Handbook of Israel: Major Debates

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Editorial Manager: Anne Weberling

Volume 1

Part A: Cleavages

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Foreword

Israel is one of the most disputed settings in the world. Its presence in the media is incommensurate with its geographic and demographic size. Any event in the region, any incident within or without, is immediately the focus of attention from the world media. The Israelis themselves are, as a rule, avid consumers of news who debate among themselves the significance of almost every issue reaching the public agenda. The opinions are anything but consensual: the harshest oppositions, denials, and confrontations animate the country's public life, and beyond it, the Jewish world as a whole in tandem with world opinion.

This is the context in which this Handbook is aimed at presenting major issues that divide the academic community with respect to the analysis of Israeli society. It consists of thirteen topics grouped into three parts – "Cleavages," "The Challenge of Post-Zionism," and "Israel Outward" – that discuss questions ranging from the nature of Israeli democracy to the role of religion in the state and society. For each topic, we present high-standard contributions from most experienced and renowned scholars working on the various aspects considered. These scholars represent a range of prevailing contradictory views of the issues under consideration. For each topic, several scholars were asked to contribute an essay revealing their perspective.

In this complex task, we are grateful to the members of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Handbook, and of course to De Gruyter Oldenbourg for its encouragement and kind readiness to extend the utmost help all along this long-term undertaking. We wish to thank Diana Rubanenko for her efficient work on translations and language editing and her continuous agreeable and cooperative disposition.

Last but not least, the academic editors of this handbook are immensely grateful to the Editorial Manager, Anne Weberling, for her dedicated, most efficient and outstanding work on this project.

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Zohar Shavit and Yaacov Shavit

Background

Most cultural examinations of the State of Israel aiming to define that state's identity focus chiefly on the relationship between its "religious" and "secular" strata (often perceived as a relationship between religion and state). The general conclusion of such analyses is that the relationship is not one of two distinct extremes, but that instead "there exists [in the state] a continuum ranging from those 'who are scrupulous about observing the Commandments' to those 'who do not observe the Commandments at all.'"[1] That continuum is determined by a number of elements defining "religiousness" (in the Jewish context) and/or a religious way of life. In contrast, scarce attention is paid to elements that may characterize "secularism"; instead the latter is generally defined in negative terms as the simple absence of religion.[2] This definition, which we maintain is incorrect, originates in the fact that by its very nature "secularism" has no *Shulhan Aruch* (codex of laws); nonetheless we contend that it possesses unique and defining traits.

Moreover, these definitions have dealt principally with "secularism" rather than with "culture as a whole," and have neglected to examine the value-systems or lifestyles of non-religious Israelis – or, on the other hand, the extent to which religious Israeli Jews interact with and participate in "non-religious" culture.

In this essay we argue that it is incorrect to view culture in Israel as simply a continuum between "religiosity" and "secularism," or to define a linear scale of religiosity. It is instead necessary to describe and analyze the differences between the cultures of "religious" and "non-religious" Jews and how both cultures are manifested in Jewish society in the State of Israel. In other words, we argue that on the one hand religious Jewish culture comprises more than "*Torah* and *mitzvot*," while on the other, non-religious Jewish culture extends beyond "secularism." We thus begin by examining what characterizes these two strata (or, more appropriately, spheres) of Israel's culture, each of which constitutes a subculture within it – where one may be termed "Israeli-Jewish" and the other "Jewish-Israeli." We then examine the degree to which each of these spheres is present and involved in the sum total of the culture of the Jewish population of the State of Israel.

1 Levy, Levinson, and Katz 1993, 1.

2 Chadwick 1990.

This paper was completed in September 2015.

The first section of this essay deals with the theoretical aspects of our discussion and endeavors to define the basic concepts it involves; these are often vague concepts laden with various and ever-evolving interpretations. The second section seeks to describe specific differences between the Israeli-Jewish and Jewish-Israeli subcultures and to examine the most notable among them; the final part of the essay deals with the elements of each subculture that may seem to define it, while also emphasizing the many elements the two subcultures share. It is worth recalling, however, that even when certain elements are common to both subcultures, what nevertheless creates two distinct and different spheres is the differing status and function of each element within them, in addition to the existence of elements distinctive to each.

In conclusion we explain why, in our opinion, it is the subculture we call "Israeli-Jewish" that is hegemonic within Israel's culture as a whole, in contrast perhaps to the prevalent view (or even consensus) that the hegemonic culture is that of the "Jewish-Israeli" sphere.

We must emphasize that this essay deals with neither the political nor the material culture of Israel's non-Jewish minority. Nor does our interest lie in the question of "cultural essence" – which stems from an essentialist perception – but rather in culture as defined by the sum total of those elements that characterize a specific community. It is also important to remember that behind any discussion on the history of Jewish culture (or of the various cultures of various groups of Jews) lie questions of continuity, connection to the past, and unity – and that, in the context of the "Jewish state" in particular, one often encounters questions about the connection between culture and the way in which territorial Jewish nationalism is realized within Israel.

