amital (Oradea, 1924 – Jerusalem, 2010) was a prominent Israeli Orthodox rabbi. During the Second World War, he was deported to Auschwitz with his family, he survived the *Shah* and, in 1944, he emigrated to *Eretz Israel*. After the Six Day War, he founded

In 1984, ‘Oz Ve Shalom’ and ‘Netivot Shalom’ merged into one movement called ‘Oz Ve Shalom-Netivot Shalom.’²² The main aims of this old-new movement were to promote peace between Israelis and Palestinians within a religious Zionist framework and to strongly oppose every ethnocentric, extremist nationalist²³ and fundamentalist claim advanced by religious Jews in the name of God and in the name of the Torah.²⁴

Mainly active in the 1980s, the members of ‘Oz Ve Shalom’ and ‘Netivot Shalom’ organized many activities to encourage what they saw as “consciousness-raising”²⁵ among Israeli and Diaspora Jews. Among the activities they promoted were public prayers, demonstrations, political and educational campaigns, informational activities, petitions, public lectures, rallies and publications highlighting the religious and moral duty of seeking and building peace.²⁶

Just to give an example, the so-called anti-Kahane campaign has been one of the most significant actions promoted by the members of ‘Oz Ve Shalom’ and ‘Netivot Shalom.’ When in the 1984 Knesset elections, the ultra-nationalist party ‘Kach’ led by Rabbi Meir Kahane got 25,907 votes, equivalent to one seat in the Israeli parliament,²⁷ the members of the religious peace movements that

Yeshivat Har Etzion, near the settlement of Alon Shevut, in the region of Gush Etzion. In 1971, Rabbi Amital invited Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein (Paris, 1933) to join him at Yeshivat Har Etzion as *Rosh Yeshiva*. Although being a rabbi who headed a yeshiva in the Occupied Territories, especially in the 1980s, Rabbi Yehuda Amital gave voice to the moderate camp within religious Zionism. In 1988, he contributed to the foundation of ‘Meimad’ and became the party leader. In 1995, Shimon Peres from the Labor Party, who led the government after Rabin’s assassination, gave him a ministry without portfolio. On the biography and the thought of Rabbi Yehuda Amital, see Elyashev Reichner, *By Faith Alone: The Story of Rabbi Yehuda Amital*, (Jerusalem: Maggid, 2011).

²² *Unification or Cooperation: Debate in ‘Oz Ve Shalom’ Forum, November 27, 1983*, (Jerusalem: Oz Ve Shalom, 1983), 1, (Hebrew).

²³ On the difference between extremist nationalism (*leumanut*) and nationalism (*leumiut*), see Mordechai Breuer, “Extremist Nationalism and Judaism” *Netivot Shalom* 3 (1996): 5-10, (Hebrew).

²⁴ Since ‘Oz Ve Shalom-Netivot Shalom’ is not a political party with a well-structured program, but rather a religious movement aiming at promoting sensitivity to peace and justice from and within a religious Zionist perspective, it is hardly possible to describe the program of this movement in any organic way. In order to understand the spirit and the guidelines of ‘Oz Ve Shalom-Netivot Shalom,’ see especially the links *About the Movement and Objectives and Principles* in the official website of the movement at: <http://www.netivot-shalom.org.il/>, accessed 31 May 2013. On the same topic, see also *Rally at the Jerusalem Khan, 7 February 1988: You Must Not Remain Indifferent*, (Jerusalem: Oz Ve Shalom-Netivot Shalom, 1988).

²⁵ “Our Activities: Overview and Examples” *Oz Ve Shalom*, English Bulletin 1 (1982): 3.

²⁶ On the activities organized by ‘Oz Ve Shalom’ and ‘Netivot Shalom,’ see ‘Oz Ve Shalom’ bulletins in Hebrew, English and German and ‘Oz Ve Shalom-Netivot Shalom’ newspaper editions in Hebrew. This material is available at the National Library of Israel, in Jerusalem. Some of the activities promoted by the religious peace movement ‘Oz Ve Shalom-Netivot Shalom’ are reported also in the association’s official website, see <http://www.netivot-shalom.org.il/>, accessed 31 May 2013.

²⁷ http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res11.htm, accessed 31 May 2013.

I presented above realized that it was urgent for them to oppose the ideology that Kahane upheld and spread, which fostered racism in the name of Judaism.²⁸ As we can read in the 1984 English bulletin of 'Oz Ve Shalom,' Israeli religious Zionists for peace expressed a more general concern that went beyond the elections results:

We have a long struggle ahead of us, to counteract the chauvinistic and anti-democratic elements in our midst. Meir Kahane is but a symptom of a general social disease that goes beyond the voters who put him over the electoral threshold – this is but 1.2% of the Israeli electorate. (...) But even outside the Knesset, this ideology must be effectively countered. A recent Van Leer Institute survey found that 25% of Israeli young people display anti-democratic tendencies, though they themselves may deny it. When asked whether they believe in democracy, they tend to say, “of course”. When asked, should Israeli Arabs enjoy equal rights and benefits, this segment of our youth will say “no”. So the challenge is to translate the abstract concept of democracy into practical concern for the rights and welfare of the minority.²⁹

In order to invalidate Kahane's racist arguments, the members of 'Oz Ve Shalom' and 'Netivot Shalom' highlighted biblical and Talmudic passages calling for tolerance and peaceful coexistence between Jews and non-Jews. As reported in an article published in «The Jerusalem Post» on July 27, 1984, the members of these religious peace movements used to join into anti-racist demonstrations, too:

Several dozen members of the religious peace movements Netivot Shalom and Oz Ve Shalom marched through the Old City of Jerusalem yesterday from the Jaffa Gate to the Western Wall. (...) They distributed a letter to Arab merchants along the way saying: “Meir Kahane does not represent the majority of the Jewish people nor does he represent our Torah and the Jewish religion... We call on you to

²⁸ For the collected writings of Rabbi Meir Kahane, see David J. Fein, *Beyond Words: Selected Writings of Rabbi Meir Kahane, 1960-1990*, (Brooklyn: Institute for Publication of the Writings of Rabbi Meir Kahane, 2010). On the biography and the ideology of Rabbi Meir Kahane, see Ehud Sprinzak, *Kach and Meir Kahane: The Emergence of Jewish Quasi-Fascism*, (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1985); Raphael Mergui, Philippe Simonnot, *Israel's Ayatollahs: Meir Kahane and the Far Right in Israel*, (London: Saqi Books, 1987); Robert I. Friedman, *The False Prophet: Rabbi Meir Kahane: From FBI Informant to Knesset Member*, (Brooklyn: Lawrence Hill Books, 1990). On the opposition of many Israelis to Kahane's ideology, see Raphael Cohen-Almagor, *The Boundaries of Liberty and Tolerance: The Struggle Against Kahanism in Israel*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994).

²⁹ “The Educational Challenge” *Oz Ve Shalom*, English Bulletin 4/5 (1984): 8-9.

work together with us to achieve a just peace between our peoples...
for we are all created in the image of the One-God.”³⁰

The anti-Kahane campaign promoted by religious Zionists for peace grew even stronger in 1985, when they decided to “fight fire with fire without succumbing to the vulgarity and the negativity one is combating.”³¹ In the first months of 1985, the members of ‘Oz Ve Shalom-Netivot Shalom’ handed out thousands of leaflets especially in the neighborhoods where Kahane used to hold his speeches. The campaign of ‘Oz Ve Shalom-Netivot Shalom’ addressed every Israeli citizen, above all those belonging to the Israeli Jewish religious background. As they themselves understood:

Since surveys show that a sizable percentage of Kach supporters have religious backgrounds, it is vital that we reach traditionally observant neighborhoods, with our arguments from Biblical and Rabbinic sources.³²

In 1988, the religious doves of ‘Oz Ve Shalom-Netivot Shalom,’ who no longer identified with any political party, decided to give their contribution to the foundation of a new political framework called ‘Meimad.’³³ The name ‘Meimad’ was the Hebrew acronym for “Jewish State, democratic State”. The social base of ‘Meimad’ party was a group of religious Zionists who had gradually distanced from the ‘Mafdal,’ the Israeli National Religious Party, which starting from the elections of 1977 had drifted more and more to the right. During the 1980s, most of the left-wing exponents of the ‘Mafdal,’ had been gradually removed from the party’s management board and more right-wing representatives had taken their place. In the parliamentary elections of 1988, ‘Meimad,’ led by Rabbi Yehuda Amital, who in 1982 had supported the opposition of ‘Netivot Shalom’ to the first Lebanon War, ran for the Knesset. ‘Meimad’ got only about 16,000 votes, which were not enough to overcome the threshold³⁴ and to obtain a Knesset seat.³⁵

³⁰ “Kollek Calls for Law Banning Racist Talk,” *The Jerusalem Post*, 27 July 1984.

³¹ “Update on Oz Ve Shalom and Netivot Shalom” *Oz Ve Shalom*, English Bulletin 6 (1985): 9.

³² *Ibid.*, 9-10.

³³ On ‘Meimad’ social and political outlooks, see *Why Meimad? The Religious Center Party*, (Jerusalem: Meimad, 1988), (Hebrew).

³⁴ In the elections to the twelfth Knesset, which took place on November 1, 1988, the qualifying threshold (1%) corresponded to 22,831 votes. Source: http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res12.htm, accessed 15 March 2013

³⁵ For an analysis of the 1988 Israeli elections results focusing on religious parties, see Robert O. Freedman, “Religion, Politics and the Israeli Elections of 1988” *Middle East Journal* 43/3 (1989): 406-22.

‘Shomrei Mishpat/Rabbis for Human Rights’: All streams of Judaism together to advance the respect of human rights³⁶

In 1988, in the wake of the first Intifada, which began in December 1987, a group of ordained rabbis founded a human rights movement aiming at defending the basic human rights of every human being living in the state of Israel and in the oPt. The movement was called ‘Shomrei Mishpat’ (‘Those who act justly’)³⁷ – ‘Rabbinic Human Rights Watch’ (from 1991 on, the non governmental organization (NGO) changed its name in ‘Shomrei Mishpat/Rabbis for Human Rights’).³⁸ ‘Rabbis for Human Rights’ shared some of the values of the Orthodox peace movement ‘Oz Ve Shalom-Netivot Shalom,’ but the two groups were quite different from some points of view.

First of all, the members of ‘Rabbis for Human Rights’ were mainly Reform and Conservative rabbis who were born in the 1950s in the United States and had emigrated to the State of Israel after the war of 1967. Most of them had been involved in the social and political movements founded in North America in the 1960s and 1970s, protesting against the war in Vietnam and on behalf of civil rights of discriminated minorities in the United States.

