



Three discursive dilemmas for Israeli religious settlers

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Abstract

Israeli religious settlers live in contested territory that they claim is promised to them by God. The settlers are at the center of the Israeli–Palestinian dispute and are the recipients of international condemnation for their illegal behavior. Because the territories are neither sovereign nor legally recognized by Israel, their definition is open to construction. Religious settlers make arguments to satisfy three discursive dilemmas that must be solved in order to normalize their lives. They must 1) construct their own authenticity, 2) marginalize the native others, and 3) establish cultural authority. These dilemmas are explicated in this essay.

Keywords

Argument, discourse, discursive dilemmas, identity, ideology, Israeli–Palestinian conflict, settlements, settlers, social construction, Toulmin

Kimmerling (1989) described the Israeli West Bank territories and the ideology of annexation as a legitimization process for the Zionist enterprise. Given that the territories are defined as a ‘frontier land’ – neither sovereign nor part of the Israeli official map – their definition is open to construction. These constructions become a site for definitional contestation, and when conceptualized as discursive struggles they offer interesting arenas for the study of conflict and communication. This study uses the analysis of arguments to see how Israeli settlers explain three discursive dilemmas they must solve. These three dilemmas are 1) the construction of their own *authenticity*, 2) the *discourse of marginality*, including the confrontation with the Palestinians or the ‘native others’, and 3) the use of rituals and collective memory to normalize life and established cultural

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and religious *authority*. Settlers must, on the one hand, legitimize their existence and perpetuate Jewish control of the land, but this must be accomplished in the context of objections from much of Israeli society as well as the international community. There lies the dilemma that must be worked out discursively (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000).

The analysis reported here is theoretically informed by Billig et al. (1988) and the ideological dilemmas perspective. A 'dilemmas' perspective emerges from the pressures to resolve competing values such as equality versus authority, individuality versus the common good, or the differences between clashing group-centered preferences such as those between settlers and local Arabs. The dilemmas perspective also explores how messages are contextual and political such that they contain strategies of persuasion and manipulation. Dilemmas are managed through persuasion and argument over competing interpretations (Simons, 2000). Dilemma management is mostly a matter of attacking and defending, accusing and justifying, asserting and denying. I adopt in this article a perspective that explores vulnerabilities and inner tensions of arguments expressed by settlers, followed by a depiction of these arguments as grounded in historical contexts (Wodak, 2001). Settler arguments as presented to an outsider are a site for negotiation. The arguments are both justifications and constructions designed to manage their most important dilemmas. These justifications construct settler authenticity, authority, and marginalize the indigenous population.

What is a settlement?

Contiguous land can be claimed or annexed for any number of reasons including economic, security, or military defeat. Benvenisti (1995) argued that Israel's position with respect to the territories was not ideological but purely economic and practical. He held that the land was legally available to Israel, and that Israel's incursion into the territories was justified by economic interests. But my concern here is with religious and ideological justifications. Still, in either case the 'settlers' and their 'occupying' behavior have become a part of Israel and restructured how Israelis define themselves. In the face of this conflict, the settlers must work through discourses about the land, sanctity, Zionism, and the cultural 'other', namely, the Palestinian Arabs. A settlement is a communal Israeli village purposefully located in the West Bank or what religious settlers refer to as the ancient biblical land of Judea and Samaria, land that is currently contested territory. The settlement represents religious and political significance in every manner from architecture to geographical location and design. Israel's victory in the Six Day War in 1967 resulted in a return to holy places and thus reconnected the Israeli public with sacred places and religious feelings.

