

Radicalization of the Settlers' Youth: Hebron as a Hub for Jewish Extremism

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Abstract:

The city of Hebron has been a hub for radicalization and terrorism throughout the modern history of Israel. This paper examines the past trends of radicalization and terrorism in Hebron and explains why it is still a present and rising ideology within the Jewish communities and organization such as the Hilltop Youth movement. The research first presents the transmission of social memory through memorials and symbolism of the Hebron hills area and then presents the impact of Meir Kahana's movement. As observed, Hebron slowly grew and spread its population and philosophy to the then new settlement of Kiryat Arba. An exceptionally strong ideology of an extreme form of Judaism grew out of those two small towns. As analyzed—based on an exhaustive ethnographic fieldwork and bibliographic research—this form of fundamentalism and national-religious point of view gave birth to a new uprising of violence and radicalism amongst the settler youth organizations such as the Hilltop Youth movement.

Keywords: Judaism; Radicalization; Settlers; Terrorism; West Bank

Résumé:

Dès le début de l'histoire moderne de l'État d'Israël, les villes d'Hébron et Kiryat Arba sont devenues une plaque tournante pour la radicalisation et le terrorisme en Cisjordanie. Cette recherche examine cette tendance, explique pourquoi elle est toujours d'actualité ainsi qu'à la hausse au sein de ces communautés juives. En premier lieu, nous analysons la transmission de la mémoire sociale à travers monuments et symboles caractérisant la région d'Hébron. Ensuite, nous présentons l'impact du mouvement du rabbin Meir Kahana. À l'aide des facteurs étudiés, nous avons observé qu'une idéologie extrême du judaïsme est née des colonies juives de Hébron et Kiryat Arba. Selon notre analyse—basée sur un travail de terrain ethnographique exhaustif et de recherche bibliographique—cette forme de fondamentalisme ainsi que l'idéologie nationale religieuse donnèrent naissance à un nouveau soulèvement de la violence et du radicalisme au sein des organisations activistes des colonies juives en Cisjordanie telle que le Hilltop Youth Movement.

Mots-clés: Cisjordanie; Colonisateurs; Judaïsme; Radicalisation; Terrorisme

Introduction

Land

Land of the present, land of the past, land of the future consecration,

Land, though we die,

Land still we'll cry,

'Tis good to die for our great nation....

Land chosen for rule, land chosen for pain,

Land, when may I call you mine again?

O Land, the road is long,

And the enemy strong,

But still we'll conquer this son of Cain.

(Friedman, 1990: 33)

The rise of Jewish terrorism and radicalization worries many Israeli and international thinkers. Recently, the *Journal of Foreign Affairs* dedicated an article to the rise of settler terrorism. The authors, Daniel Bymann and Natan Sachs, explained that violence has not always been a part of these communities. In the past, the Israeli authorities and the settler leadership worked together to prevent assaults and keep radicalism under control. "Yet in recent years, the settler movement has experienced a profound breakdown in discipline, with extremists now beyond the reach of either Israeli law enforcement or the discipline of settler leaders" (Bymann & Sachs, 2012, August 14: 1). They argue that radicalism stems from multiple factors, such as "the growth of the settler population over the past generation, the diversification of religious and ideological strands

among it, and the sense of betrayal felt by settlers following Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005" (Bymann & Sachs, 2012, August 14: 1).

In September 2011, unknown perpetrators infiltrated an IDF base in the Benjamin region. They entered the mechanic shop of the base, slashed tires, and cut the cables of 12 army vehicles. In December of that same year, a right-wing movement organized an attack on a number of strategic sites in the West Bank.

On the night of the December 13, 2011, settlers and right wing Israelis organized four events in order to protest the anticipated eviction of the largest illegal outpost, Migron, located in the West Bank. The first event took place at Joseph's Tomb, when five Braslov Hassidic Jews went to pray without military permission, as required by law. The site is under Palestinian Authority (P.A.) control, and the P.A. police's reaction to the threat was to open fire on the crowd; fortunately, no injuries occurred during the incident. Later in the same evening, a number of right-wing activists seized an abandoned church near Qasr Al-Yehud. The activists cut their way through the fence and danced near the structure; some of them also entered the church and chanted songs. The IDF, who were responsible for security in this area, arrested the perpetrators.

The third event took place close to the Jordanian border, a usually quiet area of the West Bank. Seventeen activists, three of whom were minors, occupied structures near the border. This time the perpetrators wanted not only to demonstrate against the rumour of eviction, but also wanted to send a message to the Jordanian authority to stay out of the Temple of Mount affairs. The demonstration zone was under IDF control, and the Israeli army responded by surrounding the crowd, evacuating them, and arresting four of the activists. The most significant event took place later that night near Qualqilya. The right-wing movement, accompanied by the settlers, had the same motives as the other three demonstrations earlier that night: to respond to the rumours of eviction of the illegal Migron outpost. One hundred protesters surrounded the area of one of the key West Bank military bases, the Efraim Regional Brigade's base. Fifty activists infiltrated the base, threw stones, burned tires, and vandalized military vehicles. The event wounded one army commander as well as his deputy. The other activists blocked a main West Bank road and threw stones at Palestinian vehicles and IDF soldiers in the area. Taken by surprise, although the army was able to repel the youths, no arrests were made.

