

Religious Zionism in Israel Today: Toward the Center

One ongoing topic of political and social discussion in Israel today is the changing character of leadership, or of the "elites." This change is thought to occur in regard to both the governing elites and the leadership in other crucial spheres, such as the military and the media. To the extent that this change is occurring it is consequential because it will be bound up with changes in policy, and in behavior and substance. In this chapter we will focus upon one population sector involved in these processes – the Religious Zionist sector*. This sector, for the most part, carries its own approach to Zionism and Jewish nationalism, and, as we shall see, is eager to exercise moral and political influence and leadership.

As commonly defined, the Religious Zionist community constitutes about 10-12 percent of the population¹, however, according to a recent survey, this community comprises about one fifth of the Jewish population.²

Despite its small size, the Religious Zionist

community has an outsized impact on Israeli public life. It has spearheaded the movement to settle Judea and Samaria (that is, the occupied territories of the West Bank), and today its members make up a very sizable portion of the IDF's officer corps (in combat units they make up over a third of the officers). Moreover, in the current government they control three ministries, two of which have an important impact on general Israeli public life – the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Justice. Just as important, for the first time in the history of the state, three of the most senior positions in the security and defense establishment – Head of the Mossad, Head of General Security Service (Shin Bet), and Chief of Police are held by people who were raised in the Religious Zionist community.

Religious Zionism arose and developed as an attempt to integrate Orthodox Judaism and modern nationalism. Within this framework, Religious Zionists view the flourishing of the Jewish

people, the State of Israel, and the control and settlement of the Land of Israel as essential parts of the religious way of life they are committed to.

The first development is the increased crystallization of the drive to have an impact upon, and even lead, the political, cultural, and moral life of Israel. Religious Zionism constitutes an alternative, integral formulation of Jewish nationalism, which is different from, and even opposed to, liberal formulations insofar as it tends to give priority to collective belonging and collective goals over individual goals, needs, and ambitions. Religious Zionist moral and political leadership would aim to strengthen the Jewish nationalist character of the State of Israel and its attachment to the Greater Land of Israel. Currently, the Religious Zionist community aims to exercise this leadership through its prominence in the military, through its control of the Education and Justice Ministries and the policies and legislation they initiate and implement, and through grass roots efforts at education and local communal leadership.

In addition to the attempt at leadership implemented through the Jewish Home Party and organizations fully identified with the Religious Zionist sector, the Religious Zionist public also attempts to exercise leadership through the ruling Likud Party.

A second development is that there has been a reduction in religiosity among part of the Religious Zionist public. While this development has only fully affected part of the community, it has had a good deal of public visibility and discussion. It is

noteworthy because it partially reverses the trend that has characterized Religious Zionism for the past generation or so.

As Religious Zionism presents a public image that is less sectarian and stringently religious, its integral nationalist agenda and nationalist leadership can become more generally acceptable. This trend also finds expression in the attempt to appoint non-observant representatives of the Jewish Home Party to the Knesset and the Government.

Part I - The Drive Toward Political and Moral Leadership

The drive toward moral and political leadership is a long-term trend in Religious Zionism and essentially grows out of the fundamental identity dilemma that characterizes this sector. This dilemma derives from the confrontation of traditional Orthodox Jews with modern Jewish nationalism as the organizing principle of Jewish life. Those groups that carried the Jewish religion as the organizing principle of Jewish life can react to this challenge in one of the following ways:

One can oppose and reject modern Jewish nationalism.

One can assign to it a limited instrumental meaning and thereby attempt to enable it to coexist with traditional Judaism.

One can attempt to effect an integration and unification of religion and modern nationalism. It should be stressed that this is not a return to the traditional conflation of religion and peoplehood (though its proponents sometimes want to

present it as such), but an attempt to integrate religion with the ideas of modern nationalism and its institutional structures such as the modern nation-state.

The response of Religious Zionism has been to integrate and unify traditional Orthodox Judaism with modern nationalism. This attempt at integration has been gradual and long term. In the first stage, the Religious Zionist implemented the unification of religion and nationalism at the local and communal level – especially in Religious Zionist *kibbutzim* and *moshavim*. It was only in the late 1950s that they started to think about implementing it on the state-wide political level as well, with the emergence of “the generation of the state,” who were organized into the Young Mizrahi Faction within the National Religious Party. This generation was socialized after the creation of the state in 1948 with the state educational system and the IDF playing decisive roles. In the late 1950s, the Young Mizrahi faction began to think about Religious Zionism not as minor partner to Mapai, which politically and ideologically led the Israeli state and society, but as an alternative to Mapai (or part of an alternative) with a different political and ideological vision, one that married religion and nationalism.³ The contemporary Jewish Home Party and its leadership continue this attempt to unify religion and nationalism.