Settlements are self-contained communities that require roads, schools, buildings, and all the essentials of municipalities. Various religious and political organizations (e.g. the Gush Emunim, regional councils) have taken the lead in promoting settlements by developing apparently normal communities in every way except location. Settlements typically resemble modern suburban bedroom communities where residents come and go at will. But these settlements are perceived as anything but innocent or *normal*. They are a discursive space for a counter Israeli society that has religious redemption and control as its goals. A critical point about discourse is its constitutive nature. That is, a discourse

states how the world is, should be, and what matters the most. It defines an acceptable way to talk and conduct oneself. For example, a settlement is a community in contested territory with an indigenous population and can be framed 'politically' as an intrusive and immoral incursion into a place where it does not belong. Or, the settlement can be framed as a 'homecoming' semiotically rooted in the redemption of the land that God promised the Jews. Primary references here are 'return', 'redemption', and 'security'. Settlements are steeped in semiotic richness designed to define themselves even with respect to their physical presence and architecture. The planned physical and architectural structures of West Bank settlements are a mirror of the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians. As Weizman explains in *The Politics of Verticality* (2004), settlements are referred to as topographical points indicating that it is their positioning or location rather than their nature and composition that matter most. In the following I focus on the details of argumentative interaction as a vehicle for managing the three discursive dilemmas that settlers use to justify the construction of their own authenticity and the disruption of Palestinian life.

Data and analytic method

The methodological perspective here is to elicit arguments to show how one (settlers) presents themselves to 'outsiders'. This is not a study where an 'insider' exposes the anthropological structure of a culture; rather, from a discourse perspective I am eliciting information designed to identify argumentative functions that construct an image that the settlers want to transfer to an outsider audience. I took note of actors, agency, metaphors, language, and argumentative strategies. The goal is to utilize as natural a setting as possible to interview people and elicit information from informants that treats them almost as case studies useful for displaying complex phenomena.

The interviews were conversations between two people (the author and an informant) designed to depict the story the interviewee communicates and extract the argumentative points that index the dilemma solutions. Subjects were contacted through local communities and friendship networks and asked if they would participate in a discussion about settlements, settlers, and their thoughts on the conflict. The interviews were informal and not subject to a particular structure in order to allow conversations to develop and elaborate naturally. In this way interviews allow for flexible ways to collect and interpret information but, on the other hand, at the expense of systematic control. The conversations were unstructured and free-flowing. But since I was more concerned with eliciting text data in the form of information from interviewees, the goals of the study were best served by opportunities for discursive elaboration. The methodological considerations in this article draw on positioning theory (Van Langenhove and Harré, 1999), which seeks to identify arguments that represent a person's position or stance toward an issue, in this case 'settling the land'. Israeli settlers use arguments to position themselves as resolving the particular discursive dilemmas that challenge them, namely, their authenticity, authority, and the need to marginalize the local community. The arguments are used as a resource for how the settlers justify their existence. The interviews were conducted in English and in various locations depending on where people were able to meet. Subjects describe themselves as religious, and although there are various levels of observance and

some differences among religious practices, all subjects would be described as Orthodox. I conducted interviews and discussions with residents of the town of Ariel while I was teaching at Ariel University Center in Israel. I also had contact with residents of the settlements Kedumim, Itamar, and Shilo. The analysis refers to *religious* settlers, and not necessarily to those who live in settlements for economic reasons. There were numerous obstacles to securing interviews, including willingness to participate, availability, language deficiencies, and suspicions about the research. In the end, over a two-and-a-half-month period I interviewed 17 people and spent time with each of them eliciting conversation about settlements, politics, religion, and their personal lives. I triangulated my notes, observations, and academic and personal experiences with an eye toward dominant themes and the discourse of authenticity, marginality, and authority emerged.

The premise is that ideologies and subject construction of reality are expressed in discourse, and argumentative discourse in particular (Van Dijk, 1995). Certainly surface structures such as lexical choice and syntax are expressive of ideologies and instrumental in reality construction, but deeper factors play a role as well. Consequently, I take the settler arguments from my notes and represent them as Toulmin (1958) structures, and suggest that such arguments are preferential forms of discourse for the expression of settler ideology. The arguments are 'real' arguments that emerge from interaction, and have been cast as Toulmin structures by the author. The Toulmin model focuses not on formal relationships among parts of an argument, but on functional relationships. The model allows the researcher to not only understand arguments but locate problems. The nature of Data and Warrants helps embed the argument in substantive context (e.g. settlers) and forces the analyst to see arguments as situationally dependent. Toulmin's model is more than a formal presentation, it shows how each part of the argument is either sufficient or not. Toulmin, responsive to dilemma theory discussed above, holds that argument is a means of resolving differences by exploring justification for standpoints. Arguers allow their positions to unfold and in the process represent a speaker's ideological position, as well as the tactics they employ for sustaining these ideological positions and resolving dilemmas. Since each part of the Toulmin structure can be seen as an answer to a question about the argument (sufficiency, relations between premises and conclusions, and quality of evidence) it is possible to understand the cogency and effectiveness of an argument. Kosic and Triandafyllidou (2004) and Taub and Hamo (2011) clearly pointed out how discourse exhibits a highly coherent representation of ideology. This analysis used the results of arguments emerging from interviews and conversations to examine the salient characteristics of ideological discourse. And rather than simply identify manipulative uses of various discursive devices, I discuss the arguments against the backdrop of ideology, historical context, rhetorical requirements, and settler dilemmas.

