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BOOK REVIEW

Sivan Hirsch-Hoefler and Cass Mudde (2020), *The Israeli Settler Movement: Assessing and Explaining Social Movement Success*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

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With “The Israeli Settler Movement: Assessing and Explaining Social Movement Success” Sivan Hirsch-Hoefler and Cass Mudde officially enter the kaleidoscopic and fascinating world of Social Movement Studies. Hirsch-Hoefler’s knowledge of the Israeli far-right has evidently enriched the whole contribution: too much research on non-western social movements tends to de-historicize and take these movements out of their geopolitical context making these studies mere theory-testing exercises that do not enrich Social Movement Theory as a whole. Showing how the Israeli settler movement can be heterogeneous and multifaceted in its ideological convictions strategies and repertoires - although with a very clear and shared aim: annexing as Palestinian Territories as possible - is something remarkable that had not yet been done (not too surprising though, considering how hard is to enter these communities). The authors use organizational heterogeneity to show how the movement acted with different repertoires in different public spheres. This finding is very timing and interesting, in fact, working in synch at different operational levels through a sort of “company structure-organization” is arguably one of the reasons behind the movement favourable outcomes, although, as it will be stressed later, structural reasons seem to be predominant in explaining the movement’s successes. The authors have filled an important gap in the literature on the far-right social movements: the Israeli Settler Movement had never been addressed from a perspective of social movement studies.

The book is organized into seven chapters that will be here reviewed from a critical perspective of the social movement theory scholarship. The first chapter outlines the authors’ theoretical framework that they describe as «comprehensive and original». Their main argument is summarised in these lines: «*We argue that political success of social movements is multifaceted, encompassing policies resources, and support, and is best analyzed through the individual contributions of the three essentially separate but intimately connected branches of a social movement (institutions, networks, and influencers), each of which specializes in a specific repertoire of actions (combining moderate, radical, or extreme actions) and targets specific political arenas (state, civil society, and society at both the national and international levels)*» (p. 6). The literature usually

group them under three main labels: Political (Amenta, Andrews, & Neal, 2019), Biographical (Passy & Monsch, 2019) and Cultural (Amenta & Polletta, 2019; Giuni, 2008). The authors defined success in terms of 1) policy gains and changes (political outcome); 2) resources gained by the movement; 3) support. Leaving aside the normative connotation implicit in the term *success*¹ that usually makes prefer the term outcome or social movement *consequences*, the differentiation proposed by the authors is convincing. These three outcomes are very important for any social movement that want to affirm itself. However, how much these three outcomes are tailored on the movement in question? The settler movement has always overtly pursued exactly these three outcomes – just like the Zionist movement of the late nineteenth century. Hence, how much are they the result of the movement strategies and tools instead of a mere result of the specific political system they are socialized in? Is this set of outcomes replicable in a context different from the Israeli one and not that favourable? It seems that the authors do not entirely disentangle this aspect. The authors' analytical framework can be synthesized as an approach that largely builds upon two notorious social movement theories, namely, the Political Opportunity Structure (POS) and the Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT), and tries to evaluate the movement's success by integrating these two structural theories with a meso-level of analysis that keeps into account the movement's components – institutions, civil society organizations and influencers – as well. They investigate how all these different levels of political influences interact through various repertoires of action to reach the three main movement's goals: policy gain, resources and support.

As for the “multifaceted” feature of social movement outcomes, this has been largely studied by Lorenzo Bosi (2016) and others who looked at how different types of social movement outcomes mutually influence one another shifting the focus from single outcomes to the interaction between different types of effects (Bosi, Giugni, & Uba, 2016). Hirsch-Hoefler and Mudde, however, make a step further and distinguish between different movement's branches, their repertoire of actions and the political arenas they operate in (Jasper, 2015). The authors' merit is certainly the one of going through these different levels of influence of the movement (the institutional, civil society, and opinion leaders' level) in a very accurate and articulate way. Nevertheless, how they frame and label these levels of action is perhaps not entirely convincing. In their theoretical framework, they divide between the centralized branch (institutions), the decentralized branch (networks), and the individual branch (influencers). The first two – institutions and civil-society networks – are fundamental. The Israeli settlers' movement, as the authors recognize in chapter 3, was very successful in integrating in the Israeli institutional system through the Yesha Council², the COGAT³ and other representative bodies. The same is true for civil society organizations: they all do incredible work on the ground to strengthen the movement's grassroots bases. What is probably slightly less convincing is the figure of “influencers”. In the theoretical framework, influencers are described as people *«who can be members of groups or organizations within the other two branches but whose actions are primarily individual and their relevance is based on their own personal reputation rather than that of the group(s) they belong to – one can think of athletes, intellectuals, movie stars, pundits, singers, and so on»* (p.11). However in chapter five they state: *«Individual influencers are not linked to movement organizations, whether formal or informal, but are single individual or small groups of people working directly or indirectly to spread the message if the settler*

¹ Success for whom? Certainly not for the Palestinians and the International Community - who have deemed settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) illegal for international law - and certainly not for the peace process in general.

