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**The Temple  
Mount  
Movements and  
the Changing  
Status Quo at  
the Holy  
Esplanade**

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## Sommario

מבוא .....	1
ראשי הפרקים של התזה .....	3
Introduction .....	5
The Status Quo: A Brief Introduction .....	6
The Temple Mount Movements .....	7
Cultural Violence and the Delegitimization of Palestinians' Rights.....	8
Theoretical Framework: The Question of Violence. ....	10
Outline of the thesis.....	12
Research methodology .....	13
First Chapter: What is the Status Quo? How did it Change after the Six-Day War?.....	16
A Brief History of the Holy Esplanade: Why is the Site Important? .....	16
The Status Quo .....	18
The End of the Six-Day War and the Developing of the Israeli Status Quo.....	20
The Chief Rabbinate Ban .....	23
The Mercaz Ha-Rav Yeshiva .....	26
The Rise of Gush Emunim .....	27
The Jewish Underground: Yehuda Etzion and the awakening of Messianism .....	31
1980s-1990s: From the First Intifada to the Oslo Accords .....	35
The Holy Esplanade during the First Intifada .....	37
The First Years of Israeli Status Quo .....	38
Conclusions .....	41
Second Chapter: The Temple Mount Movements.....	43
The Status Quo: Why is it so important?.....	43
The Temple Mount Movements .....	45
The Temple Mount Faithful .....	48
The Temple Institute.....	51
Chai Vekayam .....	55
The Movement for the Establishment of the Temple .....	58
Yehuda Glick and Moshe Feiglin: Temple Mount Activists and Politics.....	60
Moshe Feiglin: from Zo Artzeinu to Zehut .....	60
Feiglin and the Temple Mount .....	63
Yehuda Glick: Human rights and Temple Mount activism.....	64
Conclusions .....	67

Chapter Three: Changes in Israeli Politics and the Rise of the Temple Mount Movements .....	69
The Likud Crisis and the Oslo Accords.....	69
The Temple Mount Movements and the Oslo Accords.....	72
Evangelical Christians and the Temple Mount Movements.....	75
The Evolving Status Quo.....	77
The Last attempt of Peace .....	78
The Second Intifada.....	81
The Temple Mount During the Second Intifada.....	83
The Reopening of the Holy Esplanade to non-Muslims.....	85
The Disengagement of Gaza and the Rising Power of the Temple Mount Movements .....	88
The Loss of Faith in the Gush Emunim’s Ideology.....	89
The Growing Power of Temple Mount Activists-.....	91
President Obama and Israel .....	91
The Building of a Crisis: Increasing Visits on the Site and the Diplomatic Crisis with Jordan .....	93
A New Wave of Violence and a Diplomatic Crisis.....	95
The Knife Intifada .....	100
Conclusions .....	104
Conclusions .....	106
Bibliography .....	110
Online Sources.....	117
Primary Sources.....	119
Websites .....	120

## מבוא

תזה זו נועדה להביא להבנה עמוקה יותר של המשבר הקיים באתר זה, שנשאר מבין הבלתי-יציבים ביותר במזרח התיכון. תקוותי היא שהמחקר להלן יהווה השראה עבור מחקרים נוספים על המצב הפוליטי הנוכחי בישראל, ויספק בסיס להתייחסות נוספת לנושא ולהבנה טובה יותר של האירועים המתפתחים.

המונח "תנועות הר הבית" מגדיר את הקבוצות והארגונים היהודיים, שמטרתם העיקרית היא שינוי הסטטוס קוו במפלס הר הבית. הסטטוס קוו הוא משטר של שליטה באתרים הקדושים המשותפים ליותר מפולחן אחד, שפותח על ידי העות'מאנים בשנת 1852, נשמר והורחב על ידי הבריטים בשנת 1917 ובשנת 1947 על ידי האסיפה הכללית של האו"ם. עד שנת 1947 מפלס הר הבית לא נכלל בסטטוס קוו מכיוון שהיה ברור, הן לעות'מאנים והן לבריטים, כי מדובר באתר מוסלמי בלבד. מאז ניצחון ישראל במלחמת ששת הימים ואיחוד ירושלים תחת שלטון ישראלי, התפתח הסטטוס קוו הישראלי.

תזה זו בוחנת שתי שאלות עיקריות הקשורות בהרחבה: מהן תנועות הר הבית, וכיצד הן מאיימות על הסטטוס קוו במפלס הר הבית? מטרת התזה היא להסביר מדוע הסטטוס קוו כה חשוב במצב השברירי של הסכסוך הישראלי-פלסטיני, וכיצד תנועות הר הבית מצליחות לשנות את נקודת המבט של החברה הישראלית לגבי האתר באמצעות התרבות ביקורי היהודים, אירגוני הרצאות וכנסים והשתתפות בתהליך קבלת ההחלטות הפוליטיות.

החשיבות של נושא שינוי הסטטוס קוו במפלס הר הבית יחסית חדשה. לפני הסכמי אוסלו (1993), תנועות הר הבית היו מיעוט בתוך החברה הישראלית ובתוך

המגזרים הדתיים-לאומיים. קבוצות אלה קמו בעקבות מלחמת ששת הימים, ורבות מהן זכו להכרה רשמית בשנות השמונים. אפילו אז הפופולריות שלהם גברה רק בראשית שנות התשעים עם כישלונה של האידיאולוגיה של גוש אמונים. למעשה, האידיאולוגיה של ארץ ישראל השלמה, כלומר האמונה כי כל ארץ ישראל נועדה לעם היהודי וכי תכניתו של אלוהים הייתה ליישב את כל הארץ המקראית, הוכחה כבלתי מוצלחת. בעשור הראשון של שנות האלפיים, השפעתן וכוחן של תנועות הר הבית גדלו בהתמדה. תומכים חשובים של הר הבית הפכו לחלק ממפלגות מרכזיות בממשלה, כמו הליכוד, וזכו לתמיכה ממגזרים שונים של החברה הישראלית. לפיכך, מהתחלותיהן השוליות והמעוררות, תנועות הר הבית הפכו להיות מרכזיות בפוליטיקה ובחברה בישראל.

בנוסף, מפלס הר הבית זכה לחשיבות לאורך השנים כסמל לאומי ודתי, המרכזי הן ליהודים-ישראלים והן לפלסטינים. זהו המקום היחיד בגדה המערבית, שבו ירדן עדיין ממלאת תפקיד כמגן האתר הקדוש, אחת הנקודות החשובות ביותר בהסכם השלום הירדני-ישראלי שנחתם בשנת 1994. כיום, זה גם המקום היחיד בירושלים בו הפלסטינים נהנים ממידה קטנה של אוטונומיה.

החלטתי להתמקד בנושא זה לתזה היא הכרה בחשיבותם של מפלס הר הבית ותנועות הר הבית בהשפעה על שינויים בפוליטיקה הישראלית. חשוב שנבחן בקפידה כל התפתחויות ושינויים באתר, מכיוון שלכל אירוע במתחם יש השלכות המשתרעות בכל אזור המזרח התיכון. יתרה מזאת, כאמור, תנועות הר הבית החלו להיות בעלות השפעה רבה רק לאחרונה וכוחן העולה הוא התופעה המשקפת שינויים גדולים בפוליטיקה ובחברה הישראלית.

### **ראשי הפרקים של התזה**

בפרק הראשון התזה תעסוק בעיקר בהתפתחות הסטטוס קוו הישראלי והתקופה משנת 1967 ועד סוף המאה העשרים. הפרק יציג את ההיסטוריה של מפלס הר הבית ואת השיבות האתר באמונות היהודית והמוסלמית. שנית, היא תתאר את הסטטוס קוו בצורותיו הקודמות ותתמקד במיוחד בהתפתחות הסטטוס קוו הישראלי לאחר מלחמת ששת הימים ובשאלה מדוע, הן הממשלה והן הרשות הדתית, היו נגד יהודים העולים על ההר. בחלק העוסק בהתפתחות הסטטוס קוו הישראלי, העבודה תתרכז גם באירועים קריטיים, כמו איסור הרבנות הראשית כתוצאה ממלחמת ששת הימים, עמדת מרכז הרב בנוגע לכניסת יהודים לאתר, ועליית גוש אמונים לאחר מלחמת יום הכיפורים (1973). לבסוף, היא תדון בשינויים בפוליטיקה הישראלית בשנות השמונים ובהתפרצות האינתיפאדה הראשונה.

הפרק השני יבחן מדוע הסטטוס קוו כה חשוב וכיצד כל שינוי בו הוא סכנה פוטנציאלית לסדר הפוליטי והאזרחי. הוא יתמקד גם בשאלה מהן תנועות הר הבית וידגיש את המאפיינים של הקבוצות החשובות ביותר, תוך תיאור מטרותיהן ופעילויותיהן העיקריות בחברה הישראלית. לבסוף, הוא יתמקד בשתי הדמויות הפוליטיות המרכזיות שמטרתן העיקרית בסדר היום הפוליטי היא שינוי הסטטוס קוו: משה פייגלין ויהודה גליק.

הפרק השלישי יעסוק במשבר שפגע בליכוד ובפוליטיקה הימנית הישראלית לאחר הסכמי אוסלו ורצח רבין. לאחר מכן, הוא יבחן כיצד תנועות הר הבית קיבלו יותר כוח וסמכות בגלל משבר תנועות ההתנחלויות של הסכמי אוסלו (1993-1995) והתמיכה הגוברת של נוצרים אוונגליסטים. יתרה מזאת, הוא יתרכז באירועים



אקטואליים נוספים, כמו האינתיפאדה השנייה (2000-2005), ההתנתקות מעזה, עליית תנועות הר הבית ותומכיהן והפיכתן לאידיאולוגיה החזקה ביותר בציונות הדתית. החל מהעשור הראשון של שנות האלפיים, ריבוי הביקורים של יהודים באתר ומגבלות הכניסה שהוטלו על פלסטינים בשנים 2013-2014 הביאו למשבר דיפלומטי עם ירדן ולאינתיפאדת הסכינים בשנת 2015. למרות שאלו נפתרו באופן זמני על ידי הסכם שבשתיקה בחסות שר החוץ האמריקני ג'ון קרי, הדבר גרם לנתניהו לאסור על חברי כנסת להיכנס לאתר ולהפסיק את כל הגבלות הכניסה לפלסטינים.

## Introduction

This thesis is intended to add to increased understanding of the crisis long extant at the Holy Esplanade<sup>1</sup>, which remains one of the most volatile in the Middle East. My hope is that this research might serve to inspire further studies on the current political situation in Israel, providing background for further consideration of the topic and a better understanding of unfolding events.

My decision to focus on this topic for this thesis is a recognition of the importance of the Holy Esplanade and the Temple Mount movements in influencing changing Israeli politics. It is of major importance that we carefully observe and study any developments and changes at the site, because any event at the compound has consequences extending throughout the Middle East region. Moreover, as stated, the Temple Mount movements began to be very influential only recently and their ascendant power it is a phenomenon which reflects major changes in Israeli politics and society. For this reason, the work gives also significant emphasis to external factors that helped the success of these movements, such as the growing interest of Evangelical Christians towards the Temple Mount, and the changes in the U.S. attitude towards Israel and the peace process.

The work is developed around two main broadly related questions: what are the Temple Mount movements, and how are they threatening the *status quo* at the Holy Esplanade? The goal is to explain why the *status quo* is so important in the fragile situation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and how the Temple Mount movements are succeeding in changing the perspective of Israeli society over the site, increasing Jewish visits, organizing teaching and conferences and being part of the political decision making process.

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<sup>1</sup> The Holy Esplanade is the politically correct term used by scholars to name the Temple Mount/al-Aqsa compound.

## *The Status Quo: A Brief Introduction*

In 1852, Ottoman Sultan Abdul Majid issued a *firman*, giving to different Christian communities, rights and rules over seven holy sites between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The edict became known as the *status quo*.<sup>2</sup> In 1917, with the beginning of the British mandate in Palestine, the new ruling government kept the Ottoman *status quo* and expanded it, adding to it also non-Christian sites, such as the Western Wall. In both the Ottoman and the British *status quo*, the Holy Esplanade was not mentioned. In fact, it was clear for both the Ottomans and the British, that the site was a Muslim site only.<sup>3</sup>

In 1947, the United Nation General Assembly, when discussing the division of Jerusalem between the future Israeli and Palestinian states, added the al-Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock to the list of the sites under the *status quo*. However, in 1948, with the breakout of the Arab-Israeli war and the Israeli declaration of independence, Jerusalem was divided between east and west and the *status quo* was left out of political and public discourses. In fact, from 1948 until 1967, the Old City remained under Jordanian rule and Jews were not allowed to pray neither at the Western Wall, nor on the Holy Esplanade. The *status quo* remained valid only in the sites of the first Ottoman *status quo*.<sup>4</sup>

With the Israeli victory of the Six-Day war and the unification of Jerusalem, the Israeli government had to decide what to do about the Holy Esplanade. From the beginning, Israeli officials were uncertain to how to deal with the site. On one hand, keeping the *status quo* unchanged would have meant maintaining worship restrictions for Jews, not only at the Holy Esplanade, but also at the Western Wall. On the other hand, Moshe Dayan, Israeli Defense Minister, feared that imposing complete Israeli sovereignty over the site would have caused a major revolt in the Muslim world, which could have led the international community to pressure Israel to withdraw from East-Jerusalem. In conclusion, the Israeli government decided to keep the existing *status quo* at the Holy Esplanade, with Muslim as worshippers and Jews as just visitors, leaving the

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Dumper, "The Background to the Struggle" in *The Politics of Sacred Space- The Old City of Jerusalem in the Middle East Conflict*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. p. 19-39, (Boulder, Colorado, United States of America, 2002): 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Dumper, "The Background to the Struggle", 23.

administration of the compound under the Jordanian *waqf*.<sup>5</sup> Jewish messianism was directed to the Western Wall, the new religious and national symbol. However, not everyone was satisfied with the government's decision to leave the Temple Mount under Muslim rule. A new group started to rise, calling for complete Jewish sovereignty over the Holy Esplanade and the building of the Third Temple.

### *The Temple Mount Movements*

The term "Temple Mount movements" defines those Jewish groups and organizations which have their primary goal a change of the *status quo* at the Holy Esplanade. These groups arose in the aftermath of the Six-Day War, with many of them only becoming officially recognized in the 1980s.<sup>6</sup> However, their popularity grew only in the beginning of the 1990s, with the Oslo Accords (1993) and the failing of the Gush Emunim ideology. In fact, the Greater Israel ideology, the belief that all the land of Israel was for the Jewish people and that it was God's Plan to settle the entire biblical land was proven to be unsuccessful. Today, there are twenty-nine associations registered to the Israeli Registrar of Associations with the Temple Mount as the center of their agenda.<sup>7</sup> While the main shared goal is to change the *status quo*, not all of the Temple Mount movements have the same way of action and degree of religiosity. Some are more religious, such as the Movement for the Establishment of the Temple, founded by Ultra-Orthodox rabbis, while other are more Zionist and "secular", such as the Temple Mount Faithful. Hence, there is a Temple Mount movement for every social group, as for soldiers, women and students.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> M. Dumper, "The Background to the Struggle", 24.

<sup>6</sup> Ir Amim, "What are the Temple Mount Movements and Why Should We Be Worried?", *Ir Amim*, accessed September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019, <http://www.ir-amim.org.il/en/node/2113>

<sup>7</sup> It is the State register for associations and companies for the benefit of the public. Ministry of Justice-Israeli Corporations Authority, "Registrar of Associations", *Ministry of Justice-Israeli Corporations Authority*, accessed May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019,

[https://www.gov.il/en/departments/topics/associations\\_and\\_companies\\_for\\_the\\_benefit\\_of\\_the\\_public](https://www.gov.il/en/departments/topics/associations_and_companies_for_the_benefit_of_the_public)

Rachel Z. Feldman, "Temple Mount Pilgrimage in the Name of Human Rights: The Use of Piety Practice and Liberal Discourse to Carry out Proxy-State Conquest", *Settler Colonial Studies*, 8, n. 4, p. 537-558, (2018): 541-542.

<sup>8</sup> Ir Amim, "What are the Temple Mount Movements and Why Should We Be Worried?", *Ir Amim*, accessed September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019, <http://www.ir-amim.org.il/en/node/2113>

Thus, the heightened importance of the issue of changing the *status quo* at the Holy Esplanade is relatively new. Before the Oslo Accords (1993) the Temple Mount movements were a minority inside Israeli society and the national-religious sectors. With the first decade of the 2000s, their influence and power grew steadily. Temple Mount movements have been able to ride the wave of changes in the Israeli society, understanding and adapting to new political situations, and gaining more and more public support. These movements have played an important role in making the issue of the Temple visible and accessible to Israeli society. Over the years, important Temple Mount advocates became part of central parties in the government, such as Likud, and gained support from different spheres of Israeli society. Especially inside Likud, which in the last ten years has been the predominant Israeli political party, the Temple Mount activists have taken on more important roles within it. At the same time, more political figures, not directly related to Temple movements, also began to support the changing of the *status quo* and to lobby for the Jewish right to pray at the site. Thus, Temple Mount activists are today playing a more decisive role in pressuring the Israeli government to change the *status quo*. From marginal and contested beginnings, the Temple Mount movements grew to become central in Israeli politics and society.

### *Cultural Violence and the Delegitimization of Palestinians' Rights*

One of the reasons for the Temple Mount movements' success is the employ of cultural violence. For Israel and the Temple Mount movements, nationalism and religion are the two most important and targeted spheres of cultural violence. The Israeli government and many civil society movements (such as pro-land movements) have been using cultural violence over the years to delegitimize Palestinian heritage and rights over the West Bank and Jerusalem. In the case of the Temple Mount movements, they have been using education and liberal discourse to discredit Palestinian heritage at the site. Over the years the Israeli government has developed a narrative defining Palestinians as terrorists, portraying them as "Arabs", denying them any national rights and thus linking them to a broader denigrated Arab community. Moreover, historical and religious facts have been molded to support the claim that Jews have more attachment to the site than Muslims,

this claim achieving popular notoriety in Israeli society.<sup>9</sup> This narrative was first used to support the legitimization of the occupation of the West Bank and, until 2005, Gaza. Now the same narrative has been employed in a more liberal way by the Temple Mount movements, promoting freedom of worship for “everyone” to the site, but at the same time describing Palestinian rights of attachment to it as less important than Jewish connections.<sup>10</sup>

This delegitimization of Palestinians rights over the years conducted by government and pro-land movements, together with the new liberal and appealing narrative of the Temple Mount movements, have brought on an increase of Jewish visits at the site and in more government concessions to their actions and needs. More restrictions have been put on Palestinians, such as entry restrictions based on age and gender during periods of tension. During Jewish high holidays, Jews are increasingly permitted to enter the site without restrictions. Over this same time, Palestinian Muslims have been increasingly denied their rights of access and worship when, according to the *status quo*, they should have the priority over religious Jews who have the historical status of being just visitors at the site.<sup>11</sup> These restrictions levelled at Palestinians bring about escalations of violence, which are then used by Temple Mount movements and the government as supporting claims that Palestinians are terrorists and only want the destruction of all the Jews and the State of Israel. They succeeded in hiding structural violence behind their discourse of supporting human rights and freedom of worship, and in direct violence as in allowing Jews to visit the site and trying to pray there, thus provoking the escalation of Palestinian protests.<sup>12</sup> These usually result in violent clashes with the Israeli police and results in the arrest of many Palestinians. Every act of direct violence perpetrated by Palestinians is described as a terrorist attack against the Jewish people and as threat to Israeli democracy and existence. Therefore, the argument proceeds that it is actually Palestinians who are preventing a peaceful co-existence of both religions at the site.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that Palestinians do the same delegitimization with Jews, claiming that they have no rights to the land. However, Palestinians are not in a position of power.

<sup>10</sup> Aneta Brockhill & Karl Cordell, “The Violence of Culture: The Legitimation of the Israeli Occupation of Palestine”, *Third World Quarterly*, 40, n.5, p. 981-998, (2019): 984-990.

<sup>11</sup> Aviv Tatarsky, “Collective Restrictions on the Entry of Muslims Worshippers to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif: A Violation of the Spirit of the Status Quo and a Key Factor in the Outbreak of Violence in Jerusalem”, *Ir Amim*, p. 1-12, (2015): 4-7.

<sup>12</sup> A. Brockhill & K. Cordell, “The Violence of Culture”, 982-990.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

Palestinians, increasingly deprived of their rights over the years, and denied their houses and freedom, see in the Holy Esplanade the last Palestinian stronghold, the only place in Jerusalem where they still have some power and control. Over the years, it became a strong national symbol, embodying the last hope of the possibility of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as capital.

Israel has used cultural practices, clothed Israeli national and religious beliefs, to legitimize structural and direct violence against Palestinian political, economic and religious rights both in the West Bank and Jerusalem. This government narrative that targets Palestinians, together with Temple Mount messages and activities, has increased the public debate on the *status quo* and the support of Temple Mount movements.

### *Theoretical Framework: The Question of Violence*

Another important point to understand is the nature of violence used by these movements that allows them to become so successful. The Temple Mount movements engage mostly in non-violent actions, such as trying to pray at the site, conducting marches and conferences, and refusing any kind of physical violence believed detrimental to the pursuit of their goals. It is important to note that after the killing of Rabin, both the Israeli Left and Right underwent a very serious crisis.<sup>14</sup> The Left lost its possibility of reaching a peace agreement, while the Right, especially settlements groups and organizations, such as the Yesha Council<sup>15</sup>, lost much supportive consensus because the assassination was seen as such a violent event. The Temple Mount movements understood that physical violence was not the right way of action in pursuit of their goals and they began instead to focus on education and other activities, such as tourism, and Temple Mount

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<sup>14</sup> Dov Waxman, "From Conflict to Consensus: Cultural Conflict and The Israeli Debate Over Territorial Withdrawal", *Israel Studies*, 13, n. 2, (2008): 73-96;

Oded Haklai, "Linking Ideas and Opportunities in Contentious Politics: the Israeli Nonparliamentary Opposition to the Peace Process", *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 36, n. 4, (2003):791-812.

<sup>15</sup> An umbrella organization born in the 1980s, after the failure of Gush Emunim, representing the settlers of Judea, Samaria and Gaza. The goal of the Yesha Council was to be the mediator between the settlers and the State.

conferences. Moreover, these movements are legal and enjoy, financial and political government support.

However, it would be incorrect to view the Temple Mount movements as completely peaceful. Although they may not engage in more common acts of physical violence, they do employ more subtle, but no less destructive types of violence. Thus, the Temple Mount movements do not fit the description of violent movements as per historical and theoretical literature, movements usually associated with physical violence, and in the majority of the cases in opposition to the ruling government.<sup>16</sup> This work, using the concept of cultural violence, proves that even groups which do not engage in physical violence can embrace other subtle forms of violence, that especially in Western democracy, are proven to be more efficient and successful. Doing so, this thesis aims to include the Temple Mount movements in the existing literature on violent social movements, showing how, behind their liberal narrative and their non-violent actions, is hiding their real goal, the delegitimization of Palestinian's rights over the Holy Esplanade and the land of Israel.<sup>17</sup>

Further study of the nature of violence as a political tool reveals it can be divided into two main divisions: the Minimalist Conception of Violence (MCV) that defines violence as the use of physical force; and the Comprehensive Conception of Violence (CCV) that introduces an understanding of violence in terms of violations of civil rights.<sup>18</sup> The scholar Johan Galtung (1990), added a third concept, Cultural Violence (CV):

“By ‘cultural violence’ we mean those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence--exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics)--that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Donatella della Porta, “Political Violence and Social Movements- An Introduction” in *Clandestine Political Violence*, Cambridge University Press, (New York, 2013): 1-31.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

A. Brockhill & K. Cordell, “The Violence of Culture”, 982-990.

<sup>18</sup> Vittorio Bufacchi, “Two Concepts of Violence”, *Political Studies Review*, 3, p. 193-204, (2005): 198-199.

<sup>19</sup> Johan Galtung, “Cultural Violence”, *Journal of Peace Research*, 27, n.3, p. 291-305, (1990): 291.



According to Galtung, “direct” violence refers to physical and visible violence, while “structural” violence is a more hidden and subtle way of engaging in violence and it is usually embedded in politics, economy and social structure. Cultural violence enables a legitimization of both structural and direct violence and uses aspects of culture as a means to legitimize violent decisions or actions. This renders “reality opaque”, often transforming a repressive and violent act to seemingly non-violent or directly hiding it.<sup>20</sup> Delegitimization, alienation and marginalization of the “other” are the different forms in which cultural violence expresses itself, often in an invisible way.<sup>21</sup> Governments use CV to legitimize actions against, for example, a different ethnic group, religion, heritage (as in the war against Islam to protect the Judeo-Christian Western heritage).

### *Outline of the thesis*

In the first chapter, the thesis will deal mostly with the development of the Israeli *status quo* and the period from 1967 to the end of the 1900s. The chapter will introduce the history of the Holy Esplanade and the importance of the site in Jewish and Muslim beliefs. Secondly, it will describe the *status quo* in its previous forms mostly focusing on the development of the Israeli *status quo* after the Six-Day War and why both the government and the religious authority were against Jews ascending to the Mount. While talking about the development of the Israeli *status quo*, the work will also concentrate on critical events, such as the Chief Rabbinate Ban as a consequence of the Six Day-War, the Mercaz Ha-Rav position regarding Jewish entrance to the site, and the rise of Gush Emunim after the Yom Kippur War (1973). Lastly, it will deal with changes in Israeli politics in the 1980s and the outbreak of the First Intifada.

The second chapter will discuss why the *status quo* is so important and how every change to it is potentially dangerous to both political and civil order. It will also focus on what the Temple Mount movements are and, will then underline the characteristics of the most important groups, describing their main goals and activities inside Israeli society. Lastly,

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<sup>20</sup> Johan Galtung, “Cultural Violence”, 294.

<sup>21</sup> A. Brockhill & K. Cordell, “The Violence of Culture”, 984.

it will focus on the two most important political figures who have as the main goal in their political agenda to change the *status quo*: Moshe Feiglin and Yehuda Glick.

The third chapter will deal with the crisis that hit the Likud and right-wing Israeli politics after the Oslo Accords and the murder of Rabin. Then, it will focus on how the Temple Mount movements gained more power and authority because of the crisis of the settlement movements of the Oslo Accords (1993-1995) and the increasing support of Evangelical Christians. Moreover, it will concentrate on more current events, such as the Second Intifada (2000- 2005), the disengagement from Gaza, and the rise of the Temple Mount movements and their advocates becoming the most powerful ideology inside religious-Zionism. Beginning in the first decade of the 2000s, increasing visits at the site by Jews and restrictions of entry imposed on Palestinians in 2013-2014 resulted in a diplomatic crisis with Jordan and the Knife Intifada in 2015. Although resolved temporarily by a tacit agreement sponsored by the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, this caused Netanyahu to ban Knesset members from the site and ceased any restrictions of entrance by Palestinians.

### *Research methodology*

For my research methodology, I mainly have used academic journals and books from prominent scholars in the fields of Israeli and Middle Eastern studies, along with reports by civil society associations such as Ir Amim and the International Crisis Group. Moreover, I frequently explored the Israeli government website, read Israeli newspapers<sup>22</sup>, and scrolled through Social Network pages of different Temple Mount movements.