The authenticity dilemma

The first thing a settler must do is establish his or her authenticity. Feige (2009), Ravitski (1987), Taub (2010), and Zecharya (2008) all explain how ethnoreligious communities are mostly constituted by narratives about their origins. The Toulmin structure begins with the claim which we normally think of as a *conclusion*. It is followed by data or some sort of *main line of proof*. The proof is justification for the claim. The *warrant* is what justifies the connection between the data in the claim. The warrant answers the

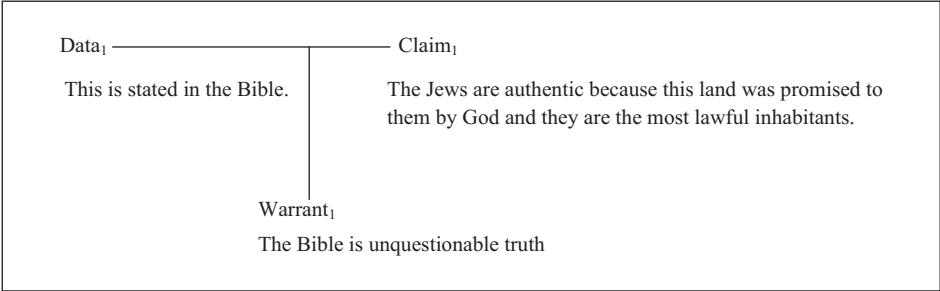


Figure 1. Structure of authenticity argument.

question ‘How do you get here?’ It carries the data to the claim and accesses justification for the claim. Figure 1 represents the authenticity argument for settlers. All of them make the same claim on the basis of the same data. Figure 1 displays the argument and for the settler solves the authenticity problem because of the sanctity and inerrancy of the Bible.

This biblical argument sets into motion a narrative composed of bits of history and group identity that are consolidated into a narrative or ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1991). Such narratives must be complete and coherent enough to include discourses about belonging, citizenship, and culture, as well as to position people in relation to one another. These narratives are particularly potent because they clothe power with legitimacy, which is just the discursive puzzle that requires resolution. Jewish settlers in Israel have developed a narrative of ‘return to biblically promised land’ that includes erasing the sovereignty of the indigenous people. The Bible is the most potent weapon and is used as a foundational document, but holds special sanctity for the religious as the defining document for the Jewish contact narrative. The Bible stretches time farther back to define Jews as the original inhabitants and the current Palestinian population as temporary. Argument₁ is ‘ground’ for settlers. Ground is the point at which one can go no further and simply says ‘that’s the way things are’. The Bible and land are ground. A premise stating the inerrancy of the Bible is unnecessary because it is considered foundational. Settlers drive their main arguments by persistently going to ground.

Following the statement of the ground argument is Argument₂, which negates any legal arguments about property rights by sanctifying the past. Informants engaged in the following argument:

- Claim₂: This is Jewish land bequeathed to them with rights that have never been relinquished.
- Data₂: The relationship between the land and the Jews is transhistorical and not subject to secular considerations. The Jewish people were not ‘born of the soil’ but on the land on the basis of the covenantal relationship with God.
- Warrant₂: The Bible is the true measure of time and a map of history. The Jews represent an unbroken chain to the ancients and are here now to reclaim their promised land.

