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Bachelor Thesis

# Who are the Hilltop Youth?

*Perception of self vs. Perception of researchers*



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## Abstract

This qualitative study focuses on perceptions of actors within protracted social conflicts and the value of using self-categorization as a tool to increase understanding of conflict actors as a step towards finding alternative solutions. It compares self-perceptions of the Hilltop Youth, a radical settler group in the West Bank region in the Middle East, to categorizations used in all of the established literature on the group. Five categories that are recurring in the literature on the Hilltop Youth (terrorists, vigilantes, active flank within a social movement, gang, and activist) are contrasted with Self-Categorization theory and will be used as a tool to determine the self-image of the group as displayed in the digital and social media. The findings show that the category that finds common ground between the two perspectives is activists. The Hilltop Youth view themselves as freedom fighters, doing what they are chosen to do: settle the land, already promised to them. Their actions and beliefs translate to political activism this both including building homes and creating outposts as well as conducting “price tag” attacks. The findings underline the difference in perceived realities between the Hilltop Youth and researchers. Concluding the need to incorporate the perspective of the actor itself in order to create a sustainable peace based on the same reality, something that have been overlooked in previous Hilltop Youth research.

**Keywords:** *Hilltop Youth, HY, Israel, price tag, activists, self-categorization, protracted social conflict.*



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## 1. Deep-rooted realities

Protracted social conflict is the prolonged conflict not always between states but more so within and across countries. A protracted social conflict has an element of self-perception and the formation of group identity, the societal needs and elements of grievance is also highlighted as important within the protracted social conflict. The protracted social conflict is a long and challenging conflict to solve and the process has many different phases. The identifying of actors is seen as important and the views and needs of the parties are essential. Identifying the actors' needs and wants, the self-image and self-category of the actor are important to take into consideration (Ramsbotham, et al., 2016, p. 115-119). Looking at group interests and political aims, one may argue that this cannot be done without analyzing the groups' self-perception and the way they express the actions of themselves.

There is an ongoing protracted social conflict between Israel and Palestine, a struggle of land and power that has been a pressing issue for decades. The conflict is deeply rooted in societies and beliefs that run through generations, the conflict that began at the end of the ninetieth century, is still a pressing issue and affects people's daily lives (Ranta, 2015, p. 401). The conflict is colored by both Israel and Palestine claiming power and the right to the land. The state of Israel wants to create a land for the Jews as was promised in the Torah and the Palestinians living in the area for generations claiming the right to the land (Breger, et al., 2012, p. 1-4). UN resolutions and peace plans as well as wars and turmoil have during the years shaped the conflict in the way that it is today. The political standing points have shifted with different rulings and countries involving in the conflict. The division of land between Israel and the Arabs stems from the UN partition plan in 1947. This plan as well as wars that followed caused the state of Israel to increase its power over land in the area (Peters, 2013, p. 1-4).



Israel has since early 1967 engaged in creating Jewish settlements on the West Bank. Originating from a religious conviction that the Jews have the ultimate right to the land, this belief going beyond international law and agreements. The settlements are illegal under international law and the Israeli government has received critic for enabling the settlements. The settlements are according to Israel, built on religious grounds and with no consideration for Palestinian homes or cites. Creating issues and turmoil between Israeli settlers and Palestinian communities nearby, this inflicts a major challenge to solving the conflict. Settler communities are growing and there is strong support for these communities, stemming from both the Israeli societies and the Israeli government (Ranta, 2015, p. 407). The settlements have negatively impacted the conflict resolution process. The increased number of settlements fuels the anger and hostile relations between the groups.

One settler group that has made a name for itself in this conflict is the Hilltop Youth (HY). The HY is the example of an accelerating situation and a group taking charge of the story in which the settlements continue to expand (Amon, 2004, p. 48, 60-61, Byman & Sachs, 2012, p. 73-75). The HY is a group of young settlers, conducting violent acts and spreading the settlement areas throughout the West Bank. The Hilltop Youth name was founded sometime around 2005 when Israel started evacuating illegal settlements in Gaza. The HY is to some extent the children of the original settlers in the West Bank, distancing themselves from other settlers and with religious convictions inhabiting the West Bank (Friedman, 2015, p. 392-393). There have been attacks on Palestinians and Palestinian homes in which the HY have claimed responsibility for. They are Israeli Jews, living in the established settlements or Israel, now moving out of the areas aiming at increasing the occupied areas. The HY is known for its "price tag" attacks which are attacks on Palestinians aiming at showing that living on their land has a price. This message is both towards the Palestinians and the Israeli Defense Forces that try to hinder this



process (Eiran & Krause, 2018, p. 637-638). The definition of this group differs among researchers and politicians. After an attack in the village of Duma in 2015 where a Palestinian family were sleeping, two parents and an 18 months child were killed during a fire, carried out by the HY, political leaders in Israel addressed this as terrorism (Eiran & Krause, 2018, p. 637). This shapes in ways the discussion and reality of the HY and calls for an in-depth discussion aiming at sorting out the definition of this group and defining the reality in which they act ultimately aiming at solving the conflict.

### 1.1 Research problem and relevance

The HY threatens and attacks the villages close by and the shepherds maintaining the lands have raised concern with their presence in the area in the West Bank (Levinson, 2015). The Israeli settler violence undermines the peace process and the relations with the Palestinians (Byman & Sachs, 2012, p. 74). HY is a violent and unpredictable group there is a need for evaluating the type of collection of people this is. Knowing who they are one can assess the situation and the potential management and conflict prevention can be done. HY acts as a case study for evaluating an actor within a protracted social conflict, there is a need for mapping and categorizing the different parties within protracted social conflicts. Within protracted social conflicts one needs to determine the societal needs of individuals within the group, the interests of the group, this as well as the non-negotiable needs of the group (Ramsbotham, et al., 2016, p. 117-118).

The categorizing of the HY looking at their identification and comparing that to how other researchers view them is a fundamental step towards solving the conflict and knowing how to deal with the group. How do they see themselves and how are they perceived by others? The previous research takes different stands against the group but not how the group categorizes itself. If we do not know who they are, or how they view themselves, do we know how to deal with them? A solution is needed for the Israel and Palestine conflict, and



cooperation between all parties is essential for a sense of sustainable peace. Without knowing who the group is and how they view themselves a cooperative solution is not possible if the perception differs. The case of the HY will show on the importance of categorizing the actors within a protracted social conflict, aiming at determining angles of cooperation, focusing on attracting and sustaining peace using the self-categorization as a tool.

## 1.2 Purpose and research questions

The research purpose is to analyze the definition and categorization of the HY by researchers and compare that to the self-categorization that the HY itself puts forth in different sources. Previous research does not incorporate any angle in which the HY themselves have a voice regarding defining themselves. In dealing with a violent group, their view, and how they see themselves is important especially when not correlating with how researchers define the group. The research aims at determining the correlating categorization for the group. In assigning a category to a group, a set of angles on how to solve issues attached, and how to cooperate with that type of group follows. In finding a category that both researchers and the group itself align with, the set paths of solving the issues may come closest to the truth.

- Who are the Hilltop Youth according to researchers and how do they categorize themselves?
- What aim do researchers view them to have and what aim do they claim to have themselves?
- How do different views correlate and overlap?

## 2. Previous Research

The literature on the HY gives different answers to the question of who the HY really are. The early HY research starts in the 2010s and in the years of 2011, 2012, and 2014 some researchers write about the HY as violent extremists conducting terrorist acts. These researchers take a direct stand in



the issue and categorize them as terrorists. The discussions regarding the group directly state that the acts are from radical settlers acting on extreme terms and aims to inflict terror and advance their political aims. The researchers mention that state representatives have publicly called some of the acts of the group terrorism and this being a definition that follows (Byman & Sachs, 2012, p. 73-76. Carton, 2011, p. 49. Boudreau, 2014, p. 70–71).

In 2014 the HY was a part of research made regarding New Age culture in Israel. The HY is then used as an example of the rise in gatherings based on spirituality. The HY and the rise in orthodox Jewish settlers was a part of a new age culture basing its lives on religious spirituality in Israel (Werczberger & Huss, 2014, p. 6-7).