My research grounds on existing literature and reports, used to support my personal observations and insights gathered during my year of study at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. There, I had the chance to study the topic from a closer perspective. I often visited the compound, both alone and as well with tour guides. In such occasions, I had

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<sup>22</sup> Such as Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, The Times of Israel, and Makor Rishon.

the opportunity to talk with religious Jews ascending to the site, and *waqf* officials. Unfortunately, my time in Jerusalem was too short to gather enough interviews and insights. Hopefully, this work will be a starting point for a future and more developed research. Literature from Motti Inbari<sup>23</sup>, Hillel Cohen<sup>24</sup>, Micheal Dumper<sup>25</sup>, and Yoel Cohen<sup>26</sup> is important for filling sections related to the historical background and the description of the movements. The work of Yitzhak Reiter, is particularly relevant for understanding the different stages and changes of the *status quo* after the Six-Day war.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the works of Ami Pedahzur and Arie Perlinger<sup>28</sup>, Tomer Persico<sup>29</sup>, Oded Haklai<sup>30</sup>, and Dov Waxman<sup>31</sup>, are crucial for describing the changes in Israeli politics and society. Finally, all the important reports on the topic by the International Crisis Group<sup>32</sup> and Ir Amim<sup>33</sup>. These reports have been also used to show the other face of Israeli civil

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<sup>23</sup> Motti Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount: Who will Build the Third Temple?*, (Albany: State University of New York, 2009);

M. Inbari, "Religious Zionism and the Temple Mount Dilemma-Key Trends", *Israel Studies*, 12, n.2, (2009): 29-47.

<sup>24</sup> Hillel Cohen, "The Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa in Zionist and Palestinian National Consciousness", *Israel Studies Review*, 11, n. ½, (2017): 1-19.

Professor Hillel Cohen was particularly important for my research. In fact, after following his course "Jerusalem: between Zionism and the Palestinian National Movement", during the Spring Semester of 2018 at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, I have decided to develop this topic for my MA thesis.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Dumper, *The Politics of Sacred Space- the Old City of Jerusalem in the Middle East Conflict*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2002).

<sup>26</sup> Yoel Cohen, "The Political Role of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate in the Temple Mount Question", *The Jewish Political Studies Review*, 11, n. ½, (1999): 101-126.

<sup>27</sup> Yitzhak Reiter, *The Eroding Status Quo- Power Struggles on the Temple Mount*, (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research and Multieducator, INC., 2017).

<sup>28</sup> Ami Pedahzur and Arie Perlinger, "The Camp David Accords- The Struggle Over the Promised Land", in *Jewish Terrorism in Israel*, p. 38-69, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Tomer Persico, "The End Point of Zionism", *Israel Studies Review*, 32, n. 1, (2017): 104-122.

<sup>30</sup> O. Haklai, "Linking Ideas and Opportunities in Contentious Politics", 791-812;

Oded Haklai, "Religious—Nationalist Mobilization and State Penetration", *Comparative Political Studies*, 40, n. 6, (2007): 713-739.

<sup>31</sup> D. Waxman, "From Conflict to Consensus", 73-96.

<sup>32</sup> International Crisis Group, "Leap of Faith: Israel's National Religious and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", *Middle East Report*, n. 147, (2013): 5-48;

ICG, "The Status Quo at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade", *Crisis Group Middle East Report* n. 158, (2015): 1-31;

ICG, "How to Preserve the Fragile Calm at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade", *Crisis Group Middle East Briefing*, n. 48, (2016): 1-20.

<sup>33</sup> A. Tatarsky, "Collective Restrictions on the Entry of Muslims Worshippers to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif", 1-12;

A. Tatarsky, "Increasing Cooperation Between the Temple Movements & Israeli Police", *Ir Amim*, (2017): 1-7;

Yizhar Be'er, "Dangerous Liaison- The Dynamics of the Rise of the Temple Movements and their Implications", *Ir Amim-Keshev*, trad. Shoshana London Sappir, (2013): 5-79.

society, which is working toward a peaceful future resolution and co-existence in Israel and the Temple Mount.

As a final caveat, one important discussion missing from this study is the role of Palestinian organizations and Palestinian terrorism at the site which, while noted, is not developed commensurately vis-à-vis the Israeli role in the area. Moreover, another topic worthy of future attention is the Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox strong opposition toward Jewish ascension to the site and, consequently, to the Temple Mount movements.<sup>34</sup> These are topics worthy of future discussion and examination.

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<sup>34</sup> One very relevant group against Jewish ascension to the site is Ateret Cohanim, probably today the most powerful and active settler organization in Jerusalem.

## **First Chapter: What is the Status Quo? How did it Change after the Six-Day War?**

### *A Brief History of the Holy Esplanade: Why is the Site Important?*

The Holy Esplanade in Jerusalem, known as Temple Mount for Jews and al-Aqsa compound for Muslims, is at the center of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and as such is one of the most contentious spots in the entire Middle East. For Jews it is the place where the Foundation Stone lays, and where, according to the Babylonian Talmud (Yoma 54:2), the world was created. Accordingly, all of humanity has a link with the Holy City and the compound.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, as Maimonides noted, on that same Stone, Abraham, the first Prophet, intended to sacrifice his son Isaac, to prove his loyalty and obedience to God. According to Jewish tradition, Abraham's descendants are the true inheritors and guardians of the site.<sup>36</sup> Since the compound was so important, Solomon, the son of the Great King David, constructed the First Temple there circa 967 BCE. It was destroyed by the Babylonians some four hundred years later in 586 BCE and Jews were then expelled from the region and held in captivity in Babylonia.<sup>37</sup>

Jews returned to Jerusalem in 516 BCE, seventy years after the destruction of the First Temple. With their return to the Holy Land, the Second Temple was built. Around 19 BCE, Herod the Great expanded the Second Temple, and transformed it to a magnificent structure which earned him fame as the greatest builder in Jewish history. The Second Temple was then destroyed by the army of the Roman Titus in 70 CE during the first Jewish-Roman war. The Romans did not destroy the Western Wall of the Temple Mount, which then became the most sacred site for Judaism, because of its proximity to the Temple Mount and the Holy of Holies of the Temple.<sup>38</sup> At the end of the first Jewish-Roman war, the Jewish people fled the region for foreign lands thus marking in history the beginnings of the Diaspora.

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<sup>35</sup> H. Cohen, "The Temple Mount/al-Aqsa", 1-2.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>37</sup> M. Inbari, "Introduction", in *Jewish Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount: Who will Build the Third Temple?*, 1-17, (Albany: State University of New York 2009): 2-3.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

Jews did not regain control over the Holy City until nearly two thousand years later in 1948, with the creation of the State of Israel thus giving Jews rule over West Jerusalem.<sup>39</sup> However, the control of the Holy Esplanade did not come until 1967, after the Israeli victory in the Six-Day War. From the 13<sup>th</sup> century until 1967, almost no Jews entered the compound, beside for some rare exceptions. The reasons for this were two-fold: first, the rabbinical ban. Since the destruction of the Second Temple and the Diaspora, Jews were under a state of impurity. Moreover, the right position of the Holy of Holies was unknown, and since only Kohanim could access that area, after a strict procedure of purification and only during specific times, rabbis prohibited Jews from entering the site. Secondly during the period of Muslim rule, Jews were not permitted to ascend and pray on the Temple Mount.<sup>40</sup>

For Muslims, Jerusalem is the city of the First Prophet and thus the second of the world's most ancient prayer sites. Jerusalem was the first city where Muslims directed their prayers, before turning to Mecca and where Muhammad started his miraculously Night Journey to Heaven, where he met and talked with the prophets that came before him and discussed with God the directions for conduct of Muslim prayers.<sup>41</sup> Thus, according to Muslim belief, Islam is the religion with "its feet in Arabia, its head in Jerusalem and its soul in heaven".<sup>42</sup> For these reasons, Jerusalem is forever bound to Mecca and to Islam.

In 640 CE, Caliph Umar Ibn al-Khattab conquered Jerusalem, which then came under Muslim authority. Under rule of this Muslim Caliphate, Jews could return to the city. Then for the first time, all the three Abrahamic faiths (Christianity now established throughout the Mediterranean) were together in the Holy City. Umar decided to clean up the Mount where the Temple stood, which became a dumb during Roman and Byzantine rulings, and there he built a temporary mosque.<sup>43</sup>

Around fifty years later, in 691-2 CE, Caliph 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Marwan started the construction of the octagonal building named Dome of the Rock, which still today stands

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<sup>39</sup> East Jerusalem will be under Jordanian rule until 1967.

<sup>40</sup> M. Inbari, "Introduction", 3-4.

<sup>41</sup> H. Cohen, "The Temple Mount/al-Aqsa", 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>43</sup> M. Inbari, "Introduction", 3-5.

on the top of the Foundation Stone.<sup>44</sup> In 715 CE, the Umayyads built al-Masjid al-Aqsa, the Furthest Mosque, connecting the name with the Night Journey of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>45</sup>

### *The Status Quo*

With the Ottoman Empire, a regime of governing the holy sites shared by more than one cult was developed. In 1852, Ottoman sultan Abdul Majid issued the first *firman* regarding religious places. The edict gave rules and rights to the various religious communities living in the Holy Land, demarcating areas of worship and establishing a schedule for prayers.<sup>46</sup> The Ottomans developed these rules mostly for establishing rights of Christian denominations in seven sites between Jerusalem and Bethlehem.<sup>47</sup> These edicts became known as the *status quo*. When the British Mandate started in Palestine in 1917 after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in WWI, the British added to the Ottoman *status quo* non-Christian religious sites, as the Western Wall.<sup>48</sup> In both cases, the *status quo* was influenced by the needs of the most powerful communities, while undermining the rights of the weak ones.<sup>49</sup> In fact, Jews were banned from praying at the Holy Esplanade both under the Ottomans and the British, even if the site was very important to them. Additionally, Jews could pray at the Western Wall, but only if following strict rules.<sup>50</sup> It is important to note that in both understandings of the *status quo*, the Holy Esplanade was not mentioned. In fact, it was *de facto* understood for both the Ottomans and the British that the site was a Muslim site only.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> H. Cohen, “The Temple Mount/al-Aqsa”, 3

<sup>45</sup> M. Inbari, “Introduction”, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Chad F. Emmet, “The Status Quo Solution for Jerusalem”, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 26, no. 2, p. 1-40, (1997): 20.

<sup>47</sup> The sites of the first *status quo* were: The Church of the Holy Sepulcher and its dependencies; the Convent of Dayr al-Sultan; the Sanctuary of the Ascension; the Tomb of the Virgin Mary; the Church of Nativity; the Milk Grotto; the Shepherd’s field. M. Dumper, “The Background to the Struggle”, 20.

<sup>48</sup> The new sites were the Western Wall; Rachel’s Tomb; the Cenacle on Mount Zion.

M. Dumper, “The Background to the Struggle”, 20.

<sup>49</sup> *Ivi*, 20-21.

<sup>50</sup> Y. Reiter, “‘Status-quo’ as an Expression of the Post-1967 Agreements” in *The Eroding Status-Quo-Power Struggles on the Temple Mount*, (Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research and Multieducator, INC., 2017): 19.

<sup>51</sup> C. F. Emmet, “The Status Quo Solution for Jerusalem”, 20.

In 1947, with the adoption of Resolution 181 by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Jerusalem was declared a *corpus separatum*, and the partition of territories between the future states of Palestine and Israel was defined. The Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque were thus added to the list of the *status quo*.<sup>52</sup> With the breakout of the Arab-Israeli war after Israel declared independence in 1948, and the subsequent division of Jerusalem between East and West, the *status quo* was left out of political and public discourse. In fact, from 1948 until 1967, the Old City of Jerusalem was under Jordanian rule. Jews were not allowed to pray neither on the Holy Esplanade, nor at the Western Wall. The al-Aqsa compound remained under the Jerusalem *waqf*, controlled by Jordan, which still controls it today. During these years the *status quo* remained a fact only in those areas of the first Ottoman *status quo*.<sup>53</sup> But informally, the *status quo* became the *modus operandi* for many religious sites guaranteeing rights of access to holy places and thus maintaining civil order in the region.<sup>54</sup>

Until the end of the Six-Day War, the idea of ascending to the Temple Mount and building the Third Temple was little considered in Israeli society. In fact, Israelis were more fixated on continuing building the newborn State of Israel, and messianism and religion were left aside from consideration. Only a small and marginal group of religious Jews kept to their dream of the construction of the Third Temple.<sup>55</sup> However, with the surprising victory of Israel in only six days over its neighbor adversaries, and the unification of Jerusalem under Israeli rule, messianism arose in Israeli society. Both the government and the Chief Rabbinate had to discuss and decide what to do with the Temple Mount.

In the aftermath of the Six-Day War, the Israeli *status quo* was developed.

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<sup>52</sup> UN list: Dome of the Rock; al Aqsa Mosque; Mosque of the Ascension; Tomb of David; Church of St. Anne; Church of St. James; Church of St. Mark; House of Caiaphas; Pool of Bethesda; Tomb of Absalom; Bath of Rabbi Ishmael; Pool of Siloam; Cemetery of Mount Olives; Tomb of Zachariah.

M. Dumper, "The Background to the Struggle", 21.

<sup>53</sup> *Ivi*, 23.

<sup>54</sup> M. Dumper, "The Background to the Struggle", 23.

<sup>55</sup> H. Cohen, "The Temple Mount/al-Aqsa", 13.



## *The End of the Six-Day War and the Developing of the Israeli Status Quo*

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 1967, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) defeated the Jordanian army and took over the Old City of Jerusalem and the Holy Esplanade. Just three days later, the war ended, and Israeli rule was imposed over all Jerusalem. For the first time since the Hasmonean era, Jews again had control over united Jerusalem and the Holy Esplanade.<sup>56</sup>

In the aftermath of the war, Israel instituted an administration over Jerusalem and its holy sites. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 1967, the Knesset pronounced the “Protection of Holy Places Law 5727”. However, the law did not mention the role or function of the *status quo* in any of its previous forms (Ottoman, British and UN), and additionally did not even state the criteria for which a holy site was defined.<sup>57</sup> The law stated:

1. The Holy Places shall be protected from desecration and any other violation and from anything likely to violate the freedom of access of the members of the different religions to the places sacred to them or their feelings regard to those places.
2. A) Whosoever desecrates or otherwise violates a Holy Place shall be liable to imprisonment for a term of seven years.  
B) Whosoever does anything likely to violate the freedom of access of the members of the different religions to the places sacred to them or their feelings with regard to those places shall be liable to imprisonment for a term of five years.
3. This Law shall add to, and not derogate from any other law.
4. The Minister of Religious Affairs is charged with the implementation of this Law and he may, after consultation with, or upon the proposal of, representatives of the religions concerned and with the consent of the Minister of Justice make regulations as to any matter relation to such implementation.
5. This Law shall come into force on the date of its adoption by the Knesset.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> M. Dumper, “The Background to the Struggle”, 24.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>58</sup> Economic, Cooperation Foundation, “The Israeli Palestinian Conflict: an Interactive Database”, accessed 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2019, [https://ecf.org.il/media\\_items/460](https://ecf.org.il/media_items/460).

Freedom of access and worship was a central point in the law. However, Israeli government from the beginning, showed uncertainty regarding what to do about the Holy Esplanade. Israel could not keep to the same condition as in the past since it would have meant an imposition of worship restrictions upon Jews not only on the Holy Esplanade, but also at the Western Wall. Since Israeli society was very sensitive to the issue, the government thus had to define urgently its position on the topic.<sup>59</sup>

Some important events occurred right after the end of the war, which showed the government uncertainty regarding how to deal with the site, making the first days after the war very chaotic. On the same day of the Israeli conquest over the Holy Esplanade, an Israeli flag was immediately raised over the Dome of the Rock. The IDF Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren ascended to the site and prayed there with a group of soldiers.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, Zera Warhafting, the Minister of Religious Affairs at the time, stated that the Temple Mount now belonged to the Jewish people. On the other hand, he also added that the government had no intention of replacing the mosque with a synagogue. In the following days, the Moroccan quarter was destroyed, and the Western Wall plaza was built in its place.<sup>61</sup> Discussion of the future of the site was now on the Israeli political agenda and it was fundamentally important to plan the next moves. Moshe Dayan, Israel Defense Minister, was worried about Israel establishing its presence over the compound. He believed that establishing complete Israeli control over the site would cause not only anger and revolt in the Muslim world, but also it would lead the international community to pressure Israel to withdraw from East Jerusalem.<sup>62</sup> It is important to underline that Israel was less than twenty years old at the time. It was a country struggling with its own existence and security and seeking for international support and approval. It was impossible for 1967 Israel to do what the modern state is doing and to impose itself internationally as today.

As the law stated, the responsibility for the site was given to the Minister of Religious Affairs, a position held by Zerach Warhaftig. However, since Warhaftig was connected to the National Religious Party (NRP), which at the time started to express more

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<sup>59</sup> M. Dumper, "The Background to the Struggle", 24.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*.

hawkish<sup>63</sup> positions regarding the territories and the peace agreement with the Palestinians, Moshe Dayan, whom was less interested in religion, was assigned to replace him. Dayan was put in charge of the site in 1968.<sup>64</sup> By this move, the Israeli government fully recognized the *waqf* responsibility for managing the site, including entrances, and Israel assumed the duties for the site security. After only two weeks from the end of the war, Moshe Dayan issued to reestablish Muslim prayers at the site, making clear that Israel had no intention of taking it over.<sup>65</sup> In addition, non-Muslims were banned from praying at the compound while they could visit as visitors during certain hours. The rules and procedures of the first Israeli *status quo* will be discussed in more details later.

Moshe Dayan had to face another problem. He knew that messianic forces were becoming stronger inside Israeli society and he believed he had to counter their influence. For this reason, great effort was undertaken to develop the Western Wall as the new religious and secular symbol of Israel. Jews believe that the Western Wall is holy because it is the closest part to the Holy of Holiness of the Temple. Additionally, it is a sacred place where Jews prayed in the past. The Western Wall plaza was developed on the site of the demolished Moroccan quarter, and it became the place it is today where both religious and national ceremonies are held.<sup>66</sup>

Many reasons made the decision of the government to discourage Jewish presence at the site acceptable to Israelis. One of them was the unity of Israeli society in those years. From 1948 to the 1970s, Israeli government was characterized by a dominant party, the Labor, which held majority in the Knesset, and it was powerful and respected enough to be able to shape and influence the goals of Israeli civil society. Religious parties were very weak at the time and they did not own any bargain power. The NRP, the religious-

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<sup>63</sup> In those years, the younger faction of the movement, which then will be fundamental for Gush Emunim, started to become more influential.

<sup>64</sup> M. Dumper, "The Background to the Struggle", 25.

<sup>65</sup> Y. Reiter, "'Status-quo'", 20.

<sup>66</sup> Kobi Cohen-Hattab, Doron Bar, "From Wailing to Rebirth: The Development of the Western Wall as an Israeli National Symbol After the Six-Day War", *Contemporary Jewry- Springer*, p. 1-20, (2018): 3-4.

Zionist party, was part of the government coalitions, having around 10-12 seats (on 120), and being very collaborative.<sup>67</sup>

Civil society groups existed, but they were controlled and sponsored by the government, doing the best for the leading party, Labor.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, in the aftermath of the war, thanks to the cheaper labor brought by Palestinian freedom of movement and the increase immigration from Soviet Union and Western countries, Israel experienced a rapid economic growth. The increase welfare brought the government to focus more on economic reforms, and less on religion.<sup>69</sup>

### *The Chief Rabbinate Ban*

Another factor which helped Moshe Dayan to counter the forces of messianism was the Chief Rabbinate Ban. As previously noted, Jews were not allowed to pray on the site, not only because the authorities governing the site did not allow them, but also because of uncertainty of the position of the Holy of Holies. Jewish law deems entering the Temple while being impure to be punishable with *karet*, the divine punishment, the “excision” or banishment from the people of Israel.<sup>70</sup>

The victory of the Six-Day War also put religious authorities at the crossroads of a new reality. For the first time after the destruction of the site by the Romans in 70 CE, Jews now exercised sovereignty over the Temple Mount area. The leadership of the Orthodox Jewish religious community, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, found itself in a difficult position and facing a religious dilemma. Two paths were possible after 1967: the first to

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<sup>67</sup> Asher Cohen, “Changes in the Orthodox Camp and Their Influence on the Deepening Religious-Secular Schism at the Outset of the Twenty-first Century”, in *Critical Issues in Israeli Society*, edited by Alan Dowty, p. 71-94, (Leslie Stein, Series Editor, Westport, 2004): 73.

<sup>68</sup> Yael Yishai, “Civil Society in Transition: Interest Politics in Israel”, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 555, n. Israel in Transition, p. 147-162, (1998): 149.

<sup>69</sup> *Ivi*, 150.

<sup>70</sup> Sarina Chen, "Visiting the Temple Mount: Taboo or Mitzvah", *Modern Judaism*, 34, n. 1, p. 27-41, (2013): 28.

bring back the sacrifice and the Temple worship; the second to add the capture of the Temple to the already established Jewish religious canon in the State of Israel.<sup>71</sup>

Three schools of thought developed inside the Chief Rabbinate by those studying this dilemma. The first one was guided by Rabbi Shlomo Goren, Chief Rabbi of the IDF at the time. In 1967, he was ready to build the Third Temple. During the second day of the war, he told the Central Regional Commander General Uzi Narkiss to place 100kg of dynamite under the Dome of the Rock. Goren was recorded many times saying that there was the need to destroy the Dome of the Rock in order to replace it with the Third Temple.<sup>72</sup> He based his view on the ruling of Maimonides, the supremely respected Rabbi of the XI century who posed three conditions for establishing the Third Temple: the return of Jewish monarchy, the reinstatement of the Sanhedrin and the end of Amalek.<sup>73</sup> Rabbi Goren believed that with the end of the war, all these points were satisfied. The Jewish State of Israel was representing the new Jewish Monarchy, the Chief Rabbinate the Sanhedrin and the Israeli Chief Rabbinate legal system as the end of Amalek.<sup>74</sup>

The second school of developing thought held that the Messiah would build the Temple and Jews could only wait and pray for his coming. Chief Rabbis Avraham Isaac Kook, Isser Unterman, Itzhak Nissim and 'Ovadia Yosef were among the proponents of this view.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, because of Jewish impurity and the unknown position of the Holy of Holiness, it was safer practice to prohibit Jewish entrance in the Temple area.

The third school of thought believed that the Temple will be built by man and not by the Messiah. Additionally, it was more permissive allowing entrance of Jews to certain limited areas of the Holy Esplanade. The basis of this view was that the Holy Esplanade now occupied a far larger area than the area of the Second Temple. In fact, the Second Temple buildings occupied only about 15% of the current area. Therefore, they believed Jews should be allowed to pray where the Second Temple did not stand even if they are now in a state of impurity.<sup>76</sup> Chief Rabbi Eliahu, one of the followers of this view,

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<sup>71</sup> Y. Cohen, "The Political Role of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate", 102.

<sup>72</sup> *Ivi*, 102-103.

<sup>73</sup> Y. Cohen, "The Political Role of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate", 102-103.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>76</sup> Y. Cohen, "The Political Role of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate", 105.

proposed the building of a synagogue on the edge of the Holy Esplanade area, with no exit allowing entry to the prohibited parts. Rabbi Goren later joined this school of thought, fully supporting the idea of Rabbi Eliahu. However, the actual area where the Temple was standing was disputed and there was no consensus between the rabbis regarding which areas were permitted entry and which not. Finally, most of the rabbis adhering to this school of thought concluded that allowing Jews to the Temple Mount would have been a too dangerous move.<sup>77</sup>

Inside the Chief Rabbinate Council, the second school was predominant. Consequently, the Chief Rabbis of Israel at the time, Uterman and Nissim, decided to ban Jewish entrance to the site. This decision was also taken because of strong political pressure. In fact, both Moshe Dayan and Warhaftig pressured the Chief Rabbinate Council to make one opinion more valuable than the others. Rabbi Goren was not satisfied with the decision of the Chief Rabbinate.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, he started to study the site with the Army Engineering Corps in order to identify the prohibited areas. He also proposed his personal *status quo*: putting the Holy Esplanade under the control of the Chief Rabbinate and banning both Jews and Muslims from being allowed to pray there. The ban would have allowed the Chief Rabbinate further time to study the site and to identify the areas were Jews could pray. The Rabbi was so sure about the need for these studies that he established his office on the Temple Mount and organized a one-day seminar for reservists of the military rabbinate. The seminar was followed by a visit to the Temple Mount. On Tisha B'av<sup>79</sup>, he brought a group of his followers on the Mount with a set of Torah Scrolls and an Ark. There, he started his *Minha* service. After the service, he announced his willing to hold a prayer on Yom Kippur. However, the intervention of Moshe Dayan and the Chief of General Staff at the time, Yitzhak Rabin, stopped the Rabbi's plan.<sup>80</sup> When Goren was appointed Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi in 1972, it was already too late to change the *status quo*. Additionally, his Sephardi counterparts, Rabbi 'Ovadia Yosef, was completely against the ascending of Jews to the Temple. Rabbi 'Ovadia was a very respectful figure in the rabbinical circles and he was very popular

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<sup>77</sup> Y. Cohen, "The Political Role of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate", 105.

<sup>78</sup> *Ivi*, 107-108.

<sup>79</sup> The Jewish holy day of mourning and commemorating the destruction of the First and Second Temple.

<sup>80</sup> Y. Cohen, "The Political Role of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate", 108.

among ultra-Orthodox Jews, and Sephardi traditional Jews, which in those years, were seeking for religious and political representation. Rabbi ‘Ovadia became a very respected Chief Rabbi, which made Rabbi Goren’s attempt to change the *status quo* impossible.<sup>81</sup>

With the government support of the decision of the Chief Rabbinate, the Holy Esplanade remained under *waqf* control. Messianism was redirected to the Western Wall and the Temple Mount movements were still too small and weak to be given the attention they hoped for.<sup>82</sup>

### *The Mercaz Ha-Rav Yeshiva*

Another reason why the first years of the *status quo* worked was the position of the Mercaz Ha-Rav Yeshiva in Jerusalem. The yeshiva was founded based on the teachings of Rabbi Yizhak Hacoen Kook, spiritual father of religious Zionism. He fully believed that re-establishing the Temple was a key goal of Zionism. In fact, even if Zionism was born as a secular movement, he was certain it was only temporary before religion and true Judaism would prevail over secularism. The redemption of the Jewish people would come after the re-establishment of the Jewish kingdom and the renewal of Temple rites.<sup>83</sup> In 1921, serving the purpose of redemption, the Rabbi founded the Torat Cohanim yeshiva in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City. The yeshiva was instituted in order to be ready for the time of redemption and building of the Third Temple. Its purpose was to study the Talmudic order of Kodshim, that is how to worship properly in the Temple. The school was the place where the future Levites and priests of the Third Temple were to receive their education.<sup>84</sup>

Even though Rabbi Kook believed in the importance of educating the future Levites and priests of the State of Israel, and that the Third Temple was going to be built shortly, his messianism stopped at the gate of the Temple Mount. In fact, according to Rabbi Kook’s

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<sup>81</sup> Nissim Leon, “Rabbi ‘Ovadia Yosef, the Shas Party, and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process” *The Middle East Journal*, 69, n.3, p. 379-395, (2015): 379-386.

<sup>82</sup> Y. Cohen, “The Political Role of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate”, 108.