In other words, the claim on the land is stronger than mere historical rights. Just as the Native American cannot claim rights to the land, a Jew could not claim rights to the land of Israel on the basis of historical inhabitants; rather, the Jewish people claim their unique covenantal history and the fact that they created this history. The debate in the Israeli Knesset (the main legislative body) is one over land strategy for security reasons, but for the settlers the debate is religiously inspired and the only condition for authenticity. Consequently, the Palestinian history and narrative is irrelevant. Zerubavel (1995) and Feige (2009) explain how Jewish historical time is divided into three phases – the ancient past, the era of exile, and the glorious return. Religious settlers adapted the three phases into a religious movement and constructed authenticity on the basis of the inevitability of the third phase. They use the Bible as a map of contemporary Israel. Exile means you are in a state of unpreparedness to implement the sovereignty of the land. When there is a conflict between ethnoreligious groups in the secular government – removing settlers from illegal spaces, for example – the settlers invoke the image of exile. On more than one occasion settlers made the following argument.

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| Claim ₃ : | Authentic Jews must live in the land of Israel. |
| Data ₃ : | During the period of exile Jews were forced to assimilate and did not fulfill their most important religious precept, which is to live in the land of Israel. Judaism suffered while in exile. |
| Warrant ₃ : | Only in the biblical land of Israel can Jews live purely as Jews. |

They are portrayed as being persecuted and returning to a time of landlessness and confusion. ‘The glorious return’, the third phase of Jewish history, is the most important for religious settlers. This is how they resolve the most basic discursive dilemma associated with authenticity. They cement the relationship between past and present and portray the present as the logical result and inevitable consequence of Jewish history.

The settlers are particularly adept at establishing authenticity by Judaizing the land. To Judaize the land is to symbolically and materially appropriate the ethnoscape and fill it with desired historical events, rituals, labels, and symbols. The argument goes:

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| Claim ₄ : | The Jews are the authentic inhabitants of the land. |
| Data ₄ : | Jewish rituals, biblical history, language, street names, sacred memories, and culture represent the normalcy of Jewish presence. |
| Warrant ₄ : | Ritualized normalcy indicates established presence authenticity. |

Settlers began to Judaize the land and normalize their presence by aligning themselves with what they considered to be an earthly expression of the redemptive vision; that is, they sought the support of secular political parties they thought were sympathetic to their cause. The Likud, for example, supported settlement rights and aligned with settlers to realize the rights of Jews to settle anywhere in the land. But secular Jews invoke the language of sovereignty and political rights, while settlers invoke the language of redemption and duty. Over time secular political parties realized the serious gap between

the language of sovereignty and the language of redemption as they began peace processes and territorial concessions (Taub, 2010; Taub and Hamo, 2011). So settlers took the next step, which was to establish facts on the ground by initiating their own appropriation of territory for settlement. Settlers began to see themselves as a messianic avant-garde or as increasingly ultra-Orthodox who are separate from the modern world.

After the War of Independence in 1948 it was incumbent on Israel to 'indigenize' the Jews and marginalize Palestinians. This began with the disbursement of Palestinians and the appropriation of land and villages (Morris, 1993). Yiftachel (1998) clarifies how this included the establishment of a 'frontier' that became a central vision and image for the settlement of the land of Israel as well as language that glorified ideas of 'settling' the land, 'return', and 'conquest'. The territory was socialized into Israeli consciousness through literature, music, and educational material. The centrality of Jewish history was contrasted with the marginality of others. This contrast forms the basis of what Taub (2010) refers to as the 'struggle over the meaning of Zionism', and is the elemental dilemma for settlers. The rhetoric of groups competing to occupy the same land gives rise to different ways of understanding. When settlers are pragmatic they invoke the *security argument*. Taub (2010) explains how the settlers backed off from their lofty theological heights and accepted secular legal language as a weapon in their fight to settle the land. They began to talk about settling the land for security reasons. The security argument seems to be the only pathway to common ground between the rhetoric of redemption and secular arguments about political sovereignty. The settlers had trouble with the argument from redemption because it did not resonate very well with the larger Israeli population. Argument₃, which focuses on the mundane and active Judaizing of the land, is consistent with security needs. It allows settlers to maintain their authenticity but forced them into the language of the secular arena to carry on their discursive work.

