

Contesting the Nation

Contradicting National Narratives and the Jewish Settlements

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the recently released documentary, *Ben Gurion, Epilogue*, the elderly couple, David Ben Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, and his wife, Paula sit down for an interview. After talking with Ben Gurion for long minutes about Zionism, the interviewer turns to Paula and asks whether she is a Zionist. Following a brief contemplation, she replies she is not.¹ To Paula Ben Gurion in 1960s Israel, the question was very specific: was she a part of the political movement that fought to create a national home for Jews in the land of Palestine/Israel? She was not. She had other causes at the time and did not share her husband's political activity. Answering in the negative, Paula Ben Gurion did not mean to say she was not an Israeli or a member of the Jewish nation, or that she did not believe Jews should have a national home on the land of Palestine/Israel. She likely viewed herself as all the above however, for her the question did not entail these complex elements. It is hard to imagine a mainstream public figure or their spouse in Israel today responding in the same manner. Zionism has departed from this particular historical context and taken on new meanings, a process that this paper aims to explore.

This paper argues that the contestation of the meaning of Israeli Jewish national identity occurred through struggle over the issue of Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories, and it traces this process using archival materials. Specifically, I analyze letters individuals sent to leading government officials in the early days of the settlement project and show that settlement supporters tied the issue to Zionist ethos and symbols, injecting new

content into Zionist identity in the process. Those opposing the settlements on the other hand did not view the issue as a struggle over national identity and so did not attempt to protect their left-liberal meaning of Zionism. This method of investigation reveals the different individual understandings of national identity, but it also points at broader societal divisions over the nation.

More broadly, the paper suggests a shift in our understanding of nationalism. Following Rogers Brubaker,² I question the internal coherence of the nation. Brubaker points at variation in levels of individual identification with an ethnicity which leads to variation in level of 'groupness' from one ethnicity to another. The evidence this paper brings forth demonstrates instead that multiple understandings of the meaning of the nation can limit 'groupness', the internal cohesion, of a nominal national group. Sections of society can hold different and contradicting understanding of fundamentals of national identity such as citizenship, borders, international friends and foes, and the role of religion. The result is lack of national unity which poses a challenge for governance and even democracy itself as I discuss below. Moreover, a theory of struggle over the meaning of the nation can explain political outcomes such as the recent global resurgence of nationalism in the form of populism. As I further discuss below, contradictions in national identity within the nation can pit groups in society against one another. A section of society can delegitimize another which it views as failing to represent the 'true' nation. The surge of disruptive anti establishment sentiment in many countries is such a form of struggle over the meaning of the nation.

Most nationalist constructivist accounts explain either the formation of the nation,³ or individual motivation for choosing to assimilate in a group or to mobilize against other groups.⁴ This account however explains transformations of the meaning of the national identity itself, the way individuals perceive the nation, and the process of challenging existing hegemonic national ethos.

The paper proceeds as follows: the next section presents a theory of multiple and contradicting understandings of the nation. Next, I discuss the construction of hegemonic

Zionism by the left in Israel. I then describe the early days of the settlement project which this paper analyzes. The following section presents the main data source of this paper, sets of letters individuals wrote to political officials in the 1970s and 1980s I retrieved from the Israeli National Archives. The letters, in favor and against Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories, address pivotal events in the early settlement project. Section six presents systematic text and narrative analysis of the letters. Finally I discuss the implications of the analysis in section seven.

2 CONTESTED NATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Common definitions of the nation view it as a solidarity group but differ in their analysis of the commonalities nation members share (ethnicity, territory, language, constitution)⁵ and their origins (old and deep or relatively new and malleable).⁶ Rogers Brubaker (2002) offers a different category of analysis. He questions the ‘groupness’ of the ethnic group, the tendency to take for granted that ethno-national groups are internally homogenous and externally bounded units.⁷ Instead of an innate trait of ethnicity, Brubaker suggests we view the level of ethnic ‘groupness’ as an empirical outcome.⁸ If this is the case then group-making should be examined as a project.⁹ Considering Brubaker’s critique, I define the nation as the *effort* to create a solidarity group through shared ethnicity, history, culture, language, territory, or civic identity. This problematization of the shared trait of the nation follows from Brubaker, but the purpose here is to discuss conflicting understandings of the nation across populations and geographic territories. Brubaker on the other hand seems to imply that the failure to achieve ‘groupness’ lies in indifference of populations to a top-down group identification, rather than to multiple understandings of a single nation.¹⁰

To further elucidate the difference between my own argument and Brubaker's we should consider the definition of a group. Tajfel (1982) points out that for a group to exist, both external and internal criteria are necessary. The external component is an outside consensus that the group exists. Internally, there are two necessary components for "group

identification," and a third that often follows: First, a cognitive component, an awareness of membership in the group; Second, an evaluative one, meaning that the awareness is related to some value connotation; And third, an emotional attachment in the awareness and the evaluations.¹¹ Brubaker questions the third component: the emotional attachment individuals develop toward an ethnic identity. I on the other hand challenge the second component: the shared connotations related to the group. In the context of the national group that implies that people hold different views on the nation's borders, on criteria of belonging to the nation, or on the nation's friends and enemies, on the role religion or other ideologies play in the life past and present of the nation. If sections of the nominal (or external) nation hold these different understandings of the nation then the internal criteria of a group are not met and "groupness" is diminished.

The existence of multiple perceptions of the nation becomes meaningful when these perceptions are contradictory. A nation that has or seeks a political unit is required to make numerous decisions. Contradictory perceptions of the nation implies a lack of basic consensus on fundamental issues such as borders, citizenship, religion and the state, economic ideology, or grand strategy. This will make certain decisions impossible to reach through compromise for example which borders is the state willing to fight for, which countries to ally with, and who should be granted citizenship. In his theory on democratic transition, Rustow makes the same point when he argues that national unity is the only precondition for democracy, "It simply means that the vast majority of citizens in a democracy-to-be must have no doubt or mental reservations as to which political community they belong to."¹² Adding to Rustow I argue that the mere agreement on *which* political community is insufficient and citizens also need to have a general agreement on *what* this community is.

Democratization is one moment of critical decision making for the nation. Other moments of change apply as well such as state formation, economic liberalization and other changes in market structure, demographic change, and international transformations leading to change in alliance structure. In all these a nation requires basic consensus over certain

issues that directly pertain to national identity. Demographic change for example requires a nation to decide on its rules of inclusion and exclusion or the relationship between religion(s) and the state; economic transformation requires decisions about economic ideology (the role of the political unit in the economy, principles of equality, social solidarity, and liberty). The recent rise of populism can be viewed in this light. Following a global economic crisis and demographic and technological transformations sections of the population in many developed and developing countries challenged the hegemonic understanding of the nation. The result was a struggle between co-nationals based on nationalist mobilization. Of course, some of the mobilization was turned toward 'others' foreigners, immigrants, or western forces, but much of it was directed inwards at center elite that fail to represent the 'will of the nation'.

The paper brings evidence for the formation and articulation of a challenging national perception to that of hegemonic Jewish Israeli national ethos. I show that in the struggle over the settlement issue, supporters of the Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories developed a new national story that not only ties the act of settlement to Zionist identity but also made the act of settlement into the central expression of Zionism. As such the settlement issue created contradicting perceptions of Jewish Israeli national identity which indeed later developed to a struggle over fundamental issues such as borders, citizenship, and religion-state relationship.