Secondly, unlike the members of ‘Oz Ve Shalom-Netivot Shalom’ who stressed the need to withdraw from the oPt and to draw well-defined borders between the State of Israel and the future Palestinian State,³⁹ the main purpose of ‘Rabbis for Human Rights’ was not to propose a well-defined and ultimate solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but rather to implement the rational consequences of the following biblical passage applied to the political context in which they live(d):

Then God said: “Let us make the man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have domination over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (*Genesis* 1:26-27).

³⁶ Unlike the other peace groups that I present in this paper, for multiple reasons it is relatively easy to find material in English about ‘Shomrei Mishpat/Rabbis for Human Rights.’ Apart from the material produced by this NGO itself, see, among others, Bettina Prato, “Prophetic Justice in a Home Haunted by Strangers: Transgressive Solidarity and Trauma in the Work of an Israeli Rabbis’ Group” Hent De Vries, Lawrence E. Sullivan eds, *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 557-85.

³⁷ The movement’s name is taken from *Psalms* 106:3 “Happy are those who act justly, who do right at all times.”

³⁸ “Change of the Association’s English Name” *Shomrei Mishpat/Rabbis for Human Rights* 1/4 (1991): 4, (Hebrew).

³⁹ On the peace plan proposed by the members of ‘Oz Ve Shalom-Netivot Shalom,’ see “A Wise Peace: A Model for a Peace Plan Between Israel and the Palestinians” *Netivot Shalom* 7 (1997): 15-17, (Hebrew).

As we can gather from a book called *Life, Liberty and Equality in the Jewish Tradition*,⁴⁰ which presents the *Weltanschauung* of this NGO, the members of ‘Rabbis for Human Rights’ stress that not only the Universal Declaration of Human Rights drafted by the United Nations in 1948, but also the Jewish religious tradition itself, attributes an inviolable and sacred value to the life of every human being, irrespective of his/her belonging to the Jewish people.

This concept has been central to the actions and thought of the members of ‘Rabbis for Human Rights,’ but especially to two of them, who define themselves as absolutely pacifists: Reform Rabbi Moshe Yehudai and Conservative Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom.

Moshe Yehudai was born in Jerusalem in 1940 and at the age of 21 he refused to join the Israeli army and fulfill his mandatory military service. As he himself explained:

In 1961, I attended a meeting organized by Jewish and Arab students. At that time, in the State of Israel, the debate about mandatory military service for Arab citizens of Israel was a burning issue. So an Arab student took the floor and said: “How could I join the Israeli army? On the other front, there is my people. On the other front, there could be my family. I cannot join the army, I cannot shoot Arabs.” Exactly at that moment, I thought: “He cannot join the Israeli army, because he is an Arab. But if he were in Jordan or in Egypt, he would not have had any problems in shooting Jews. He cannot shoot Arabs. Why? Because it is his people, right? If you ask Jews, they would give you exactly the same answer. They would say to you: “What are you saying?! I am a Jew, so I cannot shoot Jews. I can shoot Arabs, but not Jews. It is my people.” Right in that moment, I became a citizen of the world. I said to myself: “Jews or Arabs, that is not the point. For me they are all human beings. For me there is no difference between a Jew and an Arab.” Suddenly this thought came to my mind: “If an Arab cannot shoot Arabs, because he is himself an Arab; and a Jew cannot shoot Jews, because he is himself a Jew; I cannot shoot neither Jews nor Arabs, because for me they are all human beings.” As this thought came to my mind, I decided that I would never join any army.⁴¹

Yehudai’s pacifist worldview was strengthened by his rabbinic training, which culminated with ordination in 1983. He had become a religious pacifist, convinced that no human being is allowed to kill a life that God himself has created.⁴²

⁴⁰ Noam Zohar, *Life, Liberty and Equality in the Jewish Tradition*, (Jerusalem: Rabbis for Human Rights, 2006).

⁴¹ Interview of the A. with Moshe Yehudai, Ra’anana, 3 July 2012, (Hebrew).

⁴² Moshe Yehudai wrote a dissertation called: *The Value of the Life of the Non-Jew in the Jewish Law*, unpublished, (Hebrew).

Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom, who was born in the United States in 1953 and emigrated to Israel in 1968, fulfilled his compulsory military service at the beginning of the 1970s, but in the following years he adopted pacifism and nonviolence as guidelines of his life. In his own words:

I embraced pacifism, when my daughter, Kinneret, was born. For me it was a very strong experience. It was 1982. From that point on, it became very clear to me that I would never been ready to take up a weapon again. I began to deeply understand that everybody loves his children and I began to feel empathy and solidarity with all the parents in the world.⁴³

Despite the positions that I presented above, most of the members of ‘Rabbis for Human Rights’ do not support total conscientious objection, but they stress the importance of remaining faithful to what they call “religious humanism,”⁴⁴ even within the military framework.