This association with nationalism has resulted in a transformed Jewish theology. At the center of this theology stands the ascription of religious meaning to material, secular, pursuits and activities. Especially those constitutive of nation-

building, such as politics, settlement, defense and economic and cultural production.⁴

The most definitive expression, of this initial drive to morally and politically lead the entire state of Israel was the project of the incorporation and settlement of the Greater Land of Israel. Though the Religious Zionist community provided the most active elements in this project and elaborated its ideological formulation, it did not conceive of it as a project of the Religious Zionist sector alone. On the contrary, they conceived of it as expressing the inner, general will of the entire nation. With the accession of the Likud government in 1977, the settlement of the Greater Land of Israel became official government policy.

The Disengagement from Gaza and the Face-to-Face Project

Despite this ambition to influence national life and policy, and to exercise moral and political leadership, the National Religious sector was also characterized by other, contrasting tendencies. These tendencies, which attracted a great deal of media and academic attention, consisted of strengthening the religious commitments and behaviors of the Religious Zionist public and adopting a more secluded and sectarian lifestyle. These behaviors stemmed from an outlook that was basically dialectical: The more the Religious Zionist public purified itself in terms of its religious national lifestyle, the more salutary would its impact be on the general Israeli public. Ultimately, it envisioned a higher synthesis of religion and nationalism in which both the religious and

national components would be strong. Nevertheless, in day-to-day life, some members of Religious Zionist community participated in a life style that was removed from the general Jewish-Israeli one, including living in exclusively national religious settlements and neighborhoods and enrolling their children in the separate National Religious educational system.

Members of the national religious public began to question this approach in the 1990s with the advent of the Oslo Accords, and, more generally, the rise and strengthening of the "liberal citizenship discourse"

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– and even more so in the wake of the Gaza disengagement. This new turn was signaled by a famous article by R. Yoel Bin-Nun, entitled "We Have not Succeeded in Settling in the Hearts."⁵ Bin-Nun argued that even though the West Bank settlement enterprise

was a success in terms of "facts on the ground" – settlements and houses built, the Religious Zionist public had not succeeded in properly explaining itself and its ideology to the general Israeli public and winning them over. The Religious Zionist community thus embarked upon and strengthened initiatives that would bring their message to the broader Israeli public, especially the public living in the secular Israeli "heartland," of Tel Aviv and Gush Dan. Thus, it dispatched groups (*garinim* – seeds) to do ideological and educational work in Israeli cities. There are about 60 *garinim* operating today.

The fact that the Religious Zionist public found itself basically alone in its struggle against the government ordered dismantling of 17 settlements and the evacuation of more than 8500 people in the 2005 disengagement from Gaza very much reinforced the idea that its settlement policy and outlook had not "settled in the hearts" of the Israeli public. Thus, in the wake of the disengagement the idea of becoming more engaged with general Israeli society, more part of it, gained momentum. One aspect of this is gradual trend of integration into, and participation in, Israeli electronic media and arts. Along with the attempt to have a direct impact, Religious Zionists felt that if the general Israeli body politic accepted the Religious Zionist public as a legitimate part of itself, it would be more open to its concerns and interests.

Integral Nationalism

The mainstream of Religious Zionist thought today views the goal of the return to Zion and the establishment of the Jewish state not primarily as a response to anti-Semitism and persecution but as the realization of religious and divine ideals. Furthermore, it is the vocation of the Jewish state to realize divine ideals in its institutions and public life. Ultimately, Religious Zionists believe this realization will have both a utopian and restorative character (e.g. the rebuilding of the Temple). These utopian and restorative aspirations give contemporary Religious Zionism its "messianic" or redemptive character. The national restoration of the Jewish people as well as the political incorporation and settlement of the

Greater Land of Israel are intrinsic and important parts of this redemptive realization of divine ideals. In this context, Religious Zionists regard the Jewish nation and the Land of Israel as organic entities with a corporate life of their own, and not as aggregations of contracting individuals or infinitely dividable fragments of land.⁶

Of course, the vast majority of Religious Zionists are not theologians. Nevertheless, these underlying theological premises inform their thought on more mundane issues, especially those that concern national identity, citizenship, minority rights, democracy, and politics. As it conceives of the nation in organic, corporatist terms, it demands that the individual identify with the national collective and put him/herself at its service. Contemporary Religious Zionism does support democracy in the sense of a government that expresses the will of the people, and is based upon its consent. However, the "people" does not consist of atomistic individuals who through the social contract form a political body, but rather of the corporate nation of Israel, which is a historical, cultural, religious and even metaphysical entity.⁷ According to the regnant Religious Zionist ideology, the true inner will of the nation is in fact the will of God. From these basic, theological, ideological and political premises, Religious Zionists and their representatives tend to formulate their stands on practical, concrete, and quotidian public and political issues.