²«The Yesha Council has a formal and legal structure with an elected chair, a spokesperson, and a regular budget. While sharing the same ideological vision, the Council is characterized by favoring practicality and pragmatism over the ideological fervor that was the hallmark of Gush Emunim» (p.76).

³ «Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories operates as a civilian operation, but sits under the command of the military authority in the West Bank»(p.57). It is a unit in the Israeli Ministry of Defense that engages in coordinating civilian issues between the Government of Israel, the Israel Defense Forces.

movement» (p.160). The two statements contradict themselves, either influencers are linked to the movement organizations – as some of the people they name are – or they are not, however, the problem is not that much in having a broad an overreaching concept of influencers, but that they mean different things and this has analytical consequences. Can they be considered “proper” influencers when they are part of the movement institutions and networks? According to the network theory, these actors may be considered as an integral part of the network as a whole, maybe as brokers or gatekeepers who have more power and are more influential, hence, they can both influence the decision-making process within the movement and playing an important role outside it, when their connections and ties can reach other arenas (Diani, 1997; 2000; 2003). However, do they play the same role as those actors, athletes, and singers who are not directly linked to the movement? Probably not. It might be analytically important to make this distinction clearer. Perhaps, an opinion leader/influencer who is not seen as directly linked to the settler movement might be seen as more “independent” and his/her positions considered less biased and more neutral by a more moderate and undecided audience who do not have a clear idea on settlers. Finally, when the authors make concrete examples of who they consider as *influencers* they list public figures such as Emily Amrousi, former Yesha Council spokeswoman (p.84) – a very important figure within the settler network - and Amit Segal (son of Hagai Segal member of Jewish Underground, a convicted terrorist who planned and planted a bomb that blew off the leg of a Palestinian mayor), who was born in a settlement. On the other hand, in chapter 5, there is the example of Naomi Shemer – a pivotal figure of Hebrew song – an outspoken supporter of the Gush Emunim movement and the Jewish settlers in the territories who was also very closed to the movement but who has never formally joined. Are they part of the settlers’ network, as their personal histories and roles within the movement would tend to suggest, or are they independent public figures who “autonomously” expressed opinions in favour of the settlers’ movement? Setting the boundaries of the influencers category in advance through a more accurate framework would have probably enriched this concept’s explanatory capacity.

The authors proceed in their theoretical framework by identifying the movement’s repertoires of action. As for other social movements, the repertoire of action of the radical right emerged as diverse and multiple (Caiani, Donatella, & Wagemann, 2012, p. 209). The division between moderate repertoires (legal/non-violent do exist legal violent repertoires?), radical action (illegal/non-violent), and extreme (illegal/violent). This very informative categorization (p.16) does not fit with the other explanatory categories as shown by Table 1.1. In this last part of the theoretical framework (p.38), it is not clear whether the different variables/categories are associated with the others on the same line or they were put randomly to show all the elements that compose the authors’ theoretical framework. Indeed, while *Policies* are certainly pursued by the movement’s *Institutional bodies*, in a *Moderate* way with the *State* political arena, *Society’s Support* is rarely reached through *Extreme* repertoires (Della Porta, 2006, p. 17) associated with *Influencers*.

Table 1.1 *Theoretical framework of social movement success*

<i>Success</i>	<i>Movement branches</i>	<i>Repertoire of actions</i>	<i>Political arenas</i>
Policies	Institutions	Moderate	State
Resources	Networks	Radical	Civil society
Support	Influencers	Extreme	Society

Chapter 2 accurately retraces the history of the settlements from the 1967s six-day war until today. The authors successfully stress the public opinion debate and division on the settlements across the green line and the Israeli government’s clear willingness to legitimate formally and informally the construction of Jewish outposts in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). The Israeli government has always supported the settlers’ endeavour with direct measures and funding regardless of the political color of the government in charge: «*All the Israeli governments supported settlement activity, whatever their political persuasion. With the rise of the Likud governments, however, settlements were established over a broader territory, including areas with dense Palestinian settlement*» (p. 52).