Since the foundation of the NGO, ‘Rabbis for Human Rights’ has been calling for the respect of human values, which are at the same time universal and typical of the Jewish tradition. The initiative for creating a group of Israeli rabbis committed to human rights is Reform Rabbi David Forman’s. As he stated in a speech in 2006:

It was the beginning of July, 1982, during the first Lebanon War; I was with my artillery unit above the Beirut-Damascus highway. After a quiet few days, suddenly a barrage of Syrian rockets landed on our position. We quickly dashed into a trench to regroup. And, with missiles literally falling all around us, I turned to a fellow comrade-in-arms and said: “Do you think we should reevaluate our Zionist commitment?”⁴⁵

It was only after the outbreak of the first Intifada that Rabbi Forman decided that the time had come to establish “a rabbinic voice for decency and humanity, as opposed to the shrill voice that emanated from a rabbinic establishment that seemed to justify, in the name of the Jewish tradition, all manner of human rights abuses.”⁴⁶

Since its foundation in 1988, ‘Rabbis for Human Rights’ has been constantly reporting and denouncing violations of human rights committed by the Israeli army and by some Israeli settlers against the Palestinian population of the oPt. Over the years, ‘Rabbis for Human Rights’ has grown and has organized itself into four different departments: the Educational Department, the Legal

⁴³ Interview of the A. with Jeremy Milgrom, Jerusalem, 10 July 2012, (Hebrew).

⁴⁴ On “religious humanism,” see Noam Zohar, *Life, Liberty and Equality in the Jewish Tradition*, (Jerusalem: Rabbis for Human Rights, 2006): 11-22.

⁴⁵ *Rabbis for Human Rights 20 Year Anniversary: Position Papers*, (Jerusalem: Rabbis for Human Rights, 2008): 24.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

Department, the Economic and Social Justice Department and the Department of Rights in the Occupied Territories.⁴⁷

To give just one example of the work of ‘Rabbis for Human Rights’ with the Palestinians of the West Bank, I would like to mention the association’s olive harvest campaign, which is one of the most demanding activities that the members of ‘Rabbis for Human Rights’ carry out in the oPt. This activity began about 15 years ago with the aim of concretely supporting Palestinian farmers in harvesting their olives, especially in some areas of the West Bank, where they had problems accessing their lands due to Israel’s military restrictions and to settlers’ violence. As Rabbi Yehiel Greiniman, the director of the Department of Rights in the Occupied Territories, explained:

Our activity consists in recruiting volunteers and in collecting money for the olive harvest. We are in contact with a certain number of Palestinian villages, whose number is variable from year to year. In some villages we cannot assure our physical presence, but we help them anyway in that we call the Israeli army or the Israeli police in order to facilitate the Palestinian farmers’ access to their lands. Every year, during the olive harvest season, we organize 10, 15, 20 buses to the villages of the West Bank. Some of the volunteers harvest olives with the Palestinians, while others supervise. This activity is very helpful, because Hebrew-speaking volunteers are able to rebuke soldiers when they commit illegal acts. Sometimes the soldiers force us to go away, at other times they pay attention to what we say. So, in fact, this activity has a double aim: supporting the Palestinian farmers and educating the Israeli soldiers to respect human rights.⁴⁸

‘Eretz Shalom’: Jewish settlers building bridges to the Palestinians in the West Bank⁴⁹

As I discussed in the introduction to this paper, ‘Eretz Shalom’ is a very recent movement, not easy to analyze thoroughly, for several reasons that I will detail below. ‘Eretz Shalom’ (‘Land of Peace’), which is the less well-known and the most unexplored of the religious peace movements that I intend to analyze here, was founded in 2009, in the settlement of Tekoa, which is located in the region of Gush Etzion. The members of this religious peace movement are

⁴⁷ For more information about the tasks and the activities of each department, see ‘Rabbis for Human Rights’ official website at: <http://rhr.org.il/heb/>, accessed 31 May 2013.

⁴⁸ Interview of the A. with Yehiel Greiniman, Jerusalem, 2 July 2012, (Hebrew).

⁴⁹ ‘Eretz Shalom’ is more recent and less well-known than the other religious peace movements that I presented above. For more information, see the official website of ‘Eretz Shalom’ at http://www.erezshalom.org/?page_id=66, accessed 31 May 2013.

Some clips taken from a documentary film on ‘Eretz Shalom’ are available at: <http://myforumdaily.com/israel2/a-third-way-israeli-settlers-and-palestinians-as-neighbors/>, accessed 31 May 2013.

mainly young neo-Hasidic settlers, who were born in, or have decided to move to, “Judea and Samaria”, as they themselves call the West Bank, according to its biblical name.⁵⁰

Before presenting the main features of ‘Eretz Shalom,’ I would like to observe that there are at least three reasons that make it difficult to write about this peace movement in a comprehensive way.

First of all, ‘Eretz Shalom’ was founded only about four years ago; this represents a hindrance for a researcher working on written and archival sources to analyze the role and the recent history of this movement. As mentioned above, for this reason, I have here integrated the material available online with a substantial number of oral interviews conducted in the summer of 2012. Secondly, we must not overlook the fact that the peacemakers of ‘Eretz Shalom’ are Israeli settlers, who are part and parcel of that complicated machinery which goes under the broad name of Israeli occupation, and that settlements are generally regarded as one of the main obstacles to peace between the State of Israel and the Palestinians.⁵¹ Finally, given that the spiritual founder and promoter of ‘Eretz Shalom’ - Rabbi Menahem Froman - has died recently, the question remains as to how will this peace movement continue his legacy, or not.