One key question this paper does not directly address is under what conditions do multiple and contradicting perceptions of national identity develop. While it is beyond the scope of this paper, the Israeli case does point at two elements that contribute to the emergence of a challenge to hegemonic national identity. First, as discussed below, for many decades right wing elites were entirely excluded from political power and social capital. This presence of a powerful and exclusive ruling elite is likely to encourage challenges from outsiders to develop a counter narrative that is an alternative not only to party agenda, but also to the fundamental narrative legitimizing political power in the country. Second, the cleavage of religious-secular cleavage in Israel played a pivotal role in the rise of a challenging far

more religious national story on the right. Clearly, deep cleavages which are not embedded in the political system can lead to identity challenge on the political system.¹³

3 THE ZIONIST LEFT WING HEGEMONY

The right wing in Israel is often referred to as the *national camp*,¹⁴ whereas the left is merely *the left bloc*. Criticism of the left blames it for failing to serve the national agenda or being post-Zionist.¹⁵ Politicians on the right have been incorporating national symbols into their campaigns for a long time.¹⁶ Despite indications for the right's hold over the national lexicon, the situation was very different in the past. The labor party, Mapai, was at the center of the Zionist project since long before the formal establishment of the State of Israel. Labor was the head of the Jewish governing institutions in pre 1948 Palestine, it was the head of the labor union which included most workers in the country (Histadrut) and it owned large sectors of the economy. Through its different roles, Mapai controlled heavy industry, manufacturing, banking, services, and education.¹⁷ During the long years in power, right wing politicians and individuals aligned with right wing parties were outcasts within Jewish society. Right wing identified individuals were marginalized in the job market, and their access to the party's superior welfare system, health care, and other benefits was restricted.¹⁸ Moreover, the main right wing party, Herut, was considered an illegitimate political actor.¹⁹ This utter marginalization from political power lasted for two decades after the formation of the state of Israel.

Due to its position in power, the left not only controlled the national discourse and symbols, it practically invented these. Leaders of the Jewish nationalist project focused on the construction of shared language and symbols. Quite literally, the spoken Hebrew language itself was invented (or "revived") to serve the national project.²⁰ To create the national ethos, Zionists turned stories from Jewish antiquity into nationalist symbols and holidays. The

stories chosen focused less on faith and the role of god in Judaism, and more on heroic defense of the land and self-rule within the land.²¹ A central aspect of Zionism was the sanctification of the land. This was done not only by Jewish-turned national symbols, but also through the “religion of labor”. Although the movement was urban from early on, its ideals were of agricultural labor. One of the prominent Zionist thinkers, A. D. Gordon, preached for agricultural labor as a mean for gaining legitimate ownership of the land.²² Accordingly, the agricultural forms of settlement and in particular the socialist Kibbutz became the representative image of Zionism.²³

In the first decades of Zionism and into the early years of the State of Israel, the Zionist ethos entirely belonged to the left. Right wing Herut and politicians of the right in those years used the flag and the discourse of the ‘Whole Land of Israel’, but they did not have access to core Zionist values like socialism and the mythology of pioneering that belonged to the left. And importantly, they did not have a settling movement and so had no ‘ownership’ over the very crucial land.²⁴ As I demonstrate below, the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza was an opportunity to change the relationship between the political groups and Zionist identity.

4 THE SETTLER CHALLENGE

The outcomes of the 1967 War marked a new phase in the ongoing Arab Israeli Conflict. Following the war, Israel took control over Golan Heights, Sinai, Gaza, and the West Bank territories between the Jordan River and the Green Line, Israel’s internationally recognized border. The West bank and Gaza, inhabited by Palestinian population, were neither annexed to Israel nor given an independent status.²⁵ In the nearly fifty years since, despite some changes in legal arrangements including the Oslo Accords and the formation of

Palestinian Authority, the status of the Occupied Territories remains disputed and unrecognized by the international community.²⁶

The settlement project began shortly after the 1967 War; settlements were built around Jerusalem and later in the West Bank and Gaza strip. At first the government built settlements for security purposes. Some settlements were formed by ideologically driven individuals with or without state permission. By 1973 the Israeli state had built approximately 50 settlements in the Occupied Territories, home to 4,000 settlers.²⁷ However, settling the north of the West Bank was against the government's informal policy on the future of the territories because of the region's dense Arab population.²⁸

The group most motivated to form new settlements in the Occupied Territories were young religious Jews. The organizing movement of these settlers was 'Gush Emunim', formed in 1974.²⁹ In 1974-1975 the settlers made vigilante attempts to settle around Nablus in the north area of the West bank. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin ordered the military to forcefully remove the settlers from the land. The most notable attempt was the Sebastia settlement of December 1974. Gush Emunim members came to Sebastia in thousands. The government blocked the roads to the area, leading many to travel distances on foot. The attempt drew significant public and media attention, making settlements in the Occupied Territories into a truly controversial issue for the first time since 1967.³⁰ After initially ordering the evacuation of the settlement, Prime Minister Rabin agreed to negotiate with the settlers and struck a compromise which ultimately led to the beginning of settlement in the area.³¹ The first batch of letters analyzed here addresses these settlement attempts as will be elaborated below.

A few years later, the settlement project received a significant boost when right wing Likud became the largest party in parliament for the first time. Likud supported the settlements both materially and ideologically. However, in the following years the project experienced two significant setbacks; first, the peace process between Israel and Egypt led to international pressure on Israel to stop expanding settlements; second, in 1979 the Israeli

Supreme Court ruled for the first time in favor of Palestinian plaintiffs, and deemed the Jewish settlement Elon Moreh illegal since it was built on private Palestinian land without security justification³² After postponing and deliberation, the state complied with the court's order causing much concern among settlers; third, this was a period of growing unrest in the Palestinian population over the Jewish settlements, including violent incidents. Thus, these were years of settlement expansion but also of fierce struggle over the legitimacy and future of the Jewish settlements. The second batch of letters analyzes the discursive struggle over the settlements during these years.

5 CONTESTING THE NATION IN THEIR OWN WORDS – CITIZENS' LETTERS TO POLITICAL OFFICIALS

The paper employs letters written in support and protest of the Jewish settlements and kept in the Israeli National Archives.³³ The letters, composed by individuals, and even groups, do not seem to be directed by a top-down call for action of a political movement. Many of them are long, emotional or personal, and full of pathos. They are not business-like, and do not contain a single message. Instead, I view these letters as the way in which the rhetoric of each political group was perceived by engaged supporters. As such they allow us to view not only the arguments made by politicians and social movements, but also their intake by individuals and the public more broadly.

The first batch of letters addresses the Sebastia settlement affair of 1974. The letters in this batch were addressed to Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin (24 letters against the settlements, 56 letters for the settlements, Table 1). Many of the letters are hand written, a few are typed, and several are telegrams. Most of the letters are in Hebrew, although several on both sides are in the English language, and were sent from abroad. While most letters in support of the settlement project were written by private individuals, the majority of letters against the settlements were written by groups (e.g. party branches, Kibbutz assemblies,

professional politicians from left party Mapam). This particular set of letters (against settlements 1974-1975) is the only one that might contain letters directed by a party.

The settlers were mostly religious, but their supporters seem to be more diverse in religiosity. Many letters do not open with a Jewish religious acronym,³⁴ and do not refer to religious symbols. Regionally, letters in favor of the settlement project are very diverse, whereas letters protesting the settlements are commonly from Kibbutz, Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. In terms of gender, most letters in both groups were written by males.

As a first step of analysis, I divided the letters into those supporting and those opposing the settlements. The letters are very clear on that issue and usually state the agenda of the writer in the first line (e.g. “We protest the illegal act of settling Sebastia in Samaria”; “Preventing Jews from settling in Samaria is an affront to Zionism”). Next, I identified topics or discourses within the letters. Words or expressions were divided into eight categories: Nationalism; Judaism; Democracy and Rule of Law; State Institutions; Security; Emotions; Personal; and Other. The words included in each discourse can be found in the Appendix.