What is cultural identity?

"Culture" is a concept both vague and elusive; it occurs in various contexts and bears a multitude of definitions and connotations. There seems little point in tackling this cluster of definitions, which are frequently characterized by obfuscation, ambiguity, and elusiveness. Instead we prefer to search out the "real culture"[3] that characterizes a specific community, a search we believe has two objectives: the first, to determine the common denominator and typical traits that delineate and signify the singular nature of a given cultural identity at a given historical period; the other, to describe the multiplicity and cultural stratification that characterize those traits. Contrary to the holistic perception that all components and manifestations of culture stem from a single source (a "collective genius," say) or from a formative

3 Kroeber 1952; Kroeber and Kluckhorn 1953.

principle (in the Jewish case, "monotheism") and that they are furthermore bound by mutual affinity,[4] we maintain that the various manifestations of a specific culture never create an "organismic," holistic, static system. Instead they create a cultural system that, while clearly distinct from other cultures, is nonetheless multifaceted, nonhomogeneous, and dynamic. For our purpose, "culture" is not an "essence" but rather a defined, shared, and comprehensive system of outlooks concerning the world and humanity; a cluster of values; a corpus of formative texts; a set of codes of behavior; shared symbols and shared perceptions of the past; and more. It is furthermore a system of everyday practices that includes among other things festivals and ceremonies, literary and artistic creation, customs, and lifestyles. All these determine and shape attitudes to place; perceptions and divisions of time; and systems of social relationships. Such components create a shared culture and cultural tradition in both the collective and the private spheres.

There are few subjects more elusive than the theme of this essay, both in the general theoretical context and particularly in the Israeli context, and it is no accident that it has been the focus of long-running polemical debate and of an extensive body of literature beyond the scope of this essay. The subject is furthermore elusive since concepts such as "Judaism," "Jewish culture," and "secularism," as well as "religious culture" and "national culture," are equally difficult to pin down. In the modern Jewish context these concepts emerged as the result of the changes – the revolution, even – that took place across the Jewish world in the modern era – changes expressed by, among other things, the emergence within the modern Jewish world of entirely new forms of Judaism as well as of new forms of "Jewish cultures."[5]

This new diversity has only increased within Jewish society in the State of Israel (and previously in the Jewish *Yishuv* in Mandatory Palestine), where different types of "Jewishness" and of cultures belonging to Jews were brought together, perhaps more than anywhere else and at any other time in Jewish history. Moreover, Jews in Israel constitute both a demographic majority and sovereign power; as such they have undertaken not only projects of nation-building and state-building, but also the project of creating a national culture.[6] No longer the culture of a religious (or ethnic) minority existing as a cultural enclave within hegemonic non-Jewish host cultures, Jewish culture in Israel is that of a sovereign majority: the character of Israeli society is determined by Jews, and they are able to define the normative system of their culture and create and operate cultural institutions in accordance with specific ideologies and programs.[7] In other words, Jewish-majority society, in both theory and practice, is able to shape the culture in Israel using the tools of cultural planning[8] – planning that can not only encourage and direct culture but also supervise it in certain spheres.

4 Gombrich 1969.

5 On this subject there exists a broad body of literature. For a bird's-eye view, see Biale 2000, as well as our introduction to Volume 8 of *The Cambridge History of Judaism* (Shavit and Shavit, in press).

6 Shavit and Shavit 1998.

The two subcultures

A complete system of Israeli culture can exist only in Israel,[9] while in contrast Jewish culture can also exist in the Diaspora. As we have seen, Israeli culture consists of two subcultures, one *Jewish-Israeli* and the other *Israeli-Jewish*.[10] Both are the products of their existence in Israel; both can exist only there. Their emergence, development, and shared existence in a single country – one that is both "Holy Land" and "historical homeland" to Jews[11] – and in a sovereign Jewish state have given rise to a cultural system with features markedly different from those of other Jewish cultures in both the near and distant pasts. Each subculture is engaged in a struggle for cultural hegemony, and both simultaneously participate in shaping Israel's culture as a whole. Both subcultures are "Israeli" not only because they exist within the Israeli state, but also because their existence in a position of sovereignty – and in the historic Land of Israel – has determined and continues to determine the circumstances of their development, the form they have taken, and the relationship they share.

The *Israeli-Jewish* subculture first emerged in Jewish Palestine beginning in the 1880s. Until the State of Israel was established, it was known as "Hebrew culture" and "Eretz Yisraeli" culture. It is the continuation of a revolutionary phenomenon

7 The question of the ideal cultural model has been a subject of disagreement, and several comprehensive models have been proposed. We are aware of only a few such debates within Arab society in Mandate Palestine and in Israel.

8 Even-Zohar 2008.

9 More precisely, some of its components can be part of the culture of Israeli Jews who have emigrated to other countries.