Let us start indeed from this last point: the biography, the religious, social and political thought and the long-time peace activity of Rabbi Menahem Froman. Menahem Froman was born in Kfar Hasidim, a village located in Northern Israel, in 1945. During the Six Day War, he served as a paratrooper in the Israeli army. After the war, he returned to religion and joined ‘Gush Emunim.’ When he obtained his rabbinical ordination, he began to serve as a rabbi in the region of Gush Etzion, in the West Bank, and from 2003 until his death, occurred on March 4, 2013, he was the Chief Rabbi of the settlement of Tekoa. Despite his decision to live in a settlement in the oPt, he was considered as one of the most genuine peace activists in Israel, even by members of secular left-wing peace movements like ‘Peace Now.’⁵²

⁵⁰ On the spread of Neo-Hasidism among the second generation settlers of the West Bank, on their worldview and lifestyle, see Yair Sheleg, “Neo-Hasidic or Neo-Secular,” *Haaretz*, 25 September 2003, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/business/neo-hasidic-or-neo-secular-1.101199>, accessed 31 May 2013. For a more comprehensive study of the emergence of Neo-Hasidism in the State of Israel, see Joanna Steinhardt, “American Neo-Hasids in the Land of Israel” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 13/4 (2010): 22-42.

⁵¹ On Israeli settlements and settlers regarded as an obstacle to the peace process between the State of Israel and the Palestinians, see for instance Peter Démant, *Settlers and Settlements Under Rabin and Peres: Obstacles on the Road to Peace*, (Amsterdam: Research Center for International Political Economy and Foreign Policy Analysis, 1996).

⁵² Maayana Miskin, “Rare Peace Now Approval for “Settler” Rabbi: Peace Now Head Joins Right-Wing MKs in Eulogizing Proud “Settler” Rabbi as a Symbol of Peace,” <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/165892#.UVVrHjfxpdj>, accessed 31 May 2013. For a different view on some settlers from Tekoa and peace activism see the essay by Erin Dyer in this issue, pp. 162-184. On ‘Peace Now’ see the essay by Jon Simons in this issue, pp. 140-161. See also Kobi Nahshoni, Itamar Fleishman, Moran Azulay, “Right, Left

From the outbreak of the first Intifada, more than 25 years ago, Menahem Froman was for dialogue with all the Palestinian leaders and for respect of the political rights and the national symbols of the Palestinian people.⁵³ Unlike many, during the second Intifada, his commitment to peace grew even stronger. Especially during those years, Rabbi Menahem Froman travelled the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and even Jordan, to meet Palestinian leaders belonging to every political and religious movement, from sheikh Ahmed Yassin of ' Hamas' to Yasser Arafat of the PLO.⁵⁴

One of the deepest reasons - which guided Rabbi Froman's peace activity for many years, and which lies at the core of the religious peace movement that he himself inspired - is the belief that the land does not belong to any human being.⁵⁵ As Menahem Froman expressed in his poem dedicated to the land, called *Bat Zugo* (His Wife):

And you, bride of the Creator,
Wide as your horizon,
Deep as your heart,
And like Him.
Oh, how patient are you,
That you give ear to everything is said
About you and in your name,
But you keep silent.
All those who speak,
Walk their way to the land.
And all the words they say,
Go towards the silence.
They both gather towards the land.⁵⁶

In a recent interview, Rabbi Froman explained the meaning of these verses:

Men speak a lot of words in the name of the land. In the name of nationalism and in the name of the land we speak a lot of words, while the land speaks the language of "silence". It keeps silent. It keeps silent.

Mourn Rabbi Froman's Death" <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4352549,00.html>, accessed 31 May 2013.

⁵³ <http://www.haaretz.co.il/news/education/1.1948086>, accessed 20 March 2013, (Hebrew).

⁵⁴ On Rabbi Froman's thought and peace activity, see <http://www.haaretz.co.il/magazine/ayelet-shani/1.1774107>, <http://www.holylandfilm.com/category/menachem-fruman/>, both accessed 20 March 2013, (both in Hebrew).

⁵⁵ The idea that the land belongs to God can be traced back to *Leviticus* 25:23 "The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers." For a view of the same concept from a gender perspective see the essay by Valérie Pouzol in this issue, pp. 50-72.

⁵⁶ Menahem Froman, Hadassah Froman, *Man From the Land: Poems*, (Beit El: Sifriat Beit El, 1994), (Hebrew).

It receives all these words and finally it houses also all those who have pronounced these words. They return to the land. They return to the land. Everything is possible to the Sovereign of the World. Everything is possible to His bride.⁵⁷

The second point that I would like to consider is that ‘Eretz Shalom’ expresses a very comprehensive idea of peace that its members aim to promote not only between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs, but within every kind of human relationship.

Shivi Froman, the fourth of Froman’s ten children, who especially in the last two years before his father’s death had been very close to him and to his peace activity, explained the idea of peace embraced by ‘Eretz Shalom’ as follows:

I think that faith is the only way to peace, be it peace between a man and a woman, peace between neighbors or peace between peoples. It is not possible to build peace without God’s help. But what is peace? I do not think that making “peace” is to reduce the complexity to a single “piece”. According to the interior meaning of the Hebrew language, “shalom” (“peace”) does not stand for a single “piece”, but rather it is constituted by many “pieces”. So making peace means to find a way to let different elements create together one picture, without giving up their own features. This is what we call “hashlama” (“completion”, “acceptance”, “making peace”). Usually, it happens that two different elements merge into one. Or, on the contrary, it happens that they cannot find a way to get close to each other. The most wonderful thing happens when two different elements succeed in being tied to each other without changing their own nature. Only when two different elements can find a way to live side by side, something new comes into the world.⁵⁸

According to the discourse of ‘Eretz Shalom,’ this concept of peace could and should be implemented within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well. Shivi Froman continued:

This discourse is relevant to the relationship between us and the Palestinians, too. I absolutely do not think that we should merge into one single entity. God has created two different peoples. Each people has its own history and its own mission in the world. I do not think that God has committed a mistake in putting us together in the same land. That is the reason why I do not think that we should separate from each other. Therefore, I believe that our communal task is to try

⁵⁷ <http://news.nana10.co.il/Article/?ArticleID=962488>, accessed 21 March 2013, (Hebrew).