The research about the HY shifts some and in both 2010 and 2015 researchers start discussing the group as vigilantes. Regarding vigilantism researchers claim the violence from the HY is a clear case of vigilantism. The argument is that the violence has occurred in areas where state control is lacking, therefore they are acting as vigilantes, taking the law in its own hands. It is described as part of the settler violence and vigilantism is the product of the environment. The HY is described as angry and willing to do take engage in vigilant acts due to the lack of state presence in the area (Gazit, 2015, p. 439-441. Weiss, 2010, p. 25-29).

Some later research in 2013 and 2018 the HY has been described as an active flank being a part of a social movement that is the Israeli settlements. The settlements are then described as the main body of the social movement and the HY is just a radical flank, enabling the mission of the social movement. The HY is the big driver in pushing the settler agenda and this being both within the society and towards the state. The radical acts separate them from the settler movement, but they still act for the same cause (Eiran & Krause, 2018, p. 650-651. Neidle, 2013, p. 504-509).



Research from 2015, 2016, and 2018 have categorized the group as a gang. In discussing the HY as a gang they are a part of a subculture. They differ too much in their arrangement and the group is too versatile to fit any other definition of the group. They conduct violent acts and crimes but as a loosely gathered group they seek stability and a sense of belonging in the group. They conduct criminal acts but look for safety and stability within the group, creating a lifestyle around the cause (Friedman, 2015, p. 391-407. Friedman, 2018, p. 80. Singer, 2016, p. 30-34).

Activism is discussed in 2018 in connection to the HY violent acts. The group is described as settler activists going from non-violent to violent. This being different in not describing them in the extremist manner as other researches do. The research focuses on "price tag" violence conducted by the HY and they are described as a group of activists, fighting their political cause (Alimi & Demetriou, 2018, p. 478-481).

In summary, previous research on the HY is looking at several aspects and angles of the group but the self-perception of the HY is hardly ever mentioned and the categorizations are all based on the researcher's perceptions. This study addresses this gap.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

#### 3.1 Self-categorization theory

The self-categorization theory was first developed in the 1980<sup>th</sup> by Henri Tajfel along with John Turner within the field of social psychology. The theory is a continuation of earlier social identity theory created by them. The social identity theory claims that individuals through self-identifying with different groups categorize themselves as a part of so-called social identity (Hogg, 2010, p. 729-730; Tajfel, 1982, p. 20-24).



The self-categorization theory focuses on the group accentuating the aspects of similarities within the group and accentuating the differences towards others making the feeling of group belonging stronger. The group itself forms the ingroup attributes and defines the sense of belonging. The ingroup can change depending on other groups and if the other groups shift, the ingroup then shifts as well towards continuing to differentiate from others. The context can influence the ingroup to take a stand against and by situating themselves within the context, the group may shift in definition and form to always separate themselves from others (Hogg, 2010, p.729-730).

In categorizing self, the group creates stereotypes that apply to the group, creating a prototype of the members. This giving purpose and belonging for the group, determining the identity of the members. Norms and values are defined within the prototype and this strengthens the group as a whole (Hogg, 2010, p. 729-730).

The self-categorization theory points out depersonalization through the strong group identity and when establishing a prototype, the social identities of individuals are depersonalized. The members mirror each other, and the identity formed within the group is strengthened by the members and gives a sense of heightened status and value. They reflect glory and power upon themselves, inflicting and empowering the group identity (Hogg, 2010, p. 293-230. Myers, et al., 2014, p. 532-533).

In creating this strong ingroup prototype, the feeling towards others not being a part of the group is then founded more negative. Popularity within the group is often a member that fits the created prototype perfectly and is then seen as the perfect member. In differentiating from others strongly the social attraction for stereotypical members are stronger as well as the strong disconnect from other groups. This is defined as ethnocentrism, the prototype of the group is above other groups (Hogg, et al., 2004, p. 253-255).



The group members struggle over social strength between each other. The dynamics within the group can change when the struggle for social power within the group members proceeds. Social status for the group as a whole can shift the aim. A group with a high status aims at keeping the power and a group of a lower status promotes their positive aspects and aims to decrease social stigma (Hogg, 2010, p. 730-731).

- Ingroup

The ingroup is the group of people that share the same sense of belonging to each other. The ingroup is the safety and creates a common identity with the ingroup (Myers, et al., 2014, p. 546).

- Outgroup

The outgroup is the "others", sometimes known as an enemy or simply just not a member of the ingroup. There is a distinct set of attributes to the outgroup all stemming from not having the same as the ingroup. The ingroup sets the standard and the outgroup is the known opposing side (Myers, et al., 2014, p. 546).

- Prototype

The prototype is the known attributes to the ingroup. This could be developed by the group itself over time or is from the start equipped with a member prototype. This is the known settings for determining the identity and category of the group. This is a creation of how the "true" member is perceived (Myers, et al., 2014, p. 546).

The theoretical framework will determine how the group identifies as a whole regarding the collective group identity. The attributes that connect to the group and what makes them a collective organization. This theory will be applied in determining the ingroup, outgroup, and prototype of the HY. The theory will



contribute to outline and determine how they form a self-image as the base for how they categorize themselves. The self-categorization theory will pinpoint the formative structures of the group and the psychological attributes that form the perception of self and group identity. That in which will determine the HY's perception of belonging to a category.

## 4. Methodology

The research will be divided into two parts both looking at the material through a discourse analysis with the first part using typological theorizing applying all available academic research previously conducted regarding the categorizing of the HY. This will theoretically underline the discussion and answer the research questions regarding the aspect of how researchers have categorized them.

The second part of the research will investigate a collection of online material chosen, towards the self-categorization theory. This will answer the research questions in the aspect of the HY self-image and their categorization through discourse analysis of the material.

This research will use the HY as a case study displaying the protracted social conflict actor and aims at showing the case as an important step in categorizing all the actors. The case is then used as an example displaying the need for looking at self-categorization as well as the categorization from others to conclude to a final category for the group.

### 4.1 Material

Within the first section of the research academic research will be used, looking at the previous categorization. The academic material is based on thematic and research levels. This research will use all available previous research made on the HY to strengthen this work, this does not include all mentions of HY in books as well as research not made available to the public.



Within the second part of the research, looking at the HY categorization and identity regarding themselves, the research will analyze five YouTube clips from the years of 2012 until 2019 all from known and reliable news outlets or the group itself. These video clips are different in their outline, four are interviews with members of HY conducted by well-known media, and one is an interview is done by themselves interviewing members. All video material is available for public viewing at YouTube.com. This material will be used along with relevant secondary literature used for empirical mapping. The HY Facebook page will be analyzed for material posted in the last 12 months. This being an important part of mapping out the different aspects of the group. Using their perspective and angle will have a crucial part in complementing the empirical mapping. The material is chosen for analyzing how they present themselves towards media and how they want to be portrayed as well as how they view themselves. This diverse material collection will be useful for discourse analysis in analyzing the language in different contextual settings. The material is selected based on the quality of the content and the value of information.

Along with the strategically collected video material the research will take news articles to complementary analyze the group, aiming at getting a broad picture of the HY and creating impactful analytical applicability (Esaiaasson, et al., 2017, p. 159).

## 4.2 Case study

This research is a case study of examining an actor within a protracted social conflict. The conflict between Israel and Palestine is a protracted social conflict, this being a conflict having three fundamental attributes. First looking at the mobilization and self-identification of individuals. The emerge of leadership and political agenda. The second focuses on the state actions and the strategies of political elites and the way the policies are set in motion. The third is the self-reinforcement, the development of group identity and belief



systems governing and solidifying the conflict. The protracted social conflict is the long and unsolved conflict that has gone through many stages and phases. The protracted social conflict needs an in-depth case study to examine the involved parties that all contribute to the conflict's longevity (Ramsbotham, et al., 2016, p. 115-119).

A case study allows for examining the conflict in a detailed manner. The in-depth examination of causal mechanisms within a single case is seen as valuable. Looking at a single case, there is an opportunity to analyze a larger number of variables that are necessary for giving complete contextual aspects (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 21). In determining the real and crucial aspects of the case at hand, looking at only what is relevant for the case, the single case study is seen as valuable. The real-life setting gives the analysis deeper applicability and the opportunity to come closer to the "truth" of the case as well as the circumstances in which it occurs (Simons, 2009, p. 23).