The Historical Antecedents for the Contemporary Jewish Home Party

The Jewish Home party differs from its immediate ancestor, the National Religious Party (NRP), in that it includes avowedly secular members in its leadership. The number two person in the party, Minister of Justice Ayelet Shaked, is a secular woman. Yinon Magal, a secular journalist, represented the party as a Knesset member (until his resignation in December 2015). Although these secular representatives probably do not fully subscribe to the theological assumptions described above, they do affirm the nationalist outlook of the party and the notion of the Jewish people as a historical nation with historical claims on the Greater Land of Israel. They also tend to emphasize the Jewish identity of the State of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people.

This is not the first time Religious Zionist leadership has joined forces with secular rightwing elements. In 1979, Geula Cohen and Moshe Shamir founded the Techiyya (Renaissance) party which combined Religious Zionists, such as Hanan Porat and R. Eliezer Waldman, with rightwing secular leaders, such as Ms. Cohen and Prof. Yuval Neeman. This

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partnership between extremely Orthodox rightwing figures and rightwing secular leaders continued in the successor to the Techiyya party – The National Unity list that included R. Benny Alon (on the Religious Zionist side) and Dr. Aryeh Eldad (on the secular nationalist side).

Thus, in order to fully understand the contemporary Jewish Home Party we should compare it to both of its predecessors. The NRP viewed itself, in large part, as a sectorial party. In addition to securing the settlement of the Greater Land of Israel it also sought to obtain funds and other resources for the ongoing special needs of the Orthodox Religious Zionist community – schools, synagogues, ritual baths etc. In contrast to this, the Techiya/National Unity Party tended to want to give pure expression to the general will (*volonté générale*) in regard to the incorporation of the Greater Land of Israel.

In contrast to both its predecessors, the Bennett/Shaked wing of the Jewish Home Party tends to present a much more comprehensive integral nationalist agenda – touching upon citizenship and civics education, the national identity of the state and civil society. Furthermore, unlike the rabbis who headed Techiya, they tend to portray themselves as being much more "with it" and in touch with contemporary Israeli culture. Bennett stresses in his self-presentation his background as a successful hi-tech entrepreneur, and Shaked presents herself as a young and stylish Tel Aviv woman (as does Bennett's wife, Gilat, though she is more suburban).⁸ Their message is that their integral nationalist approach is a relevant alternative for contemporary Israeli society

and goes well with contemporary capitalist and consumerist culture.

Religious Zionists in the Likud

Religious Zionist political leadership is not confined to the Jewish Home Party. Several of the more prominent Likud leaders are Religious Zionists and promote a Religious Zionist agenda. This identification has been reciprocated by the Religious Zionist voting public. In the last elections, held in March 2014, four parliamentary mandates moved from the Jewish Home Party to the Likud.

While the Likud always contained Orthodox members, in the last 20 or so years, self-conscious Religious Zionists started to join Likud with the explicit purpose of influencing (and even taking control of) its ideology and policy. The first, vanguard example of this was Moshe Faiglin, a far right settlement activist. Although Faiglin was elected as a Likud MK, his challenges to Netanyahu for the leadership of the party were successively defeated.

Despite Faiglin's defeat and eventual departure, the idea of joining and influencing Likud began to take hold in the settlements, and substantial numbers of settlers joined the party. While many of these new members did not, at first, vote for Likud,⁹ the increased Religious Zionist presence made itself felt among the leadership. Thus, one Likud minister, and an important member of its leadership, Ze'ev Elkin (Minister of Jerusalem and Heritage) is an avowed Religious Zionist and settler; the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs,

Tzipi Hotovely is also a Religious Zionist, as is the Knesset's Speaker, Yuli Edelstein. Some of the people closest to Prime Minister Netanyahu are also Religious Zionists, namely Natan Eshel, Rami Sadan, and Shlomo Filber. The latter two hold important bureaucratic positions – Chairman of the News Corporation of Channel 10 and Director General of the Communications Ministry. In the last election, Filber and Hotovely were in charge of the Likud election headquarters in Judea and Samaria.

At the same time that Religious Zionists gained prominence in Likud, Likud leaders who were identified as secular and liberal were removed from leadership positions, and even from the party. These include the President of the State of Israel, Ruvi Rivlin (who was elected President against the will of Prime Minister Netanyahu), Dan Meridor, and Michael Eitan. The prominence of Religious Zionists in the current government, and in Likud, points to the fact that more than any previous government, the current government does not give pride of place to secular figures, but rather to those groups that did not fully accept the change in Jewish identity the Zionist revolution attempted to effect.¹⁰ These include Haredim, National Religious, and Masorati elements (such as Minister of Culture and Sport Miri Regev).¹¹

Jewish Home control of the Ministries of Education and Justice

Since the last election (16 months or so), Jewish Home Party Ministers Bennett and Shaked together with Ze'ev Elkin from Likud have implemented new initiatives and programs designed to strengthen the Jewish nationalist character of the Israeli society. Bennett has enacted changes in two main areas. The first is "Israeli-Jewish Culture." Here Bennett built upon a long-standing tendency, especially in the general state schools, to provide some Jewish identity education. He expanded the Israeli-Jewish Culture program to include all grades from first through ninth. The introduction to the curriculum includes the following:

"The curriculum in Israeli-Jewish Culture aims to strengthen and deepen the Jewish-Zionist-Israeli identity of the pupils in the general state education system, their sense of belonging, responsibility, and commitment to their people, their heritage and their culture."¹² Consistent with Bennett's ideology of integral nationalism, this sentence stresses the commitment and responsibility that individuals have to the Jewish people and its culture.

