The Impact of Gush Emunim on the Social and Political Fabric of Israeli Society

Gush Emunim is a complex social and political movement that has a controversial legacy in Israel. The rise of extreme Religious Zionism has its beginnings in the Six-Day War of 1967. As the territorial boundaries of the state increased almost tenfold, it gave rise to a newfound thinking about the concept of *Eretz Israel*. Settlement on the conquered land from Jordan and the Sinai created a new spiritual outlook on the future of the "Land of Israel". However, this idea was quickly displaced following the 1973 Yom Kippur War. In a period of disillusionment and despair, the Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful) – a movement of religious fundamentalist Zionists favouring the retention of the Occupied territories of Gaza, the West Bank and the Golan Heights was formed.

The rise of Gush Emunim (which will be also referred to as the Gush) would bring the issue of settlement in these territories to the forefront of the public and political discourse. Not only did Gush Emunim bring settlement politics into Israeli society but also its unique ideological dimensions questioned the very foundations of Zionism within the Israeli State. The movement grew in power up until 1992 but officially ceased to operate in 1984. Its legacy, however, has manifested itself in many different ways that still impacts Israeli society to this day.

This essay will explore to what extent has Gush Emunim impacted the political, and social fabric of Israeli society from the birth of the movement in 1974 to the present day. It will argue that Gush Emunim has had a profound legacy in Israel that has allowed its ideology to continue to exist within the political and social fabric of Israeli society. Its legacy has left Israel in a fundamentally vulnerable position internally as this movement has questioned the very secular nature of the state. Firstly, this essay will explore the impact of Gush Emunim on the Israeli political system, Israeli polity and the functions of the State. Secondly, this essay will examine how the Gush has affected the social fabric of Israeli society and the societal schism it has caused between secular and religious Jews. Finally, there will be a discussion on how Gush Emunim has created a 'culture of violence', which has manifested itself in Jewish extremism and terrorist actions against Palestinians and the State. The essay will conclude by arguing that Gush Emunim and its ideology presents the biggest threat to the cohesiveness of Israeli society and the future of the Israeli State.

What is Gush Emunim?

It is important to understand the historical and ideological roots of Gush Emunim as a political and social movement. The Gush has been a source of contention since its founding in 1974. Newman (1985) argues that although we see the practical achievements of the Gush in the settlement of the West Bank, Gush Emunim has also played a role 'in bringing to life an ideology which existed, but had been dormant within the national religious society.' Gush Emunim grew out of the post-1973 situation in which Israel was faced with a situation of disbelief and anomie. On the 7th of February 1974, several hundred activists attended a founding convention at *Gush Etzion* from which Gush Emunim was formed. Gush Emunim was a predominately Ashkenazi movement where a majority of members were born in Israel and were also profoundly religious (Zertal & Elder 2007, p. 207). However, Gush Emunim was not a political party or a formal movement with membership or leadership roles (Newman 2013, p. 257).

The rise of Gush Emunim occurred due to a combination of factors. These include the 'young guard' of the National

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Religious Party (NRP) deciding to create an extra-party group campaigning to settle in any part of *Eretz Israel* and a combined protest to the 'return of territories demanded by the peace initiatives of Dr. [Henry] Kissinger' (Newman 1981b, p. 27; Weissbrod 1982, p. 266). Gush Emunim set its objectives around the 'Greater Land of Israel' ideology. As such it became a decentralized political movement whose aims were to stop the possibility of any of the land controlled by Israel being relinquished voluntarily to any non-Jewish actor. This also meant thwarting any attempt by an Israeli government to compromise what they perceived as divine and sovereign territorial authority. As a consequence, Gush Emunim set up illegal outposts in *Sebastia* and *Ofra* and continued to create up to twenty more settlements in the West Bank and Gaza (Avruch 1979; Feige 2013).

The movement was further boosted by the election of Begin's *Likud* party in 1977, which helped legitimise its already existing settlements, and provided financial remuneration for further settlement developments. The movement has over time adopted a 'dual mode of political behavior as a means of achieving its objectives' (Newman 2005, p. 195). The Gush has used an extra-parliamentary mode of protest as a way to promote its cause when its goals are threatened while at the same time demonstrating a process of co-option in the political and institutional sphere (Newman 2013, p. 257).

