

Haredim vs. Secular: Israel's Internal Culture War and the Fight for Israeli Identity

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Introduction

Israel has long been the target of Arab animosity as a Jewish state in the Middle East, yet it is also the target of strong Jewish animosity. While the outside world thinks first of the Arab-Israeli conflict, simultaneously there is a sharp conflict inside Israel among its Jewish population. On one side are secular Israelis, who make up the majority of Israel's population. The name "secular Israelis," is actually a misnomer because these Jews do celebrate and observe the Jewish religion, but compared to other Jews in Israel, their observance of Judaism is weak at best. They represent Israel's modern Jew, someone who has fully assimilated into Israel's economic, social, and technological culture and resents a strong religious presence in Israeli society and politics. Their antagonists are called the Haredim, otherwise known as Israel's ultra-Orthodox Jewish population. Literally meaning "those who tremble at His [God's] word,"¹ the Haredim represent Israel's strongest Jewish religious presence. They live a completely opposite lifestyle vis-à-vis secular Israelis that can be traced back to Jewish communities that existed in Eastern Europe before the Holocaust. For the Haredim, Jewish law or *halakhah*, a pre-modern religious legal system derived from the Torah, controls their lives and how they see the world. They harbor an intense opposition to the way secular Israelis live and the way secular Israelis view religion's presence in Israel. Whereas secular Israelis feel religion should have the least presence in their daily lives, the Haredim feel religion should completely encompass everyone's life.

While only making up about ten percent of Israel's population, the Haredim have an extraordinary amount of control over the Israeli population and Israeli government. They have successfully influenced Israeli domestic policies in their favor over areas such as education, issues of personal status, and national military service, much to the chagrin of many Israelis. For

¹Samuel C. Heilman and Menachem Friedman. *Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Jews: The Case of the Haredim*. Vol. 1 of *The Fundamentalism Project*. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991: pg. 199.

example, civil marriage as an institution does not exist in Israel because the Haredim have sole control over determining whether an Israeli's marriage is legal.

This conflict, however, was not destined to become an Israeli problem. Israel's first Zionist leaders had the opportunity prevent that from happening. In 1947-8, Israel's first Prime Minister David Ben Gurion realized these traditionally religious Jews gave the state its Jewish character, more so than the young Zionists who would become future Israelis. He also believed the Haredim to be a dying remnant of Judaism's pre-Israeli past. These two thoughts motivated Ben Gurion to grant the Haredim special privileges over education, issues of personal status, and military service. This agreement was called the Status Quo Agreement of 1947 because Ben Gurion wanted to preserve the status quo between secular Israelis and the Haredim in order to prevent a potential civil war. Ironically, however, the status quo failed to continue after the agreement.

The Haredim soon formed political parties, won representation in the Israeli Knesset, and started to spread their religious influence throughout Israeli society. Israeli leaders and citizens were surprised by the Haredim's activism because these were Jews that were seen as weak and afraid of modernity. Furthermore, the Haredim's influence on Israeli society grew exponentially since 1977, thanks to the important position Haredi political parties have had in forming coalitions within the Israeli government. This activism began driving a wedge in Israeli society, and it is a wedge that still exists today. Secular Israelis have become so angered by the Haredim that they refuse to see them as fellow Israelis. Many see the Haredim as outsiders who are attacking the Israeli way of life.

The Israeli government has been unable to repair this wedge since Israel was established. Yet it is not because of weakness but rather deeply seeded reluctance. To "solve" this problem

mean possibly sparking a national debate over Israel's legitimacy as a "Jewish state." Israel identifies itself as a Jewish state and calls itself a modern democracy, but the question is whether or not it can exist as both. The Haredim represent an historic challenge to Israel's conception of a modern state because they oppose everything modernity has brought Judaism since the late nineteenth century when Israel's founding philosophy, Zionism, was first conceived. In the eyes of the Haredim, Israel is a sin against God because Israel or any conception of a truly "Jewish State" can only exist through God's command.

Recent debate over a new military service law in Israel has now brought the Haredi-secular Israeli conflict into the spotlight. Many Israelis now have to think about what Israel is and should continue to be as well as who they are. Israel is a part of their being and their livelihood, and if Israel's basic identity is being questioned, they have to question their identity as well. Thus, this research explores Israel's and Judaism's greatest internal struggle: the fight between the "old" Jew as represented by the Haredim and the "new" Jew as represented by secular Israelis. This project forces one to look at Israel in a different way, as not simply a homogenous nation of Jews, but rather a nation continuing to struggle to define itself.

I. The Haredim: Who They Are and the Origins of the Orthodoxy movement within Ashkenazi Judaism

Israel's contemporary ultra-orthodox are loose descendants from those Jews who lived predominantly in Eastern Europe during the mid to late nineteenth century. Jews sparsely populated other regions of the continent for centuries, but Eastern Europe, specifically an area known as the Pale of Settlement encompassed Western Russia, Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine. The Pale was really a part of the Russian Empire and it was the heart of Ashkenazi² Jewry. Catherine the Great of Russia in 1791 legally established the Pale of Settlement but Jews had been living in Poland since the thirteenth century, and by the seventeenth century "The Pale" region was home to the largest Jewish population in the world.

Despite their large numbers, Jews did not assimilate within non-Jewish communities. They lived in segregated, and legally autonomous, communities separated from the non-Jewish population otherwise known as *shtetls*. Studying the Torah,³ living according to its word, and practicing the Jewish faith was the dominant lifestyle in the *shtetl*. With historically strong anti-Semitic sentiment throughout Europe, *shtetls* protected not only Jews themselves, but also their religious lifestyle. Yet life in the *shtetl* was very difficult. Economic and educational opportunities were restricted to Jews according to official Russian Imperial policy because Russian culture was deeply anti-Semitic, and they were forced to live within the confines of the Pale. Poverty was the norm, and the only thing holding the Jewish people together was their heritage and religion. The Jewish people emotionally and mentally survived the harsh *shtetl* life through their belief that God would help them. However, a wave of industrialization and modernization swept across Europe starting in the early nineteenth century opening up economic

²Commonly used to refer to European Jewry; For a more detailed explanation, check the Appendix

³Holiest Jewish Text; Includes the Pentateuch, midrash, Talmud, and Zohar; For more information, see the Appendix

and social opportunities Jews never felt before. Modernization had its greatest effect on Jews living in Germany and Austria, which were outside the Pale, but it crept into the Pale as well. It is this modernizing trend that led to an identifiable “orthodox” strain within Ashkenazi Jewry and catalyzed the Orthodox movement.

When modernization’s first effects started being felt in Europe, Christian communities outside the *shtetl* started approaching Jews for their potential to contribute to European economic and social revitalization. Some Europeans even thought embracing the Jews in some way would “normalize” them and make them better citizens of a modern state. Jews had much to gain from the new opportunities brought by modernity and it ushered in what many call the “Jewish Enlightenment,” or the *Haskalah*.⁴ The *Haskalah* started in Germany and Austria where Jews assimilated into the national culture in overwhelming numbers rather than live with the social and economic constraints present in the *shtetl*. Jews were able to access modern ideas like philosophy, science, psychology, etc., all of which never existed in the *shtetl*. Inevitably, such a drastic change in lifestyle caused a change in Judaism itself because before the “emancipation,” Jewish daily life was completely religious. Assimilating Jews were learning to question the universe’s limits, learning to question religious doctrine, and were learning how mankind has the power to enact great change. This was revolutionary for the Jews because they had always been taught God is the only one who controls their destinies. Many German and Austrian Jews wanted to blend modernity and their religion, often meaning “Judaism had to do away with its restrictive and parochial tendencies and present itself as more in tune with the times.”⁵ Soon different Jewish communities were reforming their observance of Judaism to make it more congruent with

⁴Samuel C. Heilman and Menachem Friedman. *Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Jews: The Case of the Haredim*. Vol. 1 of *The Fundamentalism Project*. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991: Pg. 200.

⁵Samuel C. Heilman and Menachem Friedman. *Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Jews: The Case of the Haredim*. pg. 200-201.

modernity. For example, this included foregoing Yiddish to write and speak in German, adopting a more lenient observance of kosher dietary laws and the Sabbath, as well as observing Judaism less strictly in order to adapt to having a new life outside the *shtetl*.

Yet there were many Jews who balked at modernity's influence on the *shtetl*, and decided to continue living the traditional lifestyle. These Jews became the founders of the Orthodox movement. What made this preservation effort different from previous efforts to keep a distinctly Jewish lifestyle alive was its intra-Jewish character. Traditional Jews were resisting acculturating Jews and this meant aggressively restoring the foundations of traditional Jewish life by adopting a "contra-acculturative" mission to "save" Judaism and its people.⁶ Orthodoxy adopted a strictly selective method of teaching and exposing its youth to "secular" studies like Jewish thought, poetry and literature, linguistics, and grammar; the bulk of Orthodox education was directed towards the study of Torah.⁷ A consequence of this mission was a strong pivot away from the modern world and closer to the *shtetl*.

However, a split took place within the Orthodox movement. Some Jews believed balancing the strict religious needs of Judaism and modern life was possible and should be pursued. This approach would make them different from other assimilating Jews because they were not sacrificing any part of their Jewish faith. These Jews became known as the "modern orthodox." However, there were those who believed no such balance could exist and that being a "true Jew" was resisting modernity completely. They became known as the "ultra-orthodox." Complete separation from the modern world became necessary for survival in the minds of the ultra-orthodox. They looked upon reform movements among European Jews as a corruption of the Jewish faith brought on by modernity. Ironically, the birth of the Orthodox movement was

⁶Samuel C. Heilman and Menachem Friedman. *Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Jews: The Case of the Haredim*. Pg. 200.

⁷Moshe Samet. "The Beginnings of Orthodoxy." *Modern Judaism* 8 (1988): pg. 250.

akin to the *Haskalah* in that Orthodoxy was “an historic innovation, more a mutation than a direct continuation of the traditional Judaism from which it emerged.”⁸ However, it would take a threat like Zionism to help unite the Orthodox movement and firmly establish its *raison d’être*.

Zionism, the secular Jewish nationalist movement founded in the last decade of the nineteenth century in Central-Eastern Europe, was the culmination of the assimilating effects on Ashkenazi Jewry brought by the *Haskalah*. Its origins, however, are really found in Russia. During the reign of Tsar Alexander III (1881-1894), there were 5.2 million Russian Jews living in the Russian Empire. 4.8 million of these Jews were forced to live in the Pale of Settlement, but this area was not able to support so many people.⁹ Jews in the Pale were not allowed to leave for economic opportunities, were not allowed to attend Russian universities for higher education, and their economic livelihood quickly deteriorated. At the same time Russians were suffering from their own modernization crisis. The ruling class knew they needed to modernize for economic reasons, but hated the thought of social modernization. It was easy to blame the Jews for both economic troubles and the social evils of modernity. From the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, all the way up to 1917 a wave of *pogroms*¹⁰ swept the Pale, destroying hundreds of Jewish villages and *shtetls*, and killing many Jews. The *pogroms* were particularly bad during the 1905 Russian Revolution, when the Tsarist monarchy was rocked by strikes and protests from frustrated peasants and urban laborers wanting a better economic livelihood. Those who became refugees quickly went throughout the Pale and into Western Europe telling the horrors of the pogroms.

This collective suffering by the Jews, however, led some Jews to start writing about a solution to their persecution. Leo Pinsker, a Jewish physician from Odessa, saw no letting up of

⁸Moshe Samet. “The Beginnings of Orthodoxy.” Pg. 249.

⁹Amos Elon. *The Israelis: Founders and Sons*. New York: Penguin Books, 1983: pg. 52.

¹⁰Russian word meaning “devastation,” or a violent outrage against a particular ethnic group

the anti-Semitism running rampant in Russia, and in 1882 he published a pamphlet entitled *Auto Emancipation—an appeal to his people by a Russian Jew*. In this pamphlet, he urged Jews to come together and find a territory of their own to call home to escape anti-Semitism. He did not choose a particular territory; just anywhere that Jews could be safe. While not widely accepted by those within Judaism, certain Jews in the Pale found inspiration in Pinsker's work and starting around 1882, they decided to establish colonies in Palestine, home to where the events of the Hebrew Bible took place.¹¹

Following in Pinsker's footsteps, Austro-Hungarian Theodor Herzl wrote about an ideal, autonomous, Jewish state away from Europe in his book *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State) in 1895. After witnessing the Alfred Dreyfus case in France a year earlier, Herzl came to the realization anti-Semitism was never going to leave Europe and that the solution that would make both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) happy was creating a Jewish state founded on Jewish nationalism away from Europe. This call appealed to many Jews, and Palestine became the increasingly popular choice among Zionists, although it was not the definitive locale. Many Jews started calling Herzl, the "father of Zionism," a tagline that has continued to remain today. An important group of Jews that became attracted to Zionism were young, Russian Jewish socialists. There were many Jewish laborers in the Pale that had become attracted to socialism as more and more Russian workers across the Russian Empire were protesting the Tsar for Russia's dismal economic conditions. Yet these Jewish laborers found in Zionism a kind of liberation unique to Jews, and blended the workers' liberation narrative of socialism and the Jewish liberation national narrative of Zionism to become the most passionate leaders of the Zionist movement.

¹¹Amos Elon. *The Israelis: Founders and Sons*. Pg. 70.

Yet the orthodox, especially the ultra-orthodox, were appalled by Zionism and what it sought to do for not only Ashkenazi Jewry, but also world Jewry as a whole. The orthodox believe the Land of Israel (Palestine) is the most sacred land for all Jews because it is the land that was given by God to the ancient Israelites, but that the reestablishment of a Jewish political presence can only take place through religious means, e.g. the Messiah.¹² This does not mean that Jews cannot live in the Land of Israel, but secular Zionism offered a special type of redemption unlike the religious one. Not only was it much faster than waiting for the Messiah, but it employed nationalism, a modern European influence and idea. Zionists sought to bring Ashkenazi Jews out of “galut” or exile from Palestine, and transform the weak Jew being persecuted in Europe into a “new Jew,” a stronger Jew that would prove a Jewish socialist state would be created and coexist among the rest of the world. Zionists looked at the traditional *shtetl* Jew as the weak, “galut” Jew.

However, orthodox rabbis saw Zionism as “de-Judaization”¹³ since trying to be like all other nations sacrificed the distinctiveness that they felt had kept Jews and Judaism alive since the Romans exiled many Jews from the Holy Land in 135 AD. Furthermore, “Zionism was interpreted as the most recent and the least reputable of a long series of catastrophic pseudo-messianic attempts to forestall the redemption through human action [in Jewish history], and the religious sages of Eastern Europe joined in a chorus of condemnation.”¹⁴ While the Orthodox movement was vehemently anti-Zionist, it did not ignore or deny the appeal of Zionism; in fact, it took Zionism very seriously. The hardest Zionist principle for the Orthodox movement to

¹²Lewis Glinert and Yosseph Shilhav, “Holy Land, Holy Language: A Study of an Ultraorthodox Jewish Ideology,” *Language in Society* 20, no. 1 (March 1991): pg. 65

¹³Eliezer Ben-Rafael, “The Face of Religiosity in Israel: Cleavages or Continuum?” *Israel Studies* 13, no. 3 (Fall 2008): pg. 91

¹⁴Jehuda Reinharz, “The Conflict between Zionism and Traditionalism before World War I,” *Jewish History* 7, no. 2 (Fall 1993): pg. 60

combat was the call to resettle large numbers of Jews in the Land of Israel, because even though the resettlement of the Holy Land cannot take place until the Messiah comes, the Torah commands the resettlement nonetheless.¹⁵ This troubled the Orthodox movement greatly, but ironically the threatening nature of Zionism helped unite the Hasidic and Misnagdic¹⁶ factions within the greater movement, motivating the Orthodox to do whatever it took to prevent Zionism's mission from coming true.

With a reenergized Orthodox movement, the first stage of the battle between the Zionists and the Orthodox took place in the multiple Zionist Congresses held throughout Europe (mostly in Basel, Switzerland) starting in 1897. Herzl allowed the Orthodox to participate in the Congresses because by incorporating these Jews in the creation of a future state, not only could they legitimate the Jewish nature of Zionism by becoming the state's clerical representatives of the Jewish religion, but they could also be more easily controlled. Once the state was established, survival of the Orthodox community would be bound to the state. The Orthodox received assurances from Herzl that nothing would be done by the Zionist Congress leadership to offend the Jewish religion. Interestingly, the rigid stance toward Zionism by the Orthodox eased slightly in that instead of working to prevent the Zionist Congresses from functioning, they argued for their complete control over religious and cultural affairs in a new Zionist state. Unlike Zionism, the Orthodox intended for the future state where rabbinical control of the state dominated and *halakhic* law ruled all. Zionists, however, wanted Judaism to act more as a symbolic national identity and have the state ruled by secular law and controlled by lay Jews. The more the Orthodox argued for control over future state affairs, the more frustrated Zionists became. Soon

¹⁵Jehuda Reinharz, "The Conflict between Zionism and Traditionalism before World War I," pg. 60

¹⁶For a more detailed explanation of each faction and their differences, see Appendix

Zionists formed new factions within the Zionist Congress pushing hard for a more practical type of Zionism, one in which Zionists actively influenced cultural affairs of the new Zionist state.