<sup>83</sup> M. Inbari, “Religious Zionism and the Temple Mount Dilemma”, 33.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*.

view, Jews would be allowed to enter the site only when Gentiles recognized Jewish ownership over the Temple Mount. The preparation of priests and the establishing of the yeshiva were ways to be ready for the time of redemption. But at the same time Rabbi Kook believed the Temple Mount was too sacred, issuing many warnings to his students against entering the compound.<sup>85</sup>

The yeshiva became the pillar of religious Zionist education for generations, and many young religious Zionists studied there. After the Six-Day War, fervent messianism took over the younger members of the yeshiva. The dominant thought inside the yeshiva was the one of Rabbi Zvi Yehudah Hacoen Kook, son of the founder. For him the victory was God's plan for the people of Israel. However, as his father, he stated that the sanctity of the Temple was too important, and Jews should not be allowed even to put a finger in the cavities of the Western Wall.<sup>86</sup> He agreed with and supported Jewish control over the site, but the State of Israel had not yet attained the adequate spiritual level to allow prayer at the Holy Esplanade. For this reason, Rabbi Kook, the son, openly criticized Rabbi Goren and fully supported the decision of the Chief Rabbinate, being one of the first to sign the banning order.<sup>87</sup> The yeshiva, with the founding of Gush Emunim, became the center of the religious-Zionism circles and its rabbis will serve as spiritual and political leaders of the members of the movement.

With both the Chief Rabbinate and Mercaz ha-Rav bans, the idea of ascending the Temple Mount almost faded among Israeli society.

### *The Rise of Gush Emunim*

The Gush Emunim<sup>88</sup> movement and ideology developed right after the Six-Day war, when Hanna Porat called for the resettling of Kfar Etzion, a Jewish settlement lost by Israel during the 1948 war and regained in 1967. Porat's call to resettle the land and to be

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<sup>85</sup> M. Inbari, "Religious Zionism and the Temple Mount Dilemma", 34.

<sup>86</sup> *Ivi*, 35-36.

<sup>87</sup> M. Inbari, "Religious Zionism and the Temple Mount Dilemma", 35-36.

<sup>88</sup> "The Block of Faithful".



again, as the first Zionists, pioneers of the Land of Israel, brought in 1968, Rabbi Levinger to refuse to leave his hotel in Hebron, and later on, the establishment of Kyriat Arba just outside the Arab city. The bases of the major pro-land movement were laid.<sup>89</sup>

Right after the Six-Day war, Israeli government focused more on security than on settling the Biblical land. In 1968, Israeli Minister of Labor and former General, Yigal Allon, developed the Allon Plan, which aspired to limit the established of the Israeli settlements to the Jordan Valley and the area around Jerusalem; while the rest of the land would have served as a bargain with Palestinians for a future peace agreement. The Plan was felt essential for Israel's security and international approval.<sup>90</sup> Not everyone in Israel agreed with such policies and an opposition movement started to rise. *HaTnuah L'Eretz Yisrael HaShlema* (the Whole Land of Israel Movement) arose calling for the annexation of all the Biblical Land. The components of the movement came from all the shades of religious and political orientation. However, as the time passed, the Orthodox components grew conspicuously inside the movement, making especially the leftist and more secular supporters to dissociate from it. At the beginning, the movement was seeking for a strong political representation and thought that the NRP would have been a good option. However, the party was too weak to oppose to the Allon Plan, and the movement was almost left alone in fighting for its cause.<sup>91</sup>

Particularly important for the future development of Gush Emunim was the Youth Faction of the NRP, which formed in the beginning of the 1970s and was very close to the members of Whole Land of Israel Movement. The younger faction pushed the elders of the NRP to not take part in any coalition government with the Labor and to promote the building of new settlements in the Land of Israel. However, the elders of the party were cautious and the NRP continued to be in coalition with the Labor government, choice that led the party to lose much political support.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Lilly Weissbrod, "Gush Emunim Ideology: From Religious Doctrine to Political Action", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 18, n.3, p. 265-275, (1982): 266.

<sup>90</sup> David Newman, "From Hitnachalut to Hitnatkut: The Impact of Gush Emunim and the Settlement Movement on Israeli Politics and Society", *Israel Studies*, 10, no. 3, p. 192-224, (2005):194.

<sup>91</sup> Kevin A. Abruch, "Traditionalizing Israeli Nationalism: The Development of Gush Emunim", *Political Psychology*, 1, no. 1, p. 47-57, (1979): 48-49.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*.

The Yom Kippur war in October 1973 was the turning point for the pro-land advocates. The major loss of soldiers and the surprise attack demoralized the Israeli society, that lost trust in the Labor party and in Prime Minister Golda Meir, who appeared unprepared for the war. The Land of Israel Movement, especially its younger components, started to make harsher opposition in the concession of the Territories and to lose trust in the NRP leadership, which seemed to fail to support the Likud government against Labor. The Youth Faction started to dissociate from the NRP and expressed their idea to form a movement above parties. To be “above” politics, they had to link to “higher” values: Religion, Messianism and Redemption of the Jewish people.<sup>93</sup> On February 7, 1974, during the Tu Bi’shvat festival, Hanna Porat and Moshe Leviger, together with many members of the Youth Faction of the NRP, founded Gush Emunim in the settlement of Kfar Etzion.<sup>94</sup>

With the first Likud government (1977), support for the pro-land movements grew conspicuously. When Begin first got appointed as Prime Minister (1977-1983), he showed in many ways his support for Gush Emunim and the settlement’s agenda. While forming the new government, Begin asked Rabbi Kook Junior for his blessing. He decided to visit Rabbi Kook Junior and not the Chief Rabbi of Israel, the highest religious figure in the country, making clear that he fully supported and agreed with the Gush Emunim cause. The behavior of the new Prime Minister was rapidly associated with the supporting of the newborn settlement movement. In 1977, a picture of Begin and General Ariel Sharon (Minister of Agriculture at the time and long-standing supporter of settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) circulated in every Israeli newspaper.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, in 1981, when Begin visited Elon More, one of the Gush Emunim settlements in the West Bank, he publicly promised that many more of Elon More will be built. The Israeli Prime Minister seemed prone for an actual annexation of the West Bank.<sup>96</sup> In fact, the plan of the Likud government was to settle 750,000 Jews all over the Judea, Samaria

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<sup>93</sup> K. A. Abruch, “Traditionalizing Israeli Nationalism”, 48-49.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>95</sup> L. Weissbord, “Gush Emunim Ideology”, 265-266.

<sup>96</sup> “I, Menachem, the son of Ze’ev and Hasia Begin, do solemnly swear that as long as I serve the nation as Prime Minister, we will not leave any part of Judea, Samaria, [or] the Gaza Strip.” *The Jerusalem Post*, 10th May 1981.

Jonathan Rynhold and Dov Waxman, “Ideological Change and Israel’s Disengagement from Gaza”, *Political Science Quarterly*, 123, no.1, p. 11-37, (2008): 15.

and the Gaza Strip, in order to make a *de facto* statement and to avoid any future territorial compromise.<sup>97</sup>

Because Gush Emunim based his ideology on the teaching of Rabbi Kook and the Mercaz Ha-Rav yeshiva, the Temple Mount was of course important, but the movement did not push much for changes in the *status quo*. It called for full Israeli sovereignty over the site, but at the same time, the rabbis of the movements discouraged Jews to ascend to the Temple Mount. Gush Emunim became the center of religious-Zionism, and probably the movement's opposition to Jewish ascension on the Temple Mount, made the issue of the *status quo* and the Temple Mount movements very marginal.

In 1979, the first serious crisis hit Gush Emunim. With the mediation of the United States President Jimmy Carter, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin signed the Camp David Accords, which brought the cease-fire and the dismantlement of Sinai's settlements. The withdraw from Sinai challenged the Rabbi Kook and Gush Emunim idea of future redemption. While some members kept supporting the concept of sanctity of the State of Israel and in settling the land as the only way to bring redemption, from the outskirts of the movement, a more extremist sector arose, replacing the teaching of Kook's with their own idea of redemption, the building of the Third Temple.<sup>98</sup> Rabbi Yisrael Ariel, the founder of the Temple Institute, was one of the around one hundred people which, after the withdraw from Sinai, left Gush Emunim for the higher cause of the Temple Mount.<sup>99</sup>

In the 1980s Gush Emunim ceased to exist, since members of the group started to follow different paths and different ideologies. However, the movement ideology did not fade, and gained popularity in different political parties, as well as inside Israeli civil society. In fact, settlement construction did not stop, on the contrary, it kept growing and developing.

One of the products of Gush Emunim was in 1980 the Yesha Council, an umbrella organization of the municipality of the West Bank and Gaza strip with the goal of being

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<sup>97</sup> J. Rynhold and D. Waxman, "Ideological Change and Israel's Disengagement from Gaza", 15.

<sup>98</sup> ICG, "Leap of Faith", 7.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibidem*.

the mediator between the settlers and the State. During the 1980s-90s, the Yesha Council became the most powerful and important group representing the settlers and pressuring the Israeli government.<sup>100</sup>

### *The Jewish Underground: Yehuda Etzion and the awakening of Messianism*

As previously discussed, ascending to the Temple Mount was not part of Gush Emunim's ideology and agenda. In fact, they strictly followed the teachings of their spiritual leader, Rabbi Kook, and the position of the Mercaz Ha-Rav yeshiva. However, not everyone in the group aligned with this thinking. After the crisis that hit the movement in 1979, right after the Camp David Accords and the signing of the Peace Agreement between Israel and Egypt, some members of Gush Emunim met in Hebron to form the Jewish Underground, a Jewish terrorist group which believed in more tangible action to achieve redemption than the one followed by Gush Emunim.<sup>101</sup>

Yehuda Etzion was one of the leaders of the group. Etzion fully believed that redemption was possible only with Jewish complete control over the Temple Mount, the most sacred place for Judaism. The Jewish Underground thus felt it had to act. The members thought that taking over the site by Israel would have led to two main consequences: first, a major spiritual change inside Israeli society, a change that would have overturned the Chief Rabbinate decision as well as the government's. Second, with a major terrorist attack on the Holy Esplanade, the withdraw from Sinai would have been prevented. For these main

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<sup>100</sup> ICG, "Leap of Faith", 9.

<sup>101</sup> It is very common for social movements to turn to violence when they believe they are failing in achieving their goals. Usually, when a movement starts to fragmentize and to feel powerless, it turns to greater and more violent actions, as the Jewish Underground did when the protests of Gush Emunim seemed to be unsuccessful.

Donatella della Porta & Marco Diani, "Social Changes and Social Movements", in *Social Movements- an Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Blackwell Publishing (Oxford, 2006): 35;  
A. Pedahzur and A. Perliger, "The Camp David Accords", 48.

reasons, the goal of the Jewish Underground founding clique<sup>102</sup> was to destroy the al-Aqsa mosque.<sup>103</sup>

In 1978, the members started to meet and to develop the terrorist plan and Etzion started the recruitment of new adherents. In 1980, although all the members of the group (old and new) believed in the importance of the mission, many were still skeptical regarding its implementation. Etzion was the only one who remained faithful and focused on this goal.<sup>104</sup> Consequently, disagreements arose between members of the group. While Menachem Livni believed that the main goal and benefit of an attack would be the prevention of the evacuation from Sinai, Etzion had a deeper messianic goal, and the prevention of the withdrawal from the Sinai settlements came second. Etzion believed that the attack would have brought redemption and the establishment of the Kingdom of Israel. However, besides these divergences, the group kept planning the attack. The members studied the architecture of the compound and gathered important intelligence information, while also collecting caches of explosive materials. When everything was nearing readiness, internal tensions broke out again inside the founding clique.<sup>105</sup>

In 1982, some members of the group reached the decision to not carry out the attack. Etzion was completely against the decision, however Livni and the other members understood that the destruction of the Mosque would have caused severe political damage to Israel. Livni believed an attack would have rallied the international community against Israel, and he feared the possibility of losing the territories in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as a result. Moreover, he believed, Arab countries would revolt against Israel and the country would be dangerously isolated by the international community, probably forcing Israel to build a replacement mosque, which is against Jewish law. More to the point, the group did not have any rabbinical support in the lines of the most important Gush Emunim rabbis. When group members sought to find rabbinical approval for their planned attack, they did not find any important rabbi, but just more extremist ones, such

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<sup>102</sup> The founders of Jewish Underground were Yehuda Etzion, Menachem Livni, Yeshua Ben-Shushan and Dan Be'eri. All of them were members of Gush Emunim and residing in settlements in the Occupied Territories.

A. Pedahzur and A. Perliger, "The Camp David Accords", 46-48.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>104</sup> A. Pedahzur and A. Perliger, "The Camp David Accords", 49-50.

<sup>105</sup> *Ivi*, 49-59.

as Rabbi Yisrael Ariel. Destruction of the mosque was against the beliefs of all the prominent rabbis inside Gush Emunim and the religious Zionist community.<sup>106</sup> One unknown rabbi answered thusly to Livni:

“The children of Israel were cautioned against three things: They were not to revolt against the nations of the world, and they were not to enter the Temple Mount, and they were not force the coming of the Messiah”<sup>107</sup>

Additionally, Rabbi Shlomo Avinar, one of the Gush Emunim spiritual leaders, openly condemned the actions of the group, since he fully believed they would harm Israel’s sovereignty over the occupied territories. Even if the rabbis close to the Jewish Underground gave their blessing, the fact that prominent rabbis condemned them caused some of the founders of the group, such as Livni, to abandon the plan.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, Etzion did not give up and decided instead to try to find support from famous rabbis no longer alive. He was animated by true messianism and he saw himself as the harbinger of potentially the most revolutionary event in Jewish present history. He wanted to completely transform Jewish and Israeli society and to cause them to rebel against the present situation. His goal was to awaken the Jewish world and make them demand and work for the beginning of the promised Jewish Kingdom.<sup>109</sup> For this reason, even if Livni and other members abandoned his plan, Etzion and his followers kept working on it.

When this remaining group was defining the last details of the plot, they were also planning another terrorist attack: the explosion of five tourist busses in East Jerusalem. On that occasion, in 1984, Shin Bet security succeeded in arresting the members of the group and thereby prevented the attack.<sup>110</sup> This heretofore unknown Jewish terrorist group overnight became a focus of Israeli public attention and discussion. Moreover, it was only after the arrest of the members that Shin Bet discovered the real main plan of the group,

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<sup>106</sup> A. Pedahzur and A. Perliger, “The Camp David Accords”, 57-59.

<sup>107</sup> This passage is taken by the Tractate Ketubot in the Babylonian Talmud.

A. Pedahzur and A. Perliger, “The Camp David Accords”, 59.

<sup>108</sup> *Ivi*, 55-60.

<sup>109</sup> Y. Be’er, “Dangerous Liaison”, 26.

<sup>110</sup> Allison Kaplan Sommer, “How a Group of Jewish Terrorists Ended Up in Israel’s Halls of Power”, *Haaretz*, July 5<sup>th</sup> 2018, [https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium.MAGAZINE-how-a-group-of-jewish-terrorists-ended-up-in-israel-s-halls-of-power-1.6244028](https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium/MAGAZINE-how-a-group-of-jewish-terrorists-ended-up-in-israel-s-halls-of-power-1.6244028)

the destruction of the mosque and the killing of *waqf* officials.<sup>111</sup> Before unveil of the attempt terrorist attack, *waqf* officials had tolerated single or small groups of Jewish worshippers at the site; but after this, both the police and the *waqf* became more cautious and less tolerant of them.

After the Shin Bet discovered the operation, mainstream Israeli society turned against the group, resulting in its members starting to doubt their ability to bring the People of Israel to achieve redemption. Etzion then understood that society was not ready for his “revolution”, and that he and his fellow group members had acted too early. While in prison, he wrote several articles regarding his ideas of activism, stating:

“We must build a new force that grows very slowly, moving its educational and social activity into a new leadership. Of course, I cannot predict whether the Dome of the Rock will be removed from the Mount while the new body is developing or after it actually leads the people, but the clear fact is that the Mount will be purified with certainty”<sup>112</sup>

Etzion was right, Israeli society at the time was not ready to embrace his message. People with the same thoughts of the leader of the Jewish Underground were still marginalized by Israeli society. Moreover, a terrorist attack at the mosque and in the city of Jerusalem was too extreme, especially because of the Western and liberal direction taken by Israel in the 1980s.

The ideas of Etzion did not fade but were taken and transformed by several groups and religious and political activists.<sup>113</sup> Today, Yehuda Etzion, now living in Ofra, a settlement in the West Bank on many occasions and interviews, has claimed that he has no remorse for what he did. However, in an interview with the New York Times in 2015, he stated again that the time was not right and the project for redemption must start from “the base of the pyramid”.<sup>114</sup> His “new” vision, of abandoning violence for a more educational

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<sup>111</sup> Allison Kaplan Sommer, “How a Group of Jewish Terrorists Ended Up in Israel’s Halls of Power”, *Haaretz*, July 5<sup>th</sup> 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium/MAGAZINE-how-a-group-of-jewish-terrorists-ended-up-in-israel-s-halls-of-power-1.6244028>

<sup>112</sup> Comments by Yehuda Etzion and Menachem Livni. Haggai Segal, “Dear Brothers: The West Bank Jewish Underground”, *Bet Shamai Pubns*, (Jerusalem, 1988): 277-278.

<sup>113</sup> Ir Amim, “What are the Temple Mount Movement and Why Should We Be Worried?”, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2019, <http://www.ir-amim.org.il/en/node/2113>

<sup>114</sup> Jodi Rudoren and Isabel Kernshner, “Against Extremist Laments Violence Now Used Against Palestinians”, *The New York Times*, 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2015, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2019,

approach is also the approach of more current main Temple Mount movements and has proven successful.

Despite these incidents, the *status quo* remained stable. However, seeds of change were blooming inside Israeli society.

### *1980s-1990s: From the First Intifada to the Oslo Accords*

With the 1980s, Israel political scene changed completely. With the election of 1977, Labor lost for the first time since 1948, giving the power to Menachem Begin, the new Likud Prime Minister, who started his politics of support for Gush Emunim. In addition, 1977 was the first year in which religious party started to play an important role in Israeli politics, becoming more powerful and able to demand more in exchange for their political support. The year 1977 signed the end of the one-party dominant politics, which marked Israeli political history since its establishment.<sup>115</sup>

With the end of Begin's government and the election of Yitzhak Shamir as the new Likud Prime Minister (1983-1984 and 1986 to 1992) the politics regarding the settlers did not change. He was willing to compromise over the Territories which did not include Judea and Samaria, giving Palestinians very limited autonomy. His strategy also included to buy time for the settlements to grow and prepare for a future annexation of the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>116</sup> In 1984, 44,000 Israelis moved to the Judea and Samaria settlements<sup>117</sup> and, by the beginning of the 1990s, the settler population in the West Bank had increased to slightly more than 100,000.<sup>118</sup> Pro-land movements, enjoying full support from Likud, succeeded in making the issue of the developments of settlements central in Israeli politics.

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/22/world/middleeast/aging-extremist-laments-violence-now-used-against-palestinians.html>

<sup>115</sup> Personal notes from the Hebrew University MA course, "Israeli Politics" taught by Gideon Rahat, Autumn Semester, 2017.

<sup>116</sup> J. Rynhold and D. Waxman, "Ideological Change and Israel's Disengagement from Gaza", 16.

<sup>117</sup> Excluding Est Jerusalem settlers. *Ivi*, 15.

<sup>118</sup> O. Haklai, "Religious-Nationalist Mobilization and State Penetration", 724.



In 1982, with the beginning of the first Lebanon War, a new phenomenon appeared in Israel, the rise of pacifist movements. These movements, born to protest against the war, brought a more dovish approach also in the religious-Zionist and settler's circles. The new dovish idea was to promote a Jewish State in the pre-1967 Israeli borders and to prefer the state of Israel to the Biblical Land of Israel. The idea founded support also in the religious left-wing kibbutzim and its political representation in Meimad, the party for a Zionist and democratic Israel (the father of Yehuda Glick was a representative of this party).<sup>119</sup>

With the end of the 1980's, just after two years of the end of the first Lebanon war (1985), the First Intifada started (1987-1993). The First Intifada is the name of the first Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. With the outbreak of the Intifada, violence erupted throughout the country. The international community, that before did not pay much attention to Israeli actions in the West Bank and Gaza, started to acknowledge the occupation. In fact, many foreign civil society groups and governments called for the end of the Israeli oppression towards the Palestinians. Strong of international support, Israeli peace movements became more prominent, and Israeli society started to find itself divided on the issue of the Territories. Two different ideologies now were facing each other: the pro-land and right-wing Greater Israel ideology, against the left-wing Land for Peace.<sup>120</sup>

The year 1988 signed many important events. For the first time in Israeli history, both the Labor and Likud needed the support of religious parties to form a government coalition. During the elections, the religious parties obtained in total 18 seats in the Knesset. It was the first election of Shas, the ultra-Orthodox Sephardi party of Rabbi 'Ovadia Yosef, and the rise of Meimad, the left-wing religious-Zionist party. Moreover, the same years, the United States opened a dialogue with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), after the PLO declared Palestinian independence and recognized Israeli existence. The decision of President Regan to start diplomatic talks with the PLO shocked Israel, afraid

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<sup>119</sup> ICG, "Leap of Faith", 9.

<sup>120</sup> J. Rynhold and D. Waxman, "Ideological Change and Israel's Disengagement from Gaza", 15-21.

of losing its strongest ally. In fact, tension arose between the two historical allies on the issue of settlements, making Likud lose support.<sup>121</sup>

Israeli society was more divided than ever. Likud won the 1988 election, but it was clear that the Lebanon war and the First Intifada brought a large support towards a possible peaceful resolution with Palestinians. At the 1992's election, Labor, with Yitzhak Rabin as candidate for Prime Minister, won with 44 seats<sup>122</sup> and a year later, 1993, the Oslo Accords started.

In those years of changes and uncertainty inside Israeli politics, the Temple Mount movements were paving their way toward a more prominent role inside Israeli society. With the 1980s, they started to register as associations and, with the beginning of the Oslo Accords, they began to gain more visibility and power. The Oslo Accords and the gaining power of the Temple Mount movements will be discussed in the Third Chapter.

### *The Holy Esplanade during the First Intifada*

With riots and violence spread all over the country, of course, Jerusalem and the Holy Esplanade had an important role in these violent events. In 1990, twenty Palestinians were killed and one hundred fifty wounded by Israeli police in what is known as the "Al-Aqsa massacre" by Palestinians, and "Temple Mount Riots" by common Israeli view. The riots began when Palestinians started throwing stones at Jewish worshippers praying at the Western Wall after spreading rumors that some Temple Mount activists wanted to march on the Holy Esplanade.<sup>123</sup> Even if the free entrance of Muslims to the site was central in the *status quo*, during the First Intifada, at the peak times of violence, Israeli police began

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<sup>121</sup> Robert O. Freedman, "Religion, Politics, and the Israeli Elections of 1988", *Middle East Journal*, 43, n. 3, p. 406-422, (1989): 406.

<sup>122</sup> The Israel Democracy Institute, "About the 1992 Elections", access 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2019, <https://en.idi.org.il/israeli-elections-and-parties/elections/1992/>

<sup>123</sup> The march was stopped by the Israeli police. ICG, "The Status of the Status Quo", 6-7.

to stop young Muslims from entering the site. However, compared to later periods, the Muslim ban was still comparatively infrequent.<sup>124</sup>

With the end of the First Intifada and the beginning of the Oslo process, Israeli society was more divided than ever regarding its politics and its relationship with the Palestinians. The Holy Esplanade and the *status quo*, which were two very marginal topics until now, started to appear more in religious-Zionist discourses. The relatively calm situation at the good dialogue between the *waqf* and Israeli authorities regarding Holy Esplanade was coming to an end. The *status quo* was transforming.

### *The First Years of Israeli Status Quo*

From 1967 to the beginning of the 1990s, the *status quo* at the Holy Esplanade worked without any major incidents. In fact, Temple Mount movements and activism were on the rise, but were still too weak, and neither Israeli society nor the Israeli government were supportive of its aims. Therefore, most members of these groups preferred to remain subdued, choosing instead to concentrate on building a more solid base with stronger connections and affiliations. For a period of thirty years the three parties involved (Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority) came to a tacit agreement, the modern *status quo*.

Neither Jordan nor the PA signed a peace agreement with Israel at the conclusion of hostilities in 1967 (Jordan would sign it in 1994). Nevertheless, all the different parties worked together to maintain stability at the site. Israel recognized the role of the *waqf* in managing the compound, with monitoring done, from time to time, by the Israel Antiquities authorities. The Israeli police oversaw security and helped the *waqf* in the management of the entrance of non-Muslims to the area. Routine meetings were organized among the sides, where they discussed logistic problems and administration of the site. The meetings were held among the Israeli police, the *waqf* and representatives of

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<sup>124</sup> ICG, “The Status of the Status Quo”, 6-7.

the Jerusalem Municipality, with agreements communicated to governmental officials of Israel and Jordan.<sup>125</sup>

Oversight of Muslim activities (prayers, teachings, collecting entry fees, tourism, education, maintenance work) was left to the *waqf*. The Jerusalem *waqf* was under the control of Jordan, however some of the employees were also loyal to the PA. Regarding access to the site, Muslims could enter the Holy Esplanade without restrictions until the First Intifada. In fact, the *waqf* was dealing with access through the Muslim entrance, with the support of the Israeli police in case of security problems, which arose mostly among non-Muslims and sometimes with Palestinians from the Occupied Territories.<sup>126</sup> At some specific events the police collected the identification cards of everyone going inside to pray. Muslims interpreted this to be a method for Israel to exercise control over the site; regardless, a crisis never occurred because of it.<sup>127</sup>

Access was more complicated in the case of non-Muslim visitors, especially Jews. As previously noted, only small numbers of Jews wanted to ascend to the site at the time. Into the 1980s, Temple Mount activists and organizations were still concentrating on establishing support for the bases of their activities. The small interest of Jews to ascend the Temple Mount made the situation easier to manage.<sup>128</sup>

The *status quo* arrangements were just a continuation of the terms that the Jordanians had managed during the years from 1950 to 1967. Non-Muslims visitors were allowed entrance in the mornings on Sundays through Thursdays between Muslim prayers. The Israeli government made a small adjustment to this schedule, adding an extra hour in the afternoon.<sup>129</sup> The *waqf* was also collecting fees for entering the compound, and in the beginning, Israelis were paying just half of the entrance fee. However, collecting a fee was against the Israeli law of Protection of the Holy Sites, which affirmed freedom of access to every Holy Site. Therefore, Israel confiscated the key to the entrance of the Moroccan gate and allowed Jews to enter from there without paying. The two parties

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<sup>125</sup> Y. Reiter, "Modus Vivendi, Tacit Understandings: 1967-1996", in *The Eroding Status-Quo-Power Struggles on the Temple Mount*, Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, (Jerusalem, 2017): 29.

<sup>126</sup> *Ivi*, 29-31.

<sup>127</sup> *Ivi*, 31.

<sup>128</sup> ICG, "The Status of the Status Quo at Jerusalem Holy Esplanade", 5.

<sup>129</sup> Y. Reiter, "Modus Vivendi, Tacit Understandings: 1967-1996", 32-35.

engaged in dialogue about it and decided that the *waqf* could collect fees only for entrance to the Dome of the Rock, the Mosque and the Museum, but not for the compound in general. Nevertheless, it was clear from these arrangements that Jews could visit the compound, but not pray there.<sup>130</sup>

When the parties were meeting to decide organizational and administrative agreements, visiting hours were a priority, but no Jewish praying schedule was discussed or fixed. Thus, freedom of worship under the Protection Law was balanced against the interests of peace and public order. The Israeli ambassador to the United Nations confirmed that the Israeli government kept Jewish worshippers from praying at the site to maintain peace in Jerusalem and to prevent any clashes between religious communities.<sup>131</sup> Although Jewish prayers were technically prohibited, the *waqf* still permitted small groups of Jews to pray there silently until the 1980s.

The *status quo* was not a rigid and fixed agreement, however, in the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Jordanian views, the rules decided in those years were defying the permanent *status quo*. This divergence of opinions between the parties involved, especially Israel and Jordan, would cause major problems in the 2000s, which they will be discussed in the Third Chapter.