These events shook the political and religious arenas in Israel. Dorit Beinisch, the president of the Supreme Court, explained to Haaretz, a leading Israeli newspaper, that this attack "was about an outpost illegally constructed on private land, which the state too agreed should be evacuated". (Levinson, 2011, August 3: 1). Concerning this event, the chairman of the National Union, Yaakov Katz, claimed these actions could not be legitimized, stating that "anyone who harms the IDF, its soldiers and officers is not related to settlers but, in fact, wants to harm them". (Ravid, 2011, December 13: 1). The Prime Minister, the Vice Prime Minister, as well as the Ministry of Defense all condemned the actions as "acts of terror" or as "terrorism". The Yesha Council chairman Danny Dayan also qualified these acts as "inappropriate, shameful, and ungrateful". (Ibid). Many others incidents occurred in 2012 since the four original incidents transpired. Some settlements are part of this new trend, but few are as active and involved as Hebron and the settlement of Kyriat Arba.

Through bibliographical research and interviews (ethical clearance was approved by the International Institute for Counter-terrorism to conduct interviews with human subjects), this paper observes and presents the past trends of radicalization and terrorism in Hebron, to explain why it is still a present and rising ideology within the Jewish communities inside the 1967 borders. It first presents the memorials and symbolism of the Hebron hills area, and then presents

Meir Kahana's philosophy, his movement, and its main members. The paper concludes by examining the main activists' movements responsible for the "price tag" attacks in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem)¹: the Noar Ha'gvaot, also known as the Hilltop Youth movement.

Events, Memorials, and Symbolism

The 1980's

Violence has always been present and a subject of concern in Hebron. In 1980, the police authority found six Jewish people dead and 17 injured while coming back from the Ma'arat ha Machpela (Cave of the Patriarchs). In response to those acts of violence, which were perpetrated by Palestinians living in the city, the leaders of the Jewish community decided to react aggressively (Pedahzur & Perliger, 2009). In reaction to the Jewish community's response, Palestinians threw a Molotov cocktail into an Israeli vehicle, wounding a woman. More violent events occurred throughout the year, culminating in a January 1981 attack, when Palestinian militants stabbed and wounded a citizen of Kiryat Arba in the Hebron market.

On July 7, 1983, three Palestinians attacked a yeshiva student from Beit Romano and stabbed him in the Hebron old city market; he later died of his wounds. The Jewish community of Hebron responded later the same month, when an organized group led by Shaul Nir, a member of the Jewish Underground, decided to perpetrate violent actions in the Islamic University of Hebron. Nir's turmoil killed three Palestinians and wounded 20 more. The cycle of radicalization engaged by both sides escalated the feelings for vengeance, which helped the region to slide into violence (Pedahzur & Perliger, 2009). This cycle of violence that deepened its roots throughout the decade opened the door to radicalization on both sides. Some of the results and consequences of this are displayed in the ideology of Meir Kahana and his followers, such as Dr. Baruch Goldstein and Baruch Silverman.

Meir Kahana²

Ideology

Originally from Brooklyn, New York, Meir Kahana is the son of a revisionist Zionist Rabbi, a close friend of Zev Jabotinsky. Kahana, who was also the founder of the Jewish Defense League, based his ideology and political ambition on the motto "Never Again". His goal was to change the image of the Jewish people from being weak and vulnerable to one of being fierce fighters. After moving to Israel in 1969, he used his ideology to create an anti-Arab political movement, called the "Kach". Here you can notice that the Kahana and the Israeli ideology both shared the basic idea to fight anti-Semitism and to protect the Jewish right to the land of Israel. However, there was one fundamental difference; Kahana was calling for violence and concluded that the fight was not only against Arabs, but also against all Hellenists, which included the Jews who assimilated into the Western culture. This description of Kahana's ideology can closely be related to Sayid Qutb's ideology of Islamic societies.

Sayid Qutb took the term Jahiliya, which originally defined the period before Arabs received Islam, and updated it to describe any modern area that did not strictly comply with Islamic law. He classified all non-believers as an obstacle to the Islamic force, adding that

Jahiliya societies, which can be anywhere, can even include Muslims corrupted by Western ideologies. Kahana applies similar ideology in calling for a fight against all Western culture and non-Jewish ideas. Specifically, Rav Kahana called for:

A frontal clash with the “Hellenists”, a label that [Kahana] does not shrink from applying to assimilationist Jews influenced by Western culture: “a country crawling with Hellenism. . . (with) Hebrew-speaking Goyim (gentiles, assimilationist Jews) whose self-hatred—the spoiled fruit of the cancerous ‘I’—drives them to reject Judaism and trample it underfoot. . . Hellenists running wild in God’s Temple. On the day Judaism separated from Zionism, the latter became just another form of ugly nationalism. . . Jews versus Hellenists: that is the real battle!