### 4.3 Typological theorizing

The research will use typological theorizing within the first part of the research, drawing the previous categorization of the HY. This method draws on the linkages between the categories and the development of different typologies. There is a need for characterizing the variables within the different types to distinguish its traits. In typological theorizing the causal mechanisms behind the actions are important, one identifies the conditions under which something is happening within the categories, linkages are then drawn towards the case. The case itself develops more types within the phenomenon. The case study is then set as a phenomenon, creating a typology of types within. A collection of traits act as a type and is researched towards the case study. The different categories will by themselves contest of a phenomenon determined, then analyzed towards the case (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 235-239). The material, contesting of academic research and video material will be abductively analyzed towards being able to draw conclusions regarding the



category's others have made regarding the HY comparing that to the self-categorization. When abductively theorizing the context in which the HY provides will be analyzed in language and perspective form their worldview. In abductive theorizing it is crucial to explain the setting in which they form their world view. The way that the researchers look at the HY and forms its opinions and actions is a large part of abductively analyzing and is important to keep in mind (Bryman, 2016, p. 394).

#### 4.4 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is the analyzing of the language, here the material constitutes language from various sources, both interviews with the HY from reporters and interviews made by themselves. The discourse of news articles and independent sources will also be analyzed. Discourse analysis analyses the language, emphasizing the frame in which the language illustrates the object at hand (Bryman, 2016, p. 531). For this research looking at how the HY categorizes themselves as well as how they are categorized by others will be unveiled by looking at the discourse analyzed. The language used and theoretical reasoning from researchers academic material will be analyzed through a discourse analysis.

According to discourse analysis the discourse produces the social world and the contextual structures in which the language explains and reveals reality. Language is then seen as a constructive factor, when analyzed, explaining the aspects of society (Bryman, 2016, p. 532). The analysis of the videoclips is based on the context surrounding the language spoken. The discourse is colored by the situation, for example who the interview is, in what setting this interview is being done, and what the aim is. All of this shapes the discourse and when analyzing people's language and their statements. The researcher needs to take into consideration the context of the video clips. There is a difference between expressing themselves in a private versus public setting



and this could shape the language significantly (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, p. 229-230).

The research will through discourse analysis analyze the language used regarding how the HY defines themselves and how they categorize themselves. The material will be analyzed by deeply looking at the discourse and the language used by the HY. Discourse analysis focuses on looking at the message behind and the shaping of information presented. Using material from YouTube, including different interviews and conversations with the group, the discourse analysis prefers the unplanned conversations prior to the arranged settings in which the interviews are conducted (Taylor, 2013, p. 11-13). The videoclips differ in outline, some are formal interviews for news channels, and some are them interviewing themselves. This to create diversity in situations and circumstance where the language is analyzed. This aiming at looking at the variation of the way they talk as well as the different aspects of themselves that they choose to display. This aiming to unveil and collectively mapping a real idea of the statements (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, p. 230).

#### 4.5 Limitations & Delimitations

A major limitation of this research is the language barrier due to some material being in Yiddish and Hebrew, especially concerning the self-image of the HY. The research is limited to English sources or translated material. Limiting the material collection and possibly weakening the data collection. In connection there is a limitation in the interpretation of the data which could potentially shape the findings. The material collection is then focused mainly on English sources, aiming at keeping the translated material limited. Being aware and actively knowing that there are a potential angle and message intended for some of the material will still have a great value and is necessary when analyzing the data towards the theoretical framework. The research is a desk study which shapes the angle of the research aiming at conceptualizing the group through theory, using material accessible online. This research will not



analyze the future or the potential outcomes of the group, nor any potential success rate. Not being able to conduct a field study is a limitation that has shaped the material collection regarding the HY self-categorization.

This research will not include the categorizations from other parties such as the Israeli state, the Palestinians, or human rights groups which would have been useful giving a more complete picture. This research will only take into consideration the categorization from researchers and scholars focusing on the definitions clear outlining and theoretical underpinnings and connecting that to the self-categorization from the HY.

The consent of the participants from the HY is not established, however, the material collected is publicly published and available for anyone's interpretation. The members did not give consent for the interviews to be interpreted for this research. This is important to keep in mind even though they have given consent for the original material to be publicly published.

## 5. Background

### 5.1 The conflict between Israel and Palestine

The area of Israel and Palestine has experienced an intense and complicated history going back to the beginning of the 1830s. The population in the area was at the end of the nineteenth century mainly Arabs. The Arabs have lived on the land for generations and views this country as theirs, while the Israelis see this as their land due to the writing in the Torah and that they are being promised land of their own, the land of Israel. While the land of Palestine and the actual move towards statehood have had many different angles and views. The creation of the state of Palestine originates from Arabs within a Palestinian population in the area wanting self-rule. The more fundamental steps towards a state of Palestine came from the end of the First World War and the rise in Zionism in the area (Samih Khalidi, 2013, p. 20-21).



Zionism is a political movement where the aim is to recreate a Jewish state within Israel that began to arise. This causing violent struggles in the area and the second world war shaped the hostilities and the increase of the Jewish population in the area. Looking at the more recent historical developments in the area, the story is colored by the League of Nations along with the British drawing a boarder in 1923, aiming at solving the conflict over the land. (Ranta, 2015, p. 402-403). Many efforts to solve the conflict were made but the war in 1948 between Israel and Palestine was mainly won by Israel taking over large parts of the land. The British mandate over Palestine was over and Israel declared the State of Israel. The war resulted in the Arabs having control over the West Bank and the Gaza strip, this becoming Palestine. The partition of Palestine and the creation of Israel was supported by the UN General assembly and was voted trough in 1947 (Amit & Levit, 2011, p. 27-29).

The Six-day war in 1967 was also a huge victory for Israel and a great loss for the Arab world. Territories controlled by Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, like the Sinai in Egypt and the Golan Heights in Syria and parts of the West Bank, west of the Jordan river were now controlled by Israel. This war made Israel's grip on the land stronger and the war is viewed in messiah measures by the Israeli. The biblical entitlement to the land was now stronger than ever. Israel annexed both the West Bank and Gaza as well as began planning settlements and the movement of Israeli Jews to inhabit the areas. The Golan Heights were also a place where Israeli settlements began to take place (Amit & Levit, 2011, p. 70-72).

In the 1990s, a larger peace process occurred, and the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993. The agreement aimed at reducing the violence within the conflict and settling a mutual agreement of a two-state plan. However, the signed agreement was not implemented, and the two-state plan agreed upon was not followed through. (Ramsbotham, et al., 2016, p. 229-230). The Oslo accords divided the West Bank into three parts: Area A, B, and C. Area A was



to be under full control from the Palestinian government and military, Area B was to be controlled by the Israeli military but under Palestinian civil control. Area C was to be controlled by Israel, both civil and military. The Oslo accords planned on a gradual handover of power and land to Palestine of Area B and C but Israel still has full control over Area C. In the years following the failed Oslo Accords, violence from both sides increased (Kersel, 2014, p. 26-27).

Events leading up to these significant steps towards change are the First Intifada (1987-1993) and the Second Intifada (2000-2005). The word Intifada is an Arabic word meaning rebellion. The First Intifada was mainly non-violent while the Second Intifada was significantly more violent. Both were uprisings by the Palestinian population opposing the Jewish occupation of land. (Shafir, 2017, p. 11). The First Intifada was triggered by several reasons, but one was the deliberate killing of four Palestinians by an Israeli driver in Gaza. Following this, major protests and strikes erupted and Israel struggled to push back the events (Amit & Levit, 2011, p. 106-107). The Second Intifada was mainly triggered by failed peace negotiations. The intifada was fueled by targeted political kills from both sides and a violent push back from Israel (Amit & Levit, 2011, p. 140-152).