Frightened by this new Zionist activity, members of the Orthodox movement convened for the first time on a global scale in 1904 in Pressburg (Bratislava). This was the center of Hungarian Orthodoxy, “renowned for its hardbitten conservatism.”¹⁷ The meeting took place in order to create a “spiritual center” within the Zionist movement to counter the growth of the Zionist factions within the Zionist Congress, resulting in the birth of the Mizrahi¹⁸ movement. Yet the Zionists gained control over cultural affairs in a future Jewish state by the tenth Zionist Congress in 1911 in Basel, Switzerland. The Congress decided to create a subcommittee that would be responsible for organizing and controlling cultural activities in Palestine in order to advance Jewish national culture in all areas of life, but none of this activity should be contrary to the Jewish religion. After the Zionists made their move, the Mizrahi response was split: certain members refused to cooperate with the Zionists, while others argued for working within this new framework, believing Orthodox power and control could still be strong under such conditions. The latter kept the name Mizrahi and identified themselves as Orthodox. Those who refused to cooperate with the Zionists convened independently of Mizrahi in Kattowice, Poland, gathering members from Germany, Russia, Poland, Lithuania, and Hungary to create a world organization to combat Zionism and any acculturation within their respective communities. In late May 1912, this world organization formally became Agudat Yisrael¹⁹ (Society of Israel), setting up branches in London, Palestine, and New York. Its Palestinian branch would continue to act as a political voice for the ultra-Orthodox in Mandatory Palestine and currently in Israel as a political party.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, pg. 67

¹⁸ See Appendix for more information on Mizrahi as a religious Zionist force.

¹⁹ See Appendix for explanation of AY’s organization

After a lull in any activity during WWI, Agudat Yisrael took its fight to the new front between the Zionists and the ultra-Orthodox: the Palestinian Mandate.

II. From Mandate to Holocaust to Statehood: 1920-1948

While the fight between the ultra-Orthodox and the Zionists was centered in Europe, another facet of this battle had been taking place in Palestine at the same time. There had been growing Zionist activity in Palestine since 1904, the beginning of the “Second Aliyah” or second wave of Zionist settlers from Europe into the Holy Land. These Zionists established villages, *kibbutzim* or socialist communal settlements, political networks, trade and labor groups, fraternal organizations, professional associations, and a school system. Their goal was to create a contiguous area of settlement and “institutionalize” Zionism in Palestine. By 1914, there were over 80,000 Zionist Jews in Palestine.²⁰

However, this Zionist activity was not the first establishment of a Jewish presence in Palestine. There were Jews living in Palestine for centuries (the Jews in fact never entirely left) before any Zionist *aliyah* ever took place. These traditionalist Jews made up the “Old Yishuv,” a phrase used to denote those Jews living in Palestine before any large scale Zionist immigration took place. They lived their lives much like the Orthodox of Europe, studying Torah and leading an extremely pious lifestyle. Interestingly, as the Zionists continued to establish their foothold in Palestine, traditionalist Palestinian Jews did not react fearfully like the Eastern European Orthodox Jews. They were concerned about the Zionists, but many believed Zionism in Palestine was more of a cultural education movement rather than a political one. There was some credibility to this belief because by 1914 the Zionist settlement of Palestine was still small, and

²⁰Noah Efron. *Real Jews: Secular Versus Ultra-Orthodox and the Struggle for Jewish Identity in Israel*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 2003. Pg. 32.

the entire Zionist enterprise relied heavily on donations from rich Jews abroad. What the Palestinian Jews did not realize, however, was that the Zionists were creating a special type of infrastructure in Palestine, one that was secular, modern, and Europhilic.²¹ Thus, the Zionists were laying the foundation for pushing the traditionalist Jews out from any future Zionist state politically and culturally. Yet, it was not until Zionism received international legitimacy from the British that both the Old Yishuv and the ultra-Orthodox in Europe started actively focusing on Zionist activity in Palestine.

During World War I, Palestine was part of a rapidly weakening Ottoman Empire. All three members of the Triple Entente (Britain, France, and Russia) foresaw vast imperial spoils with an Ottoman defeat. Despite its size, the Ottoman Empire was quickly losing the ability to control the land inside its borders, and it was economically and militarily weak vis-à-vis European powers. The British in particular seized upon this opportunity. Through strategic diplomatic maneuvers during the war, the British helped topple the Ottoman Empire and established an imperial presence in the Middle East. One of these maneuvers was the famed Hussein-McMahon correspondence between Sharif Al-Hussein of Mecca and High Commissioner of Egypt Henry McMahon from 1915 to 1916. The British promised Hussein a future independent Arab state located encompassing Syria and Greater Lebanon that would be headed by his son, Prince Faisal, in return for his hand in creating an internal Arab revolt against the Ottomans. At the same time, the British and the French signed the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916), a treaty in which the British and French planned to carve out spheres of varying degrees of control within the Ottoman Empire before the war was even over. France was to have control over Syria and Greater Lebanon and the British were to have control over Palestine, Transjordan,

²¹Noah Efron. *Real Jews: Secular Versus Ultra-Orthodox and the Struggle for Jewish Identity in Israel*. Pg. 32.

and Iraq. While these two diplomatic measures conflicted, together they worked to Britain's advantage because they established an internal ally in the Arabs, and it established goodwill with France over the Ottoman Empire's territorial spoils. However, the British became fearful of the Russians surrendering in the midst of the war (c.a. 1917) and they wanted the Americans to join the Allied powers. To do so, the British wanted to attract Russian and American Jewry, both influential groups in their respective nations, by supporting Zionism in some way.

On November 2, 1917, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration, which vaguely expressed British support for a Jewish national home in Palestine and promised British facilitation for the achievement of this goal. The Zionists had been working closely with Baron Rothschild, the leader of the British Jewish community and a strong Zionist, and the British government to get this commitment. Facilitation meant helping more Zionists immigrate to Palestine, and recognizing Zionist dominance over Jewish affairs in Palestine. After the San Remo Conference in 1920, Britain received control over the Palestinian Mandate, making their promise to facilitate Zionist activity within Palestine more realistic. Soon members of the Zionist, Mizrahi, and Agudat Yisrael organizations converged upon Palestine to establish their respective "bases of attack" in the new battlefield between the Zionists and the ultra-Orthodox. Members of the Old Yishuv split, with some joining Mizrahi in its religious Zionist campaign, and with others forming their own separate community known as the "Edah Haredit" (Haredi community).²² The Edah Haredit were a small minority (9,000 out of 175,000 by the end of the 1920s) that lacked education beyond knowledge of holy texts, had no knowledge of modern politics or organization, and acted on the fringes while the Zionists dealt with the British. They

²²Gary S. Schiff. *Tradition and Politics: The Religious Parties of Israel*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1977. Pg. 71.

were mainly young, passionate, yeshiva students dedicated to an anti-Zionist campaign.²³ Their apolitical nature changed, however, when many Old Yishuv Jews started to believe in the success of Zionism and started to become Zionist pioneers. It was this shocking change that caused the Edah Haredit to work with Agudat Yisrael, the only political organization in Palestine dedicated to working against the Zionists.

Agudat Yisrael firmly established its Palestinian presence in the early 1920's, thanks to a young rabbi advocating complete separation from Zionism named Moshe Blau. Dedicated to the survival of what he called "Torah Judaism," he led the establishment of Agudat rabbinic institutions, schools, courts, and civil authorities all in the effort to build an autonomous community dedicated to the ultra-Orthodox lifestyle.²⁴ His goal was to have this community not only flourish, but also strengthen in order to provide a counterweight to the New Yishuv being built by the Zionists, including Mizrahi's religious Zionist activity. He even went far enough to negotiate independent peace agreements with Palestinian Arab nationalists, who shared the ultra-Orthodox's anti-Zionist feeling.²⁵ Agudat favored a secular Palestinian state where Jews would not be defined as a nation state, but would rather be defined as citizens so both religious and non-religious Jews would bear equal rights and responsibilities. The government of this secular Palestine would exercise only a moderate supervisory role over religious matters.²⁶ This was the opposite of the Jewish nation state Zionism sought to establish. Blau continued to work hard for Agudat's separatism from the Zionists and this brought Agudat some success, but domestic and international events started forcing Agudat to reluctantly cooperate with the Zionists.

²³Samuel C. Heilman and Menachem Friedman. *Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Jews: The Case of the Haredim*. Vol. 1 of *The Fundamentalism Project*. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991: Pg. 224.

²⁴Noah Efron. *Real Jews: Secular Versus Ultra-Orthodox and the Struggle for Jewish Identity in Israel*. Pg. 33.

²⁵*Ibid*, pg. 33.

²⁶Gary S. Schiff. *Tradition and Politics: The Religious Parties of Israel*. Pg. 73.

Domestically, increasing Arab resentment at the Zionists and their British support exploded into a series of violent riots in 1929. Arabs attacked Zionists and ultra-Orthodox Jews alike. The latter were shocked and troubled by the inability of the Arabs to discern the real differences between Zionism and their traditional ideology, especially after ultra-Orthodox leaders like Moshe Blau went to great lengths to negotiate peace agreements with the Arabs. Nonetheless, for safety needs, many members of Agudat and the ultra-Orthodox community started nominally cooperating with the Zionists.²⁷ It was international events, however, specifically the Nazi rise to power in Germany in the early 1930's, which really forced Agudat to cooperate with the Zionists more than ever. Germany in the early 1930's still had a large number of Jews, particularly Orthodox Jews. Once the anti-Semitism of the Nazi Party became evident with the issuance of the Nuremberg Laws, many Orthodox Jews left Germany for Palestine. These new Orthodox refugees started asking for Agudat to pursue a policy of détente with the Zionists, as well as greater economic and political cooperation, all in the name of saving Jewry.²⁸ Some in Agudat agreed that saving Jewry, even if it meant cooperating with Zionists, was more important than combating Zionism. However, some members of Agudat saw this new cooperation as a threat to the unity and strength of "true" Judaism, and Agudat fractured. Leading the virulent anti-Zionist faction was Moshe Blau and his brother Amram Blau, and in 1935 they both founded the Neturei Karta,²⁹ an Aramaic name meaning "Guardians of the City." Many of Agudat's passionate, militant, and youthful members joined the Neturei Karta.

Agudat still existed after the fracture, however, but with the absence of the fierce conservatism from the Neturei Karta, allowing Agudat to continue its new cooperative stance

²⁷*Ibid*, pg. 74.

²⁸Noah Efron. *Real Jews: Secular Versus Ultra-Orthodox and the Struggle for Jewish Identity in Israel*. Pg. 35.

²⁹For more information on the Neturei Karta's history and ideology in Israel, see Appendix

toward the Zionists. When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Agudat became extremely concerned for the welfare of Polish Jews because Polish Jews made up the largest ethnic group in Agudat's membership. As a result, Agudat increased its level of cooperation with the Zionists. Furthermore, events such as the Nazis killing an increasing number of Jews, and the restriction put on Jewish immigration to Palestine by the British White Paper of 1939, forced Agudat to cooperate even more with the Jewish Agency³⁰ in order to help as many European Jewish refugees illegally immigrate to Palestine as possible. After the war, increasing evidence of the destruction caused by the Holocaust had a crushing psychological effect on world Jewry, as six million Jews had been killed. Yet this post-Holocaust trauma was arguably stronger for the Orthodox because a disproportionate amount of those killed were from the traditionalist strain.

The significance of the Holocaust in the history of the secular Israeli-Haredi conflict is very important, and reaches far beyond the cooperation that took place between Agudat and the Zionists during WWII. It helped and hurt Agudat and other ultra-Orthodox movements like the Neturei Karta in different and somewhat opposing ways. Of those traditionalist Jews who survived the Holocaust and came to Palestine, "they felt that they needed to prove their spiritual worth to account for their survival. They would now resurrect the dead Jewish world and give it a life even more potent than before."³¹ In other words, these survivors were determined more than ever to keep the traditional, *shtetl* lifestyle of Eastern Europe alive in an increasingly modernizing Jewish world. This determination was "a revolutionary idea,"³² a source of strength for the ultra-Orthodox, and it contributed largely to the emergence of what can be accurately

³⁰Official representative body of the Zionists in Palestine headed by the eventual first Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben Gurion.

³¹Samuel C. Heilman and Menachem Friedman. *Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Jews: The Case of the Haredim*. Vol. 1 of *The Fundamentalism Project*. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991: Pg. 219

³²Samuel C. Heilman and Menachem Friedman. *Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Jews: The Case of the Haredim*. Pg. 219.

called Israel's contemporary Haredim. However, the Holocaust gave Zionism an incredible amount of strength. The likelihood for a Jewish state being established in Palestine after WWII was never higher, in part because the world saw what the Holocaust did to European Jewry, and in part because of the cooperation given to the Zionists by Agudat Yisrael during WWII. By helping as many European Jewish refugees immigrate to Palestine as possible, the Holocaust helped create a Jewish demographic boom in Palestine that the Zionists argued could not be ignored in their call for a Jewish state. Moreover, the Zionists had special leverage over the ultra-Orthodox in Palestine because Agudat came to the Zionists and asked for their help to illegally smuggle in refugees. This forced Agudat's hand at recognizing Zionism's strength and dominance over Jewish affairs in Palestine.³³

Despite the advantages gained by the Zionists as a result of the Holocaust vis-à-vis the ultra-Orthodox, the latter received special concessions from the Zionists that were won partly thanks to the Holocaust's devastating effects on the European Orthodox population. By 1947, the Zionists' fight for a Jewish state in Palestine against the ultra-Orthodox and the world increasingly shifted from a debate about whether it would exist to how soon would it exist. The newly formed United Nations created a special committee to study the plausibility and desirability of establishing a Jewish state that same year, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP). Members of UNSCOP planned a visit to Palestine on June 15, 1947, but David Ben Gurion, one of the top Zionist leaders and the head of the Jewish Agency, was very worried by the response the ultra-Orthodox would give to UNSCOP.³⁴ He feared members from Agudat would tell UNSCOP to not allow the creation of a Jewish state, and this was a real threat because the ultra-Orthodox not only did they represent the most pious within the Jewish

³³Noah Efron. *Real Jews: Secular Versus Ultra-Orthodox and the Struggle for Jewish Identity in Israel*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 2003. Pg. 42.

³⁴Noah Efron. *Real Jews: Secular Versus Ultra-Orthodox and the Struggle for Jewish Identity in Israel*. Pg. 44.

community. Ben Gurion was a brilliant strategist, however, and on June 12, 1947, he sent a letter to the leaders of Agudat detailing numerous cultural and religious concessions that were promised to the Haredim in return for their support for the creation of Israel. These included: safeguarding the Sabbath as a national day of rest in Israel, providing a religious public educational system and allowing private religious education, maintaining *kashrut* or kosher dietary laws in many public and government sponsored institutions, and finally confirming Orthodox religious control of personal status issues like marriage, divorce, and conversion. Aside from pure state building strategy, Ben Gurion and the Zionists made such an offer to the Haredim because of “their small number, [and] the assumption that they were part of a residual old world remnant that would continue to decline in the years ahead.”³⁵ The Holocaust’s blow to the ultra-Orthodox population, it seemed, benefitted the Haredim in an unexpected way, but there was a lot more to this letter than just a perfectly timed “truce” between the Zionists and the Haredim. It also became the document that ignited the contemporary struggle between secular Israelis and the Haredim.

While leaders of Agudat wanted more concessions in order to safeguard the interests of the Haredim, they agreed to the provisions in the letter, thereby supporting the creation of Israel and tacitly consenting to join a future Israeli government. This came as a shock not only to some within Agudat, but also Ben Gurion and the Zionists. True, Ben Gurion was the one who sent the letter and thus expected a compromise between Agudat and the Zionists, but based on both groups’ historical enmity towards each other, Ben Gurion prepared and feared a greater struggle. As for Agudat, its membership at large was puzzled by its leadership’s decision to not only support, but also become an established part of a Zionist state in the name of Judaism. This went

³⁵Samuel C. Heilman and Menachem Friedman. *Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Jews: The Case of the Haredim*. Vol. 1 of *The Fundamentalism Project*. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991: Pgs. 235-237.

against everything Agudat and the Haredim had been fighting for since Agudat's creation in 1912. Scholars like Patricia J. Woods, however, note that Agudat "made this surprising choice in order to pursue their vision to create in Israeli society God's proper Jewish People."³⁶ Ironically, the agreement was the best chance to defend the interests of the Haredim in a future Jewish state. The letter sent by Ben Gurion became known as the 1947 Status Quo Agreement, meant to artificially preserve a quasi-type of "status quo" between the Zionists and the Haredim while moving forward with the establishment of Israel. Israel was formally declared an independent Jewish state on May 14, 1948, and a representative of Agudat named Rabbi Levenstein signed Israel's Declaration of Independence.³⁷ A Zionist Jewish state was officially established, and the largest representative Haredi organization was a functioning part of its government. Ben Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, proved himself a brilliant political strategist.