(Ravitsky, 1990: 34)

Kahana explained that:

It is this foreign body, this malignancy of gentilized foreign culture, concepts and values, that must be dealt with and erased from our midst . . . these are born-by-accident Jews who are driven with schizophrenia over their identity . . . The truth is that they—not the PLO—represent the real threat to the Jewish state and people . . . They corrupt the country from within . . . What to do? How do we fight this? How do we urgently act? . . . The answer lies in ridding ourselves of the extremist version of “love of Jews” . . . Indeed, the rabbis of the Talmud bring down the verse, “And thou shalt love thy fellow Jew as thy self”, in order to explain why we must kill the Jew who is deserving of death in a humane way (Bro lo mitah yafah– Psachim 75).

(Ravitsky, 1990: 34)

The Kahana movement saw themselves as the Jewish black panthers, wanting to create a new state named Judea (Juergensmeyer, 2001: 54). Kahana’s base is catastrophic messianic way of thinking on this fundamental religious axiom:

It is a chosen people, a nation of priests and holy people, whose nationalism and religion are identical and indivisible. Its choosiness is not a racial or national, but based on the chosen mission, i.e. these people received the sacred law, the Torah, and an immutable destiny to live and uphold the Torah, to serve as a light unto the nations. The observance of the mitzvot is the sole reason for Jewish choosiness and Jewish existence . . . All that happened, happens and will happen goes according to a divine plan at the center of which stands the Jewish people.

(Kahana, 1974: 5)

According to Sprinzak (1985), Kahana’s ideology includes the notion that the Jewish people have their own normative rules, which are not universally binding. Therefore, since God is on their side no matter what happens, God leads them to success; it is, according to them, God’s will. The Kahana ideology also gives a strong importance to the Holy Land. Kahana ideology argues that democracy is a Gentile idea and if used it needs to submit to Jewish Law. This idea, just as the

Kahana's reference to Hellenism, closely aligns the idea of Jahiliya and anti-Western world of the Muslim fundamentalists. It is fascinating to compare both ideas in order to develop a deeper understanding of the movement, its actions, and its impact on the Jewish community of Hebron. For Kahana, the Arabs were a threat and an "explosive time bomb" (Sprinzak, 1985: 15) that threatened the core of Jewish existence. Therefore, the Arabs were in contradiction with his idea of Judea, and his vision of the Jewish State. Kahana's battle against the Hellenists took root in Kyriat Arba and spread its branch all over the West Bank.

Network

Looking at the Kahana movement's network, help to have a better grasp of the present repercussions and communication channel in Hebron. The network took roots in Hebron and Kyriat Arba and formed small groups extending their branches all over the West Bank. These small cells, acting as all-channel networks, had a distinct social feature; they consisted of immigrants from the United States, childhood friends, and friends from the Kahanist youth movement. Surprisingly, the characteristics of the "Kahanist cells resembled, more than anything else, to the global Salafi jihad cells of current times" (Pendhazur & Perliger, 2009: 76).

Just as with the global Salafi jihad, the Kahana movement had fuzzy boundaries. Consequently, this raises epistemological issues at the group and individual level (Sageman, 2004). Nonetheless, the groups described by Sageman (2004) and Pendhazur and Perliger (2009) were dynamic and created bonds with similar groups based on financial and logistic support or common operations. Therefore, it was also necessary to understand that the influence of the Kahana network was broad because it was a "complex communicative network, which created shared worlds of meaning and feelings, which in turn shape identity, perceptions, and preferences" (Sageman, 2004: 158). The characteristics of this organization gave the place for the ideology to spread and take roots within the settler's population in the West Bank, particularly in Hebron and Shechem.

The influence of the Kahana movement passed through the leader but also through the impact of the Baruch Goldstein event in 1994. Dr. Goldstein influenced the youth of Hebron and Kiryat Arba, mostly due to the reaction of the population after his death and his actions taken against the Palestinian people in Hebron. The fact that the adult population of that time decided to proclaim him a hero raised influence of the movement among the pro-Kahana community. Nonetheless, the influence of the Kahana movement came mostly from the second-generation members. Baruch Silverman, former right hand of Meir Kahana, became one of the most politically influential former members of the organization. Rabbi Ben Harr, Noam Arnon, and David Schwartz, all former supporters of the Kach political party, had a constant influence on the society: Ben Harr as an influential Rabbi, and Arnon and Schwartz as spokespersons of Hebron. As the analysis exposes, those four former supporters of the organization not only influenced their community but also the Hilltop Youth movement. This movement, at the time of the research, was active all over the West bank and qualified as a terrorist organization by certain members of the Knesset. Meir Kahana and its followers helped to shape and change the activist settlers youth movement in the West Bank. Kahana's ideology called for the fight against the Hellenists, the Western-world, and the assimilated Jews, which are common to the current organizations, such as the Hilltop Youth. Nonetheless, the philosophy has been reoriented to centre its focus on the importance of the land, instead of directing the fight primarily against the Arabs.