Some words or expressions were readily classified: ‘Zionism’, ‘Pioneer’, ‘State of Israel’, were placed in the Nationalism category; biblical phrases or quotes were placed in the Judaism category. Other terms were more ambiguous, in particular between the Judaism and Nationalism categories. As Jewish nationalism naturally has a Jewish component, it was not always easy to disentangle the two discourses. Two rules guided the categorization; first, I preferred to err in favor of Judaism. As my argument is mainly about settler use of national identity, I was more cautious in classifying a word or term as national if it could also be interpreted as Jewish-religious. For example, ‘Land of Fathers’ was classified as Jewish rather than national as in Hebrew the expression has a highly religious context. Similarly, ‘Jerusalem’ was classified as Jewish rather than national.

The second principle that guided the classification was the context within the text. ‘Democracy’, for example could have been classified as a separate category from rule of law.

‘Democracy’ can be used to mean ‘Justice’ or ‘Will of the People’. However, in the analyzed letters, ‘Democracy’ was most often used in conjunction with other ‘Rule of Law’ terms. The reference to a democratic state was often clarified as one in which citizens abide by the law or the decisions of an elected government. Thus, the context of the letters, more than the general dictionary definition of a word, guided the classification.

Table 1 Letter Classification

Years	For Settlements	Against Settlements	Other	Total
1974-1975	56	24		80
1978-1981	8	44	8	60

The second batch of letters is a less unified group of documents than the first, and indeed was recovered from six different files in the National Archive.³⁵ These letters, written between 1978 and 1981, were addressed to Deputy Prime Minister Yigael Yadin, the head of the party DMC (‘DASH’, Democratic Movement for Change).³⁶ The letters indicate that many DMC voters did not support the new right wing government, and particularly their party’s role within it. From Yadin’s many correspondences, I have selected to analyze all those addressing the issue of the settlements in some way. The result was sixty letters (Table 1); forty-four are letters of protest against DMC’s lack of action in government, or against Yadin personally. All these protest letters also take a stand against settlements. They address four topics of those years: the peace process with Egypt; Elon Moreh Supreme Court case; the Jewish settlement in Hebron; and the overall expansion of settlement by Minister of Agriculture Ariel Sharon. Eight letters were written in support of the settlements,³⁷ and the

rest include either general suggestions about the settlements, or requests for Yadin to clarify his views on the issue.

For this batch of letters I examined the new lines of argumentation against the settlements that did not appear in earlier letters. I have also examined the language of the letters and compared it with that of earlier letters. All letters opposing the settlements in this period were written by males, mostly from urban areas. Unlike those opposing the settlements in the earlier years, authors of these letters were voters of a centrist party and not far left political activists. Though some composers claim to represent “thousands of likeminded voters”, or “the views of professors of Tel Aviv University”, all of them were sent by private citizens.

Finally, I analyzed the narratives of all the letters together by identifying structure, and content, including the temporal dimension, location, symbols, causes, and agents.³⁸ This analysis best demonstrates the different ambition and scope of the rhetoric of each group. In addition to the letters, the paper utilizes a variety of archival documents as well as a series of interviews I conducted in Israel with settler leaders.

6 THE MULTIPLE LEXICONS OF NATIONALISM

6.1 LETTERS ADDRESSING SETTLING THE NORTH WEST BANK 1974-1975

The letters from this period all address the civilian attempts to settle the north West Bank described above. However, there is little communality between letters supporting settlement in the area and letters opposing it. The authors use words taken from different discourses, the tone and sentiment are different, as are the lines of argumentation. The discourses used by each group of letters are shown in Figure 1. Broadly, letters supporting the settlement project are more national, Jewish, emotional, and personal; whereas letters

opposing the settlement project focus on ‘rule of law’ arguments, and are far more impersonal and unemotional in tone.

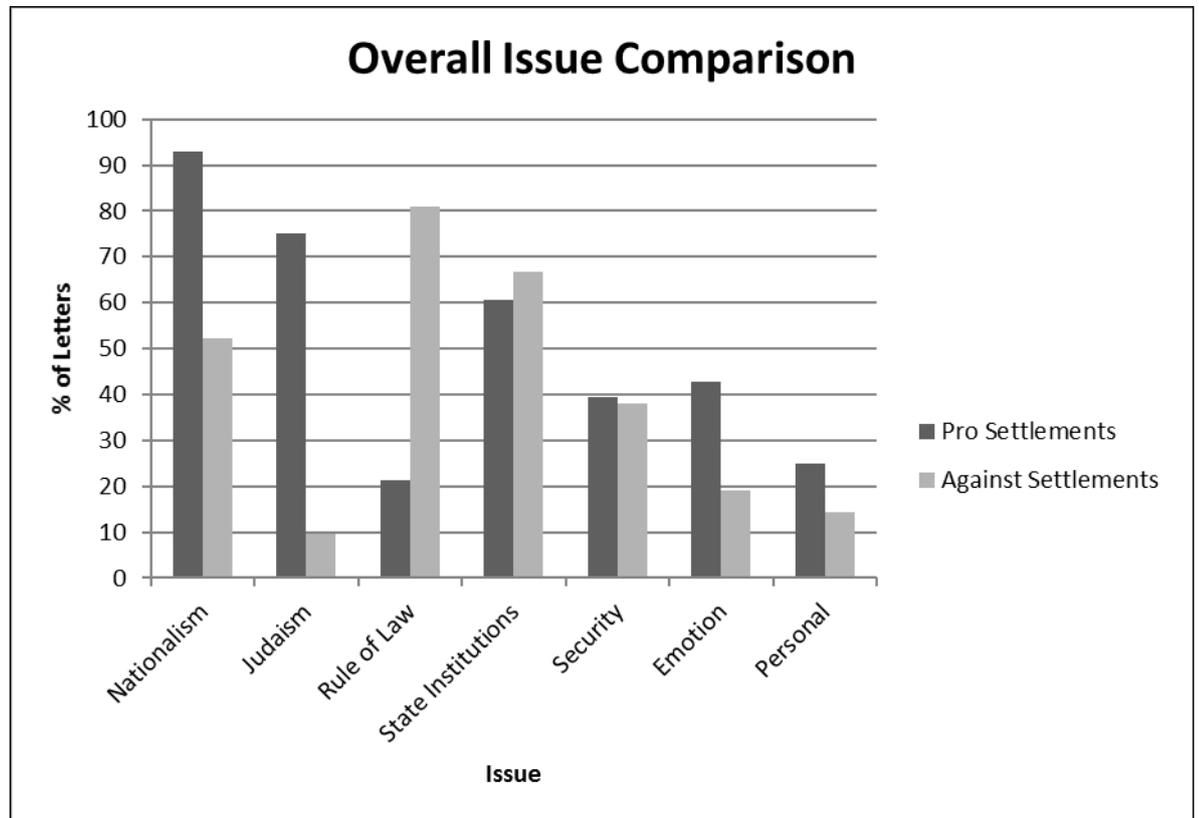


Figure 1 - Issue Comparison in Letters in Support and in Protest of Settlements

Evidently, at least in that early stage, settler supporters viewed the issue in much broader terms than their opponents. Where one group was dramatically discussing the future of Israel and Zionism in almost fatal terms, the opposing group was far more limited in its perspective. Many pro settlement letters refer to a new settlement in the north West bank as “an integral part of the historic land of Israel” or as “a vision, a dynamic of a movement, the heart and soul of Zionism.” The different scope the groups assign to the issue could be linked to the high saliency of the issue for settlers. Settlers themselves viewed it not only as a personal crucial issue, but as a national and religious matter of life and death. Many of the composers of pro settlement letters are not themselves settlers or personally linked to settlers (according to their own testimony). The dramatic tone and large scope indicates at the successful construction of the issue by settlers.