The 1947 Status Quo Agreement, however, was just one part of Ben Gurion's state building strategy and the other part necessitates further discussion. Despite Ben Gurion's friendly gesture towards the Haredim, he was a complete socialist. He never wanted Israel to become a Jewish theocracy. His defining vision for Israel was influenced by his own political theory, called *mamlakhtiut*, a term he coined from the Hebrew word for "kingdom" that represented an extreme interpretation of state control over the people's affairs.³⁸ The Israeli state was to be the center of the Israeli body politic, having power over everyone as part of Zionism's vision of class equality, and with Zionist values being Israeli values. Yet crucial to the success of *mamlakhtiut* was a unified state, and Ben Gurion was well aware of this. A unified Israeli state,

³⁶Patricia J. Woods. *Judicial Power and National Politics: Courts and Gender in the Religious-Secular Conflict in Israel*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008: Pg. 61.

³⁷Noah Efron. *Real Jews: Secular Versus Ultra-Orthodox and the Struggle for Jewish Identity in Israel*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 2003. Pg. 45.

³⁸Patricia J. Woods. *Judicial Power and National Politics: Courts and Gender in the Religious-Secular Conflict in Israel*: Pg. 71.

with both ultra-Orthodox and Zionists living together, was needed to prevent an inter-Jewish culture war, and needed for any success at convincing the British and the United Nations that a Jewish state could and should exist. It was this need for unity that ultimately motivated Ben Gurion to make concessions to the leaders of Agudat Yisrael. Focusing on unity helped transform Ben Gurion's ideological foci from Marxist notions of class and labor to a kind of labor Zionism supported by a strong state.³⁹ In other words, in order for the Zionist state to have any success at being initially created, a new emphasis on a unified Jewish state was necessary. It took the strategic genius of Ben Gurion to accomplish this, but there were negative consequences of incorporating the ultra-Orthodox into the state's framework. The first one was preventing equality before the law for all Israeli citizens. Giving the ultra-Orthodox a monopoly of power over personal status issues, as well as the freedom to establish their own separate system of education, were not opportunities given to the majority of Israelis. The latter had to follow the state or else they would be breaking the law, whereas the Status Quo Agreement empowered a minority of the Israeli population to not follow everything the state asked of the majority of Israelis. Not only do the haredim not have to obey all state laws, they have permanent control over personal status issues, a power that other Jewish citizens cannot have access to. Equality before the law is a necessary part of a well functioning democracy, but the Israeli government failed to address this problem when Israel was first established. This has come back to plague the modern Israeli state in many ways.

³⁹*Ibid*, pg. 71.

III. The Early Years: 1948-1952

Zionists and Jews worldwide had many reasons to celebrate on May 14, 1948, but the next day, Israel was attacked by five Arab nations⁴⁰ in what became known as Israel's War for Independence. Greatly outnumbered, Ben Gurion and other Israeli leaders enforced a mandatory military service draft, but they ran into a problem with the ultra-Orthodox about military service. Extreme ultra-Orthodox groups like the Neturei Karta vehemently opposed to having members of their community risk their lives to fight for a state, which they did not find legitimate, and more moderate groups like Agudat Yisrael were also opposed to the military draft. The core of this ultra-Orthodox opposition stemmed from their alternative view of service to a Jewish state and their relationship with God.

When young Haredi boys turn eighteen, the minimum age requirement for the Israeli military draft, they enter into the yeshiva⁴¹, a religious-educational institution where intensive, life long Torah study takes place. Europe's Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox brought Yeshivot (plural) with them to the Palestinian Mandate to counter the growth of Zionist educational institutions. For most of the 1920s and early '30s, the yeshiva system expanded greatly thanks to hard work by the Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox. Having the British distracted with increasing Arab-Zionist tensions gave the Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox tremendous freedom of movement. This expansion helped create a strong enough Haredi presence by the outbreak of the War for Independence for the Haredim to mount a formidable opposition to an Israeli military draft. According to the Haredim, Torah study is the only true "service" in a Jewish state because Torah study brings the Jews spiritually closer with God, thereby making them observant of God's omnipotent power and better Jews. Consequently, the Haredim believe God will eventually

⁴⁰The nations were Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq

⁴¹For a greater explanation of the significance of the Yeshiva in the Haredi world, see the chapter on "Education."

determine when enough Jews have “served” in order for their religiously sanctioned right to return to the Holy Land. The forceful sacrifice of Torah study for military service in the name of a Zionist state, however, was something many in the Haredi community refused to accept. It would be sinning against God and according to the Torah, it is God, not man, who will win battles for the Jews.

Frustrated, but keeping with his focus on unity, Ben Gurion granted the Haredim exemption from military service for yeshiva youth. In the midst of a war, Ben Gurion did not want Jews fighting Jews, or have ultra-Orthodox Jews helping the Arabs. Yet the exemption was temporary. The war came to a close in 1949, and Israel beat back the Arab armies, and even expanded its borders from those partitioned by the UN.

After the war, Agudat Yisrael, its labor sub-group Po’alei Agudat Yisrael (PAY),⁴² and Mizrahi joined the Israeli government in a unified political party named the United Religious Front (URF) that served in the Knesset from 1949 to 1951. In the election of 1951, the URF disbanded and PAY and Agudat Yisrael ran separately from Mizrahi and each other, with Mizrahi gaining the most seats out of the three, followed by Agudat Yisrael, and PAY.⁴³ Cooperation between the dominant Zionist political party, Labor, and Agudat Yisrael continued only for a short time, and in 1952 Agudat Yisrael resigned from the Knesset. Agudat’s action was in response to Ben Gurion’s insistence on having the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) draft Haredi women for some type of public service other than serving in the military.⁴⁴ After resigning, Agudat became part of a loyal Ultra-Orthodox opposition for years, maintaining a minimalist defensive position of its parochial interests, especially those granted in the 1947

⁴²For more information on PAY, see the Appendix.

⁴³Gary S. Schiff. *Tradition and Politics: The Religious Parties of Israel*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1977. Pg. 83.

⁴⁴Noah Efron. Noah Efron. *Real Jews: Secular Versus Ultra-Orthodox and the Struggle for Jewish Identity in Israel*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 2003. Pg. 49.

Status Quo Agreement, and abandoning any serious attempts to influence or impose its value on Israeli society at large.⁴⁵ It did still participate in Israeli politics, however, because doing so enabled Agudat to defend the interests of the ultra-Orthodox. Yet Agudat was more of a fringe party after it left the government, helping the Israeli government stabilize fragile coalitions in return for financial support, continued military exemptions for yeshiva youth, and continued control over issues of personal status.

IV. “Ghetto-ization” and the Growth of Israeli Haredi Culture (1950-1977)

After Agudat resigned from the Israeli government, the Haredim, with the exception of the Neturei Karta, were less militant and combative against the Zionists than at any time before. The most important reason for this trend was because the Ultra-Orthodox became aware of “their place” in Israeli society. Israeli communities were modernizing rapidly and the Israeli government was functioning smoothly without Agudat’s presence. Places like Tel Aviv became resort cities along the beach where entertainment and sexual expression flourished. The ultra-Orthodox felt weak and trapped by continuing to live among modern Israelis, so they started isolating themselves from conditions that reflected modernity.⁴⁶ Mixed Ultra-Orthodox/Secular neighborhoods largely became extinct and gave way to more separate, homogenous communities. The ultra-Orthodox living in Tel Aviv migrated to the Haredi stronghold of Bnei Brak, and the Jerusalem ultra-Orthodox concentrated in Meah Shearim, a section of Jerusalem where generations of the Old Yishuv lived. This entire process became known as the “ghetto-ization” of the Israeli Haredim, a process that greatly contributed to the Israeli Haredim’s

⁴⁵Gary S. Schiff. *Tradition and Politics: The Religious Parties of Israel*. Pg. 84.

⁴⁶Noah Efron. *Real Jews: Secular Versus Ultra-Orthodox and the Struggle for Jewish Identity in Israel*. Pg. 50.

separatist identity.⁴⁷ Over time, purely Haredi communities or “ghettos” started spreading all over Israel.

Choosing to isolate themselves from mainstream Israeli society and politics did not mean, however, that the Haredim were unable to support themselves, or that they had to do so completely on their own. The Haredim quickly started distinguishing themselves in many ways from Zionist culture. For example, in the religious arena, Haredim established their own network of rabbinic authorities to circumvent the authority of Zionist rabbis, who were seen as lacking any true religious authority. Furthermore, Haredim established their own network of social services to create an ideal, purely Haredi social service system.⁴⁸ However, there was one glaring paradox: Haredi separatism was largely dependent on and supported by the Israeli government. In 1949, Ben Gurion allowed for the establishment of four separate education systems or “trends,”⁴⁹ one of which was controlled by the ultra-Orthodox. By 1953, the “trend” system was abolished and the ultra-Orthodox set up their own “independent” school system⁵⁰ (not under Israeli governmental supervision), but seventy percent of its funding came from the Israeli government.⁵¹

Social services were also provided to the Haredim by the Israeli government, despite the presence of a Haredi social service system. This dependency on the Israeli government troubled the Haredim since the “ghetto-ization” process began because it undermined the Haredi mission to live apart from the Zionist “infidels” and be “true” Jews. A controversial type of social service the Israeli government often provided was generous child support funding to Haredi families.

⁴⁷*Ibid*, pg. 50.

⁴⁸*Ibid*, pg. 50.

⁴⁹For more on the “trend system” and Haredi education, see the chapter on “Education”

⁵⁰As promised in the 1947 Status Quo Agreement

⁵¹Noah Efron. *Real Jews: Secular Versus Ultra-Orthodox and the Struggle for Jewish Identity in Israel*: pg. 51.

Haredim typically had large families and it was hard for them to survive when Haredi men would stay in the yeshiva and refuse to work in the Israeli economy. These funds allowed yeshiva students to support themselves and it dissuaded them from looking at finding employment in the Israeli workforce. The Haredim clung to this provision intensely, often fighting to keep funding strong despite the fact it was coming from the Israeli government. They tried confronting this paradox in various ways, but were mostly unsuccessful. For example, establishing an independent social service system was meant to counter the dependence on the Israeli government for important social services. However, groups like the Neturei Karta have been successful in staying independent of Israeli social services, thanks to their commitment to resist Zionism as much as possible.

Another important aspect to this paradoxical dependency on Zionism is that it is a purely Israeli historical phenomenon. It is because Zionism is the Haredim's enemy and everything it opposes that their resistance identity can flourish, as well as their strength. Israel's small size has allowed the Haredim to strengthen and develop an identity unique to Israeli Haredim. For those Haredim who live in New York City,⁵² the absence of a Zionist state limited the effectiveness and strength of their anti-Zionist activity. Most of their focus had been raising money for Haredi causes in America, and combating non-Haredi Jewish influence in Jewish affairs. One defining characteristic of American Haredim was their active participation in American elections.⁵³ They voted for local candidates in order to attract attention to their needs, and did not use American politics as an instrument of resistance to the modern world. Also, many Haredim, particularly in New York, worked in the modern economy, often as jewelers. Israeli Haredim were more

⁵²In addition to Israel, there is a large population of Haredim that live in New York, NY, also Monsey, Kiryas Joel, New Square, and major cities like Baltimore although they are not the primary subject of this research project

⁵³Samuel C. Heilman and Menachem Friedman. *Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Jews: The Case of the Haredim*. Vol. 1 of *The Fundamentalism Project*. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991: Pg. 223.

resistant to working in Israel's economy because it was seen as helping the Zionist state survive. Thus, as much as the Israeli Haredim wished for Israel to have never existed or for Zionism to have never been founded, both historical events helped the Israeli Haredim last as a group for much longer than anyone anticipated.

V. The “Golden Age” (1978-Today)

As the “ghetto-ization” process continued from the 1950's until the early 1970's, secular Israelis viewed the Haredim as harmless, even primitive people, but that changed starting with the Yom Kippur War of 1973, and the election of 1977.⁵⁴ In October 1973, Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack against Israel on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, Yom Kippur. Israel was able to withstand the assault, but confidence in the Labor Party diminished quickly. The Labor Party had been the dominant Israeli political party for more than thirty years, with no other party strong enough to take away its absolute majority in the Knesset. Yet after the perceived unpreparedness of the Labor government during 1973, Israelis voiced their discontent in the historic election of 1977. For the first time in Israel's history, the Labor Party lost its majority in the Knesset. Replacing Labor was the Likud Party, a revisionist Zionist party. Revisionist Zionism was strongly opposed to the socialist Zionism connected to the Labor Party. Whereas Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin inspired socialist Zionists like Ben Gurion, fascist leader Benito Mussolini inspired revisionist Zionists like Vladimir Jabotinsky, the father of revisionist Zionism. Jabotinsky wanted to reestablish the glory of the ancient Kingdom of Israel, called for Israel to extend into the West Bank (even going as far east as Iraq), and to never submit to the Arabs. His Zionism was very militant, and his ideological protégé was Menachem

⁵⁴Noah Efron. *Real Jews: Secular Versus Ultra-Orthodox and the Struggle for Jewish Identity in Israel*: pg. 52.

Begin, the Likud Party leader in 1977. Although Begin won a majority in the Knesset, he did not receive an absolute majority and had to make a coalition with other smaller parties, notably Agudat Yisrael. After twenty-five years of refusing to participate as a mainstream Israeli political party, Agudat rejoined the Knesset under a Likud majority.

The main reason Agudat chose to return to mainstream Israeli politics was because Begin's coalition offer was one that the Haredim could not have refused. Of the eighty clauses included in the coalition agreement, fifty concerned religious matters, each containing a concession to the ultra-Orthodox. Two concessions, however, stand out: 1) Begin promised to greatly increase government funding for Agudat schools and 2) he also promised to remove the limit of 800 on the number of exemptions for ultra-Orthodox youth studying in the yeshivot.⁵⁵ This was very attractive to Agudat and therefore they returned to the Knesset.

Agudat was now in an unusually powerful position in Israeli politics, but this did not benefit all within the Haredi community. It is important to remember that the Haredi community was not a monolith, ideologically or ethnically. Those Haredim who immigrated to Israel from Eastern Europe are Ashkenazi Jews. Those Orthodox who immigrated to Israel from Islamic nations throughout the Middle East and North Africa are Sephardic Jews. From the earliest years of Israel's establishment, Ashkenazi Haredim discriminated against Sephardic Haredim.⁵⁶ Ashkenazim saw the Sephardim as backwards, primitive Jews who did not share the same history, intellect, or tradition as the Ashkenazi Haredim. Ashkenazi Zionists felt this way about Sephardic Zionists, too. Sephardim, whether Haredi or Zionist, were therefore were treated as second-class citizens. Ashkenazi Haredim would get more social, academic, and financial benefits than the Sephardic Haredim, and the same applied to the Zionists. This prevented the

⁵⁵*Ibid*, pg. 53.

⁵⁶Until their arrival in Israel, the Sephardic Jews were simply traditionalist Jews.

Haredi community from being completely unified. When Agudat received so many special concessions from Begin, the Sephardic Haredim's frustration was at such a boiling point, they established their own Sephardic Haredi political party, Shas, in 1984.⁵⁷ This political development certainly added to the division already within the Haredi community, but it surprisingly made the Ultra-Orthodox more powerful politically than ever before.

Since 1977, Ultra-Orthodox political parties have held the deciding votes in every election.⁵⁸ Israel's parliamentary system of government and numerous political parties have prevented any one party from gaining a complete majority in the Knesset since the very first election in 1948, making it easy for parties like Shas and Agudat Yisrael to be courted as coalition partners by larger parties like Likud and Labor. Moreover, since Ultra-Orthodox parties were largely alienated from the most basic of Israeli political issues like diplomacy, budgets, the environment, etc., they only cared about the government's help in keeping their lifestyle and communities afloat.⁵⁹ This made them more "special interest" parties as opposed to more "standard" parties like Likud or Labor, making Ultra-Orthodox political parties very accessible and attractive coalition partners.

This new political power made the Israeli Haredim stronger, wealthier (although still poorer compared to most of Israeli society), better educated (in their own curricula), and even more combative⁶⁰, especially during the 1980's, but it also led to the recognition of a "Haredi problem" by the majority secular Israeli population.⁶¹ This recognition quickly evolved into a palpable hatred for the Haredim for their political and religious influence on the daily affairs of

⁵⁷For more on the evolution and party platform of Shas, see the Appendix.