Today, the Palestinians freedom of movement is largely limited, and the rights of the people are questioned. Human Rights Watch claims in their 2020 report that the Palestinian people are targeted by the government and the military. The violence in the Gaza strip is continuing and the situation is violent between the Palestinians and the Israeli military. The destruction of Palestinian homes that have been going on for decades is still a pressing issue. In more recent history the Gaza strip has been closed off from other countries by Israel and free movement for Palestinians has been restricted in the West bank. Violent attacks have proceeded during the years from both sides and the prevention of this by the Israeli government has been limited (HRW, 2020). In contrast to Palestine, Israel is one of the most developed and economically increasing



countries in the Middle East. Israel ranked in 2018 on place 22 out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index provided by the United Nations Development Programme. Palestine ranked in place 119 showing on the difference in living conditions between the countries. The Human Development Index looks at dimensions connected to human development as life expectancy, education and per capita income (UNDP, 2018).

Israel has what they claim as a security measure built a wall separating East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The wall was built as a response to a number of suicide bombings in the area. The wall separates parts of the Palestinian population to access their land, hospitals, education, and workplaces creating damage in the economy for Palestinians in East Jerusalem (Dumper, 2013, p. 128). The length planned out for the wall was approximately 702 kilometers. In 2011 the wall was completed to 61.8%, 8.2% was under construction and 30% was planned out (OCHA, 2011).

The Oslo Accords have not been followed by the Israeli government since the start and peace processes are highly counteracted by the Israeli government over the years. Benjamin Netanyahu continues to hold power as prime minister, and this shapes the way peace is approached. The Israeli government has proceeded to change the constitution of the country and political steps have been taken towards tightening the hold on the land of Israel (HRW, 2020. Kersel, 2014, p. 25-27). In 2020 Israel has held three elections in less than a year due to the winning parties being unable to form a government. The last election in March 2020 proceeded to keep Benjamin Netanyahu in power as he formed a coalition. Netanyahu was in early 2020 indicted on corruption claims which have hampered the election process (Al Jazeera, 2020).

The last attempt to impose a solution to the conflict was Donald Trumps' "deal of the century" a not yet fully disclosed plan of how the parts will solve the issues. This deal is much debated due to the US having a close relationship with Israel and its interests (Asseburg, 2019, p. 2). The deal is seen as giving



Israel all that it wants and giving the Palestinians not nearly enough. Israel will have power and security as they claim, and Palestine will not have sovereignty and will continue to be surrounded by Israel. A deal that caters to Israel in every way and is a sign of surrender by the Palestinians if agreed upon (Bowen, 2020).

## 5.2 Israeli Settlements

The building of Israeli settlements on territory allotted to Palestinians started at the end of the 1960s, all illegal under international law. In 1968, the Israeli government approved many of the settlements built on Palestinian land, and funds increased from the government supporting the areas. Large pieces of land were confiscated by the Israeli government and the houses were sold cheap to the Israeli settlers. The development of roads and buildings began and the creation of smaller cities within the settlements was founded in the West Bank. The West Bank settlers were in 2002 about 200,000 people (Amon, 2004, p. 52). Religion shapes the reasoning regarding the land, Israel's Jewish population regards the land as belonging to them and therefore feel entitled to inhabit it. The settlements are on the Palestinian side, beyond the line established in 1947. Still, there is a division on the issue within the Israeli population, some claiming it to be a part of Israel and some that support the Oslo Accords and the peace negotiations believe that the settlements are a negative development hindering the process towards peace (Ranta, 2015, p. 407).

In 2005, the Israeli government withdrew settlements from the Gaza strip, 8600 people were removed from the area, and the sites were demolished. The decision was made by the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, with support from the government. The dismantling of the Gaza settlements is claimed by Sharon to be a part of establishing a permanent agreement with the Palestinians. However, the Israeli government lost the support of many settlers and this was seen by many settlers as a threat to their religious mission of



inhabiting the land. This was a catalysator to the increase of violent settler groups, the state was no longer a trusted ally in the settling of the land (Byman & Sachs, 2012, p. 80-83).

At the end of 2017, about 622,670 settlers were living on the West bank. At the same time, there were 131 authorized settlements by the Israeli government on the West Bank (Anon, 2019; CBS, 2020). In 2018, the Israeli government approved 5,618 additional settlement housing and during the first nine months of 2019 the Israeli government approved 5,995 settlement housing plans within the West Bank and East Jerusalem (HRW, 2020). The changing of tactics and the move towards increasing the settlements in the West Bank is potentially caused by the political shifts in the Israeli government. Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime minister since 2009, is considered by some to be the most settlement positive political figure in Israel so far (Eiran & Krause, 2018, p. 638).

### 5.3 Settler violence

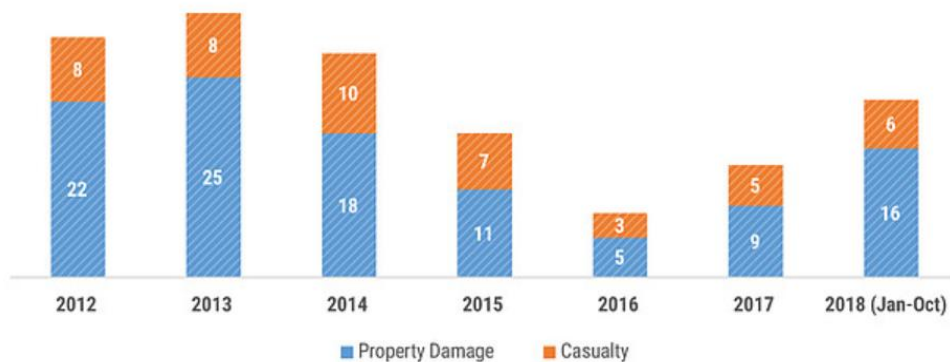
Settler violence has occurred in different forms and waves over time. The occupation of Palestinian land in the West Bank and Gaza have caused tensions in the areas on both sides. The Jewish fundamentalists have become stronger under the years of occupation, and violence and radicalization among groups have increased. Religious fundamentalism plays a large part in the formation of violent settlers and settler communities. The religious fundamentalists live by the exact writing in the Torah and have not engaged in more secularized traits of Judaism. They have on religious grounds and with different rabbis at the forefront, created groups promoting and arguing for their cause. In many cases, they have resorted to violence (Shahak & Mezvinsky, 2004, p. x-xii). The Israeli Defense Forces have in some cases attempted to restrain the settler violence and the Israeli government has condemned some of the attacks but has not prohibited settlements or conducted sufficient prosecutions of Israeli settlers (Byman & Sachs, 2012, p. 77). The violence in



the occupied territories has two different aspects, the civilian violence, and institutional military violence. The violence is at times brought forward by Israeli military operations, demolishing Palestinian homes not authorized by the state of Israel or restricting freedom of movement, violence that Gaza, in particular, has experienced. Civilian violence is bigger in the West Bank where military personnel and operations are fewer (Gazit, 2015, p. 447).

The United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has reported on the current data regarding settler violence in the Palestinian occupied areas. Their data shows on the average of reported incidents occurring monthly caused by settler violence. The damage of property along with human casualty is displayed below showing the recent years of monthly settler violence. The damage of property is the most common type of violence but the human casualty is the more brutal and dangerous violence for the Palestinians (OCHA, 2018)

**Monthly average of incidents leading to Palestinian casualties or property damage**



*Figure 1*

Source: (OCHA, 2018)

## 5.4 Settlement organizations

### 5.4.1 Gush Emunim

Gush Emunim is the original settler organization that was created in 1974 but gained power and influence from the rise in Zionism and the expansion of



Israel in 1967. Their founding believes lays in orthodox Judaism and its members were from the beginning younger, well-educated Jews. The main goal was to settle the land of Israel explained in the Torah. Gush Emunim was well organized and clear in standards and aims. With a rise in political representation the group gained power and support in several political parties. The acts of the organization were mainly peaceful protests that overflowed into violence due to an offshore organization named Jewish Underground that participated and was responsible for the violence (Neidle, 2013, p. 485-90 & Carton, 2011, p. 12-16). Gush Emunim aimed to encourage the building of settlements and pushed the religious message of Jews to inhabit the land creating Israel. They contributed to Israeli Jews settling the West Bank with 0 people in 1967 to 111,600 people in 1993. The mobilization of Jews to settle the land was their main and most successful goal. The connection to terrorist activities with the Jewish Underground gave Gush Emunim a degradation in reputation for the group and ultimately lead to its dissolving in 1985 (Neidle, 2013, p. 490-491).

