"To Be Free in Our Country": Fighting the *Kulturkampf* With Tzerie Meretz

A dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree

PhD

In

Social Anthropology

At Massey University, Turitea Campus, Palmerston North

New Zealand

Dominic Michael Patrick Moran

2004

Israeli society is deeply divided along religious-secular lines in a manner characteristic of *kulturkampf*. This dissertation discusses the role of the Meretz political party in this struggle, building on ethnographic research carried out with the youth sections of the party in 1999 and 2000 and subsequent peace activism. The history and nature of the Jewish *kulturkampf* are charted and described, as is the development of the secular Jewish identity community. Interview excerpts are used to elucidate the understandings and experience of culture war and Jewish identification from the standpoint of committed secular activists. Finally, predictions are made for the future trajectory of the *kulturkampf*

Figure 1: A RATZ sticker with Herzl in the background:
"A *Halakhic* State- The State is Gone!"

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my friends in *Tzerie* and *Noar* Meretz who worked with me through the research process and in campaigning and who taught me so much. This dissertation is ultimately for you and I hope that you see some of yourselves in these pages. *Todah robah, robah!* I would also like to acknowledge the support of my supervisors Jeff and Keith over the years and of my editors, Noeline, Meirav and Diana. Thank you also to my parents who supported me when the government thought better of it. Lastly, I would like to thank my wife Sharon and son Yuval for their loving support during the writing process.

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my mother Bernadette.

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations

Chapter 1: Introduction

In a March 1999 survey 62% of respondents stated that the secular-religious division was the most serious problem for Israeli society, as opposed to only 18% who favoured the conflict between Left and Right over the peace process (BBC News 4/6/00). This is a staggering result and evidence of the way in which the tensions concerning the religious-secular *kulturkampf* are experienced as a daily, pressing reality by Israelis. This dissertation describes the role of the Meretz political party and its activists in the ongoing *kulturkampf* ('culture war') between religious and secular Israelis. It builds on my experiences as a fieldworker and activist with the party from the 1999 general election.

The use of the term *kulturkampf* ('culture war'), with its intimations of warfare and total societal dysfunction, is controversial when describing relations between Israel's observant and non-observant publics. However, a close consideration of the modes, trajectory and intractability of culture battles over issues such as Jewish identity politics and religious coercion militates against any other understanding of the overall conflict. The Israeli *kulturkampf* is recognised here as the result of a divergence in Jewish identity politics that has, since the Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskala*), led to the fundamental breakdown of homogeneity. Through Zionism this conflict was transported to Israel where it has developed into a battle over the imagined ideal and future of the state. Here Meretz activists describe how they relate to Jewish identity and ethnicity, Zionism and Judaism and give their opinions on matters such as religious coercion and the Occupation. It is argued that the settlement of the West Bank and Gaza can only be properly understood with regard to the Israeli culture war, of which it is an expression. At the same time Israeli identity politics has become an ethnopolitical battle over who holds the most valid form of Jewish identity and over who is to be the ultimate arbiter of that identity.

Below, I describe my involvement with Meretz as both activist and ethnographer, and my reasons for choosing Meretz as an organisation deeply involved in the Israeli *kulturkampf*. The term *kulturkampf* is defined and the importance of its study reviewed before an exposition on the perceived problems of engagement for objectivity, critical distance and cultural reflexivity. My ethnographic methodology has been influenced by the work of Kurt Wolff and his ideas are discussed below. This is followed by a discourse on

the use of 'identity' before I provide a brief introduction to the subjects that will be broached in each chapter.

Why Meretz?

'To Be Free In Our Country' was the 1999 election campaign slogan for the Meretz political party. The slogan itself is a line from the Israeli national anthem, *Hatikva* ('The Hope'), and refers to the 'freedoms' (Appendix C) espoused by the party, given Meretz' commitment to the promotion of human and civil rights. Of these freedoms, the obvious referent was freedom from religious coercion and it was on the secular public's understanding of Meretz' commitment to the struggle against the Orthodox religious establishment and its perceived encroachment on secular dominion in Israel that the 1999 election result would hinge.

Israel is racked by conflicts that reflect divisions within the Jewish population between secular and religious, hawks and doves, Sephardim[1] and Ashkenazim[2]. Jewish identity is deeply implicated in these struggles and is utilised in different ways by competing groups to promote their own claims over those of their rivals and to define the boundaries of membership. The various identity communities are represented politically by a myriad of parties, movements and organisations that give Israeli politics a 'tribal' character[3], an effervescence and instability rarely seen in other democratic regimes.

It is problematic to define these groups and their representative bodies as belonging to identity communities as it creates a problem of definition and the danger of launching a reductive analysis which fails to acknowledge the extant diversity of opinions and motivations of individuals and sub-groups within the posited identity group. Nonetheless, the concept has some merit when used loosely to formulate theoretical bases for collective understandings and action for groups who share class (resource access, taste, residence, etc.), ethnic, religious and other characteristics. This is particularly true when analysing an

---

[1] Sephardim: A term originally used to refer to exiled Spanish Jewry now describes the descendants of this group throughout the world and Jews and their descendants from North Africa and the Near East.

[2] Ashkenazim: European Jews and their descendants.

[3] I use' tribal' here not in its traditional sense of a kinship-based society but in the use given the term by political commentators in Israel when referring to the fact that different identity communities display set political affinities and positions, which they hold to passionately.

otherwise amorphous public such as middle-class secular Israelis where the proposition of a shared identity community can help in analysing where the points of commonality lie and in identifying trends within this public regarding issues that impinge on the identity aggregate or merely a sub-group.

The Meretz political party represents one such identity community; that sector of the secular, dovish Ashkenazi public who believe in the necessity of strengthening Israel as a secular, democratic state built on the recognition of civil and human rights. Included in the Meretz definition of civil rights is freedom from religious coercion, to be actuated through changes in the religious-secular 'status quo' formulated in the years immediately preceding and following independence. Meretz has also been the most intractable Zionist movement with regard to the necessity of leaving the Occupied Territories and in defining the Occupation as a human rights disaster and an unnecessary blight on the state.

Meretz represents an identity community within the secular public that holds to several or all of the following points. Members do not support the right wing vision of 'Greater Israel', synonymous to some with the quasi-religious concept of *Eretz Yisrael* ('Land of Israel') and used by the right to legitimise the settlement of conquered territories. They hold an aversion to the perceived backwardness and corruption of the religious establishment and populace, see their own secular lifestyle as threatened by the growth of the religious community and the growing power of its political representatives, and hold to a more limited understanding of Zionism and nationalism. Members envision a future liberal Jewish state in tune with the Herzlian vision of a normalised Western society living at peace with its neighbours (Sachar 1995:40-41; Eisenstadt 1985:84-85).

Meretz supporters may hold to some or all of the above and their adherence to the party as the representative of their community is essentially voluntary and dependant on outside factors such as the regression of the peace process and Meretz' perceived effectiveness in making changes in the religious secular status quo - both contributed to a loss of votes for Meretz in the 2003 elections. Nonetheless, *Tzerie* Meretz (the organisation in Meretz for those between 18-35 years old) constituted for me the ideal fieldwork 'site'; a militant section of the secularist party most engaged in the *kulturkampf*, committed to vigorous street activism pertaining to the conflict.

My own interest in Meretz was raised through living in Jerusalem for just over two months in 1996. I became fascinated by the rich diversity and variety of expressions of Jewish identity in the city. My Israeli girlfriend was secular and voted Meretz - though she, like many, expressed disillusionment with the party - so I was able to get some gist of what the party stood for and the various religious, ethnic and ideological differences in the Israeli polity. My first weeks in Jerusalem were spent finding a flat and settling in. My entrée to the party was simple; I knocked off a quick research proposal on my laptop and wandered down the street to the Meretz branch to introduce myself. At first I was concerned about my poor Hebrew and expected communication difficulties, but my fears proved groundless as it turned out that virtually everybody at the Jerusalem Meretz *snif* ('branch') spoke English and were more than happy to slap a stack of flyers (which I couldn't read) on me and have me out on the streets as an activist immediately. By the end of the first week I was acting as the adult required for *Noar* (the 'Youth' section of Meretz, activists of high school age) to be allowed to go out electioneering. The learning curve was very steep. I had drivers and passers-by abusing me at intersections before I even knew why, or could understand the choice appellations they were bestowing upon me, but with the help of the *Noar* and *Tzerim* (*Tzerie* members) at the *snif*. I was soon well-informed on the election, the Jerusalem *kulturkampf*, and on their attitudes to settlers and the right wing.

Choosing to become a Meretz activist was serendipitous; I was catapulted into the middle of an election campaign in which the Israeli public was deeply engaged (unlike the 2000 and 2003 elections), fighting for ideas that I held to and which stood at the heart of the left-centre secular response to religious-nationalism. According to informants, Meretz had performed well in opposition to a Netanyahu government that had become notorious - at least on the left - for graft and corruption. As the campaign wore on it became clear to many of us that we were going to win and that Meretz would be part of a coalition government that would seek to end the cold war with Syria and conclude negotiations with the Palestinians, allowing their Authority to become a state. The hope was there too that Meretz could encourage the Labour Party to introduce a widespread reform of the religious-secular status quo. This hope was quashed on election night when it was announced that the Sephardic ultra-Orthodox party, Shas had won 17 seats and Barak promised to be the prime

minister of "everybody", an announcement met by around 100,000 celebrating supporters chanting "*Rak lo Shas*" ('Just not Shas').

Meretz proved the perfect choice for me, an ideologically committed party with left wing and liberal tendencies, that equated with my own; the target of religious and nationalistic hatred as opponents of Greater Israel and advocates of the separation of synagogue and state within the 'Zionist consensus'. As a Meretz activist I was able to participate in the Israeli *kulturkampf* in a unique and profound manner in a campaign in which religious-secular cleavages gained an astounding electoral affinity and the related internal conflict over the Occupation reached its nadir.

Why Study the Israeli *Kulturkampf?*

The term *kulturkampf* was coined in the struggle between Bismarck and the Catholic Church in the 1860s and 1870s over the privileges and prerogatives of the latter in the new German state. The Israeli *kulturkampf* is far more deep-seated and intractable than this wrestle for power between competing authorities and is of far greater consequence for the future of Israeli society due to its popular nature. We will look more closely at the applicability of the term to the Israeli secular-religious conflict and seek to provide a firmer and more wide-ranging definition (Chapter 3) but for now it suffices to acknowledge that this dissertation posits the existence of a culture war and seeks to provide details of who is involved, why, and in what way. This extrapolation of the architecture of the conflict is vital given the rather simplistic use made of the term in many commentaries, that choose to focus primarily on outbreaks of violent protest and attempts at changing the legislated status quo agreement by ultra-Orthodox and militant secular and liberal religious organisations and thus minimise the profound divisions and far greater reach of the *kulturkampf*. All Jewish-Israelis are inextricably caught up in the secular-religious conflict - to varying degrees - due to its character as a battle over Jewish identity politics, with wide-reaching implications for the future of the state and society.

Above all, the *kulturkampf* is a prolonged moment of identity crisis, confusion, competition and reproduction by numerous groups all of which compete for power and seek to impose their vision of the ideal future and understanding of the Jewish self and community on the other side. It is the forge in which cultural identity is contested and

transformed with greater rapidity than through any other process, laying naked competing identity politics and providing a unique opportunity to map cultural processes.

Organisations and movements within this conflict are increasingly being compelled to strike antagonistic poses in relation to the perceived opposition - a stance forced on them from below by the fears of their constituency. Willingly, or otherwise, they are forced into becoming engines of cultural production taking a public stance on matters they would otherwise elide or seek to address in a more moderate manner. Jewish identity politics stands at the heart of the new Israeli civil religion and, crucially, has gained electoral affinity, gutting the consociational system and leaving in its wake the naked oppositional pursuit of power and influence while turning existent societal cleavages into gaping chasms between hostile publics.

The importance of studying *kulturkampf* cleavages and the fears, beliefs and interests that inform them lies not in an effort to provide some palliative. A simple cure does not exist and calls for dialogue and reconciliation are, in my opinion, pointless given the ferocity of the conflict and the absolute conviction of many of the players. Attempts to foster Jewish unity or an exchange of ideas have failed repeatedly and organisations and campaigns set up to foster secular-religious reconciliation have foundered[4]. It is certainly beyond the purview of scholarship to provide solutions, although engagement in ameliorative discourses is possible with the understanding that intellectual confabs have minimal impact on conflicts that are by nature irrational and popular. An analysis of the struggle is useful in and of itself for comprehending what is going on in the Israeli *kulturkampf* and the impulses and understandings that move its actors and shape the confrontation. Such an inquiry should examine the sense of identity, religiosity, associated ideological belief systems, and resultant actions and discourses. It should also seek to marry these elements to an understanding of the trajectory of the wider struggle. Anthropology and sociology should lead such an investigation in order to demythologise the *kulturkampf* and provide insights into its future. Ethnography is a particularly powerful tool for centring analysis on the social actor. It is also useful for integrating the individual's thoughts and experiences into understandings of the *kulturkampf* as a whole in a way that statistical

---

[4] One such campaign was instigated by Meretz MK Dedi Zucker, who harshly criticised and then left the party over what he saw as its anti-religious politics (Jerusalem Post 9/4/99).

analysis based on polling alone can never hope to achieve and which hypotheses built solely on contemporary media or academic writings can only guess at. As Marcus and Fisher (1986:82) put it, "Without ethnography, one can only imagine what is happening to real social actors caught up in complex macroprocesses. Ethnography is thus the sensitive register of change at the level of experience".

The religious-secular *kulturkampf* is important not in its particularity but in its pervasiveness as a form of social conflict dating back to the origins of the *Haskala* in the 18th and 19th centuries. In Chapter Two we discuss the socio-economic change that led inexorably to identity conflict through the efflorescence of the *Haskala*. The Spinozan excommunication is related to contemporary Orthodox powers of sanction before a brief survey of the history of the Berlin *Haskala*, the Late *Haskala*, and two case studies of identity changes in rural Alsace and Russia. The second section of this historical chapter deals with the rise of Zionism and the emergence of, and changes in, Zionist-Israeli civil religion. These changes in Jewish society were merely a part of the great secularisation of Western Europe which, despite significant conservative and religious opposition, spread rapidly and transformed the societies it touched through the rise of the new capitalist class system. Exported globally through European imperialism, the new economic system radically transformed the societies it touched and laid the foundations for modern consumer culture and the marginalisation of institutionalised religion.

The Islamic *kulturkampf* came to the world's attention in 1979 and since then has burgeoned as a cultural phenomenon to the point where religious militancy has begun to play a role in virtually every Moslem community, including Palestinian society. Comparative studies are difficult cross-culturally as context plays a key role in the nature of such struggles, but it is not impossible to posit some value in understanding all culture wars through a study of the Israeli secular-religious conflict. It seems possible to find commonalities, in particular, between the Israeli *kulturkampf* and that in Arab societies due to the fact that Israel is a Middle Eastern society with a cultural affinity to and large population from Arab countries. Again, it is possible to make comparisons between the Israeli secular-religious impasse and that in the United States. It is no accident that the Christian Coalition has significant contacts with national-religious extremists in Israel and

that both wield significant influence within the conservative politics of their respective countries.

Surrender & Activism as Ethnographic Practice

In planning my ethnographic relationship with Meretz, I made an early decision not to seek to separate myself in any way from those who were to be my research participants by privileging my own fieldwork needs over the role I intended to play as an activist. I had some idea of what to expect from my own experiences as a Labour Party activist in New Zealand and through participation in various New Zealand student protest activities, but the intensity of the experience was totally unexpected in terms of the level of commitment I was forced to make immediately and the extent to which I had to put the ethnographic pith helmet to one side during the course of the 1999 election campaign. My fieldnotes were snatched in place of precious hours of sleep and in a mental state progressively resembling total collapse as the long days and nights of constant demonstrations, flyer handouts at intersections; banner-hanging; banner-tearing and confrontations began to take their toll. The resultant paucity of fieldnotes was outweighed by the deluge of experiences and impressions and the, attendant, rapid learning process I underwent under the tutelage of fellow activists. Bonds of friendship and mutual reliance were quickly forged and many have survived till this day, a proof, in my opinion of sociologist Kurt Wolff's (1962:18) admonition to adopt an attitude of "unconditional surrender" in fieldwork.

Employing the concept of "surrender," Kurt Wolff (1962; 1964; 1974) laid the groundwork for a radical reorientation of fieldwork relations, and a new anthropological epistemology. This came about through a crisis he experienced during his own research during which he felt that "I invaded the people (or defended myself against them) as a social scientist" (Wolff 1964:234). He felt that this defensive posture had a deleterious impact not only on field relations but also on the veracity of the knowledge gained in social research, which he saw as mutated and constrained by pre-supposition (and thus pre-ordination) and a will to knowledge, and made inherently problematic thereby. His answer was to enter into the research relationship with what he describes as an attempt to suspend 'received notions' about those he was studying allowing true knowledge to arise as 'catch'

through an attitude of 'cognitive love' and 'surrender to' (Wolff 1962:20-22; Wolff 1964: 236-243).

The state of surrender follows a willed openness (which he called "surrender to") to research participants and allows the primacy of experience, the overwhelming flow of impressions and the "frenzy of observation" to act as ultimate arbiters for the knowledge gained once fieldwork is over. To Wolff (Wolff 1963:243), 'surrender to' involves giving up the will to control the course and framing of research through a shared involvement and identification with those being studied and the researcher making a personal commitment that opens him or her to the possibility of being hurt. In the overwhelming flow of experience everything becomes pertinent and knowledge is emergent rather than prejudged through the description, definition and generalisation of the "usual procedures of science" (Wolff 1964:237, 248). Wolff wrote that, "In surrendering man does not know, and finds it wholly irrelevant to ask, whether whatever it may be he is exploring is something to which received notions are adequate - only his catch, if anything, will tell him" (Wolff 1964: 239). The understandings that arise following this undifferentiated and vulnerable period of suspension of the will to judgement and control are the 'catch'. For Wolff, this constitutes a knowledge-base of far greater potential veracity than in methods where the researcher invades the group. It provides for the post-fieldwork construction of new understandings based on an intimate, personal experience with research participants.

Wolff writes in the idiom of love and it is difficult to say whether his philosophy of surrender constitutes a systematic methodology or a plea to re-orientate the fieldwork relationship around the recognition of the primacy of experience and our ability to relate to the shared humanity that binds us to those we work with. Superficially, this giving up of the dominion of scientific pre-destination appears both naïve and impractical and it would be mendacious of me to claim that my own 'received notions' played no part in my developing understanding of what was going on around me and on my impressions of the nature of *Tzerie* Meretz and its role and place in wider society.

However, Wolff's admonition to enter the research relationship with an attitude of 'cognitive love' and a will to 'surrender to' those I was working with proved revelatory. I quickly understood that I knew almost nothing about the experience of Jewish-Israeli identity, Meretz as a community, participant attitudes and opinions on a vast array of

topics, and even on the context of the *kulturkampf* itself despite four years of focussed reading on these subjects. I felt consumed, de-centred, and overcome by the flood of experiences in my role as a sequestered activist and I realised early on that any effort to stand aside in an attempt to gain some perspective would be both pointless and futile.

I would like to be able to proffer some definition as to the separation of roles of fieldworker and committed activist but up until the May 1999 elections there was none; I was an activist pure and simple, it was the commitment that was expected of me by Meretz *Tzerim* and *Noar* and one I wholeheartedly gave myself over to because I soon began to share their belief that we were fighting for the future of Israel and that every action we undertook was a matter of life and death both for the vision of a civil, democratic state and for those who would die should peace not be achieved. This shared perception goes a long way to explaining the incredible level of commitment displayed by Meretz activists, many of whom took months off work or study to devote themselves as unpaid volunteers to street activism. One particularly poignant conversation still lingers in my memory. I was on a bus with *Noar,* returning from a days-long, incredibly tiring, interminable tour cum show of strength in the south involving around a hundred vehicles and hundreds of activists from *Tzerie* and *Noar.* I commented to one girl that New Zealand teens would never put up with a trip like that without complaint and that she must have been bored. She replied with a firm but polite lecture on the importance of the trip and the election campaign to the future of the state. I was abashed and very impressed.

Entering into the research relationship as a fully participating member of a group struggle is neither easy, nor unproblematic. It raises issues of objectivity and perspective, reflexivity and appropriate methodology - alongside more mundane questions as to the political implications for one's career and academic institution - that are difficult to answer and I cannot hope to fully palliate here. I can only say that I believe it was an approach that worked in my case and one that gave me insights into individuals, group and context that I could not have achieved through maintaining an insider-outsider role. The situation demanded absolute dedication and I would have remained an outsider and a nuisance if I hadn't given it, with dire implications for my comprehension of what was going on around me. Worse, it would have constituted an unethical exploitation at a time when I could play a minor, but not unimportant role in a cause I believed in deeply. As such, I reject

absolutely arguments that equate objectivity with distance or an apolitical stance. To be relevant to the lives of our research participants and to fully understand them we must make an unequivocal commitment as social researchers beyond the research relationship, as friends, co-workers or advocates recognising their sufferings and their concerns where possible and, where these equate with our own, devote ourselves to fighting with them. Objectivity is not a state, a relationship to study material, or a position. Perspective follows from knowledge, and intimate knowledge follows engagement, which is always achieved through an act of will - in this case 'to surrender'.

I worked as a volunteer during four campaigning periods, characterised by vigorous street activism; Barak-Bibi '99, pre-Camp David II 2000, post-Camp David II 2000-2001 and Sharon-Barak 2001. Significant library study both preceded and followed my periods of intense fieldwork and is vital to any informed critique, but the knowledge gained thereby is always viewed and judged through the prism of experience. Thus, I do not make the same epistemological claims for the chapters written here on the historical progression of the *kulturkampf* and on settler and religious society as I do for those relating to my personal experiences with Meretz.

With regards to reflexivity, both cultural and critical, I believe I was able to maintain a fair modicum of both. Cultural reflexivity was greatly aided by my living with a *sabra* (native-born Israeli) wife and child and having a largely *sabra* group of family and friends from post-election 1999, but as with critical reflexivity it is ultimately up to the reader to decide. My perspective is not that of an Israeli and certain areas of Israeli society will always remain foreign to me, but I share a great deal with my research participants - friendships, class and attendant tastes, academic background, age, ideological concerns, shared experiences - that make it bizarre for me to think of imposing a radical Self-Other dichotomy between us. This is not to obscure relations of power in inscription; research participants' voices are heard here only insofar as I deem what they have to say relevant to the discussion at hand. This dissertation does not constitute a radical attempt to re-imagine ethnographic writing in a more egalitarian format but I have attempted here to 'set my own stall' while giving space to interpretations that differ from my own.

I was unable to write fieldnotes every day as the preparation of election ephemera, travel, the setting up of almost daily demonstrations, 'intersections'[5], college elections and student days, and other street activities took up most waking hours with sleep snatched in between.

Figure 2: A typical intersection

When I did get the chance to write, the fieldnotes could not express the frenetic nature of the campaign, the intense emotions I was feeling, or the relative import of different experiences the interpretation of which had to wait for the end of the campaign. The utility of fieldnotes to my research was limited in comparison with the experiences inscribed in memory and act now more as a prompt than an account. This corresponds with the experience of other researchers: "Might it be that our attribution of near-sanctity and confidence to our field notebooks contradicts strangely a tacit recognition that much of what we say about a society is owed to what is not written down" (Cohen 1992: 339)?

It proved impossible to interview most activists during campaigning as it would have been an enormous imposition and for most was impossible given that everyone was overworked and stressed - most seemed to be surviving on caffeine and cigarettes. I took down personal details at the back of my fieldnote books and promised interviews following the elections. Close to sixty people agreed to interviews and signed consent forms (Appendix A). This proved an impossible number to interview post-election, a fact I greatly regret and - given that a copy of this dissertation will be sent to Meretz - I would like to apologise to those who gave their consent and then were not interviewed. In all 43 interviews were conducted with 40 activists between 6/4/99 and 10/5/01.

---

[5] An 'intersection' typically involves three or more activists hanging banners, handing out flyers and placing stickers on cars at important crossroads controlled by traffic lights.

I have included the interview questionnaire (Appendix B) because I feel it is important for the reader to understand the exact nature of the subjects broached, my roles as interlocutor and author in both the framing and interpretation of these, and the limitations imposed on interviewees by this framework. In all interviews discussions strayed from this line of enquiry and I often left out questions from the section on Meretz' internal politics as the passage of time made them irrelevant. Some interviews took place at Meretz headquarters in Tel Aviv, in the conference room or vacant offices due to this building's role as a focal point for party activities. Interruptions made this venue less than ideal so where possible I organised to meet interviewees in the more relaxed environment of a café, often on university campuses. In Jerusalem I was forced to conduct a couple of interviews in the *snif*, which shared the drawbacks of party headquarters. Most interviews took close to two hours, which was usually too long for both parties but proved vital for covering the topics visited here. Again, I would like to apologise to all interviewees for conducting these interviews in English, severely limiting the ability of many to express themselves fully.

Photography was the last of my fieldwork activities. Without a camera of my own, I was forced to borrow, which limited the events and activities I was able to photograph. Altogether I shot 15 rolls of film, with the subject usually being demonstrations or other Meretz activities in public places. Photographs of individuals are included here with their permission with interviewee names changed in the text itself to prevent identification.

The Problem of Identity

In Chapters 2, 5 and 7 I will be discussing Jewish identity and identity theory in greater depth but for now I will introduce issues surrounding the term 'identity' and seek to provide a framework for its usage in this dissertation.

Identity is at the heart of the contemporary 'Western' *zeitgeist*, appearing in seemingly endless forms and contexts in academic discourses, and beyond, to describe a seemingly essential feature of human culture; the urge to identify with and to be identified by others and to create a reflective image of the self. In *Self Consciousness: An Alternative Anthropology of Identity* (1994:2) Anthony Cohen posits a plastic, variable self, adopting and discarding elements as it moves between the private and public realms. He argues that a concern with collective structures and modes has blinded anthropology to the role of the

individual and their constituent self as an indissoluble entity in relation to collective categories such as 'culture', 'society' and 'ethnicity' which have been the sole concerns of analysis and description (Cohen 1994:6,132-133):

> We have concentrated on these collective structures and categories and by and large have taken the individual for granted. We have thereby created fictions... we should now set out to qualify these, if not from the bottom upwards, then by recognising that the relationship of individual and society is more complex and infinitely more variable than can be encompassed by a single, uni-dimensional deductive model (Cohen 1994:6)

I take issue somewhat with Cohen's positing a private-public division in the function of the mutable self. This seems to make assumptions as to the universality of the inherently cultural rigid public-private division, an all-pervasiveness disproved in ethnographic literature. We also should look askance at his writing off anthropology as a discipline confusing "social form with substance" (Cohen 1994:17) through generalisation, promoting the elision of the individual - indeed one of the great strengths of much recent ethnography has been a concern with the social individual, if not the constituent self. As to the plasticity of the self and the contextual nature of self-understandings, this seems to ring true and is perhaps the seat of the social diversity anthropology and other disciplines have begun to explore under the influence of post-modern scholarship.

An acknowledgement needs to be made of the fact that social identity formation, its representation in symbol and discourse, and boundary maintenance practices all need to be measured ultimately by their impact and influence on the agent self which is their judge and interpreter. The study of the action of identity formation in the extrapolation of self-understanding is highly problematic for the anthropologist. To what extent is identity consciously felt and experienced; is felt to be in harmony or dissonance with other identifications and the self; a motivating force in action and thought; or able to be expressed by the individual to an interested other? It seems here that anthropology simply does not have the methodological or theoretical arsenal to describe fully the agent self as a factor in identity. Personally, I am deeply sceptical of attempts to address this problem

through recourse to psychological explanations. Perhaps the best we can say is that, through ethnography, anthropology is able to ask for and pay greater attention to the stated understandings of self, motivations, and intentions as tests for our understandings of the impact of social identity formation. This is attempted here through questions relating to the constitution of the Jewish self in Chapter 5. I think we also need to be cognisant of the fact that the individual is not just an aggregate of identities. To reify the constituent self as such is to grossly misrepresent the essential, intangible complexity and beauty of human experience.

Brubaker and Cooper (2000:1) launch a scathing attack on the overuse and befuddlement of the concept of identity in the social sciences and humanities. They argue that identity, as used in academic discourse, has come to mean "too much", "too little", "or nothing at all" (ibid). Identity has become a hold-all: "Conceptualizing all affinities and affiliations, all forms of belonging, all experiences of commonality, connectedness, and cohesion, all self-understandings and self-identifications in the idiom of "identity" saddles us with a blunt, flat, undifferentiated vocabulary" (Brubaker & Cooper 2000:2).

They go on to provide a summary of the use of identity in which they excoriate the characterisation of modern identity as essentially mutable, fragmented, and diverse as leaving those holding this understanding, "without a rationale for talking about identities... If identity is everywhere, it is nowhere" (Brubaker & Cooper 2000:1). This echoes comments made by Israeli sociologist Sammy Smooha (Abdel-Malek & Jacobsen 1999: 200) as to the worthlessness of identity "as a scientific concept" if it is viewed as ever-changing and fluid. I profoundly disagree with these sentiments. The recognition of diversity and mutability as essential characteristics of identity formation and maintenance, does not deny the existence of stable forms and structures, or of continuity of modes of nomination, representation, symbolisation and identity group continuity through time; quite the opposite. An essential freedom of imagining and attributing meaning to identity by the individual, sub-group and identity community as a whole is the foundation and *sine qua non* of identity formation without which it could not function in representation and as a means for self-understanding.

Efforts to reify a particular version of identity as the sole referent and final understanding create unbearable dissonance between representation and experience and –

dependant on the claims to allegiance made, and the public sanction thereof - can lead to the explosion of *kulturkampf*. This is the case in contemporary Israel. Otherwise, where sanctions do not exist, individuals and groups make of the stuff of official representation (usually state-sanctioned) what they will, filling out the framework of reification with their own semantic fields. This irreducible diversity should sound a note of caution in identity investigation.

While acknowledging the apparent universality of the will to identify with and be identified by, and without attempting to explain it, we need to beware of making identity do too much. Here, I agree with Brubaker and Cooper (2000) that a radical rethinking of discourse needs to take place in which we define and delimit 'identity', although, given its utility, it should not be discarded. They propose the use of such terms as 'identification', 'self-understanding', 'self-identification', 'groupness', 'commonality' and 'connectedness' as alternatives to the use of 'identity' (Brubaker & Cooper 2000:17-20). Although these strike me as implicit within the concept of 'identity', and in some cases could lead to a certain awkwardness of interpretation without further definition (which the authors provide), I take this critique on board and attempt to use such terms here where they may elucidate which aspects of identity I am referring to.

Epstein (1978:100) argues that, "each of us carries simultaneously a range of identities just as each of us occupies a number of statuses and plays a variety of roles". I do not agree entirely with his conception of status and roles as standing in direct relation to identity formation. Certainly, public roles and statuses can play a major part in understanding and locating the self but they do not stand in a one-to-one causal relationship with regard to the imagination of a coherent self-identity and do not explain the relations they establish the hierarchy for and signify. Indeed, a great deal can be explained by the dissonance between role and status and the experienced self or group - a discord that often leads to conflict. However, I support Epstein's premise of a range of identities as simultaneously experienced constituents of self-identity. Here it is possible to imagine a conscious or somatic hierarchy of import with regard to experienced identities dependent on factors such as context, time, environment and company but, again, it is not vital to the conceptualisation of myriad identity influences to assume their mutual independence.

Finally, I would like to address the relative importance of boundary maintenance to identity. In a paper on popular culture and the construction of post-modern identities, Kellner (1992:142) postulates an increase in "Other-directedness... for as the number of possible identities increases [with modernity] one must gain recognition to assume a stable, recognized identity". This rationalisation does not seem all that convincing. Firstly, to what extent does modernity create diversity rather than that multiplicity being a latent aspect of identity formation through time? Certainly, there has been a loss of authority and of outward homogeneity with regards to the power to represent and impose even a semblance of hegemony but should we confuse this with a lack of diversity and mutability? I think not! If this position is refuted then it follows that - with regards to identity - the post-modern turn itself constitutes a belated effort to militate against the confusion of form and representational power with actual agency in identity (never absolute), but does not point to an inexplicable expansion of the facility of self-identification coterminous with modernity, even where it makes this claim.

So how does this relate to the representation of boundary maintenance in academic discourse? In shifting the emphasis of identity formation and maintenance from the identity aggregate to the liminal we are trapping ourselves in a structuralist tautology. In recognising the diversity of identifications held by the agent self and the essential mutability of identity we make it impossible to then postulate the existence of the very entities anthropology has self-flagellated over for decades; absolute identity formations engaged in the liminal production of 'culture' or 'identity'. We are drawing lines in the sand that are immediately washed away by the tide of identity diversity and change. This is not to say that the postulation of group identities with established representations of self and other is undesirable, or that the setting up of radical dichotomies of member and outsider are not consequential both in relations between groups and in the internal political representation of identity; obviously they are. But they are not constitutive. The impact of such representations also varies with time and context - as in the relationship between 'Palestinian' and 'Israeli' identity (see Chapter 4).

'Identification with' is built on familiarity. The proffering of an Other (usually presented as antipathetic) can be a powerful tool for those with representational power and this can indeed act as a powerful motivating force, particularly at times of social conflict.

However, its effect on self-understanding is always blunted by the impossibility, in many cases, of creating this dichotomy. This absolute disassociation proves impossible where cross-cultural experience 'begs the lie' and where a lack of acquaintance with genuine alterity creates a consequent shallowness of representation. If we are to investigate the cultural it must be through the discourses and representations of the identity group itself, imagined as unbounded, contested, mutable and diverse. This creates a problem of identity representation for academics only partially resolved by paying closer attention to the activist self, but we should celebrate this challenge as testament to the rich diversity of human sociality.

Sleeping My Way to the Top

It was during the course of campaigning prior to the 1999 election that I fell in love with Sharon who was to become my wife. She was the head of the *Tzerim* at this stage and was one of the primary campaign co-ordinators, so we were together day-in, day-out for weeks on end. It is impossible to say when friendship became something more. The impact on my fieldwork of this entanglement was far from clear at the time but was certainly of secondary concern. It was however far from unproblematic. Sharon was married and living with her previous husband at the time - the father of my stepson Yuval. He was well known amongst the *Tzerim* so Sharon's and my post-election cohabitation came as a shock to many and was probably opposed by a few, though no one said anything to either of us. Nonetheless, our close friends within the *Tzerim* were extremely supportive.

Given that Sharon was also a leader of one of two major factions within the *Tzerim*, and the head of the organisation, our relationship placed me firmly within the opposition camp for around half of the inner circle of the party 'Youth', many of whom I had developed friendly relations with and counted on as research participants and future interviewees. I made every effort not to be pigeonholed as a partisan figure. My friends and acquaintances from the newly ascendant opposition faction maintained a helpful and open attitude with regards to the interview process, but there is no doubt that there was some effect with regards to maintaining a balance between the information gleaned from either faction, and this should be acknowledged here. Without intending to do so, I interviewed more members of Sharon's faction than their opposition and the majority of close friends in

the years that followed also came from this group, with the obvious impact on impressions gained in fieldwork and intra/post-fieldwork this entailed. With regards to the issues discussed here I did not discern any significant differences in approach or opinion between the factions.

Through my relationship with Sharon I became a member of an Israeli family and came into contact with the minutiae of daily life in a *sabra*, mixed Ashkenazi-Sephardi family. As stepfather to an Israeli child I gained insight into the nature of childhood socialisation into Israeli-Jewish identity and generally was exposed to a plethora of experiences and understandings I would otherwise have been totally oblivious to had I left, as intended, after six months of research. Without this my pool of knowledge would have been shallower and this dissertation far more reliant on book study for context rather than experienced reality, with detrimental consequences.

An Overview of the Dissertation

Following Chapter 2 on the Jewish Enlightenment and classical Zionism, in Chapter 3 I argue for an expanded definition of the Israeli *kulturkampf* which brings into play the 'traditionalist' and national-religious publics which have previously been excluded from much analysis of the conflict through its false reduction to turf battles between the ultra-Orthodox and Ashkenazi left. Using examples from my fieldwork, interview transcripts, the media and academic publications I argue that the Israeli *kulturkampf* is deepening and growing more problematic and describe a growing tide of secular opposition to the religious-secular status quo.

Chapter 4 introduces the role of the national-religious in the Israeli *kulturkampf*, through an analysis of the messianic Kookist ideo-theology. I go on to discuss the role of Gush Emunim in transforming the military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza into a life and death struggle over the nature of the future Israeli state. The quasi-fascist Kahanist movement is also discussed and its impact on both the Israeli-Arab and the Jewish *kulturkampf* is examined. The popularisation of ethnic cleansing by the ultra-nationalist right is noted before the peace movement is introduced both as an ideological movement and identity community. The impact of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin on Meretz activists is then analysed before a discussion on the role of the proffered radical Palestinian-

Israeli dichotomy in structuring the conflict between the two, following the Israeli recognition of the existence of the Palestinian identity community. *Tzerie* attitudes to the Palestinian's right of return, the Occupation and peace process, the settlers, and the future Palestinian state are then introduced and reviewed before the chapter ends with a recounting of my experiences while campaigning at a college on the Ariel settlement.

In Chapter 5 an effort is made to define secular Jewish identity before a discussion on the ethnicisation of Jewish-Israeli national identity. Interviewees are asked to define secular Jewish identity and to differentiate this from Israeli identity before the long-term controversy over 'who is a Jew' is explored. The contentious history of this question is charted and the competing parties introduced, as is the impact on Israeli secular Jews of Orthodox sanctioned representations.

Chapter 6 looks at the socialisation of research participants into Jewish identity. The influential Guttman Report (Levy, Levinsohn & Katz 1993) is addressed before the importance of family in identity socialisation is revealed and the role of holidays and their associated rituals analysed. Interviewee responses to the question; "Is it possible to be both Jewish and secular" are discussed and then interviewees give their definitions of Israeli and Jewish identity.

Chapter 7 asks whether Israel has entered a postzionist phase, relating the perceived rise of individualism and breakdown of collective homogeneity in recent years. Interviewees provide their definitions of what it is to be a Zionist and the controversies surrounding postzionism are discussed. Activists then describe the influence of the army on identity and society before the chapter ends with a study of the Holocaust's impact on Jewish-Israeli identity.

Chapter 8 focuses specifically on Meretz as an identity community and political organisation. The genealogy of the party is presented before an analysis of the ideological propensities of young Meretz activists. The impact of self-criticism and corruption allegations is then discussed as is Meretz' role in Jewish-Israeli identity politics.

Chapter 9 gives an account of the bitter *kulturkampf* conflict between Shas and Meretz. The use of invective in conflict structuration and the battles between the two parties in the 1999-2000 coalition over education are recounted before interviewees relate to the oft-repeated accusation that Meretz is anti-religious.

Finally, the dissertation is brought to a conclusion in Chapter 10 with my summation of the nature and trajectory of the Israeli *kulturkampf*, present and future, and of the possibilities for Meretz as a political movement as it reinvents itself in a new coalition.

Chapter 2: The History of the Jewish *Kulturkampf*

In this chapter we track the development of the Jewish *kulturkampf* from its European origins to its role in the shaping of Israeli civil religion. Our discussion is divided into two sections with the first dealing with the birth of secular Jewish identity through the destruction of the traditional Jewish community and its quasi-independent status in most places. This occurred due to the opening of Jewish society to the new modes of social and economic life and attendant freedoms that developed at the time of the Industrial Revolution. The *Haskala* emerged from this milieu in the late eighteenth century as a movement designed to provide an intellectual framework for the maintenance of Jewish solidarity and identity, both as a bulwark against assimilation, and to embrace and assimilate the changes taking place in society. The *Haskala* laid the foundations for secular Jewish identifications and its essential concerns remain those of secular Israelis today. It provided the framework, though not the stimulus, for our second focus, the Zionist movement which, dismayed at the persistence of anti-Semitism sought to answer the 'Jewish problem' through programmes for Jewish cultural and political independence. We will examine the ideas and identify the important figures in each movement while sketching a brief history of the important changes in Jewish identity politics that provide the basis for an informed understanding of the contemporary *kulturkampf*.

Part 1: *Haskala*

Social and Economic Change and the Secular Jew

It is important to remember, when talking about identity politics, that changes never occur in a vacuum, despite, in this case, the traditional introversion of Jewish society. The impact of Enlightenment thought on Jewish identity was slow in coming but the tidal wave of change that had gripped European society through the Agrarian and Industrial Revolutions had already started to foment nascent class differentiation in Jewish communities by the 17th century. It was the development of modern capitalism during the 17th and 18th centuries and the attendant *embourgeoisement* of a growing number of Jews that led to the need for a rethinking both of the traditionally antipathetic relations with Gentile society and of what it meant to be Jewish. It comes as no surprise that the leaders of

the slow but steady transition of the vast majority of Jews to a largely secular identity were middle class, as are the leading proponents of secularism in Israel today.

With the development of business and class interests came a desire to fit in, to take on the norms, behaviours, lifestyle and values of a middle class that was quickly moving away from institutionalised religion and overt religiosity. It is easy to point to certain key turning points in this process, such as the French Revolution and the slow and uneven emancipation of Jews from political, occupational and economic strictures, as heralds of revolutionary change. These are important but serve more as indicators of wider social and economic influences that had already transformed the societies they were to free. It was often the disparity between actual political and civil rights and the growing role of Jews in the economic and social life of the state that led to increasingly strident calls for emancipation.

It is also vital to mention the increasing usurpation of the rights of traditional Jewish communities by the developing institutions of the state, and the geographic dispersal caused by urbanisation. For example, the number of German Jews living in urban areas quadrupled between 1816 and 1871 (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:179). Previously autonomous Jewish communities gradually lost their social base and judicial and civic functions, along with much of their power to control and sanction individual Jews (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:184-185). This power of sanction is retained in Israel over limited - though far from minor - aspects of the individual's life by state edict and the political power of the religious bloc in the Knesset, not by hegemonic authority as in pre-Enlightenment Europe.

Ideological and identity reorientation therefore proceeded alongside the wider changes of which they were the fruit. Progress differed from place to place, often depending on the proclivities of the waning monarchic potentates - particularly in Russia where political emancipation was not achieved until 1918. Likewise the impact of the *Haskala* varied widely from place to place (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:325). Lederhendler (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:337) argues that most Western and Central European Jews of the nineteenth century remained somewhere between the polls of total assimilation and introverted particularism. This is perhaps an obvious point but one that reminds us to remain wary of placing too great an emphasis on the small minority waging the *kulturkampf* on either side of the debate. Nonetheless, major, irrevocable change was taking place.

The Jewish Enlightenment

The *Haskala* was an intellectual movement that emerged from the changes recorded above. The *maskilim* (followers of the *Haskala*) encouraged Jews to study secular subjects, European languages and to enter fields such as agriculture, crafts the arts and sciences, previously the domain of Gentiles (Schoenburg 2003). The *Haskala* sought to provide a new basis for Jewish identification through the study of Jewish history and ancient Hebrew. As with the modern *kulturkampf* the battle over education was a key to the struggle with *maskilim* and traditional religious teachers increasingly fighting community to community for the right to educate Jewish children through the 18th and 19th centuries, with the former often emerging successful due to state sponsorship. The *Haskala* also created the first secular Hebrew and Yiddish literatures (Schoenburg 2003).

As the 18th century progressed many middle class European Jews felt increasingly embarrassed and angered by what seemed to them a degenerate Judaism, mired in introspection, with antiquated rituals and a theocentric education system that taught little of use to financial success or societal integration. Many began to feel that, through pragmatic change and moral regeneration, Jews must change to become 'worthy' of emancipation as full citizens of the state. It is unsurprising then that *maskilim* were to place at the heart of their reform efforts and new identity the provision of secular, emancipatory education to Jewish communities, ritual reform, acquisition of the vernacular, and occupational and residential freedoms. These calls came at different times in different places and the gradual ebb of anti-Semitic strictures was uneven and painfully slow in many places.

David Sorkin (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:186) describes the *Haskala* as the product of the collision between an ongoing internal critique of Jewish society and the thought of the Enlightenment, creating a radicalisation of ideas that had been fomenting for over a century. Through this synthesis a new, complex, yet viable form of Jewish identification and communality was created based on the ideology of emancipation (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:177). In many countries, control of the new and flourishing Hebrew press of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the *maskilim* provided them with a position of power and influence which allowed the swift dissemination of their ideas to the developing Jewish middle classes. These presses were shared with their Orthodox confreres till the late *Haskala* by which time the divisions within the Jewish community had reached

breaking point (Sorkin 2000:55). The initial sallies of the *maskilim* provoked little opposition from German rabbis and the rabbinical courts. This is probably due in part to the tentative nature of these early forays, but Sorkin (2000:39) also reads into this a general state of decay and exhaustion in the leadership and institutions of traditional Judaism. The early *maskilim* were a mixed bunch; doctors, moderate rabbis and autodidacts, all influenced by the efflorescence of secular learning and largely working in isolation (Sorkin 2000:42-43). As the *Haskala* developed so too did collegial fraternity and ideological coalescence as we can see in the circle of Sephardic 'free-thinkers' who influenced Spinoza (1982:3), and later in Mendelssohn's 'salon' confraternity of Christian intellectuals and *maskilim* (Breuer & Graetz 1996:273, 280; Erspammer 1997:65). That the traditional authority of the *talmid chakham* ('Wise student' or the 'student of a wise teacher') was on the wane by the eighteenth century is exemplified by a contemporary German story of the fight between a step-father and step-son, with the surname Gans ('goose') over an inheritance:

> The Rabbis and authorities came, they pondered the case at due length, but they accomplished nothing except to depart with fat fees. One of these rabbinical judges… made off with enough to build himself a handsome study room; and he had painted on its wall three or four rabbis plucking the feathers from a goose (Frankel & Zipperstein1992:185).

This story bears a close resemblance to complaints made today by Israeli seculars that the political leadership of the ultra-Orthodox are engaged in robbing the state. Here is a representative quote from a Haaretz feature (25/8/00) on militant secular responses to the Israeli *kulturkampf*: "You see Itzik Soudri [Shas spokesman, brother of Ovadia Yosef's daughter-in-law] and you know that the amount that he spends on silk pants could finance the budget of a whole development town. It's true that you can't call all their voters parasites, because out of their seventeen seats in the Knesset, twelve certainly came from soldiers' votes, but the party itself does not bring its voters out of their backwardness. That backwardness is a time bomb". In this quote we see the Enlightenment (and later Marxist) image of traditional religiosity as a corrupting, parasitic, primitive phenomenon to be

purged from society. That this polemic has always played a part in secular *kulturkampf* discourses is unsurprising, that the arguments have remained virtually identical through time is startling.

It should be remembered that the initial aims of the *Haskala* were far from antagonistic towards established religion. Indeed, the early *Haskala* was essentially a response to what was perceived as a widespread loss of interest in the Jewish tradition. The *Haskala* was by nature ameliorative, conservative and defensive. It sought to provide a new way of imagining Jewish identity in light of the failure of Judaism to provide new modes for Jewish communality, just as various Jewish-American organisations and congregations are currently seeking to combat the perceived tide of intermarriage and 'assimilation.' This effort to communicate tradition in new, more acceptable forms is obvious in the efforts of *maskilim* to translate traditional religious texts into the local vernacular for the first time.

Parry and Riposte: The Spinozan Excommunication

Spinoza was excommunicated from Amsterdam's Jewish community in 1656, becoming one of the earliest victims of the Jewish *kulturkampf*. He had, by this time, already lapsed from the traditional practices of Judaism, influenced both through his own studies and by a group of fellow 'free-thinkers' within the local Sephardi community. As Feldman (Spinoza 1982:3) notes, it was this falling away from orthopraxy that both drew the attention of the religious authorities and led directly to his excommunication. The impact on his work of this event is debatable but the anti-clerical and revolutionary nature of his ideas on religion, God and the pursuit of human happiness through the exercise of reason are unequivocal:

> ...he who seeks the true cause of miracles and is eager to understand the works
> of Nature as a scholar, and not just to gape at them like a fool, is universally
> considered an impious heretic and denounced by those to whom the common
> people bow down as interpreters of Nature and the Gods. For these people know
> that the dispelling of ignorance would entail the disappearance of that
> astonishment, which is the one and only support for their argument and for the
> safeguarding of their authority.... All that conduces to well being and the

worship of God they call Good and the contrary Bad. And since those who do not understand the nature of things, but only imagine things, make no affirmative judgements about things themselves and mistake their imagination for intellect, they are firmly convinced that there is order in things, ignorant as they are of things and of their nature". (Spinoza 1982:60)

The Ethics – from which this passage is taken - was published posthumously, Spinoza proving chary of bringing down upon himself further opprobrium. He identified God with nature, and denied to this entity the attributes of predestination and will, calling the latter "the asylum of ignorance" (Hampshire 1956:126) - thus presaging later definitions of the divine in liberal streams of both Judaism and Christianity. These ideas have a durability and resonance that ensure Spinoza's continued relevance to the course of the Jewish *kulturkampf* as they are grounded in a philosophy that placed at its centre the agency and ability of man to understand the nature of existence as the path to happiness.

During an interview one of my research participants brought up the subject of his mother and the personal anguish she underwent due to an Amsterdam rabbi's refusal to recognise her mother as Jewish. He relates the mayhem such decisions still cause with regards to personal status issues:

Eli: Yeah, but my sister can never get married in Israel, not that she was planning on doing it but we, we could never get married in the *Rabbanoot* [the Israeli Orthodox Rabbinate] and consider marrying in Israel. We're not Jewish... my grandmother had this fight with this rabbi in Zeist a zillion years ago and then he decided to get back at her and he wrote this letter to the Israeli Rabbinate that she's not Jewish. Now if she's not Jewish my mother's not Jewish and if my mother's not Jewish I'm not Jewish... and so my Mom made *aliyah* (immigrated) and she got married in the *Rabanoot* in Afulah and had three children... and then... five years ago she gets a letter saying, "You're not Jewish according to this rabbi", and she's like... "I've been living here for 27 years, where were you?"... And she was... hurt ... For her not to be Jewish was too much.

This appalling situation was left unresolved. If Eli or his sister decides to marry they will have to do so outside Israel or face the prospect of studying for an Orthodox conversion. That these sorts of problems are commonplace in Israel reflects the failure of the current system to meet the needs of the country's citizens and the importance of the continued Orthodox monopoly over personal status issues. Spinoza's attack on superstition and its use in engendering and enforcing social control still strike the reader as inherently modern and are a constant theme in the interviews I conducted with Young Meretz activists.

Spinoza's radical stand on religion and religious authority proved too great a leap for many *maskilim*. Indeed, the pre-eminent figure in the Berlin *Haskala,* Moses Mendelssohn, while acknowledging Spinoza's contribution to Enlightenment philosophy, found it impossible to concur with his negation of divine will and his "atheism" (Breuer & Graetz 1996:291-293). It was only with the growing politicisation and Jewish communal fragmentation of the Late Haskala that Spinoza's ideas gained currency with a new generation of Jewish thinkers. That this took close to a century is testament both to the revolutionary nature of his critique and the slow ebb of power and authority away from an increasingly embattled Orthodoxy.

Berlin: Revival to Reformation

Berlin quickly became the leading centre of the Jewish Enlightenment and it was under the leadership of Moses Mendelssohn that the *Haskala* and future possibilities for secular Jewish identity began to take shape. The Late *Haskala* in Prussia changed the focus of the Jewish Enlightenment to acculturation and emancipation. It emerged under the community leadership of the new Jewish mercantile elite, and laid the foundations for later *kulturkampf* anti-clericalism.