⁵⁸ Interview of the A. with Shivi Froman, Jerusalem, 4 July 2012, (Hebrew).

and build together, Israelis and Palestinians, what God himself wishes to be here, in this land.⁵⁹

According to several members of ‘Eretz Shalom,’ a long-lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict does not lie in a territorial partition, but rather in building a completely new and revolutionary society, composed by Israelis and Palestinians who wish to live together in peace in the same land. That is the deepest reason why ‘Eretz Shalom’ opposes every political solution calling for an “artificial”⁶⁰ separation between the two peoples.⁶¹

The settlers of ‘Eretz Shalom’ believe that any peace process based only on bilateral political agreements, including territorial compromise, is doomed to fail, because it does not take into account two basic issues. First, that the conflict does not have only political origins; this is the reason why those who seek a solution cannot consider only political issues. Secondly, irrespective of the solutions that political leaders will eventually be able to find, Israelis and Palestinians will never be completely isolated one from the other; that is the reason why it is urgent for them to recognize that the only way to build a long-lasting peace is to learn coexistence.

This is how Gidon Elazar, a young member of ‘Eretz Shalom,’ explained these concepts to me. Elazar was born in Jerusalem, in 1976. As a young man, he had been a member of ‘Oz Ve Shalom-Netivot Shalom.’ After a period of reassessment of his faith, he embraced a more spiritual and emotional approach to Judaism and became a neo-Hasid. About four years ago, Gidon Elazar, his wife Shulit and their two children, moved to the settlement of Tekoa and joined ‘Eretz Shalom.’ In his own words:

I think that there is room for everyone in this land. Or better, I believe that there is room for everyone, because I have no rational evidences to prove it. On the contrary, you could find many examples that prove that there is no room for two peoples in this land. Many people think that Rabbi Froman’s peace activity is irrational, unreal, dream-like. On the contrary, I think that his view is the most rational and logical one. In fact, it does not matter what kind of fence will be put up and it does not matter where it will be put. Finally, we will nevertheless have to live together with the Palestinians. It does not matter where the borders will be and who will live on which side. In the end, we will anyway be here together with the Palestinians. We can recognize it now, we can

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Interview of the A. with Naftali Moses, Efrat, 9 July 2012, (Hebrew).

⁶¹ On territorial partitions as bodily dismemberments from a historical perspective, see Jonathan D. Greenberg, “Generations of memory. Remembering Partition in India/Pakistan and Israel/Palestine” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25/1 (2005): 89-110. For an earlier view on territorial partitions, see the essay of Marcella Simoni in this issue, pp. 73-100.

recognize it in the future, but in the end we will be forced to recognize that this is the situation.⁶²

The movement applies the same approach to questions like the separation fence or the establishment of artificially drawn borders, which are not considered of any use to change the situation on the ground:

Many people have a fantasy called “separation fence”. The separation itself is a daydream. It is a daydream to believe that it will be possible to separate between the two peoples. Maybe we should really put aside this two-state idea, because it has been failing for dozens of years. Many people are in love with this idea: “We will put a wall, so we will imagine to be in Europe and not in the Middle East anymore.” The members of «Eretz Shalom» say: “This is not Europe. This is the Middle East and it will continue to be the Middle East also after you will have built a fence.” That is all. We have to learn to live with this awareness. One of the most foolish things here in Israel is that most of the Jews who live here do not speak Arabic. We do not speak Arabic, although all our neighbors are Arabs. We do not speak Arabic, because we want to keep on thinking that we are not here. We want to keep on thinking that we are elsewhere, that Israel is elsewhere, maybe in a cooler place.⁶³

The members of ‘Eretz Shalom’ are convinced that it is an unavoidable task of religious people to bring peace to the peoples of the Holy Land and of the entire world, not through international political negotiations, but rather through a “bottom-up” process of peaceful cohabitation.⁶⁴

The settlers of ‘Eretz Shalom’ have observed that, historically, every peace process that has been carried out “on the lawn of the White House” by well-known political leaders has provided no solution to the conflict on the ground.⁶⁵ For this reason they believe that peace will be possible only if the people who are directly involved in the conflict begin to meet each other within everyday contexts, without pretending to provide instant political solutions to the conflict. As Naftali Moses, a member of ‘Eretz Shalom,’ said: “There will not be peace now. Peace needs to be built little by little. So maybe there will be peace tomorrow or the day after tomorrow.”⁶⁶ According to the worldview that I presented here, most of the activities of ‘Eretz Shalom’ are carried out on a grassroots level.

⁶² Interview of the A. with Gidon Elazar, Tekoa, 11 July 2012, (Hebrew).

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Confront with the kabalistic concept of *Tikkun Ha-Olam* (Restoration of the World), which the members of ‘Eretz Shalom’ explicitly refer to.