⁵⁸Noah Efron. *Real Jews: Secular Versus Ultra-Orthodox and the Struggle for Jewish Identity in Israel*: pg. 54.

⁵⁹*Ibid*, pg. 54.

⁶⁰For a deeper explanation of Haredi militancy and the 1980's, see the "Neturei Karta" section in the Appendix.

⁶¹Noah Efron. *Real Jews: Secular Versus Ultra-Orthodox and the Struggle for Jewish Identity in Israel*: pg. 55.

many Israelis who did not share the same degree of religious observance. For Israel's Jewish population, roughly 80% are secular and 20% are religious, and the Haredim make up roughly 6% of the religious Jewish community.⁶² Many political parties on the far left (Ratz, Meretz, Tzomet, Shinui ("change")) started campaigning with a strong anti-Haredi message. This hatred carried over into the 1990's, and has continued to exist in contemporary Israel. The Haredim, in response to this new "hate campaign," started developing a new anger toward the secular Israelis, an anger that was adopted by more moderate individuals within the Haredi community. Tensions between the secular Israelis and the Haredim have remained intense since the early 1980's, especially since more Haredi-secular Israeli communities started appearing again thanks in part to a higher birthrate for Haredim. Neither side has made an attempt to alleviate the conflict.

Looking at the progression of the Ultra-Orthodox from small Eastern European groups opposed to Zionism, to powerful political players and constituents in a Zionist state, one can say the Haredim have had mixed results in their fight against Zionism. They failed in their original goal to separate as much as possible from Zionist culture and Zionism's influence and failed in preventing Israel from being established. However, thanks to the Status Quo Agreement of 1947, and their key role in Israeli politics, the Haredim have been able to not only survive far beyond what many early Zionist leaders hoped for, but have also been able to transform into a politically and socially influential, powerful anti-Zionist force. The Haredim have become more powerful living inside a Zionist state than they would have living outside of one. Currently, the problem is both the secular Israeli and Haredi populations are growing, with the latter growing at a much faster rate. These two conflicting cultures are increasingly becoming physically closer, adding fuel to an already fiery conflict. An important lesson to take away from this brief history of the

⁶²Eliezer Ben-Rafael, "The Face of Religiosity in Israel: Cleavages or Continuum?" *Israel Studies* 13, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 89-113, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30245833>: pg. 89.

Haredim, Zionism, and Israel, is that modernity created a crisis in Judaism that has never been resolved. Zionism is a product of the modern world, and the Ultra-Orthodox represent a traditional Jewish world extinguished from Europe but bitterly held onto by the Haredim.⁶³ Judaism is stuck between two different historical periods, and analyzing this conflict reveals a splinter in Jewish history that has been allowed to fester for decades.

⁶³ Although it is important to emphasize that Israeli Haredim are much more modern in their thinking than they actually claim to be. Medieval rabbis like Maimonides would not recognize their methods, like refusing to learn a trade, or participating in politics.

EDUCATION: THE FIGHT FOR THE SOCIALIZATION OF VALUES

I. Introduction

The fight over education is at the heart of the greater conflict between both groups of Jews. For the Haredim, an explicitly *halakhic*⁶⁴ education protects their community from the “contamination” of modern Israeli education and values. They are taught not to believe in the legitimacy of Israel, and they are purposefully not taught practical skills (math, Hebrew, science, etc.) that would help them live more like modern Israelis. Their curriculum, largely based on studying the Torah and the Talmud, has empowered the Haredi community to feel more secure living in Israel. Additionally, the Israeli government has financially supported the Haredi system of education since 1948. Funding by the Israeli government has allowed the Haredi system to exist for years beyond what many early Zionist leaders forecasted. Thus, the great irony is Haredi education has been able to flourish in a Zionist state. Secular Israelis, however, are angered by the power the Haredim have over their own system of education and by the Israeli government’s financial assistance of this system. They feel their government should be dedicated to supporting the majority in Israel (themselves), not people who refuse to believe in its legitimacy. Therefore, this chapter will explore the core issues over education between the Haredim and secular Israelis, including: the elements of Haredi education and its paradoxes, a brief history contextualizing the fight over education in Israel, and what current statistical data suggests about the future of Haredi-secular Israeli relations over education.

II. Haredi Curriculum and Their Institutions of Education and Training

⁶⁴ An education rooted in Jewish law, which is very “archaic” and traditional compared to “modern” education like that of a majority of Israelis. It does not teach subjects like math, science, or philosophy. Instead, it teaches a Jew his relationship with God, what the Torah demands and expects of Jews throughout their daily lives, the philosophies of the great Torah scholars throughout time, and to look condescendingly upon any major reform or innovation of Jewish tradition. Hence, Zionism is taught as an evil stain upon Judaism.

Uncompromising traditionalism is the best way to describe how the Haredim view education. “Anything new is forbidden on the authority of the Torah,” a philosophy first established in 1819 Hungary, the center of Ashkenazi Orthodoxy.⁶⁵ Any new idea is considered a danger to the community because reform and the questioning of long established norms is a defiance of God’s authority. Reform took place during the Haskalah, and Zionism was its most “dangerous” creation. Furthermore, since Jewish law is the foundation for Haredi education, questioning what rabbis teach is equivalent to questioning the word of God, and such a rebellious act against God is never tolerated. Israeli Haredim believe this extreme conservatism in education is a religious requirement, and that they are continuing the same education that was taught by previous generations in Eastern Europe. They also believe this conservatism to be an effective modernity “repellent,” in that it prevents the corrupting effects of modern education and values from penetrating the sacred community. Therefore, the Haredim see this extreme conservatism in education as necessary for survival.

Within the Haredi community, there are three early educational institutions: the house, the synagogue, and the elementary school. The first one is the house. Haredi children from a very young age are required to learn prayers, traditions, and the holidays the community celebrates.⁶⁶ Doing so is advantageous for the Haredim because their children are constantly being educated with Haredi values. More importantly, this is meant to teach their children their membership within a chosen community. Since Haredi children largely mature within the boundaries of their community, they will be in constant contact with a community that knows and behaves just like they do during their most formative years. Therefore, the closeness of the Haredi community serves to educate its members by making them learn from each other, as well as protect them

⁶⁵Moshe Samet, “The Beginnings of Orthodoxy,” *Modern Judaism* 8 (1988): 249-69. Pg. 257.

⁶⁶Michael Rosenak. *Jewish Fundamentalism in Israeli Education*. Vol. 2 of *The Fundamentalism Project*. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993: Pg. 385.

from modern Israeli influence. The second early educational institution is the synagogue, where young Haredi boys go with their fathers⁶⁷ everyday to see the community praying together and to recognize the importance of the Torah. Both the house and the synagogue are then supplemented by the *heder* or elementary school. This is where the children learn for the first time without their parents present, meaning the *heder* curriculum has great impact on Haredi children. The *heder* curriculum instructs Haredi children to read and study the *siddur* or prayer book and practice reading the weekly Torah portion.⁶⁸ It is through these three institutions Haredi children are taught Haredi values and what is expected of them by being part of a holy community.

However, it is the yeshiva that is the beacon of Haredi education. Once Haredi boys turn thirteen, they are considered adult men within the community in the sense they are now expected to enter a yeshiva to become full time students of the Torah.⁶⁹ They study how the Torah applies to every aspect of their lives, how it connects them to God, how it is the defining text of the Jewish people, and how its word is law. Rabbis are the teachers in a yeshiva, but they are also leaders in the greater community as well as legal justices. This helps groom and train Haredi boys to become future community leaders. After spending their teen years in the yeshiva, some boys will go out and seek employment approved by the community, most often religious and educational work, but some choose the path of politics.⁷⁰ Yet there are some who choose to continue learning at a high yeshiva, where they dedicate their lives to an exhaustive study of the

⁶⁷ Important to note here is the absence of Haredi women attending synagogue, which will be explained further in this chapter under the subsection “Paradoxes.”

⁶⁸ Michael Rosenak. *Jewish Fundamentalism in Israeli Education*. Pg. 386.

⁶⁹ The significance of the age thirteen is not only unique to the Haredim. In the eyes of Jewish religion, turning thirteen is seen almost universally as a time when boys become men, and this is celebrated as a Bar Mitzvah.

⁷⁰ It is more common to see those who pursue politics to come from more moderate camps within the Haredi community, like Agudat Yisrael, and not the Neturei Karta.

Torah. These yeshivot (plural) are the ones subject to intense criticism by the secular Israelis because of their role in the conflict over military service.⁷¹

Part of the yeshiva's importance to the Haredim is its association with protection from the modern world and its corrupting influences. Keeping Haredi boys in the yeshivot for most of their lives to study the Torah is a way to dissuade them from wanting to explore the modern world. Furthermore, spending this time in the yeshiva helps to fulfill the role of being a "true Jew," because all of this time spent away from modernity is spent laboring to become closer to God. The yeshiva accomplishes the same resistance against modernity that the Haredim want to accomplish as an entire community. At its core, "the yeshiva is not merely an educating and socializing institution, alongside the home and community, but is truly an embodiment of the Haredi ideal for life, a microcosm of the real world in which the divine Presence dwells."⁷²

In addition to the protection it provides from the modern world, the yeshiva's offensive nature is also used for internal communal enforcement. There are those within the Haredi community that are so strict in their observance of Judaism that they constantly make sure everyone is living the haredi lifestyle. For example, there is a group of Haredim known as the *Miahmarot Hatzniut* (The Chastity Guards) who patrol the streets and houses of the community to check to see no sexual deviance takes place.⁷³ Sexual expression, particularly female sexual expression, is reviled by Orthodoxy. These guards are more aggressive than they are pious, but they receive their authority from the leading rabbis of the community. More militant Haredi sub-

⁷¹This is explained in further detail in the chapter on "Military Service"

⁷²Rabbi Shlomo Volve. "The Yeshiva in Our Age" (Hebrew). *Religious Education in Israeli Society: Anthology*. Mordecai Bar-Lev, ed. Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1986: pg. 128.

⁷³Ehud Sprinzak. *Three Models of Religious Violence: The Case of Jewish Fundamentalisms in Israel*. Vol. 3 of *The Fundamentalism Project*. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993: pg. 464.

groups like the Neturei Karta and the Satmar⁷⁴ employ this enforcement tactic more typically than other Haredi sub-groups. Rights like privacy and individual status do not exist in the effort to “save” the community from internal threats; everything that happens to an individual member of the community has a public and communal side. This is a core pre-modern concept. Violence is therefore an accepted tool against anyone who goes against Haredi norms, as long as it is in the name of “protecting” the community from itself.⁷⁵ The yeshiva is like a military barracks, acting as the main source for young, militant, Haredim who act as the means for norms enforcement. Sometimes this militancy leads to many internal conflicts within the community, particularly between the Haredi rabbinical courts and yeshivot. Often “raids” will be carried out by young yeshiva students against wrongdoers in the community, or against rabbis from opposing yeshivot for disagreeing with their rabbi.⁷⁶ The militancy of these young yeshiva students is a product of their extreme loyalty to their rabbis and to the legitimacy of their yeshiva. Therefore, behind the yeshiva’s walls is a functioning system to protect the community from external as well as internal threats.

III. Paradoxes Within The Haredi Educational System

For a system that is intent on being strong enough to protect its members, Haredi education functions despite two great ideological paradoxes. The first is the basic role women play in the Haredi world. Women are strongly discouraged from studying Torah because according to Haredi belief, they are seen as intellectually and temperamentally unsuited for study

⁷⁴Hasidic Haredi sect that is notorious for being vehemently anti-Israel and extremely conservative. For more information, see the “Appendix.” Now involved in the American circumcision debate: see <http://forward.com/articles/161082/orthodox-mobilize-to-defend-circumcision-rite/>

⁷⁵Ehud Sprinzak. *Three Models of Religious Violence: The Case of Jewish Fundamentalisms in Israel*. Vol. 3 of *The Fundamentalism Project*. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993: pg. 464.

⁷⁶Ehud Sprinzak. *Three Models of Religious Violence: The Case of Jewish Fundamentalisms in Israel*. Pg. 465.

of the details of halakhah.⁷⁷ They are encouraged to stay in the house because of their role as mothers and because it is seen as a way to ensure Haredi women are sexually modest. Yet, Haredi women are also encouraged to be the ones with the most exposure to the secular, modern world. Haredi women often teach in schools for girls, run stores, and operate modern computer technology in addition to running the house. This participation in the modern world facilitates Haredi males entering the yeshivot proper (yeshivot for unmarried men) and *kollels* (yeshivot for married men) because it is a way to actively separate the sexes and prevent males from being corrupted by women.⁷⁸ Also, women provide the bulk of economic support for the families. This too has roots in the Pale of Settlement, where Jews were legally barred from most respectable occupations. Yet their exposure to the secular world, combined with their exclusion from Torah study, puts them in a position of permanent confrontation and weakness. Haredi women are lauded for their sacrifice and service to the community by representing the Haredim in the secular world, but they are socially tainted by this participation. It seems strange to allow such a thing when strength of the community is so cherished by the Haredim. However, in the Haredi world, there is a hierarchy of knowledge and thereby social class that contributes to the inferiority of Haredi women (descending order): God, Haredi rabbinical sages, yeshiva students, women, and the secular world.⁷⁹ It would seem that trying to find a way to fix this problem would help achieve the isolation so desired by the Haredim, but women are the chief economic providers of the society, so the paradox continues to exist.

The other paradox present in the Haredi educational system is the presence of Haredi “yeshivot” that admit only women as students. These schools are known as *Bet Yaakov* (The

⁷⁷Michael Rosenak. *Jewish Fundamentalism in Israeli Education*. Vol. 2 of *The Fundamentalism Project*. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993: pg. 383.

⁷⁸Michael Rosenak. *Jewish Fundamentalism in Israeli Education*. Vol. 2 of *The Fundamentalism Project*. Pg. 383.

⁷⁹*Ibid*, pg. 384.

House of Jacob), and their existence came as a response to the alienation young Haredi girls were being forced into when the Israeli Haredim were still largely in Eastern Europe. Young Haredi females were often sent by wealthy families to “secular” or Christian schools to receive a broad humanistic education. Yet this type of education succeeded in alienating girls from their communities at large. In 1933, however, Rabbi Yisrael Meir of Radun (modern day Belarus) said in a rabbinical decree that girls may be taught Torah without being taught the halakhic disputes of the Talmud in order for more of the Haredim to be holy and strong enough to fight modernity. Coming shortly after this decree, a woman named Sara Schnirer established the first network of *Bet Yaakov* in Eastern Europe in the late 1930s and soon after in Israel and New York. The intended goal of the *Bet Yaakov* was to produce modest, God fearing women who knew their place, but the curriculum ended up including broad subjects like literature, history, philosophy, business, child care, and Jewish spirituality.⁸⁰ This continued to make Haredi women second class citizens. Their very existence, however, is an example of Haredi innovation and the challenging of norms. Moreover, another paradox is the actual education in these schools sometimes includes subjects that defeat the original mission for the creation of these schools. Even if all *Bet Yaakov* only taught Torah, the established norms of Haredi society would still keep women in a position of inferiority.

III. History

The fight over education between the Haredim and the secular Israelis began in the 1920s, in Mandatory Palestine, where Agudat Yisrael was establishing its presence as an Ultra-Orthodox force. Part of this process was setting up its own system of schools to ensure those within the ultra-Orthodox community would be able to receive a Haredi education. The dominant

⁸⁰*Ibid*, pg. 387-388.

view among Agudat's Hungarian and Russian-Polish constituencies (the two largest and most conservative) and the ultra-Orthodox Jews from the Old Yishuv regarding education was no secular education was permitted, but learning a craft necessary to earn a living was permitted. The Talmud says that a man must teach his son Torah and a craft to earn a living. However, on the elementary level, Agudat officially accepted the other two popular attitudes among its members regarding education, which were: 1) Secular education in the school is permitted if it is necessary to earn a living 2) Secular education is permitted not only when necessary to acquire skills to earn a living but also when the government requires it.⁸¹ Accepting these two views on the elementary level was not much cause for controversy because secular education was still forbidden from the yeshiva. As long as the yeshiva remained free of secular education, Agudat's constituents were satisfied.

Mizrahi Orthodox Jews, however, were more open to secular and western European education. These Orthodox Jews believed a modern education was necessary to help build Israel in order to make Zionism a success. Such a progressive attitude gave Mizrahi Orthodox Jews an advantage in working with the Zionists in laying the foundation for a future Israeli state education system.⁸² Interestingly, Mizrahi and Zionist activity helped Agudat work harder to counter Zionism's growing presence in Mandatory Palestine.

Education in Mandatory Palestine was thus very factionalized and sectarian. Agudat chose to work and exist independently of the other factions because they represented secular education and Agudat wanted control over its own affairs. Its educational network included religious elementary schools (hadarim, a variant on "heder") and yeshivot concentrated largely in highly populated areas of cities from the Old Yishuv, like Jerusalem. Mizrahi and the Zionists

⁸¹Gary S. Schiff. *Tradition and Politics: The Religious Parties of Israel*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1977. Pg. 171.