10 The use of the concepts of "Hebrew culture" and "Hebrewness," once common in public and political discourse, has almost vanished since the 1950s. Moreover, in the case of rhetoric that cites "the people of Israel," the reference is either to the Jewish population of Israel ("citizens of the State of Israel" are seldom addressed) or to Jews throughout the world – "the Jewish people." That "the people of Israel" or "the Jewish people" are commonly invoked, while "Jews" are not, reflects, we believe, a desire to highlight the ethnic and national dimension of Judaism. "Hebrewness" is used chiefly in reference to literary works written in the Hebrew language ("Hebrew literature"), while in contrast the theater in Israel is called "Israeli theater" even when its productions are staged in Hebrew.

11 In this – with the addition of the territorial aspect – the new Jewish culture of the Yishuv and in Israel is an offshoot and continuation of the modern Jewish revolution, but also distinct from its other branches (for example, Yiddish culture). See Harshav 2000.

in the history of the Jewish people in the modern era.[12] The emergence, creation and establishment of this new Jewish cultural system – modern, secular, and Hebrew (though not exclusively Hebrew-language) – was expressed not only in changes within the cultural space and in cultural norms, cultural activities, and lifestyles – but also in the founding of institutions and organizations that had never previously existed in traditional Jewish society or that had even been rejected by it. This new culture adopted components from non-Jewish cultures as well as from traditional Jewish religious culture – principally those components considered appropriate for and necessary to the new culture's outlook and value system.

Jewish-Israeli culture, on the other hand, is a continuation of the religious Jewish culture that developed beginning in 18th-century Europe in response to processes of acculturation, to modernity, and to the emergence of a non-religious Jewish culture. Nonetheless, it has undergone profound changes in the context of Jewish Palestine and later the State of Israel, among other things as a response and reaction to the territorial dimension of its existence within a sovereign Jewish state in the Holy Land. Another aspect of this evolution has been the internalization, by various spheres of religious Jewish culture, of several components of Israeli-Jewish culture.

As we have seen above, these two subcultures shape, determine, and embody the cultural identity of the State of Israel and of Israeli society. They exist apart from each other and conduct a struggle over their sphere of influence (a struggle that at times takes the form of a *Kulturkampf*, or "culture war"). Yet there are also multiple points of overlap and mutual borrowing as a result of both subcultures' existence in a reality without precedent in Jewish history since the period of the Second Temple – an existence within the framework of a state governed by Jews and in whose political, societal, and economic life most of their members participate. Within this new reality a "secular," national Hebrew culture (discussed below) developed and became the foundation of numerous cultural institutions, as did, in parallel, a new religious culture reflected in theological and Halakhic developments, in the ways in which its own social structures became institutional, and in the cultural consumption and lifestyles of its members.[13] Neither subculture is homogeneous; both provide a broad umbrella for a range of streams and camps. Within each there exist extremes – conservative or radical groups – that reject totally any affinity whatsoever to the other subculture. Between the two lies a "gray area" of interlinking circles of Israeli-Jews who belong simultaneously, according to their self-definition and/or their ways of life, to both subcultures and who are generally referred to as "traditionalist" (*masorti*) Jews. In this essay we focus on the core of each subculture, as it is impossible within a short space to fully explore the diversity they contain[14] – though at times that diversity creates significant internal differences within each one.

Nor do we explore ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) society, though its current proportion, by various evaluations, is around 20% of Israel's Jewish population – close to one million people; every tenth Israeli is Haredi – because its culture dissociates itself from and has minimal contact with both the overarching culture in Israel and the Israeli-Jewish and Jewish-Israeli subcultures, though more than once it has experienced internal developments in reaction to developments in the culture in Israel.[15]

Cultural ideology, cultural programs, and cultural practices

The past two centuries have seen vigorous debate over the nature of Jewish culture[16] and over whether such a culture indeed exists and what constitutes its most "authentic" and "legitimate" form. The perceptions underlying this debate reflect a pivotal chapter in the intellectual history of the Jewish people, and have produced various models – ideal, utopian, and sometimes also pragmatic – of Jewish culture. Within the tangible reality of the Israeli state, in which Jewish society is stratified and split, and where there exists in effect no single supreme authority that is accepted by all public religious streams and able to rule on questions of *Halakha* – and certainly none capable of determining and imposing cultural practices – the intense philosophical, theological, ideological, and rhetorical discourse on the nature of Jewish culture has grown more pronounced; it has moreover acquired a political dimension, dealing with questions concerning Israel's preferred cultural identity as a "Jewish state." Much of the debate on these questions is based in theory and doctrine, invoking thinkers and writers who have suggested various *topoi* of "Israeli culture" or "Jewish culture" and various programs aimed at molding it in a given fashion; or, alternatively, invoking individuals' personal, subjective testimonies as to their own understanding of their identity and of the concepts of "Jewish" or "Israeli" culture.[17]

In this essay, we have chosen not to focus on ideals or ideology, but rather to examine the diverse facets of Jews' cultural experience in Israel, with particular at-

12 Ibid., 14.

13 The same phenomenon occurred, of course, within the Jewish Diasporas from the late 18th century onward. Contrary to the prevailing consensus, Orthodoxy is not frozen or dogmatic but undergoes its own processes of adaptation and change.