The discourse of marginality

If the Jews are the authentic inhabitants of the land, then the current population is less legitimate and must be marginalized. The discourse of marginality is about the relationship between the center and the periphery and how the concept of the center implies a periphery. The Palestinians live at the periphery of the environment and this increasingly informs their identity, albeit an undesirable one. The margins of a landscape contain what one is but not what one should be, and the conflict comes from the individual's struggle against being socialized by the margins. The basic structure of the marginality argument can be cast as a modus ponens structure:

if p , then q ; p , therefore q

Settlers state that if p (Jews are original and authentic inhabitants of the land) then q (the Palestinians are marginal). Once the logic of Claim₄ is established, the logic of the modus ponens is easily implicated. The discourse of marginality depends on comparisons of the center to the margins. The difference between the physician and the quack or the polite drinker and the drunk is a matter of centrality and marginality where the image of each contains attributions about the identity of the other. And so it is between the Palestinian

and the Israeli, the oriental and the occidental, the primitive and the modern. The dynamic is illustrated in the relationship between Israeli-Jews and Palestinians in many respects, but concerning territoriality and space in particular. To the extent that Palestinian Arabs of the West Bank are twice alien, and defined by Israel's power and Westernized successes, they are doubly classified as lower status and thus marginal. The local Palestinians are a trapped minority in settlements, meaning that they are a segment of a larger group spread across different states or geographic areas (Rabinowitz, 2001). Hence, they are twice alien: once within the state in which they are dominated (Israel and their settlers), and once again by the mother nation (other Palestinian Arabs). Settlers express themselves in the form of Argument₅. Identities can be displaced from specific places and be understood in what Appadurai (1991) has called *ethnoscapes*.

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| Claim ₅ : | The Jews belong non-reflexively to the land and the Palestinians are marginal. |
| Data ₅ : | This is dictated by the power of the biblical narrative and the 'centrality' of Jewish presence and culture on the land. |
| Warrant ₅ : | Jewish collective identification and authoritative textual sources (the Bible) render them central to the <i>ethnoscape</i> of greater Israel. |

This discourse of marginality is played out as a conflict over *ethnoscapes* (Appadurai, 1991) which are the territorialization of ethnic memory, that is, the belief shared by a group that they have a common spatial origin (Smith, 1986). Essentially, the Israelis and the Palestinians are competing to construct the identity of the same space. As Smith (1986) explains with respect to the establishment of nation-states, identities and cultures become politicized in order to create differences that justify claims to the land. The power to rule is based not on tribal or personal loyalties, but on a fixed territorial space. Settlers who define the land as 'sacred' and begin to define geographical artifacts and references as sacred to a history of exile and return, are politicizing the land in order to create national ideologies that justify a national identity and claim to a territory. The Israeli settlers use Argument₅ to render the discourse of the other as marginal.

We can borrow from Gramsci here by pointing out that the marginal or disadvantaged group is in a binary relationship with the dominant group, cut off from most avenues of legitimate participatory politics, especially in the dominant sphere. The discourses that emerge from the authoritative center overwhelm local specificities and place the marginal group in a position that is enervated and without agency. Dutta and Pal (2010) explain how this binary relationship silences the ideals of dialogue and even disadvantages the minority group when it comes to the potentialities of communication. Maoz and Ellis (2001), along with other researchers (e.g. Johnstone, 1986; Katriel, 1986), have described the divergent discussion and dialogic patterns of Israeli Jews and Arabs. The tension between centrality and marginality as expressed in Argument₅, and the nonreflective centrality attitude of settlers, are expressed in everyday communication patterns. Settlers see these as quaint cultural practices that cannot compete with the power of Hebrew and biblical narrative of the settlers. Even though religious settlers pay little attention to local Arabs and resist contact with them, they consider their own Western-style communication as a tool of the dominant culture.