The phenomenon of Kach (Kahana's movement) should also be seen in a historical and comparative perspective. Many Western democracies today are experiencing occasional waves of quasi-fascist activity. In most cases the movements involved, if they do not create soundly based elite groups and efficient organizations, are transient phenomena. Their situation greatly depends on changing conditions such as national moods and economic crises. Kach seems to fit this pattern and it seems reasonable to suggest that, in the long run, it will lose much of its appeal and most of its political power (Sprinzak, 1985).

The shape of the organized network of the Kahana movement, which was similar to the current Salafi Global jihad cells due to its blurry boundaries and dynamism, helped to spread the ideology throughout the West Bank. Its influence touched the region of the Hebron hills to Shechem in the North, as observed with the Hilltop Youth, which is presented in the last section of this paper. The Meir Kahana political party failed to play a central part in the Israeli Knesset, nonetheless, the national religious movement and supporters became more powerful in the Knesset over the years. The organization lost power after the assassination of Meir Kahana in New York, but its legacy opened the door to new movements, which spread its power throughout the Israeli government.

Baruch Goldstein

Dr. Baruch Goldstein was born in 1956 in Brooklyn. After graduating from the Albert Einstein Yeshiva University, he became a follower of Meir Kahana's ideology and a member of the Jewish Defense League. He moved to Kiryat Arba and became a community emergency doctor. According to Pedazhur and Perliger, "not only was he one of the pillars of his community, but for many years he was one of the central figures in the Kahana movement" (2009: 70). During his military service and after his discharge, he often gave medical care to victims of terrorism in his community. For Dr. Goldstein, Hebron and Kiryat Arba were prominent places for the Jewish people. As a follower of Meir Kahana, he responded to multiple casualties in his community by fighting back against the Arabs, to prevent them from killing any more Jews in the region. Therefore, after hearing that an attack on the communities of Hebron and Kiryat Arba was going to take place on the Purim day of 1994, Dr. Goldstein, dressed in his IDF uniform, decided to enter the mosque of the Tomb of the Patriarch, and attack the Muslims praying. According to his friends, Dr. Goldstein believed he was carrying out a preventive attack. After using more than 100 bullets to shoot at the worshippers, Dr. Goldstein's actions left 29 Palestinians dead; subsequently, survivors of the attack beat him to death. The direct repercussion of the events of February 25, 1994, took place in Hebron, Gaza, the West Bank, as well at the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, where Palestinians tried to throw rocks at the Jewish worshippers praying at the Western Wall. The anger and desire for revenge of the Palestinians was at that moment extremely high and led to the death of 35 more Palestinians and Israelis. After the attack by Dr. Goldstein, the Israeli government decided to adopt a partition policy in the city, which divided the Palestinian and the Jewish populations of Hebron. The division implemented by the IDF involved roads blocks, and since the authorities imposed the division by delimiting the separation line with each building, they did not have to utilize a wall. This policy also involved the installation of multiple checkpoints within the city and a division of the Tomb of the Patriarch.

Dr. Goldstein's funeral took place in Jerusalem, where more than 1,000 people participated at the ceremony led by Rabbi Lior Dov. After the interdiction by the Israeli government to bury Dr. Goldstein's body in Hebron, the authorities buried him in Kiryat Arba.

Resting in the Meir Kahana memorial park, this cemetery quickly became a pilgrimage site for right wing Israelis and Jews. Dr. Goldstein's actions led to a number of different reactions around the world. The Israeli government condemned his actions, yet the population of the Jewish communities of Hebron and Kiryat Arba treated him as a hero and a martyr.

Symbolism and Memorials

Points of symbolism representative to the Jewish people who live in the city are present throughout Hebron. The main site of this symbolism of national and religious identity is the Ma'erat ha Machpela (The Cave of the Patriarch). This sacred place for Muslims, Jews, and Christians was the burial site of Abraham, Sarah, Leah, Isaac, Jacob, and Rebecca. According to the Bible, the cave acted as a gateway for all souls going to the Garden of Eden. The symbolism of this place is not only found in the burial site but also in the building itself. This was the consequence of 700 years of constraint by the Jewish people to stay out of the Ma'erat ha Machpela, which then was only accessible to Muslims. Only in 1929 was the Jewish community able to enter the sacred site. The oral history explained that the Jewish people never stopped praying at the wall of the Ma'erat ha Machpela. They prayed in order to show their right to have access to the site, on the Hebron hills, and on the biblical land of Judea Samaria. Memorials also carried strong symbolism, as did the street art and signs erected by the Jewish community of Hebron.