#### 5.4.2 Yesha Council

Yesha Council is also one of the founding organizations within the settler movement, originating from the Gush Emunim. A movement with traditional leadership and a strong organization, they have gained power and legitimacy from the religious radical Jews. The settler organization had a strong and close relationship with the Israeli Defense Forces, this shaping the influence and power of the group in the areas (Alimi & Demetriou, 2018, p. 481). There was a transition in settler organizations from the dissolved Gush Emunim to the Yesha Council, the organization changed and altered the ideological pinpoints and way of discussing the ideological path of settling the land, aiming as distancing from the Gush Emunim. The Yesha Council consists of 24 democratically elected regional and settlement mayors, along with 10 seats with rabbis from the settlements assigned by the chairman and settlement



leaders. The Yesha Council in influencing the public has moved away from the historical claims of land and the religious conviction and focused more on engaging with the Israeli government bodies and having a more secular view in settling the land. This shapes the different way in which the Yesha Council have changed the approach of influence and gained legitimacy within the government (Neidle, 2013, p. 493-501).

#### 5.4.3 Hilltop Youth

The HY differs from the Yesha Council in that they are the more racial and religiously fundamental group. The HY is considered to be a somewhat loosely gathered group with an unknown number of members. They have no established leader but different rabbis in different settlements. The group does not have a strong unity but consists of second or third-generation young people born and raised in a settler community (Neidle, 2013, p. 502-503). The group does have members not being a part of a generational shift within the settlements but is more so originated from wandering and seeking a path in life, leading them to join the HY (Friedman, 2018, p. 79). The HY originated first after the settlement withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, the big pushing event for a more radical and violent way of expressing the will of some settlers. They live in outposts of settlement on hilltops where living conditions are poor but is a fundamental block of their mission along with the religiously based beliefs of the right to inhabit the land. The HY is not directly connected to any specific settlement but has expressed aims of furthering the Zionist convictions to all the settlement communities (Neidle, 2013, p. 502-503). Differencing the HY from previous settlement organizations is the rejection of the state. The HY views the Israeli state and military as an enemy not contributing to the cause, the cause of creating a land for the Jews at whatever it takes. The Israeli Defense Forces and the Israeli police are demolishing their homes that are built illegally and the state is trying to hinder the creation of outposts in the areas (Eiran & Krause, 2018, p. 638-652).



“Price tag” attacks are a phenomenon established by the HY, aiming at showing to the Palestinians that living in the area have a price. The attacks consist of burning Palestinian mosques, destroying homes, painting graffiti on Palestinian homes and there have been more violent attacks as well. A well-known "price tag" attack is the 2015 arson on a Palestinian home in the village Duma. A family of four were asleep in their home when HY threw a firebomb into their home killing the parents and an 18-month-child with only a 4 year old surviving. This shows the variety of attacks that the HY conducts in the occupied areas. This attack was categorized by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as a terrorist attack (Eiran & Krause, 2018, p. 637).

## 6. Findings

### 6.1 How the Hilltop Youth is characterized in research

#### 6.1.1 Terrorists

The definition of terrorism used by Daniel Bryman and Natan Sachs (2012) when describing the HY is put in the context of the acts conducted as well as the purpose of the acts: to produce a psychological effect, terror, as a means of advancing a political agenda (Byman & Sachs, 2012, p. 76. Boudreau, 2014, p. 79). They are also described as young rebellious teens conducting terrorist acts (Carton, 2011, p. 49).

This definition is used based on the HY actions being named as "price tag" attacks, namely that Palestinians who work and live on the West Bank is committing a crime. The HY claims this to be Jewish grounds and the fact the Palestinians live there, the HY wants to let them know that living on Jewish grounds will have a price. The people targeted in the attacks are often civilians that are innocent and mainly live in the area. The HY then acts to inflict, according to Bryman and Sachs, terror on them, aiming at moving their



political agenda, causing the Palestinians to want to move from the area. Bryman and Sachs, therefore, categorize them as terrorists. The HY rarely attack politicians or people of power, the attacks are focused on the Palestinian population. They are also seen as mimicking attacks from other more known terror groups globally, to increase the spread of fear and political advantage (Byman & Sachs, 2012, p. 77-76). In defining terrorism in connection to the HY, Geneviève Boucher Boudreau (2014) mentions terrorism and them being a radical movement. The argument is since they use violence towards civilians aiming at furthering their political goal they are concluded as terrorists. HY has gone through a radicalization over time and the step towards "price tag" attacks caused the shift in definition from radical movement to terrorists (Boudreau, 2014, p. 81-82). Emely Carton describes the HY as youth using terrorism as more of a cultural aim than a political. The group is more focused on inflicting terrorism on the cultural struggle and religious ideology than wanting to further a political aim (Carton, 2011, p. 49).

Laura Singer (2016) compares the HY to the category's terrorists, social movement, and gang. The group is not defined as terrorists due to the definition of inflicting fear and causing great harm to individuals who do not support their cause. Singer continues to define terrorist organizations as having organized leadership and having the aim of gaining media attention, spreading the message. The HY does have some terrorist aspects of their acts but Singer argues that the lack of leadership and organizational planning does not make them terrorists. The lack of interest in having media attention to their attacks does not follow the definition of terrorists. Terrorism according to Singer focuses more on doing grand and impactful attacks, raising a lot of media attention. The infliction of fear from the HY attacks is not the main focus, the attacks are for them retaliation and even though it creates fear, it's not on the scale of inflicting terror (Singer, 2016, p. 27-34).

### 6.1.2 Vigilantes



Nir Gazit (2015) argues that the HY is a part of state-sponsored vigilantism. The violence is considered to be an informal path to changing political structures and a way in for political control and power from the state. Vigilantism is defined by Gazit as a group that is developed in places where they are separated both geographically but also politically from others. State control is then considered to be weaker and there is a creation of a need for social control and alternative routes for power is formed. Gazit argues that in the West Bank settlements within Area C which is under Israeli jurisdiction the military presence is still limited. With settlements close to Palestinian communities and violence being common the uprising of vigilantism is formed. The HY then sees it as taking the law in its own hands, since according to them the Israeli authority lacks in prioritizing them as they please. Vigilantism occurs when a group feels a need for security, and this need not being met. The lack of control and the many different sections and areas hinders the security availability and the violent settlers have formed paramilitary units, instructed by the Israeli government. This causes a blurring of lines between the Israeli Defense Forces and civilians carrying arms. The state is then considered to play a part in the violence increasing in the settler areas. The HY and other violent groups of settlers are argued as compensating for the lack of military presence and are therefore categorized as vigilantes. The acts often take place in zones where the state is criticized and where they consider themselves to be outside of the regular 'rule of law' (Gazit, 2015, p. 438-454).

Hadas Weiss (2010) writes about the HY and his discussion is based on a belief that the HY is the second generation of settlers who have vigilant tendencies. The first generation of settlers has been through the struggles of originally settling the land. They as a movement act as the fostering influence on the strong and deep-rooted believes of the second generation of settlers, the HY. The second generation is angrier and sterner in their belief of settling the land.



Weiss argues that the first generations fostering, the lack of sufficient education, and opportunities have created a radical group of teenagers. In this discussion, the vigilantism is seen as mainly performative than an actual fundamental need not being met. The HY uses vigilant acts as a way of as Weiss calls it: "venting of personal frustrations". Vigilantism is then defined as a by-product of the radical group, an anti-establishment response in taking the law in its own hands to increase security. The environment of being the second generation of settlers, with a lack of safety and alternative routes for progress and future aims, such as education and living conditions. Weiss argues that this radical group is formed based on its environment (Weiss, 2010, p. 25-29).

### 6.1.3 Active flank within a social movement

The HY has been described by Ehud Eiran and Peter Krause as an active flank within a social movement. The settler communities are considered as a social movement, with political and social agendas pushing for their cause aiming for a long-term change (Eiran & Krause, 2018, p. 637-642).