Moses Mendelssohn

Moses Mendelssohn was the central figure in defining the role and bounds of the early *Haskala* and the nascent sense of secular Jewish identity. His house became the gathering place for a new confraternity of *maskilim* and Gentile intellectuals, attracted by his stature as a highly regarded Enlightenment philosopher, with the two groups cohabiting for the

first time "as if there were no social barriers between them" (Erspammer 1997:65). It was in this liberating atmosphere that the *Haskala* began to take shape and projects were formulated for the revitalisation of the Jewish community such as educational reform and the resurrection of Hebrew as a non-liturgical language - concerns that were to become core ideals of the Zionist movement.

Mendelssohn's early works, such as translations into German of the Pentateuch and sections of the Biblical commentaries, reflect his concern with the growing isolation of Jews from their tradition and its 'bookshelf' (Breuer 1996:2; Encarta Online Encyclopaedia 2001). Mendelssolm sought to mate Jewish tradition and faith with the scientific and philosophical trends of the Enlightenment in a manner that reaffirmed the compatibility of the former with the spirit of the age (Sorkin 2000:52). Interestingly, his belief that Hebrew language and Bible study were essential to Jewish educational reform is mirrored in the Israeli education system where the study of Torah in Hebrew is a vital element of the curricula and in the inculcation of a specific form of secular Jewish-Israeli identity.

What was both radical and revolutionary in this seemingly conservative intellectual trend was that for the first time logic and reason were to serve as arbiters and guides in the study of tradition and the pursuit of truth therein. Here the *maskilim* picked up on a preceding well-established Enlightenment critique of established Christian religion and sought to drag Judaism into its sphere of influence. That Mendelssohn foresaw traditionalist opposition to this sudden change is obvious in his defence of logic as a pious pursuit necessary to fix the maledictions he saw as contributing to the loss of traditional authority (Sorkin 2000:54). Erspammer (1997:71) relates that Mendelssohn sought to enlighten his fellow Jews by showing them that their religion contained within it aspects that made it a "temple of reason" compatible with the modern age. In order to reassert this essential enlightened nature Judaism had to be divested of the accretion of superfluous doctrines and the crippling weight of overmystification which had led to such deviations as the *Kabbala*[6] (Erpammer 1997:74). Again, it is striking how relevant this critique remains. Israel has seen the exponential revival of mystical and even messianic (ex. Chabad, Breslav, Kookist messianism) and the spread of associated movements beyond the traditional bounds of

---

[6] A Jewish mystical tradition

Hasidic Judaism. This return to mystical Judaism is again being met by secular (and some liberal-religious and Orthodox) opposition.

In *Jerusalem* (1783) Mendelssohn sets out the proper relationship of Judaism to both the Jewish individual and the state. The new Judaism was to be based on a complete separation of synagogue and state with the former wielding no coercive powers (Breuer & Graetz 1996:287). Rabbinical courts were to be done away with and Judaism would not have the power to excommunicate members so as to conform to universal moral values protecting human rights (Breuer & Graetz 1996:287). Thus Mendelssohn - probably without intending to do so - set the foundation stone for a voluntarism that was to become the norm as the development of the nation-state, and the wider social-economic trends that were its cause, swept aside the decayed traditional system of communal authority. However, Mendelssohn was not Spinoza and he and his early followers were at pains not to push their relationship with the established Jewish communal authorities beyond breaking point. Hence, when the ire of the Berlin rabbinical authorities was raised by the publication of a new *maskilic* journal *Kohelet Musar* without regard to the usual rabbinical censorship of Hebrew texts, it was quickly and discreetly withdrawn (Breuer & Graetz 1996:276). *Kohelet Musar* was to prove the first of many Hebrew *maskilic* journals that sought to use Hebrew in a manner beyond the purview of traditional scholarship. The intent was to use Hebrew in all literary forms in order to make of it a living and binding language, though these efforts to popularise the language met with limited success. Mendelssohn himself used Hebrew to write secular literature and poetry and to acquaint Jews with the intellectual world of wider society, as in his translation of German articles and writings for the later *HaMe'assef* journal (Lipman no date).

Several Jewish communities called on Mendelssohn to afford them protection against attempts at expulsion by the Gentile secular authorities (Lipman no date). In 1772 Mendelssohn had a Meclenberg ban on the traditional Jewish custom of early burial overturned. This practice was widely attacked at the time for being dangerous due to the possibility of live burials. In a private correspondence with Rabbi Jacob Emden he argued passionately that the community should voluntarily abrogate this custom as an accretion rather than as an element of true Judaism. In response Emden warned that Mendelssohn's orthodoxy might be brought into question by such a stand and that he was deliberately

misconstruing the meaning of the relevant religious texts (Sorkin 2000:102-103). The fact that this exchange remained private until 1785, when the correspondence between the two was brought to the surface by *maskilim* seeking to re-ignite the controversy over early burial, shows the temerity with which Mendelssohn and his early followers handled confrontations with the established communal authorities (Sorkin 2000: 103). They sought to keep internal debates hidden from Gentile society and handled internally with recourse to traditional channels. That the efficacy of this conservative structure was gone and its authority ebbing away is testified to by the fact that it was to Mendelssohn and other *maskilim* that Jews were increasingly turning for aid and protection.

The Late *Haskala:* The Development of Secular Anti-Clericalism

The early focus of the Berlin Haskala on Jewish cultural renewal and re-acquaintance was never going to prove capable of providing the base upon which to rebuild a unified Jewish community as this project did not gain rabbinical support and never managed to create the institutional structure necessary for self-perpetuation. By the late 1780s the focus of Prussian Jewish elite aspirations had turned to the desire for political emancipation and equal civil rights. The Seven Years War (1756-63) had brought fabulous wealth to a number of Berlin Court Jews and it was they, alongside a growing, successful mercantile class that began to patronise the *maskilim* in an effort to provide the intellectual foundation for their call for emancipation and civil equality as Prussians. It is unsurprising then that mercantilist concepts such as the importance of utility to the state began to gain currency in *maskilic* publications (Sorkin 2000: 103).

This shift in focus can be seen in the work of Mendelssohn himself who, in his intercession on behalf of the Dresden community in 1777, and later in Alsace, argued for the Jewish possession of equal natural rights. He then sharpened his repudiation of the traditional Jewish community's coercive power by defining Judaism as "divine legislation" rather than as a "revealed religion" allowing for the possibility of a higher form of authority, the state, in the lives of Jews. Hence, Judaism could not stand in the way of Jewish emancipation, as many of its Gentile opponents were arguing (Sorkin 2000:104-106).

Maskilic attacks on the traditional rabbinical authorities became more direct and of greater portent to the possibility of future Jewish internal reconstitution. The attacks on traditionalalism were intensified in order to radically disassociate the wider Jewish community from the traditional anti-Semitic image of Jews as dissolute and backward. This tainted representation of traditional society still finds an echo in secularist Israeli views on the ultra-Orthodox.

In an influential 1782 pamphlet *maskil* Naphtali Wessely described the traditional pious scholar, *talmid chakham* as a person who is ignorant of "human knowledge, errs in manners and is a burden to mankind" and fulminated that "a pious student without knowledge is worse than a carcass" (Sorkin 2000:117). He added that traditional education left Jewish pupils ignorant both of Hebrew and German and perpetuated the use of Yiddish, which itself was a symbol of the oppression of the Jewish people separating them from wider Christian society. Wessely urged Austrian Jews to take up the occupational and educational freedoms afforded by the toleration edict of Joseph II (Erspammer 1997: 80-81). Here we see two themes that were to resonate in Zionist thought; the corrupting influence of Yiddish as a language of the oppressed, and the pressing need for a radical occupational and educational reformation. Wessely's publication was treated as a frontal assault on their authority and lifestyle by a wide coalition of rabbis from Poland, Bohemia and Austria. Rabbi Hirschel Lewin had Wessely banned from Berlin (Erspammer 1997: 82). Wessely was forced to back down and changed his description of the *talmid chakham*, although his initial formulation was still used by others in following years. Angered, seven leaders of the Berlin mercantile elite wrote aggressive letters to two of Wessely's critics, the rabbis of Lissa and Posen, excoriating them for their attack on the *maskil* and threatening state intervention (Sorkin 2000:109-110, 115). The importance of this should not be overlooked as it constitutes an important juncture in the development of the Jewish *kulturkampf*. Here the leadership of secularising Prussian Jewry was assumed by the non-intellectual, non-religious elite to protect its class interests - economic self-aggrandisement and the desire for political and civil equality. This coalition between the secular economic and intellectual elite groups has remained intact - though the boundary between the two is often blurred - to this day, albeit in different modes, and has its fullest expression in the militantly secularist, liberal-capitalist Shinui party.

The initial alliance between the *maskilim* and mercantile elite was not to last as the latter began to ditch the *Haskala* vision of cultural renewal for a new emphasis on secular knowledge and *Bildung* (acculturation) as the bases of a reform agenda designed to sway royal opinion. David Friedlander, who took over the leadership of the secular community following the death of Mendelssohn, began in May 1787 to submit petitions to King William II calling for the institution of dramatic and fundamental reform for the Jewish community (Sorkin 2000:120). To Friedlander, Judaism was characterised by irrational mysticism. He believed that Jews, through self-criticism and moral improvement, should make religious compromises that would lead to the creation of a Jewish-Christian sect for which they would be rewarded with civil equality (Erspammer 1997:91).

Emancipation was now the primary goal, reflecting a wider turning away from Judaism of large numbers of Jews, many of whom sought baptism as the route to social acceptance. The baptism rate increased 74% between 1770-1800, with 5% of the Jewish adult population changing faiths and the community as a whole atrophying by 5% (Erspammer 1997:93). Obviously this reflects a dramatic failure of the *Haskala* to provide meaning within a Jewish framework for their co-religionists although it should not be automatically assumed that converts lost their Jewish identity. Indeed continuing anti-Semitism and the widespread privatisation of religious belief in both Gentile and Jewish society made such a public display of re-affiliation ephemeral rather than actual.

Sorkin posits the new premise of Jewish communality in the shared desire for emancipation and acculturation, which interacted with elements from traditional Jewish culture to create a hybrid, "Transforming the culture it appropriated, fashioning a minority group variation on the middle class culture of liberalism" (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:193). Marion Kaplan describes the privatisation of Jewish identity: "Jews flaunted their Germanness as they privatised their Jewishness. But they were unwilling to surrender entirely their identity as Jews... A collective consciousness and self-consciousness prevented them from fusing with the dominant society" (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:201). She relates how Jews acculturated by taking on the behavioural standards of German bourgeois culture and its attitudes to work and success, moving out of traditionally Jewish neighbourhoods. At the same time intramarriage, socialisation and holiday observance maintained Jewish distinctiveness (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:201). It is in the private

realm where key aspects of socialisation, and hence of identity procurement, take place and where the key to understanding Jewish secularity lies.

Russia: Fracture, Reform and Exodus

Knowledge of the changes taking place in 19th and early 20th century Russian Jewry is vital to understanding the background and reasons for Zionism. Tsarist Russia maintained far-reaching restrictions on its Jewish inhabitants right up until the end of the regime effectively retarding the development of an accultured Jewish elite. Pogroms, the social acceptability of anti-Semitism, the inability of the Tsarist economy to provide for the development of an affluent middle class and the absence of an emancipationist ethic all contributed to the underdevelopment of the Jewish community when compared to the changes taking place in Western Europe. The weakness of the central state led to the localisation of the *kulturkampf* when it did make it presence felt in the second half of the nineteenth century and the differential impact of *maskilic* reform efforts.

Nonetheless, change was taking place in the far-flung Jewish communities of the Russian Empire with the fragmentation of the binding, traditional power structure and the gradual and sporadic entrance of a newly Russified notable class, reforming rabbis and the tiny group of *maskilim*, into positions of influence and authority (Frankel and Zipperstein 1992:326). The extreme reaction of the established rabbinical leadership to the ideas and perceived influence of the new pretenders made the *maskilim* seem a less marginal group than their actual numbers and power testified to. Perhaps this is due in part to the missionary zeal *maskilic* writings exhibit: "In all its habitations there are *maskilim*, people of discernment and learning, who are working for the good of our people... He [God] dwells in the hearts of our *maskilim* so that [they may] succour the remnant [of Israel], either through being their shield and defenders, or by suggesting ways to correct their inner lives so that they may walk the straight path and earn respect in the eyes of God and King" (*maskil* Avraham Ber Gottleiber, 1859 cited in Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:328). In 1872 another *maskil*, Lev Levanda wrote that a, "great and sacred mission has been given us: to transform, re-educate, our co-religionists, to set them on the high road, to walk hand in hand with all humanity. We must be the rabbis, the teachers, writers and intellectuals" (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:329). In these passages we see a central theme of the *Haskala*;

the re-making of the Jewish individual and community through educational reform, to ensure the bestowal of civil liberties. We can also discern a play on the images of good and evil, the retrograde and the enlightened, and an absolute sense of self-righteousness that is still pervasive on both sides of the Israeli *kulturkampf*.

Unlike the earlier Berlin *maskilim* their Russian confreres were largely forced to do without the vital support of wealthy community leaders. The *maskilim* emerged through state patronage during the reign of Alexander II (1855-1881) having developed a sense of group identity in the schools and rabbinical seminaries set up by Nicholas I (1825-1855) (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:20-21, 331). These schools provided the vital institutional framework for self-perpetuation and financial support.

From the 1840s the *maskilim* had followed the strategy of their Western comrades seeking influence within the institutions of the state in order to implement their reform programme. In 1843, rabbi Yitzhak of Volozhin and the Chabad rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (the Chabad movement is an important player in the Israeli *kulturkampf*) were shocked to find themselves faced with a number of prominent *maskilim* when summoned to discuss the new Jewish crown schools by the Education Ministry (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:333). The establishment of two crown rabbinical seminaries led to the development of a dual rabbinate. The official system ordained and was led by a number of prominent rabbis who together with other *maskilim* were responsible for the censorship of Hebrew and Yiddish texts (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:340). They were opposed by the now unofficial traditional rabbinate, which, though fractured, retained popular support. Ultimately the tactic of direct opposition failed to bear fruit. By the mid-nineteenth century the Tsarist regime was already in a parlous state and did not have the popular support of a developed civil society that would have made the exercise of institutional power by the *maskilim* resonate within Jewish society. A new approach was necessary.

The *maskilic* founding of the Hebrew and Yiddish press in Russia from the 1860s to the 1880s proved vital (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:30). New papers and journals popularised the idea of the existence of Jewish interests overriding local concerns and "conferred on the intelligentsia the power to disseminate their ideas on a totally new scale hitherto utterly denied to them" (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:30). The airing in press discourses of criticisms and apologia of the traditional rabbinical elite redefined Russian-

Jewish politics and gave the *maskilim* influence far beyond their numbers. The Orthodox polemicist, Yaakov Halevi Lifschitz recognised the importance of press control in writing that, "the *maskilim* increased in strength and influence, through the power of their writings in our country" reporting that, "the people have begun to say: 'Now we have brothers in the palace'… so that only they are deemed fit for public activity, and it is to them that the people look for salvation" (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:330, 331).

In 1868-1869 the issues of religious reform, social welfare, the rabbinate and communal leadership were all debated vigorously following the failure of the traditional elite to cope with a devastating famine in Lithuania (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:332, 334). *Maskilim* accused their opponents of sustaining a primitive education system and of encouraging early marriage, which led to the maintenance of a non-productive occupational structure unable to cope with population growth which proved a contributing factor in the deaths of their co-religionists (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:334). This argument is rehashed in contemporary Israel. A common refrain among Meretz people is that Shas and other ultra-Orthodox bodies maintain school system that, through a concentration on religious education, leave students ignorant and unable to cope with the needs of the modern world, feeding a cycle of despair and dependence.

The 1860s saw the emergence in Russia of the Society for Promoting Jewish Enlightenment (OPE), under the patronage of Baron Joseph Guenzberg. The OPE provided much needed financial backing for the setting up of modern Jewish libraries and schools, and for university scholarships, teacher training stipends and selected publications (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:327, 329). The burgeoning of *maskilic* influence was such that by the 1870s *maskilim* were increasingly acting as local spokesmen and many traditional rabbis were seeking a dialogue with the OPE (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:330, 333). The *maskilim* were also beginning to ameliorate the frosty relations between the two. In 1878, many Jewish communities chose *maskilim* as their representatives on a state rabbinical commission. This body never sat but the growing power of the *maskilim* is evident in their nomination (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:336-337).

The increasing power of the *maskilim* and sporadic secularisation of Russian Jewish communities was not accompanied by the progressive implementation of systematic state reform programmes. Alexander II had freed Russian Jews from the harshest strictures

placed on their lives by imperial legislation, allowing a small group of state-educated Jews to enter professional occupations and permitting Jewish habitation beyond the traditional boundaries of the Pale[7]. Alexander's assassination ended this brief period of leniency. The increasing social unrest that accompanied his murder was cynically manipulated by the Tsarist authorities to turn the wrath of the Russian populace on the Jews by encouraging a new wave of pogroms in 1882. The May 1882 'Temporary Laws' cemented the return to state-sanctioned repression, banning Jews from buying or renting property outside the Pale, ending their access to civil service positions, banning commerce on Sundays and reducing the geographical area of the Pale by 10% (Kniesmayer & Brecher 1995).

In 1888 Alexander II survived a train crash and was warned by his spiritual advisors that the crash was a sign of divine enmity at the reforms of his predecessor. Mollified by this divine revelation the Tsar had legislation passed limiting the number of Jewish students in any given state school to 10%, leading to the ridiculous situation where many schools in the Pale were left half empty (Kniesmayer & Brecher 1995). The failing Tsarist regime continued to agitate against the Jews, launching a violent anti-Semitic campaign in 1903. The press blamed the 1905 defeat in the Russo-Japanese War on a Jewish conspiracy and a new wave of pogroms was launched with the 'Black Hundreds' declaring a policy of total extermination. The same year saw the promulgation of a new constitution, which was forced on Nicholas II by the Duma. This led to Tsarist agents being sent out to stir up a new wave of pogroms in which over three hundred communities were attacked, around a thousand Jews killed, and thousands wounded (Kniesmayer & Brecher 1995).

Jewish socialists and members of the liberal intelligentsia were shocked at the silence of their fellow moderates and comrades in the face of the repeated waves of atrocities being inflicted on the Jewish people. In response, the socialist Bund was formed in Vilna in 1897, creating Jewish self-defence groups and unions. The Bund favoured Jewish cultural and national autonomy, but not the dream of a new Jewish state that was to be the heart of the nascent Zionist programme. Like Zionism a child of the secular Jewish revolution, the Bund proved a popular alternative to the waning traditional communal structure and radical

---

[7] The Pale of permitted Jewish habitation encompassed 25 western provinces in the Ukraine, Lithuania, Belorussia, the Crimea, and part of Poland

parochialism of Zionist thought with 33,000 members by 1905 and influence in communities as far away as America (Kniesmayer & Brecher 1995).

From the 1880s, Zionism and emigration also proved a more attractive alternative to Russian Jews than the obviously failed assimilationist ethos of the *Haskala* and the first wave of emigration to Palestine began. Escape was increasingly on the minds of Jews in Tsarist Russia and Poland with the main attraction being the wealthier destinations of the West, in particular the United States. Between 1880 and 1928 only 45,000 Russian Jews fled poverty and persecution to Palestine whereas another 45,000 sailed halfway around the world to Australia, 240,000 shifted across to Western Europe, 1,749,000 entered the United States, 111,000 went to South America and 70,000 to Canada (Kniesmayer & Brecher 1995). These figures should be kept in mind in any discussion of the relative attraction of Zionism and Palestine to East European Jews.

Part 2: The Zionist Movement

Back to the Future: Imagining a Hebrew People

> This is the kernel of the problem, as we see it: the Jews comprise a distinctive element among the nations under which they dwell, and as such can neither assimilate nor be readily digested by any nation. Hence the solution lies in finding a means of so readjusting this exclusive element to the family of nations, that the basis of the Jewish question will be permanently removed (Pinsker 1882).

In this early tractate the Russian Zionist leader Leon Pinsker identifies both the perceived malaise and palliative that remains the core of the Zionist dialectic to this day. The Jewish people are everywhere aliens persecuted by the countries in which they are born and only the return of national independence can save a feeble, oppressed people from the maw of endemic anti-Semitism. Pinsker dramatises what he views as the parlous state of diasporic Jewry:

> But after the Jewish people had ceased to exist as an actual state, as a political entity, they could nevertheless not submit to total annihilation – they lived on

spiritually as a nation. The world saw in this people the uncanny form of one of the dead walking among the living. The Ghostlike apparition of a living corpse, of a people without unity or organization, without land or other bonds of unity, no longer alive, and yet walking among the living (Pinsker 1882).

Conversely, Ahad Ha'am, the leading figure of the cultural Zionist trend, held as his primary fear the assimilation of Jewry in countries where anti-Semitism was in retreat: "The new Jew, entering into the mainstream of Western culture, no longer sees himself as superior, as a member of a unique group, distinct from the rest of humanity... he does all in his power not to be different" (Silberstein 1999: 32).

The negation of the *Galut* (Diaspora) was an essential first step for Zionists in erasing any hope within the Jewish community for the better future seemingly offered by the *Haskala*. In truth, the majority of Eastern European Jews probably needed little convincing as to the impossibility of co-existence with the Gentile world given the persistence of anti-Semitic hate crimes, legislation and propaganda even as their communities were being radically altered by the slow intrusion of Western economic, cultural and political trends. It is no accident that the call for national self-determination that was Pinsker's *Auto-Emancipation* was written in the midst of the 'Storms in the South', the Russian pogroms of the early 1880s, or that there was an explosion of interest in Zionism following Alexander III repeal of the reforms of his predecessor (Avishai 1985:15).

The rise of Zionist thought and activism was meteoric in the closing decades of the late nineteenth century, at first through the activities of the socialist *Bilu* and *Hovevei Zion*[8]. It culminated in the establishment of a political agenda at the first World Zionist Congress (1897) in Basle, Switzerland, which itself immediately followed the publishing of Herzl's *The Jewish State* (1896).

Herzl did not agree with Pinsker's stand that "the other nations, by reason of their inherent *natural* antagonism, will forever reject us" (Pinsker 1882) but shared his repudiation of the *Galut*; "Wherever they [Jews] live in perceptible numbers, they are more or less persecuted. Their equality before the law, granted by statute, has become practically

---

[8] Bilu: acronym for a Hebrew biblical exclamation"O House of Jacob, come and let us go". ;Pinsker was president of the *Hovevei Zion*, 'The Lovers of Zion' (Gilbert 1998:5).

a dead letter" (Herzl 1946). To Herzl it was the intractable nature of anti-Semitism that made the emigration of Jews to a new homeland a practical necessity:

> Perhaps we could succeed in vanishing without a trace into the surrounding peoples if they would let us be for two generations. But they would not let us be. After brief periods of toleration their hostility erupts again and again... We are one people - our enemies have made us so whether we will it or not (Rejwan 1999:58).

Herzl provided the Zionist movement with a political project; to gain influence with the European powers so that they would provide the Jews with a territory in which to form a state - he mooted Uganda, Argentina and Palestine at various times. The process of colonisation would then begin with funds and immigrants attracted by Zionist activism. Herzl's goal was an enlightened, cosmopolitan Western society that would fulfil the age-old vision of being a light unto the nations (Avishai 1985:33, 38-40).

Ahad Ha'am disagreed with what he saw as an overemphasis on precipitate nationalist activism in the absence of a more long-term national-cultural renaissance. He believed that nation building should follow cultural reconstitution, and that nationalism was a tool to be used alongside education and cultural reinvigoration in the fight against assimilation and Jewish fragmentation; "In the end... there will arise the sort of revitalised generation that we are seeking... such a generation will save Israel, it will carry it to Zion, it will act, it will succeed" (Frankel & Zipperstein 1992:349).

The Zionist project retained its early concern with the reconstitution of individual and collective nature and 'character' sharing with the authors of the *Haskala* the bourgeois belief in the essential malleability of personality and the ability to change both the person and society through concerted action and effort. This understanding remains a central premise in the understanding of individuality in western society and contributes to the fixation of Meretz activists with control over education.

Universalism or Particularism?

The Zionist movement was internally riven from an early stage by opposing aspirations; to form a nation based on the *Haskala* vision of enlightened universalism that would be open to the outside world or to turn inward to a particularistic nationalism based on a perceived shared heritage and ethnicity. That the resultant national ethos favoured the latter over the former is unsurprising given the experience of such struggles over the collective consciousness in other countries and the roots of Zionism in nineteenth century Eastern European ethno-nationalism.

Anthony Smith (1991:21) identifies three defining attributes of an ethnic community; the sharing of a common name and myth of ancestry, the possession of shared historical memories, elements of a common culture, a sense of mutual solidarity, and the association of the *ethnie* with a particular territory. Esman and Rabinovitch (1988:3) add that an ethnie is also constituted by the possession of a shared language, customs and beliefs system. The historical aspects of Jewish ethnic identity and the unique association of the Jewish people with a particular territorial space, inscribed in memory through tradition, are particularly strong. The relative diversity and fragmentation of the Jewish 'nation' left the Zionists with little choice but to turn to the religious tradition as a source of symbols, collective memory and (ultimately) legitimacy. This was to have deleterious consequences for the definition of a civic Israeli identity distinct from its more particularistic Jewish antecedents.

The Israeli *kulturkampf* rests, in part, on the significance of this problem to the nature of the Israeli polity and wider society. Geertz (Esmam & Rabinovitch 1988:72) warned of the dangers of a politics of primordialism that "threatens partition, irredentism or merger... strives more deeply and is satisfied less easily". Israeli identity politics has become an ethnopolitical battle over who holds the most valid form of Jewish identity and over who is to be the ultimate arbiter of that identity. This problem was not foreseen by the first Zionists who shared the prejudice of their *maskil* forebears that traditional Jewish religious communality was a dead letter, something to be picked over for useful rallying symbols and themes to aid in the political resurrection of a newly secular people.

The *Halutz*

> The former rebels against father and rabbi became leaders of that Yishuv, and they led the way towards Zionist self-fulfilment...Jewishness thus meant mainly to be a Hebrew, to love the land to be attached to nature, to give tradition a new national and social meaning" (Rubinstein 1984:26, 27).

With the second and third Zionist immigration waves (1904-1914, 1917-1923), hailing largely from Poland and Russia, a decisive majority was established in the New Yishuv[9] for the radically socialist Labour-Zionist orientation, which built on the mixed successes of the first *aliyah* a network of communities and institutions. Labour-Zionist leaders shared with wider Zionism their opposition to Jewish habitation in the *Galut*. Ben Gurion characterised the Diaspora as consisting of "Histories of persecution and legal discrimination, the Inquisition and pogroms; of self-sacrifice and martyrdom" (Zerubavel 1995:18). President Yitzhak Ben-Zvi added that, "The spirit of heroism and courage disappeared in the Jewish ghetto in which it had no place... a sharp mind, agility, submission towards others, and patience, cowardice, and timidity in relation to neighbours and rulers" (Zerubavel 1995:19).

However, Labour-Zionism was to proffer more than a simple escape from persecution and the perceived passivity of exile. The *halutz* (pioneer) was to constitute, "a new type among the children of Israel" (Liebman & Don-Yehiya 1983:31), a torch-bearer who would fundamentally remake the character of the Jewish nation through the redeeming action of physical labour. The Land of Israel and the Jewish individual were to be reconsecrated one to the other through physical toil and suffering. The Jew would become worthy of Zion and the land would awaken at the hands of its children. For the pioneering ethos, to settle but not to work the land was to retain a parasitic and essentially exilic lifestyle. This cult of the land was to replace the traditional spiritual affinities of the Jewish people, which had led to 2000 years of suffering: "Zionism Socialism sees in the applied Jewish religion, which is not a religion but a tragedy, the major impediment confronting the Jewish nation on the crossroads to culture, science and freedom" (Nachman Syrkin cited in Liebman & Don-Zehiya 1983:36).

---

[9] The newly established Jewish community residing in Turkish/British Palestine, as opposed to the largely Sephardi Old *Yishuv*

An acquaintance, who came to mandatory Palestine from Austria as an orphaned teenager and was settled on a kibbutz, remembers being bullied and ostracised due to a love of reading and considers the theory elaborated above to be nonsense. His experience reflects a common theme in colonial cultures with an excessive emphasis on the importance of working the land leading to a more basic anti-intellectual prejudice. It is also important to note here that - though hegemonic to a point and for a significant period - the Labour-Zionist cult of redemptive labour was not without its opponents and should take a backseat in analysis to a wider social and economic understanding of the period.

Since the Jew could only be redeemed through physical labour, the phenomenon of Jewish unemployment in an economy employing large numbers of poorly paid Arab workers was considered unacceptable by Labour-Zionists. The pioneers of the second *aliyah* engendered the struggle for *Avodah Evrit*, the exclusion of Arab workers from the economy, to be replaced with Jewish labour (Kimmerling 1989:97-98,101). Much was made of the "malevolence and contemptibility of the private farmers" (Cohen & Don-Yehiya 1986:93) who refused to employ fellow Jews. Though largely unsuccessful the concept itself was to live on into the state period where it became an integral part of the ideology relegating Israeli-Arabs[10] to a peripheral role in the economy and society.

As socialists it was impossible for the Labour-Zionist pioneers to completely abrogate the tenets of Marxist class struggle. Equally, the tenuous state of the Zionist *Yishuv* and its efforts at national reconstitution required the perpetual postponement of out-and-out class war. A middle ground was thus found with the formulation of the 'constructivist' ideology. The shining example of the largely *kibbutznik* (kibbutz resident) pioneering elite was to attract future converts while political control was to be won and maintained through the "society of workers" organised institutionally through collective settlements, youth movements, political parties, and the *Histadrut* labour federation. These institutions and movements were to form the vital backbone for the development of Ashkenazi-Labour primacy, a pre-eminence sustained politically until 1977 and still intact in other aspects of economic and social life.

---

[10] I use this term here to prevent confusion for Israeli readers, but prefer the moniker 'Israeli-Palestinian' which better reflects changes in this group's identity politics.

Labour-Zionist Cultural Production

The development of a uniquely Labour-Zionist civil religion was vital to bind the disparate elements of *Yishuv* society in pursuit of eventual national self-determination and to establish, through symbolic revaluation and a re-imagining of the Palestinian Jewish collective, the primacy of the developing Labour elite. New symbolic fields and myth-making were also required to re-establish Jewish historical and cultural ties with Zion in British eyes, in competition with Palestinian-Arab counter claims of colonial usurpation.

However, one key problem presented itself to the inventors of the new secular civil religion, of what stuff was it to be made? How was it possible to acquire national legitimacy as a Jewish nation in the Jewish homeland without an appeal to religious symbols and motifs and a collective round of rituals and history tied intrinsically to Judaism? It was also obvious that the 2000 year gap in periods of national independence would have to be explained in a way that precluded the religious understanding of collective unworthiness and messianic expectation.

The answer was the development of a new civil religion based on the radical inversion of religious symbols and language and the reinterpretation of traditional myths to bring forward themes of national resistance and independence and the impossibility of Jewish self-fulfillment outside *Eretz Yisrael*. The new civil religion's master commemorative narrative   identified three distinct historical periods; Antiquity, Exile and National Revival, with the latter regarded as a reconstitution of the former and the exilic period maligned as a repugnant detour in the historic progression of the Jewish people (Zerubavel 1995:31-33).

To add legitimacy to Labour-Zionist cultural production, extensive use was made of reinterpreted religious terms and rituals, thus fusing the new and old semiotic fields in an effort to establish the Jewish legitimacy of the new cultural modes. Words from the religious lexicon such as *kedusha* (holiness), *mitzva* (commandment), and *brit* (covenant) were reinterpreted (Liebman & Don-Yehiya 1983:38). Religious phraseology was also integral to early Zionist discourses: "Where are the holy ones? ...All Israel is holy", "Let us sanctify and bless the pioneers of the nation" (Liebman and Don-Yehiya 1983:39).

Religious holidays were reinterpreted to bring out the nationalistic themes of each. Passover, Purim and Hanukah were particularly ripe for reinterpretation in this vein, with

Hanukah taking on a far greater importance than it had held previously in the religious calendar. Jewish resistance to oppression and ultimate victory against seemingly overwhelming odds was the interpretation of the mythic cycle that Labour-Zionism sought to inculcate, with God taking a back seat to heroes such as Judah the Maccabee. The intent was the same in the valorisation of non-biblical resistance figures. The defiance and martyrdom of Shimon Bar Kochba, Elazar Ben-Yair and Yosef Trumpeldor, though millennia apart, were idealised and dramatised through ritual and pilgrimage with the image of Massada entering the public imagination as a symbol of unswerving devotion to nationhood and freedom in the face of extinction. A concatenation of historic time in the mythic narrative of national independence encouraged the absolute identification of the ancient Israelites with contemporary pioneers (Zerubavel 1995:225).

Statism

The independent Israeli state co-opted the Labour-Zionist mythic chronicle and associated ritual cycle shifting the focus from the pioneering movement itself to the state as its natural consequence and fulfilment. With the continued predominance of the Labour movement in the political institution of the state, the association of the reified *halutz* with this movement was deemed prudent. This was necessary both for the continued development of a vital unifying sense of Israeliness in the face of continuing security threats, and for the political and cultural re-education of the newly arrived Sephardi masses given the long-term threat posed by this group to Labour hegemony.

The new state education system was considered vital to the development of the first generation of native Israelis and was used to imbue the Labour-Zionist ideology. Liebman (1983:87) quotes from the speech of Ben-Zion Dinur, education minister from 1951-1955, on his presentation of the law establishing state education. The state education system's role is, "to educate its citizens to full and total identification of every individual with the State... to create in the heart of each and every person the sense of direct identification with the Land". Educational themes included; the importance of the needs of the collective over those of the individual, *yedi'at haaretz* ('knowing the land'), pioneering, and heroic self-sacrifice in the service of the nation. Zerubavel (1995:121) relates that, "Field trips were considered a sacred activity through which Hebrew youth could reclaim their roots in the

land". Pioneering was reinterpreted as "Statist *halutziut*", the participation in mass activities organised by the state. Many such activities were included in the school curriculum and still feature, though to a lesser extent.

Ben Gurion oversaw the development of statist ideology (*mamlachtiut*) in which the state was presented as a "sacred value" (Liebman 1983:125) demanding absolute loyalty from its citizens whose interests were outweighed by those of its offices. Likewise the building up of the economic and social structure of the state was a calling for all citizens and the necessary fulfilment of an inevitable historical process. Through this the Jewish people and the world as a whole would be redeemed as Israel realised its potential as a moral paragon, the perfect society, a "light unto the nations" (Liebman 1983:86). There is more than a hint of traditional Jewish messianism in the supreme valuation placed on Israeli independence and indeed Ben Gurion expressed the belief that "we are living in the days of the Messiah" (Liebman 1983:86).

Archaeology, history and the other academic disciplines were used to establish unequivocally the right of the Jewish people to ownership of *Eretz Yisrael*, with deleterious results for the future independence of the academy from political pressures and influence. Such influences are still at play today in the bitter debate over postzionist theory (Chapter 7). Large state funerals were held to reinter human remains thought to be those of the Bar Kochba rebels (1982), and the defenders of Massada (1969). The military played a prominent role, as they had in the excavations, strengthening the symbolic association of the IDF with those being reburied (Zerubavel 1993:129, 189). The religious fanaticism of the Massada and Bar Kochba rebels and the devastating consequences of their resistance were downplayed in an effort to prove a concrete association between the secular state of Israel and the freedom fighters of antiquity - and between both and the Labour and Likud governments responsible for the reinterments.

Alongside the creation of commemorative narratives celebrating the connection between antiquity and contemporary Israel, statism also created 'sacred' festivals for the celebration of death in the service of the state and independence. Independence Day was the most important of these and constitutes the high-point of a sacralised time period that begins with Holocaust Day and continues through Remembrance Day. Holocaust Day itself was only instituted in 1952, with the official commemoration finally decided upon in 1959.

This reflects the ambiguous attitude of the early state to the *Shoa* (Holocaust) given the obvious failure of the late *Yishuv* to convince the bulk of Europe's Jews to emigrate, and the victim's perceived acquiescence in their own destruction (Liebman 1983:102). The late *Yishuv* was preoccupied with state-building at the time; "The disaster facing European Jewry is not directly my business" (Ben Gurion cited in Segev 1993:98). Once the idea of a commemorative day was decided upon it was felt necessary to glean from the otherwise overwhelming tragedy stories of resistance more in keeping with the Zionist ethos. Therefore, the day of memorial was officially christened Holocaust and Ghetto Rebellion Day (later Holocaust, Rebellion and Heroism Day) and the fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto, and other acts of resistance, were valorised as exemplars of Jewish courage.

Since appropriate commemorations were settled upon, Remembrance and Holocaust Day has been marked with official state ceremonies, including the recitation of the religious *Kaddish* on Remembrance Day, and the sounding of sirens throughout the country. During the sounding of the sirens the country stops in remembrance with the rather galling exception, for most Israeli Jews, of sections of the ultra-Orthodox populace. The media plays a key role in setting the tenor of the day by devoting all its programming to documentaries, movies, and discussions on the *Shoa*. Independence Day celebrations initially centred on large military parades but these were eliminated as the more public political dimension of the holiday became less important with events such as family fun days with fireworks taking their place. Liebman (1983:154) argues that this shift reflects the impossibility of steeping Independence celebrations in the traditional religious symbols and associations prevalent both in the Holocaust and Remembrance Day memorials.

Revolution and Dissensus: The Fracturing of Israeli Civil Religion

Statist civil religion was successful in providing the foundations upon which the Israeli state was formed, and consolidated a relative sense of common purpose and acquiescence to the state and its offices as the primary seat of legitimacy in Jewish-Israeli society.

However the primacy of the Ashkenazi-Labour elite could not be secured on a permanent basis in a democratic system prone to shifts in political power through demographic change. From 1949-1952 immigration from North Africa and the Middle East led to the establishment of a large and relatively impoverished Sephardi minority. With a

higher birth rate and long-term grievance against the Ashkenazi elite for their exclusion from the centres of power, and settlement in what were to become distressed neighbourhoods and development towns, the eventual ejection of the Labour elite from government was inevitable.

The impressive aspect of Labour leadership was that it actually lasted as long as it did (pre-state to 1977) with the movement atrophying intellectually and ideologically long before its political ouster. It is impossible to identify a single reason for this longevity but an important factor was its domination of the institutions of government and the reliance of a large section of the population on party and state largesse. Israel is a highly bureaucratic state in which *proteksia* - the aid of well placed friends - is essential for negotiating a morass of red tape and an officialdom seemingly determined on a permanent 'go slow'. Coupled with the reliance of the poor on state welfare and party or union acquired jobs and influence, it is unsurprising that the Labour led political-economic system outlasted the ideological resonance of their claims to leadership inscribed in statist civil religion.

The poor performance of the Labour dominated political and military leadership in the 1973 Yom Kippur War was the death knell for the 'socialist' regnum. New parties such as RATZ ('The Citizen's Rights Movement'), Sheli and the Democratic Movement for Change sprang forth, draining votes from the left and centre of Labour's traditional electorate as the Israeli economy went into an inflationary tailspin (Eisenstadt 1985:231). The young, Russian *olim* (new immigrants) and Sephardim voted overwhelmingly for the Likud in 1977 and Israel was under right wing tutelage for the first time. Racheli, remembers her parents at the announcement of the Likud's victory:

Racheli: ...my father watching the television in the '77 election... when Begin [won], and my Mum was already asleep because she couldn't stay awake, and then Chaim Yavin said *Mahapach* – you know what is *Mahapach*... the office are changed... and it was the first time in the history of Israel that the government has changed. Anyway *Abba* started screaming *"Catastrope, Catastrophe"* and my Mum went to my room to see if everything is OK [laughs].

The civil religion propounded by the newly ascendant right-religious political bloc was inevitably more deeply infused with the symbols and understandings of traditional Judaism, reflecting the centrality in the ideology of both groups of the specificity, importance and imperiled nature of Jewish identity. 1977 saw a profound escalation in the Jewish *kulturkampf*, not in terms of individual, localised conflicts but through the victory at the polls of a conception of Jewish identity dramatically at odds with the universal-humanist orientation that was a part of the Labour-Zionist tradition. To generalise, to be a Jew for the proponents of the new civil religion is to stand alone against the eternal enmity of the *goyim*, safe only through unceasing armed vigilance in the land promised by divine writ to the Jewish people. As we have seen, Labour-Zionist ideology contained elements of these understandings but in a more moderate form, less antagonistic to the Gentile world.

Given the propensities of its new authors and gatekeepers, it is unsurprising that Israeli civil religion leans heavily on the memory of the Holocaust both as a unifying element and as a lesson from history. Liebman (1983:125) explains that statism was unable to assimilate the memory of the Holocaust into its own civil religion and that the growing importance of the Holocaust in public consciousness from the 1950s on weakened the impact of statist ideology. Given the succession of wars that Israel fought from independence till the present day and the attendant fear of annihilation, which remains pervasive, it is unsurprising that the Holocaust became the central feature in a Jewish collective identity politics and civil religion that is otherwise the subject of an intense mnemonic contest.

Victory in the Six Day War brought places deeply associated with the religious tradition under Israeli control for the first time. The Western Wall - intrinsically connected to Judaism as the focus of longing in the *Galut* - became the sacred centre for the new civil religion with state ceremonies increasingly transferred to the adjacent plaza. 1967 also brought the average Israeli in the victorious army into contact with the misery of the Palestinian refugees and prompted a growing awareness of their suffering. Given the internal focus of statism on the building up of Israeli society, its suppression of earlier Labour-Zionist dreams of a Greater Israel, and an increasing lack of resonance of traditional secular Zionist dogmas, the Occupation could only be legitimised through an appeal to Jewish history interpreted through the prism of the religious tradition. Thus, as a large sector of secular Israel quickly lost interest in militant nationalism the baton of

Zionism was passed on to the national-religious community - at least as the latter perceive it. The national-religious mobilised to settle the Territories with the Bible as an atlas, attracting the support of the Revisionist right and the growing interest of the ultra-Orthodox in their efforts.

Public commemorations of both secular and religious holidays began to conform more closely to traditional Jewish forms with an attendant penetration of religious symbols (Liebman 1983:155-158). However, the lack of a coherent guiding ideology and the intensifying political contest over powers of representation in areas from Jewish identity politics to security, limited the capacity of the new civil religion to speak to wide sectors of the Israeli public (Liebman 1983:136). Israeli civil religion has ceased to function as a unifying force destroyed by the Occupation, the death of ideology, and the tribal fragmentation of society.

Conclusion

The Israeli *kulturkampf* retains many of the characteristics of the initial battle between the traditional religious authorities and the *maskilim* over the nature of the Jewish collective and identification thereto. Zionism carried this struggle from Europe to Palestine and sought to promote the association of its ruling elite with a secular identity politics freed from the strictures of *Galut* and religion to reforge the Jewish individual and collective. Neither *maskil* nor *halutz* succeeded in vanquishing traditional religious understandings of Jewish identity and peoplehood and it is to the revival of religious identity politics and its deepening conflict with secular Israel in the worsening *kulturkampf* that we now turn our attention.

Chapter 3: The Israeli Kulturkampf

In this chapter we consider the meaning and nature of the Israeli *kulturkampf* and seek to provide a working definition for this amorphous and complex social conflict. Efforts at *kulturkampf* denial are analysed and rejected before the focus of discussion shifts to the religious-secular status quo and the contest between observant and non-observant Israel over matters such as *kashrut*, civil marriage, Shabbat business openings and public transport, the *haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) draft exemption, conversion efforts and neighbourhood struggles. The chapter ends with an examination of the importance of PM Barak's proposed civil reforms package.

As noted above, 62% of respondents to a 1999 survey believed that the religious-secular cleavage was the most serious problem facing Israeli society (BBC News 4/6/00). A second study published in 2000 by Dahlia Moore of the Hebrew University, was built on a 1996-1997 survey of 5000 Jewish high school students aged 15-18 (*haredi* schools were not included), and 1200 of their Arab peers. She found that, "These students, the future of our society, carry a tremendous amount of hatred towards each other" (Jerusalem Post, 15/9/00). More students said that they "hate" settlers (51%) than Arabs (50%) - a result that no doubt would have been different had Jewish teens constituted the only respondents, but still an extraordinarily high percentage with regard to settlers. Equally, *Haredim* were hated by 47%, with only 16% of students expressing their "love" for this group, and 15% expressing "love" for settlers (Jerusalem Post, 15/9/00). These results indicate that Israeli youth are growing up in a society deeply riven by differences related to religiosity and the Arab-Israeli conflict and that these divisions are provoking not just dislike or distrust but absolute hatred of other groups. It is these rifts related to religiosity, and expressed in the *kulturkampf,* that we will now seek to define and explain.

Defining the Israeli *Kulturkampf*

Providing a cogent definition for a conflict that is, by nature, diverse and multifaceted is extremely difficult. There is already a great deal of academic discussion on the religious-secular conflict that does not attempt to describe the struggle as a whole. This makes it rather simple for those who deny the existence of the Israeli *kulturkampf* to point to the

same characteristics of tension and discord as proponents of 'culture war' and read them in a diametrically opposite fashion as manageable and tractable. Therefore any dissertation proposing an escalation of religious-secular conflict in Israel must attempt to define the bounds thereof and give some idea as to the players, trajectory of the struggle and the interconnectedness of discourse, ideology and events.

The term *kulturkampf* is used here to describe a progressive worsening of tensions between religious and secular communities from the national level to that of the neighbourhood. Encouraged by changes in Israeli civil religion since 1967, mutual isolation and contradictions of lifestyle and worldview have been transformed into a broader societal struggle in which popular resentments have achieved electoral affinity, set a large minority against the secular judicial system, and led to an 'endgame' struggle for power and resources. Israeli consociational democracy has failed to ameliorate this discord and all efforts to ease tensions have failed through an absence of popular support.

Kulturkampf is not to be confused with full-scale civil war; significant violence has accompanied the burgeoning conflict but has been held in check. Dysfunction, paralysis and a general malaise have characterised the response of authorities while an increasing discursive volatility and growing civil disobedience and vigilantism (e.g. secular civil marriage, claimed attacks on religious and synagogues, the national-religious settlement project, *haredi* 'modesty patrols', illegal proselytising, election campaign violence and store burnings) has undermined the legitimacy of the overburdened state.

Identifying the competing parties is no easy matter. The traditional understanding of the Israeli *kulturkampf* posits two diametrically opposed minority groups within society; the 'militant secularists' and ultra-Orthodox. There are various reasons for the diminution of the struggle to these two groups including major differences of lifestyle, worldview, ideology, identity, habitation, authority and interests, all of which present an easy dichotomy between *haredi* and *hiloni* (secular), and allow the opposition of convincing stereotypes. These differences are real and of some moment but don't of themselves encompass or explain the struggle as a whole.

The Guttman Report (Liebman & Katz 1997:xviii) - which we will discuss more fully in Chapter 6 - found a continuum of beliefs and observances in Israeli society and this understanding must be built into any understanding of the Israeli *kulturkampf*. Faith and

orthopraxy, or lack thereof, has long been recognised as correlating directly with opinions on the Israeli-Arab conflict, and with ethnic divisions between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, but the next logical step has not been made in transforming this understanding into hypotheses on the competing *kulturkampf* coalitions. The religious-nationalist coalition comprises *haredim*, *datiim* (Orthodox), national-religious, 'traditionalist' *Sephardim* and a large minority of right wing *hilonim* who hold to the greater *Eretz Yisrael* agenda while supporting the state's quasi-theocracy as a means of ensuring Israel's Jewish character.

The inclusion of the national-religious as a vital community in the Israeli *kulturkampf* will be disputed by some. Chapter 4 describes the manner in which the *kippot scrugot* ('knitted kippas'; national-religious) are implicated in the wider struggle for religious hegemony over the state. I will argue that this sector is deeply involved in the *kulturkampf* struggle. Settler messianism has become central to the self-understanding of national-religious society. In Chapter 4 I will describe the dangers this religious fundamentalism poses for the state and society while confirming their growing links to wider *dati* and *haredi* society. The failure of secular Israel to recognise the centrality of this community to the *kulturkampf* springs, I believe, from several sources: their identification with the Zionist project and adherence to *hitnachliut* (Zionist pioneering ideology), albeit in an altered form, their failure to stand out in terms of behaviour and dress from the majority of Orthodox Israelis, their committed service in the army and support for the state (only relative as we shall see) and the peripheral habitation of many in the Territories which allows their image as pioneering idealists to remain unsullied.

The, largely Ashkenazi, secularist camp is smaller but garners support from a large sector of the 'secular' population on issues unrelated to the future of the Territories and pertaining to perceived injustices perpetuated by the religious-secular status quo agreements, particularly those seen as threatening lifestyle changes. Many also hold 'peacenik' views though this waxes and wanes with the popularity of the peace process. There is a large group - perhaps a majority of the population - who hold to neither extreme, but this sector is under constant pressure from competing religious and secular interests to take a stand on *kulturkampf* issues. This explains the massive spike in public electoral affinity for Shas (1999) and Shinui (2003) neither of which held strongly to the 'peacenik' or 'nationalist' agendas at a time when one would have expected the Arab-Israeli conflict to

dominate all other issues. Readers should note that Shas rose with the seeming defeat of the nationalist camp in the 1999 elections, falling back again - though not to its former level - with the resumption of hostilities. Shinui emerged from nowhere in 1999 to take an extraordinary 16 mandates in 2003, feeding off secular disaffection with the seeming failures of Labour and Meretz with regard to the peace process and secular-religious status quo while taking no clear stance on the former.

So why does the conflict have a cultural character rather than constituting a regular civil struggle between opposed parties jockeying for power and resources of the state? Certainly the Israeli *kulturkampf* has a great deal to do with this competition, in particular the channeling of taxpayers' money into settlements, *yeshivot* (Torah academies) and patronage networks. For example, Shas won significant support in Arab villages in the 1999 general election through its control of local government budgets via the Interior Ministry. However, for the religious parties these resources are a means rather than an end, the end being a *Halakhic* state and the imposition of a specifically Orthodox brand of Jewish identity and orthopraxy for large sectors of the religious public. The present secular state is seen, at best, as a stepping stone to the Messiah, at worst, as an illegitimate nuisance or cash-cow. This is a rather sweeping generalisation but it does, to a certain extent, explain the leanings of the various religious communities. Certainly a diversity of streams exists within the religious public ranging from 'peacenik' national-religious to anti-Zionist *haredim*. However, continuous efforts to impose increased religious orthopraxy on the secular majority by all religious parties in the Knesset (under the guise of status quo maintenance), the leadership of the settlement movement by a messianic national-religious elite, the growing stringency of observance of national-religious, and Zionism of many ultra-Orthodox communities, alongside the stated preference of major leaders of both sectors for a *Halakhic* state, lend credence to this catholicism.

Jewish identity politics is at the heart of the Israeli *kulturkampf*. Important aspects of the state Orthodox theocracy - established under the status quo agreements of the late *Yishuv* - have been buttressed against secularist attack by appeals to the purported danger posed by change to the Jewish character of the state. In the absence of a clear definition of Jewish secularity, and through the failure of non-Orthodox Judaism to establish a strong Israeli presence, this appeal has until recently been accepted almost unquestioningly by a

majority of the secular public and extreme efforts have been made by ultra-secularists to prove their Jewish credentials with little effect. Religious and right wing attacks on the Jewishness of Meretz activists occur daily during electioneering and the Jewish credentials of the party as a whole and the wider secular public are often questioned by the religious right. Acknowledgment of this is vital because, due to the stated preference of close to 97% of Israelis for a specifically Jewish state, the Orthodox power to define Jewish identity confers both prestige and immense power in representation, while relegating militant secularism to a peripheral role in the body politic, and in the most extreme cases to a position akin to non-Jews, an illegitimate appendage of the body politic.