Nationalist type of arguments first included the act of settlement under the Zionist umbrella, or even placed Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories as the main expression of Zionism. The letters demonstrate that many supporters viewed the settlements in that light, “We visited Elon Moreh and found there the most beautiful expression of pioneering Zionism and love of Israel that may be found in our country;” another letter written by a group of Bar Ilan University professors states, “In these days of malicious attacks on Zionism, we plead you not to curtail the pioneer enthusiasm expressed in the settlement in Elon Moreh and find a way to officially authorize it.” This was a response to 1975 UN General Assembly Resolution 3379 defining Zionism as a form of racism. A north West Bank settlement was still unauthorized, and the settlers tied the two issues together as if arguing that the proper response to the UN resolution is more Zionism, and more Zionism implies more settlements. A letter from Elon Moreh settlers themselves expresses the view, “This [a government decision to allow settling the Occupied Territories] will be the most simple and clear expression of our sovereignty over the land of Israel. Us, the Elon Moreh settlers, along with the entire people, strengthen the hands of the government to make this decision, and will not budge from our place.” The last line is somewhat ironic as Prime Minister Rabin wished nothing more than for the settlers to budge from their place, as was expressed in speeches he gave at the time, and his 1979 autobiography in which he referred to the settlers in harsh terms.³⁹

The data presented in Figure 1 considers each line of discourse only once per letter, even if it was represented by multiple words and repetition. For example, if a letter from a settlement supporter spoke of the land of Israel, of pioneers and of Zionism it was counted as one entry of national discourse. The differences between pro and anti settlement letters were in fact greater than presented; most pro settlement letters contained multiple words from the national discourse whereas anti settlement letters usually contained one or less. Figure 2 attempts to capture these differences by measuring how many words from each discourse were included in each letter on average. The measures in Figure 2 still exclude word

repetition. Thus, if the word 'Israel' appeared several times within a single letter it is still counted as a single entry within the national discourse. Figure 2 illustrates that 'rule of law' is the only issue mentioned on average more than one word or expression per letter in anti settlement letters. On pro settlement letters there are two issues with more than one word or expression per letter: nationalism and Judaism. Nationalism in fact is mentioned with nearly 2.5 different words or expressions per letter.

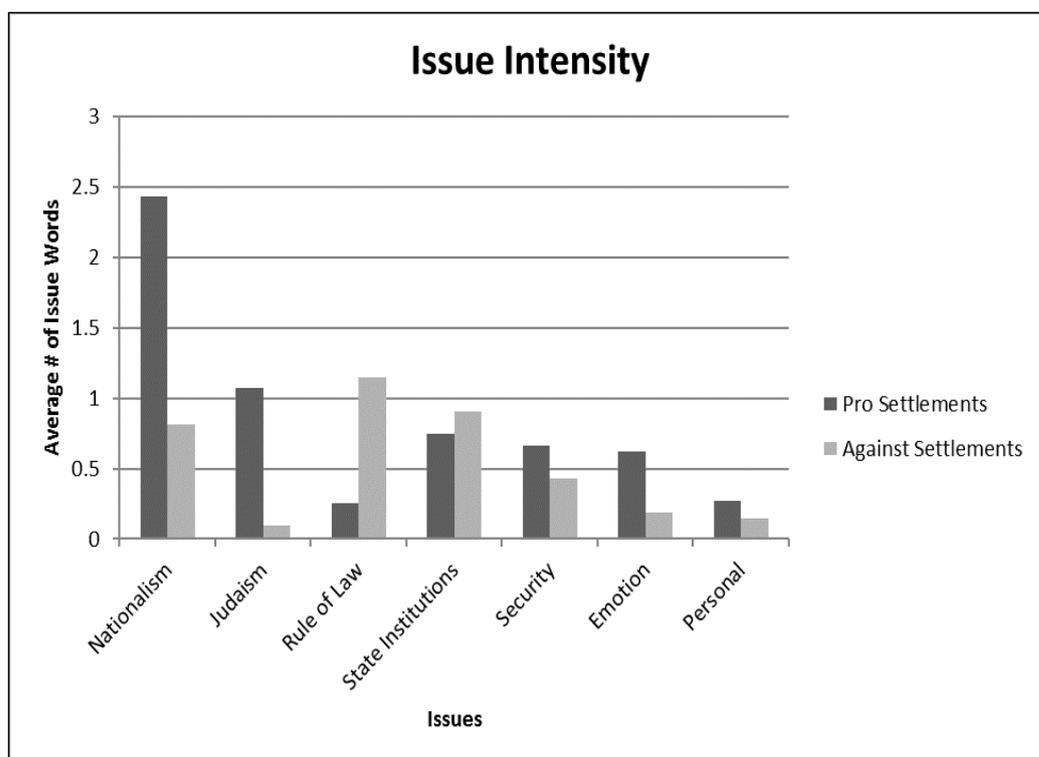


Figure 1- Issue Intensity in Letters in Support and in Protest of Settlements

The national discourse varies not only in intensity between the two types of letters; the vocabulary of nationalism is far richer in the pro settlement camp. Figure 3 shows the national vocabulary of the letters. Certain words like 'Israel' and 'Country' are shared between letter types however, there is a variety of national-Zionist words used only in pro

settlements letters. These include 'Zionism', 'National' or 'Nationalism', 'Pioneer', and 'Land of Israel'.