Equally meticulous is the description of the different movement’s branches of Chapter 3. It clearly shows how heterogeneous the movement is both from an ideological and tactical perspective. The authors differentiate among different groups of settlers: ideological (both nationalist and religious who have strong ideological convictions), quality of life settlers (those who moved to the settlements because of state financial incentives and more affordable mortgages), and ultraorthodox settlers. The description they provide of the settlers population is extremely interesting showing great knowledge and awareness of the movement: the authors are able to present a comprehensive picture of the movement making meaningful differences between the types of settlers (p.71). They also provide very interesting data concerning their political orientation: 92 percent of settlers voted right-wing party in 2013; some of them, such as the post-Mamlachti – although they represent a small minority – rejects state authority; the movement mainly rely on a moderate repertoire of actions such as lobbying and legal actions; and it has branches that encompass many different arenas (the public opinion, the military, civil society organizations, institutional bodies and international lobby where the pro-Israel lobby in “has successfully pushed the perception of common interests between Israel and the United States and the promotion of US policy toward that end”(p.59). The settler movements effectively managed to place its supporters in many key positions, most recently, Naftali Bennett an outspoken pro-settlers figure who opposed the 2010 settlement freeze while he was director of the Yesha Council and who proposed on several occasions to carry out the annexation of Area C of the West Bank, is now the new Israeli Prime minister. The authors also clearly underlined the more recent tendency to appoint to higher positions of the IDF Jewish Israeli citizens coming from the settlements. The IDF has always churned out the country leadership and this may already indicate which will be the country’s future position on the settlements.

Chapter 4 assesses the settler movement’s success. As Hirsch-Hoefler and Mudde underline, the movement has enjoined an extremely favorable structure of the political opportunities that has rarely challenged their demands, plans of expansion, and legitimacy. The only “negative case”, although further reflections need to be done on this label, is the disengagement of the Gaza settlements. As the authors mentioned on page 92, the movement, since the construction of the first settlement in the West Bank in 1967, Kfar Etzion in the Gush

Etzion Bloc the movement has proceeded by *creating “facts on the ground” with or without the support of government policies*”. As they clarify *“the government has in fact supported the movement both actively, through pro-settlement policies, and passively, by failing to implement anti-settlement policies even when these were the official position of the government”* (p.92). Nevertheless, the strategy of the “facts on the ground” works only when the government is willing to accept that, in fact, when Palestinians build without building permits either in the West Bank or in East Jerusalem or in Israel itself, their houses, tents and shacks are immediately demolished (Joronen & Griffiths, 2019; Kedar, 2003; Meade, 2011). Additionally, the state of Israel itself has always relied on the strategy of the “facts on the ground”, the settler movement did not invent anything new. In this chapter, the authors provide an accurate picture of all the success of the movement in terms of numbers, geography, and legality but they also stress that they have not reached their ultimate goal: *“bringing (all of) Eretz Yisrael under Israeli sovereignty, and more particularly, incorporating it formally within the boundaries of the State of Israel”*(p. 92). Further comments need to be done on this passage. Proceeding throughout the book a natural question comes to mind: if the settler movement is so well integrated within the state of Israel, how much can it be considered an independent grassroots movement and not a mere more-radical arm of the state itself? The impressive support the movement enjoys, the massive resources they count on both from the Israeli state and US lobby groups, and virtual impunity most of its more radical activists can rely upon, seem to suggest that the state of Israel actually benefits from the presence of mass popular movement that guarantees constant lifeblood to the endeavour of annexing the West Bank. Additionally, strong popular support serves to bring legitimacy to carry on with something that goes against the international law as settlements do. Therefore, if the settler movement, despite all its resources and support did not manage to reach its final aim, it is probably because the State of Israel does not want to. Indeed, it is known that also among the Israeli economic, military and political leadership there is uncertainty on the concrete possibility of annexing the West Bank (Mnookin & Eiran, 2005; Gilead & Cohen, 2019). Bringing such a great number of Palestinians within the Israeli borders is unacceptable for most of the Israeli public, the other option is annexing the West Bank without giving Palestinians citizenship and civil and political rights – which is very similar to the current situation considering that most of Palestinians are denied also basic human rights (Spangler, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2021; World Report 2017, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2017). This second option would result in a widespread international outcry making the Israeli state even more eligible for the definition of Apartheid (Clarno, 2017; Falk & Tilley, 2017). Hence, Israeli elites have not decided yet and reached a consensus on how to proceed with the West Bank, the easiest way is maintaining the status quo through the help of the settlers: let them conquering as much land as possible, allowing them to implement extreme repertoire of actions towards Palestinians forcing them to move to bigger cities easier to keep under control without being directly responsible for the violation of international norms and agreements (B’Tselem, 2010; Nir, 2011; Zertal & Eldar, 2009).