Denying the *Kulturkampf*

The existence of a *kulturkampf* in Israel is questioned by a number of commentators. The late Political Studies professor, Charles Liebman (Liebman & Katz 1997:96), wrote that Israel was not experiencing a culture war but an ongoing tension between religious and seculars coterminous with the growth of individuality and breakdown of a sense of collective responsibility. Elsewhere, he prevaricates, speaking of a growing militancy amongst seculars and of the development of secularist anti-Jewish tendencies, a rather extreme asseveration not backed up by the results of this or any study that I am aware of (Liebman 1990:227). He refers to a shared rhetoric of discourse, symbolic field and limited sense of a shared history and destiny, alongside the weakness of *haredi* society as mitigating factors preventing *kulturkampf*. I believe the first premise is nebulous when looked at in more than a cursory manner. I do not believe that national-religious, *haredim* and *hilonim* actually do participate in shared discourses, in fact quite the opposite. Symbols are by nature open to diverse readings and interpretations, the only reason they adhere across Israeli-Jewish society. As to the weakness of the *haredim*: Shas is a *haredi* party supported by a large sector of the 'traditional' Jewish population and has gained an unprecedented influence and power, for an ultra-Orthodox party, since the 1980s. The national-religious, who are engaged in the *kulturkampf* to the same extent as *haredim*, have been the most influential sector of society in a manner far out-weighing their numbers. With regard to the *kulturkampf* Liebman's denial is a case of recognising the same

phenomena - he even acknowledges that the conflict has trajectory (Liebman1990; 1997) - and calling them by a different name.

Moshe Lissak (Liebman & Katz 1997:66) points to the presence of Ashkenazim and Sephardim in all four categories of observance used by the Guttman Report, and a general desire to retain the attachment to diasporic Jewry, as reasons for claiming that the *kulturkampf* does not exist. This argument seems to take ethnicity as the core source of conflict in Israel, when it is but one, and to assume a harking after a global Jewish unity which there is little evidence for, particularly given that *kulturkampf* crises concerning 'who is a Jew' revolve around Orthodox efforts to keep significant sectors of world Jewry out of the country through the state application of strict *Halakhic* criteria for Jewish recognition.

Ira Sharansky (1996) also seeks to downplay the seriousness of the religious-secular cleavage, describing conflicts arising from it as ritualised, limited and comparable to similar tensions in other countries. He supports this argument by pointing to the purported failure of either side to win clear-cut victories, what he sees as a low level of violence characterising secular-religious conflicts, and the longevity of many disputes, some of which date back to the *Yishuv* (Sharansky 1996:13, 97). Sharansky (1996:1, 12, 134) believes that religious interests have proved incapable of asserting themselves with regard to major issues of public policy largely gaining leverage over "issues with high symbolic content" (Sharansky 1996:12). He excoriates proponents of *kulturkampf*, "Some researchers seem obssessed with an exaggerated view about the power of the believers or non-believers... the reality appears far from a true *kulturkampf*" (Sharansky 1996:13).

First I will deal with definition. Sharansky's recognition of disputes, ritual or otherwise, in his book proves indisputably the existence of secular-religious discord far beyond that present during the first *kulturkampf* in Bismarckian Germany at the time of the contest with the papacy. If Sharansky's interpretation of the term refers to a total breakdown in societal cohesion, there was never a great deal to start with given the mutual isolation of the competing communities. There is significant evidence that the old modes of consociational government have begun to break down and at the least are no longer acceptable to the wider public, secular or religious. I make no claims here for the absolute breakdown of society in a secular-religious civil war. As noted above, culture war does not

have to be total, or involve armed struggle to be profoundly damaging and, despite Sharansky's disallowance, the Israeli religious-secular conflict is distinctive for extreme violence, both physical and discursive - beatings, murder, arson, etc. It is bizarre to equate Israel with other Western democracies, none of which have theocratic rule over important aspects of their citizen's lives even where they privilege one denomination or religion.

For a book published the year after the murder of the prime minister by a fanatic from the national-religious community (not the first murder it must be remembered) Sharansky is strangely reticent on this community's position with regard to religious-secular cleavages. He relates that the murder of Rabin signalled that *Eretz Yisrael* is an explosive issue with religious content and recalls that a number of religious leaders, after examining their souls, came out in opposition to the killing - something of an overstatement (Sharansky 1996:118). This seems more an effort to remove the Land of Israel struggle from the purview of *kulturkampf* analysis than a serious attempt to address the issue. As to the assassination itself, this was a quintessential act of *kulturkampf*, murder in the name of God. The Land of Israel is not an issue with religious content, it is a religious concept supporting a Messianic, religious-fundamentalist worldview with powerful institutional and governmental support.

In positing a ritualistic repetition of conflicts over issues such as the *Shabbat*, *kashrut*, personal status issues, the disturbance of burial sites, etc. Sharansky identifies an important characteristic of the *kulturkampf*. There is a pattern of ritualised modes of struggle in one sphere of the culture war in which a dispute arises, then protests and counter-protests follow with much bile spilled before community and political leaders seek to find a compromise solution (Sharansky 1996:15-16).

However, even these conflicts are not without winners and losers and, as a battle between communities counterpoised in absolute opposition to the intentions and beliefs of the other, these repetitious struggles are actually highly consequential and symptomatic of *kulturkampf*. For example, when a secular community stops the building of an ultra-Orthodox kindergarten, school or *yeshiva* they win a battle for the local secular public of far greater import for neighbourhood residents than many changes in the 'status quo' at national level. To reduce the *kulturkampf* to the level of ongoing, ritual disputes is also to ignore the fact that movie theatres, restaurants, malls and other places of entertainment are

increasingly open on the Sabbath and religious holidays, the fact that the Religious Affairs Ministry (long a bastion of religious patronage and corruption) will soon be shut down, that non-kosher food is increasingly available, and that the religious-secular divide is rapidly gaining electoral affinity. It also ignores the massive spike in budgets channelled to the religious sector through the 1980s and 1990s with the rise of Shas and that party's burgeoning school system in poor traditional neighbourhoods.

Aside from the reasons mentioned above, denial of the *kulturkampf* also fails another rather intangible test, that of experience.

Activists on the *Kulturkampf*

I tried to avoid asking interviewees directly whether a *kulturkampf* exists in Israeli society, preferring to examine this issue through questions on religious coercion, explaining the term indirectly rather than using this loaded word which would tend to provoke a yes-no answer. Nonetheless, I did broach the topic head-on in some cases eliciting a variety of replies:

D: Do you believe that, that's Meretz's thing... promoting the individual above the collective in a sense?

Roni: Yeah, the point is that no one here is aware of this thing... they know that they're aware that we'll fight against *Shabbas* and all this shit but no one is looking at the big picture. And there was this term which people started using here a lot which called the culture war.

D: ...do you think a culture war is, is happening here in Israel at the moment?

R: Yeah, yeah, I mean, have you seen... last week there was this thing about the *dybbuk* [demon] which they took out of this woman... the way I see it we are now at the edge of the cultural war... we are the battlefield but we don't do shit... we should have gone to all those religious cities like Bnei Barak and Jerusalem and put like in the middle of the night lots of posters all over the walls saying "There is no God".

Several interviewees thought that the religious-secular conflict would worsen with the end of the peace process - which seemed close at the time given most interviews were held just prior to Camp David II.

Yaron: I don't know if culture war is the correct way to put it but the political system will... be completely different, there will be a complete upheaval.

D: Do you think there'll be a realignment along secular-religious [lines]?

Y: Yeah... I believe so. It will take a good election or two, like a good four, eight years to happen but I think its changing already and it'll change even more when, when the peace issues are finally settled... it will take... for all the politicians who live... on the security issues type of thing to die off.

D: Do you think there's a culture war going on in this country at the moment?

Gilad: ...I think it's going on, I think it's like a small fire. My belief is that once all the peace talks architecture gonna be over and things will settle down then the real inside war is going to be.

In the following excerpt Gal mentions the national-religious in his definition of the *kulturkampf* without prompting and speaks of the Rabin assassination as an event in this war:

Gal: Now, as we know the justification of many Likud and *Mafdal* and other parties are the religious justification. They think that due to God promise the Holy Land to the Holy People - Jesus Christ [laughs]... but these ideas are not dangerous as the *Mafdal* or *Gush Emunim* because they believe that the *Moshiach* [Messiah]... maybe not the *Moshiach* as flesh and blood but the metaphor of the *Moshiach* will come to Israel if the Holy People [laughs]

D: [interrupting] Rule the Holy Land [laughs].

G: Yes and you cannot argue with that because if you want the *Moshiach* will come you have to satisfy the condition... that the Jewish will sit on the Holy Places and if someone will want to give those Holy Places to, Oh my God, to the Arabs this is a sin, a sin. Now a

sin it's a term it's not like crime, a crime is against the people, against society, a sin it's a crime against God, I mean God himself [laughs]. You cannot do this you have to pay for it. And Rabin pay because of that reason, its not a contigenting fact that most of the *Mafdal* and *Gush Emunim* are religious and it's not surprising that Yigal Amir was Orthodox with a *kippa*... at the beginning of our conversation you asked if we are in a cultural war, I think that maybe we are close to a civil war...

D: Do you think that with peace this civil war could break out?

G: Yes. After we will achieve peace the main problem will be religious against liberalism

Several interviewees believed a culture war was neither underway nor possible. Boaz speaks of the economic crisis within ultra-Orthodox society and predicts a passive re-orientation of that community's relations to follow:

D: There [is] not going to be a *kulturkampf*?

Boaz: ...I'm the only one in Meretz that doesn't think so. I don't think it's going to be a fight. And my theory is very different. I think that we should wait... the only thing that we should do is not like recruit the Orthodox to the army, what we should do is just let them work. Because that's going to change their perspective on life, that's going to change their perspective on secular people, the way they see us because now... it's a closed society that has no contact with the outside society other than with agents that are totally brainwashed. And once they have contact... it's going to break... once they go, get out of their ghetto and go to work... they're not going to stay the same way they're going to change and especially in the modern society now that you have the internet and you can't really withhold information. It's going to break, so I don't think it's going to be a fight, it's going to be a process... I really don't believe in revolutions... everybody thinks that there's going to be a big fight but I'm not... there might be a fight but I don't think it's necessary. We shouldn't work towards a fight... just like the *kibbutzim* are now collapsing. Their society... is going to collapse soon.

D: It's being exposed to the modern world. The *kibbutzim* were exposed first.

B: Yeah, so I don't think, I mean people here [in Meretz] wants to fight but I don't think we should fight we should just wait.

Whose Status Quo?

The Israeli religious-secular 'status quo' agreement was formally negotiated between the leadership of the *Yishuv* and representatives of the Orthodox community in 1947. Its principles were first established in a letter from Ben Gurion to Rabbi I.M. Levin of the ultra-Orthodox *Agudat Israel* party. In this letter the prime minister in waiting assured Levin that the status quo with regards to the Sabbath, the public celebration of religious holidays, Orthodox control of personal status issues and *kashrut* would remain with independence. This public orthopraxy would also hold true for the Jewish Agency and state institutions (Horowitz & Lissak 1989:62; Rejwan 1999:103-105). Ben Gurion explicitly states the reasons for this far-reaching acquiescence to the desires of the observant minority as addressing, "the profound needs of adherents of the faith, so as to prevent the division of the House of Israel into two parts" (Rejwan 1999:105).

This was in fact a partial re-institution of the Orthodox *millet* system which allowed religious communities to control important aspects of community life. Its result was the progressive legislation of statutes - Days of Rest Ordinance, Kosher Food for Soldiers Ordinance, Religious Services Budget Law, Hours of Work and Rest Law, Religious Courts Law - instituting a unique democratic-theocratic mix. The Orthodox were to control a minor, though not insignificant, powerbase from which to garner public resources and impose a limited form of religious orthopraxy over the majority non-religious population.

This control has come to be seen by large sectors of the secular community as coercive. A tripartite institutional elaboration handed control of rabbinical ordinations, teacher certification for religious state schools and the licensing of *mohels* and scribes, the training of religious court judges and partial control of *kashrut* licensing to the Chief Orthodox Rabbinate (the *millet* regulator re-established as a state institution). Personal status jurisprudence was given to the religious courts system. The administration of these rabbinical courts, local religious councils, aspects of *kashrut*, maintaining the observance of legislated religious restrictions in public institutions and the army and budgets for the holy places were placed in the hands of the Religious Affairs Ministry. This vested control of vast resources from the public purse to the ultra-Orthodox *Agudat Israel* and what was to become the national-religious *Mafdal*. These parties long considered these institutions and

the Ministry to be their fiefs, before the rise of Shas added another player and growing secular resentment saw investigations begin into ever-expanding budgets and attempts to do away with the Ministry of Religious Affairs altogether. Other ministries have also been used by the religious parties to channel funds into religious institutions including the Ministry of the Interior, Labour and Social Affairs and the Housing Ministry, adding to a growing inequity in the distribution of state funds to the secular and religious communities. In the interests of fairness, it should be noted here that this funnelling of money and resources to pet projects and groups was very much in the pre and post-state tradition established by the Labour-Zionist elite in privileging their own institutions and organisations such as the kibbutzim and Histadrut.

The religious-secular status quo was never static. From the time of post-independence re-legislation, local conflicts over issues such as *Shabbat* road closures, the elaboration of religious control mechanisms and power and secular challenges to the Orthodox control of the 'who is a Jew' issue (Chapter 5), undermined the initial agreements or elaborated on them.

A pattern of religious efforts to expand public observance of the Sabbath and secular attempts to free themselves of Sabbath observance, and some *kashrut* restrictions, came to characterise the next half century and began to build extreme pressures on the overburdened consociational system of government. This consociational system was a loose understanding between the religious and secular political elites involving the trading of religious political support for government ministries and other monies and resources. A vast array of *yeshivot* and *kollelim* flourished in this environment with students exempt from army conscription so long as they remained registered students in these institutions, and the associated welfare costs proved expensive. So too did the explosive growth of the settlement project. These demands kept ratcheting up the price of consociationalism from year to year and the progressive destabilisation of governments (Netanyahu, Barak...) - through the partial commitment, then withdrawal of religious party backing - was the inevitable result. It should be remembered that the consociational system did not receive any more than grudging public support. Once both the Arab-Israeli conflict and *kulturkampf* began to gain popular electoral affinity parties had to begin pandering to popular resentments and were no longer as free to engage in the rather mercenary trade of

money for power. The consociational system no longer functions to ameliorate popular discord with displays of unity and examples of happy co-habitation. Likewise, the ever shifting status quo - only ever based on an assumption of the rival's future-extinction - has been overtaken by events and has become more a tool of religious polemic used to protect their interests. It is almost impossible today for any group in society to find its own 'social or ideological stamp' in the status quo agreement (Ravitsky 2000:16).

Religious Coercion

Before taking a closer look at different aspects of the *kulturkampf* relating to the sub-conflict between Orthodox and seculars, we will examine interviewee responses to questions relating to perceived religious coercion, designed to elicit what first comes to mind when this term is used. One interviewee responded with an anti-religious tirade while others took a more measured approach, listing elements of coercion or meditating on the impact of a putative separation of synagogue and state:

Ilan: We want to be a European country but we are not, the *haredim* are stopping us, the *dossim*... They think that... they have a copyright on the Judaism.

Naaman: I can't feel it, I eat pork, I ride on Saturday.

Ophir: The nature of it is me not being able to get married without saying some things about God and about Jerusalem and whatever. And it's me not being able to sell pork or buy pork. And many other things.

Moshe: ...the major problem is that there is no separation of state and church. That you're not allowed to marry in the way that you want, that - well marriage is the most important thing - and then there is also the conversion which is supposed to be Orthodox... Then there's all the stuff with traffic, that there are no buses on Saturday, you're not allowed to open places like coffee shops in some places on Saturday... I think that there should be a separation of state and church.

Tamar focuses on the acceptance of religious strictures and the seeming apathy of the secular public in opposing their extension:

Tamar: ...people believe that religious coercion is OK, that's the main problem. The fact that we have... religious laws that are affecting the whole population. The fact that every day they are trying to pass new laws, not just in the government, not just in the parliament, but in city halls, that's religious coercion. The fact that there is no transportation, the fact that there are no civil marriage, the fact that there is no civil burial, no civil nothing almost. The fact that Israel is the state of the Jewish people is important, and I have a problem here, but this is coercion.

Note that Tamar mentions the Jewishness of Israel in the excerpt above. The Orthodox establishment has successfully transmuted a debate on the desirability of religious strictures in public life into a debate on the Jewishness of the state. The idea that this Jewish character would be under threat with changes to the status quo has become so widespread that both Tamar and Avi felt they had to address it in our conversations - Avi in a manner that indicates the influence of this argument.

Avi: A certain part of Meretz... wants to separate between religion and... state in Israel but I have a few questions... and those questions are causing me... not to support it, at the moment... right now to separate between religious and... state... will not be good for... the peace process because we have to say to all the Palestinians "...there will be a Jewish state for the Jews and a Palestinian state for all the Palestinians"... The second thing, all the Russian immigration... there is a pretty much percent of the new immigrants which half Jewish, not Jewish and it's, it makes a lot of question about why we're here, you know, do we really want a Jewish country?

Both Gal and Yossi speak from a moderate liberal standpoint:

Gal: I don't feel on my skin the compulsion since I don't do anything that close to Judaism and still now I didn't need, because I'm not married... again it's a value, I believe in

liberalism, and, and liberalism and democracy is a contradiction I think to, to Judaism... as it shows itself in Israel... after there will be a separation country and religious... the country will be fair... for the wishes and way of life of her citizens. After this I don't care if there will be Orthodox rabbis, I mean they are people here, they have the rights that I do.

Yossi: I have a problem there, I mean, of course we are being enforced on some things but I feel... it's a game that... somebody has to lose. 'cause... they have, their vision is that if we drive on Saturday we hurt them and we have the vision that... if they don't let us drive on Saturday they hurt us.

Not one interviewee denied that religious coercion exists in Israel. This is unsurprising given that its existence is something of an article of faith for Meretz activists and supporters and is a key factor in the motivation and mobilisation of both groups. A strong argument can be made that Meretz' diminution in relation to Shinui, had a lot to do with the widespread popular concern that Meretz had done little on the subject of religious coercion. Instead it was seen as focussing excessively on the peace process in entering into a coalition with the perceived enemy, Shas.

Keeping Kosher Coercion

As an interested outsider, one of the things that has always surprised me in Israeli society is the widespread acceptance of public observance of *kashrut* restrictions even among militant seculars. This acceptance of an important mechanism of religious control is difficult to explain but appears to spring from the private observance of at least some of the traditional dietary restrictions, particularly in relation to religious festivals, as a means of expressing and experiencing Jewish identity. Also there is the profound association of Jewish tradition and culture with food and family and a broader concern with the inability of significant sectors of the population to find food to suit their level of observance should supermarkets and other stores stock foods produced without rabbinical oversight..

Where *kashrut* restrictions are challenged it is due to the perceived corruption of the Orthodox regulatory bodies responsible for licensing a plethora of organisations, companies, businesses and institutions as kosher. This power is often used as a 'sword of

Damocles' to impose unrelated modes of religious coercion, particularly on businesses that need *kashrut* certification in order to survive. Examples are myriad; in Jerusalem hotels were threatened with withdrawal of their kosher certification should they display any symbols of Christmas, including Christmas trees, or allow any form of celebration to take place. In Tel Aviv the Tango advertising company was forced to remove an advertisement for low-cut jeans at the cost of 40,000 shekels when the flour mill the giant ad was placed on was about to be forced out of business by the chief rabbi of Bnei B'rak. The rabbi refused to send kosher inspectors to a building that "displays pornographic pictures" and informed the *Eda Haredit* inspection department in Jerusalem of the case. This department then instructed the rabbi in charge of *kashrut* inspections in Lod not to accept flour from the offending mill (Haaretz, 23/3/02).

Problems can also occur when different *kashrut* inspection bodies disagree. In 2001 the Chief Rabbinate made an agreement with vegetable producers and supermarkets to allow the sale of products at Co-Op supermarkets during the year of *shmita* (every seventh year the land is to lie fallow according to *Halakha*). The Jerusalem Rabbinate responsible for overseeing this arrangement believed that the *kashrut* guidelines of its parent body were not stringent enough and plunged the supermarket chain into crisis by refusing to inspect their vegetables, making it impossible for many observant Jews to buy them. Labour MK Ophir Pines-Paz - in a classic call to *kulturkampf* - responded with a plea for the non-ultra-Orthodox population of Jerusalem to make a point of shopping at businesses stripped of their kosher certification by the local Rabbinate (Haaretz 19/1/01).

The provision of leavened bread to secular customers in cafés and restaurants during Passover is also a hot topic, with the Interior Ministry under Shas tutelage sending inspectors around to slap fines (usually small compared to the benefit to the business of selling *hametz* products) on owners. It is important to note that the law banning the public display of goods on *Pessach* was only legislated in 1986, supported by the *Mafdal*, and provides an insight into the constantly mutating nature of the status quo. Shinui MK Yossi Paritsky denounced the imposition of fines by inspectors as "pure religious coercion... there is no democracy in the world that allows such enforcement of religious laws. This is a combination of the Talaban and Iran. It's sheer madness" (Haaretz 13/4/01).

Meretz has also recently become involved in opposing perceived religious corruption in the provision of *kashrut* certification. In September 2000 Meretz launched a campaign with several small secular organisations to discourage secular supermarket shoppers from buying products certified by the Badatz *haredi* rabbinical body. Meretz spokesman Yossi Gazit explained why; "We are not telling people what they can or cannot buy. But consumers should know that because these companies are giving in to the demands of the haredim they are paying more out of their pocket. Badatz are making a lot of money and the people are being exploited" (Jerusalem Post, 22/9/00). The campaign gained some traction but was stymied by the resumption of hostilites with the Palestinians shortly thereafter, a good example of the influence of the Israeli-Arab conflict in suppressing rising tensions between secular and religious Jewish-Israelis.

One of my regrets post-fieldwork was not having asked more probing questions on *kashrut* observance. I took it as a given that fellow Meretz activists did not keep kosher daily in any way, having not seen any form of dietary observance in my visits to friends' houses and during activism when we were together day-in-day out for long periods. In hindsight I should have asked about *kashrut* observance during religious holidays. However, I think it is pretty safe to say that few Meretz activists keep kosher at home as a conscious daily decision - as opposed to passive observance through inadvertently eating *kashrut*-certified food, one of the aims of the religious in controlling licensing. Interviewees exhibited a wide variety of opinions on the issue of *kashrut*, but generally held to a form of benign voluntarism. Most thought people should be allowed to eat whatever they want, that state laws regarding *kashrut* should be relaxed, and that certification should be for those who want it rather than being a matter of coercion.

Yaron: I believe that... anybody should be allowed to eat what he wants. Let's take the army for example. OK, since in the army you have to serve side by side with religious people I can understand why the army... would want to be kosher, that makes perfect sense. I understand why some hutchers want to be kosher because they want to cater to religious groups and if hotels preserve their... *kashrut* overtly... because there is economic pressure on them to be *kashrut* then so be it... not being allowed to import pork from abroad, you know, that's ridiculous. It's just silly.

D: Do you think that... kosher restrictions should be kept in place?

Gal: Well [pauses] yes... Because there are many people here that kosher is something that is important to them... There are Jewish that although they are not religious they don't want to eat ham - I love it but OK. I think that they should know if the restaurant is, it's kosher or not. But this is the point, I don't think that the, the kosher diploma... should use as power to compel restaurants and anything else to, to be closed on *Shabbat*.

Ophir: We're never ate kosher, really never. Look, I mean, we eat the traditional food on the holidays... all the religious institutions should be broken apart from the state because... a religious community should have a rabbi that should decide if something is kosher or not. Or a religious community should, should appoint or rely on a rabbi, or some kind of rabbinate that will decide if something is kosher or not... well there are also many, many commercial issues here because different religious groups apply pressure on companies that if they don't make something kosher that they will...

D: Boycott them and stuff.

O: Yeah, boycott all the products of this company or something.

Roi was the only interviewee to acknowledge regular *kashrut* observance in his parent's home, albeit a rather minimal form - itself a testament to the voluntarism of private observances of tradition, an important characteristic of Jewish-Israeli identity politics.

D: Were your parents religious in any way?

Roi: Like me but more. My mother, she's very funny... she was saying the religion [says] you're not allowed to eat meat with milk... in the refrigerator there is separate levels, there is meat... but you can eat both [laughs] and I can, it's very mixed.

D: So you... had a sort of semi-kosher house?

R: Yeah, very semi-kosher.

Perhaps the most telling comment on *kashrut* came from Noam. His answer testifies to a general lack of concern with the subject in a party otherwise obsessed with religious coercion:

D: Do you agree with *kashrut* restrictions?

Noam: I have no idea, I never think about this.

From Cyprus With Love: Religious Marriage and the Sundering of *Am Israel*

On matters of matrimony: All members of the Executive appreciate the seriousness of the problem and the great difficulties involved, and all bodies represented by the Jewish Agency will do whatever they can to respect the profound needs of pious Jews and prevent the House of Israel from being split into two, God forbid (clause concerning marriage and divorce in the 'status quo in religious affairs document' of Jewish Agency June 1947 cited in Haaretz, 7/9/01).

In this document, The Jewish Agency promised the Orthodox a monopoly over marriage and divorce in the future state, in order to placate the 'pious' so that a united front could be presented to the UN Commission, which was in Palestine at the time to determine that body's policy on the post-Mandate future of the British protectorate (Haaretz, 7/9/01). Far from solving the issue this band-aid solution destroyed any hope for reconciliation between secular and religious (Haaretz, 7/9/01). With the defeat of legislative challenges such as those in 1950 and 2002 (RATZ also campaigned for civil marriage from the 1970s) Israeli state-mandated marriage has come to be experienced by a large minority of the secular population as a gross violation of their basic civil right to marry in a non-religious ceremony (Haaretz, 21/7/02; Sharansky 1996:93). This creates massive resentment against the religious establishment and state. It has created a host of problems for women unable to receive a *get* (religious divorce agreement), for resultant *mamzerim* (bastards), the children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers, Cohens[11], etc. It has effectively created two separate endogamous societies that can never intermarry - the bleak vision of the future

---

[11] As descendants of the priestly caste of the Temple, those with the surname Cohen and its derivatives are prohibited by *Halakha* from marrying certain classes of women including divorcees.

proposed by adherents of the status quo should civil marriage be instituted. The truth of this statement was made evident by the exposure of the Ministry of Religious Affairs blacklist of those who cannot marry into the Jewish community, as defined by *Halakha* (Sharansky 1996:138; Neuberger 1999:80).

To give some idea of the scale of the problem, I asked the clerk in the Cypriot municipality where Sharon and I were married how many Israeli couples had been married at the municipality that year (2000); his answer "Four-thousand five-hundred". This was in only one of many Cypriot municipalities involved in the burgeoning marriage travel-industry. Whether this figure is true or not, it underlines the scope of the problem faced by young secular couples who do not want, or are unable according to *Halakha*, to marry under the Israeli theocratic system. At the Larnaca hotel where we stayed there was a constant flow of couples arriving and departing with the certificates required for recognition of their marriages under Israeli civil law. Many were Russian, but a large minority were *sabras* or mixed couples like us.

Some decide not to allow themselves to be driven from the country and hold weddings in Israel with a secular celebrant, effectively consigning themselves to perpetual non-recognition as husband and wife by any but their friends and associates. Of the seven weddings of young secular Israeli friends I have attended or know the details of, only one couple was married in an Orthodox ceremony, two married overseas and the rest had secular ceremonies in Israel. The latter pose a far greater threat to the religious hegemony over marriage as foreign weddings and the civil law acceptance thereof allows the offspring of these marriages to be neatly fitted into the Jew, non-Jew categories. Conversely, secular Israeli ceremonies leave the rabbinical authorities with the nightmare scenario of trying to ascertain maternity, bastard-status and whether partnerships they cannot recognise involve the coupling of categories of Jews forbidden to marry under *Halakha*. Efrat talks of the trend in Israel to secular ceremonies and mentions a pitfall of marrying in a ceremony not recognised by the state:

Efrat: The number of people getting married in the *Rabanoot* has gone down. That means that more people are doing civilian weddings which is good... it is known in Israel that for a bank would look at you as married to give you mortgage [after a civil ceremony]... if you

want to get divorced you go to a religious court and they say you've never been married. It's a big mess.

Together with the eruption of foreign marriage, this constitutes a truly profound moment in the *kulturkampf*, the massive, popular revolt against a pivotal control mechanism of theocracy by young, secular Jews. Regardless of the institution or non-institution of civil marriage the religious control of personal status issues is at an end, doomed by a failure of religious law to adapt to modern needs and to the reality of a secular society that has rejected its strictures. With regards to Orthodox marriage all that is left now are the coercive artifices, a dwindling percentage of voluntary adherents and the paralysis of recurrent Israeli governments trapped by coalition considerations into marriages of convenience with the religious.

It did not have to be this way. Rivka reflects the ideas of many I spoke to on the subject of marriage that they would have preferred a traditional wedding ceremony with a rabbi if their participation therein was not forced:

D: You're having a secular wedding so tell me a little bit about that.

Rivka: I think that, first of all the religious people are making the religious hated by this behaviour. I don't hate tradition but... if it was separated from that it was nice to have a wedding with a rabbi, OK, but when it connects to them when you want to get a divorce and you have to go to the *Rabbanoot*, and to suffer and they have this primitive ceremony when the man took... out his shoe and throw it, something like this, and speak.

Moshe: I told to my aunt once that I have no intentions of marrying with an Orthodox rabbi so she said, "Why, why would you say something like that? I remember that when we were living in Romania[12] we were not allowed to do it and we did it anyway". So I told her, "Yeah, and here I am not allowed to marry in a secular way so I will do it anyway". It is like doing all the time the opposite of what they are making you. Nobody really likes to do something just because they're forcing you.

---

[12] Country changed to protect identity.

At the end of the first excerpt Rivka - who was married in a lavish secular ceremony in Israel by a Meretz MK - mentions the ceremony associated with the *get* which even secular couples who marry overseas must go through to be divorced. Here *Halakhic* stipulations stand in stark contrast to liberal modern jurisprudence in Western societies in treating the woman as almost a chattel of her husband, unable to free herself from an unwanted marriage without his consent. This is an issue in all Orthodox communities worldwide but for secular Israeli-Jewish women the ignominy of the process is particularly galling given the compulsion involved and potentially raises the spectre of being stuck with the status of a 'chained woman' with no recourse to civil courts for release so she can marry again and have future children recognised as other than *mamzerim*.

Here Dina talks of the process required before the Rabbinate will allow women to marry - a process she herself underwent, not to marry but to gain evidence (she wore a wire) for a Supreme Court case on civil marriage:

Dina: ...the wife of the rabbi will establish the date of the wedding, because in Israel if you want to order a place you have to do it months before. And then you're going to her after your other friends tell you how to calculate and you tell her, "Yeah, my last period will be on this date", so she'll write you this date... And everybody knows that it's a lie, the rabbi... the rabbi's wife... So, she knows that you are lying, you know that you are lying and still you go through with this, and it's even funny and you can... do... a girl talk about how I lied to the *rebbetzen* [rabbi's wife] and how she told me to act, and its funny, funny, funny. But it's not funny.

D: Do you go to a *mikvah*?

Da: It depends, most rabbis are asking you for the note but some rabbis know... you tell the rabbi that you lost the note from the *mikveh* and he knows that. It's based on a lie... religious shouldn't be based on lies... It's just ugly... even friends of mine wouldn't sometimes sign petitions, why, because this is a Jewish country and if there won't be Jewish marriage, and stuff like this, people are afraid that we lost our Jewish identity.

Here the hypocrisy of the current system is exposed. The Rabbinate knows that it is forcing a *mitzvah* on the secular population but does not really care that this observance is a

sham. Here the power to coerce and create the semblance of acquiecence is exposed as a powerful motivator in itself. In a later interview with the rabbi himself Dina was accused of being a bastard, the rabbi saying that they were not to know who her father was since her parents married while her mother was pregnant with her.

The number of mixed couples in Israel has skyrocketed over the past decade with the Russian *aliyah* of the 1990s. Surveys of the Russian community show that over 90% (one-sixth of the Israeli population are first generation Russian immigrants) want to marry in a civil ceremony (Haaretz, 1/7/03). Of this number 320,000 are considered non-Jews or marginal Jews by the Interior Ministry and, where the mother is not Jewish, their progeny will not be considered Jews and will be prevented from marrying Jews in Israel. Shas controlled the ministry for much of the 1990s and the party's leader, Eli Yishai's, response to this crisis was: "Those who want to, can undergo an Orthodox conversion. Those who don't can leave the country" (Haaretz, 16/2/01). Very few women choose the route of a friend of Erez' girlfriend and convert to Orthodox Judaism as a way to ensure their children's future in Israel, for obvious reasons considering the policing of converts exposed below:

Erez: I have a friend that came from kibbutz... and he had now a wife from Belgium[13]... she have... to do all these things that they can married in Israel. And this is not just the marriage.

D: She's going to have to get converted is she?

E: Yes. She have to be Jewish now and all this. And now... [they] go to the synagogue and he never do it... and he don't believe, and he have to go... the rabbis there always look if he goes to the synagogue in *Shabbas* and all this.

D: Right, right, so they're watching him.

M: Yeah, and you can't live like this, this is the problem.

The right to religious freedom, or to choose secularity does not exist for those forced by theocratic legislation to convert to Judaism in order to be allowed to marry in Israel. The degree of interest displayed by interviewees in civil and religious marriage prevents a full

---

[13]Country changed to protect identity.

recounting on the lengthy discussions we had regarding this topic and serves to underline the centrality of the fight for civil marriage to the *kulturkampf* struggle. It is not an issue that will go away, or be resolved in the short-term with secular parties including Meretz, Yisrael B'Aliya, Yisrael Beiteinu, the Likud and the now defunct Mercaz voting against civil marriage legislation at various points due to coalition concerns. Yaron mentions Meretz' shameful (in the opinion of many activists) failure to vote for a civil marriage law it later championed in altered form, due to the fact that it was initially tabled by Shinui and went against the wishes of PM Barak to hold the coalition with Shas and Meretz together during peace negotiations. This is followed by some final musings on the impossibility of instituting civil marriage:

Yaron: Shinui... they couldn't be happier, here is Meretz is avoiding it. But Yosef Paritsky brought... this thing up to vote... it's pretty much a copy of the resolution which Meretz has been running for all these years and *Hanhalat* Meretz (The Meretz Board) led by Yossi Sarid and Abu Vilan, they made sure that Meretz would not vote for this... they emphasised how disastrous this would be for the coalition... and then a week afterwards you had... Shas voting no confidence in the government... every person should have the right to choose who to marry, when to marry, when to divorce... there's no excuse for coercion in that.

D: Do you believe that civil marriage should be instituted in Israel?
Ehud: Of course, but... I know that there is no chance of that happening for the next years, again because the religious parties are the equilibrium and unless this breaks - unfortunately it will not break - then this is still going to be an issue... regarding the marriage more and more people are now demanding that this is not a religious act. I think the law is not that important...
D: Do you think that the law might follow?
E: It will follow, definitely, it only depends when.

Amit: I think there's no problem in getting... a solution about marriages and divorces. Marriages and divorces will be state ones... but there will be a list for the Orthodox... they

want... to control the list so... they will know who is a Jew by their terms and who is not a Jew by their terms. So I think that... they're OK to have this bookkeeping by them. I have no problem with that...

D: Do you think that's the danger with the institution of civil marriage that there will then be two kinds of Jews developing, an Orthodox camp and a non-Orthodox camp?

Amit: ...It's ugly to say, but it's their problem because they're saying, "I want you to be part of me". I said, "I'd like to be part of you". "Yes, but for this you have to do this and this and this". "Well I want you to be part of me, but for this you have to do nothing. Just be nice to me, don't tell me what to do".

'Shabbat: My Free Day'

Figure 3: Meretz protesting *haredi* efforts to close a bridge leading into B'nei B'rak

Conflicts concerning the observance of the *Shabbat* are an intractable aspect of the Israeli *kulturkampf*, dating back to the *Yishuv*. The important feature of these conflicts is not the longevity of *Shabbat* struggles but the trajectory these have taken in recent years with secular successes far outnumbering religious attempts to coerce observance. Public observance of the day of rest has been buckling under the twin onslaughts of commerce and the growing militancy of the secular public and their desire for shopping and entertainment on their only full day off work. It is this typically middle class concern with lifestyle rather than any ideological or political motive that has seen the progressive rolling back of business closures in Jewish areas.

A 2000 Jerusalem Post poll (15/9/00) of 502 adults from all sectors of the populace found that 53% supported the opening of stores in city centres on *Shabbat*; 77% of

'seculars', 41% of 'traditional' Jews, and only 6% of 'Orthodox'. Given that the vast majority of shops in city centres still close, and the importance of *Shabbat* as a day of rest and source of cultural identification for all sectors of the populace (business openings are currently concentrated in outlying malls) this level of support for store openings from both the traditional and secular populace is extraordinary and indicative of wider *kulturkampf* tensions. Such figures also give lie to the confusion of observance with an absence of societal cleavages in the Guttman Report (Levy, Levinsohn & Katz 1993:1). The struggle over *Shabbat* has several distinct, disassociated aspects which win selective support from the secular public. Mall, movie and other business openings generally garner the most support from secular and traditionalist Israelis who throng malls on Saturdays, offsetting the occasional costs of fines imposed by *Shabbat* inspectors from the Interior and Labour and Social Affairs ministries.

The second issue is that of street closures on *Shabbat*. A typical *Shabbat* road closure conflict sees a Mexican standoff with police who have been called to prevent ultra-Orthodox *yeshiva* boys pelting offending vehicles with stones, dirty nappies and garbage, usually batoning secular counter-protestors. The police know that they cannot do anything to the *yeshiva* boys as any arrests made are overturned by local rabbis springing their charges shortly thereafter, usually having threatened the local mayor with a coalition crisis.

This brings to light an important aspect of the struggle over *Shabbat*. Central government has dumped this intractable problem onto local councils (Cohen & Don-Yehiya 1986:209-210). Several cities are increasingly faced with the unenviable task of finding some way of accomodating both strong ultra-Orthodox council lobbies and their secular opponents (Meretz and other secularist parties often fare far better in local than national elections). They usually opt to placate the ultra-Orthodox.

This was the consistent pattern in Jerusalem in the past decade with Mayor Olmert proving amenable to Orthodox efforts to close roads, providing Orthodox educational institutes and building projects with strong support, both financial and bureaucratic, and stymieing Progressive and Conservative efforts to expand their institutional base at the behest of the ultra-Orthodox council faction. With the bloc vote of the 30% of Jerusalem residents who are ultra-Orthodox for their candidate, Uri Lupoliansky, Jerusalem became (in October 2003) the first major mixed secular-religious city in Israel to come under the

control of the ultra-Orthodox. Though he has struck a moderate tone thus far, cooling tensions over Bar Ilan St. (see below) and meeting with representatives of the Reform community, political favours will be called in at some stage to the detriment of secular and Arab residents (Haaretz 22/6/03).

Keeping the status quo at local government level can be very expensive and, with the economic collapse of many councils forcing them to rely increasingly on the Interior Ministry for support, pressure is being brought to bear from that body to take a beneficient approach to local religious requests due to the death-grip of Shas on the ministry until very recently. In a rather bizarre footnote to this discussion, in July 1999, the Shas Minister of the Interior Eli Yishai and Meretz Labour and Social Affairs Minister Ran Cohen threatened to pit their respective ministerial inspectors against each other over what Cohen termed the "provocative" fining of Gan Shmuel mall businesses NIS4000 each for being open on Shabbat by the Interior Ministry (Jerusalem Post, 20/7/99).

To give an idea of the extent the Orthodox establishment will go to enforce Sabbath observance on the secular public the rabbinical court of Tel Aviv refused visitation rights to a father when he stated that he would have to travel on *Shabbat* to reach his estranged wife's house. This deplorable ruling was then defended by the president of the Supreme Religious Court, Rabbi Yisrael Lau who reasoned that "rabbinical courts cannot be asked to approve of Sabbath desecration that is blatant, declared, open, and known" (Haaretz, 20/2/02).

There has been a growing sense of frustration for many seculars concerning the ban on public transport in most areas. Sporadic attempts by Meretz activists and others to institute secular bus services in centres other than Haifa have foundered. Sixty percent of respondents to the aforementioned Jerusalem Post survey (15/9/00) wanted to see buses running on *Shabbat*; 86% of 'seculars', 47% of 'traditional' Jews and only 5% of Orthodox. All interviewees who discussed public transport on *Shabbat* came out firmly in support:

Omer: At some point secular people in Israel will start saying that it hurts their emotions. The religious Jews are using the term it 'hurts their emotions' when they see a bus go and when they see a car go on the street. So secular people at some point will say it hurts their

emotion not to go on a bus on Saturday... the government will have to supply a bus if they say it hurts their emotions.

Avi: Yeah, it's very bad because young people cannot go to pubs... On Saturday morning all... Israelis go to the beach. They can't go by bus, this is the thing that most *me'atzben* [annoying].

Boaz: ...they try to limit freedom of movement... you don't have public transportation. They put all kinds of restrictions on [things] that would help the citizens have a more free and open lifestyle.

New Sabbath legislation was passed in the Knesset to protect Sabbath observance in the 1980s due to religious parties holding the balance of power in recurrent coalitions. El Al was grounded on Shabbat with efforts to overturn this legislation receiving strong support (64%) in the Jerusalem Post poll (Horowitz & Lissak 1989:160; Sharansky 1996:139; Jerusalem Post, 15/9/00). Other Israeli airlines flew more flights on *Shabbat* underlining the fact common to many *kulturkampf* struggles that the import of such efforts, for the religious, lies in maintaining the power to determine and enforce public behaviour rather than in any principled stand to encourage religiosity or ensure the Jewish character of the state. It is also important to recognise that these disputes are largely played out in secular neighbourhoods. No one I spoke to in Meretz sought to prevent road closures on Shabbat in entirely religious areas (aside from arterial routes between secular neighbourhoods) and no café, movie theatre, pub or mall has ever opened in religious neighbourhoods on Saturdays, or ever will. Very few 'pious' Jews own TVs, let alone watch them on Sabbath and none would be able to make it to Ben Gurion Airport on Saturdays, let alone take a flight.

Most clashes over road openings occur where ultra-Orthodox neighbourhoods abut roads used by the secular public, or grow to encompass roads connecting secular neighbourhoods. Meretz has been active in supporting the rights of secular residents to use these roads and regularly organises counter-demonstrations when ultra-Orthodox try to close them but most activists share the opinion that limited road closures are acceptable:

Amnon: ...inside the inner streets of definitely religious places or cities, where secular people usually... don't... go through, I don't mind them to be closed. If they want to live like this let them... But there was a case... many years ago, but a famous one, he tried to enter from Kvish Geah to Hashomer Street. And they didn't know it, they put a cable across the street and the bloody cable just killed him because of it.

The most famous road closure case in recent years has been Bar Ilan Street in Jerusalem, a vital road connecting different parts of the city which has been persistently seen as a *casus belli* by both secular and *haredi* Jerusalemites. I participated in one of several rallies held there. This demonstration followed the spraying of tear gas at passing cars by ultra-Orthodox rioters (Jerusalem Post, 11/7/99). We were kept away from the street itself by a request from Meretz' leadership to avoid violent confrontations and due to the provisions of our permit - organisers of all public demonstrations are required to obtain a permit from police in which place and numbers expected are stipulated. However a small band of activists from the local *snif* did make it to the street itself and were pelted with stones by rioting *yeshiva* boys, one ending up in hospital after receiving a gash to the head.

Trouble flared again in Bar Ilan St. in 2003 as *haredim* tested the willingness of the new mayor to support the 1997 Supreme Court ruling which specified that traffic should be allowed to use the street outside synagogue services hours (Haaretz, 28/7/03). A Meretz poster was created showing a frightening sea of black hats from the huge ultra-Orthodox demonstration against the Supreme Court. It was designed to attract seculars both to a demonstration against the Bar Ilan riots and support for Meretz. In my opinion, it is a profoundly anti-religious image and I remember feeling uncomfortable when I first saw it. Below, Ari speaks of his arrest at another Jerusalem road-closure demonstration. The pattern of police behaviour is typical and reserved for secular-leftist demonstrators:

Ari: ...all the policemen... told us to "Get out get out, we, we will keep the quiet here". The first time we got out but... they let the ultra-Orthodox to keep the road closed so we came and we wanted to open the road and the police didn't allowed it. And also one policeman on a horse... was beating me with his foot... all the media couldn't see because the horse is

keeping the leg along the wall... so I pulled, I had a Israeli flag in my hands "Oh, stop that, stop hitting, hitting, stop kicking me and stop". I kick him so I think he didn't like it.

D: You whacked him with the flag?

A: Yeah... I got arrested. They sent me to the police station... I sat and... I said that I didn't know why I'm there, I didn't do anything... they wanted me to say something in writing... They want me to say that I won't be there for one month on Saturday. So I didn't agree, I said "I didn't do anything, why, and if you want me not to be there take me to a judge and a judge will decide. You are... a police officer you are not to decide"... and he told me "OK, we're taking you to a judge" and trying to... make me threats. And I... still didn't give it... to him.

Figure 4: A Meretz protest against *haredi* efforts to close Bar Ilan St.

On the twentieth of February 2000 a new supermarket, targeted to appeal to tourists and *Shabbat* shoppers opened a couple of hundred metres down the road from where I was living in Jerusalem's central *Midrahof* shopping precinct. Despite the operation of more than one hundred pubs, restaurants, clubs and kiosks in the city on *Shabbat*, the size and centrality of Drugstore 2000 made its opening an obvious snub to the *haredi* population's crumbling control over Sabbath observance in secular areas of the city. Indeed, a *haredi* weekly, *Yom Hashishi* called the establishment of the supermarket a "ticking time bomb" (Jerusalem Post, 9/4/99). The next month, Labour Minister Eli Yishai met with four of the city's deputy mayors to plot a strategy for fighting Shabbat violations in Jerusalem, promising to convene a meeting of the religious parties in the Knesset, the chief rabbis, and the Jerusalem city council for this purpose (Jerusalem Post, 9/4/99). Nothing came of this aside from some steep fines imposed by Druse Interior Ministry inspectors which were

avoided by the Jewish owner during the following weeks through his selling the store to his Arab employees for the Sabbath, then buying it back on Sundays. The failure of the store opening to stir up the predicted level of *haredi* opposition is an important sign of the weakening resolve of the religious sector in the face of a widespread disregard for laws demanding the closure of businesses on Saturdays. The secular parties were primed for a fight: I participated in a couple of Meretz demonstrations opposite the store to support the owner but there was little trouble, the worst violence being a brief scuffle outside between a *haredi* man and a Meretz activist which was snapped by a photographer and gained notoriety well beyond its actual import. I did not see a single religious counter-demonstrator at the rallies I attended.

Figure 5: A bumper sticker: "Shabbat: My free day, Meretz"

In March 2000, the Meretz mayor of Herzliya, Yael German, was denounced on posters appearing in synagogues throughout the city by 'The Committee for the Sabbath' for allowing businesses to operate for the first time on *Shabbat*. This move was described by the group as constituting a "change in the status quo" (Jerusalem Post, 17/3/00). Further bills decried cuts in the budget for Torah culture and for the *kollelim* calling on religious Herzylians "to oppose the budget proposal of the religion-hating regime" (Jerusalem Post, 17/3/00). German responded by saying that "We will take care to honor the religious population but at the same time we will enable the secular population freedom to live as it pleases" (Jerusalem Post, 17/3/00).

It may appear from the events and opinions related above that Meretzniks are unanimous in their support for the opening of businesses on *Shabbat*. This is far from the case. In fact, opinions on whether businesses should be allowed to operate on Saturdays are split with a tendency, if any, towards support for the opening of only a limited number of shops. The general impression I formed from these responses is that the present status quo

of the limited opening of malls, restaurants and places of entertainment, alongside the provision of public transport, would satisfy many, though not all. Several backed Shulamit Aloni's antagonism to Meretz' official policy of full support for businesses operating on Saturdays, which, it sometimes seems is held more as an oppositional *kulturkampf* 'flag' to gain votes rather than as an essential ideological issue of freedom against religious repression:

> I argued with my friends in Meretz who were demonstrating against closing the shopping mall in Ramat Aviv on Shabbat. What foolishness. If a mall was built near my home, I'd demonstrate against opening it on Shabbat. Why do we need commerce on Shabbat? Public transportation, yes. Cafes and places of entertainment, yes. But one day a week businesses should be closed (Shulamit Aloni cited in The Jerusalem Report 24/4/00:24-26).

Danny: I hate the fact that Saturday... if I need something urgent you have to wait until Saturday's over because I, there's not an open shop to be seen.

Ran: The issue of... work in *Shabbat*... I see it as a social law because... if you don't keep people... in the law one day a week... of holiday or whatever, will cause... the upper class... to convert the lower class to... how do you call it – ekh omrim avadim ['how do you say slaves']? ...So it's not a religious thing, I don't care if... it will be on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, whatever, but just a, a day of. ...I don't think... that... Meretz does the right thing in this issue... I don't thinks that all of the demonstrations that Meretz organise is right... I know what's Meretz' interests... in this kind of work and... I don't think its right. Meretz' interests is that in generally is that the conflict, *haredim-hilonim,* will be... as long as it could be because Meretz get lots of votes from it.

Ran's cynicism regarding Meretz' stand on Shabbat shopping strikes me as true to the mark and I was also impressed by his awareness of the social impact of such a change, seemingly ill thought through by the party's policy-making bodies. His criticism was echoed by others:

Noam: ...one of the big fights here [Meretz] today is about the *Shabbat* and... it make me very angry because... all the big discussions is do you open the mall or don't open the mall on the *Shabbath*... they don't engage with... essential things.

D: How about... shops opening on *Shabbat*?

Moshe: Yeah, definitely... what is... on the other side here is that people should not be forced to work on *Shabbat*... it is a problem because... you should not discriminate people because of their religion beliefs and there are many people in Israel who believe that... they are not allowed to work on Saturday.

Amnon: I think that we should have a rest on Saturdays... It's not so much a matter of Judaism... if you force the workplaces to be closed then people can have a rest and no one will force them to work seven days. So, unless it's very critical... I would keep the situation as it is...

Others were unequivocal in their support for commercial freedoms:

Omer: And we have some ridiculous things; that stores that can't be open on Friday night, or Saturday, or anything else, and you have to keep finding loopholes. The kibbutz stores are open... People have the choice when they want to close the store... that should be a choice made by the owner.

Yaron: Sabbath law... is just costing the consumers a lot of money because the shops are paying very high fines if they stay open on Sabbath.

One was just too busy on *Shabbat* to care:

Amir: Now Shabbat doesn't mean anything to me since I live in Tel Aviv and work most of the Shabbat but [laughs]. I would like to see more public transportation.

The *Haredi* Draft Exemption

Few *kulturkampf* issues have received as much media coverage in recent years as the *haredi* draft exemption. Under the status quo agreement *yeshiva* students were granted exemption from conscription as long as they remained in Torah academies, a situation that led to the progressive impoverishment (alongside an explosive growth in the number of *yeshivot, kollelim,* and student numbers) of *haredi* society through reliance on government stipends as men stayed on in Torah academies to avoid the draft, forcing many ultra-Orthodox women into the workforce (Horowitz & Lissak 1989:140; Jerusalem Post, 30/6/99; Jerusalem Post, 12/5/00). The issue is presented by the secular press as one of great moment for secular and national-religious Israelis, symbolic of the, perceived, parasitic nature of *haredi* society. The secularist parties and Labour have sought to deepen public disaffection with the draft exemption identifying the issue as a potential vote getter. It is also almost the only topic that unites the secular right and left in righteous Zionist indignation, "my conscience doesn't allow me to support the Tal bill, which will perpetuate inequality in terms of carrying the burden" (Ariel Sharon cited in Haaretz, 4/1/01). A Jerusalem Post editorial (2/5/99) argued that, "The ballooning phenomenon of haredi draft deferments represents a triple blow to Israeli society, from a non-haredi perspective: It exacerbates a gross inequality regarding army service, robs the economy of a potentially productive work force, and increases poverty, thereby draining government resources".