The ideology behind Gush Emunim is based on a messianic mysticism of the late Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook. Rabbi Kook presented the secular nationalist Zionist project in Israel as a means of providing the necessary steps towards the redemption of the Jewish people in Zion. The settlement of the West Bank was seen as a 'god-ordained process of messianic redemption in which every Jew is oblige[d] to take part' (Don-Yehiya 1987, p. 220). In Gush Emunim's ideology, there are key ideological tenets that the movement advocates. These as: 'the failure of the Zionist Project, religious law as binding, peace and securitization, and democracy and legitimacy' (Newman 2013, p. 258). All of these ideological tenets are based and formed around Rabbi Kook's concept of divine redemption through the settlement of the Occupied Territories.

The Gush frames their ideological discourse in the ideas of Neo-Zionism. They argue that the left under Labour and *Mapai* had forsaken the original ideas of the settler movement and as such Gush Emunim is the contemporary manifestation of the pioneering spirit of the early Zionists (Avruch 1979, p. 49). In the eyes of Gush Emunim activists, the movement carries the mantle of the Zionist cause and has continued the spirit of Zionism by establishing settlements in challenging and sometimes treacherous terrain in the West Bank and Gaza. As a consequence, Gush Emunim established *Amana*, an organization that would set about establishing more settlements in the West Bank and Occupied Territories (Goldberg & Ben-Zadok 1986) that still exists to this day. Therefore, according to Newman (2013) settlement is seen as 'positive' and the 'Zionist way' of protecting the territory gained from the Six-Day War. Territorial compromise is perceived as treason against the original Zionist cause. Overall Gush Emunim's brand of religious fundamentalism, messianism and ultra-rightist political outlook has made it a unique phenomenon in the political and social discourse of Israeli society.

A Question of Democracy: The Gush's Influence is Israeli Politics

The Gush has had a significant effect on the body politic of Israel and has shaped the ideological and political current of the right wing since 1974. Gush Emunim never became a formal political and social movement with a centralized leadership or organizational structure. However, its ability to permeate not just social institutions but also establish a network in official institutions in the Israeli public sector demonstrates the effectiveness of the movement. However the success of the Gush lies not just in the organisations ability to infiltrate the political system but how its legacy has permeated the body politic and influenced modern day Israeli politics (Will 1980).

Gush Emunim's infiltration of the political establishment has revealed itself in the form of 'settlement organisations and political parties, to ad-hoc membership of right-wing political and educational institutions' (Newman 2013, p. 261). The settler population has never represented more than 0.5 percent of the total population of 'Greater Israel' though it has had the ability to infiltrate the public sector with such ease. The influence of Gush Emunim supporters and activists does not just permeate the high politics of Israel but also can be found at the local representative level. In local and municipal administrations that represent the settler populations in the Occupied Territories, many Gush Emunim activists have found employment in these bureaucratic and administrative centers. These include

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employment as elected officials, Mayors and high-ranking administrative staff on public and 'ad-hoc bodies' (Newman 2005, p. 205).

The Yesha Council is an example of an 'ad-hoc' public body that has ties to Gush Emunim. The Council serves all these municipalities and local government authorities in the Occupied Territories. It is a combination of the all the local mayors of these bodies, and its political objective is to promote settlement concerns and to lobby the government and members of the Knesset (Weissbrod 1982). The Yesha Rabbis Forum is another 'ad hoc' public body that represents the religious and spiritual needs of the settler community. The Forum has 'become the supreme authority for many of the settlers in determining what form of opposition, and political activity is legitimate in the face of government decisions aimed at territorial withdrawal and settlement evacuations' (Newman 2013, p. 262). A majority of members of both these organisations have been affiliated with Gush Emunim. The ability of Gush Emunim activists to permeate such bodies gives them the opportunity to utilize public sector resources and taxpayers money to consolidate settlement expansion in combination with their ideological and political ambitions.

Members and supporters of Gush Emunim have also become members of the Knesset in settler-related parties. Although originally aligned with the NRP, Gush Emunim members have now opted for more settler-associated parties to be created that represent their ideology and settlers interests better. Parties such as *Tehiyah*, *Tzomet*, *National Union* and more recently the *Jewish Home* are examples of political parties that have had Gush Emunim members in the Knesset and have played a vital part in ruling coalitions (Zertal & Elder 2007, p. 235).

The success of the settler movement through its representation in the Knesset despite its proportionality demonstrates the effectiveness of the Gush's political mobilization and infiltration process. For example, in the Sharon government from 2002-2006, ten members of the Knesset resided in the West Bank and Gaza settlements who represented settler interests and were associated with Gush Emunim (Zertal & Elder 2007, p. 235). On top of its infiltration into high politics, Gush Emunim activists have also been promoted to senior roles in the public service giving them broad access to infrastructure and educational facilities.