14 Nachtomy 2005, among others.

15 Israel's ultra-Orthodox population does, however, make up part of its overall culture. Concerning Haredi culture in Israel and its various streams there is a substantial body of literature; see, for example, Zicherman 2014, 2–14.

16 See, for example, Luz 1985 and Schweid 1995.

17 Schweid 1995.

tention to the nature of various cultural practices within each subculture's public and private spheres. In other words, we focus on culture as expressed in practice – in the question of what Jews in Israel, belonging to one subculture or both, "do and do not" within their cultural realm. To put it yet another way, our interest lies in the question of what Jews in Israel do "within religion"[18] and what they do "outside" of it.

It is worth emphasizing that Jewish culture since the 19th century has undergone far-reaching changes in everything pertaining to cultural practices, external appearance (including clothing), higher education, entertainment and leisure patterns, consumption of elements of foreign ("non-Jewish") culture, and more.[19] Such changes have not failed to affect traditional Jews and in fact have become an integral and taken-for-granted part of their world, clearly evident in their ways of life. Various surveys and studies undertaken in the past two decades, namely from the end of the 20th century to the start of the 21st, have investigated the number of people who attend synagogues, light Sabbath candles, or adhere strictly to Jewish dietary laws. Yet these surveys have not examined, for example, the frequency of Jews' attendance at theater performances, concerts, or the cinema; consumption of original and translated literature; attending sports events; and so on in a range of activities that had not been part of Jewish culture until the modern era. The fact that such research consistently investigates "religious" activities and ignores "non-religious" ones seems to demonstrate how greatly the latter have been internalized and thus no longer require legitimization – and, no less vital to our theme, how the majority of these "non-religious" activities are furthermore not necessarily perceived as an expression of "secularism."

Jewish culture, Israeli culture

Without defining "Jewish" and "Israeli" in the context of culture, we cannot answer the question "to what extent is the culture of Jews in the State of Israel Israeli or Jewish?" The terms "culture" and "Jewish culture" (as well as "Jewish identity") are relatively new in Jewish history.[20] They first appeared in the Jewish world in the late 18th century with the emergence of the *Haskala* movement, and their usage gained ground and momentum in the 19th and 20th centuries, during which additional concepts such as "religious Jewish culture," "modern Jewish culture," and "Hebrew

18 We believe the existing surveys on this and other subjects have been insufficient, as they neglect to examine in detail, for example, what "keeping the sanctity of the Sabbath" in fact involves – is it a matter of refraining from all work or, say, a more narrow set of restrictions such not listening to the radio, abstaining from calling an elevator, etc.?

19 Shavit 2009.

20 Ben-Rafael and Ben-Chaim 2006.

culture" were born and accepted as a given. These concepts triggered not only theoretical debate but also polemics on practical issues, such as the "*kultura* debate" that raged within the Zionist movement from 1899 to 1902 and arguments over the vision of a Jewish society in Palestine that Theodor Herzl presented in his utopian novel *Altneuland*.[21] The internalization and frequent use of these concepts reflect the revolution (or revolutions) that have shaken the Jewish world over the past two centuries[22] and have resulted in, among other things, Jews' significant presence *qua* Jews within non-Jewish cultures; as well as in a desire – and need – to view Judaism not only as a religion but also as a framework that may accommodate many components not included in the term "religion." In fact, according to this view the identity of "Judaism" was primarily not religious. In other words, this was a matter not simply of "adjusting" or reforming religion, but of broadening Jews' habitus so that it might also comprise elements typifying Western culture, and of establishing a new Jewish culture. To be more specific: Jewish culture could not have developed in the way that it did over the past two centuries had it remained within the framework of ultra-Orthodox Jewish society. And had ultra-Orthodoxy, or perhaps even Orthodoxy, been the hegemonic power within Israel, neither "Jewish culture," and certainly not "Hebrew culture," could have emerged or thrived.

Religiously observant national-Zionist Jews considered this "cultural" definition of Judaism as an attempt to suggest a secular-national-cultural alternative – a "new Judaism," or "Hebrew culture" – to the religious definition and religious substance of "Judaism" and of "being a Jew." Religious Jews considered this attempt a heresy, and maintained that it aimed to separate "religion" from "nationalism" and to replace the traditional Torah-based conception of Judaism (as reflected in the words of Saadia Gaon: "The Jewish nation is a nation only by virtue of its Torah") with a definition based on ethnicity, history, common destiny, and culture. It was, according to this view, a "Judaism" not committed to a religious interpretation of the canonical authoritative Jewish texts – i.e., Talmudic and Halakhic literature – and equally uncommitted to religious – i.e., rabbinical – authority.