Ehud Barak's campaign platform in 1999 included a call to end the *haredi* draft exemption. Meretz made it an issue in coalition negotiations, and this political hot potato was thrown to the Tal Commission and Supreme Court to handle, neither of which showed any great desire to rule one way or the other. It was the Supreme Court's efforts at sidestepping the issue in 1998 that led to the current imbroglio. The justices finally recognised the unsustainability of the temporary measures put in place to defer political crises over the exemption, ruling in December 1998 that the government had one year to legislate *haredi* draft deferments before conscription would become compulsory (Jerusalem Post, 20/6/99; Haaretz, 24/7/01). Desperate pleas for more time gained recurrent governments breathing space before the issue was finally forced and fobbed off onto the Tal Commission which submitted its findings in April 2000 (Haaretz, 24/7/01). The Tal Commission recommended that at the age of 23 *yeshiva* students should have the choice

whether to take a year off from Torah studies to work or pursue other study interests. After this they would have to decide whether to enter the army, or national service for a short stint before joining the workforce, or return to religious studies after the year's sabbatical. This compromise was rejected outright by Meretz and Shinui: "Adopting his report would perpetuate the sense of injustice that is destroying Israeli society and our soldiers' morale" (Meretz MK Mossi Raz cited in The Jerusalem Report 5/6/00).

The Commission's findings were passed as the Tal Law with the support of the Likud and *haredi* parties and, predictably, changed nothing when it came into effect in February 2003. The law was not annulled, as desired by Shinui in its coalition negotiations with the Likud, and has raised again the spectre of further secularist appeals (Meretz, Shinui and the anti-exemption 'Awakenings' NGO) to the High Court and desperate efforts at deferral by the government (Haaretz, 13/3/03). Shinui MK Yosef Paritsky summed up proceedings well: "The Tal Law is a bluff, from start to finish, and it's clear that nobody planned to implement it" (Haaretz, 13/3/03).

So how popular is ending the *haredi* draft exemption among Meretz activists? Not particularly. Many would not like to see more right wing religious in the army and believe that some form of national service should be implemented in its stead. Nonetheless, a significant minority called for *haredi* conscription. Research participants were asked whether *yeshiva* boys should go to the army:

Gilad: First of all they have to be forced to go to work. Really, it's more important to me. About going to the army? I don't know, I can't really tell how it's gonna solve anything if they're gonna be in the army... if they're gonna go to the army... we're gonna lose some of the basic argument against... What are we gonna say to them then, "You go the army?"
D: It kind of suits at the moment to have this.
G: It's really quite convenient [laughs] "You don't go to the army, we don't want you here". No, anyway, I don't think it's going to contribute having all these problems around it, having them in the army.

Gilad's witty commentary brings out a point made above as to the essentially political nature of calls for *haredi* conscription, a call that makes little practical sense, in my

opinion, when its consequences are considered. Roi's comments reflect the strong collectivist mentality in secular Israeli society, a hangover from classical Zionism that has weakened considerably but lives on in attitudes to army service and a more general sense of having to do something to build and protect the country. There is a feeling that Israeli society is in a sense an unfinished project which each individual must give of themselves to complete.

Roi: They shouldn't get the money because they are *haredim*, they should get the money because they don't have anything... And you have to make a rule that the country helps only the people that helps her. That only if you're going to the army and served to the country and helping to the nation you can get something from it... if they don't want to get to the army, OK, get to work. I don't have to give you money to learn... and you don't give anything to the country.
D: Right... are there other ways of giving to the country that you...
R: Yeah, not only just going to the army... helping hospitals, clean the streets... going to schools and help the little children cross the road... You can think about many works they can do not in the army. I don't sure I want them in the army. If they are going to the army the army... all the food there "No, this is not kosher, you're not allowed to eat it" and all.
D: So the army will be changed by them being in it?
R: Yeah.

Boaz: They're not going to be forced to work they're just not going to. Now the problem is that it's a very poor society because they're not allowed to work because if they go to work then the army's going to say, "Hey, you're not learning you're going to work". I don't want them in the army. I don't think the army needs them. I think it's dangerous to have religious fanatics in the army... I think that if somebody's wearing a *kippa* he shouldn't be recruited to the army because he's dangerous [laughs], that's my perspective.

Moshe and Ophir take a different tack below, diverging from the respondents above in showing the influence of Meretz' civil rights heritage in their argumentation. This perspective is rarely related to the army where a collectivist orientation tends to prevail, at

odds with the civil focus on the sovereign individual. For example, Meretz favours collectivism in oppugning conscientious objection.

Moshe: I am... for not drafting anyone who will state that he cannot serve the army because he have a religious and/or consciousness problems with it. So I definitely cannot say that I am for drafting the *haredim*.

Ophir: I'm a pacifist and I don't think that anyone should go into the army for that matter... I think that there should be some kind of national service... that everyone... should do.

Nevertheless, a strong minority of respondents called for universal Jewish conscription - no one expects Israeli-Arabs to join the army in large numbers, with the notable exception of the Druse and those Bedouin tribes that have always provided volunteers. Erez follows the official Meretz and secular media line that *haredi* non-service constitutes a gross violation of the basic values of equality and fairness in the relation of citizen to state:

Erez: ...when you are talking about human rights this is something in the human rights and the Shas don't go to the army, don't serve their country.
D: So do you think that's important? Should *yeshiva* boys be going to the army?
E: Yes, of course, like all the people here they have to serve the country. The country can't serve people that don't serve them.

Noam: Yes but... they go a long way... in the [last] 40, 50... years because they've become extremes... take Avram Ravitz, you know, the *Degel HaTorah*[14] [MK]... in '48 he fight in the *Etzel*... and today he don't go to the army, nor his children, nor his grandchildren so you understand that... they became very, very extreme.

Amnon: They should go to the army and should start work, and stop sucking our blood.

---

[14] 'Flag of Torah', an ultra-Orthodox party now in the Agudat Israel coalition.

The implementation of universal conscription is not an essential change for most Meretz activists who are much more passionate about religious coercion where it has an impact on lifestyle and matters of personal status. This is an important point to remember when considering how secular Israelis cohere as a group and brings out the effect of class tastes and the maintenance and furthering of 'lifestyle choices'[15] as a key factor in the Israeli *kulturkampf*. It is no accident that the poor are increasingly voting for parties that stand outside the old Revisionist-Labour elite and promise the alleviation of suffering, both temporal and spiritual. The upper and upper-middle classes split their vote between various liberal parties (Meretz included) that proffer greater freedoms in their public lives and advocate the twin freedoms of capital and lifestyle.

The Home Front: Fighting for Towns and Neighbourhoods

The Israeli *kulturkampf* is fiercest at the local level due to the central government having dumped a lot of the problems related to religious-secular divisions onto local government. We have discussed above the ability of religious ministers in government, and religious factions on local councils to make and break coalitions and garner budgets and permits for the extension of their power and institutional base in towns and cities. Here we will look at but a few of the hundreds of *kulturkampf* battles every year at municipal level.

On my first day as an activist in Tel Aviv I attended two demonstrations. The first was in Kfar Chabad, the second at the site of a religious institution being built across the street from a predominantly secular neighbourhood in Rehovot. Organised by Meretz, and *Am Hofshi* ('A Free People') - a secularist NGO with strong links to both Meretz and Shinui - the demonstration expressed the fears of secular residents that their neighbourhood would be gradually turned into a *haredi*, observant area. This has happened in other cities and towns where a pattern of religious educational institution establishment, mass-busing, then a gradual take-over of neighbourhoods has taken place (though sometimes the reverse happens with secular neighbourhoods encroaching on religious areas possibly through rises in housing prices where apartments are largely freehold). Rehovot is a mixed city and it is only recently that religious-secular tensions have been on the rise, with the conflict in the

---

[15]Freedom from religious coercion with regards to travel, shopping, personal status choices, and from excessive taxation, bureaucracy and the constant economic and social disruption of war.

Yovel neighbourhood being but one example. This is symptomatic of current crises involving coerced council acquiescence, *haredi* attempts at spreading out from their overcrowded neighbourhoods and the conflicts that increasingly follow this process, led by the secularist parties.

The late *Am Hofshi* leader and Jerusalem city council faction leader, Ornan Yekutieli, relating to events in Yovel, told the Jerusalem Post (30/7/99) that the same pattern of institutional establishment followed by *haredi* takeover was happening in seven cities at that time and rejected *haredi* claims that anti-religiosity was the prime motivator for protesters. In the excerpt below he mentions the fact that *haredi* groups often seek to convert seculars to ultra-Orthodoxy, a very real fear for many secular parents with troubled teens as we will see below:

> When Blacks or Jews want to move into a WASP ['white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant'] neighborhood in the US, their goal is to assimilate. The *haredim* as a community want to live separately. When they do move into a secular neighborhood, they eventually want to close the roads, they don't want their kids to see our kids, our books, our women, they don't want to assimilate into the neighborhood... what they want to do is to make people religious. That is their bread and butter (Jerusalem Post, 30/7/99).

For their part Chabad denied this was their intention in Yovel: "They say that we are going to demand that streets close, that we will throw stones on Shabbat... [Chabad] has a history of never doing that. We have never closed streets or thrown stones in our lives" (Chabad Rabbi Mendel Gluckowsky cited in Jerusalem Post, 30/7/99).

The sequence of events and players involved in the Yovel conflict are typical and instructive. At first the secular residents claimed not to have known of the council's gift of the vacant lot to Chabad - a claim questioned in a Jerusalem Post (2/7/99) column by Jonathon Rosenblum, who related that a public ground-breaking ceremony attended by the mayor took place in 1994. The head of the anti-school campaign, Yitzhak Ziv, and some of the protesting residents were national-religious and it was to the NRP and Likud that the local residents initially turned for help - an important point to consider when imagining the

shifting coalitions of interest involved in local *kulturkampf* struggles. Also important is the reference to lifestyle in Ziv's statement of opposition: "We are objecting because of damage to the quality of life not because of religious issues" (Jerusalem Post, 30/7/99). They received no help from the right wing parties and turned to Meretz, Shinui and *Am Hofshi* as a last resort only after a number of angry city hall meetings debating whether to seek secularist help.

With construction proceeding apace residents were filmed tearing down and trampling the fence surrounding the complex and the rebuilt fence was covered with protest graffiti when we arrived for the demonstration. The demonstration itself was extremely passionate. I helped set up speakers and banners and held Meretz placards as recurrent speakers, standing on the top of a van, attacked the complex as an example of *haredi* coercion. Banners made by local residents read "It is a *mitzva* to fight haredi coercion" and a "*Kollel* in a secular neighbourhood equals a discotheque in a *haredi* one" (Jerusalem Post, 30/7/99). Meretz figures such as Shimrit Or - a lyricist and secular activist who led the successful opposition to a similar Shas complex the year before in Pardes Hana - set the tone of proceedings: "We are at war... This war is fought at different places, but it is a war for all of us, all across the land. We are at the front and we must fight this war" (Jerusalem Post, 30/7/99). The demonstration itself spilled out onto the road next to the building site which gave the opportunity for passing Orthodox motorists to vent their spleen at the attendees. One driver tried to drive his car into the protesters and was only saved from a beating by policeman who forced him to drive on.

One protestor pulls another away from the car that tried to run over
demonstrators at the Yovel rally

I lost track of what happened in Yovel thereafter. Attempts were being made to resolve the issue through mediation following an appeal by residents to the Supreme Court that led to the suspension of construction (Jerusalem Post, 30/7/99). Certainly the effort put in by Meretz in organising the demonstration had a lot to do with the fact that the conflict arose in the middle of an election campaign. In the 1999 election Meretz' campaign strategy focused on religious coercion, trying to play down its peacenik persona in the public imagination.

Similar crises soon erupted in Rehovot with Marmorek neighbourhood residents opposing the council selling the local Histadrut hall, used by the secular community for 50 years, to a rabbi as a *kollel*. The lawyer for the residents threatened that if the building was transformed into a *kollel* the neighbourhood "will burn" (Jerusalem Post, 16/6/00). Shas MK Rahamim Melul fulminated that: "The instigators of the petition are joining the anti-religious faction which has spread throughout our area, an evil spirit of hate of religion and its believers which began with Meretz and was followed by Shinui" (Jerusalem Post, 16/6/00). Extraordinarily, for what is very much a middle-sized town with little history of *kulturkampf* struggles, this was soon followed by a successful campaign by secular residents to oppose the setting up of a yeshiva in the secular Ramat Yigal neighbourhood. The Rehovot council's gifting land to the religious body organising the yeshiva was lambasted by the Supreme Court as testifying to a lack of formal criteria in the municipal allocation of land to private organisations throughout Israel. The Court ordered the State Prosecutor's Office to set clear criteria for land allocation (Haaretz, 25/8/00).

Obviously something was going on at the Rehovot municipality with religious strong-arming precipitating these conflicts. A general pattern seems to emerge of a planned push to expand *haredi* neighbourhoods. This concentration of *kulturkampf* events is not unique and points to a trend of increasing conflict between competing ultra-Orthodox and secular/traditional communities throughout Israel. To run quickly through a few from 1999-2001 newspaper clippings: April 2000 saw continued construction of a synagogue in a public park, following the failure of the Netanya municipality to enforce a stop work order, a failure denounced by the local Meretz faction (Jerusalem Post, 28/4/00). An effort to start an Arab-Jewish school to foster coexistence was opposed by religious council factions as a "change in the status quo" with local Shas faction leader Avi Weizzman predicting "the

destruction of families. No mother wants her daughter to marry an Arab" (Jerusalem Post, 17/3/00). In Jerusalem in March 2001, the ultra-Orthodox factions forced Mayor Ehud Olmert to delay and eventually stymie the Reform bailout of a city school. Local Meretz faction head, Pepe Alou, railed against the initial delay as "a severe blow for the secular residents of the city. They can't impose their kind of education on us" and threatened to take the issue to the Supreme Court (Haaretz, 3/5/01).

Local religious councils have been the site of intense conflict in recent years. Secularists have succeeded in winning a series of court orders destroying the long-held Orthodox monopoly on council seats - a monopoly supported by the Likud and Labour who always gave their allocated seats on these bodies to the Orthodox. Meretz often gives its religious council seats to members of the Reform or Conservative religious communities. What resulted was gridlock as Orthodox councillors refused to sit on the same council as secular members or representatives of liberal Judaism. By April 2000 the Ra'anana religious council had not had a meeting for 16 months (Jerusalem Post, 14/4/00).

In July 1999, after 10 years of court battles against the Jerusalem city council and Religious Affairs Ministry, Rabbi Ehud Bandel, the Meretz-backed Conservative representative, won his bid to be installed as a religious councillor. The Jerusalem city council ignored the Supreme Court order to this effect in then proceeding to select five *haredi* councillors (Jerusalem Post, 16/7/99; Jerusalem Post, 14/4/00). Religious Affairs Minister Beilin was then forced to renominate Bandel - alongside a Reform rabbi - to the council again on the 22nd of September 2000. This is an example of the lack of respect paid the justice system generally by religious and their secular allies and the extent to which the Supreme Court is called in to adjudicate in conflicts encouraged by local and central government paralysis and corruption (Haaretz, 22/9/00). Talks are now (October 2003) underway to scrap religious councils altogether, a move that would, paradoxically, suit the Orthodox by allowing them to maintain their stranglehold on the provision of religious services and the determination of local religious affairs.

Ba'alei Teshuvah: A Threat to Secular Israel?
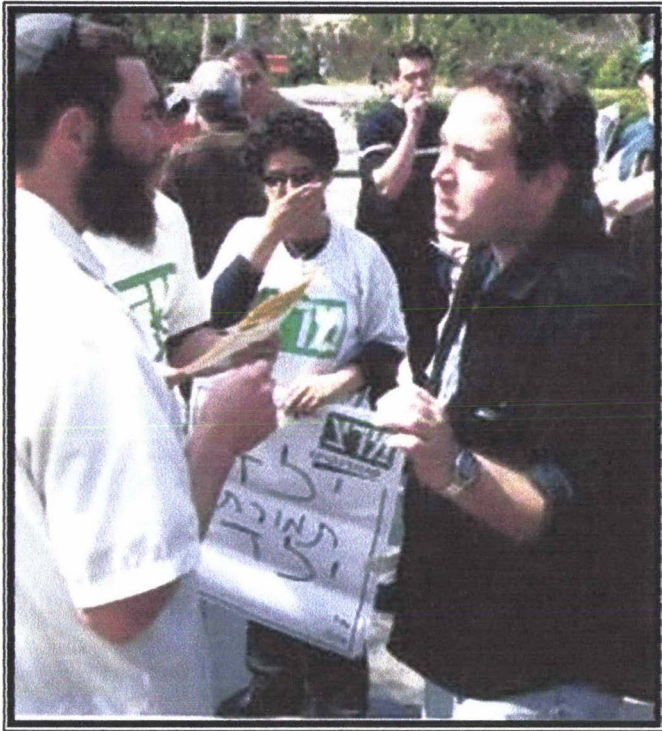
Figure 7: A Meretz activist argues with a Chabad proselytiser outside a secular school.
"A child for a child"

Few things are more frightening for secular Israeli parents than the idea of their children being spirited away by *haredi* proselytisers to a yeshiva only to reappear sometime later as *ba'alei teshuvah* (newly religious). This fear is very real. Ultra-Orthodox recruiters pick teens off the street or from in front of high schools on Friday mornings and most secular Israelis know of people, or even friends and family who have been converted to ultra-Orthodoxy. This happened to a friend of ours in Meretz, his seventeen year old brother leaving for Jerusalem to join a Shas *yeshiva* there. Distraught, the family turned to Meretz and through contacts they were able to engage an ex-Chabad rabbi, who was a proselytiser himself before becoming secular, who was able to tell them how to get him back.

In March 2000 Meretz received word that Chabad proselytisers were moving in on high school and university students in Ramat Aviv, a secular suburb in north Tel Aviv. On Friday the 17th we organised to confront the proselytisers and prevent them from carrying out this illegal activity outside the security gates of high schools as kids were leaving school. We piled into the Meretz cars and went on a bit of a wild goose chase around the suburb before eventually finding three Chabadnikim proselytising in front of a technical high school just down the road from the university. A few non-aligned secular protesters who were there before us urged us to physically attack the Chabadnikim but we said that we couldn't and wouldn't. However, we made it very hard for them to proselytise, standing around arguing with them, handing out Meretz lollipops, hanging a banner that read 'Israel

will not become Iran' and basically putting on a show of strength that prevented all but a couple of students from laying *tefillin* as intended by the Chabadnikim.

Figure 8: "Israel will not become Iran"

We called the police to come and force them to leave and were shocked when the policeman that did turn up was Orthodox himself and tried to force us to leave first. We refused to go until we were sure that the proselytisers were also leaving, which they eventually did. I did not hear of them returning in following weeks though they obviously did as the Tel Aviv Municipality was forced to impose a by-law in June banning Chabad from setting up booths in Ramat Aviv on Fridays following pressure from Meretz councilors, the neighbourhood council and a citizens' movement called 'Voice of the Silent Majority' (Haaretz, 5/6/00). Likewise, a Chabad college established in the secular Beit Milman university dorms at Tel Aviv University in order to proselytise residents was closed by the city council in April (Jerusalem Post, 14/4/00).

It is very difficult to get an idea of the number of conversions to religiosity and of religious turning to secularism and of how this will impact, if at all, on the future make-up of Israeli society. Here one of my research participants talks of his role as coordinator of Hillel and the difficulties faced by many who leave ultra-Orthodoxy. At the end of this piece he uses election and army figures to intimate a secular haemorrhaging of ultra-Orthodox and national-religious society respectively:

Tibi: Hillel it's an organisation to help people from the ultra-Orthodox to get out from the ultra-Orthodox and to have some kind of road to the secular. The person who get out of the ultra-Orthodox or leaving the ultra-Orthodox society leaving a society that telling you whatever you need to do, to know... They describe what you're going to do every time of your day and every day of your life... we're saying that people who get out from that it's

going out to these questions, to the world of the question... their world is like all of the religious whatever they pump you... all the years and all the fearness about God, what will happen with God... people who drive for the first time on Saturday... "Wow, the bridge didn't fall on me, OK"... that's what they told them... what we are doing is trying first of all to tell them that they are not alone, that's the main point... Loneliness, isolation, the fear that... "Oh my God, I'm doing the worst thing that I can do" because they get the... big punishment... One of the main problem of the ultra-Orthodox society is that after you're getting out of, 16, 18 years old person you only know how to read and write... You maybe know a lot of things but it's worthless to the secular and modern... they are really educated person but who needs all those information? So what we're trying to do is to try to raise... all kinds of scholarship... that they can learn something...

D: [laughs] Describe to me what they think of secular society.

T: Oh, every woman will jump on them... for *Seder*, for the *Pessach* I had to drag a lot of people just by the neck to get them inside... to have a *Succa* and you need to sleep, to them it's like a torture. For us it's very nice...

D: What are the sort of numbers that we're dealing with... how many people do you think are moving out of ultra-Orthodox communities into secular society?

T: Look there is one main problem nobody talks about it... usually the family wouldn't talk about it because it will damage... all the other kids that want to get married it's a bad... and second of all the people want to have still connection with the family so they wouldn't insult the family by talking... by vote it's something like four mandates. Although there was three years have passed and their youth population it's like every family has twelve kids... And it [the *haredi* vote] didn't change this election... It was supposed to grow, it didn't grow... there was some kind of details that I get from the army about... who was studying in the yeshiva and served... for three years, and wasn't... a member of the *yeshivat hesder* for the [national-religious] Zionist group, and it was amazed the result... it was something like... 10 or 30% of the population even more and that's only for the boys because the women don't go to the army... for women its more easy to get out than men.

Without accurate figures we are left with impressions and opinions only. Given what I have learnt of the respective movements to and away from religion I would have to say that

the latter seems of the greater import for the future of Israeli society despite the obvious trauma also experienced by secular parents in facing the prospect of a child lost to ultra-Orthodoxy.

Barak's Civil Reform Package

The vital debate over the role of religion has now begun in earnest. Once again, Ehud Barak has provided the trigger, but in this case for the wrong reasons and at the wrong time... prompted not only be the need to control the public agenda... but also by the desire to stem the flow of Labor Party supporters to Meretz and Shinui (Meretz MK Naomi Chazan cited in Jerusalem Post, 15/9/00).

On August 19th 2000, with his government on its last legs, PM Barak announced a sweeping programme of civil reforms to a meeting of Labour leaders. The new agenda included the promulgation of a constitution, the elimination of the nationality criteria on Israeli ID cards, national service for Arabs and *haredim*, compulsory education in citizenship, English and maths in state-funded *yeshivot*, civil marriage and burial and the abolition of the Religious Affairs Ministry. This package was soon amended with the inclusion of Shabbat buses (dropped almost immediately) and El Al flights (Jerusalem Post, 15/9/00; Haaretz, 15/9/00). The new slate of proposed reforms was wildy popular with the public.

Because of the way in which the new programme was presented by the media as a 'secular revolution' even the moderate Meimad threatened to leave the 'One Israel' list they shared with Gesher and Labor. This decision to leave was never forced as the reform package was never legislated and the whole affair proved to have as much substance as a phantasm with only the temporary destruction of the Religious Affairs Ministry following Barak's bold declaration of intent. This failure had a great deal to do with the murky internal politics of Labour, with hearts quailing at the thought of losing religious party coalition support and votes - extraordinary considering the long-term *haredi* bloc-vote for the right and proven unreliability of the religious parties in coalition (Haaretz, 1/12/00;

Haaretz, 11/1/01; Haaretz, 8/10/03). So what is the importance of this chimera of reform that no one expected to see implemented?

This was the first time that one of the two major parties had advocated a programme of sweeping civil reform in Knesset. Previously the extension of civil liberties was a matter for piecemeal election promises followed by silence on the subject once in government. This was the first government to blatantly override religious concerns regarding the maintenance of the religious-secular status quo and it did so forcefully and in a manner that unequivocally acknowledged the failure of the status quo and consociational democracy to shape an egalitarian and civil Israel. Regardless of his ability to fulfill the promises made therein, Barak's civil agenda took 'the genie out of the bottle' with regard to the Israeli *kulturkampf*. It made clear that Israel's quasi-theocracy would have to give way to the needs of the secular majority and their right - accepted publicly for the first time by any government - to shape public life on issues of import to both religious and themselves. The reform package came at a time when it could be expected that the war against the Palestinians would be the sole focus.

Conclusion

Barak's reform package was not taken up by the incoming Sharon government but even this right-religious-centre coalition is now looking to eliminate the Religious Affairs Ministry once and for all and has given the vital Interior Ministry to the Knesset's most ardently anti-religious party, Shinui. The reform programme raised public expectations to such an extent that the *kulturkampf* can no longer be taken off the agenda. The secular public realised its strength in the 'Prague Spring' of post-submission euphoria, and issues such as civil marriage and Sabbath opening were suddenly transformed from peripheral concerns of militant-secularist loonies to matters on which a public majority existed for radical change.

Finally, the Barak reform package was important for the comprehensive way in which it summed up the main issues of the conflict over religious coercion in a relatively comprehensive programme. Too often, efforts at secular reform have been introduced an issue at a time and in a way destined to fail, usually through private members bills submitted by secularist MKs. Now a compact programme of radical reforms exists and

stands as one element of a platform on which the left-centre secular parties can eventually win re-election, the second being the negotiated settlement worked out between Labour, Shahar and Meretz doves and their Palestinian partners in Geneva. We now turn to the deep implication of Jewish identity politics and *kulturkampf* in the struggle over the Occupation.

Chapter 4: An Occupied Identity

In this chapter we explore the role of the Occupation and associated identity groups in the Israeli *kulturkampf*. It is argued that the invasion of the West Bank and Gaza precipitated the fall of Labour-Zionist hegemony in identity politics bringing to the fore a new leadership sector, the national-religious, who, propelled by a wave of messianic expectation, led Israel towards a more particularistic and xenophobic understanding of Jewish identity. Here we discuss the role of Kookist theo-ideology, Gush Emunim (The Bloc of the Fauthful'), Meir Kahane, the secular ultra-nationalist right and the peace movement in the *kulturkampf* struggle and consider the Palestinian-Israeli identity dichotomy as a central component of Jewish-Israeli identity politics. Interviewee views on peace, the Occupation, the Palestinians, the right wing and the Rabin assassination are investigated.

In positing the change in orientation of large population sectors such as the national-religious and ultra-Orthodox generalisation is unavoidable and should be acknowledged. For example, I am aware that many national-religious and most settlers do not share in the messianic expectations and ultra-nationalist tendencies that have tended to characterise the settler leadership and that many ultra-Orthodox movements still have no interest in Zionist nationalism. However a loose political and identity coalition between the two movements does exist and should be acknowledged insofar as it impacts on this dissertation, and the

Figure 9: Meretz & Peace Now protest at a Tel Aviv meeting of *haredi* and settler rabbis hosted by Chabad

increasing *haredisation* of national-religious and nationalism of *haredim* should be investigated.

A recent Haaretz study (24/9/03) exposes the massive cost to the economy of supporting the settlement effort at a time when welfare cuts and mass layoffs are the norm in Israel proper. It puts the cost of non-military outlays to the settlements as 45 billion shekels[16] since 1967, 2.5 billion annually in recent years, 10000 shekels for each settler. In 2002 the Israeli Defence Forces proposed a budget of 170 million shekels for the defence of settlements, a figure that elides the true military cost of the occupation as it fails to cover the plethora of military activities in the Territories, the cost of extended *miluim* (reserve service) and the maintenance of military bases.

1967: New Zion

The sweeping military victory of 1967 over Jordan, Syria and Egypt won Israel territories in the West Bank associated with the Jewish kingdoms of the Biblical period. Both the Revisionist and national-religious camps had long coveted the West Bank, but its actual possession had always seemed something of an unrealisable dream to all but the hardcore radical right of both movements. Given the marginality of both camps in a state long dominated by *Mapai* (Labour Party) it seemed unlikely that either would gain pre-eminence in little under a decade despite the atrophying of Labour-Zionism as an ideological camp, but this was exactly what happened.

Classical Zionism, and the pre-state pioneering period in particular, is looked upon with great nostalgia by the majority of Israelis as a golden period which was the font of much that is good about modern Israeli society (Sprinzak 1991: 296). The romantic image of the early pioneer redeeming the wilderness - itself presented as uninhabited or grossly under-utilised - through suffering, hard work and heroic self-defence is one that is common to colonial societies such as South Africa and New Zealand and the same is true for Israel. The development of *moshavim* and *kibbutzim* (collective settlements) made the establishment of the Israeli state possible through the appropriation of Arab lands, and were vital in the defence of the new state in 1948 - a fact that should not be under-estimated when considering contemporary attitudes to withdrawal from the Occupied Territories.

As we have seen, the Labour-Zionist parties actively encouraged the cult of the pioneer as a simulacrum of their own vitality as a leadership group, and as a reminder of their

---

[16] The shekel was standing at a rate of 4.8 to the US$ at time of writing.

eminence in the struggles of yesteryear. This association held for a surprisingly long time given the rapid institutionalisation of the authority it represented and the mass immigration of a large *Sephardi* minority that had no part in its formation, or interest in the maintenance of Labour-Ashkenazi predominance. However, in 1967 the encouragement of a structural nostalgia surrounding the image of the pioneer was to prove fatal for the Labour elite.

With the sudden conquest of the Biblical heartland the Labour leadership found itself in a bind as to whether to retain and settle the newly won territories - which appeared to provide Israel with far greater security territorially - or to give them up in some putative future peace negotiations with Jordan[17]. With the formulation of the Allon Plan the decision was made to encourage limited settlement in areas of strategic importance away from the main Arab population concentrations in the West Bank (Sachar 1985:680). Eleven *Nachal*[18] kibbutzim were established along the Jordan River as fortified settlements and a first line of defence against invasion (Sachar 1985:680). However, a new force quickly outflanked the government; national-religious settlers who, donning the mantle of traditional Zionism, began to organise an illicit settlement drive to hasten the Messianic redemption foreseen by Rabbi A. I. Kook and his son Zvi Yehudah.

The National-Religious

The *Mizrachi* religious Zionist movement was founded in 1902 as a faction of the World Zionist Organisation (many religious also participated in the earlier *Hovevei Zion*) and constituted an effort to reconcile moderate, observant Orthodox religiosity with the Zionist project in opposition both to Labour and Revisionist secularism and *haredi* rejectionism (Eisenstadt 1985:91; Sharot 1982:225-226). As such it was faced with the theological impossibility of mating the passivity of traditional *Halakhic* messianism with the reality of a predominantly secular movement of return and cultural renewal that owed no allegiance thereto. It's unsurprising then that the first major theological innovation of the new movement would be informed by *kabbala* with the greater flexibility this tradition entertained for the interpretation and sacralisation of events, and that this turning to

---

[17] A secret meeting between Deputy PM Allon and King Hussein to discuss the future of the West Bank and Gaza came to nothing in 1970 (Sachar 1985:691-692).
[18] A unit within the IDF dedicated to the Labour-Zionist socialist ethos of the farmer-soldier. In slow decline for many years, the largely *kibbutznik Nachal* volunteer base became increasingly *peacenik* in orientation.

mystical Judaism for succour should be seen as apostasy by most *haredi* rabbis and ignored by secular society.

The progenitor of historiographic national-religious messianism was Rabbi A.I. Kook, a follower of Lurianic Cabbalism. He was the first to transform the concept of guided personal ascension through mystical experience into a wider vision encompassing secular Jews as unknowing agents of world redemption; "the community of Israel holds within itself the divine good, not for itself alone but for the whole world" (Kook 1978:xi, 92). From his influential position as Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi he called for the unification of the Jewish people and for recognition of their commonalities (Kook 1978:10, 20; (Sharot 1982:226-227). Kook was scathing in his attacks on Orthodox Judaism's failure to respond to the challenges of modernity, his writings exhibiting the influence of the *Haskala* on his understanding of the state of orthodox religiosity;

> The fact that we conceive of religious faith in a distorted form, petty and dark, is responsible for atheism's rise to influence. This is the reason that the providential pattern of building the world includes a place for atheism and its related notions... By including the good that is embraced in the theoretical concepts of atheism, religious faith reaches its fullest perfection (Kook 1978:148).

This extraordinary and courageous sacralisation of secularity as possessing at least some of the "divine sparks" that if recognised and channelled can contribute to the salvation of the world was unprecedented and brought down upon Kook the wrath of other *Halakhic* authorities who branded him a heretic - which does not have the same meaning in Judaism as in much of Christianity as authority is based on tradition and consensus not doctrine. This understanding of the role to be played by all Jews in the coming of the Messiah led, through logical progression, to Kook's recognition of the Zionist project and the institutions and bodies of the new *Yishuv* and future state. Nonetheless, Avraham Kook (1978:11) was highly critical of the diminution of Jewish identity to its nationalist component and was fully convinced that the redemptive period would see the return of all Jews to *Halakhic* observance.

A. I. Kook set the stage for Israeli religious ultra-nationalism and irredentism through his insistence on the active participation of religious in the Zionist enterprise and his identification of nation-building in *Eretz Yisrael* with the imminent arrival of the Messiah (Kook 1978:337). Later re-interpretations of his teachings by his son Zvi Yehudah and students at A. I. Kook's Jerusalem yeshiva, *Mercaz Harav* provided the theological underpinnings for a new religious-Zionist territorial maximalism. The dissemination of the new ultra-nationalist agenda was facilitated by the maintenance of a separate, ideologically committed, national-religious educational system.

The conquests of 1967 led to the explosion and elaboration of messianic expectations amongst the national-religious population, and the radicalisation of the camp as a whole. Much of this elaboration took place at *Yeshivat Mercaz Harav* whose graduates had been progressively taking over the leadership of the national-religious education system in the 1960s (Sprinzak 1991:50). Rabbi Z. Y. Kook, who was to rise to prominence as the leading spiritual authority in the early settlement movement, was said by students and graduates of the yeshiva to have prophesied the Israeli conquest of the West Bank following a speech he gave in May 1967 accusing the state of being satisfied with a mutilated and crippled Israel devoid of its holy places and cities (Newman 1985:120-121; Mergui & Simmonot 1987:125).

Zvi Yehudah's followers became missionaries of the new redemptive Zionism within their community and created and took up the leadership of the settlement movement, a pre-eminence they maintain at the time of writing. Where his father described the Jewish people as being on the path to redemption, Zvi Yehudah believed that the conquest of the West Bank signalled that the Jewish people had achieved redemption and that the arrival of the Messiah was at hand. The redemptive period had already passed through the first two of three stages - the first, a "repentance of fear" involved the return to *Eretz Yisrael* of the Jews and the second, the national resurrection in which the land and people were to be joined in a symbiotic relationship - and had reached the final stage, the "repentance of love" (Lawrence 1989:137). The responsibility for speeding this inevitable historical process lies with the Jewish people as a whole through holding fast to the land given to them by God and through repentance and a return to religious observance. Thus the unity of the redemptive Trinity, *Am* (People), *Torah* and *Eretz* would be assured. The tenor of the

resultant fundamentalist ultra-nationalism was triumphal, intransigent and aggressive in its understanding of the Jews as a chosen people: "I tell you explicitly that the Torah forbids us to surrender even one inch of our liberated land... There is no Arab land here, only the inheritance of our God - and the more the world gets used to this thought the better it will be for them and for all of us" (Z. Y. Kook cited in Harkabi 1988:148).

Harkabi notes that Nahmanides' commentary on Maimonides that; "We are commanded to inherit the land that God gave to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and must not leave it in the hands of any other nation" (Harkabi 1988:148) is used by many in the religious camp to argue against withdrawal from the Occupied Territories: "The main thrust of the commandment is conquest by the state, Jewish national rule in the holy territory (Z.Y. Kook cited in Harkabi 1988:148). The stage was set for a new generation of settlers to take up the torch of pioneering, to bend the state's will to their own and to defy it where it chose not to follow.

Gush Emunim ('Bloc of the Faithful')

Gush Emunim was formally established in 1974, emerging from a pressure group within the NRP (Sharot 1982:229). The new movement's manifesto called for the acquisition and settlement of all *Eretz Yisrael* according to the borders described in Genesis chapter 15, thus requiring the conquest of territories beyond those acquired in 1967 (Sprinzak 1991:113-114). Its leaders, many of whom were graduates of *Mercaz Harav* imbued with the Kookist ideo-theology, argued that the messianic process had begun and could be seen in a plethora of signs; the conquest of Jerusalem and the holy sites in the West Bank, the ingathering of the 'exiles' and the fructuation of the Land through Jewish settlement (Sharot 1982:230). Since all of *Eretz Yisrael* is holy, settlement in all its parts is a *mitzvah* attendant on all Jews and a pre-condition for redemption (Silberstein 1993:32).

What set Gush Emunim apart from other religious Zionist groups was its emphasis on settlement and its strategic brilliance in organisation, politicking and public relations that made it the first religious movement to garner substantial support from the secular right. The Gush leadership decided early on a loose organisational structure, an emphasis on actual settlement activity, and to hitch the Gush to as many right wing and national-religious political parties as possible making the movement all but impossible to attack

institutionally, immune to the rise and fall of different parties in Knesset, and very difficult for the government to oppose in terms of settlement activities. There is no organised membership or single representative organisation. The Gush exists as a theo-ideological stream capable of coalescing at any time with adherents in command of the institutions of the settlement movement. This institutionalised power and diffuse structure allow the Gush to provide direction and resources to the settlements while avoiding direct implication in atrocities inflicted on the Palestinian population by its followers. A large minority of the secular public took the Gush and its settlement activity to heart. This was vital to the movement's success, as was the open support of the Likud. Such was the success of Gush Emunim that its settlement arm Amana's 1978 settlement plan, aimed at establishing 100,000 settlers in the West Bank within 10 years, formed the basis of WZO and Ministry of Agriculture policy in the territories, an extraordinary achievement for an organisation only one year old (Silberstein 1993:134; Sprinzak 1991:128).

No government has been able to stop Gush settlement activities or has really shown the gumption for a direct confrontation. Indeed, despite Oslo and the promises made there and since to halt settlement activities, not a single established settlement has been evacuated and in the past ten years the settler population in the West Bank and Gaza has doubled to close to 220,000. Most of these settlers are not directly affiliated with Gush Emunim but live under its aegis as the Gush controls all West Bank regional councils and the vital patronage the settlements receive through ministerial and other budgets. The 'invisible realm' of Gush Emunim institutions is extremely powerful and, importantly, gives the movement a power no other Israeli organisation has in relation to successive governments and state policy. Alongside its Christian Coalition allies in the United States it is possibly the most powerful messianic movement in the modern world, a troubling thought for the future of Israel as a secular-democratic state:

But there exists another Zionism, the Zionism of redemption... This Zionism has not come to solve the Jewish problem by the establishment of a Jewish state but is used, instead, by the High Providence as a tool in order to advance Israel towards its redemption. Its intrinsic direction is not the normalization of the people of Israel in order to become a nation like all the nations but to become a

holy person, a people of a living God, whose basis is in Jerusalem and a king's temple is its center (Gush rabbi Yehuda Amital cited in Karsh 1997:32).

This quote exemplifies Gush Emunim's attitude both to classical Zionism and to the nature of the future state. Here it's important to emphasise the internal focus of the Gush. The enfeeblement of the Zionist pioneering spirit is a result of a decadent materialistic culture that looks to fulfil Herzl's dream of normalisation by betraying its higher calling as a people destined to save the world through observance and redemptive actions, above all by settling all of *Eretz Yisrael*. The coming of the Messiah cannot be prevented but it can be slowed with devastating consequences. The Gush's belief in redemptive action, the imminence of the Messiah and in the degeneracy of a Westernised, universalistic secular society owes much both to the tradition of Jewish zealotry and to more modern fundamentalist movements within Islam and Pentecostal Christianity. Gush Emunim's conception of the Jewish *Am* is no less a negation of Jewish secularity than that of the ultra-Orthodox. The *Halakhic* state is both a paradigm and inevitability as is the return of seculars to observance. This conversion is a sine qua non of redemption.

In the Kookist tradition the state and its institutions are legitimate insofar as they contribute to the settlement and retention of *Eretz Yisrael*, but are illegitimate where they go against God's plan of redemption and must be opposed absolutely if all attempts at reasoning and peaceful protest fail. Civil law is not considered of importance and to the Gush any state withdrawal from *Eretz Yisrael* territories would constitute a betrayal of the covenantal relationship between the Jewish people and God (Silberstein 1993:123). This is a theological innovation as *Halakha* does not go into depth on the relationship between *Eretz* and *Am* concentrating rather on correct ethical behaviour within the Jewish community. Z.Y. Kook argued that withdrawal from the Territories constituted *pikuach nefesh* ('mortal danger') - a *Halakhic* concept that has since been used to argue the opposing case (Karsh 1997:33). MK Benny Katzover who is also a Gush leader, is unequivocal in relating settlement to the coming messianic redemption; "In the beginning of the messianic age, the critical point is Eretz Israel and everything else derives from it. Without its settlement no holiness operates in the world" (Sprinzak 1991:18). GE rabbi Jacob Ariel concurs:

Eretz Yisrael is an absolute entity whose essence does not depend on any political factor. The virtue of the state of Israel in Eretz Yisrael is its ability to fulfil the obligations of settling Eretz Yisrael with no constraints or limitations. An Israeli state which limits or inhibits the settlement of Israel by its people loses both its virtue and importance (Gush Rabbi Jacob Ariel cited in Silberstein 1993:122).

The role of Gush Emunim and the national-religious in the Israeli *kulturkampf* has been largely ignored by commentators and is not at the forefront of most Meretz activist's understandings of the secular-religious conflict. This is due in part to the attachment of Gush Emunim to an activist Zionism that, as an ideal, still holds a great deal of appeal to most Jewish-Israelis, though the Occupation is, of course, anathema to many. This failure to recognise the deep implication of Messianic national-religious Zionism in the *kulturkampf* is aided by the settlers' physical, and thus mental, distance from Israel proper.

The Kookist mission to return secular Jews to observance as a prerequisite for redemption is largely unknown and seems to pale in comparison to the threat to secular lifestyles and the democratic nature of the state posed by the ultra-Orthodox, despite the fact that Gush Emunim supports neither secularism nor democracy. Likewise, the growing Zionism of many groups within Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox society, their increasing involvement in settlement activities, and the taking on of a stringently observant lifestyle by many national-religious shows the growing affinity of these previously disparate movements within the Israeli religious populace and their understanding of shared interests in opposition to secular Israel.

Jewish national-religious messianism poses a far greater threat to the state than ultra-Orthodoxy ever could, given the ability of Gush Emunim to go to extremes in pursuit of the redemptive vision, their position at the heart of the struggle over the Territories and the fact that national-religious settlers are heavily armed with a proven propensity for violence. A national-religious fanatic has already murdered a Prime Minister. When the Sinai settlement of Yamit was evacuated under the terms of the Camp David peace agreement the Gush leadership and activists decamped en masse to Yamit to physically prevent the

evacuation, and serious consideration was given by some to the committing of an exemplary suicide as a demonstration of *messirut hanefesh*[19]. This portends ill for future evacuations in the West Bank which - despite the claim that Yamit constituted "holy land" - are truly at the heart of *Eretz Yisrael* as conceived by Gush Emunim and would shatter the redemptive project on which they have built their worldview and sense of identity (Sprinzak 1991:101-105, 151-153). Z.Y. Kook made it clear to his followers that any withdrawal from *Eretz Yisrael* falls under the *Halakhic* proscription *Yehareg Uval Yaavor* ('Be killed rather than sin'). It remains to be seen how his followers will respond but they have the institutional power, the resources, the weapons and numbers to turn any evacuation into a bloodbath if they so desire (Sprinzak 1991:113).

It is important to note that the vast majority of settlers are more moderate and less inclined to violence than this presentation perhaps implies. A poll conducted by Peace Now in August 2003 reported that 90% of settlers surveyed said they "would not break the law" to oppose settlement evacuation and that only 1% would use violence. Only 12% believed that the Gush Emunim dominated Yesha Council of Settlements represented their views (Peace Now 2003b).

Gush adherents and leaders were implicated in acts of vigilantism and murder from the mid-1980s, culminating in the uncovering of a Jewish terror group dubbed the 'Underground' by the Israeli media (Silberstein 1993:143; Sprinzak 1991:91-99). This group was responsible for attacks on Palestinian mayors, an attack on the Muslim College in Hebron, and was caught planning the bombings of buses and of the mosque complex on the Temple Mount itself, the latter no doubt aimed at sparking a jihad that would speed the messianic redemption (Sprinzak 1991:97-98). Disturbingly, it became obvious in the aftermath of the capture of Underground members that only those operations which had been approved by the Gush affiliated rabbis of Kiryat Arba had taken place and that post facto denunciations from all but the most moderate of Gush rabbis were half-hearted at best. The last word on the movement's growing propensity for violence should go to Rabbi Moshe Levinger, the leader of the initial settlement of Hebron and a prominent figure in

---

[19]To Gush Emunim follower's displays of "utmost devotion" in the settlement of *Eretz Yisrael* will speed the redemptive process.

Gush Emunim - commenting in court on his being charged with murdering a Palestinian bystander in Hebron: "I did not kill an Arab but I wish I did" (Sprinzak 1991:165)

Meir Kahane & the Israeli Kulturkampf

In the late 1960s Kahane formed the Jewish Defence League in New York as a vigilante cum terror group for the protection of Jews against their enemies internal and external and for the propagation of his ideas. To Kahane the Jewish people and state have been corrupted by Western values and mores. He mentioned the concept of culture war explicitly:

> Today's culture war is more intense than the Hasmonean one. Hellenisation has deeply penetrated... The moment of truth has arrived. One option is to follow the path of Judaism, the entire Jewish idea, to reject the fear of the gentile, Western democracy and the idea of coexistence with the Arabs. This way is the condition for the Jewish state (Peri 2000:114).

Kahane's reference to the Maccabean revolt is interesting given that several research participants in Meretz described to me their sense of being on the side of the Hellenisers in the struggle against a rising tide of Jewish zealotry:

Danny: Well, sometimes *Hanukah*, as it originally was celebrated annoys me because the most famous *Hanukah* song... basically it says we should murder the, our, the non [Jews]
D: [interrupts] The Hellenist bastards.
Dy: Yeah, the Hellenist bastards, the Hellenist dogs, it continuously refers to them as dogs... its very uncomfortable for me to, to sing it [laughs]... it completely dehumanises them.

To Kahanism liberalism, human or civil rights, and left wing polities were anathema to a true Jewish state, as was democracy itself. Israel must be reconstituted as a *Halakhic* state: "there's no question of setting up a democracy in Israel, because democracy means equal rights for all, irrespective of racial or religious origins... Nobody could question the

fact that the government has to abide by the Torah... if this objective cannot be reached without having a civil war in Israel, then I'd give up" (Mergui & Simmonot 1987:31-32). He was scathing in denigrating left wing Jews as anti-Semites out to destroy him; "Let there be no mistake... These are the real fascists, the real killers. They hate and wish to destroy Kahane... They hate Kahane because they hate Judaism and Jews, and themselves" (Sprinzak 1991:216)

This image of left wing Jewish-Israelis as self-hating Jews is prevalent in Israeli society and can even be heard on occasion from Labour party sources attempting to disassociate themselves from Meretz. It certainly allows a license in dealing with leftist Jews, whether in polemic or physical violence. The remnants of Kach[20] are still active in the Territories and Jerusalem and are well known for their propensity for extreme violence particularly against Palestinians, but also against left wing Jews.

In late 2000 three Meretz activists were spraying graffiti in the early hours of the morning on Kahanist posters in Jerusalem. These posters and stickers had appeared throughout the city from the time of the failure of the Camp David talks and were highly visible, particularly on main roads, declaring that 'Kahane was right'. Meir Kahane himself was assassinated in New York in 1990 and his son Binyamin, who had taken up the leadership of one of the Kahanist splinter groups, had just been killed in an attack in the West Bank.

A car of Kahanists spotted the three Meretz activists who, realising the gravity of the situation, quickly returned to their car and took off. The Kahanist car followed and not knowing what to do the Meretz activists stopped on the side of the road for a cigarette break. The Kahanists, who were armed, left their vehicle and approached, warning them that "This time we're letting you off with a warning, but next time you'll join Leah Rabin" (Rabin's widow who had just died of cancer). As this threat was being made one of the Meretz activists was on the phone to another party flying squad which was defacing Kahanist posters elsewhere in the city and she pretended she was talking to the police giving the license plate of the Kahanist car and a description of the Kahanists themselves.

---

[20]Kach was the political party launched by Kahane following his *aliyah*. Kach won election to the Knesset in 1984 before being debarred in 1988 as a racist, anti-democratic party (Sprinzak 1991:245)

They returned to the car very frightened and were again followed, driving to a late night cafe in the centre of West Jerusalem to try and lose the Kahanists. Returning to the car, they were followed again so hit upon a plan to drive to the Prime Minister's house nearby in the hope that the security there would shake the Kahanists off. The security at the PM's house realised the danger they were in and asked if they wanted an escort to the police station, an offer they took up with alternate Kahanist cars following them all the way to the station before speeding off when they saw the Meretzniks go in. The activists filed a complaint against the Kahanists with the police then returned to graffiti more posters, circling around and around in the city several times thereafter to make sure that they hadn't picked up a tail again before returning to Tel Aviv scared and extremely shaken.

The Meretz activists were in grave danger that night given foment in Kahanist circles at the time following the death of their leader and the closure of two of their offices in Jerusalem by the police. Given their hatred for leftists it's more than likely that they would have been happy to practice the Kahanist creed of unconditional violence and *barzel* ('iron fist'; a fascist concept taken from Revisionist Zionism) (Sprinzak 1991:52-53).

Most Kahanist violence has been directed towards the Palestinian population of the West Bank with Kahane himself launching a series of provocations and vigilante attacks that succeeded in poisoning relations between the settlers and Palestinians in the 1980s. This played a prominent part in the ratcheting up of racial tensions in Israel proper and contributed greatly to the rise of the ultra-nationalist right, a trend that has shown no sign of dissipating. It was Kahane who began the popularisation of the concept of transfer, of all the Arabs in Eretz Yisrael to Arab countries: "right now we have the means to show them the door... I want to move them all out now... they must leave and I will make them leave... I want to scare them" (Mergui & Simmonot 1987:47-48, 50).

Kahane believed that Israel is the "revenge of God" against the iniquities inflicted on the Jews in exile (Sprinzak 1991:218-219). This exile must be ended immediately before the next, more catastrophic holocaust, and the Jews must prepare for the imminent messianic redemption by expelling the Arabs and settling all *Eretz Yisrael* (Sprinzak 1991:220). As a political movement Kahanism has failed and is no longer a major player but its activist cells remain influential in dragging Gush Emunim and other ultra-nationalists to new extremes of thought and behaviour in the Territories and in Israel

proper. For example, the NRP has continued to move towards the radical right, recently choosing a messianist, ultra-nationalist, transfer supporter, Effi Eitam, as its leader. To Eitam Israeli-Arabs pose a threat that "resembles a cancer". They should be granted 'residence' status without citizenship or be expelled. Palestinians must accept a state in the Sinai and Jordan or face a total war; "I can definitely see that as a consequence of a war, not many Arabs will remain here" (Andromidas 19/12/02).

As an ideological movement, Kahanism is committed to Jewish observance as the basis for collective identity, greater *Eretz Yisrael*, and a full *Halakhic* state. It shares these convictions with Gush Emunim and with much of Israeli orthodoxy, alongside an understanding of a developing schism from a secular majority showing a growing willingness to give up all these in pursuit of a secure peace.