Information and historical street signs erected by the Jewish community of Hebron allow for a glimpse into the community's level of radicalization. One of the signs, located in the middle of town at the entrance of the municipality complex, reads, "[t]his land was stolen by Arabs following the murder of 67 Hebron Jews in 1929. We demand justice return our property to us! — The Jewish community of Hebron". For the Jewish community in Hebron, the idea and concept of justice is present in this symbol, which reminds the population of their goal on a daily basis.

Therefore, the sign in the middle of town not only symbolizes their legal struggle, but also their religious right to live on this land. Baruch Silverman, one of the participants of the research, spoke about how far the citizens of Israel should fight to keep their land, stating, "[i]f you are looking for peace be ready to fight . . . This is the Middle East if you compromised you get worst . . . When you are strong you could live the minute you are weak you are finished". Every symbol represented in the community helps to remind the population of the importance of their fight. From the Tomb of the Patriarch, to the street art and signs in the city, everything is structured to make the community understand their battle, and invite them to fight and work to keep their holy land.

The memorial site and graveyard in Hebron and Kiryat Arba also played a role in the creation of fundamentalists and terrorist movements. The first memorial site was, without a doubt as I already discussed, the Ma'erat ha Machpela. It is a pivotal place for collective memory, but it did not have an impact on the radicalization of the movement in Hebron since it did not transmit the ideology of violence or aggression of the others. Nonetheless, it does transmit the idea of ownership of the land, which plays a role in its legitimization. The most relevant memorial site is the one of Meir Kahana and Baruch Goldstein in Kiryat Arba. As I already explained, those sites are not in Hebron by decision of the Israeli government, they are there for security reasons and because Meir Kahana was from Kiryat Arba. Nonetheless, Kiryat

Arba is Hebron's neighbouring settlement and is indispensable to understanding the radicalization of the region.

Meir Kahana and Baruch Goldstein's memorial park became, over time, a significant place and commemoration site for right-wing extremists and fundamentalists. Meir Kahana was considered to be the founder of the Kach organization, an organization recognized as a terrorist by the U.S. government. The memorial park in Kiryat Arba is also Baruch Goldstein's grave. Located in front of Meir Kahana memorial, Dr. Goldstein's passing is commemorated every year to remember the events of Purim 1994. Moreover, this site was a prime place of pilgrimage for the national religious and right-wing partisans. In memory of his beliefs, engagement in the community and his actions taken in the Tomb of the Patriarchs, his epitaph reads: "He gave up his soul for the nation of Israel, its Torah and Land. Clean hands and heart". For the right-wing extremists, these few words transmit the idea of "fighting all the way to the end", according Meir Mandel, which was and still is a crucial part of the Jewish identity in Judea Samaria. It gives the idea that God legitimizes these actions and that Goldstein and Kahana were following the words of the Torah. By writing that he died with "Clean hands and heart", the followers and young radicals believe that the community and the Kahana interpretation of the Jewish law supports this kind of behaviour.

As observed, the community supported and transmitted the meaning of the memorials and symbols all over Hebron and Kiryat Arba. This framework of thoughts helped new movement followers of the Kahana ideology to pursue their mission. The transmission of this ideology was not forced upon the community and, therefore, not everybody follows these ideas. Nonetheless, those inclined to follow this ideology find its legitimization within the symbols and memorials.

Baruch Silverman

Born in Boston, Silverman was raised and educated in the Holy city, got married at the Me'arat ha-Machpela and moved to Hebron after his union. For him, Hebron was one of the most prestigious places to live and to establish a Jewish community. This land, he explained to me in an interview, is the edge of the roots of the Jewish people, even though Jewish people still struggle to live there up until today. Right hand of Meir Kahana, he was arrested more than 100 times; Baruch Silverman dedicated his life to fighting for Eretz Israel and to protecting Judea and Samaria. After the assassination of Meir Kahana, Silverman led the Kach movement. Eventually, the party lost popularity, and after initially affiliating himself with the Ichud Leumi party (Jewish National Front), Silverman was, at the time of these interviews, part of the Eretz Israel Shelanu party.

The Eretz Israel Shelanu party was created to prevent the creation of a Palestinian state as well as to prevent the dismantlement of the settlements in the West Bank. The party has also been active in the question of the Ulpana and Migron settlements, as well as in the order of eviction of the houses in Hebron during the winter of 2012. According to Silverman, the Eretz Israel Shelanu party tries its best to keep the Holy land as Jewish as possible. This religious philosophy represents the party ideology. The main focus of their demand is based on the religious right to the land of Israel. This approach and way of thinking is linked to the Kahana ideology. Silverman explains, during his interview with me, that Rabbi Kahana "did not invent anything, he took it from the Bible". He adds that his motto "Never again" is the attitude to adopt facing the current situation since they "swore never again! We are not going to give the gentile

another chance to slaughter us, we will fight. If they come to kill we will kill them back”. With this approach and as a representative of the Kahana ideology, Baruch Silverman brought his followers and some citizens of Hebron closer to a more fundamentalist and radical way to conceptualize the land and the Judea Samaria region. With the support of certain Rabbi, such as Rabbi Ben Harr and Rabbi Levinger, as well as other members of the community, groups supporting the ideology of Kahana based themselves in Hebron.