The first major challenge attack to the *status quo* was in 1969, when an Australian Christian evangelist tried to set fire to the Dome of the Rock. Another dangerous episode occurred in 1976, when Judge Ruth Or ruled in favor of the Betar youth movement which met and prayed at the compound, and by this action caused a Muslim riot. Judge Or ruled that Jews should be allowed to pray at the site, proclaiming freedom of access does not have any real meaning if it does not include freedom of worship.<sup>132</sup> Muslims responded to this judicial ruling with written and physical protests. Then the Israeli police promised to the *waqf* that Jews would not be allowed to pray at the site, but even after this ruling, Jewish individuals wishing to pray quietly were still tolerated by the *waqf*. Despite these two episodes, the 1970s was a period of productive collaboration between the parties

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<sup>130</sup> Y. Reiter, "Modus Vivendi, Tacit Understandings: 1967-1996", 32-35.

<sup>131</sup> Ivi, 32-37.

<sup>132</sup> Ivi, 35-36

involved.<sup>133</sup> Notice that nothing in these arrangements was clear or strictly defined. Both the Knesset and judges ruled that Jews had the right to pray at the Temple Mount. However, the Israeli police did not allow prayers by Jews to happen. These laws and rulings are what the Temple Mount Movements used and still use to affirm their rights to the site.

### *Conclusions*

At the end of the Six-Day War, the problem of how to administer the Holy Esplanade became preeminent. The *status quo* implemented by Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority, was never a formal and written agreement with strictly defined rules. It was rather a continuation of the previous *modus vivendi* established before by the Ottomans and maintained by the British, to preserve peace and public order between the different religious communities. The Israeli government made some adjustment to the previous *status quo*, but nothing major changed. In fact, instituting any major changes at that time would have been risky for Israel, probably leading to riots and related problems with both the Arab and international community.

Because it was never a formal agreement, the rules of the *status quo* remained unclear. In 1967 the Israeli Knesset passed the Protection of Holy Places law, which granted freedom of entrance and worship at all the holy sites. However, it did not specify what the law meant for holy sites. Additionally, the government agreed to ban Jewish prayers at the Holy Esplanade; thus, technically, the Israeli government was going against its own law at the site. Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan thought that stability was more important than religion at the time. For this reason, to overcome rising messianism inside Israeli society, the government re-directed attention toward the Western Wall, making it the new religious and national symbol of the state.

The government's position of banning Jewish prayer at the site was supported by the two most important religious organizations in the Jewish Orthodox world: the Chief

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<sup>133</sup> Y. Reiter, "Modus Vivendi, Tacit Understandings: 1967-1996", 35-36.

Rabbinate of Israel and the Mercaz Ha-Rav yeshiva. Thanks to both governmental and religious opposition to Jews ascending the Temple Mount, the *status quo* and the cooperation between the three parties involved worked for almost thirty years.

However, with the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the *status quo* was transforming.

## Second Chapter: The Temple Mount Movements

### *The Status Quo: Why is it so important?*

The *status quo* is fundamental for maintaining peace and stability, not only in Jerusalem, but throughout the Middle East. Therefore, changing or even promoting any change, can be a very delicate issue. When the *status quo* is not respected or it is challenged, riots and violence usually break out in Jerusalem and in the Occupied Territories. For example, in 2000 a visit to the Temple Mount of Ariel Sharon, Israeli Prime Minister at the time, brought about the uprising of the Second Intifada. Sharon claimed that it was a Jewish right to visit the Temple Mount.<sup>134</sup> Other episodes of violence happened alongside diplomatic problems and during diplomatic talks with Jordan, in the ensuing years 2014, and 2015.

The *status quo* is one of the most important points of the Israeli-Jordanian peace agreement of 1994, when Israel assured the Hashemite Kingdom complete control over the Holy Esplanade, reaffirming its status as a Muslim only site. In political terms, control over the Holy Esplanade would be an important development for Israel, effectively representing the complete control over Jerusalem and an official defeat of Israel's enemies. However, leaving control of the Holy Esplanade to Jordan is almost fundamental to Israel foreign policy in the region. Additionally, for Palestinians it is the only place in Jerusalem where they have some autonomy and it became over the years and the many wars lost and peace processes, the only symbol of hope for a new Palestinian State.

Since the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, a new type of civil group appeared on the scene aiming to change the *status quo* and becoming more prominent inside Israeli society: The Temple Mount movements. The goals of these movements are varied, ranging from fighting for the Jewish right to pray at the Temple Mount, to the destruction of the mosque and the establishment of the Third Temple. Nevertheless, all

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<sup>134</sup> Suzanne Goldenberg, "Rioting as Sharon visits Islam holy sites", *The Guardian*, September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2000, accessed May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/sep/29/israel>



the Temple Mount movements demand a change in the *status quo* and the complete Jewish sovereignty over the site.

While in the beginning these groups were small and radical, with time they became influential in the Israeli political process. Indeed, since the Yom Kippur War and the consequently peace agreement with Egypt in 1979 to the Oslo process and the Gaza withdrawal in 2005, religious-Zionists started to be worried that the government would have given away to the Arabs not only the territories of the Greater Israel Ideology, as it did with Sinai and the Gaza Strip and planned to do with the West Bank during the Oslo Process, but also Jerusalem and the Holy Esplanade. With the fear of losing the Holy City, the issue of the Jewish sovereignty and the changing of the *status quo* on the compound arose, giving more legitimacy to the Temple Mount movements in the years to come. In fact, even if their ideologies started even before or right after the Six-Day war, those movements became “official” or semi-official only during the 1980’s, with the failure of Gush Emunim.

Additionally, since the outbreak of the Second Intifada until the present day, Israel has been governed by right-wing governments, with the coalitions headed by the parties (in chronological order) Likud-Kadima-Kadima-Likud<sup>135</sup>, leading towards a more hawkish politics in regard of the peace agreement with Palestinians and an increase development of the settlements in the West Bank. Consequently, the Temple Mount became an even more prominent issue in Israeli politics, not only as a religious symbol in itself, but also as a symbolic representation of the Jewish State of Israel.

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<sup>135</sup> Ariel Sharon (2001-2006); Ehud Olmert (2006-2009); Benjamin Netanyahu (2009-). If we do not count the two years of Ehud Barak (1999-2001), a right government is guiding Israel from 1996, when Benjamin Netanyahu became, for his first term, Prime Minister. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “The Prime Ministers of Israel”, 2013, accessed May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019, [https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/aboutisrael/state/personalities/pages/the%20prime%20ministers%20of%20the%20s tate%20of%20israel.aspx](https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/aboutisrael/state/personalities/pages/the%20prime%20ministers%20of%20the%20state%20of%20israel.aspx)

## *The Temple Mount Movements*

The Temple Mount movement is common terminology used to define several Jewish groups whose have as a pursuit in their agenda the changing of the *status quo* at the Holy Esplanade. It comprehends different types of movements designed for every different social groups, for example for university students and for women. Many of them work under the Temple Institute, which is today probably the biggest and most famous in Israel and abroad of the Temple Mount movements.<sup>136</sup> Today there are twenty-nine associations registered to the Israeli Regstral of Associations with the Temple Mount as the center of their agenda.<sup>137</sup>

The different groups have also diverse goals and courses of action: some just promote Temple studies, education and cultural activities; others openly claim for Jewish right to pray at the site; and then there are the more extremist ones which demand the destruction of the mosque and the construction of the Temple right away. However, all of them share the same goal of Jewish sovereignty over the site and the need to change the *status quo*.<sup>138</sup>

The Temple Mount movements are driven by nationalism, religion, and messianism, all connected under the romantic banner of the construction of the new Jewish Nation. The degree of messianism and religiosity changes with each group. Of course, Judaism plays an important and fundamental role in all Temple Mount movements. However, some activists see the building of the Temple not only as a religious imperative, but also as nationalistic one.<sup>139</sup> For Arie Eldad and Gershon Salomon, the realization of the Third Temple represents the unification of the Jewish people in the true Jewish Nation. The Temple is seen as the symbolic embodiment of Jewish unity and the basis for the new Israel. Religion is almost disregarded, viewed largely as a means to realize the goal of the

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<sup>136</sup> Ir Amim, "What are the Temple Mount Movements and Why Should We Be Worried?", *Ir Amim*, accessed May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019, <http://www.ir-amim.org.il/en/node/2113>

<sup>137</sup> It is the State register for associations and companies for the benefit of the public. Ministry of Justice-Israeli Corporations Authority, "Registrar of Associations", *Ministry of Justice-Israeli Corporations Authority*, accessed May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019, [https://www.gov.il/en/departments/topics/associations\\_and\\_companies\\_for\\_the\\_benefit\\_of\\_the\\_public](https://www.gov.il/en/departments/topics/associations_and_companies_for_the_benefit_of_the_public)  
R. Z. Feldman, "Temple Mount Pilgrimage in the Name of Human Rights", 541-542.

<sup>138</sup> Ir Amim, "What are the Temple Mount Movements and Why Should We Be Worried?", *Ir Amim*, accessed May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019, <http://www.ir-amim.org.il/en/node/2113>

<sup>139</sup> Y. Be'er, "Dangerous Liaison", 24-25.

unification of the Jewish people under the true Jewish Nation. This idea embraces perfectly the development of Zionism in modern Israel, which was more a secular movement when it was born but has now become a merger of religion and nationalism in the cause of the rise of the true Jewish nation.<sup>140</sup>

Of course, for other activists, religion is central. According to the Torah, one-third of the commandments regard the Temple and, it is impossible to fulfil all the imperatives of God without the Temple standing. Hence, with the building of the Third Temple and the re-establishment of Temple rites, Judaism would be complete and pure, and Jews will have again a true and real connection with God. The Temple is therefore key for Jewish unity, and in its realization the true Jewish nation will rise and be united.<sup>141</sup> Moshe Feiglin, leader of Zehut, in 2011 wrote in *Makor Rishon*<sup>142</sup>:

“The whole point of the Temple is the direct connection between man and God. The religion was created when the Temple was taken away from us. All the authenticity that is missing from religious ritualism—the shudder that goes through the secular mind when it sees the supposedly meaningless routine within the narrow confines of Halacha, which is all we have since the Temple was destroyed and which in fact substitutes it— all of that disconnection between religion and life, all are the result of the loss of the Temple.”<sup>143</sup>

Since the beginning of the 2000’s, the Temple Mount movements understood that to be heard and more popular inside Israeli society, they needed to brand themselves differently. Temple Mount movements then became the symbol of the struggle of the Jewish people to achieve their fundamental rights, to pray and visit their holiest site, the Temple Mount. They embraced non-violent way of actions and mostly focused on education and on promoting Temple values. The movements rode the wave of disillusion that religious-Zionist was experiencing after the Oslo Accords and the decision of the implementation of the Gaza withdrawal, and they become central in all the religious Zionist circles.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Y. Be’er, “Dangerous Liaison”, 24-25.

<sup>141</sup> *Ivi*, 25-26.

<sup>142</sup> A religious Zionist newspaper which also has a weekly portion regarding the Temple.

<sup>143</sup> Y. Be’er, “Dangerous Liaison” 25-26.

<sup>144</sup> R.Z. Feldman, “Temple Mount Pilgrimage”, 541.

Another important point regarding the Temple Mount movements, which gave them visibility and economic help, is their ties with the settler movements and Evangelical Christian donors, especially from the United States. Evangelical Christians have always shared a strong relationship with Israel, seeing Israel and the Jews as fundamental for the coming of the Messiah and Redemption. After the Six-Day war, Evangelical Christians shared the same feeling as the Temple Mount advocates, the urge to build the Third Temple. For this reason, they started to develop strong connections with Temple Mount advocates, and, with the forming of the Temple Mount movements, they provided them economical and organizational support. These ties will be explored more in details in the Third Chapter.

Many settler groups live and study in the Old City of Jerusalem, not only in the Jewish quarter, but also in the other three quarters, giving occasion in recent years to an increase of settlement activities in the Christian and Muslim quarters.<sup>145</sup> Even if many settler organizations do not agree with all the actions of the Temple Mount movements (see for example the citation below in the case of Ateret Cohanim)<sup>146</sup>, they all have the same goal of the Judaization of the City of Jerusalem and want to live as closely as possible to the Holy Esplanade. Therefore, most groups favored the settling of families in the Christian and Muslim quarters of the Old City.<sup>147</sup> For these reasons, strong connections have developed between Temple Mount activists and settler organizations in the Old City, which also gave rise to many rabbis changing their opinions regarding ascending the Temple Mount. These connections are especially evident among the many shared donors of these different groups, which support the cause of Jerusalem as a Jewish city and the building of the Third Temple, as Evangelical Christians.<sup>148</sup>

Another important connection shared between Temple Mount activists and settler organizations is politics. In fact, both groups have forged ties with right-wing Knesset

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<sup>145</sup> M. Dumper, “The Background to the Struggle”, 20-26.

<sup>146</sup> They follow the directions of the Chief Rabbinate and of the rabbis of Mercaz Ha-Rav yeshiva, which prohibit the entrance at the Temple Mount.

<sup>147</sup> In April 2018, I have personally interviewed a woman member of Ateret Cohanim in her house in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City. One of her main point of living in that house in the Muslim Quarter was the proximity to the Temple Mount and the belief that with the settling of Jews in the Holy City and close to the Temple, the Redemption will come shortly.

<sup>148</sup> M. Dumper, “The Background to the Struggle”, 20-26.

parties both in the past, such as Kach and Tehiya, and in present days, such as Likud, Zehut and the New Right.

In the ensuing years, the Temple Mount movements achieved impressive results. Members or active followers of these movements today occupy important roles in Israeli political parties or are very well-known rabbis. These groups were able to change both the religious and public idea of ascending the Temple Mount and have increased Jewish presence at the site.<sup>149</sup> They developed their own ways of action according to political and social changes in Israeli society, changing their focus from the violent methods of Yehuda Etzion, to a more politically correct approach. This was focused on non-violent civil disobedience and in showing how the right of Jews to pray at the site are a fundamental human right.

### *The Temple Mount Faithful*

The Temple Mount Faithful is the oldest of the Temple Mount Movements and, together with the Temple Institute, are the most active groups in promoting the Temple agenda. The Temple Mount Faithful movement was founded by Gershon Salomon in the late 1960s, and in 1982 was officially registered as an association recognized by the Israeli government.<sup>150</sup> Their goal is to replace the mosque with the Temple, which will become the new spiritual, cultural and national symbol of the State of Israel.

It can be said that the vision of redemption was always present in Salomon's family history. He comes from a family of very influential rabbis, including Avraham Solomon Zalman Zoref, considered one of the first real Zionists, who settled in Jerusalem in 1811 and then began the redemption of the Land of Israel. Thus, Solomon believed he too had a central role in the redemptive process of the State of Israel. The actual turning point for Solomon's messianism was in 1958 while he fought against the Syrian army on the Golan

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<sup>149</sup> According to Makor Rishon, 75% of national religious Jews is in favor of the ascension to the Temple Mount.

ICG, "The Status Quo at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade", 14.

<sup>150</sup> Y. Be'er, "Dangerous Liaison", 34.

Heights. During the battle he suffered serious injuries to his legs, and he could not move. When at the end of the battle the Syrian soldiers went onto the battlefield with the purpose of killing any surviving injured Israeli soldiers, they came upon Solomon surrounded by fire and angels and, greatly fearful, they fled. Solomon affirmed that at that time, God talked to him and he then understood his mission: the redemption of the Jewish Nation with the Temple Mount as a spiritual, national and cultural center.<sup>151</sup> From that moment, Solomon affirms that God has continued talking to him, and his work and struggle for the Temple Mount are a direct consequence of these revelations.<sup>152</sup>

The activities of the Temple Mount Faithful mostly involved with organizing protests according to the Hebrew calendar. The most important demonstrations take place during Jewish festivals in which the Temple was central, as during the pilgrimage holidays: Hanukkah, Tisha B'Av and Sukkot. Additionally, they organize important rallies also on Israeli national holidays, such as Jerusalem Day and Memorial Day for Fallen IDF soldiers.<sup>153</sup>

Every time Solomon wants to hold a demonstration and pray upon the Temple Mount, he follows a precise and legal routine. First, he asks the police for permission to go and pray at the Temple Mount. After the police deny it, Solomon sends a petition to the High Court of Justice, which rules that they are permitted to ascend to the Mount, conditional on approval of the police, but they cannot pray. The police usually do not allow the entrance of the group, due to security reasons, however, they have permission to pray at the Moroccan Gate.<sup>154</sup>

Thus, the Temple Mount Faithful are careful not to do anything illegal, and Solomon is very cautious in also not permitting the members of the movement to commit illegal actions. In fact, the main difference between the Temple Mount Faithful and the other major Temple Mount groups is that the Temple Mount Faithful is a Zionist group which

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<sup>151</sup> The Temple Mount & Land of Israel Faithful Movement, "Leadership of the Temple Mount Faithful", *Temple Mount & Land of Israel Faithful Movement*, accessed 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2019, <http://templemountfaithful.org/leadership.php>

<sup>152</sup> M. Inbari, "Gershon Salomon and the Temple Mount Faithful", in *Jewish Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount- Who will build the Third Temple?*, 79-97, (Albany: State University of New York. 2009): 81.

<sup>153</sup> Ivi, 82.

<sup>154</sup> M. Inbari, "Gershon Salomon and the Temple Mount Faithful", 82.

supports and respects the authority of the State of Israel. Solomon perceives himself as a modern Zionist, and he thinks that the Temple should not only be a religious center, but also the national center of the State of Israel.<sup>155</sup> For this reason, he is very careful in not contravening state laws, because he respects the state and its bodies (such as the police and the IDF), even if he is against the government's decision to leave the site to Muslims. The activities of the group are of protest directed toward the government and the *status quo*, but not against the state of Israel in general (as are, for example, the activities of Chai Vakayam which will be discussed more fully to follow).<sup>156</sup>

Of course, religion is present in the Temple Mount Faithful group, but the motivation and the scope are more nationalistic than religious. For this reason, the group suffered a crisis in 1987. If in the beginning the group could gather a wide range of adherents (from secular to orthodox), at a certain point, the methods used by Solomon started to seem not as effective by some members. Additionally, the group was perceived too "secular", and many wanted something more orthodox and religiously involved. For example, in the first declaration of the movement in 1982, there was no explicit citation about rebuilding the Temple and this was viewed as a failing by some more religious members.<sup>157</sup> Therefore, some of the earlier followers left the group and formed the Movement for the Establishment of the Temple, an ultra-orthodox movement which will be discussed later in this chapter. This fracture caused the Temple Mount Faithful to lose support in the more religious circles. However, in the mid-1990s, the group found a new strong ally in Evangelical Christians, as noted previously especially from the United States.<sup>158</sup> Since this earlier rift, Solomon re-stated the goals of the group, putting the rebuilding of the Temple as a foundational long term objective.<sup>159</sup> In fact, after the 1990s, while the group maintained its Zionist core, it also turned toward a new a more religiously active direction, driven strongly by its new supporters and by the new political situation in Israel of the Oslo Accords. In fact, with the division of Israelis between pro-land and pro-peace, religion and the Temple became central for a growing number of more secular Zionists.

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<sup>155</sup> M. Inbari, "Gershon Salomon and the Temple Mount Faithful", 82.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>157</sup> M. Inbari, "Gershon Salomon and the Temple Mount Faithful", 86-87.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>159</sup> Temple Mount & Land of Israel Faithful Movement, "Long Term Objectives", *Temple Mount & Land of Israel Faithful Movement*, accessed March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2019, <http://templemountfaithful.org/objectives.php>

All the while the activities and demonstrations of the Temple Mount Faithful group were perceived as a threat by Palestinians, and violent incidents occurred from time to time. In 1987, thousands of Muslim worshippers protested the entrance of the Temple Mount Faithful to the compound, throwing stones at Jewish worshippers praying at the Western Wall. Moreover, in 1990, during the peak of the First Intifada, the members of the *waqf* called the Muslim worshippers to come to Jerusalem and protect al-Aqsa, since the followers of the Temple Mount Faithful were coming and planning to lay the first Stone of the Third Temple.<sup>160</sup> Thousands Palestinians gathered at the site and started throwing stones at the Western Wall. When the police stormed to the complex, they opened fire against Palestinians, killing seventeen. Palestinians refer to this as “the al-Aqsa massacre”. After this incident, Solomon was banned by police from entering the site, and this ban is still in effect today.<sup>161</sup>

### *The Temple Institute*

The Temple Institute is the leading and most famous of the Temple Mount movements, founded by the famous Rabbi Yisrael Ariel in 1984, and registered as an association in the same year. In their website, it is stated that the movement is dedicated to follow the Biblical commandment to build the Holy Temple in our time. However, their short-term goal is to spread Temple awareness and conduct educational activities such as the promotion and organization of teachings regarding the laws of the Temple and education of the new priests of the Temple.<sup>162</sup> Additionally, the Temple Institute engages in organizing tours, conferences, the publication of books and Temple related research.<sup>163</sup>

The founder, Rabbi Yisrael, fought in the Six-Day War and participated in the battle to free the Western Wall and the Holy Esplanade. After the battle and with the ensuing

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<sup>160</sup> Motti Inbari claims that the announcement was lacking real substance, while documents by Ir Amim claimed that the demonstration was really planned.

M. Inbari, “Gershon Salomon and the Temple Mount Faithful”, 86-87.

<sup>161</sup> Y. Be’er, “Dangerous Liaison”, 35.

<sup>162</sup> The Temple Institute, “About the Temple Institute”, *The Temple Institute*, 2018, accessed May 29<sup>th</sup> 2019, <https://www.templeinstitute.org/about.htm>

<sup>163</sup> Y. Be’er, “Dangerous Liaison”, 37.



liberation of Jerusalem, he felt that the Messiah and redemption, along with the building of the Third Temple, were about to pass. However, when Moshe Dayan decided to leave the control of the mount to the Arabs, Rabbi Yisrael felt a deep disappointment and almost lost faith in the coming of the Messiah.<sup>164</sup> After this huge let down, he developed a new understanding. Rather than maintaining his belief that the Messiah was about to come and build the Temple, he changed his vision to now believing that the Messiah cannot come unless the Temple is built already. Therefore, with this new revelation he understood he now needed to be more active in the process of redemption and in the building of the Third Temple.<sup>165</sup>

Another huge disappointment for Rabbi Yisrael came during the Camp David Accords of 1979. With this peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, the government gave the order to evacuate the Israeli settlements in the Sinai Peninsula. The rabbi had been one of the most strident activists within Gush Emunim trying to prevent the evacuation of settlements. Thus, when the withdrawal was complete, easily and without much protest and interest from Israeli society. He felt very disillusioned by Gush Emunim, and, after the withdraw, he decided to leave the group, thinking that its leadership was not effectively able to act on behalf of the Jewish people. He then joined the Kach party list in the Knesset and in 1984, he was one of the only rabbis who supported the Jewish Underground plan to destroy the mosque. With the failure of Etzion, he understood it was the time to establish his own movement, and in the same year the Temple Institute was founded.<sup>166</sup>

The Temple Institute consists of three main constituent bodies which will be discussed following: The Institute for Study, Research and Construction, which was founded the same year of the Institute; the Midrasha (1993); and finally, the Home of Hebrew Artisan, which is a business.<sup>167</sup>

From the beginning, one of the main activities of the Institute was the recreation of 93 Temple vessels which are today on display at the Institute museum, along with the tools

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<sup>164</sup> M. Inbari, "Messianic Naturalism as the Product of Dissonance", in *Jewish Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount: Who will Build the Third Temple?*, p. 31-51, (Albany: State University of New York 2009): 33-39

<sup>165</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>166</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>167</sup> *Ibidem.*

that will be used to build the Temple, in order to be ready when the time would come.<sup>168</sup> In the 1980s, the Institute started to organize conferences on various topics related to the Temple, from history to actual halachic problems. The conferences gained the support of both the Chief Rabbinate and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In the ensuing years, leading personalities of the Israeli religious spectrum joined the conferences and participated as speakers. For example, both Israel Meir Laur, (before becoming Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi<sup>169</sup>) and Sephardi Chief Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron<sup>170</sup> attended and presented lectures to these conferences. Those Chief Rabbis did not change the official position of the Chief Rabbinate, however, the support of these religious authorities to the movement's educational activities gave a big push to the legitimization of such a movement.<sup>171</sup>

With developing support, the Institute started to grow in prestige. In 1993 the Midrasha, a college formed within the Institute, was established. The goal of the Midrasha was to work closely with state religious schools, organizing tours to Jerusalem and the Institute. In order to do all its activities, it receives funding from the Ministry of Education.<sup>172</sup>

The year after the Midrasha founding and following the introduction of the matriculation examination in Bible studies of the subject of tabernacle and sacred vessels, the popularity of the Institute and a thus a demand for the Institute's teaching services grew.<sup>173</sup> The Institute started to organize seminars and lessons in schools, in order to prepare the students for the examination. Only a year after that, in 1995, the Institute reported an attendance of thirty-five thousand students.<sup>174</sup> Thus from these early years on, education became the most popular and economically successful activity of the Temple Institute.

By the end of the 1990s, another important religious sector started to support the Temple Institute: Evangelical Christian. In 1999, 60% of the income from ticket and museum shop sales came by Christian visitors. Because of this, the Israeli Ministry of Tourism

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<sup>168</sup> The Temple Institute, "Museum", *The Temple Institute*, Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> April, 2019, <https://www.templeinstitute.org/contact.htm#museum>

<sup>169</sup> Rabbi Israel Meir Laur served as Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi from 1993 until 2003.

<sup>170</sup> Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron served as Sephardi Chief Rabbi from 1993 until 2003.

<sup>171</sup> M. Inbari, "Messianic Naturalism as the Product of Dissonance", 33-39.

<sup>172</sup> *Ivi*, 46; Y. Be'er, "Dangerous Liaison", 37.

<sup>173</sup> M. Inbari, "Messianic Naturalism as the Product of Dissonance", 46.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibidem*.

began to develop ways to cooperate with the Institute.<sup>175</sup> Due to this increasing economic success, the Institute was able to start financing more activities, conferences, an increasing publication of prayers books, and even a research arm that resulted in the development of a breed of kosher red heifer.<sup>176</sup> In 2013, according to Ir Amim, the annual volume of all economic activity at the Institute exceeded NIS 3.5 million.<sup>177</sup>

Because the main goal of the Institute is to promote the study of the Temple and does not publicly promote activism at the Temple itself, it has thus gained the official approval of religious and state bodies. The movement is officially recognized by the Ministry of Education (which also funds the Institute and sends students from state-religious schools, along with IDF soldiers).<sup>178</sup> Additionally, the Institute has been endorsed by the Chief Rabbinate.

Nevertheless, the founder of the movement (Rabbi Yisrael), and principal activists do not specifically subscribe to the idea that the primary intent of the Institute is to simply educate about the Temple. In fact, Rabbi Yisrael and Institute directors and activists of the movement frequently ascend and try to pray on the Holy Esplanade.<sup>179</sup> Additionally, Rabbi Yisrael is known for his radical vision and has claimed many times he wants to destroy the mosque and build the Temple in its place. Despite this, the Rabbi was awarded with the Education Ministry's department annual prize for his work in promoting the studies of the Temple.<sup>180</sup> Therefore, even as the positions of the activists are well known, the movement still has considerable support from governmental and religious institutions.<sup>181</sup>

In 1994, in the period of the Oslo Accords, the Institute became more involved in politics, petitioning for a law guaranteeing the right of Jews to pray at the Temple Mount. The

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<sup>175</sup> M. Inbari, "Messianic Naturalism as the Product of Dissonance", 33-39.

<sup>176</sup> By now, they have not succeeded in breeding a Kosher red-heifer.