The discussion from Eiran and Krause of the HY of categorizing them as an active flank within a social movement and not the social movement itself has three main points all stemming from analyzing the "price tag" attacks towards Palestinians and the IDF. First, if the aim is to influence the Israeli government to change laws and support the settlements more, then the attacks on Palestinians are not causally connected to their aim. The Israeli government is seen as a threat to their cause, Eiran and Krause argue that attacking the Palestinians does not influence their main cause. Secondly, the current Israeli government with Benjamin Netanyahu at the front is one of the most settlement positive governments. The government is still targeted by the HY and this contradicts the aim of seeking support and strength from the so far most willing government. Third, some settler communities have condemned and separated themselves from the HY and its "price tag" attacks, indicating



the lack of coordinated aim, as well as them potentially not seeing HY as supporting the settler communities and the settler cause.

Eiran and Krause's categorization is based on the "price tag" attacks concerning the settler communities as a social movement on its own. The "price tag" attacks then differentiate the parties. The settler communities with their policies and aims of evolving the settlements are the base. The intention of creating change, protecting, and evolving the settlement is the common denominator between the parts. The HY wants to influence the policies within the social movement (the settler communities), as the HY views the politics and the state decisions as too accommodating to the Palestinians. The definition of active flank is the deepening and furthering of the original aims of the social movement, now with a more radical and violent aspect (Eiran & Krause, 2018, p. 637-657).

Similarly, to Eiran and Krause, the group is categorized as a radical offshoot from the settler movement by James Neidle. The argument is that they are a part of the bigger settler movement but them not having a clear and limited structure and aim, the HY have a similar aim, but are more radical and determined to at any cost, push their cause. Neidle argues that they are an extreme-religious-nationalist group, justifying the violence with the writing from radical rabbis. The HY still acts within and attached to the settler movement and they are pushing the settler movement cause, but the radicalization and extremist acts have given them a somewhat separated and differentiated part of the settlement movement (Neidle, 2013, p. 504-509).

Laura Singer (2016) discards the categorization of the HY as part of a social movement. Singer defines a social movement as having organization, mobilization, collective action, and opportunity. The HY being a loosely organized group with a lack of mobilizing effect because they are not very influential as a group. They have no formal recognition and Singer argues that they are too individualistic to have a mobilizing effect. The collective action



is very limited, the group not being organized gives them a lack of collective action. They are individuals pursuing what they at the moment feel frustrated at as well as not having a known ultimate motive more than settling the land makes them not having a collective action. Lastly Singer addresses the utilizing of opportunity. The HY attacks rise when Israel dismantles settlements or when Palestinians attack them. This not being the utilization of opportunity due to the lack of strategic and planned knowledge of a correlating action (Singer, 2016, p. 27-34).

#### 6.1.4 Gang

Shimi Freidman (2015) argues that the HY is a group formed from a religious-Zionist settler community, nurtured into the group that they are today. The HY is explained as an informal and spontaneous collection of people with a tendency for organized violence. They act as a way for dropout youth troubled in life to find purpose. The HY forms a place for political activism to thrive and the occupation of hills give a geographical sense of purpose. The religious convictions and the self-created free space give an opportunity for youth to have a feeling of belonging as well as participating in the social identity of the group. The HY is considered by some as the children of the original settlers, they are more radical and the belief of a right to the land runs deeper than their parents. This is not always considered to be true, some researches claim that they are a very diverse group of people all needing a home and a sense of belonging. The HY then acts as a facilitator for confused and wandering youth. They are here categorized as a Hilltop gang, a group of rebellious youth in need of a new path in life. The group is then considered to be a subculture, the spontaneous and somewhat temporary gatherings along with an ideological aspect that does not originate from the start within the individuals but arises as youth wander into the group and learns more. The ideological conviction is then considered to arise as the group forms and not as being the big common denominator as other researches may argue (Friedman, 2015, p. 391-407).



Friedman (2018) continues the discussion in his book about the group, concluding the definition of the HY gangs, as the spontaneous gathering along with constructed norms and values within the group. Friedman argues that the farms on the hilltops and the teaching of how to build homes are the framework in which the gangs create and develop the social structures and group attributes. The creation of a safe space within the gang is the fertilizer in which the HY grows (Friedman, 2018, p. 80).

Laura Singer (2016) adds to this discussion, in her research HY is ultimately categorized as a gang. The definition of a gang that Singer uses is them being a group of three or more people within a sphere of threatening and fearful environment. To be categorized as a gang the members need to involve in criminal and violent acts. Singer argues that the small number of members, in need of protection and a sense of belonging fits the definition of a gang. The HY involves criminal acts and gives the group purpose and creates a lifestyle around it. Singer argues that to a gang there is a development of mentality around it. The gang believes it to have impactful and influential power, possibly more than what is reality. HY has a deep-rooted sense of purpose that justifies the gang activities. Singer concludes the group as, young criminals that pursue a radical ideology in need of parental guidance. Singer argues that HY fits the definition of a gang perfectly (Singer, 2016, p. 30-34).

### 6.1.5 Activists

Eitan Y. Alimi and Chares Demetriou (2018) have categorized the HY as violent activists, being a part of a 'bigger cause'. The research analyzes the use of "price tag" attacks by the HY, described as a social development among the younger generations of Israeli settlers caused by the environment they live in. The settlers are a part of a social development but the HY is the newer and angrier part of this. The HY actions are explained by Alimi and Demetriou as stemming from individuals breaking ranks within this loosely structured group, along with socially and culturally encapsulating themselves within the



group, inflicting a change in the activism from the HY, becoming increasingly violent. The actions of the group have a political aim and they are opposing the government and the military for the destroying of homes and not agreeing on policy changes demanded by the group (Alimi & Demetriou, 2018, p. 478-482). Alimi and Demetriou describe the HY as having members being "disillusioned and aggravated" (Alimi & Demetriou, 2018, p. 482). The activism used is then based on individual or collective rage. Activism is used describing the HY as being part of a social development connected to the settler communities cause and them being the violent activists, the "price tag" attacks are the main disconnect. The "price tag" attacks differ in violence and form, it ranges from arson to graffiti as vandalism. This according to Alimi and Demetriou as the politically aimed attacks with elements of revenge connected to the motives, created the definition of activism. The agenda is to push their political aims sometimes individually and sometimes collectively but with a purpose (Alimi & Demetriou, 2018, p. 478-482).

## 6.2 How the Hilltop Youth define themselves

The HY themselves present a kind and inviting tone towards others. In an interview with i24 News, a member talked about the recent move towards downplaying and decreasing violence and moving more towards occupation and building of homes as a way of contributing to the cause of settling the land. In the same sentence as the member talks about nonviolence, he also states that other members have deeper and more resenting feelings towards the Arabs and this being a cause for the attacks. The violence is then put on other more radical members within the group. The HY member being interviewed claims that he does not believe in taking the law in one's own hands, but that this is a necessity for the survival and security of the HY. Then he states that this is due to the oppression of settlers as well as a product of many years of frustration. Violence is put as a necessity and this not being a surprise or anything wrong due to their past traumas. This HY group in particular that the



mentioned member is a part of, have a rabbi guiding the group spiritually and keeping them more focused on the discussion regarding the issues rather than promoting violent acts. This not always being the case regarding the HY groups in different outposts, different outposts have different rabbis (i24 News, 2017).

The presenting of a happy and inviting group is recurring imagery. In a YouTube clip posted by the HY they are filming the building of houses on a hilltop. In the clip one can see many young boys learning how to build a home quickly and how to work together. They present a group belonging and encourage people to come and join the cause as they continue to build homes on the hilltops. They also state that they live under constant threat that their homes will be destroyed soon but as they state that, the member being interviewed laughs and says that they are not scared and will rebuild the homes that get destroyed by the Israeli military. In this clip one also meets a mother leaving her young boys to work and help the HY to rebuild the homes but also to learn construction work. This HY group collects young boys to teach them construction work as they build homes to prepare them to continue to build hilltop homes in other places. They interview a boy who is visiting the outpost to learn how to build homes in other HY settlements and he states that this has been a great experience for him, quoting:

*“The guys who come here are really dedicated, idealistic, good kids with good intentions.”* - (Eretzil.org, 2012)

In this YouTube clip they talk about themselves as being close to nature and close to the religious cause, they talk about themselves as innocent settlers that are being harassed by the state (Eretzil.org, 2012).