The multiple ways of transmission of the ideology created new movements in the region, which some found roots or recruited in Hebron, one is predominant and is radicalizing some of its branches—the Hilltop Youth organization.

Hilltop Youth Movement

The Hilltop Youth movement integrated the second generation of settlers and the new national religious fundamentalists. It took on a geographical importance and is now playing an influential role in the West Bank since the dismantlement of Gaza in 2005. This movement consists of an association of West Bank based groups; radical national religious social grouping forms those local associations. Their activities consisted in keeping and occupying the Land of Israel.

In May 2008, young settlers crashed Yesha’s Independence Day celebrations in Migron outpost, whose voluntary evacuation the army was negotiating with Yesha. The youths distributed leaflets accusing the Council’s leaders of “collaborating” with “the enemy” authorities and slashed their car tires. Some Yesha leaders said they no longer feel safe in their own communities. An officer in the West Bank military administration claimed: “These religious youths are totally out of control”.

(Middle East Report, 2009: 10)

According to this report, following the disengagement, former intelligence chief Ami Ayalon estimated that some 8% of the settlers, which were at that time 250,000, were militantly anti-state. Internal intelligence chief Yuval Diskin warns that “the faith-based community” feel its interests to be at stake, they could pose a genuine threat:

The scope of the conflict will be much larger than it was during the [Gaza] disengagement. We find a very high willingness among this public to use violence—not just stones, but live weapons—and not only in the West Bank, in order to prevent or halt a diplomatic process. Their approach began with the slogan “through love, we will win” during the [Gaza] disengagement, but has now reached “through war, we will win”.

(Middle East Report, 2009: 10)

At a meeting in Givat Asaf, an outpost near Bet El settlement that the defense ministry reportedly has slated for removal, leading national-religious rabbis called on security forces to disobey orders. The Yesha Council, too, took an increasingly tough line. “The settler population will not accept government demolition of outposts. If the government moves, the reaction will be closer to Amona than Gaza, and the government will fall” (Middle East Report, 2009: 11).

The situation did not improve in the West Bank. On August 16, 2012, near the settlement of Bet Ayin, some settler youth attacked an Arab taxi car with six firebombs. No casualties were reported, but six Palestinian victims, all family members, were wounded. Following this event the U.S. State Department qualified this attack as a “terrorist incident”. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu qualified the incident as “very serious” and Moshe Ya’alon, minister for strategic affairs described it as “a terrorist attack” (Sherwood, 2012, August 19). The U.S. and E.U. consider the recent events to be threatening as they may result in a rise of the Palestinian violence and desire of revenge on the settlers and the Israeli population. Some discussed, following this event, the possibility of a third intifada (Bymann & Sach, 2012, August 14). The rise of settler radicalization and violent attack are mostly due to the Hilltop Youth movement.

This section exposes the current situation of the movement and group linked to the Jewish community of Hebron and Kyriat Arba by first presenting the main leaders and mentors of the group to then expose the network and social organization.

Rabbi Shapiro

Author of the controversial book *Torah Hamelech*, Rabbi Shapiro is a follower of Rabbi Yitzhak Hacoen Kook and Rabbi Yitzhak Ginsburg. He is the head of the Dorsehei Yihudcha yeshiva in the Yitzar settlement in the West Bank. Rabbi Shapiro promotes violence amongst the settlers and youth movement. His book, distributed by the Yeshivat HaRaayon HaYehudi in Jerusalem, is linked to the philosophy of Meir Kahana. The Hilltop Youth movement does not accept the *Torah Hamelech*, but its philosophy is taught through different Rabbis within the group such as Rabbi Dov Lior, who signed the preface of the book.

Rabbi Levinger

Rabbi Moshe Levinger was born in Jerusalem before the creation of the Jewish state. He was a student of Rabbi Yehuda Kook at the Mercaz HaRav Jerusalem Yeshiva, where he learned the core of his beliefs and understanding of the role of the Jewish Land. Under Rabbi Kook’s guidance, he learned “that the Land of Israel must be in the hands of the Jewish people, not just by having settlements but that it is under Jewish sovereignty” (Gorenberg, 2006: 106). Over the years, Rabbi Levinger got involved in the Gush Emunim settlers movement and is now one of the leading Rabbi of Hebron since 1968. According to Meir Mandel, known to be one of the leaders of the Hilltop Youth movement, some groups of the youth movement had to follow and report orders to Levinger (see *Figure 1*).