Transferring Democracy: Secular Ultra-Nationalism & the Jewish Citizen

Kach, Tehiya, Moledet, the National Union and elements in the Likud and NRP have all championed the concept of transfer and this has gained an insidious hold in Israeli political discourse. Opinions vary as to who should be transferred and to where; Israeli-Arabs to the nascent Palestinian state or all Arabs outside the bounds of Israeli held territory. Posters appeared on roadsides throughout Israel following the Israeli-Arab riots of 2000 stating 'Transfer is Peace' and few were torn down. The relative success of such a campaign was unthinkable even a year earlier, a fact that testifies to the wave of racist paranoia that swept Jewish Israel in the wake of the outbreak of the second intifada and to the political ascendancy of ultra-nationalist elements in the Israeli right.

The Sharon government has proposed legislation based on the transfer concept under which Palestinians marrying Israeli-Arabs will not be eligible for Israeli citizenship. The thousands of couples involved each year will be forced to live apart or to move to the Palestinian Authority where the Israeli-Arab partner will have their Israeli citizenship revoked. The effect is transfer. Likewise, the Labour Party has seriously considered population transfer in peace negotiations, with Arab-Israeli villages along the Green Line dumped unwillingly inside an impoverished Palestinian State, the inhabitants again being

stripped of Israeli citizenship in the process. Meretz and the Arab parties stood alone in decrying this proposed transfer.

Secular ultra-nationalism has encouraged the acceptance of a concept of limited democracy that makes no differentiation between 'Jewish' and 'Israeli' and which has become central to the transfer discourse. Several projected transfer programmes propose the conferral of residency rights for Arabs reliant on the demonstration of absolute fealty to the Israeli state as a Zionist entity. Applicants would be forced to demonstrate this fealty through a pledge of allegiance, singing the national anthem, etc. The proponents know that many Israeli-Arabs would refuse allowing their transfer. A commitment to the Zionist character of the state has been written into the electoral law governing party eligibility, a law used by the right to attempt to debar Arab parties in the 2003 general elections.

Before 1967 the resurrection of the secular ultra-nationalist right seemed impossible. This extreme of the Revisionist Movement had always played a peripheral role in *Yishuv* and Israeli politics. It came to prominence only through the struggle against the Mandate and returned to obscurity thereafter as the Herut slowly moderated their territorial maximalist position, in light of the fact that their traditional call for a state on both sides of the Jordan River seemed a pipe-dream (Sprinzak 1991:26).

As the hold of classical Zionism ebbed as an ideological system, secular ultra-nationalism held fast to the associated symbolic field with pioneering as its archetype and apogee. They continued to espouse the absolute negation of the *Galut* and perpetuated the Revisionist admiration for the military and its accomplishments (Sprinzak 1991:183). As with classical Labour-Zionism, rightist ultra-nationalism was unable to fashion a concept of *Eretz Yisrael* distinct from the traditional religious understanding, a fact that provided the basis for co-habitation within national-religious/secular-nationalist parties with both groups agreeing to disagree on the desirability of a *Halakhic* state (Sprinzak 1991:56-57, 293). This proved none too difficult as secular ultra-nationalists shared a basic respect for the religious tradition and supported its limited co-option by the state as proof of the Jewishness of Israel. Both religious and secular ultra-nationalists shared a mutual commitment to settlement and secular radicals were increasingly able to share their hatred of Arabs with their religious confreres. Both are vocal in bewailing the corruption of Zionist and Jewish values in Israeli society. Secular ultra-nationalist Israel Eldad decried

the influence of Western culture on Israelis: "The Dizengorff Center[21]... What has developed there for years... in its coffee shops and in its theatres, is a cynical nowness, a negation of all the values of Zionism and, needless to say, of Judaism... The spiritual Molotov cocktails which are thrown from this now-center are the danger, the decay, the emptiness" (Sprinzak 1991:191).

Secular ultra-nationalism has been represented in the Knesset by a variety of small parties (often incorporating national-religious) that have tended to shoot to prominence before disappearing into coalition or at the ballot box. The most recent incarnation is the National Union coalition of Moledet, Yisrael Beytenu and Tkuma which calls for transfer and the settlement of all *Eretz Yisrael* without impediment. Due to the prominence of the Russian Yisrael Beytenu and secular Moledet it also calls for the separation of religion and state while ensuring the religious-secular status quo and Israel's Jewish character. The platform seems to intentionally avoid extrapolation on how these seemingly contradictory desires could be actuated (National Union 2003).

Though secular ultra-nationalists have been relatively unsuccessful in winning over voters, they and the national-religious have succeeded in garnering significant support within the Likud due to the gross ineptitude of the moderate wing of the party. The moderater failed to provide pragmatic and ideological leadership. Sprinzak (1991:207) reports that the Likud central committee has become so radicalised and "Its hostility to the left is so intense that to be moderate in criticizing its policies is seen as treachery". Indeed, few could have imagined the scenes in the Likud central committee of Ariel Sharon being booed and shouted down by the right as a peacenik - though, admittedly, he did win the 2003 leadership battle with Binyamin Netanyahu comfortably. The ultra-nationalist penetration of the Likud bodes ill for the future of Israeli democracy (Sprinzak 1991: 295-296).

The Peace Movement

The Israeli peace movement, of which Meretz is the main political representative, began to coalesce with the formation of Peace Now in 1978. Peace Now started as a small

---

[21] A central mall in Tel Aviv, since replaced as a symbol of Bohemian materialism in the ultra-nationalist imagination by trendy Shenkin St.

Tel Aviv peace group with the name then taken by a group of 348 IDF reserve officers and soldiers who made a plea to the Begin government to expend every effort to secure a peace treaty with Egypt at a time when this treaty seemed threatened by disagreements between Sadat and Begin (Sprinzak 1991:74; Peace Now 2003a). The movement sought to strengthen the peace with Egypt through organising exchanges with Egyptian organisations previously opposed to peace with Israel and led opposition to the Lebanon War, organising Israel's largest ever demonstration in Tel Aviv in 1982 attended by a purported 400,000. An extra-parliamentary NGO, Peace Now has gained significant support from the Labour Party and Meretz. Several figures from its leadership have won election to the Knesset on the Meretz and Labour lists.

Karsh (1997:51) records a change in the movement's position regarding the occupation of the West Bank. Up until 1985 Peace Now called for withdrawal so that Israel could live peacefully within secure borders. From 1985 it displayed a growing concern with human rights and with the unethical nature of the actions of the Occupation regime (Karsh 1997:51). The Peace Now (2003a) website states that the organisation led calls for the government to negotiate with the PLO and has been instrumental in bringing about a massive shift in public opinion from 1% to close to 50% support for a Palestinian state alongside Israel. This is overstating their influence somewhat as many other organisations and individuals played a part in paving the way for the peace process with the Palestinians but there is little doubt that, through their organisational abilities and attractiveness to large donors (NGO funding directly correlates with public profile), Peace Now was, if not instrumental, at least extremely influential. For example, Peace Now is able to keep a "settlement watch" on the development of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, something other peace groups don't have the resources for. It exposes information the government and right wing have no interest in divulging (Peace Now 2003a). Betselem also provides information on human rights violations in the Territories (as do a number of international and Palestinian groups) and is closely allied with Meretz and Peace Now.

Meretz and Peace Now are extremely close in terms of membership, politics and the stance taken with regards to the Occupation. They often co-operate in organising demonstrations, vigils and other activities. Many Meretzniks were, or are members of Peace Now, though I noticed an increasing trend of activists also working with non-Zionist

leftist organisations such as Ta'ayosh and Gush Shalom. One of the main reasons for the relative success of Peace Now in attracting widespread support from the moderate left and centre of the Israeli public is the care it takes in maintaining its Zionist credentials: "Only peace will bring security to Israel and ensure the future of our people. ...Peace Now adheres to the Zionist values upon which the State of Israel was founded, believing that a democratic, Jewish state can and must be secured without subjecting another people" (Peace Now 2003a).

The hard left of the peace movement is made up of a myriad of groups representing a variety of ideological persuasions such as communist, feminist, civil rights or occupation focused groups, and Jewish, Israeli-Arab-Jewish, and Israeli-Arab movements with a stance on both Zionism and the Occupation. Some of the more important of these are Hadash, a coalition of Arab groups and a mixed Jewish-Arab communist party; Gush Shalom, a largely Jewish anti-Occupation movement; Women in Black, a worldwide feminist peace movement started in 1988 with anti-occupation vigils every Friday throughout the country; Yesh Gvul, one of several groups supporting conscientious objection; New Profile, a Jewish anti-militaristic movement with an education focus, and Ta'ayosh, a new Arab-Jewish movement opposed to the Occupation which works with the disadvantaged in Israel and supplies food aid to Palestinian villages. All share a more radical approach to the peace process, voicing stronger denunciation of the IDF and government, and often Zionism, though attitudes and their expression tend to overlap somewhat with the moderate left. These groups tend to be characterised by a group of hardcore organisers, most working voluntarily - unlike Meretz and Peace Now that can pay some of their workers - and a periphery of supporters who come to demonstrations and participate in other activities. They are generally unable to organise mass activities involving more than a couple of thousand attendees and do not have the money, institutional backing, media access (and attendant publicity) and popular support that has made the moderate peace movement so successful. Nevertheless they provide a crucial opposition to the moderate peace movement's tendency to move towards the politically attractive centre. Indeed, Meretz lost voters to Hadash (as well as Labour and Shinui) in 2003, with some long time party activists switching their vote to the hard left.

The peace movement was plunged into crisis by the failure of negotiations with the

Palestinians and the outbreak of the second intifada in 2000. The Israeli media and the majority of the public blamed the Camp David II debacle on the Palestinians, as did the Israeli negotiating team, and support for the peace process fell away sharply. The contemporary mood can be best summed up by a conversation Sharon and I had with a friend on the street in Givatayim who was a long time Meretz activist and supporter. With a look somewhere between anger and anguish he told her that we can't trust the Palestinians and that he would never vote Meretz again. Personally, I was close to tears for days after Camp David; it seemed like our whole world and the future we had painted for ourselves and sold to others was a chimera and had turned into a nightmare.

The crisis bred lethargy and torpor - street activity seemed impossible in a climate of hatred towards the left. It took the intifada and the prompting of hard left anti-Occupation activism to get Meretz and Peace Now back on the streets. This revival was helped by a large turnout on Rabin Day with close to 150,000 peace supporters again flocking to Rabin Square, much to the amazement and joy of many activists. Gush Shalom, Hadash and various other small hard left peace movements held well-attended rallies in Tel Aviv's Museum Square and demonstrations outside the Defence Ministry against specific injustices in the territories. Peace Now and Meretz followed these with larger marches and rallies. Both petered out somewhat as money grew tight and the intifada ground on, but the peace movement was reconstituted, if on a smaller scale with less public support and a much lower profile in Knesset due to a reversal of fortunes for Meretz at the polls in 2003.

A key reason for this resilience in the face of extreme odds is the fact that the peace movement as a whole constitutes an identity community with shared symbols, ideology and sociality. It was able to give form and identity to a secular Ashkenazi middle class devoid of ideology and seeking a new rallying point given the death of classical Zionism. The organisations within this movement were, through their cumulative efforts, able to transform a popular dissatisfaction with a seemingly interminable conflict with the Arab world into a political programme and to transpose their understanding of peace, as the culmination of a series of negotiations between two separate, sovereign peoples requiring the handover of occupied territories, onto the popular understanding of the term. Endemic, peace as a popular symbol became so central to public discourse that even the right began to use it; hence Sharon's 2001 slogan "Sharon for Peace with Security". Other terms such

as *tikvah* ('hope'), *democratia* ('democracy') and *hofshi* ('freedom') became central to the peacenik lexicon alongside calls for the protection of civil and human rights, and references to *Medinat Israel* ('the state of Israel') rather than *Eretz Yisrael*, tainted as the latter is by association with territorial maximalism and religiosity.

Ideologically the peace movement borrowed heavily from the global peace and civil rights movements, providing an ethical alternative to attacking the Occupation solely on the points of economic costs and security - vital as 'ensuring security' can be convincingly argued both ways. This not only allowed an attack on the breach of universal human rights in the Territories but also the coalescence of opposition to perceived religious attacks on secular civil rights in Israel proper. This ideological duality is vital in understanding the strength and import of the Israeli peace movement, which thereby not only takes a stance on ethical relations with the most significant other (the Palestinians) but, more importantly, provides the foundations for the elaboration of an Israeli secular identity built on high ideals of a freedom threatened by religious coercion and right wing fascistic tendencies.

This ideological reorientation of the secular, middle-class Ashkenazi public raises the stakes considerably, deepening cleavages in Israeli society by redefining the Palestinian conflict as the first front in a struggle for the character and nature of Israel itself, the first battle in a reinvigorated *kulturkampf* between two diametrically opposed forces, both seeing the other as absolutely wrong and as set on a course that will lead inevitably to the destruction of the state. It has led inexorably to the political and social elaboration of mutually antipathetic groups based on ethnicity, class and religiosity: Shas and Meretz/Shinui. Shinui outflanked Meretz on secular-religious relations with extremely militant anti-Orthodox campaigns in 1999 and 2003 (strongly opposed as bigoted by Meretz activists) leaving Meretz mired in quicksand in 2003 given her identification with the failure of the peace process - rather ironic given that Meretz' ministers played no part in the failed Camp David negotiations.

In terms of sociability it suffices to mention again that politically opposed individuals rarely strike up intimate friendships, at least in my experience. Certainly you meet a lot of people campaigning who claim to be apolitical but you usually find that they simply disagree with you and don't want to argue about it. Due to the ferocity of political convictions, and the class and 'tribal' inscription of these views, it's extremely difficult to

socialise with believers from the opposition camp without significant conflict, and given the impact of class on residence it's rare that you are forced to. The cultural phenomenon of *dugri* (direct, unequivocal) speech, and the fact that politics is discussed almost daily in many social groups, raises the chances of conflict. It is easier to have as friends those who share your opinions on the Palestinian conflict and the Israeli *kulturkampf*. Gossip plays a role in defining one's social group. I remember a number of occasions when analyses of new acquaintances ended with something along the lines of, "But did you know he is a fascist?" with the connotation that that person is a little bit thick or at least somewhat beyond the Pale.

Yitzhak on the Altar

Hadar: It was the most shocking experience. I really was crying for a week without stopping, more than I cried when my grandmother died, it was really shocking.

D: What were your feelings about it?

H: Today its different, but... when I was a little child and I saw him in politics, he looked a good man, a good grandfather, really. And when he brought the peace and he started the process... it gave us hope that it would be another place to live. And when they, when he murdered him it like ruined everything, all the hope was gone.

Amir: I hate Rabin. I think he was totally fucked... I didn't like his politics... I didn't like... the way he handled things. I don't like the whole, "Let's break their legs and hands," have you heard of that... so there were so many things that I didn't like about this man that the fact that he was assassinated didn't bother me.

Analyses of societal responses to the murder of Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995 have tended to focus on discourse, identity politics, differences in mourning activities and opinions, and the longevity of changes brought about by the assassination. Where respondents have been asked their opinion of Rabin and his violent demise it has often been in an effort to categorise and generalise as to the response of different sectors of the population, divided by their attitudes towards the peace process. The result has been a simplified rendering of sentiment regarding the late prime minister, eliding more than

explaining the complexities of mourning and commemoration. Without minimising the obvious gravity of this event for the peace movement and its public supporters, it's vital, in establishing the import of Israel's first 'regicide', to let those who have been misrepresented speak for themselves.

Oslo: Incitement and Regicide

The formulation of an initial peace agreement between Israel and the PLO ceding large sectors of the Territories to a nascent Palestinian State created a fundamental crisis of belief for the large minority of Israelis who regard 'Judea' and 'Samaria' as inviolate territories of *Eretz Yisrael*. This was particularly true for the settler national-religious community, whose constitutive creed of redemption of the land via settlement faced negation at the hands of their own government. On the other side of the fence, "Secularism and dovishness were also showing deep elective affinities for one another. Meretz was... the NRP's nemesis and antithesis" (Cohen & Susser 2000:59). The settler movement was able to call for political and popular support from the followers of Revisionist Zionism, 'traditionalist' Sephardim, and important ultra-Orthodox organisations, all of which held to the importance of the Territories for the future survival of the state and, by implication, the Jewish people as a whole. Oslo presaged the fall from power of both the secular and national-religious right and their privileged position as arbiters of Israeli-Jewish identity politics.

The wave of right wing incitement against the government - and Rabin as its embodiment - which followed Oslo and continued until the assassination differed only in extremes of expression. The basic understanding was the same; the Rabin government is illegitimate and must be stopped before it destroys Israel. In keeping with its importance in New Zionism, and the perceived threat of withdrawal, the Holocaust was often a theme at anti-Oslo demonstrations and featured in the public speeches of members of Knesset including Rehavam Ze'evi: "a mad government that is shrinking Israel to the size of Auschwitz". "A lawless government... submissive, confused traitors". (Peri 2000: 4-5, 135; Karsh 1997:38). The settler movement was the most extreme in its asseverations: "a government of blood... wicked and cruel... that could create a new Tiananmen Square in Israel... All means are kosher to bring it down" (from settler periodical *Nekuda* in Peri 2000: 4).

The legitimacy of the government was denied due to its reliance on the Arab parties to pass contentious legislation (Peri 2000: 325). In the Territories the settlement movement was reaching new extremes with an investigation by the Yesha Rahbinical Council in February 1995 into the possibility of putting Rabin on trial for the crimes (according to *Halakha*) of being a *rodef* and *moser*. The former is a person who facilitates or plans the murder of a Jew and is punishable by death without trial, the latter a Jew suspected of illegally providing non-Jews with sacred Jewish property, or of providing information leading to the same (Peri 2000:108; Cohen & Susser 2000: 59). By even considering such an investigation the rabbis not only questioned the authority of the government but also presented themselves as the sole seat of legitimacy by divine writ in governance and jurisprudence. An actual order to kill the prime minister was unnecessary regardless of post-assassination protests to the contrary. Rabin's removal by any and all means was the essential understanding of national-religious society and of much of the right before the 4th of November 1995. All focused their anti-Oslo vitriol on the person of the prime minister. Thus Netanyahu, now-president Katsav, and other right wing leaders stood smiling and waving on the balcony at one of the anti-Oslo mass demonstrations as the crowd below paraded a coffin for the state of Israel betrayed by Rabin. Neither did they condemn the pictures of Rabin crowned with a *keffiyah* or SS helmet plastered round the streets of the capital (Karsh 1997: 29). Despite protestations to the contrary, Yigal Amir was to act as their executioner and no matter the genuine feelings of shock and grief felt by the majority of nationalists the result - the fall of the government and derailment of the peace process - was ultimately as desired.

Tamar: I didn't feel like an orphan suddenly. I didn't care about the person who got murdered. I really, really, really cared about the fact that a prime minister in Israel, a democratic, as if, state, was murdered by right wingers just because he wanted to make peace. That the right wing that were always, always very, very rude in the way of thinking that the land is so holy. It was always like this, they always thought that... "The land is holy so therefore we have to keep it. The land is holy therefore we should go and demonstrate. The land is holy therefore we should tear up signs of left wingers. The land is holy therefore we should beat leftists, call them traitors and say that it's OK to kill them

with the Arabs. The land is holy therefore we should kill Arabs. The land is holy therefore we can kill the Prime Minister.

"Where were you when you were needed?" (Leah Rabin post-assassination)

The Rabin family and secular media propagated the idea that Rabin had stood alone and unsupported against the rising tide of right wing incitement. Peri (2000:7-8) explains this seeming lack of popular foresight as a symptom of an "Israeli false collective consciousness" with four constituent understandings: that the Israeli security forces are omniscient and omnipotent, that Israel is a stable democracy, Israelis are non-violent, and that all evil emanates from outside the Jewish collective.

Ehud: Then I felt very angry... [at] myself, how everyone, including me, didn't see the writing on the wall... I was very angry with myself of how I didn't see the writing on the wall and how I didn't see all the demonstrations.

Yara: The assassination was a shock for me as we had no idea what was happening in religious and right wing circles. It should be a wake up call but we aren't learning the lesson, people are forgetting.

Many felt compelled by the assassination to take a public stand against the Occupation. Several *Tzerim* and *Noar* I talked to first became involved with Meretz post-assassination or started to be far more involved in pro-peace activities than before:

Roi: I started to be involved after Rabin assassinated... it was the main cause of me... to be activist. To be activist in, in Meretz it was how I'd been raised... But after Rabin was assassination it was decided to myself that nothing will prevent me for telling my opinions.

Yossi: ...in '95 I was, I stood at the back... I wasn't involved directly in politics but I was interested all, the time and it was, I guess it was a very big cata, cata...
D: Catalyst.

Y: Catalyst, right, it was a very big one for me, it was a huge one. I cried... for a long time, it was very hard to recover from it and it was really a huge shock.

Post-assassination a climate of despondency regarding the stability of Israeli democracy and the future of the state itself enveloped the country. This attitude of despair and cynicism is perhaps the most potent, debilitating and long-term effect of the murder:

Ran: Well personally I can't say I adored Rabin, or something like that... the thing is that we felt that something broke, the system didn't work... the whole life as we knew it kind of fell apart.

Ehud: I had a feeling that our democracy is stable and strong and that... once every few years the government changes... but there are basic agreements regarding our society. And I was shocked to find out that some of these basic understandings of what I felt the Israeli society is was never real as such.

Yaron: I felt like a banana republic pretty much.

The assassination of Rabin was only one episode of violence among many in the Israeli *kulturkampf*. Indeed violence, both verbal and physical, plays an integral role in Israeli political confrontations and identity politics and is granted de facto legitimacy in popular culture as a means to an end. Fistfights, death threats, the ambush and burning of vehicles, stabbings and battles with makeshift weapons over intersections, took place in the relatively peaceful (according to informants) 1999 elections **after** the murder of Rabin, largely instigated by right wing activists and members of the public but not exclusively. As early as 1992, Yona was left in little doubt of the violent proclivities of some opponents of the peace process. She describes a confrontation with Avishai Raviv, an informant for the GSS in the settlement movement who was later put on trial for not telling his handlers about Amir's plan to kill Rabin:

Yona: Avishai Raviv in front of policemen in '92, on the day of the establishing of the Meretz Party in the Knesset, we had a big thing in the cinema, and all the right wing went and started to do racism shouting against the Arabs, there was escalation there. And from Young Meretz we ran out to protect the Arabs, not just to protect the Arabs but not letting the Arabs fight... And Avishai Raviv came to me, pulled his gun out of his pocket, put it in my face and shouted, "Shut up, shut up, shut up". He was very angry, and the police didn't do anything, so I wasn't surprised that they killed Rabin. I mean, how could they say that they didn't see anything, and they all felt so guilty. It was there all the time you just had to be blind and to choose not to see it... In the six to eight months before the assassination terror was on the streets. Lefties were attacked without any provocation. It was enough to go with a t-shirt that said Meretz - not peace, just Meretz - to get attacked.

Many research participants were at the peace rally at which Rabin was killed. Following the murder right wing counter-demonstrators were still chanting that Rabin was a *boged* (traitor) and some were beaten up by enraged peaceniks. This went unreported, as it did not fit with the image of mourning desired by the media. Amnon had left the demonstration itself when he heard about the murder:

Amnon: "Immediately after we were told about it we rushed out. We saw three people going down the road in Petah Tikva[22] laughing and saying, "OK, this will be the next, Yossi Sarid, Peres, will be the next". They were laughing, joking, and I said a few words to them. They threatened me... I said that they would not be so happy later after a while, or something. They made a circle around me but then I left... too big for me to deal with yeah, and I didn't need to fight with them there.
D: Were you very angry about it, what they said?
A: Yeah, the whole thing shocked me.

---

[22] Location changed to protect identity.

Re-imagining Rabin: The Canonisation of a Secular Saint

The assassination of Rabin presented the Labour-Ashkenazi elite with a unique opportunity to re-establish their political power after many decades of decline and ideological sterility. Lacking any real unifying identity Labour and Meretz had hitched themselves - with varying degrees of commitment on Labour's part - to the peace process as their primary 'flag'. In a situation where the New Zionist ideology and appeals to

Figure 10: Tzerie Meretz Rabin Day Sticker,"Peace"

patria clearly favoured the right's rejection of compromise, the liberal centre-left was left with little political ammunition aside from utopian promises of a better tomorrow. The murder of Rabin, one of the last surviving members of the founding generation of *sabras* who had built and protected the state, presented a unique fortuity, a chance to paint the peace process, and by association the Labour-Ashkenazi leadership, in blue and white as protectors of the state against religious fanaticism and a reactionary right wing (Peri 2000:142). A bridging effect took place in media presentations with the grieving youth of the left presented as the true heirs of the pioneers, an image vital to the Labour movement given their image as fading, tired and increasingly irrelevant:

> Ever since then at Rabin Square a kind of open draft has been in operation to which people report to volunteer for a virtual Palmach[23] - not one that goes for training at the kibbutzim but one that as a select minority fights for peace against all events. They are armed with candles and stickers, paltry equipment with

---

[23] Elite Labour-Zionist military force of the pre-independence and 'War of Independence' era.

which to bring about a different politics, but after all, the Palmach trained with sticks (Avi Katzman in *Haaretz* 3/11/00).

Attitudes to peace changed for many overnight with its pursuit suddenly no longer seen as defeatist but as embattled and heroic. Ravitsky (Peri 2000:146) relates that the moderate left felt "a sense of purification and moral rectitude", a feeling that lives on in Meretz with peace reified as a vision and its pursuit as something of a crusade. Whether this is due completely to Rabin's murder I have my doubts but it has bolstered this self-appraisal in Meretz.

The right has long complained about left-elite control of the Israeli media, a complaint that seemed more paranoid and political than substantial until the Rabin assassination. Following the murder the Ashkenazi-Labour elite representation of Rabin dominated the media and all competing understandings of Rabin as a person, and of the events leading up to his assassination, were drowned out (Peri 2000:181). Given their obvious complicity in inciting a public hysteria as to the deleterious impact of Oslo, and the obsession of the media with incitement, it was understandable that the leaders of the right should choose to keep their heads down in the short-term. The post-assassination media blitz gives us an important insight into the continuing control of a dominant centre-left Ashkenazi (and largely male) elite group which still possesses considerable cultural capital and the power of representation through its predominance in the military, business and political life of Israel. Paradoxically, it was the very intensity of the media backlash and attempts at representative manipulation that held within it the seeds of ultimate failure when greater moderation could perhaps have helped in transforming short-term shock and mourning into a more long-term reconciliation in a bitterly divided society. However, a detente was always unlikely given the intensity of opinion on both sides of the peace argument.

An attempt was made to edit Rabin's biography to create something of a cult of personality (Peri 2000:53). Rabin was presented as a totemic martyr, the *sabra* embodiment of Zionism, the hero and father of the nation, and as a visionary leader who charted a course to peace (Peri 2000: 235, 351-353). The redemptive shedding of blood for the nation - with its roots in East European nationalism from which Zionism sprang - has always played a strong role in the Israeli symbolic field and appeared again in the blood-spattered

song sheet of the "Song of Peace" found in Rabin's pocket after the shooting (Peri 2000: 231, 352-353).

The media focused excessively from the first night on the mourning rituals of the youths who gathered in the Square to light candles and sit in groups, often forming the candles into words such as *shalom* and *lamah* (why). The focus on young people also reflects the traditional importance placed on youth leadership and development in the Zionist movement. The responses of Rabin's grandchildren, in particular, became the focus of national attention and the butt of later jokes. Ironically, a Meretz youth who was crying because of relationship problems with his girlfriend was presented on TV as mourning Rabin's murder. Nonetheless, the atmosphere was lachrymose at the Square:

Moshe: It was quite a horrible experience... after we finished the demonstration I helped with putting everything back and taking the signs off and people were running somewhere and... I thought that it is some Kahane *activists* came to hit the people who go or something so I ran towards this direction to share the excitement. And then I went, and when I reached there I saw some people quite horrified and one woman there shouted, "...They tried to shoot Rabin but he's OK". So I understood that there was some incident there and in fact I was quite happy actually... because both Rabin is OK and we again have seen what are the true ideas that the right wing in Israel has without any damage to us, so everything is great... I heard that he was actually assassinated I was quite shocked and everybody else was... we were gathering in the square... I did not want to go to the hospital. I did not see any point in it.

D: What was the atmosphere like in the square?

M: It was like as if really something horrible happened like a war started or something and people... were crying, friends of mine were crying. Those who were not crying also had this very gloomy face... we started to talk among ourselves thinking... what can we do now?

The square where the murder took place has been seen by peaceniks as "ours" following the huge anti-Lebanon War rally there in 1982, but it was to be transformed into a sacred space and place of ritual on Novenber the 4th 1995. It remained so with the left-

centre election victory celebration filling the square in 1999 in a frenzy of excitement. I was in Labour heartland, North Tel Aviv, that night and you could see people streaming to Rabin Square as soon as the results were announced. Meretz youth were hugging, waving flags and dancing on the Savannahs (election vehicles) while Dor Shalom and Labour supporters came bearing enormous banners with portraits of Rabin. The unofficial mourning day following the assassination, Rabin Day, has been celebrated annually in the square according to the 'Christian' calendar - the right wing post-Peres changed official commemorations to equate with the Hebrew calendar so fewer people would remember the date of the murder.

Figure 11: A Tzerie stand at Rabin Day

Attendances dwindled as the peace process collapsed, not helped by the tutelage of the increasingly right wing Rabin Centre. Rabin Day has become something of a lefty Woodstock much to the disgust of many Meretz youth who often refer to it with such appellations as "FestiRabin" and generally dislike the perceived personality cult of Rabin. Nevertheless, Peri (2000:364) is correct in arguing that the liberal-democratic tendencies of the peace camp wouldn't allow them to make Rabin the first martyr of the left. The Rabin family's prominent role in post-assassination public mourning is also a source of merriment and I've heard them referred to as "the professional orphans".

Noam: But when they began with... these festivals... just the Rabin, Rabin, Rabin, Rabin and you say let's be honest, Rabin don't was a pure guy, OK... But today they expose it like a martyr... he wasn't a martyr he was a... politician and he make many... steps that are until today there is a big argument [over].

Yara: The remembrance is taking on the form of a communist cult. What should have been emphasised was what led to the assassination. Education and tolerance should have been the focus rather than the idealisation of an individual.

Nonetheless, many interviewees felt a deep sense of personal loss and grief following the murder:

Ophir: I took it very, very, very hard... first of all I almost knew Rabin personally because he lived like five stories above my apartment. And when he was assassinated I just couldn't control myself... I didn't know I'd take it so hard. No one expected it of course, but. I started crying like crazy, I was in Beersheva[24] and I started just hitchhiking to Tel Aviv because it was already ten or eleven o'clock at night when we knew it. And I just had to go back to the army but I didn't, I couldn't... So it was really awful.

Many had trenchant criticisms of Rabin and preferred to look upon the assassination as an attack on the office of the prime minister or the state:

Roi: I was, in the country... all the memorial days and all of this is Rabin was assassination... I don't see it like this. I think the Prime Minster was assassinated. They killed, he killed my Prime Minister, not he killed Rabin... And I think this is the main issue, not Rabin is a good man.

Boaz: I don't idolise him. I don't think he was like the greatest Prime Minister ever... he probably will be remembered like that because he brought the greatest change Israel ever had. He was lucky enough... to do the Oslo Accord but I can't forget all the bad things...

---

[24] Location changed to protect identity.

that we held against him while he was Minister of Defence... I went to demonstrate against him a lot of times... About violations of human rights... in the Occupied Territories. And I don't think Shimon Peres is any more better... if you want to name names the Labour Party is responsible for the Occupation.

Tali: It's a myth now and I don't want to destroy it but when I heard that... the square in Paris... That the Square of Tolerance is on the name of Rabin for me it was a joke... Rabin is one of the symbol of the male army thinking, very conservative ... I think the situation before his murder was a lot of because of him because he was no all that much tolerant in his expression... when he talk about the settlements when they were striking that they can turn around him like plopel [propellers]... It became like a myth... for peace, like a new change, like the old generation just said "I want to change it for my kids". And I don't care if it's even a myth but I know... how it created was stupid.

Such views are diametrically opposed to the common stereotype of a left united in mourning. Yes, the Rabin assassination was a traumatic and dramatic event in the lives of every activist I talked to, but the shock and sense of loss was not necessarily felt for Rabin as a man, or even necessarily as a leader. The murder marked a turning point both in the peace process and the related Jewish *kulturkampf*. It was obvious now that the rules of the conflict had changed, that elements in the national-religious public would stop at nothing to torpedo the peace process and impose their understandings of Greater Israel and Jewish identity on all who opposed them. The slow unravelling of Israel's democratic norms - never more than superficial and utilitarian amidst significant sectors of the citizenry - was now graphically exposed and a great deal of trust in the efficacy of the state and its ability to cope peacefully with dissension died.

In May 1996 the Labour Party botched an election that should never have been lost, failing to capitalise on the shock and dismay felt by centre-right supporters, and a period of national-religious quiescence and self-reflection (Peri 2000: 153). They went on to choose (arguably) the wrong candidate for prime minister again in 1999. Since these failures and their re-emergence from a very limited period of self-flagellation, the right has moved to limit the powers of the Supreme Court through a constitutional committee, provoked the

the assassination of Rabin, but in the long-term post-assassination environment few strictures now remain to limit the fascistic tendencies of a political bloc united by racism and aggressive ultra-nationalism.

This analysis stands in stark contrast to the efforts at conflict resolution popularised in the Israeli press and in some academic discourse (Peri 2000:152,157). Certainly, attempts were made to set up encounter groups and to curb the intensity of public debate aping, rather ironically, prior efforts between Palestinians and the Israeli left and sharing the same fate. In a situation of conflict where the differences are as fundamental and seemingly intractable as those between the national-religious and peaceniks no common ground is possible on which to build the foundations of reconciliation.

The recriminations and self-examination that followed the murder of Rabin solved none of the problems facing Israeli society. The assassination was a pivotal point in the Israeli *kulturkampf* which heralded a period of instability, fear and uncertainty and an end to dissimulation; the consociational state was dead. Its impact on contemporary and future Meretz activists was mixed. For many it was a motivating factor that impelled them to act on their beliefs. For others it was merely a confirmation of what they felt they already knew about the right wing and the justice of peace. Regardless of their opinions of Rabin, his murder endures as a moment of profound trauma that lives on fresh in the memory, as it does for most Israelis.

The Palestinians: Constructing Alterity

Identity formation is always carried out in relation to a perceived other. Assigned group attributes, attitudes and constitution are identified and explained in relation to an outside group that shares none of these characteristics and is presented as antipathetic to the desires, identity and even existence of one's own group. Where inter-communal conflict is intense and related to a wider political struggle for control of resources, sovereignty and other modes of power the use of identity politics is amplified and the reification of the antagonistic 'other' becomes intense and of greater import. Both the Palestinian and Israeli identity groups seek to paint a grim picture of the other as pathological in intent and as culturally degenerate in an effort not only at cross-border identity definition and boundary

maintenance, but to gain the support of important third parties in their struggle over land and overall suzerainty. In this environment labours to achieve cross-cultural compromise or understanding and political settlement are hamstrung by the intransigence of efforts at identity perpetuation and the advocates of compromise are caste as traitors to their own people and nation.

The early Zionist settlers did not seek to address Arab counter-claims to the land they sought to colonise (Kimmerling & Migdal 1993: 24). Many came to Palestine with an Orientalist, romantic image of the Arab populace as worthy of imitation in dress and in their rootedness to the land and as a group that would welcome the 'civilising' influence of their returning cousins. The land itself was portrayed as largely empty - as it still is by some in the Revisionist camp who postulate a nineteenth century wave of Arab immigration in response to the boost given the local economy by Jewish settlement, a narrative that sits suspiciously well with their ideological proclivities. The early romanticism was not to last with nationalist conflict intensifying as recurrent *aliyot* established the critical mass required for the progression from Jewish colonisation to institutional development, in tandem with the elaboration of mutually antagonistic identity groups.

Palestinian identity developed via colonisation and the later tragedies of the indigenous Arab populace. Given the cultural affinity of Palestinian Arabs with the wider Arab 'nation' it was inevitable that claims to peoplehood and to a specific Palestinian identity should ape those of east European Zionist nationalism in its fixation on land and place as the rallying point for a new sense of self and community. Given the essentially identical nature of the foundations of both Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian identity as lying in an indestructible group relationship to a small, contested territory it is unsurprising that the conflict became a winner takes all, open-ended one with mutual ouster or annihilation as its rational consequence.

The Jewish denial of Palestinian rights to the land as indigenes carried little weight given the importance placed on prior residence in nationalist discourses. Historical arguments as to the Jews greater claim or the uninhabited nature of Palestine prior to the new *Yishuv* could not in themselves legitimise the flight and expulsions of 1948 or the obvious suffering of a suddenly displaced people, and the failure of these refugees to meld into the populations of their Arab host states. For the prior Arab residents to have no claim

obvious suffering of a suddenly displaced people, and the failure of these refugees to meld into the populations of their Arab host states. For the prior Arab residents to have no claim to Israel the existence of a distinct Palestinian identity had to be unequivocally denied; "There was no such thing as Palestinians. When was there an independent Palestinian people with a Palestinian state... They did not exist" (Golda Meir cited in Kimmerling & Migdal 1983:xvi).

Dogmatic 'truth' for a long period, this denial proved impossible to maintain with the invasion of the Territories in 1967 and the consolidation of a large portion of the 1948 refugee population under Israeli military and civil control, which immediately resurrected the debate over the legitimacy of Jewish sovereignty claims. It is difficult for any colonising group to recognise the suffering caused to indigenous people through colonisation as it brings the need for, and justice of, that settlement into question. Israel is no exception. Alongside the traditional abjuration of the possible existence of a Palestinian identity existed a denial of the *Nakba* ('catastrophe') itself.

With 1967 the distress of a large refugee population was suddenly imposed upon the Israeli public consciousness and with the first intifada the possible persistence of this 'benevolent' occupation was proved a myth. Israel was faced with a crisis of legitimacy and the impossibility of perpetuating the denial of Palestinian identity. The question was posed, "If a Palestinian people exists what are its rights as a people or nation and how do we respond to their continued suffering, our part in it, and their territorial claims?" To generalise, there were two responses. Initially the state and the majority of Israeli Jews sought to deny Palestinian national rights due to the existential nature of the 1948 conflict. The Palestinians had tried to destroy Israel and still sought to, therefore their fate was just and their competing national rights were voided through this implacable hostility to the Jews' more valid claim to the land. To proponents the Arabs have twenty-two countries and the Jews only have one therefore the former should take in the Palestinian refugees. With the first intifada another tendency developed in Israeli society, one that recognised both the existence and sovereign rights of the Palestinians and called for the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel through a negotiated settlement.

Neither orientation recognised the Palestinian right of return; a concept that Meretz youth are almost united in rejecting. This is a vital for understanding the function of

boundary maintenance in Jewish-Israeli identity politics and the physical and psychological distance this demands:

D: Should the 'Right of Return' be extended to Palestinians who left Israel in 1948?

Avi: The state of Israel, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. ...What happened in the '48 war, two great things; one 300,000 or more refugees, Palestinians, ran away from Israel, from the state of Israel today. Second, we brought 700,000 Jewish from Arab countries and we brought refugees from Europe... so the basics of two countries for two nationalities in the land of Israel became only after the Independence War. ...So because of that I really don't think that we need to take care or responsibility for them, one. Second, we don't have space physically. Israel... in 20 years will be like one big metropolis... we don't have a place for 2-3 million refugees to come back to Israel.

The idea that the Palestinian refugees pose a demographic threat to the future of the Jewish state is widespread. Many research participants recognised that an injustice had been done to the Palestinians but thought that the remedy was for a right of return exclusively to the nascent Palestinian State:

Moshe: Definitely no, because like the Palestinians have their rights for their country we have the rights to our country and... the right of return they should have for their new Palestinian state like we have our *Hok Hashvut* [Law of Return] for our state.

Boaz: Yes, not into Israel but into the Palestinian Authority. And it's not our matter to decide what's the policy inside a sovereign state. They can get in. They can decide to have in it whoever they want.... Not that it's totally just but this is the situation and right now we can't accept people from.

D: Do you believe that the families who had property that was confiscated should be recompensed for that?

B: Yes... and if that's something that is enacted then I want compensation for the Jewish property that was left in Arab countries. I think it's going to balance [laughs]. I have a slight notion.

Dina: No. I'll tell you why, because it is an agreement. And... I as an Israeli give up the Territories... in order to end this conflict, in order for you as a Palestinian to have a country, then I give you a land in order to establish... your own people. And they have to give that up.... But they didn't fight for... that right. So they know that it's impossible.

One interviewee made the argument oft heard from the right of the political spectrum that recognising the Palestinian right of return to Israel would be to reward the Arab bid in 1948 to extinguish the Israeli State. I must admit to being surprised at this response:

Raz: No. As much as I want to be humanistic and liberal and... pro many things I am convinced that many tragedies in our history were triggered and initiated by the Arabs... we can forgive some but not forget, and not give a prize...
D: A reward.
R: A reward to those who began the 1948 War.

Here we again see the impact of the politics of fear in Israeli society, propagated by the government and media; fear of the Arabs, religious-secular fears of subservience to the other and lifestyle incursion and Sephardi-Ashkenazi tensions. This politics of fear is a vital aspect of the new Zionist civil religion through its emphasis on the Holocaust as a prism for viewing the outside world, the perception it fosters of the fragility of Jewish continuity as a people, and the encouragement this gives to the *kulturkampf* over identity politics. Hadar expresses the fear of the Arab other succinctly in rejecting the Palestinian right of return:

Hadar: ...we couldn't let it happen. It's really dangerous to us... It's frightening, I think it's part of the brainwash... that they want to kill us... but it's the fact that we are afraid.

Many interviewees cited pragmatic considerations for their rejection, allowing them to recognise the suffering of the refugees while discounting the possibility of their integration into Israeli society. A common theme with those who took this line was that, though just,

the Palestinian right of return would lead to an immediate Arab majority, threatening the Jewish nature of the state - still a sacrosanct value for most interviewees:

Gal: Well the justice demand that it is but... sometimes I'm a pragmatist. I don't think that in the present time... the people in Israel are ready for that but the justice demand that they should.

Tamar: There's too many of them. Nobody can keep track. '67 yes, '48 no.

Amir: No, because then Israel won't be Israel it will be flooded with a zillion people... if we open the gates... it won't be Israel anymore. And second of all, all those people are looking forward to Israel fifty something years ago, which is not the same...they won't have their village again... they won't have... their homes back.

Two interviewees broke the consensus in accepting the possibility of a limited return. Others may well agree with this stance as it was the Israeli position at Camp David and Taba, but they didn't express this in their interviews. Crucially, elsewhere in our conversations both these interviewees expressed their desire for an Israeli state of all its citizens rather than a specifically Jewish state:

Yuval: It should be given as an option, an option that could be find is very difficult.

D: Should the right of return be extended to Palestinians and their families
Ophir: [interrupting] Of course, definitely
D: who left Israel in 1948, and should they be allowed to come back to Israel?
O: Definitely, I have no doubt about it, yeah.

Attitudes to the Occupation and Peace Process

Unsurprisingly, my research participants expressed universal opposition to the Occupation. Here they are reflecting the overwhelmingly ethical nature of contemporary peacenik discourses on the Occupation as opposed to the security focus of most elements in

Labour and the Likud, and the belief in the consecration of the Land to the Jewish people as an eternal patrimony held by the national-religious and, increasingly, mainstream Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox. These discourses are talking passed each other. The ethical, security and religious justifications, or condemnations of the Occupation share no common ground and serve as rallying points for mutually hostile political tribes in the wider *kulturkampf*.

Many interviewees spoke of the brutalisation of Israeli society and gave specific examples of depredations inflicted on Palestinians from their own experiences:

Moshe: I recall my service in the intifada and I remember many friends of mine which initially were good people and left wing... and they were ended like hitting everyone without any discrimination. Because it is a very distressing situation for a soldier, for a young person... and then they finish their army service and they will like back to normal society but... something of it remains and... I do not think that it remain so much with these friends of mine but with other people you can see more violence.

Yona: it has corrupted our society. We learned to rule other people. We learned that we can treat other people like they are not human beings just because we are stronger... One example is the Arloftiof Slaughter that wasn't even in the Israeli newspaper, about a soldier, during Ramadan, went into the market where they weren't allowed to go, because there were places that the army weren't allowed to go because they knew that once they go there, there will be mess. They weren't the army they were the special unit, police, the *Magav*, the Border Police. And they, they came there, and they knew that people would start shouting at them, and they knew that it's a mess, and they came there because they were bored and they wanted to provoke. And then one of the soldiers, I think the Palestinians threw stones at the soldiers. Then one of the soldiers stood on the jeep and started to shoot... all around and the other soldiers didn't try to stop him. And he was just shooting and there were people running all over, running away, and he still shot at them, he shot them in the back and people that wanted to help the wounded, they shot people, they couldn't come and take the wounded. And we went to Rafiah the week afterwards and we gathered all the testimonies. And people showed me... people who got hit, who got bullets in the back, and in the tushy. And we went to the hospital there, which was quite

frightening, but we went there to gain more testimonies. And, of course, we brought it to the newspapers and only one newspaper wrote something about it.

Ehud [works with students]: It changed everything. I'll give you an example... and I see in the behaviour of the students... the effects of a conqueror, the feeling that they are very powerful, that they have no limits to behaviour... And, and what happens to the Israeli soldiers - every one of us is a soldier - when you go to Gaza, when you go to Ramallah, not now but during the intifada in 1989 and before. I was seven times in Gaza and, and I've seen the behaviour of all the soldiers and I was shocked... they captured the people, brought them to the camp and treated them like animals, and hit them, and tortured them... when you go back to your family, to your workplace, or whatever, it has to affect you. It just doesn't go away. And think about what happens to soldiers who for three years serve in Gaza or Ramallah. What happens to them, they are ruined people, obviously.

The absolute association of the Land and the Jews is opposed absolutely as leading to immoral actions and the brutalisation of fellow human beings:

Racheli I think that peace and human being life are more important than any piece of land no matter how holy it is and how important and how beautiful it is.

Naaman: I don't believe in land, I believe in people.

Given the tensions between rival political camps, I was surprised at the level of concern as to the future of the settlers and settlements under any future peace agreement - at the time of most interviews an agreement seemed both imminent and inevitable:

Danny: ...if they want to stay there they can stay there... in the Palestinian State, I don't care... I don't want them to be uprooted. They can stay there.
D: They can become Palestinians.
Dy: Yeah, if that's what they want "Bye, bye, good riddance [laughs]".

Ariel: I don't think that moving settlements, for example, is the best solution because its not humane too. So if you can find other alternatives its better.

Support for a Palestinian state was universal and its necessity as a means for solving the conflict was again couched in ethical terms. Some also spoke of the death of the ideal of the bi-national state advocated by Mapam pre-independence and of its pragmatic impossibility (Executive Committee Hashomer Hatzair Worker's Party 1946). Note the importance given to national independence as a basis for identity in the first quote and the talk of natural rights in the second:

Amnon: It does not make sense that we'll have our state and they will not have their state because they have to have some legal authority and some legal identity and some self-identity. And everyone wants to have his country you cannot be thrown out in a vacuum not belonging anywhere. Let them have a country, why not?

Avi: [independence] it's their national right, it's their natural right.

Boaz: A confederation in terms of economy, yes, in terms of any other way, no. I would highly object to that... I see other Arab countries, I'm not blind and I don't like their culture and I have enough problems within Israel fighting than like creating even more problems by having to collaborate with a culture in which the total values are totally different... by making a bi-national state you're just creating a problem.

Interestingly, the security argument was used by two interviewees, in one case to oppose unilateral withdrawal and in the second to advocate the retention of some settlements in a final deal. Generally, security did not loom large as an interview theme:

Amnon: ...we were attacked and then these Territories were captured, we should give them back... only in exchange for signing a peace treaty because this will defend the country and show good will from both sides to have peace treaties. No other way, not giving just like this, no, no way.

D: Do you think that Israel should leave all the Occupied Territories?

Dina: Yes, not because I want to but because I think that would solve the problem and the terror. But we have... to have some kind of a land that would give us security. That means that you can't give away all the settlement. But the ones that you... leave in Israel, the Israel state, you have to secure them.

Fighting For Votes in the Territories

Many Israeli high schools, universities and colleges hold mock national elections just prior to election day itself in which students vote for the national parties they support to give an indication of student opinions - again reflecting the importance of youth leadership in the Zionist tradition. These polls are the focus of media attention and are a good way for smaller parties like Meretz to garner free publicity through a good performance. When it came time for the 1999 college election in Ariel, Meretz was determined to make a strong showing on the campus during voting and in support of the speech by Meretz MK Ran Cohen at the political forum.

The Gush Emunim affiliated Ariel college was created in 1982 to propagate the national-religious settler worldview and eventually compete with secular universities in Israel proper, with the support of Bar Ilan University. The college proudly flaunts its nationalist credentials: "As a demonstratively Zionist institution, the College has two key requirements: the flag of the State of Israel must be displayed in every classroom, laboratory and auditorium, and every student must study one course per semester in either Judaism, Jewish history or Land of Israel studies" (The College of Judea & Samaria 21/8/03).

Israel's largest settlement might seem a strange place for a left wing party that opposes its very existence to be electioneering but there were good reasons for the trip. Firstly, the campus and trailer park that constitutes its student accommodation are home to a fair number of students from Israel proper who, unable to study in Israeli universities, taking advantage of generous government incentives to study there, or simply wanting to take courses specific to the college, choose to study in Ariel despite their opposition to the

Occupation. The secondary motive was to show the settlers that we would not be intimidated by them, would exercise our democratic right to campaign wherever there were Israeli citizens and prove the existence of dissension regarding the merits of the Occupation even in their largest settlement. This worked spectacularly, Meretz coming third in the Ariel election with 14% of the vote.

With vans heading out from Tel Aviv party HQ to various student elections around the country on the 25th of April 1999, it was only on a whim that I decided to join Amit on a supply run to Ariel. After a confrontation with settlers at a nearby gas station we were shaken and nervous as we approached the town. Our nervousness was only increased when we were selected at a settler roadblock at the entrance to Ariel for questioning as to the purpose of our visit.

After meeting up with Manny, the remainder of the afternoon was taken up with handing out flyers and stickers. We were greeted with great hostility by most students. We also took banners to the trailer of our contact on campus, Yonatan. The inside of Yonatan's caravan was a little better than the Spartan exterior but the floor still shook with every footstep and the place must have been an oven in summer. With Manny and Amit I hung three banners on and around his trailer then we sat for a while with Yonatan serenading us on his guitar. After this we had to leave for a campus in Israel proper for more electioneering leaving the rather brave Yonatan alone to face the wrath of the settlers. This anger was not long in coming as that night he and his trailer-mate heard the banners being torn down and went out to stop it whereupon they were jumped by a mob and very badly beaten. As revenge, a special operation was undertaken the night after with tens of right wing banners torn down by a Meretz flying squad (usually 2-3 activists in a van, but in this case they travelled in an unmarked car) and replaced with Meretz banners.

At Yonatan's Trailer

We returned twice to Ariel in the lead up to election day, always having to guard our banners while handing out leaflets and stickers and talking to students. The overwhelming hostility to our presence remained and was accentuated by the death threat that was left on our van; "Think twice next time you're coming to Ariel with your stinking car, I warn you!! Meretz = sentenced as traitors and not as Jews". A second confrontation occurred on the last day with a settler approaching us as we packed the van, but was safely defused. I was extremely scared the whole time we were there as were other activists:

Roi: I was afraid there more than I was afraid in Nablus... Because in Ariel I am with my Meretz sign and all of them can see that I'm not from there.

It may seem rather gratuitous to relate such stories but they speak to an important aspect of the *kulturkampf*; the acceptability and omnipresence of physical and verbal violence in political activism particularly on the religious-right but also on the part of left wingers. Earlier that day Orit had grabbed a right wing lecturer by the throat after he had called Shulamit Aloni several choice appellations - other Meretz activists had to pull her off.