Jacob Magid wrote in late 2017 a story for *The Times of Israel* about the HY and their presenting of image. The article includes a video clip where young boys, members of the HY, talk about the perception of them and address some



concerns. The young boys address the belief that they are dirty delinquents who don't know how to take care of themselves as well as them being on the very bottom of society. In the clip they present a happy and inviting side and claim that they do shower and they are not a part of the bad image that they claim has been published. They state in the clip that they are not looking for people to join or even like them, but they are seeking recognition and respect. They are also offering tours and invites people to come and view the outposts and meet the people, then referring to their Facebook page for more information (Magid, 2017).

Arik Ascherman wrote in 2017 for the *Jerusalem Post* about his experiences with the group. The article touches on the attacks made towards Palestinians and the constant threat of further attacks. The settlements close by did strongly distanced themselves from the attacks and claim the responsibility on only the HY. The article describes the HY as the product of 50 years' occupation and with influence from rabbis that encourage violence in the name of religion. They are the youth that is raised to further the religious mission at any cause (Ascherman, 2017).

In a documentary from *Al Jazeera* the HY presents a more religiously shaped way of life. The group of HY that is featured in the piece invited the interviewer to witness the group praying and reading the Torah. They display a more religious and spiritual group. In the interview a HY member states that they are people raised in religious homes but unlike others more invested in as he states, fulfilling God's plan, namely the inhabiting of land. The HY member states that due to them being on closed military zones the illegal settler activities they participate with are according to the Torah. The Israeli Defense Forces are harassing them and destroying their homes, but they will continue to settle the land and resist the oppression (Al Jazeera English, 2018). In this documentary an incident regarding a wedding in December 2015 is highlighted. This being a wedding where a member of the HY got married.



During this wedding the HY danced with automatic weapons and knives and celebrated with pictures of a dead Arab child, killed by the HY during an arson attack (Levinson, 2015). This event got a lot of criticism and 12 of the participants got convicted for inciting violence and terrorism, but none of them got any sentences. This incident discussed with the HY is seen as bad publicity but the act of killing a Palestinian baby was still a part of the cause, and if the Israeli state treated the Palestinians as enemies then the settlers would not need to conduct these attacks. In an interview with a girl from the HY regarding the arson, she stated:

*“I don’t care if the Arabs live or die. I prefer them dead.”* - (Al Jazeera English, 2018)

In the documentary the more violent and radical HY are simply named as a 'hardline' wing within the HY. Moreover, the group is mentioned as religiously convinced that they have the right to occupy the land, and they not have to obey any international laws because the Torah sets the rules. This according to them includes killing innocent people that they see as a threat to the living as God has planned (Al Jazeera English, 2018).

*VICE News* did in 2014 a video documentary piece on Israeli Jews conducting "price tag" attacks. This documentary is before the wedding and prior to the Al Jazeera piece. Here reporter is welcomed to the house of a settler, the same settler family that is featured in the Al Jazeera piece talking about the Palestinians and discussing the wedding. Here a daughter is just released from jail after being convicted for throwing stones on Palestinian cars. The family is not HY, but the father encourages his children to conduct "price tag" attacks, and some of his daughters have married to known HY members. The family encourages the children to self-sacrifice for the cause and believes it to be beneficial for them to engage in “price tag” attacks (*VICE News*, 2014).



In 2020 an article in *The Times of Israel* was published on the involvement of the HY in the educational systems. The school systems in the settlements have approached and encourage the young teens of the HY to engage in a school educational program more adapted for the rebellious and drop-out youth. The Israeli government has shifted their approach to the group and there are now 440 schools offering an educational option to "troubled teens". Educational officials have classified the group as at-risk youth in need of a secure and supportive school system that gives hope and a sense of belonging. A previous HY teen now participating in this educational support talks about the tough and insecure environment that living in an outpost brings. He testifies on the group along with the religious element giving teens a place to belong. In the article he claims that there is a need to have a deep and impactful conviction to the cause of inhabiting the land. The insecure living conditions and the constant threat from the Israeli government and military takes its toll and without the deep beliefs the sacrifice of being a part of the HY is hard (The Times of Israel, 2020).

The HY have a Facebook page named "Hills youth - get to know us closely". An inviting site with updates on their life on daily matters. In the description of the group, the HY invites people to get to know the group beyond what the media covers.

*"On this page you will meet pioneering and stubborn youth, boys who have given up on pleasures and fun to fulfill a dream, to live a vision" –*  
(NoarHagvaot, u.d.)

In the description of the group they point out that many have left their original homes and lives of education to fulfill a greater purpose. All this even though the Israeli government is prosecuting them and destroying the outposts. The Israeli police are mentioned in the description as the big enemy, hindering the boys from achieving their purpose and making their daily lives tough (NoarHagvaot, u.d.). When looking at their Facebook page one can find many



angry posts about the destroying of their homes. The members post pictures of the rebuilding of houses and ask for help and money. The Israeli government is mentioned as the enemy and they argue for people to join the fight and help counterwork what they argue as attacks on their right to settle the land. The HY posts the celebration of children being born by families on the hills and describes the close and inviting settings in which they live. Videos and pictures are posted on the situation describing the HY to live under a constant threat of prosecution and having their homes destroyed (NoarHagvaot, 2020).

### 6.3 Summary findings

The research has previously referred to the HY in five different categories: terrorists, activists, active flank within a social movement, vigilantes, and gang. All research has based on different angles and events founded a conclusion regarding the categorization of the HY. The HY describe themselves as peaceful freedom fighters doing God's work by settling the land. They highlight building homes more than the violent acts they describe as necessary revenge by individuals. The researchers focus a great deal on the HY "price tag" attacks while the HY focuses more on the building of homes and the creation of outpost communities and the purpose of their actions.

## 7. Analysis

### 7.1 Self-categorization of the Hilltop Youth

The findings show that the HY self-categorization is based in the strong ingroup formation. The ingroup is the free and selfless youngster that is willing to live under harsh living conditions. The group has formed a type of group appearance that they embrace as well as celebrates. The group has talked about the others viewing them as dirty and not caring about their appearance. The group does look a lot alike and the ingroup is somewhat unpolished. The ingroup identification comes with them all having the same hairstyle and since



they are always working on homes and settling the land they wear similar work-appropriate clothes. The ingroup is the young teens that need a place to feel valuable in and they view themselves as providing that. The ingroup identity is formed based on the outgroup. The outgroup being other settlers, Palestinians, the Israeli government, and the military. The outgroup closest to the ingroup is the settler communities. The groups both distance themselves from each other. The HYs ingroup is based on the settlers being the outgroup. They view themselves as the true chosen ones that really are doing God's work by settling the land outside of the government-approved settlements. The HY resents the others for not participating in the development of the land.

The prototype of the HY is the teens that are willing to sacrifice themselves, their education, and their living conditions for the true cause. They see themselves as closer and higher to the purpose than others. The true members are the ones who decide to live and build families of the hilltops, they know that this type of living is hard and will be challenging but they are willing to sacrifice. The HY seems to have two different types of members. One being the families settling the land with the building of homes. The other type is the radical teen that conducts violent acts and is not afraid of getting prosecuted. These two different types of members do align at times when members with a family contribute to the violence as well. This potentially being the shift in members, the lifestyle of living close to danger is a known factor that the HY promotes as being a part of the cause.

The HY depersonalizes through the religious convictions and the self-identity is based on how the group will fulfill their greatest purpose. They use by looking similar to each other mirror one another and they together create the increase in religious conviction. The HY increases the feeling of power and rightness towards each other increasing their feeling of belonging and influence. The HY does so by educating each other and bringing members close from other outposts. They form from a young age a group identity that



is fostered by the educational practice regarding the building and rebuilding of homes. The recruitment is also based on the inviting and teaching environment provided in the outposts. The HY provides a purpose that runs deep and becomes a fundamental part of being a member of the HY.