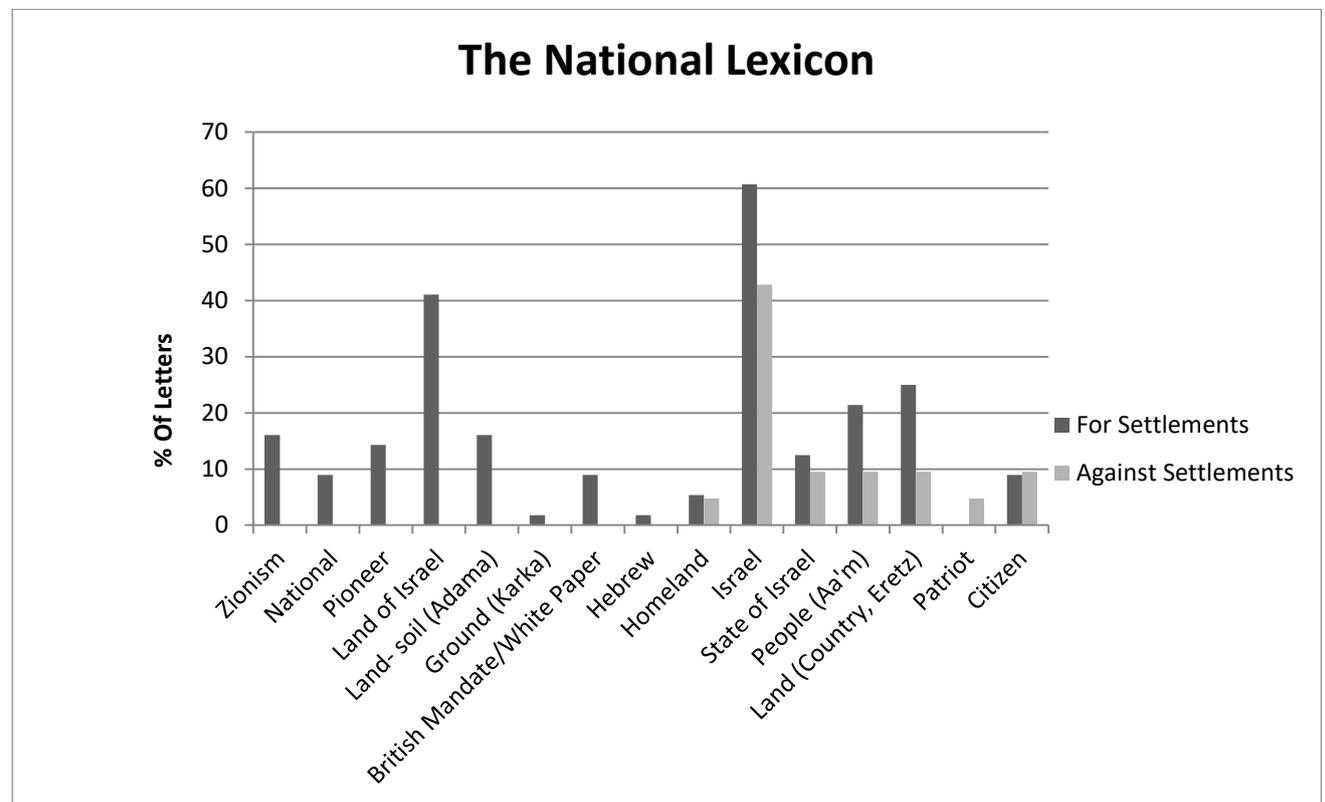


Figure 2- National Lexicon in Letters in Support and in Protest of Settlements

References to the land on the side of the settlers are easy to account for, as the purpose of their letters was to obtain permission and support for settling the land. Nonetheless, the choice of 'land' (Adama, Eretz) over 'territory' (Shtachim) is political, as land connects with Zionism, whereas territory is more easily connected with Occupied Territories and therefore the occupation.

The language of 'Zionist- National- Pioneer-British Mandate' was more metaphoric and constructed and requires clarification. The settler movement connected to the basic myths of the Zionist movement. Being a Jewish minority situated among Palestinians in the ancient

territory biblical of Israel they could easily portray themselves as successors of the Masada Jews, another minority population who refused to surrender the land and was celebrated by pioneer Zionist.⁴⁰ As part of the embodiment of the Zionist spirit, settlers used illegal methods similar to those used by the Zionists pioneers to settle the land. Like the Zionist pioneers, settlers often built new settlements at night to create facts on the ground and avoid penalty. Land was purchased illegally from Palestinian owners. The settlers named these illegal actions after the historic rebellious activities of the Zionists against British rule. The difference, however, was that the rule against which the settlers were operating was the Israeli state rather than foreign colonial mandate.⁴¹

Rhetorically, the settlers used slogans connected to the Zionist ethos of land. In particular, they were the movement of the “Whole Land of Israel” (‘Eretz Yisrael Ha’Shlema’) alluding both to the biblical territory, and to their connection with the expansionist movement formed by Zionist pioneers. They too spoke of agricultural labor as a mean for obtaining ownership of the land. Much like the Zionist movement, the first settlements in the occupied territories were agricultural but the project more broadly was not.⁴² The Zionist socialist element was left behind, and that too suited the zeitgeist, as Israel was going through accelerated economic liberalization, especially after 1977.⁴³

Only two words from the national discourse (Figure 3) are used more commonly by settler opposition: ‘Patriot’ and ‘Citizen’. The context of ‘Citizen’ is quite different for pro and anti settlement letters. In the anti settlement group, the word is used in conjugation with the rule of law discourse, and citizenship is referred to as a community of people subjected to state laws. One of the letters states: “Do not allow the posers of the settlements destroy the faith of the *citizen* in the rule of law.” Another letter protests “the behavior of *citizens* [civilians] toward soldiers...” On pro settlement letters, on the other hand, citizenship is used in the specific context of belonging to the Israeli national state, and the rights that follow from such belonging. “We believe it is the right of the *citizens* and students of the state of Israel to travel through the entire country and especially to pray at ‘Rachel’s Tomb’ which is located a

short distance from Jerusalem, the country's capital," states one letter, and another "As a Jew and *citizen* I am proud of the idealism and the purity of the struggle of the Emunim youth..." Even when pro and anti-settlements use words from the same national lexicon, they choose different words, or use them to mean different things.

A striking feature of the letters is that pro-settlement letters rarely address settlement opposition at all. Although they are a small protest group, their language is not that of grievances, but of hope, aspiration, and unity. This, most of all, points at their ambitious framing project. During many periods, including the 1974-1975 examined time frame, they did not resort to a fear based campaign, but to a very positive one, set on winning hearts and minds for their project. This is not to say that fear was entirely absent from the pro settlement discourse. The issue of security was used slightly more often and with greater intensity in the settlement group (Figures 1 and 2). However, the differences in the use of the security discourse were not as pronounced as differences in the use of national, Jewish and emotional discourses.

Letters opposing the settlements addressed the opposing camp far more often despite the fact that the government itself opposed the settlements at this point. Notably, many of the letters in this group were not composed by center left supporters but by relatively radical leftists of the workers party Mapam. In addition, the protest is understandable, as the government ultimately acted in favor of the settlers.

6.2 LATE 1970S AND 1980S: THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANTI-SETTLEMENT DISCOURSE.

The next batch of letters presents a partial reversal of roles from the previous period. Here, the government stated its support for the settlements,⁴⁴ and yet during its tenure settlers experienced existential threats. The period included settlement evacuation and territory relinquishing to Egypt as part of the Camp David Accords, and the Elon Moreh Supreme Court case, which ruled Jewish settlements on private Palestinian land were a violation of Israeli law and must be removed.

Prime Minister Begin's conversations with advisors indicate that settlers were vocal in their dismay of his actions.⁴⁵ Settler leaders lobbied, wrote, and orchestrated large demonstrations to protest the Camp David accords. Begin took these protests to heart, he had been one of the leaders of the Whole Land of Israel movement for decades and he worried that the accords he signed signified personal betrayal of his allies.⁴⁶

Several things can be inferred about settlers discourse during this period from Begin's conversations on the settlement issue, from letters in favor of settlements addressed to Deputy Prime Minister Yadin, and interviews with settler leaders including the 1983-1986 Secretary General of Yesha council, Otniel Schneller. First, the tone of settlement supporters during much of this period was not a positive one. When Prime Minister Begin landed in Israel after returning from Camp David he was received by settlers protesting with black umbrellas, equating him to Chamberlain returning from the signing of the Munich Agreement.⁴⁷ In some conversations Begin expresses his hurt and disappointment to be named a traitor by his 'friends'.⁴⁸

A few of the letters Yadin received from settler supporters were quite similar to the 1974-5 letters in the range of discourses, but indeed less positive in tone. Settler supporters continued to incorporate national discourse into their rhetoric. A line from one of these letters seems to best capture the attempts to bind together the settlements and Zionism. The author writes to Yadin, "Do you not see, as the masses of Israel see clearly [that questioning settlements in the West Bank] is questioning the justification for the entire Jewish settlement in Israel?"