Y. Be'er, "Dangerous Liaison", 37.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>178</sup> In the years 2008-2011, the Ministry of Culture, Science and Sports and the Ministry of Education economically supported the Temple Institute and the Midrasha with an average of NIS 412,000 per year. The Midrasha in 2012 received NIS 189,000 from the Ministry of Education.

Y. Be'er, "Dangerous Liaison", 55.

<sup>179</sup> *Ivi*, 59.

<sup>180</sup> Y. Be'er, "Dangerous Liaison", 59.

<sup>181</sup> M. Inbari, "Messianic Naturalism as the Product of Dissonance", 32.

Institute also tried to influence the Chief Rabbinate to change his position regarding Jewish entrance on the site, but without success.<sup>182</sup> In fact, the years of the Oslo Accords, the fear of losing the Temple Mount became more vivid in the religious Zionists arena, and the movement started to gain much more support. As a consequence of its growing success, the movement further developed strong political ties. After the 2016 election of the 20<sup>th</sup> Knesset, Yehuda Glick, the former CEO of the Temple Institute, became a Member of Knesset.<sup>183</sup>

The Temple Institute also has a very busy online presence, running a website in four languages (Hebrew, English, Hungarian and Spanish), a Facebook and Instagram page and a YouTube channel, with over 1,200 YouTube videos.<sup>184</sup> It also runs an Internet TV channel and a Temple Talk radio station. Moreover, since 2011, the Temple Institute has featured a weekly section on the Temple Mount on Makor Rishon, written by Arnon Segal.<sup>185</sup>

Today the Temple Institute is the most important and influential expositor of Temple issues. Due to its great online presence, its connection with political powers and its recognition by religious and governmental bodies, it enjoys supremacy in its public image and breadth of activities.

### *Chai Vekayam*

In the late 1980s another of the Temple Mount movements, Chai Vakayam started to form among the members of Bat Ayin settlement, one of the most radical settlements in the West Bank, becoming an “unofficial” movement in 1991.<sup>186</sup> It is home to mostly all newly observant Jews who embraced religious Zionism after the crisis that withdrawal

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<sup>182</sup> M. Inbari, “Messianic Naturalism as the Product of Dissonance”, 32.

<sup>183</sup> Jerusalem of Peace, “About Member of Knesset Yehuda Glick”, *Jerusalem of Peace*, accessed 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2019, <http://jerusalemofpeace.com/page1.asp>

<sup>184</sup> The Temple Institute, “The Temple Institute”, *YouTube*, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/user/henryporter2/featured>

<sup>185</sup> Y. Be’er, “Dangerous Liaison”, 59.

<sup>186</sup> The movement is not registered as an association, so it is unofficial for the Israeli government.

from Sinai and the beginning of the peace talks brought to Gush Emunim. Members of the second generation of Gush Emunim had lost hope in the movement and were trying to find a new and more efficient way to achieve redemption.<sup>187</sup> The founders of the group are Motti Karpel and Chaim Nativ, and, when he got out of prison in 1989, Yehuda Etzion too became a central member.<sup>188</sup>

When Yehuda Etzion joined Chai Vekayam, he was not the same person as he was during the Jewish Underground years. He understood, after the failure of the Jewish Underground attack at the Holy Esplanade, that Israeli society was not ready for his message, and therefore he believed any individual or small group action promoting the establishment of the Third Temple would prove fruitless.<sup>189</sup> To address this situation and work toward building the Temple, Israeli society would need to be united around a new effort. He did not regret his previous actions with the Jewish Underground group. However, he concluded that the time was not right for the old ways of activism, and he now believed a movement was needed that which would challenge the regime of the State of Israel, offering a spiritual, religious and political alternative which would unite the Jewish society ready to engage in the process of redemption.<sup>190</sup>

Chai Vekayam thus acts differently from the Temple Mount Faithful and the Temple Institute. The Temple Mount Faithful respects the law and the security bodies such as the IDF and the police, and the Temple Institute receives large institutional support. Chai Vekayam rather engages in civil disobedience against the State and institutional bodies. Mirroring the “Identity Card” of the movement, adherents are called upon to challenge laws if they are believed against the goal of redemption. Especially in Judea and Samaria for instance, Israeli laws are not viewed as binding according to group members. Etzion called for not paying taxes and agreeing with the rabbis who urged soldiers to refuse to take action in evicting Israeli settlements in the West Bank.<sup>191</sup> Motti Karpel himself went to prison because he refused to perform reserve duty and to follow military orders.

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<sup>187</sup> Y. Be'er, “Dangerous Liaison”, 47.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>189</sup> M. Inbari, “The Movement for Redemption and Yehuda Etzion” in *Jewish Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount: Who will Build the Third Temple?*, p. 51-78, (Albany: State University of New York 2009):70.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>191</sup> M. Inbari, “The Movement for Redemption and Yehuda Etzion”, 71.

However, even this movement do not engage or promote any violent actions toward the State of Israel. During rallies and protests, violet clashes outbreak with the police or the IDF, however their protests start mostly peacefully.<sup>192</sup>

The main activity of Chai Vekayam is to ascend and pray on the Temple Mount, refusing any coordination with the police. As it was stated before, they believe that the laws of the State of Israel in these matters do not apply to them. Sometimes when they try to ascend, journalists will follow along and film their “struggle” to enter the Temple Mount. Trying to enter and pray, which is illegal under the *status quo*, many participants are thus arrested, and criminal files are opened on them.<sup>193</sup> However, these arrests play in favor of the group. By suffering this “injustice”, their goal is to demonstrate to the Israeli public that the site is completely under Muslim control and Jews have almost no right to enter the site. These incursions into the Holy Esplanade are often cause for tense confrontations leading to Palestinian rioting against the members of the group and the police.<sup>194</sup> They act to provoke Palestinians and to show how they just want to pray there and the Palestinians are the one preventing any peaceful co-existence at the site. Even if they do not use any physical violence at the site, they engage in hate speech, protected by the Israeli police and the right-wing media.

Another important activity of Chai Vekayam is the re-establishing of the Pesach sacrifice, which is seen as a challenge to Halacha and rabbinical authority. Since the group is unable to fulfill the sacrifice on the Temple itself, they organize the ceremony at the hill of the mixed neighborhood of Abu Tor that faces the Temple Mount.<sup>195</sup> Additionally, Etzion has held and participated in many conferences on the topic of the Temple. Beginning in 1988, during the festival of Sukkot, Etzion, together with the Temple Institute, organized the “Temple Conference”, which was attended by a large number of people including many rabbis. These participating rabbis thus demonstrated support for Jewish prayer

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<sup>192</sup> M. Inbari, “The Movement for Redemption and Yehuda Etzion”, 73.

<sup>193</sup> Y. Be’er, “Dangerous Liaison”, 47.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>195</sup> M. Inbari, “The Movement for Redemption and Yehuda Etzion”, 73.

gatherings at the site and, during the second conference in 2000, the Census of the Priests and Levites was announced.<sup>196</sup>

In more recent times Chai Vakayam continues in demonstrations of radical activism, focusing mostly on Yehuda Etzion and his lectures, thus raising continuing awareness on the Temple issue and the *status quo*. Even if the message of the group is extreme, owing to the well-known persona of Yehuda Etzion, the movement enjoys considerable press and media attention, making the issue of the *status quo* centrally recognized and debated.

### *The Movement for the Establishment of the Temple*

The Movement for the Establishment of the Temple, a fourth of the Temple Mount movements, started as a small group composed mostly of ultra-Orthodox Jews. Founded in 1987, into the 1990s, it counted only about one-hundred members.<sup>197</sup> The founder of the movement, Yosef Elboim, is a former member of the Temple Mount Faithful who decided to leave the group since he perceived it too secular and believed that more tangible actions had to be pursued for the goal of the construction of the Temple. The group believes that Israel has made a huge theological mistake in not building the Temple right away, and it demands the building the Third Temple and the ensuring of the Halacha to all the Biblical land of Israel.<sup>198</sup>

This movement is motivated by the importance of following all the Torah commandments as possible<sup>199</sup> and ensuring a constant Jewish presence at the Temple Mount compound. Behaving differently from the Temple Mount Faithful and Chai Vakayam, the members of the Movement for the Establishment of the Temple do not engage in large protests or in ascending to the Mount with a big group of people. They organize small and quiet groups of worshippers, without asking police permission, and ascend the Mount, thus

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<sup>196</sup> M. Inbari, “The Movement for Redemption and Yehuda Etzion”, 73.

<sup>197</sup> Y. Be’er, “Dangerous Liaison”, 46.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>199</sup> In the Torah there are 613 commandments and 202 of them are completely related on the existence of the Temple. The Temple Institute, “Statement of Principles”, *The Temple Institute*, accessed May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019, <https://www.templeinstitute.org/statement.htm>

establishing a Jewish presence.<sup>200</sup> One of the main goals of the group is to convince as many Jews as possible to visit the compound and engage in prayer. By so doing, Elboim tries to change the perception of Ultra-orthodox and Orthodox rabbis regarding ascending and praying on the Mount. In fact, Elboim comes from a Haredi background, however he did not have much success in spreading his ideology to other Haredim. Even if Elboim believes that change can begin in the ultra-Orthodox community and then spread to other sections of religious society, the majority of the Haredim community still believes it is prohibited from ascending and praying on the Temple Mount. Nevertheless, Elboim has attained some success. He claimed that during the last ten years, four hundred Haredim have ascended to the site. Additionally, an event of major importance for the movement happened when Rabbi Shmuel Auerbach, leader of the extremist Lithuanian-Jerusalem faction, did not condemn students in his Yeshiva whom wanted to ascend to the Temple.<sup>201</sup>

On the other hand, Elboim had greater success with religious-Zionists by influencing many former Gush Emunim members. In fact, until the Oslo Accords, the group was pretty much unknown. During the Oslo Accords, members of Elboim's movement started to intensify their actions and presence at the Temple Mount. Because of the spreading fear of losing the Temple Mount to the Arabs, the movement convinced many Gush Emunim rabbis to change their opinion regarding Jewish ascension to the site. The greatest accomplishment of the movement was the Yesha Council decision of 1996, which gave permission and encouraged the rabbis and their students to visit the Temple and pray. The rabbis of the Movement for the Establishment of the Temple played an important and fundamental role in this ruling, which was reaffirmed in 2001.<sup>202</sup> After being part of this historical decision, the movement gained much more popularity and support from a great number of settlers.

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<sup>200</sup> Nir Hasson, "Number of Jews Visiting the Temple Mount Rising Fast, and so Is the Controversy", *Haaretz*, July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018, accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-number-of-jews-visiting-the-temple-mount-rising-fast-1.6246386>;

Y. Be'er, "Dangerous Liaison", 46.

<sup>201</sup> Nir Hasson, "Number of Jews Visiting the Temple Mount Rising Fast, and so Is the Controversy", *Haaretz*, July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018, accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-number-of-jews-visiting-the-temple-mount-rising-fast-1.6246386>

<sup>202</sup> M. Inbari, "Haredi Messianic Activism", in *Jewish Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount: Who will Build the Third Temple?*, p. 97-131, (Albany: State University of New York 2009): 126-129.



The members of the movement also occupy a leadership role in the organization of the Temple Conference, which after the Yesha Council decision, became more important.<sup>203</sup>

### *Yehuda Glick and Moshe Feiglin: Temple Mount Activists and Politics*

Israeli politics in recent years is leading more in the direction of giving a voice to people and groups asking for more rights for Jews on the Temple Mount. This process is visible in Members of Knesset publicly supporting the changing of the *status quo* and the right to Jews to pray there. The focus here will be on the two most active Knesset members in the area of Temple Mount activism: Moshe Feiglin and Yehuda Glick.

Both are politicians of course, active in the Knesset and unabashed Temple Mount activists. They differ in their ideology and methodology, while at the same time exhibiting similarities. First, the Temple is at the center of their politics and activism. Second, they are both influenced by the American notions of civil liberties and civil disobedience. Both represent ideologies coming from ideas of activism and redemption born with Yehuda Etzion and Chai Vekayam, but they developed them differently. They took part in a process called Israelization and Modernization, dissociating themselves from violence and focusing on a more popular and politically correct behavior espousing peaceful civil disobedience and the pursuit of human rights and freedom of worship.<sup>204</sup>

### *Moshe Feiglin: from Zo Artzeinu to Zehut*

Moshe Feiglin was born in Haifa in 1962. His family was politically and religious diverse, however Zionism was deeply rooted in them. Feiglin's ancestors were among the pioneers who left the Soviet Union to settle in the Land of Israel. Feiglin's grandfather was the

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<sup>203</sup> Y. Be'er, "Dangerous Liaison", 46

<sup>204</sup> Shlomo Fischer, "From Yehuda Etzion to Yehuda Glick- From Redemptive Revolution to Human Rights on the Temple Mount", *Israel Studies* 32, no.1, p. 67-87, (2017): 73.

first child born in the settlement of Metula, and his ancestors were among the founders of many settlements in Northern Israel.<sup>205</sup>

Feiglin started to be involved in politics during the Oslo Accords. When the peace talks with the Palestinians started, he gave up his tech company to join Shmuel Sacket in the founding of Zo Artzeinu (This is Our Land). The group found many followers from among the ranks of the old members of Gush Emunim and the Yesha Council. Many of these perceived existing settlement groups as too reticent and ineffective, and for those reasons Zo Artzeinu gained much support.<sup>206</sup> The movement believed that the government should obey and serve the nation and people, and not the other way around. In fact, those were the years where Israel was most divided on the issue of territories and civil society from both Right and Left was active and protesting.

The core activism of the group was rooted in non-violent civil disobedience, claiming that their protest was inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the struggle of African Americans in the United States.<sup>207</sup> They organized protests in the streets, blocking roads and traffic throughout Israel. The biggest protest they succeeded in organizing was on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August 1995, when, according to the group, 100,000 Israelis protested in the streets.<sup>208</sup> This new demonstration of protesting was revolutionary in Israeli history: Zo Artzeinu was fighting for civil liberties and against the state, which they believed was undermining people's rights.<sup>209</sup> While in the United States this way of protesting is perhaps viewed as left-wing, Zo Artzeinu transformed the issue of civil liberties from a radical right-wing perspective. The group was against Rabin's politics, which focused on peace with the Arabs and withdrawing from disputed territories, seen as the selling of Israeli land to the Arabs. This contrarian movement had a big impact in Israel and became

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<sup>205</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, "Moshe Feiglin", *Jewish Virtual Library*, accessed May 25<sup>th</sup>, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/moshe-feiglin>

<sup>206</sup> O. Haklai, "Linking Ideas and Opportunities in Contentious Politics", 805-806.

<sup>207</sup> It is possible to find similarities in the ideology of Gush Etzion. In fact, even the members of Chai Vekayam do not respect army orders and see itself in opposition with the present State of Israel. Feiglin and his group Zo Artzeinu, were supporters of Chai Vakayam.  
*Ibidem.*

<sup>208</sup> Manhigut Yehudit, "The birth of Manhigut Yehudit", *Manhigut Yehudit*, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013, accessed May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019, <https://www.jewishisrael.org/beginnings/>

<sup>209</sup> Of course, for the group Palestinians did not have any rights on the Land, which is the Land of the only Jewish nation. S. Fischer, "From Yehuda Etzion to Yehuda Glick", 72.

very popular among the settler circles, becoming even influential in the less radical circles of Israeli society.

However, a crisis hit the movement in 1995. In fact, the movement using a narrative of fighting for civil liberties and human rights, it also promoted hate speech against Palestinians, using religion and nationalism to undermine their rights of the land. With the murder of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 and the subsequent election of Benjamin Netanyahu as Prime Minister (1996), Israeli society changed direction and the movement lost consensus. The murder of Rabin had a huge impact in Israeli society which saw the act as a threat to democracy. For the first time, it seemed that the enemy of Israel was not outside, but completely rooted in the country's politics and society. The public became less tolerant of extremist right-wing groups. Even though Yigal Amir, Rabin's murderer, was not himself registered in any movements, he had ties with many rabbis of the Yesha Council along with many right-wing groups, such as Zo Artzeinu.<sup>210</sup>

The resulting loss of popularity after the assassination was a turning point for Zo Artzeinu, which then began to become more "political". Nevertheless, Feiglin decided not to abandon his principles, even as the movement was deteriorating. Consequently, in 1996, he founded Manhigut Yehudit (Jewish Leadership), a party which had the goal of continuing inside the political arena what Zo Artzeinu had started in the streets.<sup>211</sup> In 2000, Manhigut Yehudit joined Likud.

With the joining of Likud, Feiglin started his political career as a member of the party. He served as a Deputy Speaker of the 19<sup>th</sup> Knesset and was part of the Likud until 2014. One year later, he decided to establish his own party, Zehut- the Israeli Jewish Movement. The main goal of this new party is the establishment of a real Jewish state in all the land of Israel (including the West Bank and Gaza), with Israeli control in all parts of the land, especially and primarily, on the Temple Mount. Feiglin believes that the Zionist movement brought to the founding of the modern state of Israel a lack of holiness and this prevented it having the necessary tools to reflect the Jewish essence of Israel and thus guiding its purpose. He wants to promote an "alternative" leadership of the State of Israel,

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<sup>210</sup> O. Haklai, "Linking Ideas and Opportunities in Contentious Politics", 805-810.

<sup>211</sup> *Ivi*, 805-806.

which embraces its holiness and is based on the Jewish religion.<sup>212</sup> Even if Zehut and its supporters are still a minority in the Israeli political arena, they have made their voices louder in those years, causing even more popular politicians and members of Knesset to listen to their claims.

On April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019, Israel held an election which saw the debut of Zehut on the national stage. While Feiglin predicted winning 5-7 seats (of the 120 in the Knesset), in fact his party did not pass the threshold of 3.25% (which was 4 seats), and thus not making entry into the 21<sup>st</sup> Knesset.<sup>213</sup>

### *Feiglin and the Temple Mount*

Feiglin was a supporter of the Temple Mount movements since his first years of activism with Zo Artzeinu. Even if he was more concentrated on protesting against the Oslo Accords, he was also a supporter of the Yehuda Etzion movement, Chai Vekayam and participated in many initiatives regarding the Temple Mount, such as conferences and meetings organized by the Temple Mount movements.

Since he himself was elected to the 19<sup>th</sup> Knesset, Feiglin ascended to the Mount several times, and as part of his political campaign he promised to work on the behalf of the Temple Mount. Once he even tried to enter to the Dome of the Rock, an action that caused violent protests to occur on the compound injuring several people. In 2013, Netanyahu personally intervened, telling the police not to allow Feiglin entrance at the site.<sup>214</sup>

With the founding of his own party, Zehut, Feiglin could finally express his ideas regarding the Temple Mount in his own political agenda, without the restrictions imposed by Prime Minister Netanyahu. On the Zehut website, there is an entire section regarding Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. In fact, gaining complete sovereignty of Israel over the

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<sup>212</sup> Manhigut Yehudit, "Who are We?", *Manhigut Yehudit*, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013, accessed May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019, <https://www.jewishisrael.org/who-are-we/>

<sup>213</sup> Yotam Berger, "Far-right, Pro-pot Feiglin on Failure to Enter the Knesset: There will be 'Another Election' Soon", *Haaretz*, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019, accessed May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/elections/far-right-pro-weed-feiglin-on-not-making-it-to-knesset-another-election-soon-1.7107253>

<sup>214</sup> Y. Be'er, "Dangerous Liaison", 61-62.

Temple Mount is one of the main goals of Zehut. The *status quo* is not even mentioned. Zehut states that the *waqf* will be no longer on the site, which instead will be handed to the Chief Rabbinate, allowing it to regulate Jewish prayer services on the compound, in the respect of the Halacha. Additionally, it claims to build a Synagogue in the permitted areas and to conduct archeological research without any type of restrictions. Zehut claims the Temple Mount is the center of the entire Jewish nation and all non-Jews who will still live in Jerusalem will have to completely respect Jewish control over the city and this its most sacred place. Zehut is the first party which states as a political objective the actual building of the Third Temple.<sup>215</sup> Just twenty years ago, it was unthinkable to have a party like that running in the political elections. Even if Feiglin's party did not succeed in the 2019 election, nevertheless it still represents an important factor in the cause of Temple Mount activism. According to Zehut's website, 120,000 Israelis voted for the party and an additional 150,000 were going to vote for them (according to their polling), but at the last minute decided to vote for their usual parties.<sup>216</sup>

### *Yehuda Glick: Human rights and Temple Mount activism*

Today Yehuda Glick is the most famous and successful of Temple Mount activists in Israel. Glick was born in the United States in 1965, and at the age of eight he made Aliyah with his family. His family is religious-Zionist, but at the same time they have very liberal and moderate views. His father, Dr. Shimon Glick, was a former director of the Ministry of Health and additionally was one of the leading figures of Meimad, a liberal Zionist group advocating for the two-state solution. Additionally, his brother is a physician living on a settlement in the West Bank, providing his services to both settlers and Palestinians. Therefore, and probably thanks to his family's political orientation, he developed a type of activism which, unlike that of Feiglin, shows a respect for and recognition of other points of view.<sup>217</sup> He believes and is a supporter of the Greater Israel Ideology, but at the

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<sup>215</sup> Zehut, "Jerusalem and the Temple Mount", *Zehut*, June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018, accessed May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019. <https://zehut.org.il/israels-security-and-diplomatic-plan/?lang=en#temple-mount>

<sup>216</sup> Shelly Karzen, "We are not going anywhere, by Moshe Feiglin", *Zehut*, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019, accessed May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019, <https://zehut.org.il/we-are-not-going-anywhere-by-moshe-feiglin/?lang=en>

<sup>217</sup> S. Fischer, "From Yehuda Etzion to Yehuda Glick", 80.

same time he calls for peace and coexistence, both in the Land of Israel and at the Temple Mount.

Yehuda Glick started his political activities in the 1990s, joining Manhigut Yehudit and then its section of Likud. In 1996 he began working in the Ministry of Immigration and Absorption, filling important positions including spokesperson of the Minister Yuli Yoel Eldestein.<sup>218</sup> However, in 2005, after almost ten years of service, he decided to quit his job at the Ministry as a sign of protest over the disengagement in Gaza.<sup>219</sup>

Even when he was not involved in any Temple Mount groups, Yehuda Glick was favorable to the entrance of Jews to the compound and worked as a Jewish religious guide on the site, demonstrating considerable knowledge of the Temple. His Temple activism truly began after he resigned from the Ministry. In 2005 he became the CEO of the Temple Institute, giving lectures on various Temple Mount topics and organizing tours and conferences, a position which he held for five years. Additionally, in 2008, he became the chairman of the Temple Mount Heritage Foundation and of haLiba (For Jewish Freedom on the Temple Mount).<sup>220</sup> haLiba is in fact primarily focused on promoting the Jewish right to pray and visit freely the Temple Mount. According to Glick, the act of praying on the Temple will provide a national and religious fulfillment for the Jewish people. The goal of haLiba is to change Israel's political approach and to allow what it is stated in Israeli law, freedom of worship in the holy sites. According to the website, the interest of Jews and non-Jews in the Temple Mount is increasing, and more people want to ascend to the Mount and pray. For this reason, haLiba believes the *status quo* needs to be changed.<sup>221</sup> Moreover, during the years of his work at the Temple Mount Foundation, Glick focused on teaching the importance of the Temple Mount in the Jewish tradition and encouraged Jews to ascend the Temple, even organizing and guiding tours.

Given his work as an activist, the police see him as a danger to the *status quo* and security. In 2013, he was recorded by the *waqf* officials as praying at the site, which caused protests

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<sup>218</sup> Members of Knesset, "Knesset Members: Yehuda Joshua Glick", *Members of Knesset*, accessed May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019, [https://knesset.gov.il/mk/eng/mk\\_eng.asp?mk\\_individual\\_id\\_t=955](https://knesset.gov.il/mk/eng/mk_eng.asp?mk_individual_id_t=955)

<sup>219</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>220</sup> S. Fischer, "From Yehuda Etzion to Yehuda Glick", 80.

<sup>221</sup> haLiba, "About haLiba", *haLiba*, accessed 27<sup>th</sup> May, 2019, <http://haliba.co.il/en>

among the Palestinians present. The *waqf* called the police, and consequently, Glick was banned from entering the site. In protest of this ban, Glick went on a hunger strike of twelve days. The hunger strike gave to Glick major press attention, which enabled him to express nation-wide his point of view and to show the lack of rights of Jewish-Israelis at the compound.<sup>222</sup>

For his intense activity in promoting the changing of the *status quo*, he is perceived as a threat by Palestinians. In fact, by his liberal rhetoric claiming that the Temple should be a center for peace and thus arguing that everyone should be allowed to pray there, he attracts not only to Temple Mount activists and right-wing extremists, but also more liberal thinkers. He combines a very progressive message with an extremist goal. He wants freedom of worship for everyone, but at the same time he does not take into consideration the Palestinian right to the land and to the Holy Esplanade.<sup>223</sup>

For his activities, on October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2014, after he attended and was a speaker at a conference at the Jerusalem's Begin Center on Jewish presence on the Temple Mount organized by the group Temple Mount Faithful, Glick was shot and seriously injured. The shooter was a Palestinian member of the organization Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine, who Glick affirmed told him before shooting:

“I am sorry, but you are an enemy of al-Aqsa”.<sup>224</sup>

On the same year of the attack, police labeled Glick “the most dangerous man in the Middle East”.<sup>225</sup>

The attack did not stop his commitment as an important symbol of the Temple Mount activism. In 2016, he was elected as a member of Knesset for Likud. After his appointment, he opened his Knesset office with the name “Jerusalem for Peace”, underlining his goal of building the Temple to bring peace in Jerusalem. He argues that

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<sup>222</sup> Y. Be'er, “Dangerous Liaison”, 66.

<sup>223</sup> Renee Ghert-Zand, “Yehudah Glick, shot in Jerusalem, works for Jews’ right to pray on Temple Mount”, *The Times of Israel*, October 30<sup>th</sup> 2014, accessed May 27<sup>th</sup> 2019, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/yehudah-glick-shot-in-jerusalem-works-for-jews-right-to-pray-on-temple-mount/>

<sup>224</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>225</sup> Y. Be'er, “Dangerous Liaison”, 66.

the Temple will bring peace for everyone and that whoever wants to pray there should be allowed to do so (even Muslims, Reform Jews and Women of the Wall).<sup>226</sup> By this, he could appear as a moderate, promoting the rights of everyone in the holiest place for Jews and the third for Muslims; an extremist would never endorse people's rights as he does. However, Palestinian's rights and demands are not really part of his agenda. Muslims can come and pray on the compound, which will be the Temple Mount, not the al-Aqsa compound anymore. Additionally, they will not have any claims on the Holy Esplanade, which will be completely under Jewish authority.

Yehuda Glick's approach has proven successful. Jewish visits to the Temple Mount have been increasing during the years and the topic of changing the *status quo* has, by his activism, become more popular and acceptable in both political, religious and public arenas.<sup>227</sup>

### *Conclusions*

The Temple Mount Movements and activists are not anymore simply small groups on the margins of Israeli society. On the contrary, they are now loud voices which can speak of notable successes in many of their goals and actions. They have made the issue of changing the *status quo* possible, embracing civil disobedience instead of violence to get closer to what the society finds acceptable, even desirable. Since the 2000s, the *status quo* is transforming, and the Temple Mount Movements are the main actors in this process. In fact, the biggest Temple Mount movements are completely integrated and well known in Israeli society. Moreover, many right-wing politicians are beginning to support the demands of changing the *status quo* and to give Jews the right to pray at the site.

However, changing the *status quo* it is not easy. It is one of the core points of the peace agreement with Jordan that Israel counts on to prevent a diplomatic breakdown. Moreover, any changes on it would lead to Palestinian riots and violence at the site.