⁸²Gary S. Schiff. *Tradition and Politics: The Religious Parties of Israel*. Pgs. 171-172.

were part of three educational “trends” that were approved by the British Mandatory government in Palestine: the General or Zionist trend, the Mizrahi trend, and the Labor trend. The Labor trend was an offshoot from the Zionist trend following a more intense socialist ideology than a majority of mainstream Zionists. As for Agudat, its relative separatism from Zionist activity contributed to its lack of official recognition by the British because the Zionists were the chief liaisons between the Jews and the British in Palestine. However, lack of official recognition means all of Agudat’s financing came from contributions from Ultra-Orthodox Jews in Europe and Palestine.⁸³ The Zionist, Mizrahi, and Labor trends, because of their official status, had a great financial advantage vis-à-vis Agudat.

After 1941, the British officially recognized Agudat’s schools and Agudat started receiving some additional financial support from the Mandatory government. This extra support was vital for Agudat because at this time the Nazis were imprisoning or killing many Jews in Eastern Europe, which included Agudat’s benefactors. Once Israel was established, however, Agudat was forced to reconcile its anti-Zionist stance in order to have government financial support for its educational system, and opted for inclusion in the state educational system as a fourth trend.⁸⁴ After being promised its own educational autonomy in the 1947 Status Quo Agreement, joining the state educational system was not sacrificing too much. Furthermore, state funding would keep Agudat financially secure. Organizing as a separate trend also allowed for Agudat to separate themselves from not only the Zionist education but also Mizrahi education. Agudat’s official position on Mizrahi’s religious Zionist education was ambiguous, but it dreaded the possibility of merging with Mizrahi and having to share a common curriculum with

⁸³*Ibid*, pg. 173.

⁸⁴*Ibid*, pg. 174.

its members. Ironically, it was joining the Israeli state educational framework that gave Agudat advantages it never had before.

While the trend system was an effective way for Agudat to extract financial benefits from the Israeli government as well as for Ben Gurion to keep religious parties like Agudat and Mizrahi under his supervision, the system started to crumble. The Compulsory Education Law of 1949 was passed to preserve the trend system, mandating free and compulsory education for children aged five to thirteen in one of the four trends. It also empowered the Minister of Education to allow attendance in schools meeting minimal state standards and to exempt children from the law who attended non-recognized schools.⁸⁵ All the latter part did was undermine mandating attendance in “trend” education. Exemption from the “trend” mandate applied to groups like the Neturei Karta, who forbade any kind of secular education in their schools no matter what the level. Their schools were not government supported, but that also meant they were not government regulated. Preserving the trend system was critical to Ben Gurion’s *mamlakhtiut* philosophy, but there were obvious loopholes in this law that weakened the strength of the trend system.

More detrimental to the trend system, however, was the fight over new immigrants. Mapai, the forerunner to the Labor party, was frustrated by the weakness of the Compulsory Education Law of 1949 because it controlled the government and wanted to dominate the education system. Most of these immigrants were Jews who came from Islamic dominant countries, like Yemen (the largest source of immigrants), Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, among others. More importantly, however, was the fact they were more religious than Mapai, giving Mizrahi and Agudat a distinct advantage. Therefore, Mapai targeted the influx of new,

⁸⁵Gary S. Schiff. *Tradition and Politics: The Religious Parties of Israel*. Pg. 174.

particularly Sephardic religious Jews to achieve their goal. Its intention was to use its numerical and organizational strengths to independently seek out prospective youth to join by convincing their parents its education trend was a better fit. When immigrants came to Israel, they were first housed in camps (*mahanot*) that were divided based on party strength in respective areas of the state, giving Mapai control of most of the camps. Mapai was able to easily persuade the new immigrants to not join the religious camps because the immigrants did not know anything about the intricacies of the trend system. Both Mizrahi and Agudat sent formal complaints to an independent, government appointed investigating committee to explore Mapai's unfair methods of pressure and coercion in the *mahanot*. The government affirmed them because both parties threatened to leave and thereby collapse the government.⁸⁶ On March 14, 1950, a compromise was reached and the Knesset passed an amendment to the 1949 Compulsory Education Law providing for exclusively religious education in the Yemenite camps under the supervision of representatives from Mizrahi and Agudat. In other camps, two types of schools were established, religious and non-religious, and registration data from all the camps showed more than 80% of the immigrant parents choosing some form of religious education.⁸⁷ Agudat and Mizrahi were very pleased with the situation, but the Mapai and Labor trends found a way to circumvent this disadvantage.

While many immigrants were choosing religious education, a majority of them were unknowingly being transferred to transit camps (*ma'abarot*) where immigrant parents were unaware of the differences within the trend system. As a result, many were being registered in the Labor and Mapai trends. Fighting between all the trends started again, and despite more attempts at a compromise, Mizrahi and Agudat both voted in February 1951 to leave the

⁸⁶*Ibid*, pg. 175.

⁸⁷*Ibid*, pg. 176.

government, collapsing the First Knesset.⁸⁸ Elections for forming a Second Knesset were held five months later.

When the Second Knesset was forming, the government questioned the future existence of the trend system because its weaknesses helped collapse the first Knesset. Agudat was the greatest supporter of keeping the trend system alive because the system helped keep it separate from Mizrahi, helped Agudat keep its separatist education and ideology alive, and the system, allowed for Israeli government funding, ensuring the survival of Agudat's education system. The survival of the trend system, as well as the continuation of the government's refusal to draft Haredi women into some type of national service, became the two policies Agudat declared necessary for its membership in the Second Knesset. Ben Gurion refused to compromise on the drafting of Haredi women, and on September 18, 1952, Agudat resigned from the Israeli government. Agudat thought leaving the government would put pressure on Ben Gurion to submit to their demands, but Ben Gurion found other coalition partners in smaller left wing political parties that had long advocated for the abolition of the trend system in favor of a nationalized education system.

The State Education Law of 1953 passed after Agudat left the government, substituting two types of education, state education and religious state education, in place of the old trend system. State education was (and is) defined as “without attachment to a party or communal body or any other organization outside the Government, under the supervision of the Minister [of Education].”⁸⁹ Religious state education was (and is) defined as “a state educational system whose way of life, curriculum, teachers, and inspectors are religious.”⁹⁰ Israeli secular education

⁸⁸Gary S. Schiff. *Tradition and Politics: The Religious Parties of Israel*. Pg. 177.

⁸⁹*Ibid*, pg. 182.

⁹⁰Gary S. Schiff. *Tradition and Politics: The Religious Parties of Israel*. Pg. 182.

fit within the state education category, and religious state education was matched with Mafdal.⁹¹ Agudat was still given the option to join either of these two categories, but the majority refused to do so; only 21 of some 104 Agudat schools joined the religious state education system. The majority of Agudat schools were organized under a separate framework called *Hinukh' Atzmai* (HA/independent education), which was to be a “recognized” educational framework by the Minister of Education, making it legal and eligible for budgetary support.⁹²

By organizing itself as an independent, but officially recognized, education framework, Agudat became very strong. Agudat was still able to have control over most of what it taught, though it needed to follow two minimal conditions set by the Ministry of Education. Teachers within the HA system needed to possess formal qualifications equal to those in official schools and the language of instruction, except for Talmud, needed to be Hebrew. Talmud could continue being taught in Yiddish. Agudat agreed to this because these requirements affected only its elementary schools and not its secondary educational institutions, like the yeshivot. However, the main reason Agudat agreed to these requirements was because doing so would ensure it kept receiving generous funding from the Israeli government. In 1953, 60% of HA's budget was government funded. In 1956, it rose to 66%, in 1957, it rose to 75%, and in 1960 it rose to 80%. In 1977, right before Likud took control of the Knesset, this figure remained at 80% because the education minister was from the ruling Labor Party, which allowed for it to remain that high in return for Agudat's political support. Agudat's support existed despite their relatively weak representation in the Knesset vis-à-vis other political parties. Once Likud came to power in 1977, however, Agudat became an active member of its coalition, and therefore funding and educational autonomy for Agudat remained at an all time high.

⁹¹Mizrahi and its separate worker's party, ha-Poel ha-Mizrahi, merged to create a new party called Mafdal in 1963

⁹²Gary S. Schiff. *Tradition and Politics: The Religious Parties of Israel*. Pg. 183.

IV. Secular Israeli Frustration, Current Data, and Conclusions

The relative strength of Agudat's schools, as well as the survival of a broader Haredi educational presence in Israel, has angered the majority of Israelis. Haredi schools are educating an estimated 37% of first graders yet they are being kept alive financially by the Israeli government, a government Haredi schools are teaching their youth to not believe in, listen to, or consider legitimate. Furthermore, more extreme Haredi groups like Netueri Karta are still allowed to have their own educational system, despite the fact their presence is technically illegal. A key part of this anger is the political importance attributed to Agudat. Israel's political system has allowed for small religious parties like Agudat (and Shas, once it was established in 1984) to be necessary in forming coalitions, forcing the two largest political parties in Israel, Labor and Likud, to often give into the demands of the Haredim in return for political favors. Secular Israelis feel the Haredim are holding the Israeli government hostage, and are frustrated by the Israeli government's lax approach to these groups. Moreover, having differing curricula between the Haredi schools and modern Israeli schools puts more pressure on secular Israelis to carry the burden of the state. Secular Israelis are expected to take their modern education, find employment, and work for a living, all of which helps the Israeli economy and Israeli livelihood. Unlike the Haredim, secular Israelis are not paid by the government to receive an education that is intentionally taught to prevent finding a job in Israel's economy. Despite being a demographic majority, secular Israelis over the years have increasingly felt their government is not doing enough for them and doing too much for the Haredim.

Recent economic data for Israel supports secular Israeli frustration. In 2008, Israel's unemployment rate was 19 percent in men ages 35-54, Israel's largest working age group. Contributing to this was a 65 percent unemployment rate among Haredi men. From 1998 to

2009, the number of hours worked weekly by Haredi men ages 35-54 dropped from 42.5 to 37.5, while for secular Israeli men (35-54) it only dropped from 49.3 to 47.6. Haredi women (35-54) maintained the same number of weekly working hours at 29.7 but for secular Israeli women (35-54), their number of weekly working hours increased from 36.8 to 37.8.⁹³ According to a report by the Taub Center for Social Policy Issues in Israel, Ultra-Orthodox children represented one-fifth of all primary school pupils in Israel in 2008-2009, with an increase in their enrollment from 1998-2009 by 51 percent. The report warned, “As this major segment of the population rapidly increases, their ability and willingness to be engaged in a modern competitive society has become a major issue that needs to be reckoned with by Israeli society.”⁹⁴

Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) also has analyzed the effects of the fight over education on the future for Israel’s education system and economy. In 2011, the CBS projected a four percent increase in students enrolled in Haredi primary schools from 2012 to 2016, compared to a three percent increase in students enrolled in Religious-State primary schools and only a one and a half percent increase in students enrolled in the Israeli state primary schools from 2012 to 2016. Further, the CBS projected a 2.2% increase in enrollment in Haredi secondary schools from 2012-2016, compared to a 1.3% increase in Religious-State secondary school enrollment and a 0.1% decrease in Israeli state secondary school enrollment from 2012-2016. Furthermore, the CBS found that during the 2009-2010 school year 5,633 total Ultra-Orthodox youth dropped out of school (grades 7-12), or 5.5% versus a 2.8% dropout rate for youth enrolled in the Religious-State schools (grades 7-12) and a 0.7% dropout rate for youth enrolled in the Israeli state schools (grades 7-12). The most important thing to note in the Ultra-

⁹³“Fewer workers who work more – with a lower standard of living.” *The Taub Center for Social Policy Issues*. Web. May, 31 2011. <http://taubcenter.org.il/index.php/e-bulletin/fewer-workers/lang/en>. June 20, 2012. Pgs 2-3.

⁹⁴“Fewer workers who work more – with a lower standard of living.” *The Taub Center for Social Policy Issues*. Web. May, 31 2011. <http://taubcenter.org.il/index.php/e-bulletin/fewer-workers/lang/en>. June 20, 2012. Pg 3.

Orthodox figure, however, is that of the 5.5% that dropped out, 42.4% enrolled in yeshivot.⁹⁵

Since the Israeli government supports the yeshivot system and is the one Haredi institution that is not subject to any regulations, these pupils that have dropped out are continuing the cycle of being paid to learn not to work. Additionally, more Ultra-Orthodox youth are entering the Israeli education system than secular Israelis, putting more pressure on the Israeli economy, on the secular Israelis, and on the government.

However, there is also some data that suggests some encouraging economic trends and new developments within the Haredi world. In a March 2012 report from the Bank of Israel, analysis of the most current Labor Force Surveys reveal a sharp increase in the employment rate among Haredi men, from about 38 percent in 2009 to about 45 percent in 2011. Part of this increase is due to the number of Ultra-Orthodox men who have acquired a higher education or training that is oriented towards a modern labor market, rising from 2,000 since the mid 2000s to about 6,000 in 2010. The employment rate among Ultra-Orthodox men is still, however, significantly lower than the government's target rate (45% employment vs. targeted 63%).⁹⁶ These results suggest a great change taking place within Haredi culture and the Haredim's role in Israel, something encouraging for the Israeli government and for the secular Israelis. However, all the educational and economic data taken as a whole suggests nothing other than uncertainty. Both the secular Israelis and the Haredim have fought and will continue to fight over the "proper role" Haredi education has in Israeli society, and it is this uncertainty that is helping ignite current tensions between the two groups of Jews.

⁹⁵“Statistical Abstract of Israel (2011): Education.” *Central Bureau of Statistics*. Web. http://www1.cbs.gov.il/reader/shnaton/templ_shnaton_e.html?num_tab=st08_33x&CYear=2011. June 20, 2012.

⁹⁶“Evidence of a rapid increase in the employment rate among ultra-Orthodox men during 2010-11.” *Bank of Israel: Office of the Spokesperson and Economic Information*. March 7 2012. Web. www.bankisrael.gov.il/press/eng/120307/120307h.doc. June 20, 2012: Pgs. 1-2.

Issues of Personal Status: The ultra-Orthodox's greatest weapon against secular Israelis

I. Introduction

The 1947 Status Quo Agreement between Prime Minister David Ben Gurion and Agudat Yisrael had many unintended legacies, but one that continues to divide Israeli society is the ultra-Orthodox's control of issues of personal status. Secular Israelis are bound by the state to submit to the *halakhic* legal interpretation of ultra-Orthodox and Orthodox rabbis on matters of marriage and divorce and Jewish identity. Since 1948, the ultra-Orthodox and Orthodox have held the power to determine, for example, whether an Israeli's marriage or divorce is legal, or whether someone can accurately call themselves Jewish, according to *halakhic* law. Having this type of control has been key to the power and influence of Israel's religious establishment⁹⁷ over secular Israelis. Whereas Haredi education is separated from the rest of Israelis, the latter are legally bound to have their way of life directly affected by a group of Israelis who oppose it in every way. This has angered secular Israelis because they believe their way of life should be ruled according to secular law, not *halakhic* law. Ergo, their anger is also directed at the Israeli government's inability to correct this problem. The question, however, is whether it is the inability or reluctance of the Israeli government to do anything to address the fight over issues of personal status.

II. The Israeli Court System, The Chief Rabbinate, and the Ministry of Interior

To fully understand the conflict over issues of personal status, one needs to know the organization and power of three important Israeli state institutions. The first is the Israeli court

⁹⁷This term refers to those Israelis who identify themselves as "religious" in some way: The ultra-Orthodox, Orthodox, Religious Zionists (National Religious). It is not restricted to the ultra-Orthodox, yet within the religious establishment, they hold most of the power over issues of personal status.

system. Israel has four distinct court systems: civil, religious, military, and labor.⁹⁸ Each has its own style of organization, distribution of legal power, and rules. For example, civil courts have justices who rule according to civil law and rule on criminal issues like murder or assault, whereas religious courts have rabbinical justices who rule according to *halakhic* law on issues like marriage and divorce. This separation helps establish autonomy and power for the religious courts, and helps keep religious control over issues of personal status. The rabbinical court system is composed of twenty district courts and a Supreme Rabbinical Court of Appeal located in Jerusalem. Only appeal on substantive questions can be brought to the Supreme Rabbinical Court of Appeal.⁹⁹ However, there is one civil court that can rule on religious matters: the Israeli Supreme Court. This court functions as both the highest court of appeal for civil cases and the High Court of Justice. Its jurisdiction supersedes lower courts, and it decides whether or not lower courts have acted within their jurisdiction. Yet it becomes the final arbiter in situations where rabbinical court decisions are appealed because rabbinical court decisions can only be appealed “on the grounds of inappropriate jurisdiction or lack of a reasonable opportunity to appeal within the religious court system.”¹⁰⁰ Thus most of the fighting between secular and religious control over issues of personal status takes place in the courts.