⁶⁵ Interview with of the A. Naftali Moses, Efrat, 9 July 2012, (Hebrew).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Since the foundation of the movement, the members of ‘Eretz Shalom’ have been organizing meetings between Israeli settlers and Palestinian villagers of the West Bank both in public and in private places. The main aim of these meetings was to give both to the Israeli settlers and to the Palestinian villagers of the West Bank the opportunity to get to know each other in ordinary contexts. The members of ‘Eretz Shalom’ believe that building trust on a personal level is an essential basis for a durable peace. It is important to highlight that these informal meetings involve entire families, including children, because according to ‘Eretz Shalom’ peace is to be built by all members of the society. Organizing meetings between settlers and Palestinians in the oPt is part of an unusual peacebuilding strategy, that contributes to demolishing some common stereotypes about who is a reliable partner for peace. In the same way as the movement considers Palestinians as reliable partners for peace, its activities show that, unlike what most people think, some settlers can build peace, too.

Gidon and Shulit Elazar provided direct evidence of such an encounter, telling the story of a meeting with a Palestinian family from the nearby village of Beit Ummar. In their story one can hear the difficulties of ‘Eretz Shalom,’ since it promotes a kind of peace activity that is not well considered by both the Israeli and the Palestinian social and political establishment:

A short time ago, I, my wife and my children went to the village of Beit Ummar to meet a Palestinian family. Meeting one another is not easy at all. From a technical point of view, it is not easy to find a place where it is possible to meet each other. The prevailing atmosphere here does not regard this kind of initiative favorably.⁶⁷

Some of the activities of ‘Eretz Shalom’ are planned, like Jewish-Muslim-Christian interreligious prayers,⁶⁸ entertainment and musical events coauthored by Israeli and Palestinian artists from the oPt/Judea and Samaria.⁶⁹ Other events are spontaneous and originate from personal friendships, like the meal to break the Ramadan and Tisha Be-Av fast, that took place on July 29, 2012 in the settlement of Tekoa. Israeli settlers and Palestinian villagers breaking fast together appeared as so exceptional that it even gained some media coverage.⁷⁰ Finally, many projects are still in an early phase; among them the creation of a communal market where Israeli settlers and Palestinian farmers could sell their agricultural products; the opening of Arabic language courses for settlers held by Palestinian teachers; the co-publishing of a magazine called *Maktub* dealing

⁶⁷ Interview of the A. with Gidon Elazar.

⁶⁸http://www.terrasanta.net/tsx/articolo.jsp?wi_number=2586&wi_codseq=%20&language=en, accessed 24 March 2013.

⁶⁹ http://www.flickr.com/photos/jerusalem_peacemakers/sets/72157627209237971/detail/, accessed 24 March 2013.

⁷⁰ <http://www.jerusalemonline.com/culture-and-lifestyle/israelis-and-palestinians-break-their-fast-together>, accessed 24 March 2013.

with Jewish and Arabic poetry, literature and culture;⁷¹ the shared farming of a field.⁷²

As I discussed at the beginning of this essay, many aspects of the peace activity carried out by the members of 'Eretz Shalom' need to be problematized in a wider way. For example, it could be helpful to explore more comprehensively the effectiveness of the peace-building strategy that the members of 'Eretz Shalom' propose; the relationship between the settlers of 'Eretz Shalom' and their Palestinian partners; the influence that the peace activity of 'Eretz Shalom' exercises on the rest of the settler population. There are some of the directions that any research on their activity and impact needs to eventually address, most likely in a close future when more evidence will be available.

Conclusions - The importance of grassroots peace movements within the Israeli-Jewish religious and traditional context

I would like to conclude this paper by briefly illustrating the psychological and practical value of the Jewish-Israeli religious and traditional peace movements analyzed here in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution process.

Peace must be made among peoples, not just governments. No one step can change overnight what lies in the hearts and in the minds of millions. (...) I have suggested principles on territory and security that I believe can be the basis for talks. But, for the moment, put aside the plans and the process. I ask you, instead, to think about what can be done to build trust between the people. (...) That is where peace begins – not just in the plans of leaders, but in the hearts of people; not just in a carefully designed process, but in the daily connections that take place among those who live together in this land, and in this sacred city of Jerusalem. (...) You must create the change that you want to see.⁷³

These words, addressed to about 600 students from universities and colleges across Israel, were pronounced by US president Barack Obama at the Jerusalem Convention Center, on 21 March 2013. Regardless of the political implications of Barack Obama's recent visit to Israel and to the oPt, which is not the topic of this paper, I would like to take the above-mentioned quotation

⁷¹ The co-publishing of this magazine is already in an operative phase. Mention of it can be found at <http://www.indiegogo.com/projects/heaven-s-field-organic-farm>, accessed 6 June 2013.

⁷² For more information about this project, see <http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/70399516/a-third-way-israeli-settlers-and-palestinians-as-n/posts/138818>, accessed 24 March 2013.

⁷³ Barack Obama's speech at Jerusalem Convention Center, 21 March 2013. For the full text of United States president's speech in Jerusalem, see <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/mar/21/barack-obama-speech-jerusalem-text>, accessed 25 March 2013.

as a cue to stress on the importance of grassroots peace initiatives between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

In his speech, Obama did not state that internal political leaders, foreign governments and international institutions cannot help advancing peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Naturally, the support of all these institutions is of primary importance for the peace process in the Middle East. Still, as Obama highlighted, peace must grow, above all, in the hearts of the common people who live in the State of Israel and in the oPt.