Other letters, however, focus more on Jewish messianic ownership over the land of Israel and less on Zionism. The period following the Camp David Accords was one of internal struggles and ideological and political splits within the settlement movement. The failure to prevent land compromise and Jewish settlement evacuation reinforced extremist voices within the movement.⁴⁹ Some of the heated debates of the era were between extremist settlers who insisted on building in remote areas to cover as much ground as possible within

the Occupied Territories, and more moderate settlers who wanted to create settlement blocs closer to the Green Line that will be perceived as an integral part of the Israeli state.⁵⁰

The divisions within the settler movement, and the vocal Jewish-messianic voices made it easier for a center-left camp to mobilize against the settlers. The letters opposing settlements all share a common theme: the right wing government is destroying Israel in every sense and so their party, DMC, must quit the government and break the ruling coalition to save the country. Phrases like ‘save the state of Israel’, ‘utter national despair’, and ‘imminent destruction’ appear in approximately ninety percent of the letters. The dramatic tones are not only a response to the expansion of settlements but also to economic crisis and rising inflation at the time. In addition, regardless of the settlement issue, struggles between religious and secular powers over policy were prominent during this period.⁵¹ Many letters do not list any specific reason for the imminent destruction of Israel, but simply take it as common knowledge that this is the path the country is on because of government policies. However, nearly all the letters that do list specific grievances mention the settlement issue as a central source of concern.

In terms of language, there is certainly a vast use of words from the national discourse, in particular ‘State of Israel’ and ‘People’, but also ‘Zionism’. The letters often declare that the ‘Situation’ in the country is a ‘Shame’ or a ‘Disgrace’ to the ‘State of Israel’ and to ‘Zionism’. Unlike the pro-settlement group, these authors do not attempt to define Zionism, but take it for granted that growing economic cleavages, religious extremism, and certain aspects of the settlement project are against the values of Zionism.

Importantly, most letters do not reject or even discuss the basic justification for the settlement project. None of the letters argues that Israel has no right over the Occupied Territories, or that the action of taking the land is against the values of Zionism, for the most part the arguments are instrumental. Several lines of argumentation against settlements that did not appear in the earlier period come up in these letters, most of them still very much

prominent today in the Jewish Israeli center-left. Figure 3 summarizes these lines of argument.

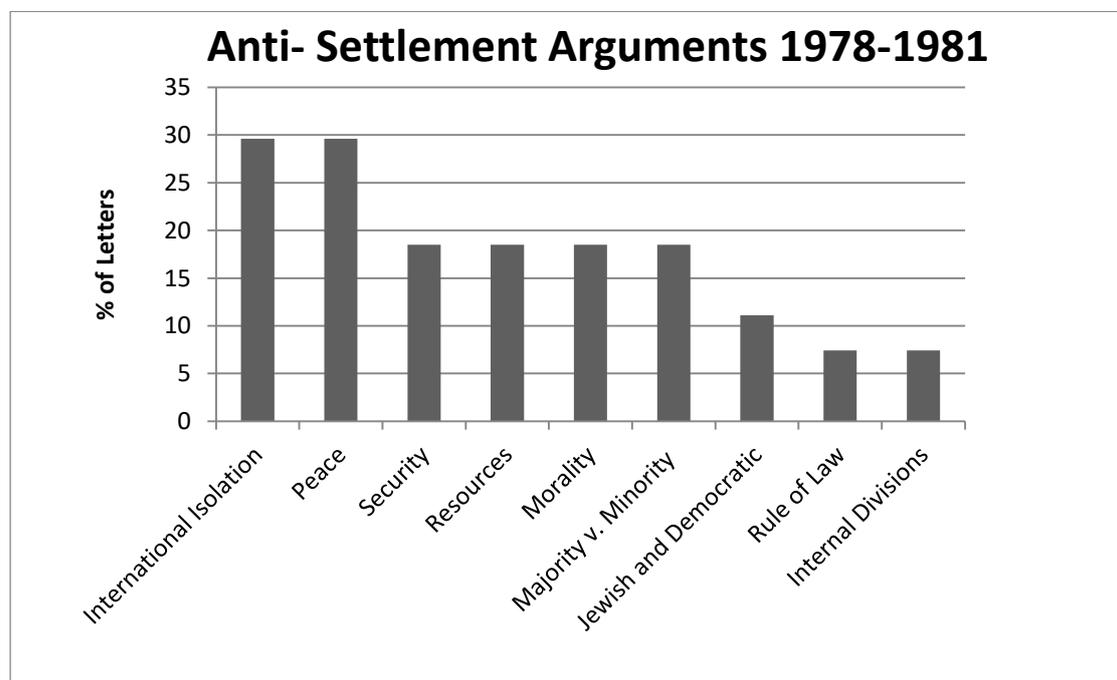


Figure 3- Lines of Argument in Letters Protesting Settlements

Three related themes recur in many letters: international isolation, peace, and security. The concern of letter composers was that Israel's visible expansion actions in the settlements were a danger to its relationship with the US and thus to its international position; that these actions were aggravating Palestinians, leading to growing support for the PLO; and that they were damaging the chances of peace in the region.

The rising saliency of Israel's isolation in the international arena was the result of UN and American pressure on Israel during this period. While the US often tried to shield Israel from direct UN condemnation, the Carter administration was clearer in its opposition to the settlements than previous administrations.⁵²

As mentioned above, these arguments were not an ideological rejection of the settlement, but an instrumental one. Several letters reject either 'showy' settlement actions of

the government, or ‘useless’ small and remote settlements. Of particular objection was the expansion of the Jewish settlement in Hebron. This was deemed by many letters as ‘irrational’, as a cause for aggravation in the heart of a Palestinian city, as entirely ‘useless’, and as a symbol of the government succumbing to Messianic Jews. Indeed, the Hebron Jewish settlement was and still remains at the ‘Jewish’ end of the settlers’ ideological scale, and is populated by the extreme religious and violent representatives of the movement.⁵³

The resources allotted to the settlements are another prominent theme in the letters, which remains salient in current day Israeli political discourse. This is another instrumental rather than principle-based issue that settlement opponents take offense with. One author even states this directly, “Let these settlements prove themselves economically.” Similarly, the repeating argument that settlers are a negligible minority, whose agenda is overrepresented in government decisions, does not directly address Israel’s right to settle the territories (Figure 3 Majority-Minority).

Two more themes that appear in the letters are worth discussing. First, the Jewish and Democratic theme appears in only a few letters, but has since become a central argument for the center-left.⁵⁴ According to this line of argument, Israel can only remain both Jewish and democratic if the Occupied Territories do not become a part of the state, as only within the 1967 borders there is a Jewish majority, which will enable to preserve the Jewish nature of the state by democratic means.

The practical implications of the Jewish and Democratic arguments change according to the period, and the agenda behind it. For Yadin himself, ‘Jewish and Democratic’ did not imply the formation of a Palestinian state. He writes in one of his response letters,

“Ultimately, Israel ought to be Jewish and Democratic. This will not be possible if one of our goals would be to include over a million Arabs within the domain of the state. If this is the case, and the state grants all the Arabs voting rights, the state will cease being Jewish. If we will not grant them this right, the state will not be democratic. Therefore, I am in the opinion

that there has to be a political solution that gives Israel complete security in the East front (and thus I support settlements in the Jordan Valley and the East slopes of Judea and Samaria), and prevents the formation of an independent Palestinian state between Jordan and Israel."⁵⁵

For Yadin then, some political solution that is not annexation will suffice to fulfill the Jewish and Democratic conditions. Here, the objection is only to certain settlements that are an obstacle for such political solution. In later periods, the Jewish and Democratic argument did serve in the Jewish center-left as justification for formation of an independent Palestinian state.