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<sup>226</sup> Shalom Jerusalem Foundation, "About Us", *Shalom Jerusalem Foundation*, accessed 25<sup>th</sup> May, 2019, <http://jerusalemofpeace.com/PAGE1.asp>

<sup>227</sup> Y. Be'er, "Dangerous Liaison", 66.



Additionally, even within Israeli society, there are many people and groups that still follow the religious decision of the Chief Rabbinate believing that ascending to the Temple is prohibited.

## Chapter Three: Changes in Israeli Politics and the Rise of the Temple Mount Movements

### *The Likud Crisis and the Oslo Accords*

Society and politics within Israel have changed radically since the 1980s. With the outbreak of the First Intifada in 1987, an ideological crisis hit Likud, the major right-wing Israeli party. Historically in opposition of any territorial withdrawal during much of the last century, it divided upon the issue of territories and whether withdrawing from the West Bank and Gaza was necessary for Israel's security and development as a Democratic Jewish State. According to a 1991 poll of the Likud Central Committee, a narrow majority of the party was ready to cede part of the West Bank and Gaza in exchange for peace and security.<sup>228</sup> This internal division of Likud caused the party to be voted out of office and the new election installed the Labor Party candidate, Yitzhak Rabin, as the new Israeli Prime Minister. This split in Likud mirrored the split inside Israeli society at the time, deeply divided upon the two main ideologies, the right-wing Greater Israel Ideology and the left leaning Land for Peace faction.<sup>229</sup>

Following Rabin's election (1992), the Oslo Peace Process began (1993). As a result, Israel signed the Declaration of Principles on a Palestinian self-governing authority in the West Bank and Gaza, acknowledging Palestinian national rights and recognizing the Palestine Liberation Organization.<sup>230</sup> Under this agreement the Israeli government abandoned the idea of implementing the Greater Israel Ideology and, after years of government support, the settlers found themselves losing support both within the government and among the wider Israeli society. This was the second time in which Israel decided to give away territories in exchange for peace. The first time, in 1979, the Camp David Accords gave legitimacy to Israeli groups such as Gush Emunim and, even after the withdraw from Sinai, the government still strongly supported and implemented settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. Under the Oslo Accords, the idea of the Greater

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<sup>228</sup> J. Rynhold and D. Waxman, "Ideological Change and Israel's Disengagement from Gaza", 16.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>230</sup> J. Rynhold and D. Waxman, "Ideological Change and Israel's Disengagement from Gaza", 16-17.

Israel Ideology seemed to be more untenable, giving space and legitimacy to the left-wing idea of Land for Peace.<sup>231</sup>

The Oslo Process caused Israeli society to be more than ever divided on the issue of territorial withdrawal. It was almost equally split, with 40% to 50% of Israeli population opposed the peace process. In fact, even if both Oslo Agreements (Oslo I and Oslo II) passed the Knesset, Rabin never had a complete majority on the issue. The hope was that the Oslo Process would bring peace and stability, but it did not. Both Palestinians and Israelis continued engaging in protests, riots and violent actions. Therefore, in March 1995, disagreements regarding the peace process reached a peak, leaving only 11% of Israeli population satisfied with it.<sup>232</sup>

Violence and civil disobedience erupted in the settlement circles. One of these groups, Zo Artzeinu (described previously in chapter two), was a very radical protest group opposed to the Oslo process, where the famous Temple Activist and future MK, Moshe Feiglin was one of the founders. Zo Artzeinu focused on civil disobedience more than on violent actions, employing roadblocks and the disobedience to army orders. However, not all settlers avoided violence. The two most violent episodes of in this period were in 1994, when Baruch Goldstein<sup>233</sup>, went inside the Muslim side of the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron and killed 29 Palestinian worshippers, and in 1995, when Yagal Amir assassinated PM Rabin during a peace rally. Even if Amir was not a member of any pro-settlement groups<sup>234</sup>, he related to many rabbis of these groups and participated in protests with different movements, such as Zo Artzeinu. The murder of Rabin was a pivotal turning point for the settler movements, which as a result lost much popular support. In

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<sup>231</sup> J. Rynhold and D. Waxman, "Ideological Change and Israel's Disengagement from Gaza", 19.

<sup>232</sup>Percentage taken from "The Peace Index" which is a monthly survey that monitors public sentiment on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Israel Democracy Institute, "Peace Index", *Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace and Research*, 1995, accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 2019, <https://en.idi.org.il/centers/1159/1520> ;

Dov Waxman, "From Controversy to Consensus", 76-77.

<sup>233</sup> American born Israeli doctor member of Kach, the very violent and radical group founded by Rabbi Kahane. After this episode, the group was declared illegal by Israeli government and it was not able anymore to run for the Knesset.

<sup>234</sup> However, at young age, he participated in several national-religious youth camps and he had a strong legacy with national religious rabbis.

fact, for many Israelis it started to seem that the threat to the country's democracy and security came not only from Palestinians, but from Israelis themselves.<sup>235</sup>

After the assassination of Rabin, Israeli society was not ready to abandon the peace negotiations with Palestinians. In those years, Likud was still divided on the issue of the withdrawal from the territories and Netanyahu, the new Likud party leader, did not force his party to take an official position, being fearful that this would have led to an internal crisis.<sup>236</sup> Likud had the chance to be in power again, and Netanyahu understood the possibility of the moment of shock that Israel was living to win the election. He knew that in order to win, he needed to have the party united. Therefore, Netanyahu decided to be more moderate and to try to satisfy the interests of most of his voters and party members. In fact, huge pressures were weighing on Israel. As a matter of fact, the most influential Israeli ally, the United States, supported the peace agreement with the Palestinians. Additionally, the First Intifada damaged Israel's international image, causing most of the international community to push for and support the peace agreement.<sup>237</sup>

Netanyahu decided to base his campaign on the issue of security. He thus recognized the Oslo Accords as an internationally recognized agreement. However, he also claimed that the right of the Jewish people to live in Eretz Israel was an eternal right and not to be questioned.<sup>238</sup>

With the murder of Yitzhak Rabin and victory in the 1996 election of Netanyahu over the Labor candidate, Peres, the peace agreement was fully compromised, and Israel would never reach the same promise of peace as during the Oslo process.

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<sup>235</sup> Aviad Rubin, "Bifurcated Loyalty and Religious Actors' Behavior in Democratic Politics: The Case of post-1967 Religious Zionism in Israel", *Religion, State & Society*, 42, n.1, p. 46-65, (2014): 58.

<sup>236</sup> J. Rynhold and D. Waxman, "Ideological Change and Israel's Disengagement from Gaza", 19.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibidem*.

## *The Temple Mount Movements and the Oslo Accords*

As in every peace agreement or memorandum between Israelis and Palestinians, during the Oslo Accords Jerusalem played an important and central role in negotiations, it being one of the most crucial of problematic issues to solve. During the peace process, both parties decided to leave the question of Jerusalem aside, probably because both knew that a compromise on that issue was unreachable. It was decided that delicate issues, such as Jerusalem and the refugees, would be handled no later than two years after the signing of the self-rule accord.<sup>239</sup>

Following the Oslo Accords, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) established its control in parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In 1994, while Israel and Jordan were both seeking for a peace agreement, control over East Jerusalem and the holy sites became central for the PLO agenda. In fact, the PLO mostly wanted to control Muslim religious institutions in the city, especially the Holy Esplanade.<sup>240</sup> The struggle between Jordan and the PLO for the control over the Holy Esplanade made the communication and coordination with Israel harder, especially regarding the fragile understanding with respect to sites archeology and maintenance.<sup>241</sup> However, after the signing of the Oslo Accords, in 1994 Israel and Jordan signed their peace agreement and Jordan became the official protector of the Muslim and Christian holy shrines in Israel and Palestine, including the Holy Esplanade, undermining the role of the PLO in the city.<sup>242</sup>

During the peace talks with Jordan, another important actor wanted to have a say, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel. In fact, the Chief Rabbinate asked to have an official role during negotiations between the two countries, but its request was denied. As a matter of fact, the Chief Rabbinate opposed to give to Muslims control over the site, claiming for a full

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<sup>239</sup> Gregory S. Mahler, "The Peace Process", in *Politics and Government in Israel*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., p. 269-300, (Plymouth, 2011): 283.

<sup>240</sup> Elie Rekhess, "The Palestinian Leadership in East Jerusalem after 1967", in *Jerusalem: Idea and Reality*, ed. Tamar Mayer and Suleiman Ali Mourad, Routledge, p. 266-283, (New York, 2008): 275.

<sup>241</sup> Craig Larkin and Michael Dumper, "In Defense of Al-Aqsa: The Islamic Movement inside Israel and the Battle for Jerusalem" *The Middle East Journal*, 66, n.1, p. 31-52, (2012): 33.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibidem*.

Israeli sovereignty. However, its position was against of the government's one at the time.<sup>243</sup>

Consequently, in those years, a profound crisis hit the settlement groups. The rising fear of a compromise over Jerusalem and the Jewish holiest site, the Temple Mount, together with the failure of the Greater Israel Ideology, caused many settlers and rabbis opposed to the ascension to the Mount, to change their opinion on the issue. The current crisis led some rabbis to intensify their messianic expectations, thinking that what was happening was an ultimate test to prove Israel's spiritual elevation.<sup>244</sup> A growing number of religious authorities and leading personalities in the settlement movements stated that the losing of territories by Israel to the Palestinians was a divine punishment for not ascending to the Temple Mount.<sup>245</sup> One of the modern spiritual leaders of religious Zionism, the rabbi of Kyriat Arba, Dov Lior, stated:

“We, who believe in reward and punishment and in Divine providence, must know that one of the main reasons why we are suffering torment is the profound apathy among large sections of our people concerning the Temple Mount in general and the construction of the Temple, in particular.”<sup>246</sup>

The Temple Mount movements, which were active since the 1980s but relatively marginal inside the society, suddenly became more prominent and important. The issue of the Temple Mount neglected during the first twenty years after the Six-Day War because of greater interest in promoting the Greater Israel Ideology and gaining control over the West Bank and Gaza, now gained primacy. Because the Oslo Accords demolished the dream of realizing biblical prophecy, the fear of losing Jerusalem brought more attention to the holy city and its holiest site, the Temple Mount. In 1996, increased interest in the Temple Mount and the shift in sentiment of the settlers and Orthodox community regarding the idea of ascending to Mount Moriah, became clear by the decision made by the Council of Yesha Rabbis (CYR). This decision gave permission to Jews to ascend the Mount and, additionally, urged the rabbis to ascend with their

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<sup>243</sup> Y. Cohen, “The Political Role of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate”, 114.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>245</sup> M. Inbari, “Religious Zionism and the Temple Mount Dilemma”, 39.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibidem*.

congregants.<sup>247</sup> The CYR believed that the lack of Jewish presence at the Temple Mount could have led the Israeli government to hand the compound over to the Arabs. Therefore, their goal was to mobilize masses of Jews to ascend the Temple, so it would have been harder for the government to compromise on it. Such an action was openly counter to the Chief Rabbinate ruling and the beliefs of the Mercaz Ha-Rav yeshiva where most of the rabbis had graduated from. In addition, not all the rabbis in the settler's circle were favorable to this ruling and this led to some tensions inside the settler movements, especially the Yesha Council.<sup>248</sup> However, it was a huge accomplishment for the Temple Mount movements. In fact, the biggest settler's organization gave their blessing on ascending to the Temple Mount. Some of the most prominent actors of the decision made by the Yesha Council, were the rabbis of the Movement for the Establishment of the Temple, which supported and gave advice to the council decision makers.<sup>249</sup>

Even as all the Prime Ministers have stated their intention to not change the *status quo* and to keep the site under Muslim control (and this position was confirmed in the Israeli Jordanian peace treaty), it was clear that interest in changing the *status quo* was increasing inside Israeli society, especially in the Orthodox, national religious camp. At the time, most Israelis were still inclined to an agreement with the Palestinians, however, increasing violence from both sides made it also possible for more extremist party members to be more open to ideas of changing the *status quo*. Many settlers and Temple Mount activists, such as Moshe Feiglin, expressed disappointment with the politics of Netanyahu, who completely excluded the Temple Mount from his political agenda. In fact, one of the reasons why Netanyahu won the election of 1996 was the support of the settlers, especially the Yesha Council, as he represented to them the only leader committed to stopping withdrawal from the territories.<sup>250</sup>

Thus, the Temple Mount became more than ever a symbol of Jewish sovereignty over Jerusalem, a national and religious symbol which the government seemed ready to compromise on for peace. In this historical period where the settler's movements seemed

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<sup>247</sup> M. Inbari, "Religious Zionism and the Temple Mount Dilemma", 40.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>250</sup> Manhigut Yehudit, "Who are We?", *Manhigut Yehudit*, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013, accessed May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019, <https://www.jewishisrael.org/who-are-we/>

more divided and powerless than ever, the Temple Mount became for many disillusioned settlers a beacon highlighting their religious and national beliefs. The most prominent Temple Mount movements understood that it was now the necessary time for them to express their claims more forcefully.

### *Evangelical Christians and the Temple Mount Movements*

Another important factor which played a fundamental role in the increased visibility of the Temple Mount movements were the actions of Evangelical Christian groups in the 1990s. Evangelical Christians have always had a special relationship with Israel and the Jews. In fact, they see the Jewish people and Israel as fundamental for the coming of Biblical End of Times and the arrival of the Messiah. The construction of the Third Temple itself it is an essential part of the redemption scenario and the preparing for the arriving of the Messiah.<sup>251</sup> For these reasons, after the Six-Day war, Evangelical Christian groups started to increase their presence in the city of Jerusalem to be ready for Redemption. However, when the Israeli government decided to leave the Holy Esplanade to the *waqf*, the Christian groups felt very disappointed.<sup>252</sup> Evangelical Christians understood the need to act, and started to organize major visits to Israel, making them the second major religious group to visit and live in the country. They started volunteering in kibbutzim in the West Bank, alongside living in Jerusalem and funding the Temple Mount movements, especially the Temple Institute, the Temple Mount Faithful and the Temple Mount Foundation (in which Yehuda Glick was CEO).<sup>253</sup>

With the Oslo Accords, another wave of disillusion hit these Christian groups. Many felt that their project of building the Temple was vanishing, however, they continued their activism and to help financially the Temple Mount movements.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Yaakov Ariel, "Doomsday in Jerusalem? Christian Messianic Groups and the Rebuilding of the Temple", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 13, n. 1, p. 1-14, (2001): 1-2.

<sup>252</sup> *Ivi*, 3-4.

<sup>253</sup> *Ivi*, 5.

<sup>254</sup> *Ivi*, 11-12.



Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, their messianic imagination grew. More and more Evangelical Christians from the United States started to visit Jerusalem, the Temple Institute and the Holy Esplanade, causing Israeli authority to concern that some possible violent actions might be carried out by them. For example, in 1999 Israeli Security forces arrested several members of “Concerned Christians”, a Christian Evangelical group, which was suspected of planning a mass suicide or other actions intended to damage the mosque. In the same year, Israeli Security arrested and deported several Christian activists, because of the fear that they too were intent on doing something to damage the mosque.<sup>255</sup> While these groups were extreme, many other Evangelical Christians also promoted “peaceful” actions with a goal of building of the Temple without destroying the mosque.<sup>256</sup>

These Evangelical Christian organizations are mainly located in the US and, especially after the election of President Donald Trump in 2016 (who in his political campaign was in fact supported by many Evangelical Christians), they became stronger and found more legitimacy in their work giving more support from overseas.<sup>257</sup> Today, one of the most important and powerful of these Evangelical Christian movements is Cry for Zion, an Israel-based organization born in 2014, which works in recruiting Christians worldwide to push for total Israel sovereignty over the Temple Mount.<sup>258</sup>

Therefore, Temple Mount movements, with their new power and visibility gained by the Yesha Rabbi’s decision, and the support of increasing tourism of Evangelical Christians, found the confidence and the power to act and promote more Temple awareness and the Jewish right to pray at the Temple Mount. Temple Mount movements were ready to reach a broader group in Israeli society and a stronger role inside Israeli politics.

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<sup>255</sup> Y. Ariel, “Doomsday in Jerusalem?”, 11.

<sup>256</sup> Many Evangelical Christians association has given funds to study and research the exact point where the Temple was standing.

*Ivi*, 6.

<sup>257</sup> M. Dumper, “The Background to the Struggle”, 23.

<sup>258</sup> Naomi Zeveloff, “A Christian Group Is Building a Movement that Could Destabilize Jerusalem’s Most Explosive Holy Site”, *The Daily Blast*, February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019, accessed May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/a-christian-group-is-building-a-movement-that-could-destabilize-jerusalem-s-most-explosive-holy-site>

## *The Evolving Status Quo*

In September 1996, Prime Minister Netanyahu inaugurated the Western Wall Tunnel which uncovered a portion of ancient Jerusalem that run under the Western Wall and many houses and shops in the Muslim quarter of the Old City, where it also ends.<sup>259</sup> Israel started the work for the tunnel and opened it without any coordination with the *waqf*, believing that the *status quo* was not involved since the excavation did not pass under the Esplanade. However, the *waqf* and the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement saw the Israeli action as a threat to the compound. The Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement started the campaign of “al-Aqsa is in Danger”, calling upon Palestinians to come and pray with Palestinian flags and for more Muslim presence at the site, and to stop what they perceived as an Israeli invasion.<sup>260</sup>

Right after the opening of the tunnel, violence broke out at the Holy Esplanade. The *waqf* ceased communication with Israeli police and Israeli authorities regarding security, entrance and maintenance at the site. The cessation of cooperation was clear when the *waqf* decided to close the entrance to non-Muslims following the days of violence. However, the Israeli police did not agree to that and allowed visitors to enter anyway clearly undermining the role of the *waqf* in the administration and control of entrances. This decision proved to both Palestinians and Israelis that the *status quo* was not as before.<sup>261</sup>

To fight Israeli “invasion” of the site, the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement started to fund the work of the *waqf* for the opening of two underground areas under al-Aqsa: the Marwani Mosque<sup>262</sup> and Ancient al-Aqsa. One of the main reasons for opening these two underground spaces was to bring more worshippers to pray at the site to counter the fear that Israel had plans to take possession of Solomon’s Stable and turn it into a Jewish site for prayer.<sup>263</sup> For the construction and restoration work at the Marwani

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<sup>259</sup> The exit of the Western Wall tunnel is approximately at the First Station of the Via Dolorosa.

<sup>260</sup> Y. Reiter, “Collapse of the Modus Vivendi, 1996-2003”, 73.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>262</sup> Also known as Solomon’s stable.

<sup>263</sup> ICG, “The Status of the Status Quo”, 7-9;

Y. Reiter, “Collapse of the Modus Vivendi, 1996-2003”, 73.

Mosque, the *waqf* operated without consulting and obtaining the approval of Israeli authorities. At the beginning, Israel closed an eye on this issue. However, in 1999, civil society groups and Temple Mount activists discovered that during the work for transforming the underground areas in three Muslim prayer halls, many Jewish artifacts (along with Islamic ones) were discarded without being properly studied.<sup>264</sup> A revolt ensued with some Temple Mount advocates and other Jewish groups demanding more monitoring of the site and the activities of the *waqf* thus resulting in an increase of Israeli and Jewish presence. Nevertheless, Israel and the *waqf* succeeded in keeping the site relatively calm. As during the First Intifada, Israeli police blocked young Palestinians from entering the site during these incidents of violence.<sup>265</sup>

### *The last attempt of Peace*

Beside the issue of Jerusalem, Netanyahu still seemed to be partially committed to the peace process. In 1997, the Knesset passed the Hebron Accords, a plan to divide the city in two parts, one under Israeli rule and the other under complete Palestinian rule. This was again a setback for settlers, which saw the city of one of the first settlements<sup>266</sup> and the place where the Cave of the Patriarchs stands, traded for peace. It was also this event which strengthened the resolve and goals of the Temple Mount movements and revealed the importance of sovereignty over the Temple Mount.<sup>267</sup> During the 1990s, beginning with about fifteen Jews ascending the Mount regularly, the number arose by the end of the decade to as many as one thousand.<sup>268</sup>

During the years post-Oslo, it seemed that the Israeli government was willing to give away parts of the West Bank, but the question of Jerusalem was still a taboo to discuss. According to the Oslo Accords, sensitive issues such as settlements in the West Bank, the return of Palestinian refugees and Jerusalem, should have been discussed no later than

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<sup>264</sup> ICG, “The Status of the Status Quo”, 7-9.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>266</sup> Kyriat Arba was founded in 1968.

<sup>267</sup> O. Haklai, “Linking Ideas and Opportunities in Contentious Politics”, 806-807.

<sup>268</sup> Y. Reiter, “Collapse of the Modus Vivendi, 1996-2003”, 83.

two years after the signing of the agreement. However, the two years' goal for discussion passed in 1995. The impact of Rabin's murder, terrorist acts by both sides and Netanyahu's election signaled that the peace process was falling apart. Consequently, important issues were not discussed. The American President at the time, Bill Clinton, was greatly interested in Middle East politics and was looking for a way to revive the peace process between the two parties. He invited Netanyahu and Arafat to the eastern shore of Maryland at what became known as the Wye River Conference (named after the hosting conference center), where the two parties, with the U.S. as a mediator, participated in discussions for nine days.<sup>269</sup> At the end the parties signed the Wye River Memorandum, in which Israel was committed in withdrawing from about 13% of the West Bank in three months and adding a 14% of the West Bank areas under the Palestinian Authority. There was also to be a liberation of some Palestinian prisoners.<sup>270</sup> For their part the Palestinian Authority was committed to engaging in more aggressive antiterrorism measures. The accord was signed, but again it must be emphasized without a discussion nor any agreement concerning the status of Jerusalem.<sup>271</sup>

In the same year (1998), just a month before the Wye Memorandum was agreed to, Temple Mount activists were meeting for their annual conference in Jerusalem. Thousands attended the conference from every religious background. Many political personalities and members of the government close to the national religious and settlement circles participated, giving their support to the work of the Temple activists. Hanan Porat, one of the founders of Gush Emunim and a member of the Knesset (MK), sent personal invitations to the conference to other MKs. By their invited attendance at the conference, it was clear that Temple Mount activists were no longer a small neglected minority but were now instead part of the more mainstream Israeli national religious sector.<sup>272</sup>

With the 1999 election, again the focus of the political campaigns was peace with Palestinians and finalizing of the Oslo Accords. Ehud Barack was elected as Israeli Prime Minister and he represented hope for a long-lasting peace agreement with the Palestinians.

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<sup>269</sup> G. S. Mahler, "The Peace Process", 285-286.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>272</sup> Y. Reiter, "Collapse of the Modus Vivendi, 1996-2003", 78-79.

Together with his willingness to negotiate with Palestinians and with the support and interest of the US President Bill Clinton looking forward to real achievement in the Middle East peace process to end his presidential term, the Palestinian Authority and Israel met again in the summer of 2000 for the Camp David Summit.<sup>273</sup>

At the Summit, the usual problematic topics had to be discussed. Arafat understood that it was probably his last big political opportunity and he was not willing to compromise on any important questions, especially the status of Jerusalem. He wanted complete control over East Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa compound. He was quoted saying to his delegate on the way of negotiation with Israelis:

“The Haram is dearer to me than anything else”.<sup>274</sup>

On the Israeli side, for the first time, the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barack was ready to compromise over Jerusalem. Barack knew he could not give complete control over East Jerusalem to the Palestinians. In fact, the sovereignty of Jerusalem was one of the most sensitive topics and the one which most of the Israeli society agreed on: Jerusalem was and must remain an undivided city under Israeli complete control.<sup>275</sup> However, Barack was willing to give Palestinians a role in the Jerusalem municipality and reaffirmed that Israel was committed to the *status quo*, emphasizing that his government follow the decision of the Chief Rabbinate that there be no entrance and praying at the compound. Nevertheless, he also knew he could not give up the Israeli role of security and supervision over the site. Arafat did not agree with these Israeli terms and consequently the Camp David Summit ended incomplete failure. Violence was expected to result soon thereafter.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Gilead Sher, “Negotiating in Jerusalem: reflections of an Israeli negotiator”, in *Jerusalem: Idea and Reality*, edited by Tamar Mayr and Suleiman Ali Mourad, Routledge, p. 303-321, (New York, 2008):305.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>275</sup> Gilead Sher, “Negotiating in Jerusalem”, 305- 315.

<sup>276</sup> G.S. Mahler, “The Peace Process”, 285-286.

## *The Second Intifada*

The year 2000 represented a real turning point for Israeli politics and the role of the Holy Esplanade. During the Camp David Summit (2000), national-religious Israeli organizations saw the looming threat of a compromise over Jerusalem, which led to a fear of losing the Temple Mount more vivid. All during the Camp David Summit period, Temple Mount activists pressured both the government and the Chief Rabbinate to do something regarding the site. When a letter sent in June 2000 by Chief Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi Doron to the Prime Minister Barack was revealed supporting the ban of Jewish prayer at the site, it raised many criticisms especially by members of the National Religious Party who petitioned to dismiss the ban and to allow Jews to enter the site under the halachic rule of “occupation”. This was to be a temporary rule, the same as used in 1967 to give religious cover to allowing soldiers deployed as a standing presence at the site.<sup>277</sup> The Rabbinate disagreed, owing to growing protests by settlers’ rabbis and other political figures. The Chief Rabbinate decided instead to form a Rabbinic Committee to examine other possible action to fulfill the Jewish right over the Temple Mount. In addition, the Chief Rabbinate underscored the prohibition disallowing foreign rule over the Temple Mount, stressing the fact that Ehud Barack promised not to give up on Israeli sovereignty over the most important Jewish site.<sup>278</sup> However, for the Temple Mount advocates, the Chief Rabbinate position was not enough. Meidad, the national-religious liberal party, claimed that the position of the Chief Rabbinate was more political than religious, and urged for a new ruling on the issue of Jewish entrance.<sup>279</sup> Of course, the Chief Rabbinate suffered from political pressure to maintain their ruling. However, we should not forget also the religious pressure to the Rabbinate by settlers such as the member of Ateret Cohanim and by Ultra-Orthodox, largely against Jewish entrance at the site.<sup>280</sup>

In the same year, Rabbi Yisrael (founder of the Temple Institute), ruled that it was permitted to visit and ascend to the Temple Mount according to the Torah commandment

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<sup>277</sup> Y. Reiter, “Collapse of the Modus Vivendi, 1996-2003”, 75-76.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>280</sup> M. Inbari, “Religious Zionism and The Temple Mount Dilemma”, 42.

to take over the Holy Land of Israel. It was a breakthrough for Temple Mount activists, which before this were cautious about which areas they were permitted to visit and pray. Heretofore they usually stopped at the southern entrance and prayed outside. According to Ir Amim, after the ruling of the rabbi, 50,000 Jews participated in a demonstration for the right to pray and demonstrate Jewish sovereignty over the Temple Mount outside the Lion's Gate.<sup>281</sup> Because of the increasing pressure and presence of the Temple Mount activists, in August 2000 the *waqf* decided to block members of the Temple Mount Faithful from entering the site without any prior coordination with the Israeli police. Consequently, the Israeli government ordered the police to close the entrance to all tourists, causing the *waqf* to lose entrance fee receipts. Tensions raised, but the two parties met and talked, and the situation returned to normal.<sup>282</sup> But not for long.