To represent its interest further, Gush Emunim formed the '*Eretz Israel* Lobby' during the late 1980s. This lobby group 'counts members from [all] across the right wing political spectrum' and has had immense influence in channeling funds to the building of new settlements (Newman & Hermann 1992, p. 522). The Sason report published on 8 March 2005 concluded that Israeli state administrative bodies had been discreetly diverting millions of shekels to build illegal West Bank settlements and outposts in Judea and Samaria (Sason 2005). As the Sason Report demonstrated the Gush Emunim lobby group gave the movement direct access to political figures (including Prime Ministers) and promoted settler-related issues in the corridors of the Knesset. A social movement within Israel has never experienced such unprecedented power. During the tenure of right-wing secular governments, Gush Emunim has associated itself closer with the ruling party particularly the *Likud*. Their reliance however on each other has become strained over time particularly as the government has pursued pragmatic approaches to the Occupied Territories such as the 'Land for Peace' deals of 1978 and the Oslo Accords of 1993 (Weissbrod 1996).

Gush Emunim has permeated a large section of the political establishment from local representation all the way up to high politics. This has allowed Gush Emunim and the movement's descendants to exert untold political influence in the corridors of power. The question arises however as to what extent does the Gush work within the framework of the democratic system. The Gush is not an anti-democratic movement, but it has its ' own specific interpretation of the conduct of Israel's democratic regime with respect to the one issue that truly concerns the movement, namely *Eretz Israel*' (Sprinzak 1985, p. 28).

One of the factors concerning Gush Emunim's relationship to the state has been the issue of democracy and the Gush's religious beliefs. In the Gush's ideology, the Laws of the Torah take precedence over the laws of the Israeli state. This means that canonical decisions made by Rabbi's have more authority within the movement than the laws decided by the Knesset (Newman & Hermann 1992, p. 525). Since 1974, Gush Emunim activists and supporters have portrayed the expulsion of settlers and pragmatic government policies in searching for peace with the Palestinians as being immoral or undemocratic.

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The wider democratisation discourse that is promoted by the settler movement is problematic because they are not prepared to forgo their religious beliefs in favour of governmental decisions. At the same time however Gush Emunim activists and the settler movement wish to be seen as a legitimate part of Israeli society (Newman 2005, p. 199). This has led to problems in the military and other socialization organs of state when the government has implemented unpopular decisions such as the Gaza withdrawal of 2005. While Gush Emunim supporters say that they work within the democratic discourse, the organisations ability to permeate the halls of power and act as an extra-parliamentary social movement challenges this idea.

Gush Emunim's ideology undermines the rules of the democratic system and has led to an understanding that the law of the state could be broken if it served "higher or divine" aims ('The Gush Emunim Settlers Movement is Established: This Week in Haaretz 1974' 2011). The settler movement sees itself as above the law of the land when it comes to challenges to its political and territorial ambitions. Its ability to influence policy and challenge the authority and legitimacy of the state compromises the very democratic foundations it argues it espouses. Gush Emunim's ideology presents a direct threat to the democratic nature of the Israeli state.

Socialization, Neo-Zionism and the schism in the social fabric of Israel

The Gush has had its most success and influence in its ability to act as a socialization tool within Israeli society and its role as the masthead for Neo-Zionism (Ram 1995). Gush Emunim has successfully (through its political and community influence) created a new generation of ideologically driven activists. This is due to the movement's ability to disseminate its message and provide arenas for ideological socialization within the wider settlement community. The political power and influence that the Gush has access to have led the movement to have a relative autonomy in its dealings with its own educational and religious networks. As a consequence, it limits access only to those who promote the 'correct message' of the movement, whether this is in synagogues, educational institutions and the *Yeshivot* (Newman 2005, p. 210).

The right-wing religious nationalist message of the Gush has also been promoted through the use of mass media and in synagogues throughout the state. This includes establishing a radio station (*Arutz 7*) and its own newspapers (*Mekor Rishon* and *Nekudah*) (Newman 2013, p. 264). Its promotion of the 'divine promise of the Land of Israel to the Jewish people, the supremacy of the Torah over the rule of the majority, and the supreme sanctity of the Land above all else' during Friday evening sermons by Orthodox Rabbis has been increasing throughout synagogues in Israel (Newman 2013, p. 264). The *Bnei Akiva* national religious movement has also promoted Gush Emunim's ideology to the younger generation in the settlements. This has seen second and third generation manifestations of the movement's ideology in organisations such as the *Kahane Chai* party and the *Hilltop Youth,* who have committed acts of violence against Palestinians in these areas (Zertal & Elder 2007, p. 441).