Finally, the morality justification that appears in Figure 3 deserves attention. These refer to the moral implication of occupation over another people for Israeli citizens and society. They are usually combined with a variety of other lines of argument as expressed by one of the letters, "The settlements lead us to complete isolation and internal division which destroy all that is good in the morality of the Israeli citizen, and demonstrate the government has no control over its members, and the minority of Gush Emunim can do as they please." Only a couple of letters mention certain Israeli acts in the Occupied Territories as immoral, for example the destruction of Palestinian property in Hebron. Thus, the debate over the nature of the Zionist project and what acts should define Zionism remains in the pro-settlement group. Those opposing the settlements remained committed to the Zionist national identity, but their identity was not redefined by the settlement issue.

6.3 HEGEMONIC ARGUMENTS AND CHALLENGING STORIES

I analyze narratives in the letters from both periods,⁵⁶ and find that letters that opposed the settlements hardly contained political *narratives* at all. Instead, they used the rhetorical mode of *arguments*, particularly instrumental arguments.⁵⁷ The findings of the narrative analysis are summarized in Table 2.

Pro settlement letters use a broad temporal frame, often stretching from biblical times to present day. The letters are rich with symbols from these periods. As was the case for the hegemonic Zionist movement, the order of events leads directly from the biblical kingdom of Judah to nineteenth and twentieth century Zionist movement. The significant addition here is a third chronological event, the act of settlement in the West Bank as naturally following from the previous two. Similarly, the actors in the story are Jews, Zionist, settlers, and their agency is settling the land of Israel and protecting it. Letters against settlers on the other hand, focus on the present and the near future. They often take the structure of an argument: If the government continues to do X the outcome will be Y. The actors in these letters are very specific and neither historical nor symbolic – the government and the settlers engaged in a political struggle, the settlers portrayed as villains, the government as weak. The letters mostly lack symbolism.

In terms of location as well, pro settlement letters fall clearly into the realm of storytelling. Events take place in a defined, though not necessarily realistic, space - the whole land of Israel. Letters against settlements rarely mention a location, but when they do, there is no consensus over space. Some refer to the 1967 borders as Israel's borders, others single out the north West Bank settlements as a mistake, still others object to settlements in densely populated areas. This vagueness represents the group's lack of unified agenda and its instrumental stance.

In pro settlement letters causality is both more abstract and more powerful. It presents a far reaching causal chain rather than a particular argument, but the message is unambiguous and unqualified – for the Jewish people to survive on the land of Israel, we must settle the land. The multiple causalities presented by settlements opposition are shorter and more precise, but less powerful - Settlements in the present will lead to democratic decline in the future; settlements in certain areas will lead to disorder among the Arab-Palestinian population, etc.

All these elements point at a fundamental difference in rhetorical mode, settlement supporters were telling stories while those who opposed settlements were making arguments. I draw the distinction from Krebs (2015), who defines stories and arguments as different in purpose, structure, and breadth. Where arguments deduce a desired course of action from known principles and seek to “persuade the audience of the correctness of a course of action”⁵⁸, stories are far more ambitious. They do not directly attempt to promote one policy but rather to organize and offer interpretation to a series of events, creating a broad understanding from which a course of action can be deduced. Thus, while stories are more distant from a particular course of action than arguments, they are more powerful in defining the limits of argumentation for other actors.⁵⁹

The rhetoric of those opposing the settlements is narrow in scope and presumption, refers to particular actions rather than attempting to explain a set of events, and directly suggests a course of action. The pro settlement rhetoric on the other hand, easily qualifies as a story. It is not directly linked to a course of action but much broader, offering historical interpretation out of which a course of action must be deduced. The discussion section below addresses these differences and their consequences.

Table 2- Narrative Analysis Summary

	For Settlements	Against Settlements
Time	Long arc of history. Often referred to as 2000 years. With mentions of other historical periods in particular pre state Israel/Palestine under British mandate.	Present and near future.
Location	The whole land of Israel	Israel, no consensus over its borders.
Symbols	Biblical locations and stories, heroic myths from the Jewish and Zionist past, pioneering stories from the mandate era.	None
Actors	The settlers as vanguard pioneer leaders acting for a shared national goal. They are comparable to biblical Jews and pioneer Zionists.	A weak government failing to restrain extremist and outlaw settlers.
Causality	To continue the existence of Jews in the land of Israel we must settle the land	To prevent disorder/ unrest/ international criticism/ difficulties in the peace process/ economic distress we must refrain from

		settling/extravagant settlements/ settlements in certain areas/ unauthorized settlements/ succumbing to extremist settlers.
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7 DISCUSSION

The paper presented evidence for the development of a contesting meaning to hegemonic Jewish Israeli national identity. I showed that settlement supporters and those who opposed the settlements used entirely different rhetorical means to make their case. Settlement supporters told causal stories that placed the settlers as the new link in the long chain of Jewish nationalism. Their language combined nationalism, religion, and emotion to turn the act of Jewish settlement in the Occupied Territories into the true expression of Zionism. The pathos in their rhetoric matched the ambitious goal of opening the meaning of national identity for contestation and setting new limits of argumentation for other groups in society.

On the opposite side, those who opposed the settlements did not recognize the challenge on the legitimacy of their perception of national identity. They did see the settlements as a threat: first, as a threat to the rule of law, and later as a threat to Israel's international standing, to its security, and its economy. But they failed to respond to the ideational challenge the settlements posed. Instead, they chose to make narrow instrumental arguments that did not reassert their perception of the nation.

The new meaning of identity settlement supporters put forth was built on hegemonic Zionism in the sense that it continued the ethos of sanctifying the land of Israel, and the Jewish myths Zionism was built upon. However, it also contradicted some of the fundamental

elements of hegemonic Jewish national identity. First, the borders of the ‘Whole Land of Israel’ were not in line with hegemonic perception. While Zionist pioneers did not set fixed borders for the State of Israel, the principle that guided them has always been pragmatism.⁶⁰ The firm borders between the sea and the Jordan River that settlement supporters insisted on went against the pragmatic element so fundamental to Zionism. Second, though Zionism used Jewish religion to legitimize its causes (and in particular the claim on the land), it approached Jewish mythology as a historical national story rather than a divine religious story. Settlement supporters on the other hand, reinserted the divine into national stories. To them, the act of settlement on the land was at the same time national heroism and religious redemption.⁶¹ Thus, settler Zionist perception entirely reshaped the role and nature of religion within national identity. Last, the implication of the settlements was a challenge to Israel’s democracy as demonstrated by the Jewish and democratic argument so common to the Israeli left. The occupation, and the settlements within it, created a de-facto one state with non-citizen subjects. Though Israeli law only applies within the Green Line, the internationally recognized borders of Israel, that is a technicality intended to preserve democracy in a limited territory.⁶²

These contradictions became increasingly crucial over the years and led to delegitimation of the left for not being committed enough to Zionism and even betraying the nation. One of the challenges of the left is that the Jewish and democratic argument itself holds an inherent tension that makes it so difficult to form a coherent counter-narrative to the ‘Zionism as settlements’ story of the right. If Israel is Jewish and democratic, then non-Jews are excluded, and the debate is over the extent of exclusion rather than over the principle of exclusion. This makes the coherent right wing exclusive story more powerful.⁶³

More broadly, I showed that national identity can have entirely different and contradicting meanings for different sections of society. This challenges the view of nations as coherent groups. The argument here goes beyond demonstrating different traditions within a national identity,⁶⁴ because the contradicting perceptions of identity here do not create a

single complex identity, but instead multiple national groups within the same nominal or external ethno-nation. The implication is that a contested national identity is open to struggle over the ‘true’ meaning of the nation between intra-national groups. This struggle can manifest in the rise of nationalist discourse that presents the elite establishment as foreign to the ‘true’ nation, and even legitimizes an overturn of liberal institutions. Thus, theorizing on intra-national struggles over the meaning of the nation can shed light on the recent rise of populism.