The other field in which Bennett advanced a more nationalist agenda is that of civics education. Here, Bennett and the bureaucrats under him reshaped the civics curriculum and textbook to give them a more nationalist and collectivist orientation,¹³ and to minimize the more individualist and liberal construction of citizenship with its emphasis upon human and civil rights.

The Justice Ministry under Ayelet Shaked of the Jewish Home Party is also advancing legislation of a similarly nationalist character. She is advancing the new NGO law which requires that NGOs that receive more than half their funding from foreign sources to disclose so in all their public communications. In the vast majority of cases this law would affect NGOs that advocate for civil rights, especially for the Palestinian population, and oppose the Israeli occupation of Judea and Samaria. Minister Shaked has also gone on record that the Supreme Court in implementing its doctrine of judicial review has

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arrogated to itself undue powers. Accordingly, she has tabled legislation that anchors the Supreme Court's power of judicial review in law and provides a mechanism whereby a special majority in the Knesset can override the Court's decision to cancel a law. One of the

commonplaces of religious and rightwing political discourse in Israel is that the Court, in its zeal to protect minorities and the rights of the Palestinians, works against the well-being of the Jewish people and the Jewish majority.

In addition to being Minister of Education, Naftali Bennett is also Minister of Diaspora Affairs. The ministry has recently announced the funding of programs promoting Jewish identity and support for Israel on American college campuses. The Ministry awarded the funding to two Orthodox groups and to the Hillel Foundation.¹⁴

Religious Zionists in the Army

Since the late 1980s, Religious Zionists have joined elite IDF special forces units and have become officers in combat units in significant numbers. Currently, well over one third of the junior officers in these units are Religious Zionists, as are approximately 50 percent of the candidates in the combat officer training course. This is particularly true in the ground forces. Increasing numbers of Religious Zionist officers are entering the upper echelons of command, becoming commanders of combat regiments and brigades. This is in contrast to the situation that obtained before the late 1980s when the IDF's entire high command and its elite combat units were almost entirely composed of secular troops¹⁵.

One of the reasons for this development is that the previous reservoir of manpower for elite and combat positions in the IDF – the secular (mainly Ashkenazic) middle class – has in recent years provided less manpower than it had previously. The explanations for this are many and complex, but one central reason is the cultural and social change that has come over a good part of Israeli society, especially the secular middle class. This sector of society has moved from what Shafir and Peled called a "republican citizenship discourse" in which contribution to the common good earned one high status and social and material rewards to a "liberal citizenship discourse." In the latter, individuals are encouraged to achieve rewards and benefits individualistically, through competition in the economic and other marketplaces. Accordingly, military service and officership in

combat units has become somewhat devalued for this population¹⁶.

Thus, the army was willing to have other high quality population groups fill the vacuum. The group that did in fact fill this vacuum were the Religious Zionists. In order to do this they developed a new organizational form – the *mechina* or pre-Army preparatory program. The *mechina* was designed to allow Religious Zionist youth (first and mainly males) to take leadership and elite roles while remaining loyal Orthodox Jews and dedicated to the Religious Zionist nationalist ideology. Thus, the *mechina* program enables the Religious Zionist sector to influence first the military and ultimately Israeli society as a whole.

In the *mechina* program, unlike the Hesder Yeshiva, students study for one or two years and then complete full mandatory military service of three years or more. Unlike the Hesder program, the *mechina* curriculum does not place heavy emphasis on Talmud. Rather, the emphasis is on National Religious ideology and theology (mainly the writings of Rabbi A.I. Kook and his school), Bible, and Halacha. The avowed aim is not to prepare *Talmidei Chachamim* but rather to prepare young men for leadership positions in the army and in society. Most of the graduates are encouraged to enlist in elite units and to enter officer training courses. The *mechina* is part of the attempt to bring worldly national life (i.e. the military) under religious regulation, and thus imbue it with religious and Divine ideals. In 2013 there were about 1,400 young people in 21 Religious Zionist *mechina* programs¹⁷.

To one extent or another, this program of imbuing the IDF with religious ideals seems to be succeeding. There seems to be a gradual process whereby the place and the weight of (Jewish Orthodox) religion and religious authorities appears to be increasing. Observers (including very critical ones) have shown: 1) how the Jewish religion gradually defines the collective identity of the army; 2) how orders and instructions are gradually being made to fit religious requirements vis-a-vis troop deployment in the occupied territories, the place of women, and behavior on the Sabbath; 3) Religious authorities gradually play a role, alongside the formal commanders, in shaping and regulating the army's actions and undertakings¹⁸. Furthermore, until recently, troops were also exposed to religious education and socialization including with respect to military ethics and rules of engagement.