Daniella Weiss

Daniella Weiss is a respected figure in the Gush Emunim settlers’ movement. She is recognized as an important activist in Judea Samaria. For her, it is a priority to establish as many outposts as possible in order to preserve and maintain the Jewish State. She considers those actions as a form of “Price Tag”.

Meir Mandel

Meir Mandel is considered the leader of the Hilltop Youth movement despite only being 26 years old. Mandel, originally from the settlement of Hashonaim, has three children and has been part of the Noar Ha'Gvaot since he was 14 years old. He was part of the group that tried to cross the Jordanian border during the events of December 2011. In an interview I had the chance to do with him in the spring of 2012, he denied the promotion of violence among the group, but he insisted in associating its group to the Ze'ev Jabotinsky and Jewish Defense league philosophy, which follows the motto "Never Again". Moreover, this philosophy is similar to a certain part of the vision of Meir Kahana; it does correspond to its views on the importance of the Land more than on the desire to evacuate the Arab population living in Eretz Israel.

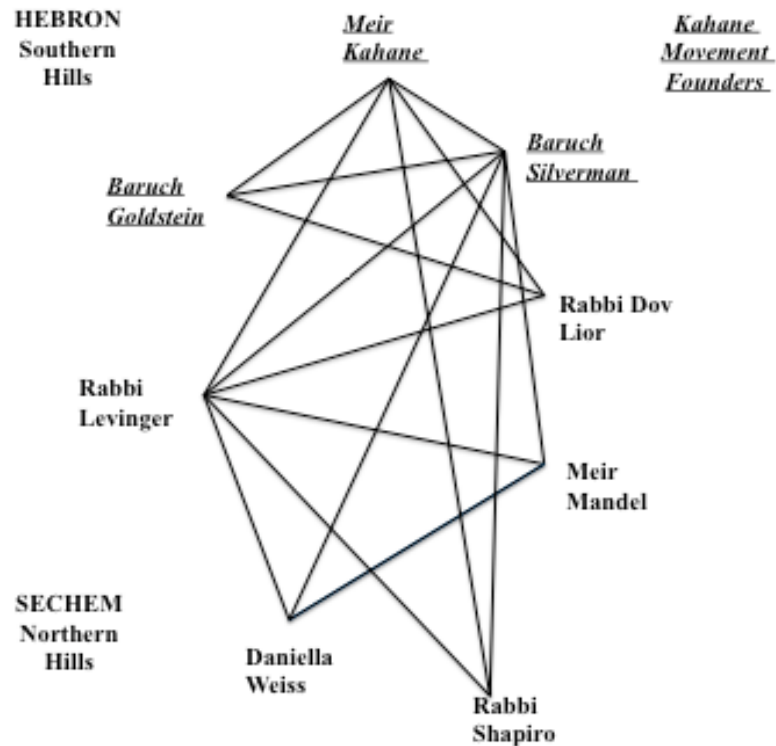
Mandel now plays a crucial role all over the West Bank but is mostly present in Shechem and the Northern Hill region. He also connects the Northern Hill to Hebron by behind under the orders of Rabbi Levinger.

The Network

After observing the prominent figures of the movement, let us now look at the interconnection of these people and build the overall network of the organization linked to Hebron and Kyriat Arba. To understand the network connection I base my understanding of the structure on sociologist Anthony Giddens's approach. "The principal issue with which I shall be concerned in this paper is that of connecting a notion of human action with structural explanation in social analysis" (Giddens, 1979: 49). Based on this theory I describe the Hilltop Youth network, as presented to me through interviews and observations made over six months of research. *Figure 1* shows the network built from the data collection of this research. As observed, the network is divided in two geographical regions, the Hebron and the Southern Hills; and Shechem and the Northern Hills.

Influenced by members of the Kahana movement network the Hilltop Youth base its foundation on "small, tight networks known in the professional literature as all-channel networks, with distinct social feature" (Pendhazur & Perliger, 2009: 76), characteristics that are similar to the global Salafi jihad cells. As observed, Hebron is at the centre of the movement. Even though Mandel denies the movement being the new generation of Kahana's movement, I quickly saw that most of the main leaders of the faction located in Hebron have been with or linked to Meir Kahana's ideology such as Rabbi Levinger, to whom the leaders of the main communities of the Hilltop Youth had to report to and take orders from. Daniella Weiss is also a main member connecting the Southern Hills to the Northern ones. Her connection amongst the population as well as in the political sphere made her a key member of the network. These connections are forming the base of the network if I rely on Giddens (1979) theory of social structure. Moreover, the network also links more than 1,000 families in the West Bank.