On September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2000, the situation on the site exploded. Ariel Sharon, the new leader of the Likud after winning against Netanyahu at the 1999 party primaries, together with six other Knesset members and escorted by army and police, visited the site. The reason for this visit was mostly driven by his hawkish political ideas and to show his support for settlements, and to demonstrate that he had no intention to give up on the site. In fact, he understood the growing national religious interest regarding the compound and wanted to make clear his position on the issue. After his visit, he said:

“The Temple Mount is in our hands and will remain in our hands. It is the holiest site in Judaism and it is the right of every Jew to visit the Temple Mount (...)”<sup>283</sup>

It can be argued that this visit signaled the end of the last real attempt at a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

PM Ehud Barack, who did not have a majority in the Knesset anymore, could not handle the pressure of the Second Intifada, which broke right after Sharon's visit. With conflict breaking in all Israel and in the territories, Barack was not powerful enough in the Knesset to manage this crisis. For this reason, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of December, he resigned. Sharon, the

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<sup>281</sup> Y. Reiter, “Collapse of the Modus Vivendi, 1996-2003”, 78.

<sup>282</sup> *Ivi*, 83-84.

<sup>283</sup> Suzanne Goldenberg, “Rioting as Sharon visits Islam holy site”, September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2000, accessed 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/sep/29/israel>

leader of the dominant Likud faction, was clear in his campaign expressing his hawkish political ideas. He declared that the Oslo Accords were no longer to be honored and that he was ready to counter Palestinian violence. In the election of February 2001, Sharon became the new Israeli Prime Minister.<sup>284</sup>

In response to these developments, U.S. President Clinton initiated a last attempt to resuscitate the peace process. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2001, the President asked to U.S. Senator George J. Mitchell to issue a report outlining possible solutions to stop the violence. However, the resulting report did not state anything new. It called for a cease-fire, halting of Israeli settlements and a restarting of the peace process.<sup>285</sup> However, the violence continued. Another attempt was made by Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in 2002, which proposed a two-state solution. While the Arab League accepted this agreement in Beirut, no progress was made with the Israeli and Palestinian governments.<sup>286</sup>

Thus, the peace agreement process not only did not advance, it completely collapsed. A contributing factor in this collapse was found in the new U.S. President George W. Bush (2002), for whom the Middle East peace process was no longer a priority. In fact, Bush did not even care to visit the region until the end of his second term in 2008. Israel found itself without a U.S. mediator and in a situation of uncontrolled violence, “resolved” by the operation Defensive Shield in 2002 and the building of the Separation Barrier.<sup>287</sup>

### *The Temple Mount During the Second Intifada*

From 2000 until 2003, both the *waqf* and the Israeli government decided to close the Holy Esplanade to non-Muslims due to security concerns.<sup>288</sup> In this period of violence and of not permitting entrance to the site, the Temple Mount movements continued working in pursuit of their goals. Increasing violence in Israel by Palestinians, coupled with the fact

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<sup>284</sup> G. S. Mahler, “The Peace Process”, 287.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>286</sup> G. S. Mahler, “The Peace Process”, 289.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>288</sup> ICG, “The Status of the Status Quo”, 9.



that Jews were not permitted to enter the Temple Mount, awakened a fervor in the National Religious sector, alongside more secular sectors of the Israeli society, to the issue of the Temple Mount and of the necessity to have Jewish and Israeli sovereignty over it. Various religious publications on the topic of prayer regulations on the Temple Mount began to be published by the Temple Mount movements and other religious Zionist organizations. The issue arrived also in the Knesset, where Uri Ariel<sup>289</sup>, at the time the former leader of the Yesha Council and its unofficial representative inside the Knesset, proposed a law for the regulation of Jewish prayers at the Temple Mount.<sup>290</sup> The issue of the Temple Mount, which was a complete taboo inside Gush Emunim in the 1970s-80s, became now central to the former members, now supporters of the Temple Mount movement.

In 2001, the Yesha Council, in a joint meeting with the Movement for the Establishing the Temple, re-affirmed the decision taken in 1996, encouraging the faithful to ascend to the Temple respecting the Halacha. When the Movement for the Establishment of the Temple was founded it counted no more than hundred people and it was considered a very marginal group. In 2001, the members of the same movement made decisions with the most important settlement organizations, demonstrating ties between the Jewish national-religious Orthodoxy and the Temple Movements.<sup>291</sup>

In 2002, the Reform movement's Israel Religious Action Center commissioned a survey on the topic of ascension to the Temple Mount: 42% of the public favored Jews praying at the Temple Mount and 55% did not. Similar proportions were in the Ultra-Orthodox and traditional sector. Another question was regarding people being in favor or not of the construction of the Third Temple: 53% answered affirmatively and 37% negatively.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Appointed by Benjamin Netanyahu in the 20th Knesset as Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Knesset Members, "Uri Yehuda Ariel", *Knesset Members*, accessed June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019, [https://knesset.gov.il/mk/eng/mk\\_eng.asp?mk\\_individual\\_id t=713](https://knesset.gov.il/mk/eng/mk_eng.asp?mk_individual_id t=713)

<sup>290</sup> M. Inbari, "Haredi Messianic Activism", 129.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibidem*.

## *The Reopening of the Holy Esplanade to non-Muslims*

In 2003, the Holy Esplanade reopened to non-Muslim visitors. In the first three months after the reopening, 4,000 Jews entered the site, becoming 70,000 in total by October 2004.<sup>293</sup>

During the Second Intifada, the role of the Palestinian Authority (PA) at the Holy Esplanade completely disappeared. Because of the Oslo Process, the PA had gained some power over the site, with members of the Palestinian *waqf* being part of the Jordanian *waqf*. However, with the violence and failure of the Oslo Accords, Palestinians lost control over the site, which then returned completely to the Jordanian *waqf*. The Israeli government ceased any communication with the PA, and, in addition, the Israeli government did not even discuss the reopening with Jordan.<sup>294</sup> In 2003, right after the re-election of Ariel Sharon as Prime Minister, the Holy Esplanade re-opened to non-Muslims. With this decision, the coordination of access, which was one of the main powers of the Jordanian *waqf* before the 2000s, ceased to exist. The *waqf* could no longer control entrance of non-Muslims and, moreover, to collect fees for entrance of the monuments. Additionally, the *waqf* could not control nor stop religious Jews from entering the mosque or the Dome of the Rock. Therefore, it was safer to disallow non-Muslims from entering. Thus, the Israeli police now had completely control over entrance of non-Muslims. Nevertheless, the prayer ban remained.<sup>295</sup>

Additionally, following the construction of the Separation Barrier during the Second Intifada, Israeli police started to implement restrictions on Palestinians ascending to the site. With the construction of the barrier, it became harder for Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza to access Jerusalem. Moreover, the Israeli police introduced age restrictions. But in the time period from 2003-2012, it used them very rarely, approximately only for three days.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> M. Inbari, "Religious Zionism and the Temple Mount Dilemma", 42.

<sup>294</sup> ICG, "The Status of the Status Quo", 9-11.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>296</sup> In comparison to only the year 2013-2014, which Israeli police used the age restrictions for thirty days, with an additional expansion of the age restrictions.

ICG, "The Status of the Status Quo", 11.

The lack of communication between the *waqf* and Israel made the situation at the Holy Esplanade really tense. Probably the most exemplary controversy was the one regarding the Moroccan gate bridge. In 2004, due to heavy rain and a light earthquake, the existent ramp to the Moroccan gate was heavily damaged suffering a collapse. Israel authorities replaced it with a wooden bridge (the one that we can still see today) and started developing a project for a new bridge. The idea was to build the bridge in a way which would allow easier access to the City of David (an archeological site in the Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan managed by a settler's organization), and the Temple Mount.<sup>297</sup> Israel did not consult Jordan regarding the plan<sup>298</sup>, and when in 2006 the plan was ready, Israeli government started the construction of the new bridge, under cover of the excuse of doing maintenance work. Of course, this led to a diplomatic tumult with Jordan, which opposed the Israeli plan. Consequently, City Council Member Pepe Alalo (Meretz Party) and Ir Amim requested that the Jerusalem Municipality develop a proper plan for the construction of the new bridge that could be presented to Jordan.<sup>299</sup> Many projects arrived at the Jerusalem Municipality, and several them included space for the construction of a synagogue.<sup>300</sup> The plan decided upon by the Jerusalem Municipality was one which included an expansion of the Western Wall Plaza and a new ascent to the entrance. Both Jordan and Egypt assured Israel that riots would break out if Israel continued with the building of the bridge. The main problem between Israel and Jordan regarding construction of the bridge is mostly revealed by the fact that the two parties did not agree on what the *status quo* meant. While Israel believes that the outside of the Holy Esplanade is not under *waqf* control, the Jordanian *waqf* believes that the entire area surrounding the Esplanade is part of the compound. Therefore, Israel thinks the bridge is under Israeli authority and that the government does not need Jordan's permission. On the other hand, Jordan cited the 1994 agreement and the power of management over the site.<sup>301</sup> In the end, no work was done.

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<sup>297</sup> ICG, "The Status of the Status Quo", 11.

<sup>298</sup> Regarding this point, I found discrepancies. According to Ir Amim (2013) and the International Crisis Group Report (2015), Israel started the project without consulting with Jordan. However, according to Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (2011), Israel was always communicating with Jordan and the other international parties involved (UNESCO and Turkey).

<sup>299</sup> Y. Be'er, "Dangerous Liaison", 30-31.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibidem*.

In October 2011, the issue of the bridge reappeared. Cabin Secretary Zvi Hauser sent to Jordan a memorandum for the construction of the bridge, which was again rejected. Even if the new project was under the supervision of UNESCO and Israel promised to Jordan that the authenticity of the site would have not been harmed and it was only a matter of security, Jordan did not give its permission.<sup>302</sup> In fact, the Jordanian Kingdom was dealing with different pressures regarding the site. On one hand, it must deal with its ally, Israel, with whom it has a diplomatic and economic agreement. On the other hand, the Hashemite Kingdom has the largest number of Palestinian refugees and it also has to deal with the numerous pressures of Islamic groups, both in Jordan and in Egypt. Therefore, any concessions made to Israel regarding the site could cause major internal and democratic problems.<sup>303</sup>

Two months later, Shlomo Eshkol, the engineer of the Jerusalem Municipality, ordered the closure of the bridge if any measures for the new construction would not have been taken. After the engineer's affirmation, the Jordanian Foreign Minister at the time, Nasser Joudah, announced that Jordan was against any Israeli action over the Holy Site.<sup>304</sup> Consequently, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 2011, the Western Wall Heritage Fund, the Israeli organization in charge of the Western Wall and the gate, closed the bridge upon the order of the Jerusalem Municipality. On that evening, forty members of the Israeli extremist right-wing group Hilton Youth, occupied a building at the baptismal site of Qasr al-Yahud on the border with Jordan and refused to evacuate in an act of protest to demonstrate to the Jordanian government that it must not interfere in the Temple Mount affairs. After two days, Prime Minister Netanyahu ordered a reopening of the bridge, fearing a diplomatic crisis with its two neighbors, Jordan and Egypt.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Y. Be'er, "Dangerous Liaison", 30-31.

<sup>303</sup> Akiva Eldar, "Who is This Netanyahu That's Involving Muslims in Jerusalem Affairs?", *Haaretz*, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011, accessed June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5214455>

<sup>304</sup> Y. Be'er, "Dangerous Liaison", 30-31.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibidem*.

## *The Disengagement of Gaza and the Rising Power of the Temple Mount*

### *Movements*

Two of the main events and historical processes that gave power and legitimacy to the Temple Mount movements and moved them into the mainstream religious-Zionist public arena, were the Oslo Accords and the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip.

As previously discussed, during the Oslo Process the Likud underwent serious changes in its ideology. From being completely opposed to any territorial withdrawal, it moved in a more moderate direction, being more concerned with security and being open to give away territories in exchange for peace. The idea of the Greater Israel ideology, the rock and the fundamental ideology of Gush Emunim in the 1970s, felt not possible anymore. International pressure, together with the Palestinian violence and the Israeli society being more and more divided about the question of the territories, also forced Likud to engage in a more moderate tactic. Another important point influencing Likud to leave the Greater Israel Ideology was the need to maintain a Jewish majority in Israel and to build a stronger democratic Jewish State. In fact, since the Palestinian birth rate was higher than the Jewish-Israeli rate, the possibility of having a Palestinian majority in Israel in the coming years was plausible. Therefore, since the First Intifada, the Greater Israel ideology began to seem to be unlikely, and the ensuing disengagement from Gaza in 2005 was proof of its failing.<sup>306</sup> In addition, the left-wing idea of Land for Peace was also failing, and since the extreme violence of the Second Intifada, Israelis were seeking more for security and thus a complete physical separation from the Palestinians. With both the extreme right and left dreams now failed, the Israeli government and society was ready to abandon territories without any type of peace agreement.<sup>307</sup>

In 2003, while finishing the Separation Barrier and dealing with the bloody Second Intifada, Sharon, in his second term as Prime Minister, proposed the disengagement from the entire Gaza Strip twenty-one settlements, and another four isolated settlements in the

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<sup>306</sup> D. Waxman, "From Controversy to Consensus", 85.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibidem*.

north of the West Bank, for a total number of 8,000 Israeli settlers.<sup>308</sup> Sharon, known as one of the fathers and major political supporters of the settler's movements since the beginning of his political career, thus began implementing the biggest disengagement on Israeli history. It was the political answer to perceived Israeli needs: heightened security achieved by separation from the Palestinians. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 2005, the disengagement plan was approved. The decision was received very well by the Israeli society because many of them believed that the disengagement was the first step toward complete withdrawal from the Occupied Territories, even if Sharon denied this many time. Israelis saw disengagement as practical tool, a necessity to end violence and to remain a Jewish majority and democratic state. Obviously, the settlers were not enthusiastic about the decision, protesting and trying to change Israeli mainstream view of the disengagement. Again, Israeli society was deeply divided.<sup>309</sup>

### *The Loss of Faith in the Gush Emunim's Ideology*

Disengagement was a huge setback for religious Zionists. The belief that all the land of Israel was for the Jewish people and that it was God's plan to settle the entire biblical land was destroyed. In fact, not only was the government withdrawing from biblical Israeli land, but the disengagement also proceeded smoothly and with the support of most Israelis. A huge debate occurred inside the Rabbinical circles. Rabbi Kook's ideology, which drove the Gush Emunim followers and was at the center of religious Zionism, failed again. Some rabbis, for example Shlomo Avinar, remained loyal to the ideology of the state as superior and as representative of God's will. On the other hand, more active militant rabbis (such as Dov Lior, rabbi of Kiryat Arba) did not agree with this view and called for civil disobedience. Soldiers were implored to disobey orders to dismantle the settlements.<sup>310</sup> In addition, the two former Chief Rabbis, Avraham Shapira (head at the Mercaz Ha-Rav) and Mordechai Eliyahu, asked soldiers to not evacuate Jews from their homes in any way possible to them. Civil disobedience and lobbying the Knesset did not

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<sup>308</sup> R. and D. Waxman, "Ideological Change and Israel's Disengagement from Gaza", 19-20.

<sup>309</sup> D. Waxman, "From Controversy to Consensus", 88-89;

R. and D. Waxman, "Ideological Change and Israel's Disengagement from Gaza", 19.

<sup>310</sup> A. Rubin, "Bifurcated loyalty and religious actors", 58-59.

achieve the desired outcome, and it was clear that the Knesset did not want to reverse its decision. For this reason, some settlers turned to violence in desperate response. It seemed that Israel was in the verge of civil war.<sup>311</sup>

The disengagement and failure of Gush Emunim's ideology made the Temple Mount cause even more important to religious Zionists who now raised it as their new symbol for Jewish unity and redemption. Former settlers devoted to Kook's teachings started to join the vision of Temple Mount advocates, joining their groups and participating in their conferences. Visits at the Mount increased significantly. The Temple Mount thus became central for the unification of the Jewish people helping many religious-Zionists to overcome the fundamental religious crisis they were experiencing.<sup>312</sup>

Additionally, the Temple Mount became more than ever tied to Jewish nationalism. It was now not just a religious symbol, it became also a national and secular one, tied up with the idea of Jewish unity, together with the principle of human rights and freedom of worship.<sup>313</sup> Owing to this developing perception of the Temple as a national symbol, together with the belief that the freedom to worship there was a human right, the idea of ascending the Temple and of Jewish sovereignty over it became popular in the more traditional right-wing secular arena. The Temple, as the symbol of Jewish control and victory over the entire land after years of struggle with the Palestinians, increasingly came to mirror the aspiration where religion and nationalism meet, where the modern Jewish nation would rise. Since the Holy Esplanade is the only place where Palestinians still had some margin of control in Jerusalem, it also symbolized the last piece to complete in Israel's ethnocratic puzzle. This increased secular popularity brought the Temple Mount movement increased political support from the biggest right-wing party, Likud.<sup>314</sup>

With the growing influence of the Temple Mount issue inside Israeli society, more tangible action developed among rabbis and politicians to try to change the *status quo*. In 2007, dozens of Rabbis visited the Holy Esplanade with their congregates. Many of them were West-Bank Rabbis, but also more "moderate" rabbis joined the visits, as a guide to

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<sup>311</sup> A. Rubin, "Bifurcated loyalty and religious actors", 58-59.

<sup>312</sup> T. Persico, "The End Point of Zionism", 112-113.

<sup>313</sup> *Ivi*, 113.

<sup>314</sup> *Ivi*, 115.

where the new Israeli Orthodoxy was leading.<sup>315</sup> In 2008, on occasion of the important nationalist 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the unification of Jerusalem, forty West Bank rabbis visited the compound to show that it belonged to Jews and thus challenged the Chief Rabbinate to change its position.<sup>316</sup>

In the political arena, this change of attitude towards the Temple Mount was also very visible. During those years and culminating in the election of the 18<sup>th</sup> Knesset, almost half of the members of Likud were promoting Jewish visits to the site claiming that the Temple Mount symbolized the very real Jewish connection to the Land of Israel. The building of the Third Temple became also for many members of the mainstream political party a need and a duty, a way to finally have Jewish sovereignty over Jerusalem and thus represent a complete defeat the Palestinians.<sup>317</sup>

### *The Growing Power of Temple Mount Activists-*

#### *President Obama and Israel*

It is well known that the United States has always been the first and most important ally for Israel. As previously stated, with the election of George W. Bush as U.S. President, the American focus on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process was not at the top of its foreign agenda, instead having to concentrate on a preoccupation with Iraq and Afghanistan. During his first mandate, President Bush proposed, together with the European Union and Russia, the “Road Map for Peace”, calling for a two-state solution. However, as stated, promoting the plan was not a priority and the Bush administration did not give much attention to it. In fact, Bush visited the Middle East and Israel only at the end of his second term, in 2008.<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> Y. Reiter, “Collapse of the Modus Vivendi, 1996-2003”, 79-81

<sup>316</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>317</sup> T. Persico, “The End Point of Zionism”, 115.

<sup>318</sup> G. S. Mahler, “The Peace Process”, 289.



With the new American election in the same year and the victory of the left-wing and liberal Democrat Barack Obama, the Israeli public, now was very far from the 1990s state of mind and the Oslo Accords and less publicly keen to the idea of an accord with the Palestinians. The Israelis thus waited to see what would happen with the new President.

Obama, in his first term did not visit Israel, but believing in the importance of restoring relations between the U.S. and the Arab world after the Bush administration, he did visit Turkey and Egypt. However, in the beginning of his second term, Obama visited Israel as his first international trip, although he was not a supporter of Prime Minister Netanyahu, preferring instead in the 2009 Israeli election, the Kadima leader, Tzipi Livni.<sup>319</sup> Nevertheless, Obama wished to restore the American role as mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and Netanyahu still seemed willing to undertake new negotiations with the Palestinians in the peace process. He publicly gave a speech at Bar-Ilan University claiming his commitment to the two-state solution. Additionally, after strong pressure from the White House, Netanyahu froze the construction of settlements in the West Bank for ten months.<sup>320</sup> Nevertheless, the Palestinians on their part were not willing to open any negotiations until Israel declared a complete halt to settlement construction.<sup>321</sup> After the ten months freeze, Netanyahu refused to extend the period and settlement construction started again.<sup>322</sup>

Obama's presidency, even given disagreements with Netanyahu's administration, was still based on a strong American support of Israel. In fact, when in 2011 the United Nations Security Council voted to condemn the Israeli settlements as illegal, the U.S. vetoed the petition. Obama declared that it was not because the United States supported the construction of Israeli settlements, but because this fragile situation should have been resolved through negotiations and not with "binding and punitive UN decisions".<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> Eytan Gilboa, "Obama in Israel: Fixing American-Israeli Relations", *Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 7, n. 2, p. 19-28, (2013): 20.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>322</sup> Mark Landler, "U.S. Drops Bid to Sway Israel on Settlements", *The New York Times*, 7<sup>th</sup> December, 2007, accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/08/world/middleeast/08diplo.html>

<sup>323</sup> Neil MacFarquhar, "U.S. Blocks Security Council Censure of Israeli Settlements", 18<sup>th</sup> February, 2011, accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/19/world/middleeast/19nations.html>

The possibility of a new peace process, after the end of one of the bloodiest periods of Israeli history, gave more legitimacy to less extremist and more secular Israelis to the view that the Temple Mount was the new national symbol of hope and stability. In fact, from 2009, the visits to the Temple Mount increased significantly and Temple Mount supporters began to increase their numbers as members of the Knesset.

*The Building of a Crisis: Increasing Visits on the Site and the Diplomatic  
Crisis with Jordan*

In 2009, 5658 people entered the Temple Mount site, and since 2010, religious Jewish Israelis have started to visit the site in increasing numbers in guided tours given by members of Temple Mount organizations (the most popular are the tours of the Temple Institute, in which many Evangelical Christians participate).<sup>324</sup> In 2011, eleven Temple activists were banned from ascending the site, because accused of praying and incite violence, including Yehuda Glick, Gershon Solomon, Yehuda Etzion, Yosef and Nechemiah Elboim.<sup>325</sup> In addition, Knesset members started to push for new laws enabling access to the Temple Mount. For example, until 2011 soldiers in uniform were not allowed to enter the site. According to the pre-2000 *status quo*, soldiers could enter the site only in case of security needs. However, the Knesset members Danny Danon, Tzipi Hotovely, Arie' Eldad and Ze'ev Elkin petitioned the Knesset in 2011 to allow army soldiers in uniform to visit the Holy Esplanade.<sup>326</sup> From this point on, many IDF soldiers have visited the site and the Temple Institute started to organize special visits for them. In the same year, a picture of armed IDF soldiers at the site was published in several Islamic newspapers. Both Palestinians and Jordanians wrote about the de facto Israeli takeover of the site.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> R. Z. Feldman, "Temple Mount pilgrimage in the name of human rights", 542.

<sup>325</sup> Y. Be'er, "Dangerous Liaison", 64.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>327</sup> Y. Be'er, "Dangerous Liaison", 66;  
ICG, "The Status of the Status Quo", 66.

In 2012, MK Michael Ben-Ari<sup>328</sup> organized a conference inside the Knesset regarding Jewish sovereignty over the Temple Mount. The conference gained support by many members of the government coalition, like Arieh Eldad and Uri Ariel from the National Union party, and part of the Temple lobby inside the Knesset. Over one hundred rabbis participated in the conference, giving speeches and classes on the Temple Mount. In the same year, MK Arieh Eldad proposed a bill permitting Jews to ascend and pray at the Mount, which was rejected.<sup>329</sup> Members of Knesset started to be more outspoken about the Temple Mount and to lobby for Jewish rights on the site. Pressure by political members directed at the Israeli police also helped to make the site more accessible for Jews. Before the outbreak of the Second Intifada the police allowed only small groups of religious Jews to ascend the site. Since the first decade of the 2000s, police have allowed groups of 30-50 people, escorted by many police officers.<sup>330</sup>

In 2013, the election of the 19<sup>th</sup> Knesset revealed to Israel how Temple Mount activists were then undeniably part of the political system. With many members of Knesset supporting the Temple Mount agenda, activism on the Mount intensified even more. Moshe Feiglin, the well-known Temple Mount activist and MK of the Likud, tried to access the Dome of the Rock in order to prove it was under Israeli rule. Prime Minister Netanyahu had to personally talk to the police to ban his entrance.<sup>331</sup> In the same year, the police stopped Yehuda Glick in his attempt to visit the compound, fearful of the violence that his visit would spark. Glick decided to protest the police decision by engaging in a hunger strike, which gave him wide visibility and helped raise the issue of Jewish rights of access to the site.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Michael Ben Ari is today the leader of the far-right party Otzma Yehudit. He was excluded from running to the 21<sup>st</sup> Knesset for his violent politics anti-Arabs. Toi Staff, "High Court bars far-right party leader Ben Ari from running in elections", *The Times of Israel*, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019, accessed June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/high-court-bars-far-right-party-leader-ben-ari-from-elections/>

<sup>329</sup> Y. Be'er, "Dangerous Liaison", 60-61.

<sup>330</sup> *Ivi*, 66;

ICG, "The Status of the Status Quo", 9.

<sup>331</sup> Y. Be'er, "Dangerous Liaison", 66;

ICG, "The Status of the Status Quo", 62.

<sup>332</sup> Renee Ghert-Zand, "Yehuda Glick shot in Jerusalem, works for Jews' right to pray on Temple Mount", *The Times of Israel*, 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2014, accessed 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2019, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/yehudah-glick-shot-in-jerusalem-works-for-jews-right-to-pray-on-temple-mount/>

Prime Minister Netanyahu reassured the nation many times that the government had no intention to changing the *status quo*. However, because of the increase action of the activists and the growing number of Temple Mount supporters in the Knesset visiting the site, Palestinians perceived the Israeli actions as threat and were convinced this was the way in which Israel wanted to take over the site. During the end of 2013 and the beginning of 2014, violence started to escalate more frequently on the compound. Palestinians started to protest on the Holy Esplanade and in East Jerusalem. In February 2014, the Knesset considered a motion to discuss Jewish sovereignty over the Temple Mount, proposed by Likud MK Moshe Feiglin. Right after the discussion, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February, Palestinian youths gathered on the compound after hearing the rumor that Temple activists were coming to the compound to raise an Israeli flag. Clashes with the police ensued, with Palestinians throwing stones and fireworks upon them and on the worshippers at the Western Wall.<sup>333</sup>

### *A New Wave of Violence and a Diplomatic Crisis*

In 2014 many events contributed to the escalation of violence on the site.<sup>334</sup> In July, with the beginning of Operation Protective Edge in Gaza, the beginning of Jewish holidays, and the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, riots and violence increased in Jerusalem. Violence escalated in June 2014 when Israeli police started to implement limitations of access to Muslims at the Holy Esplanade. Muslim men were banned from entering the compound half of the Fridays from June to mid-November, including all Fridays during Ramadan. Additionally, Muslim women could not enter the site on all weekdays, during times of Jewish visits.<sup>335</sup> These restrictions got even harsher during the Jewish holidays, when Muslim men could not access the site at all.<sup>336</sup> These limitations were the work of Likud MK, Miri Regev, who chaired the Knesset's Interior and Environment Committee

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<sup>333</sup> BBC, "Israeli police and Palestinians clash at Jerusalem site", February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014.  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26338344>

<sup>334</sup> T. Persico, "The End Point of Zionism", 115.

<sup>335</sup> A. Tatarsky, "Collective Restrictions on the Entry of Muslims Worshippers to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif", 5.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibidem*.

from 2013 to 2015. She held more than fifteen committee sessions regarding Jewish entrance on the site.<sup>337</sup>

It was not the first time that Israeli police imposed entry limitations, however, the format of these restrictions was different most times. While in the past, the police imposed limitations rarely and only after violent events; in the summer of 2014, the reasons given were to facilitate the Jewish entrance at the site, increasing the Palestinian feeling of alienation and frustration.<sup>338</sup> This change of approach of the police was a consequence of strong political pressure the police had to endure. In fact, political figures such as Regev and Feiglin accused the police officers of being “cowards” not able to stand up to the threat of Palestinian terror.<sup>339</sup> Prime Minister Netanyahu did nothing to stop this right-wing campaign of harassment towards the police and the hate speech against Palestinians. right-wing members of Knesset kept pushing for their goal of forcing the police to divide entry hours to the compound between Jews and Muslims, as it was in Hebron<sup>340</sup>, and during periods of violence preventing Muslims from entering the site, since they were commonly believed to be the perpetrators of terrorist violence. It was the proof that Israeli structural violence, perpetuated by the government to legitimize the Temple Mount movements’ activities was working.