It would be incorrect to maintain that traditional-religious Judaism lacked its own "culture" until the 19th century – that it possessed no unique traditions and customs, or that it did not produce philosophy, literature, and art. At the same time, Jewish tradition prohibited the adoption of certain cultural customs or manners that it considered alien (*tarbut zara*), but it offered no clear guidance in regard to permis-

21 Laskov 1990.

22 In 1925, the national poet Chaim Nachman Bialik wrote: "In the consciousness of the nation, the term culture, in its comprehensive and human sense, has replaced the theological term Torah," while in 1920 the philosopher Achad Haam wrote, "One has only to utter from the podium the terrible word kultura – a word than which there is none more exalted and lofty in the entire human linguistic treasury – to arouse tremendous excitement on all sides as if the great Day of Judgment had arrived." Bialik 1965; Achad Haam [1920] 1944.

sible cultural elements which can be adapted by the Jewish society. The late 19th century – an era when national cultures and movements began to emerge and take hold – saw the boundaries of "Jewish culture" expand in response to the challenges posed by "Western culture" and modernization. The adoption and internalization of the concept of "culture" altered the worldview and discourse of various segments of modern religious Jewish society. As a result, a new understanding of "Judaism" began to emerge which saw it as a comprehensive world encompassing both "religion" and "culture" – a world capable of offering a complete alternative to "culture," not only to secular-Jewish culture but also to Western culture and all its non-religious components. Modern religious society also began to mine intensively the historical past for manifestations and expressions of a distinctive, autarkic, and all-inclusive "Jewish culture" – for Jewish literature, Jewish science, Jewish music, Jewish painting, etc.[23] – an endeavor frequently accompanied by efforts to create the components required for such cultural production to develop, as well as by actual cultural creativity.

It is for this reason that we propose to consider the so-called "Jewishness" of culture in Israel not in terms of the extent to which Jewish religion is part of Israel's culture as a whole, but rather as a question of the extent to which *culture specific to Jews* forms part of it. From a "secular" viewpoint, "Jewish culture" is not identical to, and does not overlap with, "Judaism" in its religious sense; "Judaism" is not just a "religion" in the meaning of belief or praxis but also encompasses a variety of cultural components that are not "religious," and is furthermore able to exist without the presence of "religion." In other words, an "Israeli-Jew" can abandon "religion" yet still self-define as "culturally Jewish" or even as a "secular Jew". His or her cultural identity rests on historical consciousness, a shared historical past, a sense of affiliation, and a cultural repertoire. This is a Judaism that believes itself sovereign to select for itself those components it wishes to appropriate from Jewish tradition – and frequently to imbue them with new content.

It is often acknowledged that there is no agreed-upon and binding definition of what Judaism is, and as such there is equally no definition of religious-Jewish culture – what elements it requires, which it rejects, and what boundaries clearly separate it from other cultures and cannot be crossed.[24] Jewish history abounds with various examples of "Judaism" and of "Jewish" lives that were not characterized only by religion. Repeated attempts in Israel to reach consensus on what fundamentally defines a Jew (and what defines Judaism) have been unsuccessful and remain purely theoretical, and at the same time have sparked profound disaccord within

23 Often in the attempt to prove that all these components of culture not only existed in the Torah world but also received legitimacy in it.

24 The question of a formal definition crops up only around the issue of conversion to Judaism.

the religious community.[25] Israel's ultra-Orthodox (*Haredi*), national-Orthodox (*dati-leumi*) and "traditional" (*masorti*) Jews are divided over matters of theology and Halakha, as well as over the question of what constitutes a correct or ideal "Jewish" lifestyle and what level of participation and involvement in Israeli culture is permitted and desirable for a religious Jew. At the same time, it is important to observe that neither has non-religious society, with its broad variety of its cultural predilections, ever formed any consensus over what values and qualities should define non-religious Jewish culture, how tightly bound it should be to "religion" and religious tradition, and what boundaries demarcate it from other cultures.

The concept of "Israeliness" is also a vague one when compared to the concept of Hebrew culture. For the most part, the creation of "Hebrew culture" has been the outcome of an ideology and explicit program to construct a full, multidimensional culture; "Israeliness," in contrast, emerged chiefly from socio-cultural trends and processes. "Hebrew culture" was one of the chief and most important products of the Jewish revolution during the 19th and 20th centuries,[26] which created the new cultural system by means of a combination of both modern elements and historical elements newly revived. The revival of the Hebrew language is an obvious example: long surviving primarily as a sacred language rarely spoken, Hebrew is today a living national language. The late 19th century saw the widespread use of spoken and written Hebrew in the new Jewish society of Yishuv Palestine and an emergence of new linguistic registers. A large number of newspapers were published in Hebrew, as were periodicals, literature, and textbooks. Theater performances were staged in Hebrew; popular songs were sung in it. Hebrew became a rich, multi-layered literary and spoken language – a new Hebrew, "Israeli Hebrew," that lent the modern Hebrew culture its name. As is often the case with a *lingua franca*, Hebrew has become the most prominent expression of Israel's national culture even while it exists alongside other languages, and Hebrew's hegemony in the State of Israel is seen in its use by ultra-Orthodox Israelis for most of their cross-cultural interactions.