Under the current leadership of Eizenkot, the high command of the IDF is attempting to curtail religious influence

It would seem that the current high command under the leadership of Leut. General Eizenkot is attempting to curtail, to some extent, religious influence in the military. Chief of Staff Eisenkott removed the Jewish Identity Unit from the Army Rabbinat in January 2016. He also appointed a Chief Army Rabbi, Brigadier Gen. Rabbi Eyal Krim, who made it clear that he would adhere to the traditional norms and command structures of the IDF (including being inclusive of all

soldiers regardless of faith, persuasion, or sexual orientation.) This move, though, is being met with resistance on the part of some of the leaders of the mechinot. (See below regarding R. Yigal Levenstein's speech).¹⁹

Religious Zionists in the Mainstream Electronic Media

Religious Zionists have also recently become visible in the mainstream media. This phenomenon is part of the Religious Zionist ambition to become part of the Israeli mainstream, and, at the same time, to influence it. It must be noted, however, that the attempt to impact the Israeli mainstream is somewhat more muted in this area than in the political or even the military arenas. While some commentators – e.g. Segal and Emily Amrousi – are ideologically identified, other correspondents, such as Amit Segal are less so.

In order to facilitate its members' entrance into the media, the Religious Zionist community has developed programs and schools that provide training in cinema and electronic media. The contemporary openness to Religious Zionist correspondents and commentators is apparently connected to the policy of increased multiculturalism and pluralism in the electronic media.²⁰

The Reduction in Religiosity

The most noticeable thing about the rise of the current strain of integral nationalist Religious Zionism 40 and 50 years ago was the increase of religiosity and rigor in religious observance.

This had very concrete and palpable expressions. Young men, upon reaching manhood, went off to study Torah within the confines of yeshivot. Observance of the mitzvot and the Halacha ceased to be a generalized marker signifying loyalty to the religious outlook and its construction of the Zionist endeavor. Thus, young men began to observe with care and attention those laws which had hitherto been treated fairly laxly such as wearing *tzizit* the entire day and not only during prayer, and consistent participation in communal prayer. Among young women, the change was perhaps even more palpable. Despite the fashion of mini-skirts in the late 1960s and early 1970s they lengthened their skirts and sleeves to conform to the legal-textual dictates of "modest dress," ceased wearing trousers, and, after marriage, covered their hair, all this in contrast to the previous generation. In many religious neighborhoods and settlements, a more serious religious ambience began to take hold – characterized by classes in Talmud and Torah and widespread attendance at communal prayer.

The last 15 years have seen a relaxation of religious rigor at least in certain circles in the Religious Zionist community. Again, women's dress and appearance has played a signifying role. Many married women today do not fully cover their hair, but more symbolically put on a kerchief or wide ribbon through which most of their hair is visible. Some married religious Zionist women have removed their hair covering altogether; Similarly, in certain circles there has been a return to women's trousers and short sleeves. The religious press has treated these changes not as deviance but as legitimate social developments.

A certain change has also been introduced into relations between the sexes. Mixed-sex “salon dancing” has also been introduced into some Religious Zionist weddings (toward the end of the evening). Even premarital intimacy (to various degrees) seems to be somewhat more prevalent and acceptable. Again, the religious media has highlighted these developments and treated them as legitimate human interest stories, without unequivocal condemnation.²¹

There have also been widespread reports in the religious press and media about certain behaviors, among some young people, including alcohol and drug use, sexual relations, pornography, and participation in rock and roll or pop culture. In contrast to the past, not only is there more willingness to discuss such phenomena, writers and educators attempt to understand them and what (legitimate) needs they serve.²²

Perhaps the most striking measure of diminished religiosity is the vastly increased enlistment of religious women in the IDF. From 2010 to today, the number of young women entering military service has more than doubled, from 935 to over 2000.²³ Many of these young women come from institutions that are publically identified as strictly Orthodox and even Nationalist Haredi. These young women also do not restrict their service to units that were traditionally reserved for Orthodox women soldiers such as soldier-teacher units. Today, they serve in a wide variety of units, especially in intelligence and even in combat units.

The resulting picture is a much wider spectrum of religious observance than was prevalent (or at

least was presented as prevalent) 20 years ago. Indeed, there are groups that continue to strictly adhere to all the stringent practices, and even intensify them. At the same time, there are many groups and individuals who are quite lenient (*Leitim* in Religious Zionist slang) and there is a huge population in the middle that adheres to various gradients of strictness.