Another key Israeli institution is the Chief Rabbinate. It is responsible for the legal development of *halakhah* and for testing and certifying any rabbi who wishes to be a candidate for a *dayan* (city, town, locality) rabbi or a *shochet* (ritual butcher for kosher dietary practice) rabbi.¹⁰¹ The Chief Rabbinate is an elected position. Any political party can run a candidate to serve as part of the Chief Rabbinate. From the mandatory period up to about the 1990s, Mizrahi

⁹⁸For purposes of this research, only civil and religious courts will be examined.

⁹⁹Patricia J. Woods. *Judicial Power and National Politics: Courts and Gender in the Religious-Secular Conflict in Israel*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008: Pg. 35.

¹⁰¹Gary S. Schiff. *Tradition and Politics: The Religious Parties of Israel*. Pg. 157.

(currently the National Religious Party) enjoyed dominant control over this position. Religious Zionists helped institutionalize the position during the mandatory period in order for any future Zionist state to have an official religious presence, and it was validated by the Knesset in 1953.¹⁰² Haredim long refused to run candidates for the position because they were against serving the state in any way, but in the 1970s Haredi rabbis began joining the Rabbinate in increasing numbers. By the 1990s, the majority of the Rabbinate was Haredi.¹⁰³ This has serious implications for most Israelis because having Haredim control the Chief Rabbinate empowers the ultra-Orthodox to certify only Haredi rabbis for state service. These rabbis can choose to serve on Israeli religious courts, whereby the most conservative within the religious establishment decide trial cases involving issues of personal status. They can also serve as *dayan* or *shochet* of areas heavily populated by secular Israelis, subjecting the latter to increased communal restrictions.

The last key Israeli institution is the Ministry of Interior. This branch of the Israeli government works with immigration and population registry. In Israel, any immigrant who comes to live in Israel must register as part of their official identification whether or not he or she is Jewish. It is up to the Ministry of Interior to make an administrative determination as to the validity of one's claim of being Jewish, but it often consults rabbinical courts on determining someone's degree of Judaism. Different groups within the Israeli religious establishment have differing litmus tests to determine one's Jewish identity. Thus if the Haredim are heavily represented in the rabbinical courts, they can have a strong influence over the Ministry of Interior in ruling on someone's Jewish status. This helps bring the Ministry of Interior into the fight between the Haredim and secular Israelis over issues of personal status.

¹⁰²*Ibid*, pg. 153.

¹⁰³Patricia J. Woods. *Judicial Power and National Politics: Courts and Gender in the Religious-Secular Conflict in Israel*. Pg. 79.

III. History

The origins of determining issues of personal status can be traced to the 1947 Status Quo Agreement. Of the many concessions given to the Haredim, control over issues such as marriage and divorce law, and determining one's Jewish status were included. For Zionist state builders like Ben Gurion, issues of family and gender, the heart of family law, were subservient to issues of "high politics" like security and economic issues, and Zionist leaders failed to consider them important enough to have remained within their control.¹⁰⁴ This was a mistake that would keep Israelis more divided than united over time.

Part of the reason why the Haredim joined the state was because of their newfound control over marriage and divorce law, as well as determining Jewish status. Essentially, these two issues are one in the same; they are rooted in the family. In the eyes of the Israeli religious establishment, the greater Jewish community is founded upon a strong Jewish family. This is why marriage, divorce, and conversion are so central; they determine who is and who is not a member of the greater Jewish community. According to *halakhah*, one's Jewish identity is determined through the mother, and thus many restrictions are put on her marriage. For example, if a woman has a child with one man while she is married to another man, her child is considered a *mamzer* (bastard) who cannot marry within the Jewish community or participate in certain rituals. Similar types of restrictions are put on a woman's divorce. For example, women are not allowed to initiate divorces from their husbands and must somehow get their husbands to give them a divorce (a *get*). Furthermore, women who do not receive a *get* are forbidden to establish

¹⁰⁴Patricia J. Woods. *Judicial Power and National Politics: Courts and Gender in the Religious-Secular Conflict in Israel*. Pg. xvi.

relations with another man or start a family.¹⁰⁵ Having control over marriage and divorce law also gives the Haredim the power to determine who is Jewish, according to Jewish religious law.

Yet religious Zionists from Mizrahi were instrumental in helping the Haredim establish and keep control over these issues of personal status. The Haredim faced an internal conflict that Mizrahi Jews did not have to deal with. Incorporating themselves within the Israeli framework internally divided many Haredim because they were supposed to do everything possible to separate themselves from Zionism and modernity. Mizrahi Jews, however, wanted to establish a strong religious presence in Israel. Once Agudat Yisrael left the Knesset in 1952, Mizrahi started fighting for more powers to be given to the religious establishment, including the Haredim. For example, Mizrahi helped pass the Rabbinical Courts (Marriage and Divorce) Law of 1953. The law said: 1) All matters of marriage and divorce of Jews in Israel, whether citizens of the state or its residents, are in the exclusive jurisdiction of the rabbinical courts and 2) Marriage and divorce of Jews will be conducted in Israel according to Torah or *halakhic* law.¹⁰⁶ This not only affected Israeli citizens, but also Jews from around the world that came to visit or live in Israel, or decided to marry in Israel. Moreover, in 1955, Mizrahi helped pass the Dayanim Law, which granted *dayanim* (plural of *dayan*) the same legal status as civil judges, and established the Chief Rabbinate as the sole institution empowered to set the qualifications for the *dayanim*.¹⁰⁷ Civil judges had their qualifications set by state law, not the Chief Rabbinate, and *dayanim* were only bound by the strictures of *halakhah*, whereas civil judges were bound by the strictures of state law. These two laws helped establish autonomy and power for rabbinical courts, enabling the religious establishment to keep legal control over issues of personal status.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, pg. 81.

¹⁰⁶ Gary S. Schiff. *Tradition and Politics: The Religious Parties of Israel*. Pgs. 159-160.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, pg. 160.

After early legal inroads made by Mizrahi, the battle over issues of personal status evolved from being fought in the chambers of the Knesset to being fought in the chambers of the High Court of Justice.¹⁰⁸ The first case to be brought to the High Court of Justice over an issue of personal status was *Rufeisen v. Minister of the Interior*, nicknamed “The Brother Daniel Case.” Oswald Rufeisen, the plaintiff, was contesting the Minister of the Interior’s decision to refuse him Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return.¹⁰⁹ Rufeisen was born to a Polish Jewish family in 1922 and received a Jewish upbringing. In 1942, in the midst of the Holocaust, he hid in a convent and converted to Christianity and in 1945 he became a monk named Brother Daniel. He applied for Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return during the 1950s but the Minister of the Interior refused to grant his request, citing Rufeisen’s Christianity. Rufeisen appealed, claiming he was Jewish according to *halakhic* law. The case went to the High Court of Justice in 1962 where it had to decide how to define the word “Jew” in the Law of Return in order to determine whether or not Rufeisen was Jewish. In its decision, the High Court of Justice agreed with the Interior Minister, explaining “In light of the popular, Jewish meaning of the term ‘Jew,’ a Jew who has converted to Christianity is not called a Jew...[and] does not have the right to call himself by the name ‘Jew.’” The court further wrote in its decision, “Israel is not a theocratic state because it is not religion that orders the lives of its citizens but the law.”¹¹⁰ Rufeisen was thus forced to have the nationality category on his identification card read “nation-less” because he was not a member of the Jewish nation nor was he a member of the Polish nation since he

¹⁰⁸ Although there is a staggering amount of case law dealing with issues of personal status, the only ones that will be examined are those few that have made it to the High Court of Justice.

¹⁰⁹ The Law of Return was passed in 1950 that established the right for any Jewish person in the world to have the right to immigrate to Israel freely. It was meant to serve Zionism’s political goal of bringing back the “exiled” Jew to his ancient homeland and it also served the messianic goal of bringing the Jewish people back to the Holy Land. This encouraged many Jews to immigrate to Israel, but the overwhelming number of immigrants forced the state to start taking measures to legally define “who is a Jew.”

¹¹⁰ “Jewish Religion and Israeli Nationality: The Brother Daniel Case.” *Israel in the Middle East: Documents and readings on society, politics, and foreign relations, pre-1948 to the present*. Eds. Itamar Rabinovich and Jehuda Reinharz. Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2008: Pg. 172.

gave up his Polish status once he decided to become Israeli. The decision made Mizrahi's successor, Mafdal, nervous because the Supreme Court's activism seemed to transfer power of deciding who is a Jew from the rabbinical courts to some popular will used by the Supreme Court.

Following the "Brother Daniel" case was *Benjamin Shalit v. Minister of the Interior*, a case that ignited the anger of not only the religious establishment but also of many Israelis who were less religious. Benjamin Shalit, a native born Israeli Jew, married a non-Jewish woman abroad and returned home, requesting his children be formally registered as Jews under the *le'om* (ethnic or national) category. Mafdal controlled the Interior Ministry at the time and denied his request because Mafdal wanted to make sure a child of mixed marriage was not registered as to its religion or nationality in order to prevent the possibility of his child being identified as Jewish. Shalit appealed the decision and the case went to the High Court of Justice in 1968. In a 5-4 decision, the court ruled Shalit was allowed to register his children as Jews under the *le'om* category but not under the "religion" category.¹¹¹ Unlike the Rufeisen case, here the court ruled that two individuals who were not Jewish in a *halakhic* sense were to be considered Jews at least ethnically. While the court went to extreme lengths to point out its intention was not to detract from the authority of the rabbinical courts to decide questions of personal status, many Orthodox Jews and Israeli citizens felt the court overstepped its bounds.¹¹²

With broad interparty support in the Knesset in 1970, Mafdal acted against the Israeli Supreme Court ruling, helping draft and pass legislation that made the definition of a Jew for purposes of immigration and population registry someone born to a Jewish mother or one who converted, excluding those who have converted to another religion besides Judaism. However,

¹¹¹ Gary S. Schiff. *Tradition and Politics: The Religious Parties of Israel*. Pg. 200.

¹¹² *Ibid*, pg. 200.

the new law did allow non-Jewish family members to enjoy the same citizenship privileges and immigrant status as their Jewish relatives, still excluding Jews who had converted to another religion. This part of the law was included as a compromise within the Knesset between the religious and secular parties.¹¹³ This was seen as a victory for the religious establishment, and this motivated many Haredim to serve as members of a powerful Israeli religious establishment. By the 1990s the Haredim replaced religious Zionists as the largest representative group of the religious establishment in the rabbinate.

At the same time Haredim started coming into the state's fold, there was also a general weakening of the Knesset's ability to effectively negotiate policy over issues of personal status. When Likud came to power in 1977, it persuaded Agudat Yisrael to join its coalition because it did not have an absolute majority in the Knesset. This had a direct impact on the efficacy of the Knesset's attempts to make policy concerning issues of personal status. Out of the forty bills brought to the Knesset in the 1980s and 1990s on the issue of marriage and divorce, only twelve made it even as far as a preliminary reading in the full Knesset. Prior to the 1980s all eight bills concerning marriage and divorce not only made it through a preliminary reading in the full Knesset as well as committee reading, but two also made it back to the Knesset for a vote, and one made it into law.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, after 1977, the ability of the Knesset to even discuss issues of religion and state decreased dramatically. Prior to 1977, 100% of bills introduced in the Knesset on matters of religion and state went through at least the first step in the hearing process; By the 1980s, only 30% made it as far as the first step.¹¹⁵ Moreover, prior to the 1980s, two out of two civil marriage bills were debated and received Knesset attention beyond a preliminary

¹¹³Gary S. Schiff. *Tradition and Politics: The Religious Parties of Israel*. Pg. 201.

¹¹⁴Patricia J. Woods. *Judicial Power and National Politics: Courts and Gender in the Religious-Secular Conflict in Israel*. Pg. 49.

¹¹⁵Patricia J. Woods. *Judicial Power and National Politics: Courts and Gender in the Religious-Secular Conflict in Israel*. Pg. 49.

reading; after 1980, only one out of four bills on civil marriage made it even as far as a preliminary reading.¹¹⁶ Once the Haredim rejoined the Knesset as part of a Likud led coalition, all the religious parties in the Knesset gained the confidence and numerical representation to successfully act against the wishes of secular parties wanting to “threaten” the religious establishment’s control over issues of personal status.

IV. Secular Israelis, The Fight for Jewish Identity, and Conclusions

Today in Israel the religious establishment still holds complete power over determining issues of personal status, and this irks secular Israelis. The latter are angered by the fact they are living in a modern, industrialized nation, yet they are forced to submit to the opinions of a minority of Israelis whose sole purpose is to fight modernity. Secular Israelis feel religion has overstepped its place and is having a negative effect on their lives and on Israel as a whole. Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) surveyed 1.5 million secular Israelis aged twenty and over in 2009 about their attitudes concerning state and religion. According to the survey, 60.6% believe the impact of religion on the state and Israeli society had become stronger in recent years, 77.3% believe there should be a separation between religion and state, 89.8% believe civil marriage ceremonies should be allowed in Israel, and only 34.6% believe the views of religious leaders should be heard in the policy making process.¹¹⁷ In the same survey, about 306,000 Israelis who identify themselves as ultra-Orthodox were asked the same questions. According to the survey, 69.9% believe the impact of religion on the state and society had become stronger in recent years, only 14.3% believed there should be a separation between religion and state, only

¹¹⁶*Ibid*, pg. 53.

¹¹⁷“Statistical Abstract of Israel (2011): Jews Aged 20 and Over, By Attitudes Concerning State and Religion.” *Central Bureau of Statistics*. Web. http://www1.cbs.gov.il/reader/shnaton/templ_shnaton_e.html?num_tab=st07_09x&CYear=2011. June 20, 2012.

3.3% believed civil marriage ceremonies should be allowed in Israel, and 94.9% believed the views of religious leaders should be heard in the policy making process.¹¹⁸

There are certain conclusions to take away from this survey. One, secular Israelis and ultra-Orthodox Israelis are deeply divided over the role religion should play in the state's affairs as well as in society in general. Having control over marriage and divorce laws, and thereby de facto control over determining Jewish identity has pushed these two groups farther away from any type of mutual consensus. Furthermore, the polarization suggested in the survey shows how the Status Quo Agreement of 1947 has left a negative legacy on Israeli society. Ben Gurion and other early Zionist leaders felt the agreement would help unite Israelis more, but it has had the opposite effect.

As recently as June 2012, however, the Israeli government made a historic move and declared it was going to recognize and fund the salaries of Reform and Conservative Rabbis, who have differing, sometimes completely opposite, religious views and interpretations from the Haredim. For example, Reform and Conservative synagogues allow women to be rabbis and read from the Torah. An Orthodox synagogue forbids such activity. More than a hundred ultra-Orthodox rabbis protested the move by the government. Sephardi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar, said, "This is a battle for the soul of the Jewish people."¹¹⁹ What Rabbi Amar said is possibly the most important element of the battle over issues of personal status. The Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox ideal have a different social vision for Israel than secular Israelis have. Whereas the former see an Israeli state ruled completely by *halakhah* as the only way to save and protect the

¹¹⁸“Statistical Abstract of Israel (2011): Jews Aged 20 and Over, By Attitudes Concerning State and Religion.” *Central Bureau of Statistics*. Web.

http://www1.cbs.gov.il/reader/shnaton/templ_shnaton_e.html?num_tab=st07_09x&CYear=2011. June 20, 2012.

¹¹⁹Yair Ettinger. “More than 100 Orthodox leaders protest recognition of Reform, Conservative rabbis.” *Haaretz*. June 26, 2012. Web. <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-news/more-than-100-orthodox-leaders-protest-recognition-of-conservative-reform-rabbis.premium-1.444153>. July 2, 2012.

sanctity of the Jewish people, the latter see an Israeli state governed by a secular rule of law as the only way to protect the civil liberties of a modern democracy's citizens. The Haredim need to retain control of issues of personal status because it helps them fulfill their social and religious mission to correct the wrongs Zionism has brought to Judaism. Enforcing *halakhic* decisions on crucial aspects of secular Israelis' lives is exactly what the Haredim want and intend to continue.

This is a fight “fundamentally about defining the nature of the Jewish community [and] the nature of the Jewish state.”¹²⁰ The Haredim and other Orthodox rabbis see the inclusion of Reform and Conservative rabbis within the state's framework as a threat to their battle for the nature of Israel's identity. While this recent step taken by the Israeli government has made secular Israelis hopeful of actual reform, there is still resistance by the government to completely undermine the rabbinical courts' control of issues of personal status. This is because Israel has still not figured what kind of nation it is: is it a secular democracy or has it increasingly become closer to a theocracy since it was established in 1948? The presence of the ultra-Orthodox and others within the religious establishment help Israel appear more religious than secular Israelis do, and this complicated identity crisis is one in which Israel has yet to figure out how to solve.