Hebrew culture revived and secularized many elements of culture and updated various others, all in a relatively short timeframe and through intensive effort. We mention only few of these changes here. One was a "return" to the Bible as a primary authoritative text in place of rabbinical literature, which was the central element of rabbinical Judaism. The most important change in attitude to the Bible was an understanding of it as justifying the existence of a nationalist Jewish society territorially bound to the Land of Israel – not a "Holy Land" but rather a "motherland" (*moledet*)[27] – and it was treated as, *inter alia*, both a historical and a literary text. Modern Hebrew literature attained the status of "national literature" and became a

25 Ben-Rafael 2001.

26 Harshav 2000.

27 Schweid 1979.

constitutive factor in shaping the consciousness and values of Hebrew culture. History was given a major place in the notion of "Hebrewness," and the history of the Jewish people was held as a unifying factor, as well as a source of continuity and belonging to the Jews who settled in Zion; especially emphasized were the Biblical era and the periods of the First and Second Temples (in particular during the reign of the Hasmoneans). History as knowledge of the past and geography as knowledge of the land were taught in order to create historical continuity and foster a national consciousness of belonging. Hebrew culture continued to celebrate traditional Jewish festivals but imbued many of them with new content, as well as creating new celebrations such as *Tu bi'shvat* and Israel's Independence Day.[28] It shaped a new attitude to the Land of Israel as a physical, geographical territory; to its landscapes and natural environment; and to archeological sites from the Jewish historical past. In addition to this movement there also emerged a radical strain of secular "Hebrewness" intent on a total break from tradition; nonetheless the mainstream ideology of Hebrew culture did not support such a break but opted rather to selectively include values and texts that were seen as being handed down through the ages, or that possessed – or could be granted – national significance and symbolism.

It is important to emphasize that the creation of Hebrew culture involved borrowing and adopting not only material and technological aspects of civilization but also cultural institutions and habits of cultural consumption; and moreover to emphasize that culture in Israel is open to rich and varied cultural imports. We distinguish here between the act of adopting a certain cultural component and its actual implementation; there is a difference, for example, between adopting the institution of theater or attending theatrical productions on the one hand, and determining which dramatic pieces should be staged on the other. This distinction raises the question of whether imported cultural components are in fact part of Israeli culture as a whole, and whether "Israeli culture" can be considered the sum total of all the cultural components that exist and operate within it.

The answer to this question lies in the process of furnishing the new cultural system and the central role that "imported" culture played therein. The modern Hebrew culture that was created, developed and institutionalized in the Jewish Yishuv and later in the State of Israel was a project of conception, construction, and structuring of a complete national culture.[29] This was an intensive process, at once spontaneous and engineered, that furnished the cultural system with all its central and peripheral components, including a popular culture and a folk culture, and these were frequently generated by agents of culture[30] rather than spontaneously. Cultural institutions that were considered vital components of "culture" in the West were established in Israel. A major component of "Hebrew culture" was its self-perception as autochthonous and indigenous – that is, a consciousness of and sense of "authentic" connection to the land and its terrain,[31] as well as the development of a local way of life; the latter included, for example, evenings of community singing held in schools, by youth movements, or for the general public; folk-dancing; and hikes across Israel. Such activities represented what became known, chiefly in retrospect, as "Eretz-Yisraeli (Land of Israel) culture". Of course, the idea of establishing a homogeneous Hebrew culture according to a preset program was fairly utopian. Nonetheless this project has seen the emergence of a cultural core, comprising cultural values and assets shared by a large part of the Jewish public in the Yishuv and later, in the State of Israel.

In regard to the discussion of tradition in the national context, we prefer to use the term "creation of tradition" over "invention." Indeed, the creation of Hebrew culture, including Hebrew culture in Jewish Palestine and the State of Israel, was the result of a great surge of creation that included among other things the creation of a new Jewish mythos and ethos, which were integrated into in the new cultural experience.

The process of creation involved not only the construction of new elements, but also the adoption of elements and models borrowed from different cultural traditions and introduced by new *olim* (immigrants) coming to the Yishuv and Israel. These included, for example, several bourgeois traditions or "soft" religious traditions[32] such as traditional foods and clothing, specific ceremonies, and components of folk culture (folklore).

Between secularism and culture

"Secularism" is both a worldview and lifestyle[33] that, in the context of Judaism, offers an alternative to the choice between abandoning one's Jewish identity and living a religious life. From a historical perspective, it is worth distinguishing between processes of secularization that were central to the trend of integration with non-Jewish cultures (which in the modern era did not demand religious conversion) and those secularization processes that were part of creating a new Jewish cultural system. Most "secular" Jews are those who have distanced themselves from the normative religious way of life as the result of socio-cultural processes. The "average" secular individual is not required to adhere to any philosophical intellectual founda-

28 Shavit and Sitton 2004.
29 Shavit and Shavit 1998.
30 Shavit and Sitton 2004.
31 On the portrayal (and stereotype) of the Sabra, or native-born Israeli, see Almog 1997.
32 By this we mean adherence to some aspects of the Jewish tradition, such as observing the Sabbath, attending synagogue on Jewish holidays, keeping kosher, and so forth.
33 Feiner 2012; Bar-Levav et al. 2013.