Religious settlers see themselves as natives – belonging non-reflexively to the land. This is how they want to define themselves and have others see them. But they must face the dilemma posed by Palestinian Arabs who have lived in the villages on the land for centuries. Consequently, they take on a discursive strategy designed to solve this dilemma by orienting in two ways: first, as we have seen, they classify themselves as original inhabitants ‘returning’ to their home. Settlers displace Palestinians on the basis of biblical promises and their self-definition as carriers of Jewish collective memory. Yet they maintain a distant attitude about traditional Arabs because they view them as remnants of the pastoral past. They see local villagers as romantic vestiges of an earlier biblical time, and although this stance moderates their discriminatory attitudes, it also reproduces colonial situations. A resident of the settlement of Ariel told stories of trickery on the part of local Arabs who worked at a food stand just outside the gates of the community. The interviewee’s story was full of snide references to local customs and condescending attitudes about Palestinian culture, politics, and preoccupation with tradition over modernity. To the interviewee, the local Arab population is rooted in orientalism and traditionalism, while he is engaged in important nation-building. At no time during the interview was there any sign of sympathetic engagement with the ‘other’. This is because any semblance of ‘dialogue’ or symmetrical communication between settlers and Palestinians is almost impossible. The settlers make this point with the attitude that the Palestinian should be thankful that the Jews have reinvigorated the land. They have, as the saying goes, made the desert bloom. Argument₆ encapsulates the way the interviewees maintain their own centrality and marginality of the other.

Claim ₆ :	Jewish language and culture is superior and central to the redemption process.
Data ₆ :	There has been strong economic, cultural, and political progress since the arrival of the Jews and the establishment of the State of Israel.
Warrant ₆ :	The economic and cultural development of the last 60 years must be explained by the arrival of the Jews.

The Jewish groups in settlement towns are West-centric and typically do not take local communication practices seriously. The settlers will explain their own reasons and presence, but ignore the Palestinians. They actually know very little about the local communities and Arab culture and substitute stereotypes for contextualized knowledge. They solve this problem by engaging in various rationalizations. Settlers have borrowed orientalist images from secular Zionism that include an ‘empty’ and undeveloped land which is ripe for development (see Argument₆). Israeli-Jewish employers who hire Palestinians refer to the ‘social peace’ in order to valorize political equality. Spivak (1999), in her seminal work on subaltern communities, and Rabasa (2001), writing about Latin American cultural resistance, explain how dominant universal narratives of power and modernity co-opt local voices and shut off discursive spaces of expression. In other words, opportunities for expression remain inaccessible to minority voices.

Argument₇ is the way in which settlers depoliticize and denationalize Palestinians and continue the argument that the Jewish settlers are central and the Palestinians are a marginal silent partner. The Palestinians are only ‘authentic’ if they remain in their simple primitive state. Palestinians clearly have a ‘voice’ in the modern technological world, but

for settlers that voice remains isolated and childlike in its lack of will and agency. One settler made the argument that the Palestinians should be partners with them in the establishment of the State of Israel.

- Claim₇: The Palestinians should be a partner in the redemption and avoid nationalization activities in conflict with the Israelis.
- Data₇: Jewish redemption processes are inevitable and central to settling the land, and Palestinian political activity is a distraction.
- Warrant₇: Palestinian political activity interferes with the redemption of the land.

Constructing Palestinians as authentic primitives is another discursive strategy that reproduces the center–margin dialectic. The religious Zionist settlers have no conflict with individual Arabs, as long as he or she is not seeking rights or interfering with the general settlement project. But this sense of protectiveness can turn quickly when there is a violent incident and the local ‘primitives’ will be described as murderous and compared to Cossack hordes. Feige (2009) cites examples of letters in settler publications that invoke images of Cossacks, pogroms, Hitler, dispersion, and ghettos. These imply a coherent Jewish consciousness that imagines terrorist acts as a continuation of Jewish history with no distinctions made between historical contexts. At this point Arab hatred for the Jews becomes demonic and the settler will insist on retribution using Palestinian violence as evidence of his primitive consciousness. Some Israeli scholars have observed the role reversal where the Palestinians are modern Jews persecuted through no fault of their own. Settlers have fused the political right to self-determination with ethnoreligious self-determination. This is the primary argumentative goal of settlers. The reification of the ethnoreligious state justifies all forms of self-preservation including violence and all forms of defense central to the survival of the group. Hence, settlers have orientalist and discriminatory attitudes pertaining to Palestinians which serve the binary relationship referred to above by keeping Palestinians defined as marginal in all cases.