This is the same reason why it is not easy to consider the Gaza disengagement as a failure (chapter 6) for the settler movement. Sharon was perfectly aware that the security threat would have been too high and the protection of the settlers living within the Gaza Strip too expensive. Leaving the Gaza Strip transforming it into a de-facto open sky prison was more convenient than keeping settlers in a territory where, the 2006 elections have subsequently shown, the Hamas movement was obtaining growing support by advocating for violent actions to liberate Palestine. Additionally, some other analysts have pointed at the fact that the Gaza disengagement was portrayed in such a traumatic way by the media also to prevent that something similar could have happened to settlers in the West Bank (Pappe, 2017). Such a positive Political Opportunity Structure, also indicated in the reconstruction of the positive case in chapter 5, the settlement of Ariel, makes quite hard to detect and quantify the role of other factors while explaining the movement success.

Chapter 7 addresses the conclusions. The interpretation and readings of settler movement outcomes are surely very accurate; however, the considerations made above might be useful to enrich future studies on social movements' outcomes. The Israeli settler movement is a case at the edge in the quite limited array of successful social movements now a day, and it is centrally important asking why. However, the conclusion they reach has largely been addressed and explored by the whole Amenta's work in his political mediation model (Amenta, 2013). When the authors' state that « *When applied to the Israeli settler movement, this multifaceted approach showed how the organizational structure of that particular social movement, together with constraints and opportunities in the political system, have contributed to both its successes (e.g., Ariel) and failures (e.g., Gaza disengagement). In other words, our theoretical model suggests that individual and structural factors, both internal and external, shape social movement success in combination* » (p.229). This is very true but also identified by Amenta (2013) when he says that strategies and organization, therefore internal factors, lead to outcomes only if they adapt to external conditions, therefore POS.

The book unquestionably is an accurate reconstruction of the Israeli settler movement but it also shows some limitations. It can be considered the first in-depth study of the contemporary settler movements together with its ramifications abroad, providing a clear picture of a longstanding, radical right-wing social movement in a non-Western context. It is also an important contribution to those who want to study social movements from a more holistic perspective keeping into account all the movement's components and repertoires. However, some biases and theoretical inaccuracies make it just a partial attempt towards the study of an aspect of social movements as important as the movement's outcomes. Bringing the spotlight on social movements' successes (although the normative implication of this term as shown above) is something very timing and on which much still needs to be said.

As social movements' scholars know and the authors recognize that «Social movements do not exist within a vacuum » (p. 33). This is very true, however, the authors tend to omit, undermining part of their explanatory models, two very important contextual elements that played a pivotal role in determining the movement's successes and failures. First, settlements are illegal according to international law and also according to the International Court of Justice and the Israeli Supreme Court itself has never addressed the issue of the settlements' legality. This is overtly mentioned only on page 62, but this is not a minor element. Settler movement leaders are aware of that, as well as the Israeli government, this is also why, as mentioned by the authors, they have to rely on strong pro-Israel lobbies all around the world, and in the US in particular. Additionally, as mentioned above, this is also, why the Israeli government needs the settler movement to justify something seen as a breach of international law from most of the international community.

The second important inaccuracy the authors fail to deal with convincingly is how much the history of the state of Israel influences their claims and margin of action. The Zionist movement was a settler movement that subsequently, because of a series of favorable conditions, managed to establish a Jewish state in the land of Palestine previously under the British mandate. The authors are aware of that because they mention on page 151, «*One of the best-known settler actions is creating facts on the ground, that is, establishing new settlements or restabilizing settlements that were evacuated by the Israeli government. The tactic has been central to the settler movement since the early days of Gush Emunim, which in turn adopted the tactic from the early Zionist movement.* » This does not come out of the blue and many Israeli citizens empathize with what the settlers are doing in the West Bank because this is what their ancestors have done since the 1880 (p. 41). The historical and consequently cultural roots of the Zionist settler colonial project (Rodinson, 1973; Sayegh, 1965) have certainly played an important role in how the movement framed its messages, developed its ideological basis and accessed the state institutions. This cannot be omit or kept at the margin while studying the Israeli settler movement. For many non-politicized Israeli citizens criticizing the settler movement would mean questioning

or at least looking critically at the creation of their state, and this is something many Israelis are not willing to address yet but they will, eventually, if they want to find a solution to the conflict that includes both keeping settlers where they are and stopping violating Palestinians human, political and civil rights. The Israeli state aspires to gain more land since its creation, and it has engaged in several wars to obtain it, a movement that is continuing what the Zionist leadership has started in the late nineteenth century is therefore very likely to succeed.

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