tion;[34] he or she is not necessarily an atheist but rather someone who is called less and less to religion, does not observe the Commandments, and does not require religious services or rabbinical authority, as an essential part of his or her cultural world and lifestyle. A secular Israeli who observes the Sabbath, keeps *kosher*, occasionally attends synagogue, and even believes in the revelation on Mount Sinai does so simply because these are components in his or her cultural system, where they possess mainly symbolic value. Such behavior reveals an affinity toward specific religious practices rather than toward religious culture as a whole; overall, non-religious components occupy a far greater part of the culture of the individual "secular Israeli" than religious ones. In the ultra-Orthodox community, in contrast, there is no room for cultural elements not based in religion, which are rejected and denounced *a priori*. Ultra-Orthodox culture finds in "secular culture" of any sort not only shades of heresy but also idolatry. It describes that culture as devoid of spiritual content, lacking in values and morality, shallow, rootless, and degenerate. In contrast, it refers to itself as "Torah Judaism" – the Judaism of values and vast spiritual wealth, and as such the "true" Judaism.[35] Secular culture, chiefly in its more radical streams, views ultra-Orthodox Jewish culture as insular, mediaeval, exilic, and narrow-minded – certainly in cultural terms.

Much has been written about the inherent weakening of Israeli secularism, at least with respect to its self-perception. Attesting to this are countless examples of the emergence of groups affiliated with a "new Judaism" characterized by interest in "the Jewish sources texts," and of a renaissance of non-Orthodox interest in Jewish tradition. We maintain, however, that groups of this kind do not express a yearning to return to "rabbinical Judaism," but rather offer a new and different reading of "the sources" stemming from a perception of Judaism as an "open and self-renewing culture that draws on sources passed down through the ages"[36] – all without relinquishing the hegemonic cultural habitus of the contemporary "secular Israeli." A far more marginal phenomenon is that of a "return to the sources" – that is, to a reading of rabbinical literature as imbued with humanistic values and existential significance. In any event, however, we must emphasize that such a reading differs dramatically from the way that literature is studied in *yeshivot*, which do not provide the option of studying the Bible or Jewish philosophy in addition to the Talmud.

In fact, Jewish-Israeli culture includes no components of ultra-Orthodox culture apart, perhaps, from components of folk religion, chiefly a growing practice of visiting the graves of the "righteous" and seeking advice, blessing, or healing from

34 Katz 2011.

35 Bartal 2002.

36 This is the objective of one such group, "Bina," which defines itself as a *beit midrash* and claims to offer "Israeli *midrash* that responds to questions of Jewish identity." See also Katz 2014.

mekubbalim (kabbalists). The ultra-Orthodox community scrupulously differentiates itself from the framework of the general culture in Israel, as well as from the national-religious culture, in every way possible: it resides in specific and generally separate geographic areas, and its rich spiritual world is restricted to synagogues, *batei midrash*, yeshivot, and independently run schools. It has its own – religious – literature, and the boundaries that separate it from the secular public, as well as from national-religious and traditional Jews, are evident in both public and private life. In contrast, national-religious and traditional-religious Jews participate in almost every aspect of the Israeli experience; secular Israeli culture and national-religious culture are barely separated by any boundaries, whether with respect to dress (apart from a few specific items), residential areas, or participation in cultural practices such as reading for leisure, watching films, attending concerts, and visiting museums. At the same time, however, the priorities of Israel's national-religious culture differ from those of secular Israeli culture, especially in the importance it attributes to Israel's territorial claims. For this reason we consider it a Jewish-Israeli subculture within Israeli culture as a whole.

Culture wars (Kulturkämpfe)

Battles over Israeli culture revolve around three main points. First is the struggle over the character of the public sphere, primarily with respect to preserving the "sanctity of the Sabbath."[37] Observing the Sabbath is considered not only a biblical commandment, but also a symbolic asset of vital importance for Judaism and Jewishness, even by many non-observant Jews. The second concerns legislation affecting the norms of the private sphere – primarily on matters of personal status such as marriage and divorce and birth and death. The third point of conflict relates to the autonomy of the ultra-Orthodox educational systems.

In addition, spokespersons for and representatives of religion and religious culture have attempted to intervene in events within non-religious cultural frameworks, chiefly via governmental authority and legislation on matters of everyday life such as, for example, the sale of non-kosher food or the operation of businesses on the Sabbath, as well as through attempts to censor various activities perceived as damaging to the "Jewish nature" of the State of Israel, such as activities that violate the observance of the Sabbath in the public sphere. This struggle not only is waged in Israel between movements, organizations, and groups within civil society but, as

37 Primarily through the prohibition of public transport and open business hours. A survey published in early 2014 shows that a third of all Israelis keep the Sabbath.

noted, is further evident in political decisions, where the actors involved are political parties representing different cultural values.[38]

Any discussion of culture in Israel cannot be complete without addressing the question of cultural supply and demand – that is, what demand exists for various elements of the cultural supply. This question must be dealt with if we intend to clarify to what extent the overall culture of Jewish society in Israel is "Jewish-Israeli" or "Israeli-Jewish." We believe that there exists overall a greater demand for components of the Israeli-Jewish subculture than for components of the Jewish-Israeli subculture. In other words, the demand for the sum total of the first subculture is greater and more dominant than for the second. Needless to say, however, it is not our intention to determine which components of the two subcultures are of greater value – if that question can even be answered.