Here lies therefore one of the factors that points at the importance of the Israeli-Jewish religious and traditional peace and human rights movements that I presented here as grassroots peace-building groups; their value as promoters of conflict-resolution within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been acknowledged by several scholars.⁷⁴ While this points can be relevant to many grassroots peace movement, secular or religious, a second point can be made as to the specific value of religious peace-building.⁷⁵

As Yehezkel Landau - chairman of 'Oz Ve Shalom-Netivot Shalom' between 1982 and 1991 - wrote in his report about interreligious peace-building in Israel/Palestine, mainly based on interviews that he conducted with clerics, educators and peace activists from September 2002 to June 2003:

Even though the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is primarily a political dispute between two nations over a common homeland, it has religious aspects that need to be addressed in any effective peacemaking strategy. The peace agenda cannot be the monopoly of secular nationalist leaders, for such an approach guarantees that fervent religious believers on all sides will feel excluded and threatened by the diplomatic process. Religious militants need to be addressed in their own symbolic language; otherwise, they will continue to sabotage any peacebuilding efforts. (...) Politicians and diplomats need to tap the insights and the experience of these religious professionals. The efforts described here deserve greater media coverage and philanthropic support. As the fate

⁷⁴ On the effectiveness of grassroots peace-building initiatives within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, see *Bridging the Divide: Peacebuilding in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, eds. Edy Kaufman, Walid Salem, Juliette Verhoeven, (London: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 2006); *Beyond Bullets and Bombs: Grassroots Peacebuilding Between Israelis and Palestinians*, ed. Judy Kuriansky, (Westport: Praeger, 2007); Julia Chaitin, *Peace-Building in Israel and Palestine: Social Psychology and Grassroots Initiatives*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). On the importance of grassroots peacebuilding initiatives in any conflict resolution process, see *Local Peacebuilding and National Peace: Interaction Between Grassroots and Elite Processes*, eds. Christopher R. Mitchell, Landon E. Hancock, (New York: Continuum, 2012).

⁷⁵ On the specific value of religious peacebuilding, see *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding*, ed. David R. Smock, (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2002); *Religion and Peacebuilding*, eds. Harold G. Coward, Gordon Scott Smith, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004); Ina Merdjanova, Patrice Brodeur, *Religion as a Conversation Starter: Interreligious Dialogue for Peace Building in the Balkans*, (New York: Continuum, 2009); Katrien Hertog, *The Complex Reality of Religious Peacebuilding: Conceptual Contributions and Critical Analysis*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010).

of the Oslo process shows, peacemaking that prescribes only political, military and economic arrangements is doomed to fail; leaders on both sides must take into account the feelings, attitudes, yearnings, and symbolic images that Israelis and Palestinians harbor.⁷⁶

According to Landau, there are two basic aspects that need to be taken into consideration to develop an effective peacemaking strategy between Israelis and Palestinians.

The first refers to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict not only as a political dispute and therefore it must be recognized that the solution to it must go beyond the political domain. The second is the need to find a way to make the religious believers, which represent about one-third of the Israeli population,⁷⁷ feel involved and not excluded or threatened by a peace process shaped only by secular political leaders.

In this paper I tried to outline some of the main religious, political and social issues that have been elaborated and acted upon by some Orthodox and traditional Jews in Israel. As it is obvious, many aspects of the Israeli-Jewish religious peace activism still need further exploration: for example it could be interesting to bring back into the narrative of the conflict, and possibly also into the present political discourse, the history of a religious grassroots work that aims at building bridges between conflicting populations starting from the philosophical heart of the matter; to explore and discuss the complexity of the positions of these movements vis-à-vis the Israeli authorities; to look at these movements through the eyes of the majority of the Israeli population; and finally, to investigate how these movements impact on the relations with Palestinians. In this respect, my hope is that this paper can be a starting point for a more comprehensive study of a thriving reality, little-known and yet not so marginal.

⁷⁶ Yehezkel Landau, *Healing the Holy Land: Interreligious Peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine*, (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2003), 5. By Yehezkel Landau on this topic, see also Yehezkel Landau, "Blessing Both Jew and Palestinian. A Religious Zionist View," in *Walking the Red Line. Israelis in Search of Justice for Palestine*, ed. D. Hurwitz, (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1992), 119-27; Yehezkel Landau, "A Practical Connection between the Heavens and the Earth in Israel/Palestine," in *Understanding One Another in Israeli Society*, ed. Ron Kronish, (Jerusalem: ICCI, 1997), 19-23; Yehezkel Landau, "A Holistic Peace Process for the Middle East," in *How Long Lord? Voices from the Ground and Visions for the Future in Israel/Palestine*, eds. Maurine and Robert Tobin, (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 2003), 233-37.

⁷⁷ According to a survey conducted by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics in 2009, the Jewish population of the State of Israel is composed by the following groups: 8% Ultra-Orthodox Jews, 12% religious Zionists, 38% traditional Jews (of which 13% religious traditional Jews and 25% non-religious traditional Jews), 42% secular Jews. According to these data, if we add together all the Israeli Jews who have a direct connection to religion, we find that they represent about one-third of the Jewish population of the State of Israel. This survey, entitled *The Observance of the Jewish Tradition and the Religious Changes within the Jewish Population of Israel*, is available at <http://www1.cbs.gov.il/reader>, accessed 26 March 2013, (Hebrew).

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