Having described the role of the Occupation and associated struggles in the Israeli *kulturkampf* we now turn our attention to Jewish identity politics.

Chapter 5: Jewish Identity Politics:
In Search of the Secular Jew

We focus in this chapter on defining secular Jewish-Israeli identity and discussing its relation to other modes of Jewish identification. The Israeli state is described as an imagined community engaged in cultural production and we also look at the confusion of Israeli and Jewish identity and the *kulturkampf* conflict over the 'who is a Jew' issue.

A central proposition of this dissertation is that secular Jewish identity exists as a sub-group within the wider Jewish identity community. In Chapter One I proffered the concept of 'identity communities' as a way of imagining how secular Jews may cohere in pursuit of political and other goals related to class, interests, ethnicity, religiosity and other shared characteristics. These shared interests and attributes go a long way to explaining the politics of identity but they don't explain how the sum of these equates to a mode of Jewish identity adherence. I will argue here that those who hold to a form of secular Jewish-Israeli identity do in fact cohere as a group. They do so through a shared nationality and relationship to the historical Jewish tradition, a strong sense of a shared ethnicity, and through a shared stance relating to Orthodox Judaism and its practical impact on their lives and the Israeli state. From this a sense of secularity emerges which is built on more than a negative relationship to religion and religiosity.

National Identity and Secular Israel

Danny: Christianity has given up the national aspect of it in favour of the universal religion… Jewish religion didn't, it's still a very national religion… When someone… converts into Judaism he becomes a part of the nation… So there's… a great confusion sometimes between religion and nation.

In Chapter Two we charted the emergence of an ardently secularist movement of national rejuvenation which laid the foundations for the return to Zion, itself building on the Jewish *Haskala* and the possibilities this provided for a reorientation of the relationship between the individual and *Am*. A voluntary coalescence occurred around the

understanding of the Jew as a member of a national community (in the modern sense), bound by ties of history, ethnicity and mutual reliance, and destined for a future as a rejuvenated, free people living in their own nation-state, speaking Hebrew and beholden to none. It was the ideological victory of this re-imagining of peoplehood that laid the basis for secular Jewish-Israeli identity and provided this identity with both content and meaning.

With the mutation of Zionist ideology into a less well-defined Israeli nationalism, secularity was faced with a perceptual crisis in relation to a resurgence of religious claims to Jewish authenticity. With Jewish culture so long carried in the vessel of the religious tradition, and with a general failure of secular Jewishness to provide adequate means for Jewish expression outside the bounds of religious modes and symbolic fields, the Israeli public sphere was surrendered to the religious. Their, often conservative, understandings of what it is to be a Jew seriously undermined the popular legitimacy of secular Jewish voluntarism in self-expression and group definition.

Secular Jewish identity is not viewed by many Israelis as a legitimate basis for imagining Jewish peoplehood but exists regardless as an actual reality of self-understanding and in the non-religious (usually private) expression of Jewish identity. It is a central element in an Israeli national identity hopelessly confused with Zionism and Jewish identity, given the inability of most seculars to draw a line between Jewish and Israeli, as we shall see below. Jewish-Israeli secularity is beset with problems of public legitimacy but finds public expression in a widespread patriotic sentiment, pride in the army (itself the product and embodiment of Jewish-Zionist secularity), a desire to serve the state and Israeli people (both always imagined as Jewish) and in a pervasive voluntarism with regard to the public celebration of both religious and national holidays. With regard to religious festivals, this is best exemplified by public gatherings for such festivals as *Purim* and *Succot* where the secular public comes together either in groups of friends and family, or in municipally-organised events to watch the kids parade in costume, and for entertainment, food and relaxation. They do so in the same manner that secular publics in Christian countries attend the ubiquitous Christmas parades and with the same lack of attention to the religious meanings of the festival, while utilising the religious symbols relevant to each holiday. In my own family we light *Shabbat* candles and say the blessing, dress up for *Purim*, build a *Succa* every year and attend many of the municipal events related to religious festivals as a

way of expressing my wife's and son's Jewish identity, yet are entirely secular, and I would vouchsafe that this is true for most secular Jews worldwide.

None of this should surprise. The will to identify as a nation is never encompassed by religious understandings of peoplehood, no matter to what extent this perceived shared heritage has been transported through time by the religious tradition which shaped its understanding. Nationalism's power lies in its modularity and the ease with which it is transported from one cultural context to another as a profoundly powerful tool for inventing a sense of shared history (albeit selectively) and future, personified in the image of the eternal, irreducible nation-state (Anderson 1983:4-7; Wicker 1997:46). The nation-state itself is largely chimeric given the fact that nations or peoples almost never form discrete population units corresponding with modern state domains of suzerainty. Benedict Anderson (1983:6-7) postulates that the modern nation-state is an imagined community. Most fellow-members never know each other and thus must invent community through envisaging the ties that bind them. The nation itself is imagined as limited so that a differentiation might be set up between members and non-members, and is reified as a sovereign entity. Anderson (1983:7) explains that the nation is always imagined as a community of "deep horizontal comradeship", and that it is this experienced fraternity that has allowed appeals to nation to be so effective in mobilising and motivating members even to the extent where they will die for this imagined community. This is certainly true of Israel.

Bernard Nietschmann (1989) makes a clear differentiation between nation and state. He argues that a nation constitutes the geographically bounded territory of a common people who have a common ancestry, history, society, institutions, ideology and language. In contrast, a state is a centralised political system that is recognised by others of its kind and uses a civilian and military bureaucracy to enforce one set of laws, institutions, and sometimes language and religion within its boundaries with no regard to pre-existing nations therein (Nietschmann 1989:3). As a state, Israel seeks to ensure its legitimacy through appeals to cultural specificity and fashions itself through self-representation as the endpoint of a long but inevitable historical process that transformed peoplehood into statehood.

Herzfeld (1997:7, 21-22) notes that the state bolsters its authority through the production of a structural nostalgia for a lost golden age of unity and cultural efflorescence that feeds back into official invocations of moral and customary values, often selectively appropriated from local codes. He argues that it is in the deluge of nationalist historiography that the individual is able to find the materials from which to construct their own understandings of theirs' and their people's past. The Israeli state went to great lengths in cultural production as it tried to weld myriad, unassociated immigrant groups into an imagined community (particularly through education).

Israel maintains an understanding of nationality that is deeply confused with Jewish ethnicity (Rejwan 1999:47). It is impossible to envisage the Israeli without bringing into play Jewish themes and symbols married intrinsically to imagined peoplehood and ethnie. The result of this nationalisation and politicisation of Jewish identity in struggles for legitimacy, resources and power in the Israeli state is *kulturkampf*.

Secular Jewish Ethnicity

Where nationalism asserts ties to a collective heritage, ethnicity best embodies authenticity in the Israeli popular imagination, a fact that helps explain the invasion of civil religion by a religious tradition that speaks in the name of *Am* rather than the Israeli.

Barth (1969:10-11) describes the ethnic group, as presented in anthropological literature, as characterised by biological self-perpetuation; sharing fundamental cultural values realised in cultural forms; as a collective with its own field of communication and interaction and as a group with members able to distinguish self from outsiders in formulating an ethnic category opposed to others of "the same order". Barth (1969:11) argues for the problematisation of boundary maintenance, an assertion borne out in the Israeli *kulturkampf* through the extreme politicisation of the 'who is a Jew' question. He also prefers to see the possession of a shared culture as a result rather than as a defining characteristic of ethnic group organisation, an asseveration backed by the post-functionalist fracturing of claims to cultural homogeneity (Barth 1969:11). Barth (1969:14-15) emphasises ascription as a vital feature of ethnic group identification and proposes the investigation of ethnic boundary maintenance which he perceives to be at the heart of ethnicity production. Barth's approach is backed by Lamont and Molnar (2002:175) who

assert that; "This relational perspective resonates with more recent work on racial and ethnic identity construction that considers these identities are the result of a process of self-definition and the construction of symbolic boundaries and assignment of collective identities by others".

Wicker (1997:30) provides an essential insight into the Israeli *kulturkampf* by arguing that; "In situations of extreme ethnic overload, channels of violence are moved from the intra-ethnic to the inter-ethnic level, identity switching and inter-marriage suddenly count as treason and hybrid social worlds have to be re-segregated along ethnic lines". The result is the ethnicisation of national identity and politics and the radical juxtaposition of competing images of the ideal ethnie such as the Israeli left-liberal universalistic humanistic reading of Jewish tradition and its more particularistic religious counterpose.

With regard to the wider community of secular Jews, ultra-Orthodox denunciations of the non-observant as *goyim* have mutated into a gross generalisation of secular lifestyle choices as non-Jewish, selfish, individualistic materialism expressed in many cases by those who share therein including elements of the secular media and of the academy (usually Zionist-oriented). This is unsurprising given the emphasis in Judaism on orthopraxy and the strong collectivist ethos Zionism helped engender in Israeli secular society, but its predictability does not belie the fact it is highly consequential. The boundaries of Jewish inclusion and exclusion are set at a point where the majority of secular Jews find themselves left beyond the Pale with no defence against a barrage of attacks on the Jewishness of their lifestyle and behavioural patterns. It also hands significant authority in representation to the religious who are easily able to assert their own Jewish identity through the public nature of their adherence to the tenets of Judaism - long the vessel of Jewish tradition. It creates a constant tension within secular Jewish society of proving their existence not only as a community but as Jews when they have no criteria to define their own Jewishness except strong self-ascription and state-recognition. Otherwise they are left with the 'stuff' of tradition, irreducibly linked to Judaism, itself an immensely powerful cultural engine and seeming seat of identity.

Where secular Jewish-Israelis seek to negotiate their Jewish identity in the face of these powerful religio-cultural expressions, they do so largely alone or within the family as the public sphere belongs to Orthodox Judaism. This point is vital in understanding the

vicious Orthodox battle to keep Reform and Conservative Judaism out of Israel, given the legitimacy these denominations would provide the voluntarism of those who identify as secular Jewish-Israelis - the motto of our local Reform synagogue here in

Wellington, New Zealand is, 'Reform Judaism: Because there is more than one way to be Jewish'. Indeed, many secular Israeli Jews are turned off Orthodox religiosity precisely because they see nothing of themselves in it and, in my opinion, a significant minority would show a greater interest in the religious tradition if Orthodox coercion and conservatism had not turned them off religion altogether. Secular Israeli-Jewish identity politics is strongly reactive to religious rejection of their Jewishness and expresses itself in largely ethnic terms as a pride in Jewish peoplehood and achievements through time and a sense of belonging thereto.

Liebman (1990:xv, xvii) distinguishes two camps of ideological secularists, the nationalist and universalist, identifying each with Mapam and RATZ respectively. No easy dichotomy arose from interview responses but both elements certainly appeared in most. I asked Meretzniks to discuss whether Jewish identity is a nationality or an ethnicity and whether it necessarily has a religious dimension. Several found it difficult to separate religion and nationality, often confusing the latter with ethnicity, possibly due to the popular semantic confusion of 'Israeli' and 'Jewish':

Ariel: It's more by nationality but it's also my religious and I don't know which comes first, I really don't know. But I can say that second... I really have a strong Jewish identity. I know that I am a [part of the] Jewish people and I feel myself as a Jewish, you know not a citizen of the world or something like that

D: Is it an ethnicity, is it a religion?
Yossi: ...for me... it cannot be only religious but I wonder whether it's really... a nationality being Jewish? I'm not sure.

Benny: Yeah, right, I just can't give you an answer because I'm so confused about it. I don't know [how to] separate, and how you can, or if it's wrong or right to separate nationality with religious, especially about Jews... I just can't tell.

D: Is Jewishness necessarily tied to Judaism?

Tali: No... it's more like a national thing... less than a religious thing... It was always a nation... it's like a people that spread all over the world.

Avi believes that Jews constitute an ethnic group identifiable by shared behavioural characteristics:

Avi: It's an ethnic group you can see by the way we behave. Jewish behaviour is something you can see all over the world... the *chutzpah* and all, everything... I think a combination of religious and ethnic because there is such a thing you call the Jewish behaviours, no doubt about it.

Danny posits a common genetic background in proposing a shared ethnicity. Both his and Avi's answer eschew the cultural in postulating the existence of deeper bonds of consanguinity and attendant behaviours that stand somewhere between ethnicity and 'race'.

D: Is their any ethnic dimension to it [Jewish identity]?

Danny: An ethnic dimension, yes of course... It's a nation and there is a genetic similarity between one Jew and another... I know that in the '50s they did... genetic research comparing Jews from different descents. They found that all Jews except for... one community had very, very distinct similarities... in their DNA. The only group that was different were the Yemenite group. That, by the way, was why they didn't publish it.

Hadar: Yeah. So people are looking for their tribe. So I look upon it as a tribe... that you're born to, but... not something that is religious.

Yaron and Moshe reject elemental associations for the cultural and open the possibility of membership through knowledge and desire rather than descent:

Yaron: Yeah, I understand that for a lot of people… it also has a religious meaning but for me it has no religious meaning because I'm not religious. So for me being Jewish means that I'm part of an ethnic group.

D: So you think you can voluntarily identify with an ethnic group rather than seeing yourself as primordially associated through blood?

Y: I understand that for a lot of people this causes a very difficult identity crisis but it doesn't seem to do so for me… I don't see why you… [could] become a member of the New Zealander nation or a member of the Australian nation and not become a member of the Jewish nation just by showing that you very much want to become part of the nation and being able to adapt to the culture or wishing to adopt the culture.

Moshe: If you think of it as a nation then when you live enough among people of this nation and you like speak their language and share their feasts… then at the end you'll have similar identity and then you will be a part of the same nation even if you're originally not from the same ethnic group…

D: …over time that's exactly what's been happening.

M: Exactly, exactly. Like many of them just married Jews and they lived with them so… practically they are Jews now.

In the following excerpts interviewees explicitly reject religiosity as a determinant of Jewish identity:

D: Is Jewishness necessarily tied to Judaism?

Tali: No… it's more like a national thing… less than a religious thing… It was always a nation… it's like a people that spread all over the world.

Erez: You don't have to go to synagogue and actually you don't have to believe in the God to be Jewish, of course, because if the *Halakha* say that you have just a Jewish mother you don't have to believe in God.

D: Does Jewish identity necessarily have a religious dimension?

Ehud: Not at all.

Living Secular Jewish Identity

I asked research participants what it is to be Jewish and whether it is possible to be a secular Jew. The subject also often came up spontaneously. Given the centrality of the question to this dissertation I have included every interviewee's definition of what it is to be Jewish in an effort to avoid misrepresentation. Respondents' answers exhibit a great deal of forethought on the issue - a reflexivity that is itself a response to religious challenges to secular Jewish legitimacy.

D: Is a secular Jewish identity possible?

Amir: Yes... that's the way I see myself as Jewish and secular...

D: What... are some of the aspects of Israel... that you don't like?

A: The fact that... it's a Jewish country and that someone could call me up one day and tell me, "Hey, you're not Jewish you're not who you are", take my identity.

D What is it, to be a secular Jew?

Hadar: When they have the courage to stand up and say "We like to eat pork and we think it's very normal to do this and it's our right to do whatever we like on Yom Kippur". So it gives other people more courage... And it's good.

Hadar interpreted my question as referring to militant secularity. Noam agrees that to be a Jew is to be a rebel but takes issue with the irreligiosity of those referred to as seculars in Israel, concurring with my proposition that this 'secularity' has more to do with lifestyle than a lack of religious belief:

D: What is Jewishness?

Noam: I think to be a... rebel, yes, a revolution[ary]...

D: Is a secular-Jewish identity possible?

N: No... if you talk about secular so that it's someone that... don't exposed to Jewish festivals.... He can't be... Jewish and don't experience it. Maybe you are the man of the

world, it's a good thing but... no, no... there is no secular. Also, let's say, I, if you asked me "What you are secular... or not secular?" I will tell, and most of the people... will tell you that they are secular by the definition... of the society but...

D: [interrupts] Yeah, in Israel it's more of a lifestyle definition than anything else though isn't it?

N: Yes, yes, yes it's the lifestyle. This is... so, but I go to, to synagogue... [at] *Pessach.*

Boaz and Idan speak of Meretz' role in laying the foundations for the recognition of the legitimacy of Jewish diversity. I particularly enjoy Idan's description of a new Judaism:

Boaz: I am Jewish, I was born Jewish but I, I'm not religious in any way and as long as Judaism is identified as a religious thing I can't really recognise myself as being Jewish because I'm not religious.

D: Do you think that Judaism is necessarily tied to being Jewish or is it a...

B: [interrupts] No.

D: secular form of Judaism, of Jewishness is possible?

B: Of course it's possible. I think Judaism is a culture and you can share a culture without share the religion or the religious belief.

D: OK. Do you think... that Meretz is acting as a cultural engine in terms of creating secular Jewish identity in Israel?

B: Yes, definitely because first of all giving legitimacy to being secular... There's a vast problem... if you say Jewish values... people on the street would say "'Oh yeah, that's good our children should get Jewish values". And they never ask themselves what the heck Jewish values are... I mean, what are Jewish values? You can find in religion, especially in the... Old Testament, you can find anything... if you love somebody and she's married and you want her can you kill her husband? is that a Jewish value, who can say [laughs]... I don't buy into it... every political party has a... very great impact on the political discourse... and on the culture and when Shulamit Aloni said that like, "No, I am a secular but... in order to be a, a cultured person I don't need to be religious". I think it's... opened a door... to a new kind of thinking and it's changed a lot.

D: What was the ideological aspects of Meretz that appealed to you?

Idan: Mostly the religious thing but I think it's more deeper than that. Like the first Zionists who came here to Israel, they wanted to build here not just a state but... a new Jew... They did the first steps. And after the state was formed they didn't succeed but I think that there isn't a new Jew but there is a new Judaism.

D: Right, interesting. What is the new Judaism?

I: That we accept each other. I like to eat ham and I like to eat cheese with meat but I don't think that I'm doing something very exciting. I like to do that, I do that in my home. I do that not just in my home. I do it in the street but I don't think that it's something special. I accept that people don't want to do that. That you can accept the other, that you can live with a lot of Jews with different looks at the world and different sides. If you can accept each other, that is the new Judaism. I think that this is Meretz today.

For the majority of activists interviewed, ties to the Jewish people were conceived of as historical and cultural. Notice how many refer to knowing the Bible and other works of the religious tradition as important in understanding one's people and by extension oneself, this while explicitly rejecting religion as the basis for Jewish identity and community.

Michael: I believe that there is a people called the Jewish people and... the religion is not the only thing which binds it... Somebody said that Judaism is what Jews do... And you don't have to be religious... to be a Jewish... I myself don't believe... in God, for example... I am a Jew... I feel like Jew. I'm annoyed by anti-Semitism... like every other person.

D: Tell... me about your own identity as a Jew. What... components... of Jewishness do you think... are part of you?

M: I speak Hebrew... I read in Hebrew... my favourite songs are in Hebrew... I think that's the main thing, I think that the language it is very important. I like the bible... I learn a lot from it, I mean in a sense... a lot of the principles... we believe in, or a lot of the first social rules came from there. I don't believe everything written there... I don't believe that we should throw stones at homosexuals for example.

D: Describe what it is to be Jewish.

Vered: A collective memory. Like the Holocaust, like the Bible.

D: A shared history as well?

Vered: Yeah, a shared history... like the Bible, but not in a religious way. It's my book like any religious man... I don't like when the religious tell me that I'm a Jewish only if I... [am] religious and work like the Torah said... I'm very interested in the *Halakha*. I learn a lot about Jewish and I want to learn in the university about philosophical Jewish as well. It's very interesting, but it's very smart... There is a lot of stupid... stuff, about how to wear your socks, the right one before the left, and then your shoelaces, the left one before the right... and shit like that. Yeah, but there's a book called *Devarim* that's talking about law for the people, for the *goyim*, and it's very socialist.

D: Does Jewish identity necessarily have a religious dimension?

Yaron: Well obviously no because I'm Jewish and I'm not religious. It can but it doesn't have to... I think that without history you don't have any identity whatsoever... I understand that people have a need to identify themselves... it's just a basic human need... there's some nice stories, there's some very... lyrical passages... they are very nice. So, yeah, but I don't know if... I'd pick up and read the Bible before I'd read, you know, Churchill's six books on World War II... I define my secularity... as in having a... John Bach or, or a John Stuart... Mill type of thing. So that's... how... my secular identity is defined... that's why I don't define myself as a secular but... as a liberal and that's my Jewish, non-religious identity... I believe that like the *Avodah* and Likud. National Jewish identity is not religious but it's not definitely liberal based.

Yaron's self-definition, as a liberal Jew, is an interesting one based on reflection on what being a secular Jew entails, and how he believes this equates with his sense of self. Yossi describes how secular Jews cohere as a voluntaristic cultural group - notice the emphasis on holiday celebrations and Hebrew and the stress he places on intentionality in learning what it is to be Jewish:

D: Is it possible to be entirely secular and Jewish and if so... what does that mean?

Yossi: Entirely secular and Jewish, yeah, sure. Again, first of all you, you are born Jewish... you speak the language, you speak Hebrew and you live with many other Jewish and you share the same habits... of holidays and all that... I would say that you have to have the holidays but... what you can do is... maybe celebrate it in different ways... feeling... at least in a little bit that you're a part of this... people... Well a development of that is if... you're interested and, and you... try to learn and know... the cultural part; not only do you say "OK, I'm a Jew"... but I think you're a better Jew

D: What does it mean to say that you're Jewish?

Ehud: That's the million-dollar question. It means that... I'm part of... an enormous community. It has a history, a tradition that connects everyone who feels that they belong to the Jewish community. And it means values

D: Tell me some of the values of Judaism, or Jewish tradition that you like...

E: ...don't do to others what you don't want others to do to you... it's like the Ten Commandments

Amit proposes a continued emphasis on education as an element of Jewish tradition retained in the transition to secularity:

Amit: I think Jewish... One kind cultural things about the Passover Seder and stuff. But I think even more deep are the heritage I have from my mother and my grandmother about the way I look at stuff. This is a very, a very Jewish thing that you get through culture and not only... how you clap your hands in this kind of holiday or the next kind of holiday. Although it is a very¹ important, stuff about culture... you have to be good at studies... you have to be a book person. You can see it all abroad... you have to be a good intellectual... it has a very root, historical reason.

Yossi describes his sense of belonging to a people united by culture and history. His choice to study Jewish tradition in a Reform synagogue again emphasises that a proper definition of 'secular' Israeli-Jews, as a social category, concerns itself primarily with

lifestyle rather than a lack of belief or religiosity – though many are also secular in the traditional sense:

D: What does it mean to say you're Jewish?

Yossi: The simple answer is just because I was born... to the Jewish people I feel a connection... to the history. I mean I learned it, I live in it... I speak the language, I speak Hebrew, I live here and... I'm interested in that... not in the ceremonial parts... not... the tradition of *mitzvot* and all that but the tradition of and the books, I love some of the books... the Bible, of course. I don't believe in many of the stories but I like to read them... I don't have to believe in it to enjoy reading or to connect to these stories. And of course many other books; Jewish philosophers, religious and not religious... I'm trying to connect... to the Reformists because that's a very good way... otherwise where should I go to, either to a regular *Bet Knesset*, which... I have no intention of doing or to a library which... it's very lonely to, to open books alone... in a Reformist *Bet Knesset* I can ask the rabbi or other people who understand more than me and learn about it and read books.

Avi: I really think that every Jewish should know, just know not to do, not to believe, just know part of the Jewish tradition... I want to study sometime about our traditional culture, about the *mitzvot*, why we do it, what is the reason... [behind] the different holidays... I know a bit about the Jewish history... in... the Diaspora and all that... I think every Jewish should know these things as a part of his identity and so you don't have to be religious to be Jewish.

Moshe: So I'm doing it not only on *Shavuot*, I try to study... the Bible, the *Talmud...* It's because I find it interesting, because I find it a major part of my identity... in fact the only part in the identity is the cultural identity, and as a culture Judaism is the culture which I grew up on. It is not the only one. So if I would have to combine my identity I would say that 80% of it is this one... and 10% is[25]... and 5% is American because of all the influence we have here. And there is also maybe 1% from my trips around the world... I can also

---

[25] Country of birth, excised to protect identity.

divide it and say that the most crucial element of my identity is being a[26]... and I do think that one can be part of the Jewish nation and without being religious or without having a religion at all... not all people have... to have all the cultural aspects of Judaism. Maybe I like to do it because I like to study.

Eight respondents identified either as nominal Jews or as non-Jews, often as explicit responses to the Orthodox monopolisation of Jewish identity. As all these respondents are Jewish according to both *Halakha* and state law, their minimalisation or opting out of Jewish identity is important in problematising and stressing the voluntarism of what seems a natural category of self-ascription, ethnicity. It shows how public identities can fail to convince as representations of self or act as only a minor corollary of other identity elements:

D: So do you think that Jewish identity is necessarily... tied to religion?
Roni: That's a good question... Jewish identity throughout history was defined... by the 'other'. Being a Jew meant you were hated by all those anti-Semites... Once again I don't define myself as Jewish.

Ophir: Well too many people here... think that their way of being Jewish is... the only right way of being Jewish. And, of course, that's not true, there are many. You can be Jewish in many ways, not only in their way.
D: Tell me about your way of being Jewish anyway.
O: Oh, it's a very hard question... I ask myself every day... To tell you the truth I don't care too much... Primarily I'm a citizen of the world before being Jewish, before being Israeli. If I'm Jewish it's just because my mother was Jewish, that's all... I don't believe in God...
D: Do you have any interest in Jewish tradition at all?
O: Very little, I mean, I have nothing against it, of course, but I have more interesting things... I mean, when you say Jewish identity what's Jewish if not a religion?
D: Can there be such a thing as secular identity then, secular Jewish identity?

---

[26] Occupation excluded to protect identity.

O: Well, maybe yeah, but it also has to do with the religion, even if it's secular because. My parents, for example, they define themselves secular but you can't help it, their Jewish identity has religious marks, religious traits...

D: So you think Jewish identity's necessarily built on religious tradition, for example?

O: Yeah.

Raz: I never considered myself as a Jew. My parents were communists and I did not have a circumcision done by the rabbi but by a surgeon, and I did not celebrate bar mitzvah... but we do gather on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Pessach* my family.

Efrat: ...before I was a Marxist I used to think that I can have a relation to... Jewishness but now I don't feel that because, well objectively I am Jewish because my ancestors are Jewish but it doesn't mean anything to me... when I talk to people they're saying... "do you define yourself as Jewish?" I say, "Well the fact is I am because my mother is a Jew and her mother was a Jew and so on and so on". And they say "so why aren't you proud of it?" And I said, "It's two different things. One is the fact that I am, the second is... to say that it has any value", and I don't think who I am has any value. Like I'm not better because I am a Jew or because I'm a woman or because of anything.

Nir: I call myself atheist... I don't believe in God, I don't believe in any religion... Well I am a Jew whether I like it or not... there's certain things that you keep like on *Pessach,* Passover you do the big meal, stuff like that. It's not me keeping the *mitzvahs* and reading the Torah three times a day... it's basic stuff.

Gilad: It was during the officer's course and we were speaking about Jewish identity and everything and I told that I feel myself maybe technically I think I'm a Jew but I don't see anything Jewish about me... I don't see it as a... genetic thing and once you don't believe in something it doesn't have any meaning... people at first began to see it as quite a show, they thought I was extreme. But I can't imagine how can it be thought extreme. I always wondered how can you be in the middle on such a thing... I only started to see the effects days later when people actually started treating me differently... a few people were...

suddenly exploding at me and shouting "What are you doing here anyway and why do you serve in the army if you don't a Jew"... It was the first time I think I realised how much people can hate you just because you think something different than they do... I think being Jewish involves first of all having... faith, believing in the Jewish God... which complies you to do everything, the ceremonies and the prayers. It's like a package deal, but it's first of all being a believer. Since I'm not... a lot of people tell me "Ah... we don't exactly believe but we like to keep those sort of things because we think they're beautiful. Like, we like to keep some sort of ceremony". You know, it's very nice and everything but... how can it define me as something. I don't actually see why people do things they don't believe in.

Gilad denies the right of secular Jews to self-identify as such in premising Jewish identity on religiosity - an argument that shows the influence of Orthodox discourses, in my opinion. Gal concurs and relates his belief that holding to Jewish identity is impossible if one is to be a universalist and a humanist, a view supported by Ran:

Gal: No, honestly I don't think I'm Jewish... I understand Judaism as an agreement between man, individual and God. Since I am atheist I cannot be Jewish because I don't have the notion of God... I don't think like most of the Orthodox Jew... that you are born with a Jewish soul. I don't believe in dualism, I don't accept the dissertation that God send you a soul... since I'm not a dualist and I'm not believing in God I cannot be Jewish in the sense of you are a Jewish from birth no matter if you are doing the *mitzvot* or not, since you've got... a Jewish soul. So I'm not doing any of the *mitzvot* because I didn't do any agreement with God and I don't believe that I have a Jewish soul. Therefore I don't know any notion that I could be Jewish... I personally don't have the problem with identity. I think of myself as a humanist. Now a humanist have to be first of all cosmopolitan.

Ran: I don't define myself a Jewish. I support cancelling all nations.

Secular Israeli views on Jewish identity equate with Levine's (1997:74) study of New Zealand Jews in that their 'identification with' is essentially idiosyncratic and displays a

high degree of voluntary selection, far less mediated by social networks and community than religious - although the state plays a prominent role. As Liebman and Don Yehiya (1981:106) note Israeli atheists are able to identify as Jews and stand as ardent backers of the Jewishness of the state through pigeon-holing the religious tradition as relating solely to life cycle rituals and family associations rather than as imposing certain beliefs and practices. This holds true for the wider Israeli secular community in which religious modes of Jewish solidarity are constantly reinterpreted or rejected, dependant on their perceived utility in representing the Jewish self and family (Krausz & Tulea 1998:27, 30, 94). As such, secular Jewish-Israeli identity is neither "secularism by default" (Friedman cited in Liebman & Katz 1997:140) nor an absolute rejection of religious symbols and semantic fields relating to Jewishness but a vigorous, diverse and inherently modern trawling of tradition in pursuit of both personal meaning and a mode of relating to community (Krausz & Tulea 1997:30).

Israeli Identity

The idea of an independently secular Jewish nation is of relatively recent origin, and to this day its primary concepts suffer from a certain ideological fuzziness (ex-Meretz MK Amnon Rubinstein 1984:169).

Don Yehiya and Liebman (Lehman-Wilzig & Susser 1981:101-102) argue that the terms Israeli and Jewish are virtually synonymous for Israeli Jews, a finding explained by reference to a public survey result in which 93% thought that Israel should be a Jewish state and 64% believed that the state should adhere to Jewish values. It is in the vagueness and semantic mutability of references to a 'Jewish state' and 'Jewish values' that the power of Orthodox and Zionist discourses on these subjects lies; these terms are easy to agree with as general statements of preference with a content to be decided by others. The avalanche of religious understandings that swept aside secular civil religion from 1967 also helped to cement the hopeless confusion of Israeli and Jewish. The image of the Zionist, secular *sabra* now seems anachronistic and dated and has been replaced, if at all, by the template of the national-religious soldier-settler as the embodiment of modern Zionism - a new ideal with little appeal for many.

Given the general consensus on the desirability of a Jewish state the debate then turns on definitions of what this constitutes with regard to political institutions, identity politics, education, etc. Here again Orthodox have the advantage of possessing a long tradition which formulated the model of an observant Jewish state governed by *Halakha* within which each Jew has a responsibility to observe the *mitzvot* and thus speed the messianic redemption. Seculars have no such model from which to draw inspiration and around which to rally. Appeals to 'democracy', 'Zionism' or 'civil and human rights' as transcendent values tend to fall flat through a lack of semantic depth and lack a vital sense of Jewish specificity necessary for popular support. Perceived threats to lifestyle do enervate secular Israelis but do not play a direct role in identity politics and are easily bastardised by opponents as appeals to anti-religious sentiment and to selfish, individualistic materialism.

In order to test the perceived confusion of Jewish and Israeli I asked interviewees if they were able to separate the two. I also asked whether Israeli identity exists and if so what it consists of. In the first excerpt Raz separates Israeli from Jewish through categorising the latter as a religious identity like any other. He also mentions the efforts at identity boundary maintenance that prevent the striking of 'Jewish' nationality from Israeli identity cards:

Raz: Part... of our culture is the implosion of religious identity with national identity... on the identity card your nationality is Jewish and you are not allowed to change it to Israeli nationality. And I do believe that being Jewish is like being Christian... So I do believe that it is only a question of religious identity and if you are like myself, or if... [you] do not have any religious tendencies or beliefs... do not call... [yourself] Jewish. ...even the secular people believe that we must celebrate and keep our Jewish identity because it survived 2000 years and if we do not declare ourselves Jewish then what can happen with the Jewish nation. And they cannot conceive of being Israeli as being a substitute for being Jewish.

D: Would you say that being Israeli is your primary identification, national identification?

R: Yes...I will never say that I'm Jewish... I never have this problem here because nobody speaks about it. Whenever I'm abroad... people say, "You are Jewish". And it's very difficult to explain to them I'm not Jewish, I'm Israeli and most of my friends... Gentiles

do not practice their religion but they expect me because I'm Jewish to practice my religion.

D: What then is the difference between Jewish and Israeli identity? How would you define the two?

R: Very easy as I said: national versus religious. Ah, and of course, again this is very important… a Jewish-Israeli fear that… if we do not collapse this into this then Arabs can become Israelis as well. So in order to subordinate the Arabs, whatever their religion is, we have to say we are Jewish-Israelis and this is the same thing and then we can relegate them to outside of our society.

D: Does Israeli identity even exist?

Yuval: Yes, I think it does… Israeli identity is more related to the land and Jewish identity is more spiritual.

Yuval shares Raz' opinion that 'Israeli' and 'Jewish' identities are separable due to the religious connotations of the latter. His identification of Israeli identity with the land is an interesting one as it did not come up often as a theme in interviews, probably due to the association of *Eretz Yisrael* with the nationalist right, exemplified in Roi's ejaculation:

Roi: Being an Israeli it's good, being a Jew it means that you are a fascist.

Naaman believes that the death of classical Zionism opened the door for the definition of a specifically Israeli identity, while Idan appeals for the nationalisation of Israeli identity:

Naaman: My identity is Israeli and only a part of it is Jewish. [We are seeing] the death of Zionism and the beginning of an Israeli identity.

Idan: I think that we have to be Israelis like the French are French… it's very difficult because our history and our religious are mixed. I know what's religious and what is historical but I don't think most of the Jews knows that, not just the religious ones.

Several interviewees who favoured the existence of a separate Israeli identity made an effort to define its content and parameters, usually relying on behavioural or cultural arguments to make their case. Avi describes Israeli culture as a rich, vivacious, mongrel identity:

Avi: Israeli identity... is a combination of our Jewish identity... the Jewish people is always acting like a herd of sheeps... here... is a very, very weird and interesting combination between the fact that we came from more than a hundred countries and that we adopted... in very certain ways the Middle Eastern mentality, you know, we push, we loud, we tatatata [simulates car-horn] all the times... and it's created a unique... identity not culturally but more like in the way we behave. We brought the bananas from South America, we brought everything from all over the world and... we call it Israeli. So everything is Israeli. So, when I hear in anything that some people said about food, or music... that it's not Israeli I disagree... with that kind of thing because everything is Israeli now everything, everything. One thing I can tell you, the one thing that really is of ourself is the language. I really proud of... Hebrew because this is the one thing because it's abstract it's not something that we touch but this is the one thing that we really made by ourself.

Roni: I can define myself as an Israeli only because when I was young... I lived in Jerusalem, I smoked Israeli weed and I had Israeli friends... and I went to the Israeli beach, and that's it, and I like *falafel*... Israelis... don't give a damn and do whatever they want whenever they want... sometimes this ends up badly like in this... bridge that collapsed at the *Maccabiah,* for example. Sometimes it ends up in great stuff.

In the following excerpt, Yaron speaks of identity with regard to context, and of the importance of the army and secular Israeli festivals to Israeli identity. I don't share his belief in the efficacy of the latter in differentiating Israeli from Jewish identity given the failure of secularity to stamp its mark on these festivals and the increasing seep of religious symbols and discourses into official celebrations and commemorations.

Interestingly he also mentions fieldtrips as strengthening his sense of Israeliness:

Yaron: Since Judaism is both a nationality and religion when in Israel you feel Israeli... I would define myself as Israeli first and foremost... I find that when you're... anywhere else you need to identify yourself as a certain Jew so at times... you move back in, into Judaism again, etc. Did I believe in God when I read from the Torah, no I didn't But it was more of a traditional type thing it made it more important... being completely secular, the difference is that I look at Judaism as being a nationality not being religious... you get your national holidays which strengthen your secular or your Israeli identity, I think *Yom HaShoa, Yom Ha'atzmaoot,* Independence Day, Holocaust Day and Remembrance Day definitely strengthen your [identity]. You do a lot of fieldtrips... being a small country you can pretty much branch out all the way across, that strengthens [identity]. Army definitely makes you feel your strength in your identity with the country.

Efrat: I like Israeli movies [laughs], cult movies. I like certain Israeli jokes... because the mainstream is so not me here I like all the alternative things like all the
D: [interrupts] So you're searching for... your own identity as an Israeli on, on the fringes of society?
E: Yeah, exactly, especially, especially... in art... like Israeli satire, I think is the best satire in the world because there's so much shit here there's so much to laugh about.

Six respondents felt that it was impossible to make a clear cut differentiation between what is Israeli and what is Jewish:

Noam: Yes, I think that Judaism it's nationalism... Israeli or Jewish, I think that you can't put primary one [one first].

Amit: For me they're intact... I cannot see where do I begin to be Jewish and stop being Israeli, or... being Israeli, stop being Jewish. For me they are combined. For me being Israeli and being Jewish are... almost the same. But I can see in other people that you can be Israeli and not be a Jew, or you can be a Jew and not be Israeli. Or you can be a Jewish-

Israeli and differentiate between the two identities saying at home I'm a Jew, outside I'm Israeli... But I can see them as the same unity inside myself.

Dalia: I see my Jewish identity in my nationality... It's really hard because I would say my culture but there are a lot of things... in Jewish culture... that I am so not proud of and I so don't wanna see... Violence... and rude behaviour and

D: Do you think that's Israeli culture or Jewish culture?

Dalia: That's the thing that I don't know... the separation is not there.

Boaz: I can't really make the distinction between what's Israel and what's Jewish for me at least because for me... it's the same.

Nir views this semantic confusion as of great consequence for the future of Israel as a democratic state:

Nir: I think that being Israeli, whether you like it or not, is being Jewish even if you're an Arab it means...

D: [interrupts] It's a Jewish culture isn't it really?

N: Yeah, it's a Jewish country. That's the big argument that people don't know if it's a Jewish country or a democratic country...

D: [interrupts] Can it be both?

N: No way can it be both if you're Jewish and you're not religious stay out of this country. That's what I want to do get the hell outta here.

Ehud was the only interviewee to relate that he felt more Jewish than Israeli, although others probably felt the same way but were chary of expressing it:

Ehud: Israeli to me... is that I live here... Of course the language has a lot of influence... Israel means to me that even if I live for 30 years in New Zealand, in the United States or any other where I'll always be Israeli no matter what happens... Judaism is something more vague. It has a sense of much deeper meaning going into the history, the tradition.

D: Do you think that the two are interconnected in certain ways?

E: They are interconnected now, obviously they work. They're interconnected to me because I am an Israeli citizen... And of course they're interconnected but you come to the point where you need to distinguish between the two... basically I feel more Jewish but there are times when I feel more Israeli. But, if I need to weigh them then I do feel more Jewish.

In summation, most Meretz activists felt that it was possible to differentiate between Israeli and Jewish identity and some made an effort to do so indicating forethought on the subject given that they had no time to ruminate before answering. Overall this result is unsurprising - if any group in Israel could be expected to separate between Israeli and Jewish identity it would be activists of a militantly secular party. Nonetheless it is important as an indicator of an enforced voluntarism in imagining the Israeli, and of the failure of state-sponsored civil religion to make a clean suture in representing the Frankenstein body-politic as a Jewish-Israeli entity. Where a widespread confusion exists between the two identities, there is also a profound dissensus for secular Israelis in equating their own experiences of being Israeli and Jewish with the explicitly religious understandings of the Jewish collective fostered in public discourses. These explicitly negate secularity as a valid form of Jewish or Israeli life.

Who is a Jew?

Given the importance of Israel as the first sovereign Jewish entity in two millennia, its self-perception as a place of refuge for Jews, and the fact that around a third of world Jewry lives within its borders, the state's stand on the 'who is a Jew' issue is of greater consequence to world Jewry than any decision ever made by rabbinical authorities. The Law of Return raised the stakes considerably, without solving the issue, in ensuring the right of all Jews to Israeli citizenship without setting the boundaries of the collective - the buck being passed initially to the Interior Ministry and Rabbinate to rule as they saw fit.

In the Brother Daniel case of 1958, the Supreme Court provided the first definition under the Law of Return by ruling that a Catholic brother who had voluntarily converted to Catholicism had in doing so cast himself beyond the bounds of the Jewish community - this

despite his assertion that he still believed himself to be Jewish (Sachar 1996:604). This judgement established the right of the state to override *Halakha* in defining 'who is a Jew' for most purposes of state (excluding personal status issues) given that according to Jewish law Brother Damien was still a Jew. Sachar (1996:604) relates that the Orthodox authorities probably acquiesced due to the fact that the criteria for recognition as a member of the Jewish people were tightened rather than relaxed by the decision. Certainly this seems to be true given the coalition crises and storms of protest that were to follow later governments' attempts to impose more liberal criteria.

In March 1958, Interior Minister Israel Bar-Yehuda set in motion the next crisis over the issue in seeking to systematise his ministry's handling of claims to Jewish nationality by informing his officials that "good faith" claims would be accepted both for adults claiming to be Jews and for their children (Sachar 1996:606; Zucker & Zucker 1973:173-174). Here Bar-Yehuda showed a preference for self-ascription similar to the views of many Meretz activists and set the stage for the total separation of Jewish nationality from Orthodox religious understandings of community and belonging, despite the fact that religious definitions would still hold sway over personal status issues. It set in train a prolonged crisis in which a cabinet decision to back Bar-Yehuda led to national-religious resignations and threats from the Herut, General Zionists and Progressives to join the religious in an attempt to bring down the Ben Gurion government over the matter (Sachar 1996:604-606; Zucker & Zucker 1973:179; Lehman, Wilzig & Susser 1981:140). Ben Gurion's response in placating Rabbi Yehuda Maimon is also important. The prime minister argued that the Declaration of Independence guaranteed religious freedom and conscience rather than proclaiming the rule of religious law (Sachar 1996:605). The same argument is made today by Meretz with regard to religious coercion and identity politics, and I noticed copies of the Declaration on several office walls in *Mercaz Meretz*. In an attempt to defuse the crisis Ben Gurion asked 43 *Hahamei Yisrael* ('Wise Men of Israel') to provide their definitions of 'who is a Jew'. Most were Orthodox religious sages and the result was predictable (Krausz & Tulea 1998:36). While many emphasised the need for openness and tolerance in interpretation, the majority swung behind *Halakha* as the ultimate arbiter of Jewish identity. Even the non-observant came out strongly for maternal Jewishness as a necessity in the absence of conversion (Krausz & Tulea 1996:36, 57-58,

60). With this 'easy out' and two years of coalition strife avoided, 1960 saw the drafting of new regulations signalling total victory for the religious in establishing Jewish maternity and conversion to the pre-existing ban on those who had converted to another religion as determinants of Jewish identity for the offices of state (Sachar 1996:606).

This status quo held until 1970 when Benyamin Shalit was successful in his appeal to the Supreme Court to have his children - born of a Gentile mother - recognised as Jews on their identity cards. Again it was the NRP leading opposition to the loophole opened by the Supreme Court judgement in favour of Shalit and the ambiguity on this point of law was ended through the introduction of new legislation, with Shalit's treated as a one-off case. However, the new law also gave a small victory to liberal opinion in not specifying the manner in which conversions were to be carried out, a breach later exploited by liberal Judaism in forcing non-Orthodox conversion procedures on the Orthodox via the Neeman Commission which proposed the establishment of a joint Orthodox-Reform/Conservative conversion institution to prepare candidates for conversion and a new system of rabbinic courts to rule on the matter - moves effectively stymied by Orthodox intransigence (Sachar 1996:606-607; Haaretz, 2/3/00; Report of the Neeman Committee 11/2/98).

As with other aspects of the *kulturkampf*, crises regarding 'who is a Jew' are increasing in their frequency and impact aided by the growing activism of the Supreme Court in a series of liberal rulings on issues dealing with nationality and conversion. In November 1999 the Supreme Court was asked to rule on the Jewish identity of 40 converts to Judaism refused registration as Jews by the Interior Ministry due to their conversions not being recognised in what was described by columnist Akiva Eldar (Haaretz, 4/10/99) as "Meretz's first test vis-à-vis the thousands of Reform and Conservative Jews who contributed large sums so that Yossi Sarid could make their Israeli brothers and sisters part of the Jewish consensus". I did not hear of any Reform or Conservative funding of the party. The fact that the equally secularist Yisrael B'aliyah party was in control of the ministry limited Meretz' influence but it is true that Meretz has worked for some years with the Reform movement's Israel Religious Action Committee (IRAC) in seeking the liberalisation of regulations interpreting the Law of Return, in bringing cases before the Supreme Court relating to this and non-Orthodox conversions, and in protesting injustices related to these. I personally attended two protests outside the Tel Aviv Rabbinical Courts and was part of a

graffiti squad that (working outside the party's purview) spray-painted Interior Ministries in major cities to protest the pending deportation of a Russian woman whose son was killed fighting in the IDF.

In February 2000 the Supreme Court ruled 10-1 that the Interior Ministry must recognise as Jews those converted in non-Orthodox ceremonies outside Israel in the state's population register. Uri Regev, the head of IRAC and a parliamentary candidate in Meretz primaries, lauded the decision; "The court is asserting that, legally speaking, this is not the state of the Jewish religion but of the Jewish people, and the Jewish people are composed of several denominations and each must be respected" (Jerusalem Report 25/3/02:22-23). Columnist Moshe Negbi (Jerusalem Report 25/3/02:46) was not as impressed, "with the Supreme Court's decision to grant the most restricted possible recognition of Reform and Conservative conversions... The decision leaves in place most of the discrimination against the non-Orthodox, violating both the principle of equality before the law and the principle of religious freedom".

It is important to note that the imbroglio over foreign conversions only came about due to a Shas directive in 1996, following a 1989 decision forcing recognition of conversions by any "recognised" community overseas, that workers in the Interior Ministry must insist that such converts be "integrated into the converting congregation", i.e. converts would have to live in their converting community for an indeterminate period to be eligible for Israeli citizenship (Gross 25/3/02:22-23). In effect this negated the Court's ruling and was used to block all non-Orthodox converts from making *aliyah*.

The impact of the Supreme Court's 2002 decision was extremely limited; Shas announcing a delay in implementation to "study" the decision and the Shas leader and Interior Minster Eli Yishai gave several interviews in which he stated that he would do everything in his power to see that the decision was never implemented (Haaretz, 6/3/02; Jerusalem Report 25/3/02:22-23). Orthodox control of personal status issues remained unaffected thereby (Haaretz, 22/2/02). Shinui's assumption of the Interior Ministry mantle in March 2003 was termed a "revolution" by the new minister, Shinui deputy and ex-Meretz MK Avraham Poraz (Haaretz, 13/3/03). Poraz' proposed changes to ministry conduct included the rescinding of a ban on the Islamic Movement's newpaper, opposition to previous Shas efforts to strip those Israeli-Arabs accused of involvement in terror attacks

of Israeli citizenship, and to back civil marriage for those unable to marry under *Halakha*. Poraz informed heads of local authorities that fund transfers would no longer be conditioned on the construction of religious institutions in their municipalities and stated that the files of those refused entry to the country due to questions concerning their Jewishness were to be reviewed in what Poraz termed "a humanistic and enlightened policy that views a person as a person, irrespective of whether he is according to Jewish law" (Haaretz, 13/3/03).

The discourse surrounding these changes was typical of the Israeli *kulturkampf*. Former Interior Minister Yishai fulminated, "They are going to open the gates of the country, and that endangers the state's existence". Poraz responded; "We are proud to be Jews and we do not intend to change the Jewish character of the state, but we are also proud to be part of a universal culture" (Haaretz, 13/3/03). His proposal in May 2003 that Reform and Conservative conversions in Israel be recognised as citizens presages a future Supreme Court ruling (yet to be made at time of writing). Poraz asked for this stance to be presented to the court as the state's opinion on the matter (Haaretz, 21/5/03). NRP head Effi Eitam immediately called on PM Sharon to strip Poraz of the power to grant citizenship.

Regardless of the result of these clashes it is obvious that the growing crisis over 'who is a Jew' springs from a total breakdown in the status quo and speaks also to the failure of consociationalism in a *kulturkampf* increasingly characterised by a 'winner takes all' mentality and a total lack of middle ground. We now turn our attention to Meretz activist opnions on 'who is a Jew'. I asked interviewees to provide me with their definitions. To generalise, most favoured at least a measure of self-ascription in Jewish identification and rejected *Halakhic* understandings while emphasising the possession of a shared culture and sense of belonging.

D: Who is a Jew for you?

Danny: OK, anyone who's... persecuted for being a Jew...

D: [interrupts] Is it *Halakhic* as well?

Dy: No, no, no, no, no certainly not.

D: Is it... self-ascription.

Dy: ...it's enough that you feel Jewish. It's bad enough to be a Jew come on [laughs]... you have to know something about... not necessarily the religious aspect of Judaism, but the cultural aspect of Judaism... that and wanting to be a Jew.

Amir: I guess a Jew is anyone who wants to and feels a Jew, not necessarily because his mother is Jewish in all the *Halakha* laws.

Ehud and Amit also reject matrilineal descent as the basis for Jewish identification while emphasising the need for a commitment to the Jewish people beyond simple self-ascription:

Ehud: My definition is that Jewish is not necessarily someone who is born to a Jewish mother but someone who sees himself as a Jewish, and wants to be part of the Jewish, and understands what the commitments are, etc., etc. That's my definition, and I have to say that the definition is very problematic... The commitments of being Jewish is to acknowledge the fact that you are part of... the long, long generations of the Jewish people... The fact that you belong... to a people... it's something that is so deep inside of you, and not decide one day that... it's not a part of you. You share with all your feelings, with all of your heart that this religion, that this group of people means something to you and that's what I mean by the commitment...
D: Do you have a responsibility... to propagate the tradition?
E: Yes, but it's not something that I feel as being responsible, it feels like something which is so natural to me that I don't feel it as a responsibility.

Amit: Whoever thinks of himself as Jew and considers himself a part of the Jewish big family, or tribe, or even community... he is a Jew. But if I have to think of it more I might turn out to be a little bit more conservative then... Maybe I'll have to ask him... [if he] really want to be Jew to do something about it... like, if you want to be an American citizen you have to take an exam. So to take an exam... I can differentiate between Judaism as a religion and Jewishness as a nation... So maybe Jewishness is more of the Jewish nation and Judaism is Jewish religion... To me Jewish is an affiliation to a group who has certain

history, who has a certain culture. And the culture and history are combined with the Jewish religion... the history and culture of the Jewish people was affected and done by Jewish religion because of historical reasons. And to ignore this would be stupid. You have to look at this and say it, say it out loud... this is a part of my heritage, part of my history. A bad part, a good part, never mind, but this is a part. Now the thing is to see how I react to it. And I think that today I can look at it as part of a history and still look at myself as a Jewish person without being a religious Jew, without looking to all the monotheistic beliefs of Judaism.