¹²⁰Patricia J. Woods. *Judicial Power and National Politics: Courts and Gender in the Religious-Secular Conflict in Israel*. Pg. 76.

Military Service: Israel's Most Current Haredi-Secular Battle that Threatens to Spark a Nationwide Culture War

I. Introduction

The fight over an equitable system of military service has existed since Israel was first established in 1948, but it has recently become such an intense national issue that it threatens to ignite a culture war unlike any Israel has ever experienced. Israel has a mandatory military service draft for all of its citizens, yet the ultra-Orthodox have clung to their original military exemptions from Israel's War for Independence in 1948. Since that time, the number of yeshivot in Israel has increased significantly, contributing to a parallel increase in the number of haredi men applying for exemptions from military service in order to study Torah. Secular Israelis as well as many Israeli government officials have long been angry over Haredi military exemptions because the problem implicates more than just military exemptions. Government subsidies have supported the education, housing, and general way of life for Haredi youth that refuse to serve in the military, which is an issue that the Israeli government has failed to successfully reform since 1948.

However, in February 2012, the Israeli High Court of Justice ruled the Tal Law unconstitutional, meaning it would officially expire July 31, 2012. The Tal Law was a temporary law passed in March 2001, and updated in July 2002, that allowed for the continuation of military exemptions for Haredi youth but under conditions supervised by the IDF. Before the law was set to expire, Shas and United Torah Judaism helped renew the law legislatively for another five years. The ruling placed the burden of figuring out what to do with the Haredi military deferments onto the Knesset. In April 2012, a new coalition government was formed between the revisionist political party Likud and the centrist political party Kadima. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Shaul Mofaz currently lead the parties, respectively. One of the

preconditions to forming the coalition was both parties would work together to draft a new Basic Law that would once and for all end Haredi military deferments by making military service more equitable. Haredi leaders reacted furiously, not only because they were defending their right to not serve in the military, but also because they held no political leverage. Once the new coalition government formed between Likud and Kadima, there was enough support between the two parties that even if Shas and United Torah Judaism threatened to resign from the government, the coalition would still exist. However, the coalition collapsed in July due to strong differences between Mofaz and Netanyahu.

While strictly a domestic Israeli issue, this fight over equitable military service policy in Israel has been analyzed and covered in the world media, and it has revealed that major changes and splits within the Haredi community are taking place over this issue. Often the Haredim have been stereotyped as a monolithic group that refuses to contribute to the growth and development of Israeli society, but further analysis into this conflict is proving this stereotype untrue.

II. Service through Torah study: A History of Haredi Opposition to Enlisting in the Israeli Defense Forces

The crux of Haredi opposition to serving in the Israeli army has been two fold: serving in the military prevents Haredi youth from devoting their time to Torah study, and putting their youth in harm's way in the service of a Zionist state undermines their mission to combat Zionism and modernity. To the Haredim, Torah study is the only true "service" in a Jewish state because Torah study brings the Jews spiritually closer with God, thereby making them observant of God's omnipotent power and better Jews. Consequently, the Haredim believe God will eventually determine when enough Jews have "served" in order to enact their return to the Holy

Land. The Haredim identify most with these religious texts and develop a soulful and spiritual connection to them through their study of Torah.¹²¹ They yearn for the world and the Jewish community to return to pre-modern times. Studying Torah in the yeshivot insulates and protects Haredim from modernity, which is why the Haredim are so insistent on having their youth devote the time that would be required of them to serve in the military to lifetime Torah study. Moreover, the Haredim feel God has given them the responsibility to devote their lives to the Torah in order to save the Jewish people from disaster. The Zionists, however, with their lack of intensive Torah study, are the ones bringing the Jewish people closer to disaster. Essentially Torah study is a defensive mechanism against any modern influence that might penetrate the minds of Haredim.

After 1948, the Haredim continued to use the precedent set by Ben Gurion to apply for exemptions from military service. As the number of yeshivot throughout Israel increased, more Haredim applied for military exemptions in order to devote themselves to Torah study, and when limits were put in place on the exemptions, many Haredim dodged the draft. Once the 1977 elections took place, and Agudat Yisrael joined the Likud led coalition, the number of Haredi military exemptions increased significantly. Likud leader Menachem Begin promised to remove the limit of 800 on the number of exemptions for ultra-Orthodox youth studying in the yeshivot as an enticement for Agudat Yisrael to join the coalition.¹²² When Shas was established in 1984, the political power of the Haredim grew even more, and Haredi political parties collectively forced the Israeli government to allow for the military exemptions to continue and increase. When the Tal Law was up for review in February 2012, the High Court of Justice ruled it

¹²¹It is important to understand, however, that the “The Torah” is not simply the Jewish Bible. It also includes the Pentateuch, Midrash, Talmud, and Zohar, all religious commentary and philosophical writings from Judaism’s greatest religious scholars dating as far back as the “Second Temple Period” (c.a. 3rd century BCE).

¹²²Noah Efron. *Real Jews: Secular Versus Ultra-Orthodox and the Struggle for Jewish Identity in Israel*. Pg. 54.

unconstitutional because legally allowing one sector of the Israeli population to forego the same military service the majority of Israelis are required to do was a violation of the principle of the rule of law. Haredim protested the activism of the court ferociously, but to no avail. After the High Court of Justice's ruling, a national debate erupted in Israel over the Haredim's role in Israeli society.

III. Current Debate

One of the strongest arguments for reform is that continuing to allow Haredim to apply for exemptions from military service places an unfair burden of citizenship on those who do serve. Currently, the Haredim make up about one tenth of Israel's 7.8 million citizens, and 63,000 Haredim received exemptions in order to study Torah in 2010. In 2011, only 15 percent of recruitment-age Haredim enlisted, compared with 75 percent in the rest of the Jewish population.¹²³ Kadima leader Shaul Mofaz called this situation "a moral stain on Israeli society."¹²⁴ Many Israelis feel it is unfair they have to risk their lives for their country when a rebellious, minority sect of the population does not have to fight because they are studying Torah. Interestingly, aside from secular Israelis, many Modern Orthodox or National Religious are angered by the exemptions the Haredim receive from the government. Religious Zionists consider the Torah just as important as the Haredim do, but they balance fighting for Israel and studying the Torah. *The New York Times* even reported in May 2012 "the resentment, even demonization, of Haredim is deep and growing, most profoundly among the...Modern

¹²³Karin Brulliard. "Israel's brewing battle over military service." *LexisNexis Academic*. May 13, 2012. *The Washington Post*. Web. June 13, 2012. Pg. 2.

¹²⁴Karin Brulliard. "Israel's brewing battle over military service." *LexisNexis Academic*. May 13, 2012. *The Washington Post*. Web. June 13, 2012. Pg. 2.

Orthodox.”¹²⁵ Furthermore, when the Haredi political parties refused to nominate any representative to the Plesner committee¹²⁶ to formulate legislative proposals on fixing the military deferment system, many Israelis saw this move as resistance to sharing the burden of other citizens to fix a national problem.¹²⁷ However, military service is not the only form of national service that has been suggested by the secular majority. Others have suggested coming up with another type of national or charitable service that may take the place of military service. Nonetheless, many Israelis want a new law that would require more Haredim to serve the state in some way in order to create an equitable burden of citizenship for everyone.

Another common argument for requiring Haredim to serve in the military is that it will help the Israeli economy. Many Israeli economists have warned about the lifetime Torah study component of the exemptions taken by the Haredim, explaining it has contributed to Haredi poverty and unemployment. Executive Director of the Taub Center for Social Policy Studies David Ben David also warned that the combination of high fertility rates, poverty, and an education system lacking any secular curriculum is dangerous for the future of Israel, and that the exemptions are allowing Haredi youth to continually forego the secular world to stay in the yeshivot. “‘They are going to be the future of our country,’ [David] said. ‘Their skills fit a merchant class of the 19th century.’”¹²⁸ By serving in the army or serving the state in some other way, it is the hope of many Israelis that this will expose Haredi youth enough to the secular world so they will be motivated to pursue a modern education, job, and lifestyle. Doing so would

¹²⁵Jodi Rudoren. “The Fight Over Who Fights in Israel.” *LexisNexis Academic*. May 20, 2012. *The New York Times*. Web. June 13, 2012. Pg. 2.

¹²⁶Knesset committee created after the formation of the Likud-Kadima coalition in May 2012 headed by Kadima MK Yohanan Plesner responsible for drafting proposals on a new Basic Law to replace the Tal Law.

¹²⁷Isi Leibler. “Religion and state at the crossroads.” *LexisNexis Academic*. June 7, 2012. *The Jerusalem Post*. Web. June 13, 2012. Pg. 1.

¹²⁸Karin Brulliard. “Israel’s brewing battle over military service.” *LexisNexis Academic*. May 13, 2012. *The Washington Post*. Web. June 13, 2012. Pg. 3.

improve the Israeli economy, decrease the subsidies given by the Israeli government to support the Haredim financially, and make the Haredim share the responsibility of contributing to the Israeli workforce.

However, there are obstacles to a drafting a new Basic Law to replace the Tal Law. A common argument made by the Haredim against reform of their military service exemptions is that the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) do not want a large influx of Haredim to join the army. Shas party head Eli Yishai said the IDF does not want the haredim in its ranks, even though there are “more and more haredi youth who want to join the army.”¹²⁹ There are two very important things embedded within Yishai’s statement. One is the claim the IDF does not want more Haredim and that is partly true. There are a few Haredim that already serve in the IDF’s Shazar program, which is a special program designed to train Haredi soldiers for combat while allowing them to observe Judaism on military bases, as they would back in their communities. Yet the majority of Haredim stay in full time yeshiva study instead. The IDF welcomes those Haredim that enlist, but drafting the Haredim en masse would be almost impossible. Professor Stuart Cohen Bar-Ilan University has said providing the appropriate gender-segregated facilities, prayer time and strictly kosher rations to the Haredim if a new draft law were made would be “intolerable” to the IDF and too costly.¹³⁰ Yet Yishai is correct when he says more haredi youth do want to serve in the IDF than ever before. In a May 2012 survey of haredi youth on the question of military service, 41% said they would be “very or moderately interested in joining the IDF’s Shazar program for haredi soliders” while 59% said they had little or no interest in doing so. While not in the majority, having over 40% of haredi youth show this level of interest

¹²⁹“Yishai: Military does not want haredi soldiers among its ranks.” *LexisNexis Academic*. May 10, 2012. *The Jerusalem Post*. Web. June 13, 2012. Pg. 1.

¹³⁰Karin Brulliard. “Israel’s brewing battle over military service.” *LexisNexis Academic*. May 13, 2012. *The Washington Post*. Web. June 13, 2012. Pg. 3.

in joining the IDF is shocking, especially when many write off all the Haredim as draft dodgers. Even though the numbers are encouraging, many Israelis still want a written law mandating the Haredim serve the state in some way. As for the IDF's issue with absorbing too many new Haredi soldiers, it makes the Plesner committee's work even more difficult, thus prolonging the debate.

The other obstacle is the resistance many Haredim have to any threat against their full time Torah study privileges. Forcing the Haredim to serve in the military rather than studying Torah is an issue some Haredim will never compromise on, even if the Israeli government requires it. Rabbi Yaakov Litzman of the United Torah Judaism party proclaimed in June 2012, "We will not tolerate a situation in which someone wishing to engage in Torah studies would be denied that option."¹³¹ The editor of the Orthodox weekly magazine *Mishpacha* told *The Times of Israel* in May 2012, "The single, razor-sharp historic truth is that Torah study is the secret of Jewish survival.' Without Torah study, he concluded, 'Israel will just be a Hebrew-speaking Sweden.'"¹³² Many Haredim believe having Torah study is what makes the Jewish people Jewish, what gives Israel any right to call itself a Jewish state. Therefore, this battle over military deferments is complicated by the fact it is also forcing Israel to face an identity crisis. Is it a truly Jewish state or is it a secular democracy populated by many Jews? The Haredim can continue to make threats about if something is done to the deferments, but no one knows exactly how far they will go to fight any future reform, and this uncertainty is very dangerous.

¹³¹Isi Leibler. "Religion and state at the crossroads." *LexisNexis Academic*. June 7, 2012. *The Jerusalem Post*. Web. June 13, 2012. Pg. 1.

¹³²Mitch Ginsburg. "For universal draft lawmakers, a conundrum of Talmudic proportions." *LexisNexis Academic*. May 10, 2012. *The Times of Israel*. Web. June 13, 2012. Pg. 3.

IV. The Fall of the Likud-Kadima Coalition Government and Conclusions

While many Israelis hoped for the successful drafting of a new Basic Law that would start the path to necessary reform of Israel's military service policy, nothing successful came from the Likud-Kadima unity government. In fact, on July 17, 2012, after only 70 days, Kadima's premiere Shaul Mofaz left the government, citing deep personal differences with Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu over a new law and Netanyahu's apparent "alliance" with the ultra-Orthodox.¹³³ Netanyahu had received the support of many Haredi political parties in the past, and Mofaz felt Netanyahu focused on making too many assurances to the Haredim that nothing drastic would be done to the Torah study in Israel with a new law. In short, Mofaz felt Netanyahu was not going far enough to effectively reform the broken system of Haredi military deferments in any negotiations over a new law. It still left, however, Israelis without a solution. The Tal Law did expire on July 31, 2012, and no other attempts at reform have taken place since. The inability of the Israeli government to effectively combat this issue shows how Israel is currently fighting for its own identity, and this fight is caught up in the middle of the historic fight between the Haredim and secular Israelis. All that can be assured from the current situation is a gross level of uncertainty that only continues to plague Israel and its citizens.

¹³³Yossi Verter. "Kadima bolts over draft dispute, shattering coalition after only 70 days." *Haaretz*. July 18, 2012. Web. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/kadima-bolts-over-draft-dispute-shattering-coalition-after-only-70-days-1.451793>. July 18, 2012. Pg. 1.

Conclusion

Israel's Haredim have proven themselves to be a very powerful force in Israeli society. Through the Status Quo Agreement, the Haredim established a power base before Israel was even established. This has helped the Haredim transform into a politically and socially influential group, and they have effectively held the Israeli legal and political systems hostage at the expense of a majority of Israelis. In addition to securing their own educational autonomy, the Haredim have secured a financial safety net thanks to the Israeli government's support of the yeshivot and family allowances. This has allowed the Haredim to educate their youth to perpetuate the same anti-modernity ideology and methods that have angered secular Israelis and rendered the Israeli government ineffective at combating Haredi influence. Moreover, the Haredim still have control over issues of personal status for Israeli society. This is a key part to not only Haredi power but also secular Israeli frustration. The latter want their marriages and Jewish identity to be determined by the state through secular law, not *halakhic* law. Until the Israeli government can find a way to fix this problem, Israeli society will be ruled by two separate and opposing legal systems. Lastly, the current inability of the Israeli government to draft a replacement law for the Tal Law prolongs Haredi military deferments and thus more time in the yeshivot.

Essentially what makes this conflict so difficult to resolve is because it forces Israelis to think about what being Jewish and Israeli means in a modern world. Traditional Judaism taught for generations Jews were the "chosen" people. This viewpoint is also echoed throughout the Torah. They were protected by God and had a unique ancestry, tradition, and culture. Their lives were connected to a Biblical people through the Jewish religion. While this empowered them as a collective people, it often became the source of their persecution. Those Jews living in the Pale

of Settlement suffered for identifying with a religion that was naturally passed down to them by their ancestors. Choosing whether or not to be Jewish was out of the question; it was a fact of life. Zionists, however, believed otherwise. They sought to correct anti-Semitism by removing the “Jew” from Judaism and attaching the “Jew” to the nation state. Zionism embraced modernity and wanted to normalize Jews by having them establish a state to call their own. The state was to replace Judaism as the primary collective identity for Jews.

Yet Zionism helped establish a Jewish state. Israel became the national home for Jews. There is an inherent problem in this situation because it combines two different and opposing identities. Judaism is a religion, not a nationalist ideology, and Zionism was a socialist, nationalist movement. The latter transformed Judaism into a religious-nationalist movement. To be Israeli meant identifying oneself simultaneously as Jewish and Israeli. Zionists realized preserving some aspect of Judaism within its ideology attracted more Jews and gave it more strength. After the Holocaust, calling for a Jewish state won the sympathy of many non-Jewish nations. The Haredim, however, were sickened by Zionism’s use of Judaism to fulfill its nationalist aspirations. It was seen as a corruption of Judaism and an act of defiance towards God. The Haredim had no intention of becoming Israeli citizens and did all they could to prevent the establishment of Israel.