Gush Emunim has also been very successful in its ability to promote its members into the religious Zionist '*Hesder*' units in the Israeli Defence Force (IDF). The *Hesder* have a particular place within the IDF structure and are seen as highly motivated soldiers due to the religious education that was taught to them within the settlements and their commitment to Israel. Unlike the *Haredim*, the religious Zionists see the participation in the military as a national and religious duty and by the late 1990s, many of these religiously motivated soldiers reached high-level command positions. However, their spiritual mentors and Rabbis in their settler communities have significant influence over these soldiers and officers (Newman 2005, p. 211).

From 2000 to 2014, national religious representation in the officer training core has risen from 15 to 42 percent (International Crisis Group 2013, p. 22). Baruch Kimmerling (1994) argued in 1994 about the increasing influence of these religious zealots in the military, particularly when it came to times to evacuate settlements. His fear was that these soldiers might refuse to carry out government orders on withdrawing from parts of the Occupied Territories or removal of settlers from established settlements (Shahak & Mezvinsky 1999, p. 90). This fear would be proved correct with the 2005 Gaza Withdrawal, where religious soldiers refused to obey their commanders in evacuating settlers and as such were penalized heavily by the military authorities (Cohen 2007).

The socialization process that Gush Emunim has employed also has had ramifications for the rest of Israeli society.

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Gush Emunim's application of the Neo-Zionist discourse has caused division within Israel and has questioned the legitimacy of the Zionist project in Israel. Neo-Zionism according to Uri Ram is 'an exclusionary, nationalist, even racist, and anti-democratic political-cultural trend, striving to heighten the fence encasing Israeli identity' (Ram 2003, p. 58; 2007). Neo-Zionism provides an organisational and ideology framework for Gush Emunim to promote their cause across a broad spectrum of Israeli society. Its ability to identify with the *Torah* and the People (rather than just exclusively territory) has meant it can mobilize *Haredim* and secular Jews alike to the cause (Ram 2004, p. 316). Its mixture of Zionist and Jewish components promotes the exclusionary character of the Jewish spiritual and ethnic community rather than Israeli identity (Ram 2004, p. 315). This, of course, does not include Palestinians or even non-practicing and Post-Zionist Jews who as one Israeli scholar noted were perceived as 'Hebrew-speaking *goyim*' (International Crisis Group 2013, p. 9).

There has been a continuing social battle between those within Israel who promote the Post-Zionist ideology and the Neo-Zionists (Gush Emunim and the settler movement) who promote this exclusionary Jewishness over Israel's secular democracy. Gush Emunim's political allegiance is to the ethnic-nationalist concept of Judaism rather than the Israeli identity of the state. Gush's belief that the secular nationalist project of the state is a stage of religious revival is very concerning particularly as several Israeli governments have pursued pragmatic responses to the Palestinian issue (Ram 2004, p. 315). Gush Emunim's allegiance brings into question Israel's existence as either a secular democratic state or a Jewish state. The Rabin assassination of 1994 would further promote the division between secular and religious Jews, and Gush Emunim's ideology would become less defined by territorial gains and more so on ethnic-nationalist identity.

A Culture of Violence

One of the political and social legacies of the Gush Emunim movement has been the rise of a culture of violence in Israeli society. Although most of the time protests have been peaceful, opposition to Palestinian statehood and territorial expulsion has manifested itself into the rise of violent Jewish extremism within Israel and the Occupied Territories. Vigilante actions by Jewish settlers began in 1976 and became increasingly more frequent as the years continued (Weisburd 1985).

The Arab-Israeli Peace process, particularly the 1978 Camp David Accords and the Oslo accords of 1993, directly threatened the main ideological pillars of Gush Emunim and its legacy. As such the idea of Palestinian control of *Eretz Israel* completely contradicted the messianic message of Gush Emunim. While many people in the Labour opposition outlined the problems that would arise from the increasing fundamentalism of the settlement movement including Gush Emunim, it was not until 1984 that a Jewish terrorist organization known as *The Jewish Underground* was discovered in the West Bank. In 1984, twenty-nine leading activists who were members of Gush Emunim and the Yesha Council were arrested on suspicion of having placed bombs on five Arab buses (Cromer 1988, p. 350). These activists were found guilty of this crime and others including assassination attempts on the Mayors of Nablus, Ramallah and El Bira. They also were indicted on a planned conspiracy to blow up the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount (Friedman 1986).