Alongside these differences in behavior (for which it is very difficult to obtain hard data) there is also awareness, journalistically, academically and among the subjects themselves of different ideological streams and orientations, mainly in regard to the degree or extent of religiosity. Newspapers that appeal to the Religious Zionist public periodically publish articles asking whether the Religious Zionist public indeed consists of a single group or whether it is helplessly divided among different sub-groups. Academically, various studies assume that the Religious Zionist public is organized into a number of subgroups that can be ordered according to a spectrum of more or less religiosity or conservative to liberal religious orientations. We will look at two relatively recent surveys: The survey published by Tamar Herman and her staff at the Israeli Democracy Institute (IDI) in 2014, and the 2007 survey conducted as part of Hanan Moses' doctorate.

The IDI survey first asked a large representative sample (4,597) of the general Jewish Israeli population whether they belong, both in their outlook and their way of life, to the National Religious sector. Twenty-two percent answered that they did to a large or very large extent. The survey then asked those who did identify as

national religious to identify themselves in terms of the degree of their religiosity. The group that identified as modern/liberal National Religious turned out to be twice as large (12 percent) as the group that identified as Haredi/Torani National Religious (6 percent).²⁴ One of the surprises of the IDI survey was that the segment that identifies as "National Religious" is much larger and more variegated than is commonly supposed. From our point of view, what is especially interesting is that fully 24 percent of those who said they "belonged to the National Religious sector" defined

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themselves as "traditional religious," not as fully Orthodox. According to this survey at least 37 percent of the sector is either liberal Orthodox or not fully Orthodox (another 12 percent is either "traditional-not religious" or "secular"). Thus, the spectrum that we saw above in regard to religious observance

repeats itself in regard to self-definition.

The implications of this extend to the authority of rabbis in regard to political issues. While 58 percent of the Religious Zionist total population reports that it to a great or very great extent, attributes importance to the rulings of rabbis on political issues, over a third reported that it, did not attribute such importance. This attitude was especially characteristic of the liberal Orthodox population.²⁵

We can see this ideological spectrum in regard

to other issues as well; the survey Hanan Moses conducted in 2007 inquired about a whole range of issues. He too, divided his population into three main groups: Torani Nationalists (corresponding to Haredi nationalists in the IDI survey), Religious Zionist Bourgeoisie (corresponding to "just" Religious Nationalists) and Modern Orthodox. These classifications were confirmed, more or less, by the respondents themselves when asked to provide religious self-definition. Moses asked the respondents about a whole range of issues²⁶, and their answers more or less organize themselves according to the three main group classifications with the Torani Nationalists giving the most conservative answers, the Bourgeoisie in the middle, and the Modern Orthodox being the most liberal. This pattern repeated itself in regard to attitudes regarding women; the Arab minority; the secular population; America, the West and Western values; rabbinic authority; change in the Halacha; and homosexuals. Such differences emerged with great force in the summer of 2016. R. Yigal Levenstein, the very conservative co-head of the mechina in Eli, savagely attacked the LGBT community in a speech that was widely circulated on YouTube repeatedly calling them "perverts." In response a significant number of liberal Religious Zionists joined the Gay Pride Parade held in Jerusalem in July.

Being Less Sectarian and Religious Increases the Impact and Appeal of Religious Zionism

The two phenomena just discussed – the attempt on the part of Religious Zionists to become part of the moral, political, and cultural leadership of Israel, and the decline in religiosity among part of the Religious Zionist camp seem to be related. The reduction in religiosity allows part of the Religious Zionist community, and especially its political leadership, to project an image of Religious Zionists as stakeholders in the Israeli mainstream lifestyle, not a religiously outlandish sectarian community. The Religious Zionist leadership hopes this projection will ease their entrance into national leadership positions and their acceptance by the broader Israeli public. Thus, what we have here is a truly dialectical process. **Decreased** religiosity **within** the Religious Zionist community will facilitate Religious Zionist leadership at the national level in Israel, and in turn **increase** religionization of the Israeli public sphere.

A number of phenomena seem to exhibit these dialectical characteristics. The first is the journalistic phenomenon *Motzash*, which is sort of the style, arts, culture, and home supplement of *Makor Rishon*, one of Israel's more conservative newspapers. *Motzash* is a portmanteau of *Motzei Shabbat*, Saturday night. Originally, in a chatty, gossipy style, it covered fashion, fads, social trends, personalities, and politics in the Religious Zionist sector. This supplement, which first appeared about five years ago, signifies a recognition of the reality that if the Israeli state and society are to

embody divine ideals, somehow these ideals will be intertwined with these mundane, materialistic objects and concerns.

In February 2016, *Motzash* announced a new departure: that it would expand its scope beyond the consumerist and cultural issues of the Religious Zionist sector, and cover Israeli culture and consumerism as a whole. It is worth quoting from the opening letter from the publisher announcing the change:

"In these past five years [since the founding of *Motzash*], the [Religious Zionist] public itself has engendered a revolution and has captured new heights. Its increasing influence in the all-Israeli public space is recognizable in every sphere: in politics, in the military, in the defense establishment, in the media, and in culture.