Figure 1: Hilltop Youth Movement and Kahane Movement Founder



In the summer of 2012, the organization became more active. The “price tag” attacks have now turned to physical violence against the Palestinians communities surrounding the settlements. On August 16, 2012, close to the Bat Ayin settlement in the West Bank, young settlers shot firebombs at a Palestinian taxi car. The turning point in the actions taken by the organization show a desire to provoke and occupy a bigger place on the land of Judea and Samaria. The Vice Prime Minister Moshe Ya’alon considered this attack as “terrorist attacks”. “They run contrary to Jewish morality and values and constitute first and foremost an educational and moral failure” (Ravid, 2012, August 19: 1).

For many years, this organization did not cross the line of violence and terrorists act, so the questions are: why have they now crossed this line? Is the movement stronger? Are its members more extreme or is it because their previous actions were not punished? These are all questions researcher and policy makers need to ask themselves in a world where the threat of Israel’s surrounding neighbours is growing and where the impact of their interior policies have rising consequences for the survival of the Jewish state.

Conclusion

Hebron has been, throughout the modern history of the State of Israel, a hub for radicalization and terrorism. With the rise of the JDL and the ideology of Meir Kahana, the town slowly grew and spread its population and philosophy to the settlement of Kiryat Arba, founded by Rabbi Moshe Levinger. From those two small towns grew an exceptionally strong form of Jewish

extremism. As observed, this form of fundamentalism and national-religious point of view gave birth to a new uprising of violence, and now terrorism, amongst the settler youth.

The concept of terrorism is often used to legitimize and explain many wars and violent events that occurred over the past, but have not yet officially been used to describe the Jewish violence in the West Bank. The main issue with this concept is that there is no consensus on the definition of terrorism. According to Virginia Held:

Government characteristically define “terrorism” as something only their opponents can commit, as something only those who seek to change policies, or to attack a given political system or status quo can engage in.

(Held, 2008: 16)

This observation involves a strong political aspect and aspirations, present in the act of terrorism. John M. Deutch argues, “Terrorism is best defined as acts of violence committed against innocent people or noncombatants that are intended to achieve political ends through fear and intimidation” (1997: 12). He also divided terrorism into two groups; the one sponsored by their government and the one carried out by groups trying to gain independence or to change their own government (Deutch, 1991). Boaz Ganor completes the division of Deutch by differentiating terrorism to national liberation violence and that “Freedom fighter” or violent acts generated by a national movement of liberation usually do not attack “civilians”.

Walter Laqueur highlights four key points in defining terrorism: “(1) it is collective action, not individual; (2) it is political, not criminal; (3) it is covert, not conventional warfare; and (4) it is of course violent” (Laqueur, 1987: 72). Anthony Oberschall adds to the definition that those “violent means [are] to achieve political goals” (2004: 27), which I already defined, but he qualifies those goals as “Ethno national, religious, or ideological” (Laqueur, 1987: 27), which help to build a border around the definition of terrorism.

Finally, by putting together all those attempts to define terrorism, I can trace three key points, based on Boaz Ganor’s article (2002), to build clear boundaries of this well discussed concept. (1) It is a violent act, which involves that any acts that do not include a treat or a violent attack are not terrorism. (2) It has political ends; those political ends can be ethno national, religious, or ideological as well as sponsored or not by their government. (3) It uses civilians as targets, which differ terrorism from guerrilla warfare, civil insurrection, conventional war, or criminal offense. Once again, I would like to emphasize the point that there is no formal consensus of this largely used term and that this definition is based on a number of characteristics that describe the term in a distinctive way. Nonetheless, in order to qualify the promotion of violence and terrorists’ acts amongst the new generation of settlers I am using Ganor’s (2002) definition. Terrorism is here defined as an act or threat of violence towards civilians where the organization aims their violent activities to achieve their political goal. Some could argue that the Hilltop Youth movement is not a terrorist organization but more a radical movement. I would not classify them in this way since they showed that they used violence on civilians to achieve their political goals. Nonetheless, I could conclude that Hebron is a hub for radicalization since it does support McCauley and Moskalenko’s (2008) idea of radicalization. As viewed and explained in their article, Hebron is a town where a dynamic opposition towards actions of others can be observed. It is also a place where “individuals react to personal victimization, to group grievance, and to state action against friends and lovers” and where “[n]on-state groups competing for the same base of sympathizers, and threat from internal

dissension” (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008: 430). As observed, Hebron has all those factors that created radical groups and terrorist organizations such as the Kahana movement and the Hilltop Youth. In conclusion, it is a crucial task for state and non-state actors to have a deep understanding of this terrorist organization. This knowledge will help to enhance sustainable communications strategies to manage this group, which increase the level of violence of their actions in order to show their opposition to the current political situation in the West Bank.

Notes

- 1 This area represents a Biblical area of the ancient Kingdom of Israel known as “Ezra Yehuda VeShomron” in Hebrew. In this paper I use the term “West Bank” when talking about the political sense of the Palestinian Occupied Territories and Judea Samaria when referring to the biblical sense of this same piece of land.
 - 2 All the names of the people interviewed were changed for confidentiality.
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