Yuval backs self-ascription but is unsure of what conversion should consist of. His interest in the Bible as a marker of identity and as a moral referent is worthy of note and is an interest expressed by others - though not on tape:

Yuval: The one who believes he is a Jew is a Jew... I don't think it should be something very cruel [laughs] but even the ceremony I don't know if one should stand in a place and say "I am a Jew, I am a Jew, I am a Jew" and he becomes a Jew... I more identify... with some of the moral points of Judaism not with the history. I heard a lecture from a professor from Meretz, who is a professor in my university... He can solve every problem in Israel with only the Bible... that's... the best quality I can find in Judaism, to use the Bible to solve everything.

Yaron would like to see the acknowledgement of self-ascription but doubts its efficacy as a means for imagining the Jewish community:

Yaron: ...my idea of what would be a Jew would be for a lot more of yourself believing you're a Jew and a lot less of your culture around you believing you're a Jew. Well let's say an Orthodox religious Jew would believe that what you feel is much less important and what the society thinks is much more important... By my standards being a Jew means... that you feel a Jew and that should suffice. But unfortunately in society today that doesn't really work.

Yossi's interview excerpt is interesting in that he sketches a format for secular conversions to Jewish identity based on learning the culture, history and language, which could be described as a trinity useful in imagining the 'stuff' of secular Jewish-Israeli identity:

D: ...can you be a Jew without conversion do you think?

Yossi: Yeah, yeah, that's what I'm saying... I think you have... to go through some learning process. That can be by yourself or in some other institute but you have... to know the history, the culture. It will be... better if you know the language... and live here in Israel, but you can be also in the States. But you have... to know some basic things and connect.

Tali's is a more conservative approach. She strays from *Halakha* in partially supporting paternal descent:

Tali: For one thing I think that the fact that you are born a Jewish make you a Jewish... I really think that people ... that are born to a Jewish family even if he's a mix and he's decided that he's a Jewish, he's a Jewish... I think the fact that you're born a Jewish it doesn't matter... if it's a mother or father but if it's a mother it's easier for sure because it's like...

D: [interrupts] Yeah, because it's the *Halakhic* definition.

T: Yeah its, yeah, and its like more official you know?

Vered: Oh my God... I thought about it so much and I don't have an answer because I think that Jewish is everyone that feels Jewish...

D: Would you feel comfortable if someone for example converted in Reform or Conservative?

V: Yeah, yeah, of course. Because I believe if someone wanted to be Jewish I hope it's not for the money or to marry someone, its really from the...

D: [interrupts] From the heart?

V: Yeah, from the heart. I hope so.

Omer denies the right of anyone to determine Jewish identity for the individual and bemoans the Orthodox public monopoly on matters related to identity:

Omer: My personal belief is someone who believes he's a Jew is a Jew... If they think they're Conservative, if they do things differently, who am I to say that if you do one thing one way is a good Jew and another way is not a Jew at all... I can't be a judge and neither can any of the others as much as I can see. Maybe they're more knowledgeable than me, but I don't think that that is something that knowledge is enough.

D: Right, so *Halakha* is not enough in this case, *Halakhic* knowledge?

O: Right, I don't think it is enough... I think that the Orthodox Jews are making it even more extreme than it may be...

D: There's an argument that's made by a couple of authors that I've read that since the creation of the state the concept of *Halakhic humrah, Halakhic* stringency has become far more important than it was in the Diaspora where you had to be more moderate within communities.

O: ...I think that's true... in all of the modern countries in the world it's hardest for a Jew to live in Israel unless you're an Orthodox religious Jew. It's hardest if you're a Conservative... if you believe in anything you will be accepted in most countries, all of the modern countries except for Israel.

Yuli chose to focus on the Jewishness of new immigrants from the Soviet Union possibly due to the fact that she is an immigrant himself:

Yuli: The problem of the fact that many Russians... according to the *Halakha* are not Jewish... But in my opinion Israel gave a national promise to the Jewish identity. Now to be Jewish is a kind of belonging to a national group. And in my opinion...someone... who arrived from Russia, OK. Let's say you only have one of his four grandfathers, grandparents who were Jewish, OK, so he could receive the Israeli citizenship according to the Law of Return. But he himself is not a Jew.

Conclusion

Secular Jewish identity is extremely hard to pin down given that its foundations are not specifically anti-religious but lie in the individual's interpretation of their own identity. Its impact on self-understanding is also highly individuated with their Jewish identity being extremely important to some and relatively inconsequential for others. Secular Jewish-Israeli identity is far less mediated by social networks and community than religious identities and suffers from a lack of popular support due to the pre-eminence of Orthodox understandings in Israeli identity politics. Secularist organisations such as Meretz play a key role in giving form and a sense of 'groupness' to the incoherence of secular Jewish-Israeli identity politics as engines of cultural production. We now explore secular Jewish identity further by turning our attention to socialisation, identifying the family as the key social unit for learning Jewish identity, and the 'little tradition' of hag and home as its basis.

Chapter 6: Secular-Jewish Socialisation

Identity transmission occurs in the family, school and other significant environments where interaction takes place. Through such exchanges the individual learns the constituent elements of identity and modes of imagining these in relation to each other. Here we discuss the primary role of family in Jewish-Israeli socialisation, positing the home and holidays as essential in both learning and experiencing secular Jewish identity. We also relate to the confusion of observance with the meaning of performance in the most important survey of Jewish-Israeli beliefs and observances, the Guttman Report (Levy, Levinsohn & Katz 1993) and discuss its findings with relation to the *kulturkampf*. After considering the relationship of interviewees to important holidays as signifiers of identity, and discussing family voting patterns, we finish with a brief analysis of the role of the education system in inculcating an abridged form of the religious tradition that promotes Jewish particularism.

A Response to the Guttman Report

Ariel: Israel society is not interested in being secular. You can see the statistics of people who practice, as I said before, *Pessach* or Yom Kippur. You know I think that 75% of the Israeli population fasts on Yom Kippur or something like that. And I think I read only the other day 90% of families or households have mezuzah.

The Guttman Report (Levy, Levinsohn & Katz 1993), looking into the observance, beliefs and social interaction of Israeli Jews, constitutes the most thorough survey yet on Jewish-Israeli religiosity and its expressions. As such, it is a necessary starting point for any study of the relationship between Judaism and Jewish identity, particularly given the continuum of beliefs and observance evinced across society and the authors' interpretation of this as signaling an exaggeration of religious-secular tensions by *kulturkampf* adherents.

To run quickly through some of the more interesting findings of this 1991 survey of 1200 adults from all Israeli-Jewish communities: affiliation broke down as 44% non-aligned, 6% *haredi*, 12% national-religious, 6% Reform and 29% mostly or somewhat

religious/traditional. With regard to *kashrut,* 69% reported that they always eat kosher food at home; 78% of non-observant always attend a Seder and 71% fast on Yom Kippur. Non-observant 'Western' (Ashkenazi) Jews are the most isolated socially from other groups. Every observance group believed that the majority of Israeli Jews shared the same level of observance as themselves. Of the entire survey sample, 59% attend synagogue on the High Holidays; 39% definitely support civil marriage with 44% definitely opposed, 16% saying they would definitely opt for a civil wedding. Seventy percent of non-observant Jews wanted less religion in the state with 42% of respondents wanting a total divorce between the two (39% were opposed); 94% believed that non-kosher food should be provided in the army and 90% supported the conscription of yeshiva boys. Thirty-nine percent believed in the coming of the Messiah, 29% doubted it, and 32% didn't believe at all. Two-thirds favoured public transport and the opening of movie theatres on Shabbat and 63% believing completely in God with 37% doubting or not believing at all (Levy, Levinsohn & Katz 1993:6,11,15, 34, 51-52, 86, 93-95, 97).

So, does the obviously high level of observance expressed above prove the existence of a continuum of belief and observance and the traditional bent of most Israelis, favoured by the authors in interpreting their results? Does it speak of the "misleading" characterisation of Israeli society as cleft by secular-religious divisions (Levy, Levinsohn & Katz 1993:1)? Certainly, a continuum is uncovered with regard to belief and observance, and the ethnic and religious corollaries thereto, that we should keep in mind when discussing seculars and religious as groups with dichotomous desires, interests, motivations and intentions. However, it is important to note that these explanatory features go largely unreported in this study, with intention and motivation subsumed by practice. One lesson of the Guttman Report is that we can neither speak of two separate, opposed publics divided by belief and observance, nor set strict boundaries to these groups.

However, with regard to the primary focus of the Report, the Israeli *kulturkampf* has very little to do with beliefs and observances - as we shall see below with the significant holding to many aspects of both by secular Meretz activists. The Israeli culture war is concerned with Jewish identity politics, **public** observance, personal status issues, political power over public monies and resources, territory, education, etc. None of these have much to do with beliefs and observances at all aside from the fact that Ashkenazi, middle-class

Jews tend to also be secular and have expanded the meaning of this term as a badge of identity rather than it acting as a descriptor of non-religiosity. As such the survey's authors have missed the mark in expanding an interesting and informative survey of belief and observance into a denial of *kulturkampf* that their findings do not support because they don't directly relate.

With regard to observances, only the 69% who reported keeping *kashrut* was particularly surprising and is a figure I think might be lowered significantly if actual practice in the home was observed. Personally, I was never in a house'that kept *kashrut* in more than a perfunctory manner in three and a half years in Israel, though this may well have been a function of the fact that my social circle was largely made up of Meretz activists or supporters. As we have seen in Chapter 4, *kashrut* is not a subject of great concern for most secular militants except where theo-political strictures prevent their eating whatever they wish. With regards to belief, the 63% who expressed firm belief in God constitutes the smallest proportion of believers in God that I have ever heard of - the figure in New Zealand (in many ways a more secular society than Israel) is somewhere between 80-90%.

Of far greater relevance to the culture war is the large majority opposing draft exemptions for yeshiva boys and favouring Shabbat public transport and movie openings. Here the majority of survey respondents reject the status quo, a fact that militates against the interpretation of survey results as discounting *kulturkampf,* as does the finding that 70% of non-observant wanted less religion in Israeli public life. These results directly contradict Levy's, Levinsohn's and Katz' (1993:1) reading of their survey as does their later admission that, "The assessment of the *haredim* by the non-observant, and the anti-religious by the observant, is not only less positive - it borders on a very strong rejection" (Levy, Levinsohn & Katz 1993:79). Their equating non-observance with anti-religiosity is highly questionable, if not derogatory, and perhaps speaks somewhat to the guiding vision of the study.

The Report itself was manna from heaven for religious polemicists. The political left was excoriated by the *haredi* press for having lied to the public about the secularity of Israel. The head of *Agudat Israel,* MK Avraham Ravitz, called for a Knesset debate on the Guttman Report to disprove the theory that religious constitute a minority - a questionable

claim given the survey's figures on affiliation (Liebman & Katz 1997:46-47, 55). Liebman (Liebman & Katz 1997:63) argued that the Report showed that a small group within society was observant while the majority flesh out a ritual pattern of living through selection and the reinterpretation of traditional elements. Katz (Liebman & Katz 1997:80) explains the importance of this voluntarism; "The very idea of picking and choosing is unacceptable to Orthodox Judaism but is widespread among Jewish-Israelis".

Nonetheless, the Report shows that when most Israeli Jews refer to collective national identity this identity is defined by concepts, symbols and values taken from the religious tradition (Kimmerling cited in Liebman & Katz 1997:105). As we have seen in Chapter Two, the new Israeli civil religion is founded on religio-ethnic particularism, building on the failure of classical Zionism and 'statism' to free themselves from reliance on the symbolic fields and conceptual repertoire of Judaism sufficiently to create an alternative system of Jewish cultural representation. Secular Israelis see no essential contradiction in their imagining coherent Jewish selves through a process of selection from the same religious tradition they reject as a political system and code for life, and refuse to affiliate to. We will see this theme - and that of selection - repeating itself constantly in the discussion below on the secular celebration of religious festivals.

The 'Little Tradition': *Hag* & Family as the Seat of Jewish Identity

Family has long been recognised by the social sciences as a vital seat of cultural learning, continuity and reproduction. It is also one of the most difficult areas to study as the privacy of the family home (in Western societies) does not usually allow for the lengthy intrusion required by various exploratory techniques. A problem of specificity and generalisation remains when translating family experience onto the broader canvas of the public realm. As such, the 'little tradition' of the domestic sphere (as opposed to the 'big tradition' of explicit *Halakhic* observance) goes woefully under-reported in the survey data and interview material that are the bases on which social scientific assumptions are made. This critique is also relevant for our discussion given the difficulty of recording the experience of *kulturkampf* rather than its modes and public face.

I devoted a section of the interview questionnaire to issues related to how religious festivals are celebrated in the home, Jewish symbolisation in the household, and how

respondents related both to religiosity and Jewish tradition. The purpose of this was to bring to light the domestic socialisation of Jewish identity in secular homes. The domestic celebration of religious festivals is treated as a matter of little public import (except by religious proselytisers) and suffers from a resultant lack of significance in the eyes of many interviewees. Questions related to this subject were often met with a mixture of bemusement and boredom, particularly when compared to questions on the peace process, Meretz and religious coercion. Nonetheless, the information garnered is of great import to understanding the socialisation, experience and expression of secular Jewish-Israeli identity.

One surprising result was the number of Meretz activists who claimed ownership of the Jewish tradition and were actively engaged in both studying and interpreting the tradition as a way of understanding and expressing their own Jewish identity. Others felt no compulsion to address the tradition at all, but most at least participated in religious festivals with family while taking a critically reflexive attitude to the elements of tradition reflected therein. Both responses testify to the omnipresent and unavoidable nature of the religious tradition as a template to be addressed, rejected and reinterpreted by secular Jews in imagining the self. The constant ferment of personal reproduction is typical of modern identity politics and is an uncertainty not faced by those with an implicit faith in the tenets and stipulations of Orthodox Judaism, hence the legitimacy given this certitude in *kulturkampf* struggles when related to secular identity heterogeneity. In the first excerpt below notice how Moshe discounts the possibility of other seculars studying the religious tradition as a way of preparing for holiday celebration as he does. This practice is actually quite common amongst the Meretz activists I spoke to.

D: Do you celebrate Jewish festivals at home?
Moshe: Well, yes... although not always in the way we should celebrate them... And actually I do like these festivals, and also I'm doing things that many other secular people will not do. Like on *Shavuot* there is... a night of studying the Bible, the Ruth book in the Bible and some other stuff... and this is something that most public do not [do] and I like to do it from time to time, but I am going to do it with the Reform or the Conservative group...
D: Is there any religious importance to the festivals for you?

M: No ...I like to understand the religious aspects... I have no spiritual dimension whatsoever.

D: Do you celebrate Jewish festivals in your house?

Avi: Yeah, not really just more... to do part of the *mitzvot* [so] to speak... what I'm doing in a couple of the last years is that every holiday I go to the encyclopedia to check about the certain holiday why does it happen... what are the meaning of the holiday in order... to be more educated.

D: That's nice. Do you believe that you follow some *mitzvot*?

A: No... not from religious reasons. I don't believe in Torah. I'm not religious, but I can say that I have a very strong Jewish identity.

Avi's response is typical in rejecting the idea that holiday observance constitutes the performance of *mitzvot*, an important point to make given the absence of motivation as a factor in the Guttman Report's interpretation of the meanings of performance. Yossi brings forth the significance of family togetherness as central to the holiday experience, again a common theme:

Yossi: ...the family we celebrate the Jewish... the common ones... Hanukah, *Pessach*... it's a tradition... that's... the family meeting time except for funerals... and weddings... basically it's... my mother's close and... a little extended family.

Tali: And the main holidays are more like tradition. That's the tradition that's handed to me through the family with the friends.

D: Does your family celebrate the Jewish festivals and if so do you agree with the way they celebrate them?

Gilad: Not exactly. They're celebrating them less and less... both of my parents came from very religious families. I can see why it took them a while... to cut themselves off completely from it. I think we, as children, influenced a lot the cutting off and its more, mainly because there is a holiday it's like a gathering of the family

D: Are there any religious dimensions. For example, in *Pessach* do you read the *Haggadah* (The ceremonial text used at the Passover *Seder*) and stuff like that?

G: Not anymore. I think if we do it... right now, it's because my sister have small children and wanted them... to know things... you tell them some people believe some don't, things I didn't really grow up on. We grew up on... there is a God and... the education system simply gives you as a fact there are certain things. The question doesn't come up. We try to, to raise the question. We don't want them to grow up ignorant.

Gilad speaks of the importance of knowing the tradition and of socialising children into awareness of their Jewish identity and to reflexive thinkers with regards to the tradition. He mentions the importance of the secular education system as a powerful socialising agent, a theme we will return to below. Eli's family stopped celebrating religious festivals with the 'excommunication' of his family by the Orthodox rabbinical authorities. This is an extreme example of the de-Judaising impact of the Orthodox monopoly on secular Israeli society, a common theme in discussions with Meretz activists.

Eli: Yeah, my life would have been totally different if I weren't Jewish. You know, I still remember all the holidays we used to celebrate, which we don't celebrate anymore because my Mom's...

D: How come.

Amit: Because of, of the whole *Rabanoot* thing.

D: Oh, OK, so she, she turned away from the...

Amit: It's amazing, they, they got... the privilege.

Passover

> I know of no other single ancient memory... which serves as a better symbol of our present and future than the memory of the exodus from Egypt (Berl Katznelson, Labour-Zionist ideologue cited in Liebman 1983:49).

Passover elicited by far the greatest response of all the religious festivals discussed in interviews. Research participants tended to have a very clear understanding of the

importance of *Pessach* to them as Jews and as members of Jewish families, and of the significance of the holiday to wider Israeli society. Liebman (1983:49-50) relates that Labour-Zionism realised early that Passover could be reinterpreted in a manner commensurate with Zionist socialism and nationalism. The kibbutzim produced a variety of new *Haggadot* which extirpated God from the text while emphasising the naturist, nationalist and agricultural elements of the holiday tradition, or class and revolutionary themes, depending on each kibbutz' ideological propensities (Liebman 1983:50). These texts changed from year to year and in some kibbutzim came full circle, returning to the traditional religious *Haggadah*, deity and all. Here it is pertinent to note that most Meretz activists interviewed were from Israel's three major cities (particularly Tel Aviv) and that a dislike for the kibbutzim and their power within Meretz was often expressed. Therefore, the kibbutz experience of Passover is not that of the majority of respondents. However a number did grow up on kibbutzim in which the secular ritual reformulations were still practised, including Ehud. Yuval was the only respondent to report private use of a kibbutz *Haggadah* though most spoke of attenuating and reinterpreting the text, while reading, to suit them.

Ehud: The kibbutz we have our own interpretation of the *Haggadah* and we celebrate all the holidays with our own interpretation which means that we read the whole *Haggadah* and people are singing and people are reading etc... It's in the dining hall and... people are taking part of it and someone is organising it, makes sure that the majority of the people are involved and everyone has his own part... some are dancing, some are reading, and some are singing. It... gives you a feeling of belonging which is very nice.

D: It sounds like a big family thing.

E: It is, it is, it is...

D: Tell me a little bit about how the *Haggadah* is used in your kibbutz.

E: ...The kibbutz culture respects a lot the religion but the main idea is the different interpretations of religion... and so the *Haggadah* it's just like your going through the things that really happened but you don't treat them as a must, you treat them... as nice stories that should be part of the tradition passed from generation to generation, but not more than that.

Yuval: I don't know, I think it's [the *Haggadah*] from the *Hashomer Hatzair*.

D: Tell me... about the Seder itself.

Y: The Seder itself? The main line was more or less like a religious, religious Seder, it was some part of it. Reading parts and singing parts... So the frame was more or less the same, the food was the same... it's the same text but some words are different... No mentions of God of course.

Aviv: I think that religious is an important part of the Jewish identity but I do recognise that for people who don't believe it's impossible to celebrate Jewish holidays, no, it is possible... Israel... permits it, really. For instance when I was... in the kibbutz of my cousin, it's a kibbutz from *Hashomer Hatzair*... So it's a collective Seder with all the members of the kibbutz in the *hedder ochel* [dining room] and even the *Haggadah*... It's special for the kibbutz movement. OK, you have the main things but in a kibbutz in the kibbutznik way... but *Pessach* with my family in the United States[27] it was a really important celebration because it's the favourite of my father... the signification of *Pessach* for him is a signification of national liberation... From enslavement and going back to Israel.

Though the Seder mentioned above took place in the Diaspora, Aviv's father's emphasis on national liberation and the return to Zion as key themes accurately reflect the tenor of Passover and other holiday celebrations in Israel. In particular, emphasis is placed on elements stressing Jewish particularism and miracles of national salvation in the face of overwhelming odds.

Ophir: We have a family Seder... we always do it... with an enlarged family... uncles and cousins...

D: So tell me about the *Haggadah* as well, do you read the full *Haggadah*?

O: Yeah, we read it all, or most of it.

---

[27] Country changed to protect identity.

D: Are you happy with that? Do you think it's an important part of your Jewish identity to celebrate in this way?

O: Of course, it's nice. Important, it's not, I mean there are much more important things to me than Jewish identity.

With Ophir, we see the importance of *Pessach* as a family celebration overwhelming his misgivings about identifying as a Jew. For those with a universalistic orientation holiday celebrations may serve as the only real connection to a Jewish particularism they reject in other settings, allowing them to touch base with Jewish identity and see themselves as part of a Jewish family without compromising their beliefs. This is an extremely important aspect of these domestic celebrations. The secular Jewish family and its individual members are able to renegotiate their own relationship with a Jewishness that is, in its public modes, either a source of intense conflict or is denied them altogether. Below we see this negotiation taking place in different attitudes to the reading of the *Haggadah* - often a source of fun with ritual family squabbles about how much and what to read. In the first Efrat describes how she tried to stymie a *Haggadah* reading altogether, unsuccessfully:

Efrat: ...we had the Seder, and we have family in England... my father's sister... when we were starting to read the *Haggadah* I said... "Why are we reading this? Why don't we just do something else... or eat", and she started telling me, "Don't you see what you're doing? You're giving the holiday... just to the Orthodox, we should have the holiday too". But I told her, "This says nothing to me", and she says, "Does *Pessach* mean nothing to you?" I told her, "Really and sincerely *Pessach* means two things for me, and that's why I love *Pessach*, one is being with family and the second is eating good food" [laughs] ...I love holidays but just because it's family and good food... and festivity. And... if I was a Christian I would probably have Christmas and also I wouldn't believe.

D: ...It was always the same in our family at Christmas.

E: Yeah, and the thing is, I think in your holidays you don't have to do anything especially that you have to think about and we have to read this thing about this rabbi and this rabbi... and God. And why do I have to read about God, he doesn't exist, I don't believe in him. At

the end we read - my Dad got a bit upset so I felt bad about bringing up the subject then everyone started fighting.

Boaz: We would have a Seder, like all the family.

D: ...what sort of reading do you do though as the *Haggadah*?

B: *Haggadah*... We do like half and then my grandfather insists to sit there alone and read the second half [laughs].

Noam: Yes, the family Seder and, and my father don't let us to go from the table until he read everything.

D: *Kol HaHaggadah* ['All the Haggadah']?

N: *Kol HaHaggadah*... because in Russia[28] it's harder because you don't have the *Haggadah* and you a little Hebrew and a little German, because my parents speak German, and a little Russian. So we stay well until two or three in the morning. Here we read very fast because it's in Hebrew.

D: ...How long would it take?

N: Let's say above 12 o'clock we're finished but we have another mission... most of my parents friends don't believe and they don't have nothing of the Jewish aspects... so every *Pessach*... my parents invites them to come... and they learn things about *Haggadah* so?

D: How many people do you have typically?

N: 20, not a lot, 20. Yes, it depends, 15 until 20.

D: OK, do you celebrate Jewish festivals in your home?

Danny: ...We do celebrate but... the content of the Jewish festivals celebration are not religious... it's more of a cultural... ritual. Yes, so in *Pessach* we all the family sit together and read a little bit from the *Haggadah*. By the way, from year to year the *Haggadah*, I don't know how, is getting shorter [laughs]... and for God's sake I've heard these stories [laughs] why again... So we fill in instead of the religious content the family content and to be together and see the family.

---

[28] Country and other details changed to protect identity.

In a number of cases Meretz activists reported insisting on reading more than other family members desired as a way to address and claim the religious tradition as their own:

Moshe: ...not all my family likes to read all the traditional *Haggadah*... usually I am the one reading the *Haggadah* because I am the one most fluent, and most understand the stories. And then I am explaining them...

D: Do you think that, for example, that bread should be allowed to be sold publicly... on *Pessach*?

M: Yeah, definitely. It was the situation once and I think that it is a... really idiotic law because you have in like McDonald's, you can go there and buy bread which is kosher for Passover but you get inside a cheeseburger... well it is not exactly that stupid because there are many people in Israel... who will not eat bread in Passover but who will eat this cheeseburger, people who decide for themselves... which *mitzvas* to take and which not.

In a non-taped interview Yara stated that she would personally read the full *Haggadah* at the Seder as it gives a feeling of holiday and celebration when you perform the rituals. Her family usually does a quick read through, a couple of songs and then it's "Let's eat". Below, Avi repeats the theme mentioned above of studying the religious texts related to holidays in an effort to find their import and as a way of developing and expressing Jewish identity. Here we see how identity is always a work in progress, a state of becoming as much as being. Identity as process is exemplified again in Yossi's quote:

Avi: We read the *Haggadah* and I read it for my intellectual education because I really think that as a Jewish I must know my history and the religion is part... of my culture... I'm not against Jewish culture.

D: Do you read a full *Haggadah*?

Yossi: Yeah, usually... they like to skip and go straight to the food [laughs]... just the beginning because the food is really good... But... the last Passover... I insisted... on... skipping less than they wanted and I said "No, no, no... let's say... a little bit more and... not disrespect it like that. Let's read a little bit, let's... enjoy the reading of it".... I thought

of bringing my family once... a secular *Haggadah*. I didn't. I know there are many but I'm thinking of doing that. But it's not... a must for me. It... can be interesting just... to read it and see what values we take from it... not the religious part, the values and the traditional... things, the history and all that.

D: What's your role?

Amnon: I'm responsible for reading everything... I want that everything will be read... I try to insist, I'm not about to quarrel with anyone but if there is someone who insists it's me, yeah. And I'll tell you why; because not only to be only a festival of eating like pigs, although... maybe it can be with a nice dinner but we want something spiritually... my grandmother and also my grandfather before he died would teach things to make it more interesting for me.

For others the *Haggadah* is something to be endured before getting to the food - though note the emphasis on socialising the next generation into Jewish identity in the first passage below. Other interviewees mentioned the fact that their family's celebration of the religious holidays gradually grew less and less elaborate as they grew older, again emphasising the use of religious festivals as a means for socialising children into Jewish identity.

Nir: Passover you simply say, "Blah, blah, blah, amen, let's eat"... So we read like certain parts just... for the little kids to say in kindergarten "Yeah we read the *Haggadah*" and we eat, watch TV, go home... it takes about an hour.

Raz: if[29] and I were alone we would celebrate Seder, because it is a party but we would not read the *Haggadah*... unfortunately I cannot convince the other parts of my family - my parents yes, but not my sisters and their family, to start having something that is not religious.

---

[29] Partner's name excised.

Hadar: Now, let's say in Pessach, Passover we do only a meal, a nice meal but we don't read the *Haggadah*... We used to read... the religious one, but I was so sick... [of] it that I, so I told them that I don't want to do it anymore and they stopped.

I particularly liked Gilad's ribald commentary on the beauty of traditional holiday stories:

D: Did you have Jewish storybooks?
Gilad: Yeah... at Passover there are all kinds of stories about, I don't know, about Eliyahu Neveh and his golden nuts [both break into hysterical laughter].

Reclaiming *Pessach* in Jerusalem

On the 6th of April 1999 Meretz held a public, secular Seder in a park in central Jerusalem, *Gan Sacher*. It was a very important and highly symbolic event with the party taking over a public park bordered on one side by the hill on which the Knesset stands and on the other side by a mixed religious-secular neighbourhood in which *Shabbat* street closures had been vigorously contested. It was, in a very real sense, a symbolic invasion.

I arrived at the park to join the preparations for the Seder at 8am to be met with coffee at the tent set up by the unemployed to protest the anti-welfare policies of the Netanyahu administration. A couple of Meretz activists had spent the night there and were a little worse for wear but were soon incorporated with the rest of us into banner hanging parties and we set about turning our end of the park into a Meretz coliseum. Despite the fact that we had a valid permit for our Seder, three local policemen soon arrived and ordered us to pull down those banners facing a busy thoroughfare. We removed these and thought that everything was kosher till the police, reinforced by other local cops began to tear down all our banners from the trees facing the park itself without warning or justification. I caught up with a lone policeman on the far side of the park as he tried to tear down one of the banners I had hung with great difficulty and grabbed his arm as he went to rip it off. It was a rather stupid thing to do as I could have been arrested for assaulting a police officer and deported but, incredibly, it worked and alongside the physical obstruction of other activists we were able to save most of the banners - which they also wanted to confiscate and

destroy. This would have struck a debilitating blow to the campaign as a whole as we had thousands of shekels worth of banners up. As it was, when the busloads (the convoy was over one hundred vehicles strong) of *Noar* arrived around lunchtime the natural amphitheatre was a sea of green and everything was set up.

The Seder itself went off without a hitch and involved the reading of a secular *Haggadah* by Meretz MKs and other party members. Noar activists wrote the *Haggadah* itself. Here Dalia and Michael speak of the content and importance of the *Haggadah* and Jerusalem Seder:

Michael: I like the Seder, I think it should change though. I think... the creation of Israel and... the end of the occupation... these certain new aspects of freedom that we are experiencing, so that should be added like the kibbutzim did with the Seder, for example.

D: How did you feel about... the Seder that we did... in *Gan Sacher*?

M: I was proud of it... I loved it... I think that's one of the most moving things I've done in Noar Meretz... They tried... for a long time to find different aspects... the main origins were humanist ones.

D: How was it important for you?

M: ... it was a kind of proof that I am preserving something of the Judaism, something of my identity and doing it my way. And it's my proof to the world that I am a Jew but... I don't have to be going... with my head in the wall [sand?].

Dalia: If I have... to find a point... where I feel, you know, "Here, this is where I feel I'm a Jew" it would be in places like weddings and bar mitzvahs and Passover for instance and not for their...

D: [interrupts] Right, so the actual rituals?

Da: Yeah, and... not for.. their religious value but for the togetherness value they have. That's why you remember in the elections... in Jerusalem there was the Passover Seder?... [I] along with two of my *Chanichim* were... the one who wrote it... still it's... one of the things that I'm most proud of...

D: Tell me what you were trying to do... what was your aim?

Da: ... my idea was... to show... our culture as people of... democratic... and... humanistic religion... to say these are our principles, this is what we believe in... after the elections... I went... back home and I brought the Seder with me and... I showed it to a person... who's a principal of a school and... she was very impressed by it and she took it to the school to show it... My aunt... who's something... in the Ministry of Education... she's responsible for a few schools... in the Haifa area. And then she took it [to] show... at something... that she was going to be in... an uncle of mine who's one of the founding fathers... of one of the kibbutz'... in Israel he took one too... that maybe they'll read it in the kibbutz'... we printed... all the stuff... think of what you could do with it 'cause you can take it and teach it in school...

D: Cool. What were some of the elements of the Seder anyway?

Da: ... [the traditional *Haggadah*] sort of has... chapters and each chapter has a name... so what we did is we took those names and we just gave them different meaning... *Kaddesh*, which is like praise, so we said that you praise... the thinking man... in the actual *Haggadah* for each thing we found passages... that were relevant. For instance the story of the... four brothers... they ask... about democracy and why we have... to keep democracy... because its hard work to keep democracy... And what we tried to do is just take a lot of passages... from different places. It was really important for us to take passages as examples... from Jewish literature... we took a lot, a lot from the *kabbal* for instance...

D: [interrupts] What sort of *kabbalistic* passages did you have?

Da: ...the one that I do remember it's not from the *kabbala* its from *Talmud*... it talks about... the human in the centre, about that each person should think that... the world was... created for me and I am in the centre [laughs]... we took... modern things too... we only took one thing that somebody who's not Jewish wrote... we have one passage from Voltaire. We talked a little about Socrates... we had a passage there about... the respect of the law... and the dilemma a man has between the laws of the state he lives in and his own conscience...

D: There were bits from the Declaration of Independence as well wasn't there?

Da: Yeah, there was bits from the Declaration of Independence... One of the most amazing things I think... was something we read ourselves... a passage about the dilemma a man has

between... his moral and his conscience and, and between upholding the law and... his values... living in a democracy.

D: It's an amazing document.

Da: Thank you [laughs].

The first *Haggadah* passage Dalia refers to is that of the 'four sons'. Each son is given a defining characteristic in the traditional text, wise, wicked, simple, and the one who does not know what to ask and the appropriate responses are given for each so that they may learn the meaning of the exodus story (Simeon 1985). Below is a translation of the *Noar* Meretz version. Even given the exigencies of translation the power of this radical revision of tradition, both as a mission statement and summation of values related to human and civil rights, is evident. Throughout this piece, and the *Haggadah* as a whole, human agency and judgement replaces reliance on God as organising concepts. It is an impressive achievement given that the *Haggadah* was entirely organised and written by young people and was not an official party project.

The Wise
What does he say?

What are these testimonies, and laws, and rules that the Democracy has commanded us?

And you say to him that the Democracy gives us a system of rules in which all people live as equals to each other and before the law, in which the human and civil rights of everyone are protected by virtue of their being human.

The Wicked
What does he say?

What is this work to you?

And you say to him that we must protect the Democracy and defend it against those who threaten to destroy it.

The Simple
What does he say?

What is this?

And you say to him, the human being, he alone, has the power to liberate himself from the yoke of oppression and imposed limitations, and there is no separating his happiness/well-being from the happiness/well-being of those around him.

The One Who Does Not Know How to Ask

You broach the subject.

Give him complete respect and faith, see him as an equal. Let your approach be complete towards your student, relevant and through experience (Noar Meretz 1999).

Yom Kippur

Racheli: In Yom Kippur we remember the rabbis of the *Mishnah* saying that what's important is not your relationship with God... you first have to ask your friends if you did harm to them to forgive you and then God, God will forgive you. And also what amazes us, it's more important... if I lie to you than if I swear, if I false sweared in the name of God. I mean, first if I want to be forgiven I have to give... forgiveness.

Yom Kippur marks the apogee of the religious calendar and, due to its close association with the ideas of repentance and forgiveness and explicit religiosity, was not available for Zionist trans-valuation as a nationalistic celebration in the same manner as Hanukah, Passover, Purim and other holidays. Participation or non-participation in religious rituals on Yom Kippur provides us with a clear picture of the secular individual's relationship with the religious tradition free from Zionist accretions and, to an extent, from family interposition. For many secular Israeli Jews, the holiday's themes of introspection and reconciliation are taken up, though rarely in the sense that God stands as arbitrator. Many research participants reported fasting, or having fasted, as a way of marking the day and expressing and experiencing their own Jewish identity. Seculars also enjoy the rest and relaxation of a day free of cars and work and many join their religious neighbours in walking the streets on *Erev Yom Kippur* (the evening when Yom Kippur starts), often to visit friends for socialisation and video nights.

Ophir: I used to, I don't fast any more. No, actually none of us do... I had no reason I just, why not?

D: Is it a cultural thing do you think?

O: Yeah, but it means nothing to me.

D: Right, how long ago did you stop?

O: Two years ago I think.

Noam's family take a typical approach in rejecting dogmatic' observance while selecting those elements of the ritual that speak to them, including attending an Orthodox synagogue for prayers. Many Meretz activists do attend synagogue - whether Reform of Orthodox - on Yom Kippur, effectively disproving the anti-religious tag imposed by some commentators.

D: Do you fast on Yom Kippur?

Noam: No, in the past, yes, but I have to smoke [laughs]... Honestly, until two, or three in the afternoon I can, but after that I have to smoke. But I'll give you an example. My parents, and also my sister, they'll... fast and go to the synagogue but to be honest they come home and look at TV... it's something realistic, not like the *haredim*... if you can make things easy so make them, don't be so dogmatic. So they go to synagogue, my father go and pray there and after that go home... and look at video... and stuff.

Yossi takes the opportunity presented by my question on observance to reflect on the importance of the festival for him, the impact of fasting, and on the reflexive relationship of seculars to the tradition:

D: Does anyone in your family fast on Yom Kippur, or is there any other way you mark the day?

Yossi: ...I tried to... I fasted... for part of the day, a big part... But... I tried not to treat it as like... I have to... When I ate I tried not to treat it as... I'm breaking or something like that... I did it more as a challenge for myself... surely not a religious thing... But... it's also an experience that I can understand... it's powerful. There are very powerful things in

religious even if you don't believe in God and all that... because I do believe in God but in a very different God than others. I believe that God is inside of all of us... is the moral... the values we have... the way we act... when you fast... there's some process... of maybe... clarifying things with yourself but you do it with yourself... not with God or... for example... the tradition is... to beg a pardon from somebody if you hurt him... it's good... to do it... But in the way of thinking of myself and... looking at the year... putting a pause and looking back and maybe a little to the future and clearing... your head a little is... And when you don't eat... it's something physical because you're... not messing around with other things, you're just thinking. It's very quiet and you can walk and all that so you can just think... I see a lot of logic things in religious and... the things that are logical I can connect because I'm... a logic person and I live in this kind... of an environment of logic people. You try to find a meaning or an explanation to everything and I don't think there has to be... anything... but I'm looking for it. So... when I find a good explanation that I, I like I can connect with it.

Amnon: I do, I fast.

D: What's your reason?

A: ...As a Jew - OK, non-religious - but as a Jew I decide... which holidays to celebrate... If I consider myself as a Jew or someone that it does matter, in this case a Jew, I celebrate also the hard parts, or the hard holidays... Yom Kippur is generally for asking forgiveness from God...

D: [interrupts] For sins.

A: Yeah for sins and mainly from your friends but... I don't believe that if I don't eat all day anyone will forgive me and if I'll be hungry I'll be happy that I could make it the whole day. But mostly, as I said to celebrate also this one... But, no way, I don't think it's a matter of forgiveness and...

D: So do you pray then?

A: Yeah. I like [to], I go at least in the... first evening we go to the synagogue and read because I want at least once a year to see inside the Torah and be in a synagogue.

Aviv speaks of being confused as to his motivation in donning a *tallit* and *tefillin* ('prayer shawl', 'phylacteries') at his local synagogue each Yom Kippur:

Aviv: Yom Kippur I fast, I do fast and I go each year in the same synagogue in the United States[30]. But I have to admit, I really like the atmosphere in the synagogue. I meet there people that I don't see for the whole year and people that were with me... when we were in the school together we went every Sunday... to learn for our bar mitzvah. And the same people I saw... them growing up... and they have childrens... I really like the atmosphere in the synagogue in the Yom Kippur day... but when I put my *tallit* and my kippa I ask myself "OK, am I OK? Do I believe in this? Do I?"

D: Do you do it as a cultural thing?

A: Yes but it's a religious thing... it's really important for me as a Jew but... there's something which I ask myself "What do I do here"?

In another non-taped interview, Naaman told me that each Yom Kippur his family used to visit his granddad for a holiday blessing. He tried fasting on Yom Kippur once but doesn't remember why, and relates that he is sometimes "cruel" on Yom Kippur doing such things as going round with an open coke bottle in sight in his bag. Hadar speaks for a large percentage of Meretz activists who see Yom Kippur as a day for rest, eating and watching videos - you have to get to the video stores early on the morning before the holiday because the chaotic mob scenes of frenzied video grabbing start early.

D: Do you fast on Yom Kippur?

Hadar: No, I never did.

D: Did you do the regular secular thing of trying to get the videos as early as possible in the morning?

H: Yes [laughs], and also a lot of food. I get really hungry on Yom Kippur, more than every other day...

D: What do you do to mark *Yom Kippur*, have you ever fasted for example?

[30] Country changed to protect identity.

Gal: No, and I always take video movies... And a good book and it's OK.

D: That... seems to be the real... Israeli cultural tradition for *Yom Kippur*.

G: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, you have time to read and... to rest, yes.

D: Have you ever fasted for *Yom Kippur*?

Boaz: My father does, I don't see why. Nobody else does... I like *Yom Kippur* a lot, it's very quiet. You can stay home, you can read... I like holidays in general even ones that you're supposed to be very sad in but... it doesn't have a religious significance to me. It has a more like traditional.

Spirituality, God & Religion

In formulating my interview questionnaire I decided to avoid direct probing of matters relating to God, and personal spirituality. I thought that a yes-no answer of no great utility would follow any probing with regard to belief in the divine. This was a mistake. In fact interviewees often volunteered information on the divine, spirituality and tradition and spoke of how these related to their own lives. By nature, these musings are far from uniform but present a dynamic and fascinating insight into individual struggles to mould faith or credulity, tradition and spirituality into a coherent vision of self. Racheli identifies herself as an atheist, uses the *Talmud* to point to the divine as a human concept rather than a transcendental reality, and underscores the importance of social justice in the Jewish tradition as an element she can relate to - as does Idan:

Racheli: Yeah, I feel very connected to my Jewish roots and nothing in terms of religious... I will never be a religious person. I'm not believing in the existence of any God... this is really far, far from what I think or really believe in the superiority of human beings...

D: At the same time it's religious tradition?

R: It's not just religious tradition... it's a cultural, Jewish cultural, Jewish thinking... with all the philosophical basis of the tradition. It's amazing, it's beautiful and I can tell you that with my socialist thinking is just out of thinking of the person and thinking of justice in Judaism... Marx with all the criticism that I have about it... I think that there was some

elements in Marx that were very Jewish... the concept of social justice he claims is very similar to the philosophical idea of justice in the Bible. And also what is called - this is criticism of Marx - because also what he called historical materialism it's very determinist, religious actually if you are thinking about it... I think the *Talmud* is amazing, it's filled with philosophy that most of the secular people are not familiar with. I think what religious people are doing now to the religion and to Judaism... Jewish culture, is a shame... The concept of God in the Jewish thinking is something that I can take now and replace with the idea of conscience and justice... the *Tanakh* and the *Talmud* and the Torah address, it just relates the word to God, the words of man, or conscious... or justice, it wouldn't change the ideas, it wouldn't change the principles. Of course *Rav* Ovadia Yosef will say something else, but what's different for me and other secular people is I'm not ashamed to address the Jewish material...

D: ...you don't feel you have to turn away from it at all, in your own identity you feel you can... embrace aspects of the tradition?

R: Yeah... many secular people when they start to argue with religious people they feel like they're totally ignorant, which they probably are... I was but I learned and now it's mine and my interpretation is legitimate not less than *Rav* ●vadia Yosef's is... in *Alef Tishre* [the first of the month, *Tishre*] and then after that in ten *Tishre* which is *Yom HaKippurim* God has to judge. So the concept was that the decision of the day of the judgement would be the people's decision not the God's decision. They weren't waiting for a sign from God, OK, and there was a discussion in the *Talmud* about this, how you say that it is *Alef Tishre*, how you make the decision. Then... in this discussion they said... "The court of the heavens is not starting his work until the court of the earth is saying so". It's an amazing sentence... God would not judge people until they say they are ready to... I interpret it as an acknowledge that actually God is man's concept. It's very important, it's a very holy concept, but it's man's concept and until man is not acknowledge this concept it's not existing.

Idan: Because I don't believe in God I believe that the Ten Commandments were given by a man. I think it could have been Moses, you can call it anything you like, but a man gave that and that man was the, the leader of the group who was the Jewish people. And this is

the first moral thing that mankind did.

Ilan denies the possibility of mankind knowing the will of God, an understanding he links specifically to religious claims of authority in the matter:

D: ...do you believe in God yourself?

Ilan: I believe in a higher force... I don't think I can define it... Maybe there is a higher force. I don't believe we can define, or say what it wants, that's why I'm going against the *dossim*.

Ophir, Danny and Moshe have had contact with the Reform movement - although Danny's ended with his immigration to Israel. This is true for only a minority of Meretz activists and for a much smaller percentage of secular Israelis, although the Guttman Report did find a surprisingly high 6% of Jewish-Israelis defining their affiliation as to 'Progressive' Judaism (Levy, Levinsohn & Katz 1993:15):

Ophir: Yeah, well I saw some of them because I had something to do with the Reform Movement here... a couple of years ago I went with my girlfriend to... a seminar... there is... the Young People's Forum, or something like that, of the Reform Movement in Israel... Anyway there was this seminar about love and passion in the Jewish tradition, in the Jewish sources... the subject was very interesting but I really didn't like the prayers... even though it was the Reform *Nusach*... The Reform prayer books. God doesn't talk to me. My brother's girlfriend is very active in the Reform Movement and they always try to grab me to come to the synagogue.

D: Do you think Reform Judaism is a positive thing?

O: Yeah, yeah it is... it's not for me but for many people... as opposed to many religious people and many religious movement... the noisy ones ruin Judaism and make it really, really gross.

D: Did you go to synagogue regularly?

Danny: On holidays and sometimes on Sabbaths. We weren't too religious. My father's more, much more religious than my mother...

D: Did it have an organ because... some do and some don't?

Dy: ...it did and then they played guitars... Part, they usually sang in Hebrew and then translated to Russian[31]. ...sometimes the sermons were given in Russian.

D: Did you... enjoy going to synagogue?

Dy: Yeah, it was fun. I was a little kid in there with all these men.

D: ...Do you believe in God?

Dy: No [laughs]. Well it's kind of complicated because being gay, it's really rather difficult for a gay person to believe in God. In the structure of the... monotheist religion it's kind of difficult even though there are several streams both in Judaism and in the Christianity that are more progressive still they're not the mainstream.

Moshe: So, you asked about the Bible, and I'm not using it as a criteria for moral guidance and I'm not looking for the moral in each one of the stories. So first of all I like the stories... and I say that it is part of my identity because for many years it was part of the identity of my parent's and grandparents, but I do not have to treat it the same way that they have.

D: What's the difference between the way you would treat it, for example, and the way that your grandparents...

M: Well, the most obvious thing, that I am secular... I know that there is no God and there was no creation and that probably most of these stories never happened... I can also try and think... what is the moral of the story, although I do not say that I will take it for me in advance.

D: You say that... you go to the, the Reform synagogue. What attracted you to Reform rather than the Orthodox?

M: Well, the Orthodox in Israel are quite impossible. Like if, if you're not 100% Orthodox they will not like to associate with you and the Reforms don't care whether you believe there is God or not believe. Like, we were sitting there and we were talking about how every one of us thinks about the relationships between... a person and the God. So I said

---

[31] Language changed to prevent identification.

that God is the invention of the people, and, and this stuff, and there is no God basically... they said "OK, very nice answer, very nice ideas you have". And so they are open-minded and because... they believe like I believe, that if someone wants to do all these *mitzvot* and everything OK... if he takes a small part of it which he is going [to do] that's OK. And I am also doing occasionally a mitzvah, like I try to treat my parents well...

D: [laughs] How about places, is the Western Wall special for you, for example?

M: No, not too much, I have been there for a couple of times... I was there in *Tisha B'av* with the Reform synagogue. We used to go up... it was a discussion about the meanings of *Tisha B'av*, the day where, according to the tradition both Temples have been destroyed so we first read a few texts concerning the destruction of the Second Temple by Hadrian and what said Rabbi Yochanan Ben-Zakkai... which is very important because the ideology of Yochanan Ben-Zakkai is something that is quite left ideology... in the Israeli terms... he just said we cannot be there always so maybe we should compromise with them. And it was not exactly the kind of compromise which we would like to do today but that's probably what we would have done had we been there. So, reading these texts may be interesting and also... you can find a relation to what's going on today... most of these Reform people are also quite left [wing].

Yossi discovered the strength of religious solidarity through his own synagogue experience (unspecified but probably Orthodox):

Yossi: I was raised in a very... non-religious house. No, no special religious, connection to religious but there wasn't... anything against and... I went there [synagogue] on Yom Kippur and it was very interesting... I just enjoyed, I didn't know exactly what to do and all that but it was nice there and... I had a friend there who came with me. It was very nice... we prayed. Although I did not... connect... to many of the words... because I don't believe in certain things. But still... the spiritual experience, it was just a feeling... of together... and then I understood the big power of the communities in the religious, especially, you know, B'nei Barak, Jerusalem and all that.

Socialising Children into Jewish Identity

I asked interviewees to predict how they would socialise their children into Jewish identity in order to ascertain their feelings of comfort or disease with regard to their own Jewish identity. By approaching the question from a tangent, "Do you want your children to grow up with the same sense of Jewishness as yourself", I sought to get them to provide an ideal vision of the changes that they would like to see not only in their own children but, by extension, in the relationship of the next generation of secular Jews to Jewish identity and tradition. The success or failure of this approach is up to the reader to decide, but I believe it allowed a depersonalisation of discussion that facilitated a broader understanding of projected ideals of Jewish socialisation.

The general picture that emerges is one of a lack of outright hostility to religiosity and a longing for a mode of secular Jewish identification closer to, and with greater knowledge of tradition. Naaman said that he would tell his children about Judaism and give any sons he had a *brit mila* (circumcision) and *bar mitzvah*. He would also like them to marry fellow Jews - an opinion that is widely held in secular Jewish-Israeli society but was, I believe, rarely expressed to me due to the fact that I am a Gentile married to a Jew. Naaman doesn't care if his kids marry religious and won't mind if they choose observance over secularity. However, he doesn't believe that they would find ultra-Orthodoxy attractive. In Ehud's response we see the theme mentioned above of a desire for a closer connection to tradition in identification. He blames the Orthodox for turning seculars off the tradition:

Ehud: No, no. I think I would want them to have more sense of Jewishness than I do and I would like them to grow up in a society in which they would want to inquire, to investigate Judaism much more than I do. And I think they would be able to do it in a society where... Judaism is not so controversial. As long as it is so controversial I'm afraid they will keep apart from it.

D: Do you think that the politicisation of Judaism has turned a lot of people off?

E: Definitely, I don't think so I know so. And that's one of the main obstacles, and I think that... if my kids will belong to a more healthy society, also in that aspect of Judaism, they will be richer people.

Ophir: I'll let them do what they want... it was important to my father that... he... brought me up... as a Jew... Because he said, "Look, I want you to know what a Jew is. You can decide whatever you want. I won't force you to do anything but I want you to know what a Jew is.

Gilad: I think knowledge is the basic thing in here, I'd like them to know all the options and then they can decide. The basic question about everything is do you believe in God or don't you... if they say, "OK we believe there is a God." I can't argue with them I can only try to persuade them that the religious as I see it is... not going to lead to anything good in the long run.

In the excerpts above and below we see the Meretz emphasis on freedoms of choice and association being expressed alongside the, related, voluntarism and selectivity of secular identity politics.

D: Is it important to you to carry this [holiday observance] on with your kids if you have kids?

Boaz: The ones that I like I will and the ones that I don't... I won't... it's important for me for them to know about it, I don't really care if they observe it... I think it's fun, I would like them to have the fun that I had... it's not about the historic significance... most of those things that we celebrate are a pile of rubbish... historically speaking. Like... in Hanukah... we celebrate about how... the Maccabeans were heroes and... actually they were like right wing fanatics and they were fighting people like me and, and they brought doom... the Diaspora, its because of them. So I don't see the reason to celebrate but whatever [laughs].

Below, Yaron specifies how he will present tradition to his children as a cultural experience rather than as a code for life, without imposing his own disbelief in the divine:

D: If you... have children do you want them to grow up with the same sort of Jewish upbringing that you had or?

Yaron: To some degree yes, to some degree no... I'd be happy enough to expose them... to the Bible and tell them about stories and such but... I would make sure that I present these as stories and mythical history and to that extent that's how it should be learned... it has to be defined or understood as culture... not as orders...

D: Not as, not as binding *mitzvot*?