Reduction of religiosity allows Religious Zionists an image of stakeholders in the Israeli mainstream lifestyle

We transformed ourselves from followers into leaders. We matured.

Also, we at *Motzash* decided that it is time to become mature. To exit ... our little *shtetl*. To construct another story upon our strong foundations, to ascend and widen our gaze to the left and to the right to the horizon..."²⁷

This letter not only confirms the process elaborated in this chapter, it celebrates it. The "new" *Motzash* does not shy away from sensationalist topics such as prostitution. But it

also devoted a recent special issue favorable to the changes in Israeli culture being led by Miri Regev.²⁸ In other words, leading, even if it means to open a space for traditional-religious Mizrahi and Dati creations it also entails a greater openness to more worldly and non-religious phenomena.

A similar dialectic obtains vis-a-vis the military. While, as we have seen, many observers have noticed (and some have expressed concern about) the increasing influence of rabbis and their institutions on the Israeli military, the characteristics of the *Mechinistim*, the officers and elite soldiers who are graduates of the *mechina*, are a different story. Although filled with motivation and deep adherence to Religious Zionist ideology, they are also in many ways "regular guys," who listen to the same music and watch the same sports and movies as the other soldiers. Thus, their leadership and influence are more easily accepted. Despite its ambition of educating the entire military into its ideology of integral nationalism, in certain ways the military rabbinate has also proved accommodating. The Chief Rabbi of the IDF has allowed, for instance, soldiers to participate in ceremonies and events that include women singing.

Developments in political ideology have followed a similar path. About 15 years ago, scholars at Bar-Ilan University (a university under Orthodox auspices) started to translate Religious Zionist political theology into more universalist political philosophical terms. On the basis of Aristotle, Machiavelli, the Roman political tradition and other thinkers and traditions, these scholars

started to hold up "republican (collectivist or communitarian) democracy" and nationalism as autonomous political ideals. That is, they provided justifications for these ideals not on the basis of R. Kook's theology and metaphysics, but on the basis of Western philosophical arguments. It would seem that they undertook this enterprise because they realized that in order to have an impact on Israeli public discourse they need to formulate their viewpoint and ideology in universalistic and Western terms, and because they themselves wished to be less sectarian and obscurantist and more part of the Israeli intellectual mainstream. Thus, the Department of Political Science and the Law School at Bar Ilan, together with think tanks and foundations²⁹ continue to train cadres of young scholars with a nationalist and "republican" point of view couched in Western and secular – and not in theological or metaphysical – terms. Some of these young scholars played central roles in the reform and the revision of the national civics curriculum to reflect a more nationalist and republican outlook.³⁰

The process detailed in this section, was clearly a central plank of the electoral strategy adopted by Naftali Bennett and the Jewish Home Party. Bennett himself did not study in a yeshiva and seems to belong to the more religiously relaxed pole of the Religious Zionist community. His wife, Gilat, did not grow up Orthodox and she does not cover her hair nor always dress in standard Orthodox garb. In a recent favorable interview in *Motzash*, designed to make her more acceptable to the Jewish Home's Orthodox constituents,

she admitted that accommodating herself to the Orthodox way of life was still a process.³¹ As we have already pointed out, Jewish Home's number-two party leader, Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked, is a secular Tel Aviv woman. Secular figures such as Ronen Shoval and Danny Dayan were encouraged to compete in the most recent primaries, and the party's parliamentary delegation at first included Yinon Magal, a well know grass smoking Tel Aviv media person. This strategy seemed work in the 2013 elections; Jewish Home increased its representation by four mandates. In 2015, however, those mandates went over to the Likud. From our point of view, the results of both elections were very similar. Religious/right-wing voters want to vote for Religious Zionist integral nationalist politicians in a framework that is not narrowly sectarian or sectorial, but rather national and concerned with Israeli society as a whole.

The recent IDI survey we quoted earlier may confirm this. The survey showed that fully 22 percent of the Jewish Israeli population "belong" to the National Religious sector. Of these, 24 percent define themselves as "traditional-religious," and another 12 percent identified as "traditional-not religious" or secular. In other words, fully 36 percent of those who identity as National Religious are not fully Orthodox and practice a religious life style that is less observant than what had been considered the core National Religious population.

Conclusion

As is the case in other countries (e.g. India, Algeria) religious nationalism is on the rise.³²

Israel's regime and public discourse has become more visibly Jewishly nationalist in recent years. The increasing prominence of Religious Zionists in the government and in central institutions has been an important contributing factor to this. Despite the fact that Religious Zionists, in general, wish to advance religious and religious nationalist interests, they have also, on occasion, exhibited a more open and inclusive policy toward both Jewish and non-Jewish groups in Israel. This was exemplified in Naftali Bennett's (as Minister of Religious Affairs) attempt to erect a prayer space for liberal Jewish groups at the Western Wall, and his continuing support for such a space, along with that of Ayelet Shaked. It appears that this openness and inclusiveness is related to the decline of conservative, strictly Orthodox and sectarian religious orientations among certain Religious Zionist groups.