Scholars have argued that the terrorist actions of *The Jewish Underground* are attributed to a combination of the 'high handed policies of the [*Likud*] government and Gush Emunim' (Cromer 1988, p. 353; Lustick 1987). Gush Emunim members were quick to dispel these activists as 'loners and eccentrics' who were unrepresentative of the settler movement. However, Sprinzak argues that 'most of the members of the Underground did not violate the ideology or the spirit of Gush Emunim; they simply carried its doctrine all the way ad absurdum' (Cromer 1988, p. 351). Gush Emunim's 'Greater Land of Israel' ideology has been argued to be the 'original sin' of this violence because it failed to put a limit or halt any vigilantism committed by its supporters. As a consequence, it manifested into an idealization of violence as a means to promote their political and territorial ambitions.

After this incident, many members of Gush Emunim were unapologetic about *The Jewish Underground's* actions (Friedland & Hecht 1998). Their rhetoric became, even more, radicalized as many saw this as an act of defense against increasing Palestinian nationalism. Initially members of Gush Emunim and the wider settlement community did not wish to harm Palestinians in the territories, but as Gush Emunim supporters pushed for the Judaization of the

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Occupied Territories, the language became more radical. Gush Emunim activists justified their argument of taking the law into their own hands through messianic logic that 'if the state turns against redemption, one must choose redemption over the state' (Taub 2010, p. 1210). The massacre by Baruch Goldstein would exemplify the radicalization of Gush Emunim's rhetoric and demonstrate the influence of Jewish fundamentalism and extremism in Jewish society. Goldstein would enter the Muslim prayer hall of the Patriarchs Cave in Hebron on February 25th, 1994, killing 29 worshippers including men, women and children and wounding many (Paine 1995).

Goldstein was a follower of Meir Kahane and Kahane's fundamentalist and racist interpretation of religious Zionism. At Goldstein's funeral, many religious fundamentalist Jews paid great tribute to Goldstein's actions even extolling that he did not kill enough Arabs in the massacre. Major politicians condemned Goldstein's actions, however, remained silent on the broader issue of Jewish Extremism (Shahak & Mezvinsky 1999, p. 101). Although Gush Emunim was not directly involved in the incident, the movement did not condemn Goldstein's act. Gush Emunim spiritual leaders, openly praised the criminal act, hailing Goldstein as a 'saint who carried out the Lord's will' (Shahak & Mezvinsky 1999, pp. 99-100). Goldstein's act was a symptom of the radicalisation process and the culture of violence that was occurring due to the espousal of the Gush's messianic and fundamentalist ideology.

This 'culture of violence' would reach its precipice with the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by Yigal Amir. Although Amir was not connected to Gush Emunim and did not grow up in a settlement, he was a product of the movements influence on society and its culture of violence that it helped foster. He was trained in the Gush Emunim oriented *Yeshivat Kerem De-Yavneh* and was a student in high Halakhic learning at *Bar Ilan* University (Sprinzak 2001, p. 228). However with the assassination of Rabin, a soul-searching mission was pursued within the Gush Emunim movement. This was only brief as Gush Emunim activists pointed the blame to Amir being 'an eccentric stray weed' who did not represent the larger religious Zionist movement (Zertal & Elder 2007, p. 153).

After the assassination of Rabin, the legitimacy of Gush Emunim and the settler movement would forever be tarnished. Other explanations for political extremism represent terrorist actions as the fringe elements within social movements. Gush Emunim's messianic and ideological puritanism however is different as it allowed Jewish extremism to develop and even legitimized its actions through doctrinal and theological justification (Taub 2010, p. 1210). Sovereignty would win over theology and ideology, and the movement would not gain the same social traction that it once had in the early 1970s and 1980s (Cahan 2014). The Gush did not openly critique this culture of violence, and its messianic rhetoric and lack of political accountability helped foster this culture of violence. The inheritance of Jewish extremism would be one of the most devastating legacies of Gush Emunim on Israeli society that can still be felt today.