Even though the Haredim acted as Zionism’s greatest enemy, they represented a truly Jewish existence. They were the survivors of a chapter in Jewish history that was wiped out with the Holocaust. David Ben Gurion realized this about the Haredim and offered for them to become Israeli citizens by offering them the right to live independently of the mainstream culture. This could be seen as Zionism’s “peace offering” to traditional Judaism, but the latter

had no intention of making peace. In fact, such an offer by Zionists motivated many Haredim to stop passively resisting Zionism and instead attack Zionism by making the state more religious.

This is the core of the fight that currently exists in Israel. The Haredim have acted as a constant reminder to Israelis that Judaism cannot simply be watered down to fit within the Zionist narrative. Israelis have acted as a constant reminder to Haredim that Judaism is changing and is able to exist within a modern democracy. Both groups want Judaism to go in their respective directions, and despite the fact Zionism succeeded at creating a modern Jewish state, Judaism is stuck between two different historical periods. Israel can never be completely modern if the Haredim continue to have such a powerful degree of influence, but Israel can also never be completely Jewish without the Haredim. The Israeli government is trying to figure out how to strike the right balance between secularism but with great difficulty. It has been too afraid to open up its own “Pandora’s Box” and actively decide what direction Israel and Judaism should take, but the reality is this box has just opened.

Tensions between secular Israelis and the Haredim are at an all time high, but the future of this conflict is full of uncertainty. No accurate predication can be made as to the status of Haredi-secular relations Israel. There are current signs of both sides simultaneously gaining and losing. For example, a big loss for the Haredim was the recent death of Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, the great sage of the Lithuanian (non-Hasidic) Haredi community. Among the Haredim, this group has been one of the strongest in the fight against modernity. Elyashiv’s death has left this community with a great leadership vacuum, threatening to divide it between rival rabbinical factions in Bnei Brak and Jerusalem.¹³⁴ This has also raised questions about whether potential democratization can take place within the Haredi world in terms of how it

¹³⁴Yair Ettinger. “Rabbi Elyashiv, venerated leader in ultra-Orthodox community, dies at 102.” *Haaretz*. July 18, 2012. Web. <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-news/rabbi-elyashiv-venerated-leader-in-ultra-orthodox-community-dies-at-102-1.451991>. July 18, 2012. Pg. 1.

chooses its leaders and its education style, but those close to the late Elyashiv were reported to have said, ““No new Haredi ideological trend will arise...unless there is some sort of revolt.””¹³⁵ Yet it is possible this revolt is already taking place as shown by the younger generation of Haredim showing interest in serving in the IDF and in taking jobs in the Israeli economy. However, the recent inability for the Israeli government to draft a new military service law shows the Haredim still are important members of Israeli society. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu’s friendliness towards Haredi politicians is what apparently drove Kadima leader Shaul Mofaz away from the government. Furthermore, Netanyahu as well as other Israeli politicians have very recently consulted Rabbi Ovadia Yossef, the chief rabbi of the Shas party, on what the Israeli government should do regarding a strike against Iran.¹³⁶ These actions suggest a visible religious presence in Israel is still desired, despite the majority of the Israeli population feeling otherwise.

Questioning what Israel is is also forcing Israelis to question who they are as well. They are thinking about whether or not they identify as Jews first and Israelis second, or vice versa. This is a very sensitive subject to many, but it is one that Judaism has yet to solve since Israel was established. One thing is for certain, however, and that is the Haredim are growing and are here to stay. What that means for Israel only time will tell, but the important thing to understand is this is not a nation completely unified, but rather teetering on thin ice. Israel now needs to figure out what kind of state it will become.

¹³⁵Yair Ettinger. “Rabbi Elyashiv, venerated leader in ultra-Orthodox community, dies at 102.” *Haaretz*. July 18, 2012. Web. <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-news/rabbi-elyashiv-venerated-leader-in-ultra-orthodox-community-dies-at-102-1.451991>. July 18, 2012. Pg. 2.

¹³⁶Yair Ettinger and Barak Ravid. “Israeli defense officials consult with Rabbi Ovadia Yossef over Iran strike.” *Haaretz*. August 21, 2012. Web. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/israeli-defense-officials-consult-with-rabbi-ovadia-yosef-over-iran-strike.premium-1.459547>. August 23, 2012. Pg. 1.

Appendix

Part I – Basic Terms

Ashkenazi/Ashkenazim – Refers to those Jews who are historically from Eastern Europe; These Jews were directly affected by Europe’s industrial revolution, they lived in the *shtetl*, spoke Yiddish, and were the founders of Zionism. Ethnically, they were those Jews who suffered the most casualties during the Holocaust. Since Israel’s establishment in 1948, these Jews have enjoyed more privileges and opportunities in Israeli society than Sephardic Jews.

Halakhah – Usually translated as “Jewish law,” it literally means “the path that one walks;” This is a traditional Jewish legal system connected to the Torah that dictates every aspect of an observant Jew’s life: what you do when you wake up in the morning, what you can and cannot eat, what you can and cannot wear, how to groom yourself, how to conduct business, who you can marry, how to observe the holidays and Shabbat, how to treat God, other people, and animals.

Haskalah - Otherwise known as the “Jewish Enlightenment,” this event took place in the latter half of the nineteenth century in Europe; it was a movement led by assimilating Jews who adapted modern education and a modern way of life to help modernize Judaism. The Haredim look disdainfully on this culture movement as the impetus for Zionism’s conception.

Hasidim - Began as a movement in second half of the eighteenth century in southeastern Poland as a kind of folk religion based on feeling, piety, and human attachments. They embrace the principles set forth in the early eighteenth century by its founders Israel ben Eliezer (“Baal Shem Tov” of Podolia) and Dov-Baer (“the Great *Maggid*” from Volhynia); These essential principles asserted that rigorous learning in yeshivot and rigorous formalistic observance is not true piety. True piety is uniting the soul with prayer. They maintain a belief in the special power of the individual’s spiritual connection with God, and such a connection is exemplified in their religious leader, the *rebbe*, who is considered a *tsaddik* or perfectly righteous man, and is an intercessor with God. The *tsaddik* is part of a prophetic lineage going back to the patriarchs of Judaism and Moses and he can work miracles, marking both a return to the past and paving the way towards the future with a new kind of a-legalistic Judaism; Their religious opponents are the Misnagdim/Mitnagdim.

Heder/hadarim – Private Jewish elementary school where kids are taught the Bible and the fundamentals of the Jewish religion

Misnagdim/Mitnagdim - Literally means “opponents,” in this case opponents to the Hasidim. These Jews are an elite of sorts, believing Judaism is solely based on knowledge and scholarly qualities. These Jews come mainly from Lithuania, and they see the Hasidim as people who discourage the study of the Talmud since the Hasidim make their own emendations and deletions to a tradition the Mitnagdim believe is subject only to rabbinic interpretations.

Law of Return – A law passed in 1950 that established the right for any Jewish person in the world to have the right to immigrate to Israel freely. It was meant to serve Zionism’s political goal of bringing back the “exiled” Jew to his ancient homeland and it also served the messianic goal of bringing the Jewish people back to the Holy Land. This encouraged many Jews to immigrate to Israel, but the overwhelming amount of immigrants forced the state to start taking measures to legally define “who is a Jew.”

Sephardic/Sephardim – Name given to those Jews who originated in Spain. It has become common, however, to use this term to refer to any Jew that is not Ashkenazi. Therefore, those Jews of Middle Eastern origin started being called Sephardim because they observe the same traditions as those Jews from Spain. These Jews are heavily discriminated against in Israeli society by Ashkenazim and are treated as second class citizens because they are perceived as inferior Jews who did not share the same history, intellect, or tradition as the Ashkenazim. The Shas party represents the Sephardic Haredim in the Israeli government.

Torah – For most Jews, this is their holiest text containing the five books of Moses, but for the Haredim it is the “soul” of their existence. The Haredim include the Pentateuch, Midrash, Talmud, and Zohar when referring to the Torah, all religious commentary and philosophical writings from Judaism’s greatest religious scholars dating as far back as pre-medieval times. The Haredim identify most with these religious texts and have developed a spiritual connection to them. Whereas a modern, secular Jew would identify more closely with Israel, the Haredim identify with the Torah. It embodies what it truly means to be a Jewish person, and helps set the Jewish community apart from non-Jewish ones.

Part II – Important Groups

Agudat Yisrael

Agudat Yisrael is a world Haredi organization formed in May 1912 in Kattowice, Poland as a reaction to not only Zionism but also to those Jews within Mizrahi who agreed to cooperate with the Zionists in establishing a Zionist state. It has branches in Israel, London, and New York, and its ethnic makeup comes largely from Poland, Germany, Russia, Lithuania, and Hungary. It acted as the Haredim’s chief representative force from the Palestinian Mandate to about the 1980s, until Shas replaced Agudat as the dominant Haredi political party.

Agudat’s organizational structure helps set it apart ideologically from other non-Haredi Israeli parties. Central authority and power is located within its supreme rabbinical body known as the “Council of Torah Greats” or *Mo’etzet Gedolai ha Torah*. These rabbis serve Agudat’s world organization as a whole, not one particular regional branch. They have key powers within the organization like having the ability to decide whether or not the Israeli branch of Agudat Yisrael will join or reject a coalition offer from other parties in the Israeli government. Every regional branch has representatives in Agudat’s legislative body known as the World Actions Committee (WAC) and in its executive body known as the World Executive. Agudat as a movement has never focused only on Israel. It has been just as concerned with the status and welfare of world

Orthodox Jewry. Yet the Israeli delegation in the World Actions Committee is the largest and most powerful.

Within the Israeli branch of Agudat, there are many different factions. The two strongest are the Polish Central faction and the Hungarian-Romanian faction, both of which are ideological opponents. The Polish faction is more moderate in its views whereas the Hungarian-Romanian faction is more conservative. Agudat does have a Sephardic faction, and has ever since it started competing for Sephardic votes in the 1950s. The majority within this faction are Yemenites. The Jerusalem Faction is composed of those descendants of the Old Yishuv that have remained in Jerusalem but have not left to join the Neturei Karta. Agudat's most militant factions are the *Tze'irei Agudat Yisrael* or "Youth" faction and the *B'nei Torah* (Sons of Torah) faction. The former has a history of special militancy and were the most vocal in arguing for exclusive recognition of Orthodox conversions in defining someone's Jewish status. As for the *B'nei Torah* faction, it is Agudat's smallest faction and is the only faction has not received a seat in the Knesset when Agudat has been in power. It is composed largely of yeshiva students.

Mizrahi

The word "Mizrahi" literally means "Eastern" in Hebrew and is also a term for Jews of Middle Eastern origin, even though these Jews have become popularly known as Sephardim. In the context of the conflict between orthodox and secular Judaism, this term refers to those Jews who agreed to work with the Zionists after the tenth Zionist Congress in 1911, when it was established that the Zionists would respect the major tenets of Judaism while Zionists controlled the cultural framework of a future state. Within the Orthodox strain, these Jews are known as the Modern Orthodox because unlike the Haredim, they continue to actively work with modernity while still living a strictly orthodox Jewish lifestyle.

Mizrahi Jews believe the Torah should be used as a tool to transform all of Israeli society, including the secular Jews. While this sounds similar to the Haredim's mission, Mizrahi Jews embrace the emerging social ideals of modernity as well as the religious ideals of the Torah in order to make Zionism truly Jewish. Mizrahi Jews do not see Zionism as the enemy, but they do seek to make Zionism more religious. They formed a political party with the same name once Israel was established and have successfully established key religious institutions in Israel, including the Chief Rabbinate and the religious courts.

Neturei Karta

This group is an iconic Haredi sub-group for its characteristically strong resistance to Zionism and modernity, and its militancy. It does not believe in the legitimacy of the Israeli state, refuses to have its members become official citizens, and yet they live within Israel's borders. Founded in 1935 by former Agudat Yisrael members Moshe and Amram Blau, this group's name is an Aramaic phrase meaning "Guardians of the Wall." It has attracted many young, militant Haredi youth for its stern determination to live a truly separatist lifestyle. Jews belonging to this group are largely self sufficient unlike other Haredi groups, and they refuse to participate in politics.

Historically the Neturei Karta (NK) did everything it could to prevent the establishment of Israel. When it looked inevitable that Palestine would become a Jewish state around 1947-48, the Neturei Karta sent ambassadors around the world to lobby against the creation of Israel and traveled to the United Nations to demand that Jerusalem be internationalized. From about 1950-1954, this group became notorious among secular Israelis for leading what has been called the “Sabbath riots.” These demonstrations argued for the cessation of all traffic in neighborhoods heavily populated by the Neturei Karta from sundown Friday to sundown Sunday, and they often involved NK members throwing stones at commuters on the Sabbath. Many secular Israelis complained that the NK located themselves right next to their communities and still expected no traffic to take place. It was only until the NK forced secular Israelis to give up on the traffic issue that the riots stopped. Israelis witnessed a new era of militancy, however, from the NK during the 1980s, when many secular Israeli archaeologists started conducting Biblical excavations to see if the events in the Old Testament were fact or fiction. The NK would try and prevent the excavation from taking place through either stone throwing or refusing to move from the site because they argued such activity was desecrating holy land and thus God.

Despite their militancy, the NK has always been more important to the Haredim as a symbol rather than a political force. Their protests remind other Haredim as well as secular Israelis that Haredi militancy is real and can be successful. Even though the NK represent a minority of Haredim, secular Israelis have increasingly stereotyped all Haredim as being just as militant and rejectionist, a key factor in the polarization between secular Israelis and Haredim.

Po’alei Agudat Yisrael (PAY)

This group was a branch of Agudat Yisrael aiming to represent and protect the economic interests of Agudat’s members. Once Agudat Yisrael moved its center of activity to the Palestinian Mandate, PAY established a Palestinian branch in 1923. When a large amount of German and Polish immigrants came to Palestine in the 1930s, and when Agudat Yisrael started taking a more moderate stance toward the Zionists, PAY increasingly grew in membership and started gaining more independence from its parent body. Soon it became more of an autonomous labor organization and its activity started to look very similar to Zionist pioneering activity. The heads of Agudat Yisrael looked with extreme reserve on this new development from PAY but still kept a working relationship.

When the first Israeli Knesset formed in 1949, PAY wanted to exist as a separate political party from Agudat Yisrael in the larger United Religious Front because it came to resent Agudat’s negative outlook on its labor activity. Over the years, PAY has not chosen a definitive stance toward its relationship with Agudat. However, when other Haredi parties became more powerful in the 1980s like Shas and United Torah Judaism, PAY merged back with Agudat as a single political party.

Satmar

The Satmar is a Hasidic sect originating in Hungary, the center of ultra-Orthodox Judaism. It was founded by Grand Rebbe Yoel Tietelbaum in the early 1950s. Unlike the other Haredim observed in this project, the Satmar's largest communities are located in the United States, more specifically the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn and Kiryas Joel, New York. They live the ideal Haredi lifestyle. They refuse to speak any language other than Yiddish, separate themselves from modern culture, and are intensely anti-Zionist. They are often confused with the Neturei Karta. In fact, their anti-Zionism is what makes them unique compared to other Israeli Haredi groups. The Satmar do not live in a Zionist state, but act with more anti-Zionist intensity than other Israeli Haredim. They are known for taking out full-page anti-Zionist ads in the *New York Times*, and are currently at the center of a debate over circumcision with the New York City Department of health.

Shas

Shas was founded in 1984 as a Haredi political party representing the Sephardic Haredim. Its ideological and political ambitions are similar to Ashkenazi political parties like Agudat Yisrael in that it has an all-Israeli all-Jewish calling in order to make all Israelis "truly" Jewish. However, Agudat Yisrael was not founded to only serve Ashkenazi Haredim, even though Ashkenazim are the majority of its members. Shas' creation was more ethnically based, a response to the discrimination Sephardic Haredim were receiving from the Ashkenazim. Its leader, Rabbi Ovadia Yossef, wants Shas to restore the Sephardim to their former glory. He argues that Sephardic culture was predominant among Jews living in the Holy Land (Palestine) for hundreds of years and thus justifies it as the only "true" variant of Judaism fit for Israel. Shas actively seeks out congregations of Middle Eastern Jews to spread its political and religious message. Yet support for Shas among Middle Eastern Jews is not unanimous. Moroccan, Yemenite, and Kurdish Jews have their own religious rites and ideology they do not feel should be secondary to Shas's. Since its entrance into Knesset politics, Shas has not only remained the most powerful Haredi political party, but it has also helped increase the representation of other religious parties.

United Torah Judaism (UTJ)

UTJ was founded in 1992 thanks to the merger of Agudat Yisrael and the Degel Ha Torah party. Its creation was more politically than ideologically based because both parties realized they would have a better chance for more representation if they united into one party. In 2004 the party split over differences in coalition formation but reunited in 2006 and has remained the collective party for Ashkenazi Haredim. Shas often votes with UTJ because both parties have similar needs and interests within the state. Both parties are currently the most resistant to a new Israeli military service law.

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