The authority dilemma

Settlers marginalize Palestinians by appealing to authority, but it is an authority that resonates with the settler community and deep elements of the Jewish historical consciousness. Hence, Argument₈ is quite common. In other words, they are unconcerned with the general international community or the public at large and seek a form of self-justification based on internal community authority standards. Handley (2011) explains how traditional social movements are more successful when they use pragmatic arguments for an intended audience. Thus, the appeal to the biblical right to the land or Jewish ethnoreligious roots creates arguments that resonate and converge with the interests of the target settler community. As Yiftachel (1998) argues, the essential strategy of the settler project is to legitimize their existence by ‘indigenizing’ themselves. The Jewish people are historically a ‘deterritorialized’ ethnoreligious group and their goal of self-determination includes territorial identity. This is in contrast to the common assertion among settlers

that the land was never important to the Palestinians until the Jews arrived, and only as a response to Jewish presence.

- Claim₈: The ethnoscape was never important to the Palestinians until the Jews arrived. But it represents a primordial claim of the Jewish people.
- Data₈: There is no history or documentation of Palestinian primordial or ethno-religious claims to the land. It only became important to them after 1948.
- Warrant₈: Palestinians ‘construct’ history favorable to them by making the claim that they are indigenous people.

Argument₉ below is very common not only among settlers, but in the Israeli population in general. Only after the Israelis arrived, the story goes, did the Palestinian ethnoscape evolve, and it took particular shape after 1948 and 1967 when the idea of a Palestinian state began to arise. Interestingly, the settlers fashion a favorable history by accusing the Palestinians of ‘constructing’ history. They go on to claim that it is the Palestinian elite who are most responsible for devising a Palestinian ethnoscape and giving it intellectual justification. It was the Palestinian elite who, for example, sought to shore up the importance of Jerusalem when for Muslims Jerusalem was less important than Mecca and Medina.

- Claim₉: Jerusalem is more important and central to the Jewish people than to the Palestinians.
- Data₉: Jerusalem is mentioned 669 times in the Hebrew Bible. It is never mentioned in the Koran.
- Warrant₉: The fact that Jerusalem was never mentioned in the Koran but is mentioned many times in the Hebrew Bible is evidence of its ancient and historical centrality to the Jews but not the Palestinians or Muslims.

The settlers, then, began to delineate whole areas of land between the Egyptian and Lebanese border, and Jordan to the East, and claimed it as ‘Jewish’ on the grounds that the Jews were there in previous centuries, and although driven away, are the original inhabitants of the region. All other ethnic categories are regarded as intruders. This primordial claim to the land makes it easy to classify others as marginal. Settler authority discourse activates a pattern of thinking, a pattern that is social and marks objects such as land and geography as central or marginal, thereby giving them symbolic authority in society. Arguing that one group is more powerful by identifying center and marginal distinctions results in the attribution of status to one group or the other. This status (such as a claim to be an indigenous inhabitant of sacred land) is more than mere ornament because those marked as marginal are denied power while power is afforded the other group. Settlers have taken historically ignored religious sites and cultural images and filled them with Jewish religious significance in an effort to increase their authority over the landscape. For example, historically neglected religious sites such as the Western Wall or the Cave of Machpela, sites that secular Jews paid little attention to and religious Jews knew primarily

as biblical references, became foregrounded in religious Jewish consciousness when soldiers arrived at the sites. Feige (2009) explains how the Cave of Machpela exploded in significance after the Israeli army first arrived there during the Six Day War.