Conclusion

Gush Emunim is a complex and diverse organization and its legacy within the Israeli polity, and the greater community is profound. The Gush has managed to be one of the most unique and powerful social movements in Israel and has given birth to the modern settler movement. From its humble origins in 1974 to *Gush Katif* in 2005, there have been many manifestations of the 'Greater Land of Israel' ideology espoused by Gush Emunim. However, this essay has demonstrated the extent that Gush Emunim has influenced and impacted Israeli society. This author believes that Gush Emunim and the ideology that it espouses is an insidious force and dangerous to the social fabric of Israeli society.

Gush Emunim's 'Greater Land of Israel' ideology is exclusionist and unrealistic in a modern political context. Neo-Zionism and the messianic belief system behind Gush Emunim not only jeopardises the peace process because of its maximalist ideas but its lack of compromise means that no political solution to the question of the Occupied Territories can be sought as long as violence continues. Gush Emuinim's ideology inspires an exclusionary sense of Jewishness in an ever-increasing globalized world. The co-option of such an extremist ideology by the secular right in Israel jeopardizes Israel's place in the international system and economy. Its promotion of Neo-Zionism has also put it at odds with an increasing secularization of Israeli society. Gush Emunim's firm hold on education and a lack of oversight means that this radical ideology continues to be heard and accepted which presents a fundamental issue that needs to be addressed and resolved in Israel.

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Moreover, the way that Gush Emunim has compromised the democratic character of Israel due to its vast influence within the state presents a direct challenge to Israeli democracy. Its ability to permeate its ideology from local municipalities and authorities all the way to the halls of the Knesset shows the insidious nature of such a movement. Its ideas of placing *Torah* Law above that of the law of the state demonstrates that Gush Emunim does not wish to work within the framework of a secular national democracy and essentially advocates the belief in a theocracy in Israel. The way that the Gush has influenced and even infiltrated the political system of Israel compromises the state and its legitimacy.

This is exemplified by the way the Gush has acted as a socialization tool within Israeli society. Gush Emunim's ideology has firstly infiltrated the IDF, which is has been the principal instrument for socialization in Israel. The loyalty of the '*Hesder*' soldiers to their Rabbis' over the state jeopardises the foundational basis of the IDF. This has been demonstrated by soldiers not obeying orders during the 2005 Gaza Withdrawal and the removal of settlers from outposts. Ben-Gurion had disbanded the *Lehi* and the *Palmach* to promote loyalty to the state and create a strong bond in civil-military relations so there would not be this conflict (Ben-Dor & Pedahzur 2004). The state would overrule all other authority. However, the rise of religious zealots in the armed forces compromises this agenda.

Finally, Gush Emunim's legacy has created a culture of violence within Israeli society. The lack of accountability and even promotion of Gush Emunim's ideology within the halls of power helped to foster the violence of settlers against Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. The rise of *The Jewish Underground* was a natural progression in this process of extremism. When you have an extra-parliamentary social movement, which influences the state, but its ideology sees itself above it, there is no accountability when extra-legal measures are taken. The fact that Gush Emunim did not condemn the actions of the Jewish Underground only helped the rise of individuals like Amir and Goldstein.

Gush Emunim's lack of critique and legitimation of such actions also demonstrates the danger that this movement causes. It is these continuing fundamentalist ideas that pose a significant threat to the sanctity and structure of the Israeli secular state. The rise of Gush Emunim is part of a larger discussion about the nature of the Jewish state. This essay has argued that its influence and legacy has been so dramatic that it has in fact caused a schism to occur within the very fabric of Israeli society. It would take the assassination of a Prime Minister to understand the real influence of Gush Emunim within Israel. By the time that this event had occurred the fault line had already split the country that remains as ever present in today's Israel.

Individuals such as Amir and Goldstein were by-products of a lack of regulation on an extremist and fundamentalist ideology who only populate a small fraction of the population. This brings not just the question of the Jewish nature of the state but also how much influence this extremist minority has over the majority in the state. Since the Oslo Accords peace process, Gush Emunim's territorial identity has taken a backseat. However, it still exists in the form of ethnic-nationalist rhetoric, which has become more prominent in the political discourse as people query the 'Jewish' character of the state.

Gush Emunim has not existed as a movement as such since 1984, but its ideological legacy lives on in the political and social discourse of Israeli society. The rise of the religious right and the ideology that it espouses within Israeli society poses a bigger threat to Israeli social dynamics and cohesiveness than the Arab-Israeli conflict. Unless this form of extremism can be removed and peace sought in the Occupied Territories, the idea of Israel taking its correct place in the international community will be a long time coming.

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