The police claimed that age restrictions were needed to prevent acts of terror from occurring. However, the highest peak of violence in Jerusalem occurred especially during the periods of these police-imposed limitations. Additionally, since the Jews are only

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<sup>337</sup> Miri Regev organized more meetings regarding the subject in her two years of chairperson than all the meetings from 1967 to 2013.

T. Persico, “The End Point of Zionism”, 115;

A. Tatarsky, “Collective Restrictions on the Entry of Muslims Worshippers to the Temple Mount/ Haram al-Sharif”, 5.

<sup>338</sup> A. Tatarsky, “Collective Restrictions on the Entry of Muslims Worshippers to the Temple Mount/ Haram al-Sharif”, 5.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>340</sup> Miri Regev at a Knesset debate on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 2014 claimed: “(...) We will reach a situation where the Temple Mount will be just like the Cave of Patriarchs: certain days for Jews and certain days for Muslims. I urge the Prime Minister to have the courage to stand up to the world and say that we believe that every citizen who wishes to go up to the Temple Mount and pray should be able to do so”. A. Tatarsky, “Collective Restrictions on the Entry of Muslims Worshippers to the Temple Mount/ Haram al-Sharif”, 9.

visitors, while Muslims are worshippers according to the *status quo*, Muslims should have expected priority in visits to the site, something that did not occur during 2014.<sup>341</sup>

The violence escalated with the kidnapping and murder of three young Israeli settlers and, in revenge, of a Palestinian boy in East Jerusalem. Violence and riots were the norm all the summer of 2014, making it one of the bloodiest years of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>342</sup>

The real turning point occurred on the 30<sup>th</sup> October 2014. On the evening before, various members of Knesset, important rabbis and many Temple activists and supporters, attended a conference in Jerusalem regarding Jewish sovereignty over the Temple Mount. Yehuda Glick, at the time CEO of the Temple Mount Foundation and haLiba, was present at the conference as a speaker. When the conference finished, and Glick exited the conference building, a man wearing a helmet approached him with a gun and shot him.<sup>343</sup>

Glick survived the attack. The shooter was identified by police to be Muataz Hijazi, a 32-year-old militant of Islamic Jihad group from Abu Tor, and he was killed by the police in a shooting the day after the attempted murder. While Yitzhak Aharonovich, Public Security Minister at the time, urged politicians and political figures not to inflame the already unstable situation, many right-wing politicians commented on the act, portraying it as an attack against Israel and the Jews and calling for the suppression of Arab terror in Jerusalem and Israel.<sup>344</sup> The Economy Minister, Naftali Bennet, from the settler's party Jewish Home, claimed that the Palestinian attack in Jerusalem on an Israeli politician crossed the line.<sup>345</sup> Moshe Feiglin commented that he expected the attack, and that he would go to the Mount to pray for Glick. Additionally, Uri Ariel, the Housing Minister,

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<sup>341</sup> A.Tatarsky, "Collective Restrictions on the Entry of Muslims Worshippers to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif", 8-10.

<sup>342</sup> ICG, "The Status of the Status Quo", 1.

<sup>343</sup> Kobi Nachshoni, "Yehuda Glick: Shooter yelled 'You're an enemy of al-Aqsa'", *Ynet news.com*, 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2014, accessed 8th August, 2019, <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4592971,00.html>

<sup>344</sup> Daniel K. Eisenbud and JPOST.com Staff, "Jerusalem's Temple Mount closes to all visitors after shooting of Yehuda Glick", *The Jerusalem Post*, 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2014, accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2019, <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Unknown-assailant-shots-seriously-wounds-known-right-wing-activist-in-Jerusalem-380210>

<sup>345</sup> *Ibidem*.

said that the bullet was directed at every Jew wanting to pray at the Mount, calling also for the opening of the site to all Jews.<sup>346</sup>

With the closing of the Holy Esplanade the day after to both Muslims and non-Muslims, riots began again in all Jerusalem. However, this time, many Temple Mount activists started to protest demanding the government give more Jewish authority over the site. Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas called the Israeli decision a “declaration of war”. On the same day police tried to calm the situation by allowing Muslim men over the age of fifty to enter the site. However, it did not work.<sup>347</sup> The peak of tension occurred in November, when the Jordanian king recalled the Jordanian Ambassador in Tel Aviv. The Jordanian government had not recalled its ambassador during more violent protests, such as the Second Intifada and the Gaza war, but it did now when Jordan’s status over the compound appeared to be undermined.<sup>348</sup> The control over the site is vitally important for the Jordanian Kingdom since without it, Jordan would lose the support and respect not only of its people, but of the entire Muslim world. The U.S. then intervened to prevent a bigger diplomatic crisis from developing. Secretary of State John Kerry was appointed by President Obama to oversee the talks between the two parties. He organized a meeting in November between Prime Minister Netanyahu and King Abdullah II of Jordan, and the U.S. was again the mediator of the dialogue in the Middle East.<sup>349</sup>

During the talks, Israel ensured that the Israeli government was engaged in the maintaining the *status quo*. However, the definition of which *status quo* was not clear. For Jordan, it meant the pre-2000 agreement, where the Hashemite Kingdom played an important role regarding the control of access and maintenance work. However, for Netanyahu the *status quo* was the one before the violence of 2014 when Israel exercised

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<sup>346</sup> Lazar Berman and Ilan Ben Zion, “Temple Mount activist shot, seriously hurt outside Jerusalem’s Begin Center”, *The Times of Israel*, 29<sup>th</sup> October, 2014, accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2019,

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/man-shot-seriously-injured-outside-jeruselems-begin-center/>  
<sup>347</sup> Holly Yan, “Palestinian President: Closing Jerusalem holy site ‘a declaration of war’”, *CMN*, 4<sup>th</sup> November, 2014, accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/10/30/world/meast/temple-mount/index.html>

<sup>348</sup> ICG, “The Status of the Status Quo”, 19-21.

<sup>349</sup> William Booth and Taylor Luck, “Relationship Between Israel and Jordan grows warier amid tensions in Jerusalem”, *The Washington Post*, 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2014, accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/ties-between-israel-and-jordan-grow-warier-amid-tensions-in-jerusalem/2014/11/23/cbd89ba2-7008-11e4-893f-86bd390a3340\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.a3e0d6850b66](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/ties-between-israel-and-jordan-grow-warier-amid-tensions-in-jerusalem/2014/11/23/cbd89ba2-7008-11e4-893f-86bd390a3340_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.a3e0d6850b66)

complete control over access and also maintained the prayer ban. However, Israel was not willing to cede any control regarding access of the Mount to Jordan. In fact, the popularity of the Temple Mount activists was now higher than ever, and more Jews were ascending than ever before. In addition, Temple Mount supporters were now more actively part of the Netanyahu government. According to a survey done by Miskar in 2014, 74.5% of Israelis, which identified themselves as religious-Zionist, were in favor of Jewish rights of ascension on the Mount. Additionally, 98.6% of those respondents believed that ascending to the Mount was an act that strengthened the sovereignty of Israel over the Mount and 54.4% of them adding that it fulfilled a religious commandment.<sup>350</sup> Consequently any decision to give power to Jordan in terms of access and control would have be seen by Israeli society as giving away even more Jewish sovereignty over the compound and would cause Netanyahu a significant loss of political support.<sup>351</sup> Netanyahu also felt pressure from the Knesset committee supporting Jews right to pray at the Temple Mount which claimed that both Muslims and Jews should have the right to pray there but in separate spaces as was customary in Hebron. Further they believed that when riots happened that the site should be closed not only to non-Muslims, but to everybody.<sup>352</sup>

To avoid violence, Israel and Jordan had to come to an agreement. Israel committed to limiting the entrance of religious Jews to the site, beginning with groups no larger than five (later fifteen). Moreover, Knesset Members were banned from entering the site altogether. Finally, Israel promised no more limitations of access at the Muslim entrance. King Abdullah promised more tangible actions to prevent stone-throwers and rioters.<sup>353</sup> In fact, the accord was needed to prevent violence on the part of both sides. After the agreement, an apparent restorative calm arrived again in Jerusalem. In February 2015, the Jordanian Ambassador returned to Tel Aviv.<sup>354</sup>

However, Temple Mount activists did not react positively to Netanyahu's agreement. Moshe Feiglin and Arnon Segel, together with other activists and important figures, called

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<sup>350</sup> Y. Reiter, "Collapse of the Modus Vivendi, 1996-2003", 82.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>352</sup> ICG, "The Status of the Status Quo", 21.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>354</sup> ICG, "How to Preserve the Fragile Calm at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade", 3.



for more Jews to be allowed to visit the site. They claimed that no one could stop Jews from praying at their holiest site, thus publicly challenging Israeli policy.<sup>355</sup>

### *The Knife Intifada*

Netanyahu again won the Israeli election in 2015 and formed a coalition government in which Temple Mount supporters were stronger than ever.<sup>356</sup>

In mid-July tensions re-emerged in Jerusalem, and it became clear that the talks of November 2014 were not enough. With the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan in July 2015, violence and protests start to emerge again on the Holy Esplanade. The mounting disagreement between Jordan and Israel became clear when the intelligence agencies of both countries became aware that a group of youngsters from Hebron were planning to enter the compound early in the morning and throw stones at Jewish visitors to the Western Wall. Not surprisingly, the two governments had different opinions on how to react. While Jordan and the *waqf* demanded the closure of the site to non-Muslims, Netanyahu instead decided that it was Israel's intent to stop Muslim terrorism and violence at the site. Since no mutual agreement was made, the police, fearful of the threat of confrontation and violence, closed the site to non-Muslims. The decision of the police brought about huge protests by Temple Mount activists and their Knesset supporters, demanding no more Muslim and foreign incursions into this holiest Jewish site.<sup>357</sup>

On July 26<sup>th</sup>, the day of Tisha B'Av, many Jewish visitors were expecting to ascend to the site. Early that morning, Palestinian rioters entered the Esplanade and began throwing stones upon the Western Wall worshippers and the Israeli police. Clashes started. According to Palestinian and Arab news services, the violence started because of a large number of religious Jews descending upon the site being escorted by the police.<sup>358</sup> In fact,

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<sup>355</sup> A.Tatarsky, "Collective Restrictions on the Entry of Muslims Worshippers to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif", 11.

<sup>356</sup> ICG, "How to Preserve the Fragile Calm at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade", 5.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>358</sup> BBC News, "Al-Aqsa: Israeli police enter Jerusalem holy site", *BBC*, 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2015, accessed 9<sup>th</sup> July, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33667528>

Internal Security Minister Gilad Erdan ordered the police to ensure Jewish visits at the site, even to groups as large as thirty worshippers. With Erdan's permission one of these groups of religious Jews was also joined by Uri Ariel, the Agricultural Minister.<sup>359</sup> The police succeeded in stopping the clashes and to re-open the compound to visitors. Four police officers were injured, and several Palestinians arrested.<sup>360</sup> The Israeli government website stated the same day:

“the *status quo* was restored, and visitors were able to tour the Temple Mount plaza”.<sup>361</sup>

The Jordanian government condemned Israel for the entrance of copious numbers of religious Jews, calling it a “violation” of the *status quo* at the site. Hamas spokesman, Sami Abu Zuhri, called the events of the 26<sup>th</sup> a provocation.<sup>362</sup>

Two months later in September, one week before Rosh Hashana<sup>363</sup>, the Minister of Defense Moshe Ya'alon banned two Muslim groups from entering Jerusalem, accusing them of being the major cause of troublemaking in the city. In addition, three days before Rosh Hashana, Erdan again ordered the police to implement age and gender restrictions during the holidays, with the excuse that stone-throwing was likely to happen. Even as the Police Chief tried to convince the Minister that these restrictions would cause a wave of violence, the priority of the Minister was to ensure Jewish visits there would be preserved.<sup>364</sup> Thus, Palestinians were again, as in 2014, prevented from entering the site, while Jewish visitors could walk and visit it freely escorted by the police. Clashes in Jerusalem escalated, and although Netanyahu again publicly banned Knesset members to enter the site, it was an insufficient tactic. For Palestinians, it was proof that Israel wanted to divide the compound, a clear expression of the important goal of Knesset members who supported the Temple Mount movements. Tensions broke out again between Israel

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<sup>359</sup> As stated before, Netanyahu ensure to King Abdullah that no Knesset Members would access the site. This is clearly against the 2014 agreement.

<sup>360</sup> ICG, “How to Preserve the Fragile Calm at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade”, 5

<sup>361</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Tisha B'Av: Events on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem”, *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2015, accessed 9<sup>th</sup> July, 2019, <https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Issues/Pages/Tisha-BAv-Events-on-the-Temple-Mount-in-Jerusalem.aspx>

<sup>362</sup> Toni Staff, “Jordan rails against Israel's ‘violation’ on Temple Mount”, *The Times of Israel*, 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2015, accessed 9<sup>th</sup> July, 2019, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/jordan-rails-against-israels-violation-on-temple-mount/>

<sup>363</sup> Jewish New Year.

<sup>364</sup> ICG, “How to Preserve the Fragile Calm at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade”, 4-6.

and Jordan, and it was clear that the agreement of 2014 was not to be honored. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry tried again to mediate and tried to restore the relations of the two countries, which seemed to be very damaged. In October 2015, Kerry visited Amman and talked with the Jordanian King. He succeeded in making the two parties state again their understandings over the Esplanade, however King Abdullah was furious and felt betrayed by Netanyahu. He claimed that Netanyahu should renew his commitment to preserve the *status quo*. King Abdullah also threatened Israel that another violation of the agreements would lead to a review of the 1994 peace treaty.<sup>365</sup> In spite of this rancor, Kerry remarkably succeeded in enabling the parties to reach rapprochement, in an agreement that came to be known as the “Kerry Understandings”.<sup>366</sup> It was in the U.S. interest to maintain stable and calm relations in the Middle East, especially between Israel, the only American strong ally in the region, and Jordan, the most moderate Muslim country.

Consequently, Netanyahu reaffirmed that Israel had no intention to divide the Compound nor to undermine the Jordanian role at the site. He again officially banned members of Knesset from entering the compound, reiterating that Muslims were worshippers and Jews just visitors. He also promised the avoidance of gender and age restrictions, fixed the number of religious Jews allowed to enter the Compound daily (60 total , and only up to 15 at a time), and the installation of cameras able to aid in recognizing which party committed a violation of the *status quo*.<sup>367</sup> Moreover, Knesset Members were prohibited from entering the site, despite their claims of religious justification. In addition, Netanyahu welcomed increasing coordination for security, maintenance work and archeology. King Abdullah for his part did not comment on coordinating security with Israel, which other Muslim countries and Palestinians would not accept, but at the same time raised the number of *waqf* security guards from 170 to 250 and *waqf* administration officers from 250 to 500.<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> ICG, “How to Preserve the Fragile Calm at Jerusalem’s Holy Esplanade”, 4-6.

<sup>366</sup> Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, “Protecting the Status of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem”, *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*, accessed 9<sup>th</sup> August, 2019, [http://jcpa.org/status-quo-temple-mount/#\\_toc\\_title](http://jcpa.org/status-quo-temple-mount/#_toc_title)

<sup>367</sup> ICG, “How to Preserve the Fragile Calm at Jerusalem’s Holy Esplanade”, 7-8.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibidem*.

Remarkably and for the first time, an Israeli leader stated clearly that Jews were not allowed to pray at the Mount. This prayer ban, which was presented by many Israeli leaders as “temporary”, was legitimized by the Supreme Court ruling which declared Jewish prayer legal. Therefore, many Temple Mount activists thought it was just a matter of time for Jews to be allowed to pray there. However, Netanyahu presented and claimed in 2015 that the ban was permanent.<sup>369</sup>

The decision of Netanyahu provoked two different directions inside Likud. Temple Mount advocates in the Knesset understood they lost an appeal on Netanyahu’s policy making, which at least in 2015 favored stable relations with Jordan over the support of Temple Advocates. Further, after a month of violence in the city of Jerusalem, the Israeli public was more favorable to a stable situation over changing the *status quo*. In a poll by NRG-Ma’ariv done the 15<sup>th</sup> November of that year, the consensus on changing the *status quo* at the site dropped from 57% of September to 43% in November.<sup>370</sup> For this reason, the less radical party members of Likud (such as Miri Regev, introduced earlier), who before November 2015 were supportive of changing the *status quo* at the Temple Mount, began to maintain a lower profile on the issue.<sup>371</sup>

On the other hand, the more committed activists did not relent. Senior politicians and leading national religious rabbis stated that the situation was temporary and that none would give up until the Temple Mount was under complete Jewish-Israeli sovereignty. Moshe Feiglin, one of the most active Knesset Members on the issue of the Temple Mount, left to form his own party, Zehut, which states as its main objectives the changing of the *status quo* and the Jewish right to pray at the site. Moreover, the activists and members of Knesset of both Likud and Jewish Home, also did not give up trying to undermine Netanyahu’s leadership of Likud embracing the Temple agenda, and further working to allow Jewish prayers on the site. Junior MKs proposed a draft amendment to the Protection of the Holy Places Law (1967) in order to grant freedom of worship to Jews.<sup>372</sup> Although the amendment did not pass, the Temple Mount activists still realized some success. Erdan, for example, refused to admit the implementation of the daily quota,

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<sup>369</sup> ICG, “How to Preserve the Fragile Calm at Jerusalem’s Holy Esplanade”, 10.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>372</sup> ICG, “How to Preserve the Fragile Calm at Jerusalem’s Holy Esplanade”, 12-13.

claiming that police would ensure maximum Jewish entrance at the site. In addition, Yehuda Etzion, after years of being banned from the site, again gained permission to enter. Furthermore, the Supreme Court ruled that it was lawful to enter the site with the palm raised to the sky, as is typical in Jewish prayers.<sup>373</sup>

Thus, it was shown that Temple Mount activists' positions could become stronger even in times when they suffered from restrictions. The endorsement of the Supreme Court of Jewish prayers at the site, together with the view of the prohibition of Jewish prayer as against the freedom of worship, have made the Temple Mount movements goals more prominent in the secular arena. Even more secular Jews see the restrictions over the Holy Esplanade as wrong, and they have thus become target issues for associations such as haLiba, founded by Yehuda Glick. It claims to show that in Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East, their citizens do not have the freedom to visit and pray at their holiest site.<sup>374</sup>

### *Conclusions*

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen violence and change in Israel. While the last century ended with the hope of a long-lasting peace agreement, it failed at the beginning of the new one. The Oslo Accords and the disengagement from Gaza brought about two different scenarios inside religious-Zionism; at the beginning, a strong crisis hit the former Gush Emunim's members and the Yesha Council which felt disillusioned and defeated. However, soon afterward religious Zionists directed their energies toward the new chosen symbol of Jewish unity and complete sovereignty over the land of Israel: the Temple Mount.

Temple Mount advocates have kept growing in power and influence in the Israeli political system, enabling more Jews to visit the site and to demand for a change in the *status quo*. According to Ir Amim, 14,000 Jews visited the site from the end of 2015 to 2016,

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<sup>373</sup> ICG, "How to Preserve the Fragile Calm at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade", 14.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibidem*.

haLiba, "About haLiba", *haLiba*, accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2019, <http://haliba.co.il/en>

increasing to 22,000 in 2017.<sup>375</sup> Additionally, thanks to the more “secular” attitude taken by many Temple activists, such as Yehuda Glick, the freedom of worship on the site has become a very sensitive topic, supported by many secular Israelis, and by the rulings of the Israeli Supreme Court.

Another important point is that since 2016, an increase number of Evangelical Christians have started again to support and visit Jerusalem, especially after the election of Donald Trump as U.S. President, who in his political campaign promised to move the United States Embassy in Jerusalem<sup>376</sup>, acknowledging the city as the Israeli Capital, in opposition whit the politics of the international community.

The Temple Mount movements have made huge strides ahead. In the 1980s they had marginal impact and were without much influence inside Israeli politics. Now their members are in the Knesset, have positions in the most important and popular right-wing parties, and their collective voice thus will be heard.

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<sup>375</sup> Aviv Tatarsky, “Increasing Cooperation Between the Temple Movements & Israeli Police”, 1.

<sup>376</sup> Inaugurated on May 2018.

## Conclusions

Since the beginning of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Jerusalem and the Holy Esplanade have been the center of the struggle. Today, the Holy Esplanade in Jerusalem is probably the epicenter of the long-lasting conflict between Israel and Palestinians. Over the years, it became a strong national symbol for both sides. For Jews, it is the last piece of the puzzle before obtaining complete control over Jerusalem; for Palestinians it symbolizes the last hope for a future Palestinian state.

This work sought to answer two main questions, what the Temple Movements are and how their work and actions are threatening the *status quo* at the Holy Esplanade, the tacit agreement developed after the end of the Six-Day war between Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians. In order to answer these questions, I focused on the changes inside the religious-Zionism spectrum of Israeli society, and the external factors which made the increase of power of the Temple Mount movements possible.

According to the *status quo*, the compound is under the administration of the Jordanian *waqf* and Muslims are worshippers, whereas Jews are just visitors. However, since the *status quo* was never a written agreement, its rules and boundaries remained unclear. From right after the Six-Day war until the end of the 1980s, the *status quo* at the site remained stable, without any major incidents. In fact, as stated in Chapter One, both the political and the major religious authorities (the Chief Rabbinate and Mercaz ha-Rav Yeshiva) banned Jews from ascending the site. Even if religious-Zionist personalities promoted Jewish sovereignty over the Temple Mount, the site was not a priority. In fact, their focus at the time was the settling of all the Biblical Land. Movements such as Gush Emunim arose (1974). In those years, Temple Mount advocates were a small and marginal group, and the issue of ascending the Temple Mount almost disappeared from Israeli society.

As described in Chapter Two, from the fringes of Gush Emunim, the founders of these movements began organizing themselves and, in the 1980s, they registered as associations. In less than twenty years, the Temple Mount movements became, from marginal and excluded, one of the main forces of religious-Zionism inside Israeli politics.

Nowadays, Temple Mount movements are some of the most important actors in Israeli politics and society. The new acquired power of such movements mirrors political and sociological changes to which Israeli society underwent. In fact, while in the 1970s-80s the strongest ideology was the Greater Israel Ideology, after the failure of the Oslo Accords (1993), the Second Intifada (2000-2005), and the withdrawal from Gaza (2005), religious-Zionists feared a step-back over Jerusalem and the Holy Esplanade as well. Therefore, many religious authorities changed their ideology. In the latest decades, they encouraged congregants and students to ascend to the site. For instance, in 1996, the Yesha Council issued a ruling allowing Jews to ascend to the Temple Mount, which was ratified again in 2001.

As underlined in Chapter Three, violence characterized the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>. In the fragile situation of Israel, after the assassination of Rabin (1995) and the beginning of the Second Intifada (2000), Temple Mount movements understood the need to dissociate themselves from any violent actions. Their non-violent and educational approach is probably one of the main reasons of their success, a *modus operandi* which is fundamental to prove their “good” intentions. They managed to distance themselves from violent Palestinians, making clear who are the ones promoting hate and violence at the site. Thanks to their narrative, they became widely accepted and supported by Israeli society, and as a result, over the years, visits by religious Jews at the Holy Esplanade increased exponentially.

This thesis agreed with the existing literature, marking the rise of these movements coincide with the failing of the Greater Israel Ideology, brought by the Oslo Accords (1993) and the disengagement from Gaza (2005). Since the Oslo Accords, the Temple Mount became central, not only as a religious symbol, but as an important national symbol, representing Jewish unity. Freedom of worship has been linked by the Temple Mount movements, to human rights, fundamental for a democratic country. The right to pray at the Temple Mount became the emblem of Jewish struggle towards a Jewish-Israeli basic right: freedom of worship to the Jewish holiest site. The Temple Mount is now a national symbol and the changing of the *status quo* is linked to the fulfilling of a human



right, which made possible for the Temple Mount movements to draw to their cause a larger spectrum of Israeli society.<sup>377</sup>

This research aimed at enriching the existing literature on motives and actors that made possible for Temple Mount movements to be so successful. For example, this work discusses the growing support of Evangelical Christians towards the Temple Mount cause. In fact, the financial support provided by Evangelical Christians substantially has been crucial for the fulfilling of the Temple Mount agenda.<sup>378</sup> Finally, one of the aims of this work is to explain why Temple Mount movements should be defined as violent movements. The existing literature defines violent movements only clandestine and illegal movements which engage in physical-violent actions. Nevertheless, even if Temple Mount movements do not engage in direct violent actions, it is wrong to define them as harmless. In fact, with the use of cultural violence, these movements have been able to subtly hide their real goals: undermining Palestinian status and heritage at the site, behind their discourses of promoting freedom of worship and human rights.<sup>379</sup>

Temple Mount movements have not succeeded in their goal of changing the *status quo* yet. However, they have accomplished major victories. Temple Mount advocates are now part of the Knesset and of the Israeli political system, becoming very influential in the government and able to raise the issue of the *status quo* in every sectors of Israeli society. Even though it is impossible to make claims for the future, actions of the Temple Mount advocates and the growing hawkishness of Israeli politics show that the *status quo* is not as stable as before. By now, it seems that the Israeli government has no intention in changing the agreement, favoring its relationship with Jordan and other Muslim countries. For example, the statement of Prime Minister Netanyahu in 2015, after the Knife Intifada,

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<sup>377</sup> ICG, "Leap of Faith", 5-48;

M. Inbari, "Religious Zionism and the Temple Mount Dilemma", 29-47;

T. Persico, "The End Point of Zionism", 104-122.

<sup>378</sup> Y. Ariel, "Doomsday in Jerusalem?", 1-14;

E. Gilboa, "Obama in Israel", 19-28;

G. S. Mahler, "The Peace Process", 269-300.

<sup>379</sup> D. della Porta, "Political Violence and Social Movements", 1-31;

V. Bufacchi, "Two Concepts of Violence", 193-204;

J. Galtung, "Cultural Violence", 291-305;

A. Brockhill & K. Cordell, "The Violence of Culture", 981-998;

<sup>379</sup> D. della Porta & M. Diani, "The Study of Social Movements", 1-29;

Wendy Pearlman, "The Organizational Mediation Theory of Protest", in *Violence, Nonviolence and the Palestinian National Movement*, Cambridge University Press, (New York, 2011): 1-26.

in which he claimed that the Israeli government had no intention in changing the *status quo*. However, Temple Mount advocates and their followers did not lose hope and kept their work, making the Jewish visits at the site increase even more.<sup>380</sup>

In conclusion, since the topic of the changing *status quo* at the Holy Esplanade is current, it is very important, for scholars of Middle Eastern and Israeli studies, to acknowledge the importance in maintaining stable the *status quo* until the reach of a lasting agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. In fact, the *status quo* is fundamental in order to prevent an explosion of violence, not only at the site, but in the entire Middle East region. My hope is that this research will serve researchers and scholars in the field observing and trying to foresee future developments at the site.

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<sup>380</sup> According to Ir Amim, 14,000 Jews visited the site from the end of 2015 to 2016, increasing to 22,000 in 2017. A. Tatarsky, "Increasing Cooperation Between the Temple Movements & Israeli Police", 1.

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