Conclusion

Attempts to describe what is "Israeli" and what is "Jewish" in the culture of Jewish society in Israel usually point to typical behavioral patterns, values, or ways of life; or to literary and artistic works rooted in and reflective of Israeli reality. Public discourse, the research literature, and impressions by "external" observers suggest a variety of values and behavioral patterns (as well as character traits, at times) that seem representative and typical of "Israel's culture" as a whole. If we try to sum up these opinions and impressions, they range from generalizations and stereotypes at one end to suggestions of concrete characteristics at the other. The general picture obtained is twofold: on the one hand, a picture of cultural pluralism, or even syncretism, and struggles over prestigious cultural assets within Israel's culture in general; and on the other hand, a common cultural core shared by most parts of Israeli society – language, religious and non-religious holidays and celebrations, customs, historical traditions, a literary corpus in Hebrew, and so on.

It may therefore be concluded that the existence and widespread acceptance of the concept of a broad and comprehensive "Israeli culture" reflects the existence of a shared cultural core. Yet the hegemony specifically of the Israeli-Jewish subculture is what makes possible the pluralism of culture in Israel and the "Israeliness" of Israel, which should not be measured by the extent to which the private and public spheres function according to religious norms.[39]

38 An example is the initiative by the Religious Services Ministry in September 2014 to establish "centers for Jewish identity," whose mission is to educate the public on "Jewish values," as well as study sessions on "the Jewish sources" and study groups that encourage "creative efforts in various spheres, conducted in the spirit of Judaism"; another example is a television campaign advocating Sabbath eve family dinners.

39 Ben-Porat 2013.

To sum up, the cultural system in the State of Israel is a broad and comprehensive system unprecedented in Jewish history. Some components of this system are traditional; others have been plucked from Jewish tradition and imbued with new significance and substance, and a great variety of components are entirely new. It is this comprehensive system that constitutes Israel's culture. But, if we examine the concrete cultural reality of the State of Israel – which components of Jewish culture are created or consumed therein and what constitutes the habitus of the majority of Jews in the public and private spheres – we find that the religious Jewish-Israeli sphere forms only a part of the whole, while it is the Israeli-Jewish sphere that occupies the greater portion.

In contrast to the public and political rhetoric, which depicts the State of Israel as a "Jewish state," Israel's culture is, from a cultural point of view, a unique and innovative phenomenon in Jewish history due to the hegemony of the Israeli-Jewish subculture within it.

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2. To What Degree Is Israeli Culture Jewish, and to What Degree Israeli?

David Ohana

The founders of the Zionist project believed that the transformation of identity would take place in Zion. From being a subject, the Jew in his homeland would become his own ruler, he would create his authentic personality, the Jew would be transformed into a Hebrew, the child of exile would become a native. Geography would change history, and parallel with this conceptual transformation, a new culture would arise.[1] The Zionist philosophy of history that emerged presented a synthetic picture of past Jewish history in which it was deemed necessary to return and to reconnect with the initial, sovereign, Hebrew, heroic stage. Hence the emphasis placed on a whole series of symbols and myths rooted in Zion, the place of birth, and on the creation of a new human model, positive, heroic and tied to the land; and hence the obliteration of the concepts and memories that came into being between the end of Jewish independence in 132 CE and the Zionist national rebirth in 1948. Zionism was thus for many people a territorialization of Judaism, but in a deeper sense than merely restoring the Jews to their natural place.[2] It reflected a radical historical philosophy that sought to change the Jew into an old-new Hebrew. The meaning of the rebirth for the more radical thinkers was a return to Hebraism and not to Judaism, to the physical space and not to God. This involved a paradox: only in the biblical space could the new man come into being; only a return to ancient roots would restore the Jew to modern history. One may ask whether Israeli culture has been true to this Zionist vision.

A discussion of the Jewish culture of the State of Israel, or of the Jewish dimension of Israeli culture, or of the question of whether it is an Israeli culture or a Jewish one, depends on the ideological starting-point, the national perspective and the historical context in which the matter is approached. If one examines the question from the point of view of the period beginning in 1948, it is clear that the intention of Israeli culture was to be secular.[3] The first Israelis wished to take a distance from Jewish culture – religious observance with its precepts and traditions, the Jewish exile, and the image of the "old Jew" whether the student of the Mishna and Gemara or the secular Jewish intellectual.

1 Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983.
2 Evron 1995.
3 Bar-Levav, Margolin, and Feiner 2013.

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