The paper did not directly address the conditions under which contradicting national identity develops and the nation becomes contested. I can infer from the Israeli case explored here that hegemonic exclusive elite and identity cleavages that are not incorporated into the political system contribute to the emergence of challenges to hegemonic identity. However, further comparative research is required to determine the conditions and the timing of such challenges.

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¹ Ben Gurion: Epilogue. 2016. Dir. Yariv Mozer

² Brubaker, 2002

³ Gellner 1983, Anderson 1983, Darden 2011, Hechter 2000

⁴ Laitin 1998, Chandra 2005, Wilkinson 2006, Posner 2005

⁵ Greenfeld makes the same observation when she argues the content of nationalism changes because nationalism is a set of ideologies rather than a substantial form of group. Greenfeld 1993 p. 7

⁶ Smith, 1986 Gat, 2012; Anderson 1983; Chandra 2005; Gellner, 1983; Posner, 2005; .

⁷ Brubaker, 2002 p. 164

⁸ Ibid p. 168

⁹ Ibid p. 171

¹⁰ Brubaker, 1996.

¹¹ Tajfel 1982 p. 2

¹² Rustow, 1970 p. 350

¹³ Rokkan 1999; Kitschelt 1992

¹⁴ In 1984 Likud and its allies began to refer to themselves as the national camp, Hamachane Haleumi, in attempt to exclude their political rivals from the borders of legitimate politics. Lustick, Ian. 1993. p, 359

¹⁵ "Netanyahu and Herzog Spar on Jerusalem, Iran," Haaretz, Mach 14, 2015.

¹⁶ Sandler, Shmuel, and Daniel Judah Elazar., 1995, p.35. Lustick, 1993.

¹⁷ Shafir and Peled, 2002. pp. 49-51, 63

¹⁸ Ibid p. 62; Lustic, 1993

¹⁹ When first Prime Minister Ben Gurion defined the acceptable limits of his governing coalition he coined the slogan "Without Herut and without Maki" to mean that the right wing party and the extremist communist party cannot be considered for governing positions. Lustick 1994, p.39; Segev 1998, 283

²⁰ Sachar, 2013. pp 82-85

²¹ For an elaborate study of the Zionist reconstruction of Jewish tradition see Zrubavel, 1995

²² Segev 1998, p.200

²³ Segev 1998 pp. 293-295

²⁴ Lustick 1993

²⁵ Zertal, and Eldar. 2009; Gorenberg, 2006. The territories around Western Jerusalem have a different legal status. See: Lustick, 1997

²⁶ The struggle for self-determination of the Palestinian people during these years has become a central regional and international political issue. This paper takes on the far narrower issue of the way the Jewish settlement issue was debated in Israeli politics. It is important to stress that Zionist identity by no means covers all Israeli citizens. The Israeli population includes a large Arab-Palestinian minority of approximately 20%. Political parties and political discourse in Israel are divided along ethnic lines.

²⁷ Settlement Committee, Ministry of Agriculture, File A/ 17/ 7310 Israeli State Archives

²⁸ On the Allon Plan see Gorenberg, pp. 164-166.

²⁹ Rubinstein, Dani. 1982, 38 In addition to a core religious group, Gush Emunim united other factions of nationalist ideological non-religious activists.

³⁰ Gorenberg, 2006 p. 331

³¹ The protesters were to leave Sebastia, and only thirty of them would stay in a nearby military base until the government found a new location for their settlement. The protesters did end up leaving Sebastia, but instead of thirty members, thirty families remained in nearby Kadum. They would become the core of the settlements Kdumim and Elon Moreh.

³² Israeli National Archive Publications Elon Moreh.

³³ File Codes: G/37/6721; G/38/6721; GL/2/7827; GL/7/7829; GL/8/7827; GL/9/7834; GL/10/7834; GL/11/7834 Israeli State Archives

³⁴ In the Orthodox tradition written documents open with an acronym for Besiyata Dishmaya, or B'ezrat Hashem, (with god's aid)

³⁵ GL/2/7827; GL/7/7829; GL/8/7827; GL/9/7834; GL/10/7834; GL/11/7834 Israeli State Archives

³⁶ The party ran for elections in 1977 on a liberal and anti corruption platform, and managed to draw votes mostly from the left, causing a tremendous political overturn, when the leftist ruling party was ousted for the first time since the establishment of the state. Peretz. 1977: 251-66.

³⁷ The low number of letters in support of the settlements is an indication of the letter recipient, Yigael Yadin as most of the letters he received were from voters of his own party which generally did not support the settlements.

³⁸ Shenhav, 2005: 75-99; Patterson and Monroe. 1998: 315-331.

³⁹ File G/37/6721 Israeli State Archives; Rabin, 1996.

⁴⁰ Zrubavel 1995

⁴¹ Rubinstein 1982, pp. 53-57; Sprinzak, 1985.

⁴² Taub, 2010.

⁴³ Shafir and Peled, 2002

⁴⁴ When elected Prime Minister Begin declared, "There will be many more Elon Moreh's" Zertal and Eldar, 2009

⁴⁵ "With Heavy Heart, But Head Held High": Making Peace - The Story of the Peace Treaty between Israel and Egypt, July 1978-March 1979. Israel State Archives Publication.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ *ibid*

⁴⁸ *ibid*

⁴⁹ One extreme example was the appearance of Jewish terrorist group, The Jewish Underground, which stemmed from the core group of Jewish settlers. Zertal and Eldar, 2009; Huberman, 2008; Segal 1988.

⁵⁰ Otniel Schneller Interview June 2014.

⁵¹ Including legislation on abortions (1977, 1978) and religious female military service (1978).

⁵² President Carter demanded Israel stopped settling in 1976 and 1978 and expressed opposition on other occasions. During Carter's tenure the UN Security Council passed several resolutions defining the settlements as illegal, and condemning Israel. Aronson, 1996, 50-51; Malone, 2004. The US generally abstained in the vote on these resolutions. The one exception was resolution 465, the US voted in favor of the resolution but soon after made statements disavowing its vote.

⁵³ From its formation in 1967 until his death in 2015, the Jewish settlement in Hebron was led by Rabbi Moshe Levinger, the public face of Messianic settlers. Levinger was arrested many times for acts of violence and incitement against Palestinians and for shooting and killing a Palestinian shopkeeper after Palestinians threw stones at his car. Israel Kershner, “Moshe Levinger, Contentious Leader of Jewish Settlers in Hebron, Dies at 80” *New York Times* May 18, 2015.

⁵⁴ Prominent politicians promoting this line of argument in recent years include Yitzchak Herzog, Tzipi Livni, and Haim Ramon.

⁵⁵ Israeli National Archive GL/10/7834. Self translation

⁵⁶ I draw on Shenhav, 2005. Shenhav breaks down political narratives into three categories: “events, characters and background”, which include the events taking place, location, institutions, and actors; “events in sequence”, which is a temporal element; and “causality”.

⁵⁷ Krebs, 2015

⁵⁸ Krebs, 2015. pp. 36-37

⁵⁹ *ibid*

⁶⁰ Avi-HaA 1974, pp.2, 74-75

⁶¹ This is in line with the thought of the influential religious leader, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook of Merkaz Harav Yeshiva, who educated most settlement leaders in those years. Rubinstein 1982

⁶² Yiftachel, 2006

⁶³ On the Jewish and Democratic tension see: Smooha, 2002; Gavison, 1999; Greenfeld 1993 makes a similar point on the nature of ethnic nationalism.

⁶⁴ Smith, 1999