Endnotes

* In this chapter we use the terms Religious Zionist and National Religious interchangeably.

1 Central Bureau of Statistics, The Social Survey 2009-2010, <http://www.cbs.gov.il/statistical/seker-chevrati-h123.pdf>.

2 Tamar Herman Et al. Religious? Nationalist!: The Religious Nationalist Camp in 2014. Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute 2014. (Hebrew)

3 Yoni Garb, "Young Mizrachi and the Ideological Roots of Gush Emunim", in Asher Cohen and Yisrael Harel eds.

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Shlomo Fischer, Self-Expression and Democracy in Radical Religious Zionist Ideology. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2007.

4 Fischer op.cit.

5 Nekuda, 1992.

6 Dov Schwartz, Land of Reality and Imagination: The Place of Eretz Yisrael in Religious Zionist thought. Tel Aviv: Am Oved 1997, Fischer op. cit.

7 Fischer op.cit.

8 Avital Indig, "Education at Home", Motash Supplement, Makor Rishon, June 10, 2016.

9 <http://glz.co.il/1064-10565-he/Galatz.aspx>

10 See the chapter on Israeli Jewish identity in this Annual Assessment.

11 <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/47/ART2/724/707.html>

12 http://cms.education.gov.il/EducationCMS/Units/Mazkirut_Pedagogit/Tarbutisraelmoreshet/TarbutIsraelUmorashto/TochnitHamiktsa.htm

13 To be a Citizen in Israel, Jewish and Democratic State, Jerusalem: Ministry of Education, 2016. Shlomo Fischer, "The Crisis of Liberal Citizenship Discourse and Education in Israel", in Adam Seligman (ed.), Religious Education and the Challenge of Pluralism, New York: Oxford University Press. Shlomo Fischer, Pluralism Project, JPPI (unpublished).

14 Or Kashti and Barak Ravid, "Bennet Will Transfer Millions to Bring American Jews Closer to Religion", Haaretz 16.8.16.

15 Yagil Levy, The Heavenly Commander: The Theocratization of the Military in Israel, Tel Aviv: Am Oved 2015. (Hebrew p. 23-64)

16 Levy, op.cit. 113-125.

17 Levy, op. cit. 132. There are 27 secular or mixed mechinot, Yair Sheleg, "Exiting the Hothouse", Shabbat Supplement,, Makor Rishon, May 11, 2016. The importance and the contribution of the Mechina programs was publically recognized on Independence Day 2016, when R. Eli Sadan was

awarded the Israel Prize for founding the Mechina programs.

18 Levy op. cit.

19 Kobi Nachshoni, "Senior Rabbi Condemns IDF for Accomodating LGBT 'Perverts'", <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4829206,00.html>

20 Thus, the companies that hold the franchise in the Second Channel must provide cultural and ethnic variation.

21 See Gai Ezra, "Rabbi Amnon Bazak against Motzash", Srugim <http://www.srugim.co.il/129924-%D7%94%D7%A8%D7%91-%D7%91%D7%96%D7%A7-%D7%A0%D7%92%D7%93-%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%92%D7%96%D7%99%D7%9F-%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%A6%D7%A9-%D7%9E%D7%92%D7%9E%D7%94-%D7%9E%D7%A6%D7%A2%D7%A8%D7%AA>

22 E.g. Musaf Shabbat, Makor Rishon, March 25, 2016, p. 8-13.

23 Yair Ettinger, "Women in the Turret: The Revolt against Orthodoxy Reaches the IDF", Haaretz, Sept. 23, 2015. <http://www.haaretz.co.il/magazine/orthodox/.premium-1.2735155>

24 Tamar Herman et. al. op.cit. p. 42 ff.

25 Herman et. al. p. 109.

26 Hanan Moses, From Religious Zionism to Post Modern Religion: Trends and Processes among Religious Zionism Since Rabin's Assassination, Doctoral Dissertation, Bar Ilan University 2009.

27 Motzash, Feb. 5, 2016, no. 251.p. 3.

28 Odelia Goldman, "In Our Streets", Motzash, April 8, 2016 n. 260., p. 15; "Ladies and Gentlemen, Changover ,", Motzash, May 11, 2016.no. 265 special issue. P. 13ff.

29 E.g. Forum Kohelet, <http://kohelet.org.il/> and the Jewish Statesmanship Center, <http://www.statesmanship.org.il/en/>.

30 Shlomo Fischer, "The Crisis of Liberal Citizenship", Ibid JPPI Pluralism Project

31 Avital Indig, "Education at Home", Motzash, June 10, 2016.pp.

32 Michael Waltzer, The Paradox of Liberation: Secular Revolutions and Religious Counterrevolutions, New Haven: Yale U. Press 2015.