The arguments that have emerged around sites such as the Cave of Machpela are most characterized by references to exile (see Argument₃). The settler rhetoric of 'return from exile' fuels the dominant attitude toward the Palestinians and makes their presence in the land a response to what settler collective memory classifies as a crime against the Jews (Feige, 2009). Withdrawal from these territories is considered a violation of divine law, and violence is a means of coping. The discourse of marginality and authority emerge from the religious aspects of the worldview of the settlers and not the political context in which the settlements are part. This worldview postulates that the land of Israel is holy, the people are holy, and we live in an age of redemption, signaled by the return of the Jews to the land of Israel. All of these are underscored by biblical tenets (see Roislien, 2007) that include the covenantal relationship between the Jews and God, the 'fact' that the land was given to the Jewish people for eternity, and the role of these sacred sites in the Bible. These are interpreted as giving the people of Israel an inalienable right to the land, and settler argument practices (see Argument₄) emerge from these presuppositions.

Feige (2009) explains that when asked to prove that we are in a period of redemption settlers will point to Jeremiah and explain how Jeremiah predicted two exiles which the Jews have already experienced and that there will not be third. Thus, it is the time of the return and redemption. But, as we have seen, a center implies a margin and for this reason settlers include sentiments toward the Arab population that serves as their margin or 'other'. The discourse of legitimacy assists the settler community with their collective memory rooted in the experience of the 1929 Arab riots. These riots have been commemorated in settler museums and continue to significantly inform the relationship between the Jews and the Arabs in the community. Photographs of the riots are rhetorically constructed into 'visual proof' of the Jewish authentic heritage in the area. Hence, there is a fusion of the biblical with the material historical which results in normative meaning for the community. By communicatively constructing the significance of a historical event such as the 1929 riots, the settlers create a legitimacy of place. This place justifies their right to exist. In addition, constructing an authoritative and heroic past on the basis of historical incidents further cements cultural identity and undergirds the sense of rightful belonging. This relationship between contemporary material culture and an authoritative past is exemplified in the type of argument settlers make in Argument₁₀.

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| Claim ₁₀ : | Modern material culture (monuments, museums) displays the authority and rightful belonging of the settlers. |
| Data ₁₀ : | Modern material culture is proof of the authentic heritage of the Jewish people. |
| Warrant ₁₀ : | Material culture such as museums and monuments are fused with the biblical past and display a natural relationship between the present and past. |

The efforts of settlers to appropriate and define the land have resulted in a developing discursive arena that has captured the attention of the Israeli public (see Feige,

2009; Taub, 2010). Defining a land as ‘sacred’ or a people as indigenous does not materialize by itself; rather it must be constructed interactionally and maintained by individuals and groups with a stake in the issues. Argument₁₀ represents settler recognition of this present–past relationship. Their discursive practices are repeated and these shared experiences develop into a common framework of normative understanding (Hardy et al., 2005). The pattern of arguments become fixed and provide coherent and persistent schemes of understanding that become reified and are the explanatory foundation for the belief that one’s understanding of reality is ‘correct’.

Two or more competing discourses are characteristic of any conflict. Both settlers and the local population of Palestinians make claims to the land – one on the basis of historical return and redemption, the other on a competing basis of homeland and in some instances of religious endowment. The prevailing settler discourse is one of authenticity, centrality, and authority, which emphasizes the religious rights of the Jews to reclaim the land. Countering these arguments is an oppositional discourse from the Palestinians asserting a frame of indigenous and historical rights. The conflict is between these two frameworks and both of them have ‘blame’ in common. All settler arguments have blame as a subtext. *Blame* is based on the perception that someone is responsible for a failure to achieve a goal or a particular social condition. The act of blaming another person or group serves to exonerate one’s own actions. Negativity carries an intensity that may have a more powerful effect on attitudes and evaluations. Blaming is particularly counterproductive because it directs attention away from grappling with the potential epistemic value of argument.

In summary, the dominant settler discourse is built on the premise of biblical promise. It stresses the authority of the Bible and the word of God and projects an unassailable morality and inevitability. The invocation of the Bible and the word of God frames the narrative in language sealed from criticism and scrutiny. By definition, any questioning or challenge is viewed in moral terms and considered unacceptable. In contrast, the Palestinian narrative is less grounded in religious terminology but no less hardened by claims of historical rights. This study has tried to remedy the paucity of research on settler arguments used to justify their existence. The examination of their argumentative communicative practices allows for better understanding of how they see their existence in the face of ongoing challenges and condemnation. We have seen how argument is a discursive resource used by settlers to construct the world around them and position themselves within that world.

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