## 7.2 Self-categorization versus external definitions

As the findings have demonstrated, the secondary literature takes many different routes in explaining the group. Some focusing more on the violence and some more on the group as a whole. The HY is not a united group with a united set of organized aims, the one thing never leaving is the religious conviction of settling the land at any cost. The meaning of doing this at any cost is different among different HY members. This is for some of the building of homes that get destroyed by the Israeli military and for others is this conducting "price tag" attacks. The HY themselves mainly displays the first aim of living on the land. This while researches focus on the attacks that impose a threat to the Palestinian lives. The HY themselves do not promote or highlight the "price tag" attacks as a part of their group. This while some individuals speak on the matter as being radicals within the HY that themselves, based on their individual sense of retaliation.

### 7.2.1 Terrorists

The group has at times conducted acts that fit into the classification terrorism, the acts have induced a feeling of terror and the aim is to further the political agenda of the group. The radical acts by some members have had terror aspects within. This compared to the HY own believes is similar. They believe that some attacks have been more radical and violent than others but using the categorization terrorism is not accurate. They view themselves and the group as being a part of the fight for something bigger, and more fundamentally and religiously right than terrorism.

### 7.2.2 Vigilantes



The HY describes the constant presence of military and police, they want to live by themselves on their conditions at the hills. They feel threatened and persecuted by the government. Vigilantism is defined as arising in a place where state control is limited, where one needs to take the law in its own hands. This is described by themselves as not true. The military is constantly destroying their homes and banning them from living in outposts. The HY may use vigilant and self-righteous acts and claims but they believe themselves not to have the opportunity to conduct those acts freely as they are being prosecuted. The military presence is too common for vigilantism to occur.

### 7.2.3 Active flank within a social movement

The HY distance themselves strongly from the other settlers and the settlers do that in return. They do then not see themselves as a part of an active flank within a social movement. Since the settlers are not contributing or supporting the HY they are then acting on the base of their own. The HY believes that it is they who are the chosen ones to inhabit the land of Israel, they are the forefront of the fight. The HY feel hate and betrayal towards the Israeli government and the police, they safeguard and support the Israeli approved settlements but tries to dismantle and obstruct the HY. They view them as the outgroup not being the active part within the cause of the settler communities.

### 7.2.4 Gang

They view themselves as a community, a place for people to join, learn, and participate in the mission of settling the land. They have an inviting and present a joyful way of life, even though they are struggling and fighting for their rights. They believe themselves to give purpose to those who need it and they give support and a sense of belonging with the religious mission. On the other hand, they are violent and conduct criminal acts. The fact that they inhabit the land is in itself illegal. The gang categorization includes the group mentality and the giving of purpose. As the group identity is formed the many

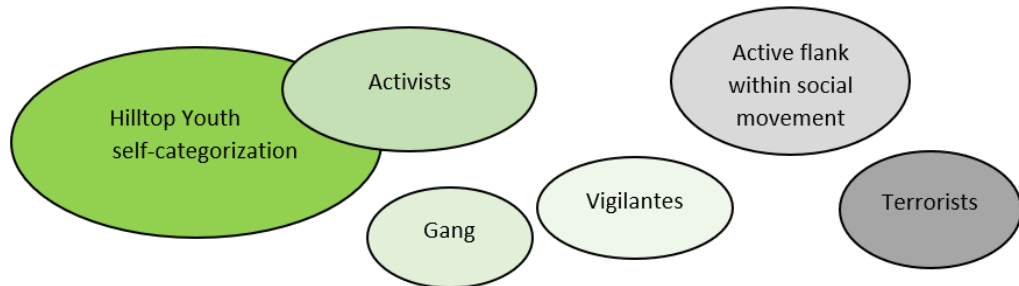


different aspects of it are included. They perceive to give purpose as well as insecurity. The destroying of homes is seen as an unfortunate consequence of them doing what they are supposed to do. The group gives space for the rebellious youth to find belonging and a future. The HY more focused on building homes is the incentive of hope and future for the radical youth. All this may correlate but the group would not consider themselves to be criminals as their mission is sanctioned by God. They believe themselves to have more power than simply being a gang and their mission is deeper and more fundamental than simply giving purpose for the group.

#### 7.2.5 Activists

The self-image of the HY does correlate to some extent to the researcher's discussion about activism. Some member's own agendas and having the feeling of wanting revenge makes the attacks be a part of their political aim. The HY as a whole is not all violent, and some groups focus on other things. The loosely structured group gives the opportunity for individuals to break range. The HY believes are closely connected to them believing that they are activists, pushing for a change. The political aspect of activism is not a correlation due to the HY not believing this to be a political issue but a religious conviction that is non-negotiable. The HY religious aims translate to political aims. The needs and wants of the group are essentially political even though they express a distance from politics.

### 7.3 Analysis Summary



*Figure 2*

The figure above shows the categorization of the HY versus the categories that researches have brought forward and the space between the perceived realities. The further the categories are from the HY self-categorization the less in common have the definition of the group has with the researcher's argument. Activism is the overlapping category even though the HY does not believe their cause is political, the belief of them being activists pushing for change is reoccurring. The category Gang is close to the functioning structures of the HY, but they do believe themselves to have more influence than a gang. Vigilantism is a not overlapping category due to the difference in perceived realities. The HY believes the state and the military to impose influence in the area, to the extent that vigilantism is not possible, which some researchers oppose. Active flank within a social movement does not overlap since the HY view the settler organizations as counteracting the religious mission of the HY. Terrorists are the category the furthest away from the HY self-categorization. The HY view themselves as a group that aims to have a peaceful and inviting environment. They view the violent actions are retaliation against the Palestinians not an act of terror to impose a political agenda.



## 8. Conclusion

Comparing the categories from researches and the HY self-categorization the category Activists are the most accurate. They form a strong ingroup based on a religious mission, a mission that also translates to a political issue regarding the controlling of land. They give an inviting and supportive environment where activism is a big part of the lifestyle and the base for the member prototype. Building homes and conducting "price tag" attacks are the big political tools for furthering their mission. Eitan Y. Alimi and Chares Demetriou's research concludes the HY to be activists. They argue that the group has socially and culturally created a network for the agenda. The group views anyone not supporting them as the opponents that being both the Palestinians and the Israeli government, they all act as the outgroup. The use of "price tag" attacks is the act of pushing a political message in activist terms. An act that the HY views as necessary for the cause.

In analyzing the different categories from researchers and the perceived reality from the HY there are many separate perceived realities. Researchers in this area have overlooked the way the HY categorizes themselves. In assessing this issue there is only one category that acquires and concludes to have a similar view. Closest to their truth, and closest to both of the perceived realities are Activists. This category brings in the self-image and goals of the HY as well as looking at the nature of the violent acts. The religious mission is translated to the political mission, a mission that the HY does not view as political but acts as the same when seeking support and policy changes from the state of Israel. The belief that the cause is not political but fundamentally right is apart of the ingroups creation of belonging and purpose.

In finding a common ground and solution, the HY needs to be heard and evaluated from the category that they view themselves as belonging to. In finding the category that overlaps with researchers the possibility of finding a solution more catering to a sustainable future is possible. The needs and wants



of the HY and the way they categorize themselves need to be taken into consideration when mapping out a solution. Focusing on the inclusion of the perceived reality of the HY not excluding them from it. Excluding the view of the HY, as have been done before in academic research, the reality in which they act upon is overlooked. That reality is the truth that they base their lives on, and if not including that, researchers potentially jeopardize the steps taken towards solving the conflict. The solution is then based on the reality of others and not the reality on the group itself. In imposing a sustainable peace within a protracted social conflict the solution can not solely be based on other perceived realities without taking into consideration the perceived reality of the group itself.

If the HY would be treated like for example an active flank within a social movement. The core issue of the HY will be overlooked. The HY does not believe that they have the same cause or aim as other settlers. Categorizing the group without their own view taken into consideration would potentially cause the wrong attachment of solution and approach when creating a solution.

This research is just the start of a larger research objective. The categories and definitions from the Palestinians as well as the Israeli Government need to be added for future research. The angle of media and international press is also a view that would be valuable for future research. For future research the view and categorization of all important parties would be useful and this could potentially show the impact of the difference in perceived realities and finding a real common ground. In decreasing the distance between perceived realities all the views of the parties involved need to be included. For additional future research the aspect of highlighting and potentially broadening the categorization of the HY itself is needed. The group could be divided into subcategories analyzing the relations between them focusing on the impact of subcategories within a group and what that dimension does to their participation in peace processes.



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