Y: Yeah, yeah, and the law prerogatives are there because they're there... they match different times, they don't really match it anymore. I'm atheist myself and if my kids decide that there's a God... it's good for them.

D: Do you want your children to grow up with the same sense of Jewishness as you have?

Noam: Yes, yes, of course, of course, of course, it's important to me... to be born Jewish... it is a burden but it's also, I think... it's a great thing... you belong to a community... you are in the same religion that the biggest minds in the history... I'm sure that my children have to know... at least what I know about the Jewish side, yes, of course...

D: [interrupts] Do you want them to learn about religion as well as the historical aspects of Jewishness?

N: Yes, of course, of course. I'll give you an example. My mother every Saturday, even every Friday lit the candles... so I, now I go to live with my girlfriend... and I ask her to, if we got married she learn these things. Yes, it's very important... it's something... from your identity.

Noam's response is interesting in that he equates knowledge and identification with a strong insistence on the performance of a particular observance. Here we see the influence of Judaism's traditional stress on orthopraxy. Moshe is unsure whether the usually unquestioned *mitzvah* of circumcision is desirable for any future sons. Following this, Avi rejects the anti-religious atmosphere of his parent's house:

D: If you have children do you want them to grow up with the same sense of Jewish identity?

Moshe: Well, I guess so... but I guess that you cannot dictate to your children which

identity to be. Probably since they would grow with me they will initially observe the same ideas that I have but later on when they will grow up who knows?

D: Yeah. Would you get them circumcised?

M: I have thought of that but I have no answer yet and I probably will not have any until I have a boy.

D: Do you want your children, if you have children, to grow up with the same sense of Jewishness that you have?

Avi: No, more open intellectually... I growed up in a very, very anti-religious mentality especially from my father... And I want my children to be more open... not to be religious, just to know because its part of their culture... "I'm Jewish".

Hadar was the only Meretz activist to say she wanted her children to have less Jewishness in their lives than her while supporting circumcision as a social rather than a cultural necessity:

D: Do you want your children to grow up with the same sense of Jewishness that you have?

Hadar: Less... even though my parents celebrated some of the holidays, still I got very anti-religious so, you could give the children some of this, maybe... [so that] when they go to kindergarten they won't feel like they're different.

D: More of a socialisation than a religious thing?

H: Yeah, also *brit mila* [circumcision]. The only reason it's because they are with other friends and they will see each other and I don't want him to suffer, but I'd do it in hospital without a rabbi.

Eli, who, it should be remembered, is not considered a Jew by the Rabbinate, stresses the need for his and recurrent generations to add to the Jewish cultural tradition and ensure its survival:

Eli: I'll... teach my children about all the Jewish holidays and Jewish tradition because that's what my grandparents did... and I find it very important to keep that heritage up.

D: So… you feel yourself part of a historical tradition going back through the centuries.

A: And every generation adds something, takes something out, whatever. Like… that's how I see religion actually, tradition, what people actually live.

Aviv returns to the theme of teaching children the importance of Jewish tradition and history in an open manner that respects their ability to choose for themselves while acknowledging the equal beauty of other cultures:

Aviv: For me Jewish celebrations are important things. I really hope that I will be able to celebrate it if one day I have a family, with children.

D: Groovy… What will you teach in the home, for example, about being Jewish?

A ...to be open with the other you have… to know about yourself, about your own people, where are you from. And I would teach them about the signification… of the celebrations and I hope that they will have more Jewish culture than me because I have many things about the Jewish thought that I don't know... I really want them to be also Jewish… and I will say to them that what makes the beauty of the world is that you have many different cultures

D: [interrupts] So you are not going to teach them that they are a part of a chosen people or anything like that?

A: No, no, no, that they are part of the Jewish people who have a hard but beautiful history… and that they have to know about themselves and they have to be open-minded and to know about other people.

Family Politics

D: Are your parents involved in politics at all?

Hadar: They see television and shout...

D: Are they right wing, left wing.

H: Left of course!

In Israel ethnicity and class are important factors affecting voting patterns but the family remain a primary influence on voting. It is difficult to pin down the reasons for this

phenomenon - which Israel shares with other countries - but the answer probably lies in the strength of the Jewish family as a social unit. Other possible factors include the difficulty of socialising with political antagonists when such divisions relate to worldview, religiosity, etc. and the consequent politicisation of the Jewish home, alongside the relative absence of youth rebellion against one's parent's generation, built partially on the collectivist orientation of education and domestic socialisation. These provide partial explanations for the phenomenon of family/'tribal' voting without fully accounting for it. Many interviewees come from staunch socialist families of long-standing, often with grandparents who were *halutzim*, and are proud of this family tradition. Others have parents who have been active for many years in Meretz and its feeder parties RATZ, Shinui and Mapam:

Idan: Well my family is from Mapai historically.

D: Right, so they were all in the *Avodah*?

I: *Avodah*, they were always *Avodah*. My grandfather and grandmother came in Israel and settled in the kibbutz of *Avodah*. They were members of Mapai from 1930 [laughs] but my mother didn't vote for *Avodah* for nearly 15 years. She voted for Meretz, RATZ, Shinui.

D: OK, how did you get involved with Meretz?

Erez: My father and my mother was in Meretz, yeah.

D: Why do you think you were left wing, was your family left wing particularly?

Avi: My grandfather was one of the people who established Kibbutz Givat HaShosha It's a kibbutz near Petah Tikva. We came in the *Aliyah Hamishi*... In the thirties... the *Shomer Hatzair*... and he [grandfather] was... a really truly socialist... there was in Israel a social newspaper which called *El Hamishmar*? And he was the last reader. The day he died they closed *El Hamishmar*... From my mother's side I can say that her father... was a member of the historic Mapai. He was a member of the city council in Lod... But... we're not a political house.

Yaron: My parents are now no longer involved in politics. My parents are both, my parents met when they were in the *Hashomer Hatzair*... They went off to *Garin*, they went off to a

kibbutz, they lived in a kibbutz, they married and so on and so forth. They left the kibbutz after about two or three years but they were definitely politic... my brother was in *Noar* Meretz for a while.

Danny tells a funny story about his communist grandparents that demonstrates how the left was split at the time by ideological conflicts. It also displays the underlying tension within the civil religion of the time between Jewish particularism and socialist universality:

Danny: ...when I came to Israel and I was exposed to my mother's side... they were communists... before Israel was independent... ideology was a way of life and people that didn't conform with majority ideology were literally thrown out... my grandmother's family - and my grandfather's to a lesser... extent... originally were *Hashomer Hatzair* but when they came to Israel they drifted towards the communist party and they were simply thrown out of their... kibbutz... they couldn't conform, they protested against many of the... more Zionist acts of the kibbutz for example... my grandmother's sister became pregnant and she wouldn't marry the daughter's father because he wasn't of the right party... so she gave birth out of wedlock and later married someone from the party.
D: The right party. Which party was this, the Communist Party of Israel?
Dy: Yeah, it was the Communist Party, exactly [laughs]... My mother... in our days she went to the far right of the family, she votes for *Avodah* [laughs].

Many parents of research participants were in the first generation of Peace Now activists and involved their children in peace movement activities at an early age.

Racheli: I grew up in a very political house and my parents were in the first line of *Shalom Akhshav* activists from '77 to today... one of my first memories... I remember that my parents woke me up... I thought it was the middle of the night, now I know it was something like 9 o'clock. And they explained that I had to see very important things in the television. They took me in front of the television and then we saw Sadat coming off the plane and there was crying... it was... later that I understand what was happening there but I remember that the thing that they took me in front of the television and said "You are

watching now an historical moment" and they were all excited so... I went to a lot of demonstrations with my parents... *Shalom Akhshav* was all young people's kids around the age of thirty, forty... when I was around the age of eight, nine the demonstrations started to become very violent... and then they stopped taking the children.

Gilad: one of my sisters... she was in *Shalom Akhshav* when they started. My other family is very politically aware you can say, not all of them.

D: Are they left wing people?

G: Yeah, yeah. They're not all active all the way although my parents... try to always emphasise it so much, go out and do things.

There are exceptions to the rule, with parents' shifting their votes between centre-left and centre-right. This is a developing phenomenon that testifies to the waning of ideology particularly within the middle classes, and has changed the Israeli political landscape since the 1970s. In such families, most Meretz activists reported pulling their family to the left through their own exhortations and example:

Benny: My parents are not involved at all... my father always voted for the Labour Party and my mother vote one time for the Likud and another time for the Labour Party... I have two younger sisters, one just got out of the army and one is sixteen years old, so everything they do... is after me.

D: OK, so they're sort of following your lead are they?

B: Yeah, following. That's why my family had four votes this time... for Meretz. My younger sister getting interested in politics after me, I told her, "Go".

D: What did your parents believe in?

Roni: Good stuff. My parents are like old-fashioned Zionists They came from Romania[32] and they had trouble getting out of there in the '70s and they're like really, really Likud... my father constantly is voting for the Pensioner Party... Now in '92 I convinced my mother

---

[32] Country changed to protect identity.

at the end to vote Meretz because I couldn't vote, but... in the last elections they voted Netanyahu, both... and I just didn't bothered... to convince them or to fight with them.

Nir was the sole critic of family politics, though he was wrong in assuming that Meretz members tended to buck the trend of intergenerational voting affinities. Two voting-patterns emerge from the interviews. The majority of activists display a family voting pattern that has changed little since the *Yishuv*, with parties coming and going while the votes of supporters remain within the same left wing camp. The second trend is of Meretz activists whose parents have joined the swelling ranks of non-ideological centrist voters who now constitute the kingmakers of the Israeli system. Nir is spot on in his summation of the impact of family voting; the persistence and deepening of social cleavages and conflict, including the religious-secular *kulturkampf*:

Nir: I think that's the most stupid thing for a person to do... to support the ideas that your parents does, I mean unfortunately that's what almost all of these people... in Meretz less, they're more idealist... if that's what you do this country never gonna change 'cause... your parents were in a fight with the *haredim* and you will be in a fight with *haredim*.

The Educated Jew

In Chapter 9 we will discuss the Meretz-Shas battle over the control of funding for the Shas school network in 1999-2000, but for now we will analyse the role of state education in the socialisation of Jewish identity.

The State Education Law of 1953, cemented the autonomy of the ultra-Orthodox Agudah Israel school system, effectively gave control of the state-religious sector to the national-religious, and destroyed the 'worker's' stream of the Labour movement in establishing the new secular state system (Liebman 1983:127; Zucker & Zucker 1985:134-135; Sachar 1996:380; Lehman-Wilzig & Susser 1981:119). Suddenly the Labour movement was divested of its ability to reproduce itself ideologically. This blow, combined with the de-ideologising bureaucratisation of 'statism' and waning of left wing collectivism, led to the slow death of the Zionist left as a vibrant, innovative political force - as opposed to the religious educational streams where theo-ideology remained a guiding factor

(Lehman-Wilzig & Susser 1981:119). The separation of educational streams also laid the basis for the deepening of mutual community isolation, laying the foundations for the worsening *kulturkampf* (Rejwan 1999:106).

Zucker & Zucker (1973:140) relate that in the 1950s the Ministry of Education and Culture became concerned that young people were becoming indifferent to and divorced from the Jewish religious tradition and history, and were lacking a sense of connection to Diaspora Jewry. In 1959 a Ministry directive established the study of the Diaspora, Jewish rites and myths and related subjects, the study of the week's reading from the Pentateuch (read in synagogue), and the celebration of religious festivals at primary schools in order to foster a "Jewish atmosphere" (Zucker & Zucker 1973:140-141). The programme was only partially successful and failed to prevent the cleavages it was intended to address, but remains in altered form as an element of the state school curriculum (Zucker & Zucker 1973:142).

Idan discusses the study of Jewish tradition at school and restates a common prejudice in Meretz that a Torah-based education leaves religious ignorant not only of vital secular topics but of the true meaning and import of Biblical passages:

Idan: When I was in school, when I learned Physics, I'd look at the teacher, I didn't know what he says and after the class I didn't remember anything. In the Bible classes when the teacher was talking what she said got into my head and never left... We don't study it as a religion we study it as a culture. God isn't the main character in the book when we study it. We study it as historical, as cultural point... And you study it with a lot of open-minded. People who study it as just, "That's what God said and that's what we have to do", they don't study it as the Bible. They don't know the Bible. I know the Bible, I know it better than them because...¦ they know just the *Halakha*, the *mitzvot* what they have to do. But they don't know what king did what and why he did that... That's the interesting part of it, the historical side, and they don't know nothing about it, they don't care... Just, "What mitzvahs, we have these kind of mitzvahs to do, this kind not to do. That's what God gave us and that's what we have to do. We don't ask no questions and we don't see if there is controversies in the Bible, we don't care"... that's why when we face them and talk to them and ask them, "Why did the Bible said that in A, in part B it said that?", "I don't know, I

never... you're absolutely right". And you open the Bible... Some people open their mind and some people, "No, I don't want to see, I don't want to know. It's beyond me, my mind is too little... I can't understand what God said".

Ophir: Look, I was brought up here so in school and in kindergarten you learn about the Jewish holidays and you learn Jewish history and you learn *Tanakh.*

D: ...Do you think it's important?

O: To tell you the truth I never thought about it, it was so evident that we should study this. And it's not too much, but you should learn it just like you study history... I completely don't believe in it. My ancestors are Jewish and this Judaism is based on something, and that something is the Torah. So I don't mind it... I think it's a best seller [laughs]. You should study it, not too much. You don't have to study the whole Torah by heart.

Ophir takes the presence of Bible and religious study as a given in state schools. Avi would like to see the strengthening of his "intellectual culture" through a greater emphasis on teaching the basic tenets of Judaism in education. This would, he believes, strengthen the Jewish identity of students and make them more knowledgeable about their history and culture:

Avi: ...in first grade... we studied part of the *Tanakh* and several books but... it didn't make me remember and... we didn't learn the basic things about Judaism. This is very bad. We didn't learn the basic thing about why are we praying... I didn't study at all.

D: So you feel it should be brought in?

A: Of course. I'm Jewish, I have to know my basic, why I'm Jewish what I have to do... every Muslim know how to pray and I really don't know. And... [I'm not] proud of it. I want to know because it's part of my intellectual culture.

Moshe blames the education system for introducing an element of xenophobia in placing too great a stress on Jewish particularity. Gilad agrees with this assessment, denouncing the idealisation of religious fanaticism, and the assumed existence of the divine in state education:

Moshe: Well, when you grow up in Israel you go to a school where all the feasts are celebrated in the school... You have a feasts notebook and every time a feasts is coming - and they are almost never too far away - so you study about this feast, what do you do in *Succot* and what is the meaning... I think that there is some xenophobia which the educational system in Israel plants into the minds of the people... maybe it changed during... the reign of Yossi Sarid as the Minister of Education... but I am quite sure that he did not change it enough and I'm quite sure that whatever he changed will be changed backwards.

Gilad: First and second grade you study the Torah. You have... religious classes, you study it not exactly as a religious book, you study it, how to interpret it...

D: [interrupts] Do you study it as literature?

G: No, no, not as literature... you study a lot of Jewish concept, all the history is painted in Jewish, you know, the brave Jews did this and did that. Once you learn about the mass suicide in *Metsada* [Massada] you study it as an act of heroism. You don't think... maybe they did something wrong when you study the story of *Bar Kochva* and you don't study like this was this fanatic guy, no chance at all, *Bar Kochva*... he committed suicide against the Roman emperor... it's religious fanaticism and all of the history of the Jewish people are based on being fanatic in religious like... in the educational system always telling you "Look how heroes they are, they died for their belief". I think it's a bit excessive... And you get it for granted... I know I never had the question inside me... is there really a God, only after, when I was maybe 10, 11 the question started to arise... does God exist, maybe there's another option? Nobody asked the question in school, not specifically.

This section introduces a subject worthy of study beyond the purview of this dissertation; the impact of state-sponsored religious education on Jewish socialisation. I do not have enough information on this topic to make judgements with regard to impact. However, it seems likely that given the nature of the school programme and the comments thereon above, that attempts to inculcate Jewish solidarity through the state education

sector lead to greater Jewish particularism and xenophobia without instilling a thorough knowledge of the texts or culture they are trying to teach.

Now we shift our focus from Jewish socialisation to a discussion of three important factors in Israeli identity politics; the army, the Holocaust and Zionism.

Chapter 7: Postzionism, the Army and the *Shoa*

In this chapter we will consider the present state of Zionism and Zionist identification through an account of controversies surrounding 'postzionist' thought, with Meretz activists giving their opinions on this debate before providing their own definitions of what it is to be a Zionist. Interviewees also relate to the army and its impacts on identification with the state, social cohesion, gender, politics and human and civil rights, before the chapter draws to a close with a piece on the Holocaust as a central and constitutive symbol in secular Jewish identity politics.

Will the Real Postzionist Please Stand Up?

A great deal of bile has been spilled in recent years concerning postzionism. To generalise, academics and commentators who have revisited the Zionist past and present and pointed out the co-opted nature of traditional Zionist history and myth-making and discourses on society, have been pilloried and branded with the label 'postzionist' (Barnett 1996:248). In part, this defensive posture has resulted from the compelling nature of the evidence produced, undermining previously held assumptions and myths of Zionist homogeneity as a virtuous system of beliefs and programme of 'return', settlement and assimilation. In the wake of the 1967 War recognition slowly developed of he centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the formation and history of Israeli society and, with related critiques, seriously undermined the progressive and humanistic image of the Zionist movement (Silberstein 1999). Concurrent changes in economic and cultural life also contributed to a societal de-ideologisation and the attendant de-mythologisation of the Zionist project. Postzionist focuses attention on issues such as the nature of Israeli democracy given its Jewish specificity, the marginalisation of certain communities from significant discursive fields, cultural and economic capital, and Zionist colonialism, and seeks to problematise established modes of Zionist thought on these issues, in doing so undermining Zionist representational hegemony. For example, Kimmerling (2002:1122) is unequivocal in identifying Israel as a colonial entity:

Israel was formed as a frontier society and a settler-immigrant state. To this day, it remains an active immigrant society engaged in a continuing settlement and territorial expansion process... [It was] sophisticated enough to distance itself from traditional global colonialism, the historical matrix from which it developed (Kimmerling 2002:1122).

The critique of Zionism as a colonial settler movement seriously undermines claims to the uniqueness, inevitability, and virtuous nature of the Zionist colonisation of Palestine by allowing its comparison with the colonial conquests of nineteenth century European empires. Indeed settler societies such as New Zealand, Australia and Canada have followed a not dissimilar historical course. Initial settlement was based morally on the assumption of a God-given 'right' to conquered territories. This was elaborated in a governing ideology that stressed the influence of colonists as agents of progress and the uninhabited or under-utilised nature of the land allowing its alienation from the local population. Both were central themes of early Zionist colonialism. Settlement followed with buy-outs, land-grabs and the violent subjugation of opposition, then the establishment of institutional forms of statehood and eventual independence and the denial of indigenous pleas for restitution. Only recently have these settler societies begun to renegotiate their historical understandings in a more critical light inspired by postcolonial critiques of previous understandings, of which postzionism is one. Israel's 'new historians' are a branch of an academic movement that has caused similar conflicts over the colonial past in New Zealand, the United States, Canada and Australia. Unlike these post-colonial societies, Israel does not recognise the indigenous rights of the usurped indigenes due to classical Zionism's certitude regarding Jewish ownership through historical and biblical ties.

This certitude and assumed righteousness has been seriously undermined since 1967 by the impact of the Occupation, which has led to a progressive public recognition of the distress caused by Zionist settlement. A more positive image of the Jewish Diaspora in the new civil religion also undermined the hegemony of classical Zionist triumphalism and, with the growing attraction of 'American' consumer culture, led to the implicit recognition that a meaningful Jewish life is possible outside Israel (Eisenstadt 1985:398). Ideological sterility, the growing legitimacy within Jewish identity politics of religious understandings

and symbolic fields, and the imperatives of social and economic liberalisation, and attendant individualism, have left secular Zionism a hollow husk open to individual and group reinterpretation in light of their own belief and value systems (Eisenstadt 1985:370; Uri Avinery cited in Schnall 1979:59).

Maoz Azaryahu (2000:43) describes the 'Americanization of Israel' as an important feature of the emergent "new Israel", and argues that this shows that Israeli society is "in the final stages of the foundation phase of its history". He argues that the American system of consumption "endorses individualism and hedonism, self-fulfilment and the quest for unrestrained pleasure" which is "why it is perceived by its opponents as a harbinger of vulgarity, commercialism and superficiality" (Azaryahu 2000:45). There is some truth in this assertion, particularly when it's related to the extreme demands imposed on Israeli youth by the state, their disinterest in Zionist education, and socialisation into 'mall-culture', but 'hedonism' and 'unrestrained pleasure' exaggerates the change in values somewhat and falls into the trap of taking at face value Zionist expressions of prior collective homogeneity and altruism (Garfinkle 1997:135; Palestine-Israel Journal 1999/2000:16-19).

A 2002 study of Israeli advertising (Haaretz, 1/2/02) found an industry obsessed with the symbols and language of American consumer culture. The study's findings were summarised by one of its co-authors, Dr. Eli Avraham; "We are still dreaming in Hebrew but America is the identity of which we are dreaming" (Haaretz, 1/2/02). Myron Aronoff (2000:92, 99) discusses the 'Americanization' of the Israeli political system through the introduction of party primaries, the institution of the direct election of the prime minister, the de-ideologisation of political debate, and the introduction of American-style electioneering through a new emphasis on the personalisation of political debate, a reliance on polls, and the increasing importance of television. Television has certainly played a part in changing the nature of political campaigning (Laskier 2000:128). Many of the activities we undertook during the 1999 campaign were designed to attract the press, particularly TV news crews, for precious seconds of countrywide exposure.

The changes occurring through economic liberalisation and the growing individualism and acquisitiveness of Israeli society have a positive aspect, overturning the previous obsession with the collective of classical Zionism and allowing the development of a nascent civil society that permits the questioning of authority, a new emphasis on civil and

human rights both politically and in terms of jurisprudence, and the demythologisation of history and conflict (Laskier 2000:129). Meretz is a product of these developments.

There is a strong rump of scholars defending the barricades of classical Zionism and arguing against what they perceive to be the pretensions of an effete minority of intellectuals out of touch with pro-Zionist popular opinion. Their task is made somewhat easier by the setting up of 'postzionism' as a windmill to tilt at rather than their seeking to address what is a complex and irreducible variety of criticisms of Israeli society including new histories and social scientific studies dealing with identity, power relations, colonialism, representation, minority rights and rebellion, etc. The label is also easily used to raise popular ire, simplistically presenting 'postzionist' scholarship as a mode of disloyalty standing outside the 'Zionist consensus': "Postzionists are a tiny minority in Israeli society today, found mostly among the intellectual elite and within academia... it is hard to see it appealing to the Jewish masses, because they have a vested interest in keeping Israel Jewish and Zionist" (Sammy Smooha cited in Abdel-Malek & Jacobson 1999:201). Notice the references to the 'masses' and postzionism as a de-Judaising academic stream. Jewish identity and society as a monist unity are both invoked with postzionists presented as alienated from both. It should be remembered here that the new civil religion, building on latent racism in society, equates membership in the Jewish collective with the ability to speak in public debates. Here we see this right to speak, or to criticise, being denied, even if unconsciously - which I believe to be the case here given Smooha's pluralistic propensities. The postzionist debate is nothing if not political.

Kimmerling coined the acronym 'Ahusal'[33] to describe the Ashkenazi Labour-socialist elite and charts their fall in *The End of Ashkenazi Hegemony* (2001) and the rise of Gush Emunim, the ultra-Orthodox and *Mizrachim* (Haaretz, 28/7/01). In a paper presented to the Association of Israel Studies in June 2000 Kimmerling wrote of two "significant empirical and theoretical changes" in Israel in the past decade, the first, "A cognitive and paradigmatic shift from the existence of a state-within-a-society to a situation of several cultures and coexistence of several societies-within-a-state". The second is a "decomposition of Israeli nationalism into two rival, competing identities" (Kimmerling

---

[33]Ahusal: Ashkenaziness (*ashkenaziut*), secularism (*hiloniut*), socialism (*sozialism*) and nationalism (*leumanut*), husal means "he was eliminated/wiped out" (Ha'aretz 28/9/01).

2000). The first change consists of "The political empowerment of diverse populations" which "threatens the veteran founding father's cultural, political and economic dominance" (Kimmerling AIS Conference 2000). In an earlier article Kimmerling identifies the four main ideological fonts of Zionism; Judaism, socialism, secular-nationalism and classic liberalism, and seeks to disclose the tensions between particularism and universalism in each component of the Zionist movement (Cohen, Lissak & Almagar 1985:262). The "delicate balance" between universalism and Jewish specificity in each element was destabilised or shifted through demographic change, which in turn led to changes in the role of religion in Zionist and Israeli collective identity - the 1967 invasion of the West Bank and Gaza and 1977 change in governing parties proving particularly momentous (Cohen, Lissak & Almagar 1985:266-267). It is this destabilisation and the consequent eruption of competing identity politics, ethno-religious-class politics and heightening of the conflicts over the peace process and *kulturkampf* which form the background for this dissertation and are denied or downplayed by those who wish to present a more pacific impression of Israeli society, or deny the steady erosion of Ahusal primacy.

The Mutiny Against Collectivism

One of the more interesting phenomena in recent Israeli history has been the rapid weakening of collectivist orientations and the emergence of a more sovereign Jewish citizen through the rapid social and economic changes mentioned above. However, a full civil society is yet to emerge. Collectivism remains a value essential to state control mechanisms (education, army, etc.) political polemic, and popular discourses on what it is to be Jewish and Israeli. However, secular society has increasingly engaged in a velvet revolution of discursive allegiance to collectivism and private rebellion against the pragmatic and ideological strictures of the collectivist ethos. The establishment of consumer culture is one example, with those malls that are open packed on Shabbat and calls to make Sunday another day off work. The army has long stood as a bulwark against individualist orientations but this bastion is also crumbling with the increasing unwillingness of secular Israelis to serve in combat units, a strong conscientious objection movement - over 1,000 soldiers have refused to serve in the Territories, which is unprecedented in the history of the state - and the increasingly vocal criticism of the IDF in

Israeli society, which is far more direct than criticisms of the military in any Western nation since Vietnam.

Recurrent governments have been increasingly viewed as corrupt and ineffectual with close to half the population at any one time standing in direct opposition to its security policies and even its legitimacy, if it is a left wing government. The popularity of Shas is a sign that 'traditional' Jews are using a newly found, individualistic reflexivity to vote in a party that is not Zionist but instead stands as a guarantor of particularistic Sephardi pride and culture **against** the values and ideology of secular Zionist collectivism, both Labour and Revisionist.

Trends diverge with regards to the recognition of the right of the individual to criticise the collective and stand apart from its imperatives. A strong collectivist orientation is still expressed through the educational emphasis on *gibush*[34] and the popular feeling that one must sacrifice elements of individual freedom for the good of the nation. This ethos, for example, leads to a blind trust that allows the actions and statements of government spokesmen and the security forces to go unchecked at times of war except by the radical left, with their protests largely being ignored by the media.

The judicial revolution instituted through the legislation of Basic Laws tabled by Meretz (see Chapter 8), installed for the first time quasi-constitutional guarantees of individual freedoms. This has proved useful for those with the money and time to devote to lengthy court battles, but has had no real impact on popular understandings of individual sovereignty vis-à-vis the state. Democratic norms are very shallow and weak in Israeli society and the development of a full civil society is a long way off. It is threatened by the anti-democratic propensities of the secular and religious right and even Labour, the collectivist ethos, excessive militarism and endemic corruption. Meretz, itself is not immune to these maladies but adheres to individualism ideologically as a guiding principle for political reform, as does Shinui.

Overall, economic liberalisation and the assumption of powerful 'American' cultural norms relating to the 'freedom to consume' and to lead a life that is not impinged upon by collectivist demands and constraints, have led to an increasingly utilitarian relationship between individual and state. This is expressed politically in the massive electoral swings

---

[34] 'Togetherness', a collectivist orientation..

between rival political camps promising freedom from insecurity either through the peace process or punitive measures. To generalise, most Israelis are tired of war and want to be left alone by a state whose main purpose, they believe, should be the facilitation of economic affluence within a Jewish society. In this sense, Israel is becoming a 'normal' Western society.

What is Zionism?

The vast majority of Meretz activists identify as Zionists, but their answers to what Zionism consists of display a general disbelief in the value system of classical Zionism. The Holocaust and perceived pervasiveness of Gentile anti-Semitism are used to legitimate the colonisation of Palestine and need for a Jewish state. A great confusion exists as to how to define Zionism in a secular milieu that is not post-colonial but in which the value system of *hitnachliut* is viewed as both anachronistic and the preserve of settler extremists. A number of responses display the influence of postzionist thought, while a handful of interviewees described themselves as non-Zionists.

Definition problems

D: Are you a Zionist?

Noam: Yes, of course... I heard that Shimon Peres... said Zionism was a revolution and a revolution that's a success and today... you don't need it anymore because you have a country... I don't know... what is to be a Zionist but I know what... is to opponent to Zionism... when I saw, let's say the militants of the... Arabs and the *haredim*. They say that they are anti-Zionist, and so I say I am a Zionist... I define myself as the opposite of them... So I don't know what is to be today a Zionist.

D: Do you think it's... to be an Israeli nationalist today...

N: No, there is no Israeli nationalism... There is... ideas that you have that supposed to be but I can't see something like this today.

We see here that the failure, on the part of the socialising state, to develop a clear sense of Israeli nationalism and identity has left secular Israelis without a consistent national identity free of Jewish particularism and its increasingly religious overtones. Thus Noam

feels unable to define his Zionism except in opposition to ultra-Orthodox and Arab rejectionism.

Below, Ehud actually describes elements of a latent nationalist ideology in seeking to define his Zionist identity, then relates directly to a universalism he believes was absent from classical Zionism (although it was an ideological element):

Ehud: I'm a Zionist, although I have problems with the definition of what a Zionist... in the sense that I identify completely... [with] a place for the Jewish people. I'm a Zionist in the sense that I feel so belonging to this country I'd never ever think of living somewhere else... but I'm not Zionist in the sense that I will not die for this country no matter what...

D: Do you think that that's changed over time - because obviously it was different in the pioneering period - what Zionism meant?

E: Right, I think it's changed in the sense that in the late '40s and the early '50s Zionism meant that you don't see anything else but yourself and you were justified living for this country and fighting for it, etc. It has changed tremendously. The country... is much more secure, much stronger. And Zionists, we are able to see others and not only ourselves.

Postzionist Tendencies

Many respondents related to themes picked up by postzionist scholarship, sometimes in an effort to explain why they themselves are not Zionists, but more often to elucidate on the aspects of the Zionist past or present they find abhorrent or desired not to be identified with:

D: What, what about yourself, are you a Zionist?

Efrat: Actually not, not really... it's not that I'm anti-Zionism in any particular way I just don't believe in nationalism... every state thinks that it's the best state and everything we do is great and every state uses violence to keep itself... sometimes when I think about things we did at '48 I feel bad about it and that's like a taboo. You're not supposed to talk about it... you're supposed to just talk about the occupying of '67... you're not supposed to talk about... shit this whole state is one big Occupation... but then again I look at my grandparents or the people that came here from... Eastern Europe and... all the rest of their

family died in the Holocaust after they came... I think it would have been better for them to go... to America to tell you the truth but they decided to come and build a country and I can't really blame them on that.

Efrat does not identify as a Zionist and links this rejection to her recognition of injustices inflicted on the Palestinian people. In a non-taped interview, Yara followed a similar line in arguing that the whole concept of the Jewish state is problematic. She believes that it's impossible to ignore the fact that the persecution of non-Jews is ongoing; "It's terrible". "I'm so ashamed of it, to be in a country that does that. I'd better stop before I burst into tears, it makes me so mad". She views Zionism as a religious ideology building on biblical understandings of the importance of Israel. She says that Israelis don't have an intrinsic right to the country, and if it was possible to choose again where the Jewish state should be set up she would insist on it being sited in some unpopulated place. Efrat and Yara were only joined by two other interviewees in declaring themselves non-Zionists, without countering this by identifying as Israeli nationalists.

Yaron: Zionism is believing in the right of Jews to come and live in Israel... it doesn't mean that you should come to Israel... But I think Zionism is about Jews having a big fall back position. And I also think that Zionism is something that's changing now... postzionism is a certain movement which speaks about Jews not having the right to live in Zion, in Israel anymore.

Aviv: I don't have any attachment for the land... since the Zionist movement and the born of the Israeli state being a Jew... has a national signification with the Hebrew language... OK, you have many people who speak Hebrew and who are not Jews, you have many Jews who don't speak Hebrew... the intellectuals of the postzionists... They say that "OK now... Israel is an individualistic society so we are not a Jewish state at all... that's nonsense for me. What does it mean to be a state like any other state... Each state has his own particularities and it's good to be like that. I'm also for universal issues and for universal values and I don't think that the nation-state... is an inevitable framework. For me it's... not a value, OK. But is it a value to survive as a people with our national language, with our

national culture... to preserve it and, on the other hand, to be open to other cultures. And it's very difficult... For me Zionism is the expression of the Jewish people, their will to survive, not more than this. In our actual world people cannot survive without a nation-state... And I'm really aware of the difficulty to be Zionist on one hand and to be humanist and left wing on the other. But many people did try from Martin Buber to the leaders of Mapam, of RATZ... of Sheli, the leaders of *Shalom Akhshav*. You have a really huge tradition of people... for whom humanistic values and Jewish will to survive was two important things.

Yaron and Aviv display the common prejudice that postzionism is in fact anti-Zionism and anti-Jewish. We see here the success of opponents in proroguing debate through a discourse on loyalty and disloyalty. Erez recognises the changes taking place in Israeli society and comes up with his own response as to what it is to be a Zionist today, again displaying the general confusion of Zionism with an underlying Israeli nationalism. Naaman is unequivocal on this point, rejecting Zionism in favour of Israeli identity.

Erez: OK. I don't know how to say that but; I'm Jewish and I'm here, and I'm doing what I'm doing and I'm in Meretz, and I see it just for that, that I'm Jewish and I have to do something good for this country because we don't have another place to live... now the Zionism... and the socialism is not like they was 50 years ago, it's something that changed all the time. But the Zionism now it's not... making more place to live and all this. Now... it's take care to good education, this is the Zionism now.

Naaman: I'm not a Jew I'm an Israeli. I was born an Israeli so I was born Zionist. Zionism has served its purpose.

Finally, Roni speaks to the general feeling that classical Zionism is a bit old-fashioned and out of step with modern realities, stating clearly that he views it as a colonial movement:

Roni: It's a little hard to define Zionism... first of all if Zionism is a philosophy... which decides that Israel is like the home of the Jews and blah, blah, blah, blah... Zionism is a very old theory and it was devised during the nineteenth century and you can smell lots of colonial and imperial smells in it.

Zion as Safe-haven

Jewish suffering in the Diaspora, past, present and future came across as a dominant theme in the responses of many interviewees. This unmasks a fear of the Gentile world, perceived as implacably hostile, that both builds on the traditional negation of *Galut* in classical Zionist ideology and goes beyond it, taking the Holocaust as its central symbol and Jewish solitude as its template in keeping with the prejudices of post-1967 civil religion.

Hadar: ...as long as there is anti-Semitism in the world we have to have a country with Jewish... I was born here, but I don't think... it must be in Israel because it's holy land... What is Zionism? For some people it means that the only place for Jewish is Israel but for the real Zionists, like Herzl, it was... what I said that as long as we have anti-Semitism we have to have a place of our own.

Here Hadar mentions Herzl's conviction that a Jewish state meant safety for the Jewish people, without relating to his belief in the attendant normalisation of Jewish society, an important omission. Tali specifically relates Israeli nationalism to the Holocaust, an unthinkable association in early post-independence Israel which virtually ignored the Holocaust, blaming the victims before commemorations were instituted in the 1950s emphasising the heroism of those who resisted the Nazi genocide:

Tali: I think the main reason... the modern nationalism... in Israel today is coming from the motive of the Holocaust.

Gal: If Zionism is a sanctuary for Jewish people against anti-Semism, yes, if Zionism... is said to build a country that will protect the Jewish people, yes, no more... I'm not saying that this should be an excuse to abuse other people.

Tamar: I'm a Zionist, I believe... that the Jewish people need a state... If the world was a better place we wouldn't... And I told you that I have a problem with this because it is also racism to say this and it's leading to other problems. And I am a Zionist, but I don't think that every Jew that come to Israel have to get immediate citizenship.' So... other people would say that I am not a Zionist. I am a Zionist in a way that I think that we need a state... because other people recognise Jewish as a nation. Even before the Jewish state people said, "OK, you're Jewish you're outside our society"... therefore we are not part of the society and we need our own state.

Both Tamar and Gal use the symbol of the Holocaust to explain their own belief in the need for a Jewish state and to criticise the Zionist assumption that Israel belongs to the Jewish people as of right. Boaz talks of a different failure of Zionism:

Boaz: ...after the Holocaust you can't say that Zionism has any kind of winning because it lost... when the Holocaust took place it meant that Zionism or at least most of the potential of Zionism died... But in a way like we have a national home now... where you don't... need to be religious in order to be a Jew... and that's very important...
D: OK, are you a Zionist?
B: I don't know. It's a difficult one to answer. I don't know, I was born here... I'm an Israeli... I didn't have to have any kind of ideology in order to come here... this is my country, this is my citizenship, I didn't have any kind of choice in the matter so... it's difficult for me to say. But... I do think that I am a Zionist in the way that I think... that Jewish people needed to have their own self-determination in order to survive.

It is important to note that the premising of Zionism in the suffering of the Jewish people in Diaspora is not necessarily consistent with classical Zionist claims to a relationship between *Eretz* and *Am* and in fact, through elision, borders on a rejection of

claims to the mutual dependence of each in the renaissance of the Jewish people. Here Meretz activists are not making strong claims to the right of the Jewish people to *Eretz Yisrael*, a stance no doubt influenced by the excessive relation of the two in settler ideology. The radical Kookist reinterpretation of classical political Zionism and the assumption of the traditional Zionist pioneering identity by the national-religious speak to the fragmentation and lack of utility of Zionism as an organising concept in identity politics. Zionism now exists as a polemical tool, a descriptor for a highly individuated secular Israeli nationalism and as the masking discourse for a colonial settlement programme. This understanding puts surveys demonstrating a virtual universality of Zionist identification into perspective.

Zionism as Nation-Building

Different tenets of Zionist ideology do survive in an altered form despite wide differences of interpretation. One particularly strong understanding is that Israel is a work in progress requiring the personal effort of the individual to bring about its realisation and ensure its safety as a Jewish country.

Racheli: I consider myself as a Zionist in my terms... I think Zionism it's the idea of living here first of all. It's the understanding that you want to live here. And part of that is wanting to make a contribution to help this country to be built. And I think my political involvement it is a Zionist action. And if Zionism is to think that we have the first claim to this piece of land then, no, I don't think so. I think that we have equal claims of this piece of land. And if Zionism is to think that if we [settle?] the West Bank we have to do it, or in Gaza, so I think... most of the right people won't define me as Zionist which I think is insulting, it's the same thing like telling me how Jewish I am. But I'm not consider myself as a postzionist, I'm not, because postzionists think that Zionism has nothing to do with the new age, and I don't believe so. I think that the Zionist revolution was a very important one. It made a lot of good things to the Jewish people.

Racheli's interview excerpt demonstrates a number of key ideas held by many Meretz activists; that the right wing are seeking to deny both the Jewishness and Zionism of the

left, that Zionism does not entail militant nationalism or ignoring the suffering of the Palestinians, that political involvement constitutes a Zionist act, and that the institution of a Jewish state was a positive development. Amit agrees that political and social work is the modern Zionism and relates to Labour-Zionist *hitnachliut* as a dead-letter:

Amit: And you remember this debate about whether we have the right about Israel. So all we said, we have the right about Israel because the UN gave it to us they said... "you deserve this". So we have to prove we deserve this... Proving being 'moral and ethical, we're very poor in this... we have failed the dream upon which I was raised. It's a very rooted feeling inside my Israelity maybe, more than my Judaism. I was raised... on the ideas of my mother and father who were born in Israel, who were into the dream. My mother, I'll always remember in Passover we were asking her what do you want to have when you found the *afikoman*, you know the thing, and she said, "Well the free state with our own flag and", urgh!...

D: Do you think that there's still that vision of an idealised Hebrew man?

A: Today it's not someone who goes to the kibbutz and works inside the kibbutz, or goes and works the land, but those who works the people... if someone goes to *Noar* Meretz and decides to do a service year and goes to, to Beersheva and works with the kids in the Meretz Youth in Beersheva and then also goes outside and helps in the neighbourhoods in Beersheva, he's the 'New Hebrew' because he is the one who is not thinking about himself but thinking about others, helping others, educating others, working for others. And I don't think working the land today is the ideal.

Michael: I guess I am a Zionist in my own way. Nobody can define Zionism, that's a cliché that is very well known but my Zionism is... being politically active that's all... it's just doing what you believe in the best... for Zion, or for the country, or for society, or for you in the end.

D: Do you feel that the existence of Israel... is vital for the Jewish people?

M: Yeah, definitely... it is the shelter, it is important... it's kind of a protector of Jewish, of Jews all over the world in a sense... Israel is a nice experiment... in the sense that it is

trying... to take a million different... cultures from around the world and try to combine them into one big pot.

Where Michael holds to the impossibility of defining Zionism and the individuated nature of identification thereto, Avi has no such doubts describing his own Zionism explicitly as a mode of Israeli nationalism. He believes firmly in the right of the Jewish people to Israel:

D: Are you a Zionist?

Avi: Yeah, I'm one of the truly last Zionists... my grandfather... I feel most connected to him, like his ideology... I have roots in the left that I really am proud of them... I see myself as a true Zionist-Israeli. I served in the army, I believe in this country and that's all.

D: ...what is it to be a Zionist?

A: It's believing... to be aware of this miracle of the birth of Israel... that the Jew came to Israel after 2000 years he came back again.... Zionism today is not just to settle in the country... to build new settlements, to protect security and all that, it's dealing with education. Today to be a Zionist is to be an Israeli patriot, this is Zionism today... we don't have to believe in the Zionism of coming to live in Israel and to settle in the country. We have to develop the country.

D: What's the basis of Jewish claims to Israel? Do you think it's a Biblical claim, a historical claim... to be able to settle here again?

A: It's a beautiful question because it's a part of all... the historical reasons, the religious reasons... all the religious people... they always ask in the political propaganda "Why are we here, why are we here? Because we are Jewish"... this is unbelievable that after 1800 years we wanted to come to Israel. So I think it's a combination of all the historical reasons and the religious.

In the following passage Idan talks of his pride in the achievements of secular Zionism while defining his own Zionist identity in relation to the army - a concept we will return to below in positing the army as one of the last surviving vestiges of Zionist collectivism and

solidarity. Ilan agrees while Ophir rejects this assessment in relating his own confusion as to whether he is a Zionist or not:

Idan: The men that came here saw that, that culture of 2000 years as something bad because we just... waited for the Messiah... 2000 years we waited. The Zionists, thought that this is not true, it's not. They left all this culture behind them and came here and built this country in the spirit of the West, of the liberal emancipation... After 2000 years of religious Jew the country was built on non-religious culture and that is what I'm proud of... But most of the people who got out from East Europe went to America. I think all the second *aliyah* were leaders of the new culture. The first *aliyah* wasn't because they were partly Orthodox and... they worked but they also took the Arabs to work for them. And from that you can't create a new people there, you can't create a new culture... if you come here and you have the money but you don't have to work for you...

D: What's Zionism?

I: I think you love the country. You care about what's happening here. In two weeks abroad you have to watch CNN to see what's going on here, to phone and ask what is going on in the country. I don't think that people from the States when they visit Europe they have to know what's happening in the U.S. To be in the army... it's part of the Zionism

Ilan: I am a patriot. They call it Zionism but I am a patriot... Israeli patriotism is Zionism... For me to live here is Zionism, to defend my country. That includes defending her from enemies between us [means within the Jewish people].

Ophir: Yeah, it's [militarist ethic] too strong. It started with Trumpeldor, "*Tov Lamut ve'ad Artzeinu*" ['It's good to die for our country', purportedly Trumpeldor's last words]... I don't think its good to die for your country... country's not worth it. And, of course, it's not worth to kill for your country... I think the image of the pioneer disappeared... the image we studied in history books of A.D. Gordon, for example, who came here and said that the work should be the essence of the... people.

D: *Avodah Evrit* wasn't it, the concept?

O: Yeah, yeah, people don't see it like this anymore. People see work as a means of acquiring more and more money...

D: Are you a Zionist?

O: You know that's a question I've been asking people for a few months now, what the fuck is Zionism?... because if you ask me what Zionism is I'll tell you it's a movement from a hundred years ago, maybe a very positive movement, that brought... Europe to recognise that the Jewish people are a nation and they should have a national home... in Israel... But today, what is Zionism, I really don't know. So I don't know if to tell you that I'm a Zionist.

Zionist Symbols

Israel has not completed the process by which symbols, myths, and a code of values are consolidated into a coherent ethos consistent with political, social, and economic patterns of behavior (Arye Cannon cited in Sprinzak & Diamond 1993:295).

In the New *Yishuv* and early state period Zionism was faced with the problem of having to create a new symbolic field to support its efforts at cultural production and reformation. It came to rely heavily on the use of symbols closely associated with the religious tradition including the *Magen David* (which is also evocative of the pre-Diasporic kingdoms of antiquity), the *menorah*, the use of secularised Biblical phrases and words to describe the Zionist project, the use of fire and candles (though torches and fire-signs were also an important aspect of nationalist cults in Europe), *Eretz Yisrael* as both a value and symbol, etc.

I asked interviewees whether the national flag - the *Magen David* imposed on a *tallit* and national anthem *Hatikva* ('The Hope') should be kept or changed to allow Israeli-Arabs to feel some connection to the state's symbolic field. This question was designed to provoke more of a 'gut reaction' as emblems of nationhood and independence are symbolic of national and, by association, personal freedom and cultural pride. Most interviewees agreed that some change needed to take place but believed that this would not happen in the near future, with some expressing misgivings related to their support for the Jewish character of

the state and personal attachment to the flag and *Hatikva*.

Yuval: ...they should be changed. Changed, is a matter of not erasing but...

D: It should be expanded do you think?

Y: Yeah.

Naaman: There should be an expansion in national symbols to incorporate Israel's minorities.

D: Should Israel keep the Zionist flag, the national anthem and other symbols or should they be changed to be more inclusive of... Israeli-Arabs?

Ehud: On one hand I would say definitely. All the things you just mentioned don't take into consideration the Arabs... On the other hand, I think we are in such a fragile state that doing it at the moment is not the best thing to do... And I tried to picture in my head when would be the best time to do it. Definitely after we are not still at war with our neighbours... and even the right wing people would treat minorities as part of the society which, at the moment, we don't... as long as the whole society don't see... the Israeli-Arabs as part of the society there's no place for it. It will just leading to... much more disputes.

I did get the feeling with some responses that the call for a delay in implementation of symbolic change had more to do with an unexpressed disagreement with symbolic reorganisation, given the rather loaded nature of the question. Regardless, most respondents didn't view the issue as one of pressing importance in light of the problems facing society.

Ophir: Yeah, they should be changed... It will take... very much time.

Yossi joins other activists in proposing an expansion of the state symbolic field rather than the scrapping of those symbols used at present out of a feeling of deep personal attachment. A general concern with maintaining the Jewish character of the state symbolically comes across here and in following excerpts:

Yossi: Maybe they should be kept... as a memorial but they... should be changed to the values of justice... and equivalency and peace and all that, something that the Arabs could identify also. The flag... it's difficult because I was born into it... If I would have been born to something else I would have been used to something else. So I'm not sure if it would be something very, very bad to change it, but maybe... some solution like two flags... there might be a solution to change it but there has to be something Jewish-Israeli in the flag.

Danny: Yeah. Unfortunately I have to say no. They have to... stay... it's part of the Jewish identity of the state. I am pro giving cultural autonomy... to Israeli-Arabs

Boaz: ...they should be changed but they can still symbolise the fact that this is a Jewish state. There's a very clear division between having an anthem that... totally... leaves them [Arabs] out. They can't really sing it, they can't identify with it and... that's a problem. However, you can have a flag that has a... Star of David on it. I don't think that's a big problem... waving the flag is not like singing an anthem that you don't recognise. And so I think... it's a problem of aesthetics and... it's a problematic area because someone might have a different taste than I and say like "Oh, you know, the flag as well... is not good".
D: Do you think that there's any possibility of these things happening soon?
B: Hell no.

Moshe: I think that the symbols should stay. Maybe in the... the far future after all our problems, or at least... All the current problems will be solved... it may become a debate but it is not an issue right now and I see no reason why it should be changed.

Avi: No change, only because of the tradition... I know that... the national anthem does not talk to the Arabs... because it's part of the tradition I think that we don't have to change it.

D: OK. Should Israel retain the Zionist flag, the national anthem and other... Jewish symbols?
Hadar: Yes, even though it doesn't mean anything... it makes me cry when I see the flag. But everyone else do it in the world and, like I said, we are a small tribe we really need

something... We should change... the national song because... Arabs here they can't sing the song because it only speak about Jewish people. But the flag, it's OK.

Amir raises an interesting point in proposing semantic rather than outright symbolic change. He rightly postulates that without their representative aspect symbols are devoid of meaning:

D: ...symbols or should they be changed to be more inclusive of the Arab population and other minorities?

Amir: No, because... it will never happen, second of all... it would have no meaning because today the flag has a meaning... If they'll put a yellow flag it wouldn't mean anything to the people... in Israel. As an Israeli I know my flag, I know my national anthem and Arabs know my national anthem too even if it's not theirs... I think you should actually change... the way of thought in Israel not the flag.

Gal was the only one of my research participants to talk of actually feeling uneasy with the current symbolic field, as opposed to merely recognising that changes need to take place:

Gal: Something like two years... [now] I don't sing the national... anthem... I cannot identify and feel sympathy with some of the lines. The flag... I would not say that I despise it but I do not feel any proud, well it's a flag... it's a symbol, that's it.

Negation of the *Galut*

[There is] a deep and principled difference between Jewish life in the Israel and the Diaspora (Ben Gurion cited in Liebman & Don-Yehiya 1983:88).

Myron Aronoff (Sprinzak & Diamond 1993:56) describes the "eschatalogical notion" of exile and redemption as the core myth of Zionism, providing the prism through which the world order was to be conceived and setting the scene for the development of mechanisms of social action. For Palestinian emigration and settlement to be viewed by

Jews as being not merely a just response to persecution but a necessity impelled by the attenuated and debased state of Diasporic Jewish culture, a radical differentiation had to be made between the weak, subservient *Galut* Jew and the proud, independent 'new Hebrew' in control of their own destiny - a juxtaposition that carried more than a hint of traditional anti-Semitic imagery. Amnon Rubinstein (Liebman & Don-Yehiya 1983:96) describes the classical Zionist vision of the new Hebrew forged by the renewal of the relationship between *Am* and *Eretz*; "He is a Hebrew and not a Jew and he is destined to bring an end to the humiliation of his parents. All that the Jews lack is in him: strength, health, physical labor... rootedness".

The mythologisation of the new native-born generation of sabras, shedding the cultural and spiritual detritus of 2000 years of subservience, bolstered statism by association and provided support to the new state's integrative mechanisms which were designed to divest new immigrants of this exilic cultural baggage in an effort that was more successful at denigration and deprivation than homogenisation. Kimmerling (1989:250) exposes the internal contradiction inherent in the reliance of the young state on the support of a thriving Jewish Diaspora, particularly in America which was a far more popular destination for pre and post-World War Two Jewish emigration from Europe. Given that Israelis were the most at risk Jewish community in the world, the vision of Israel as a Jewish lifeboat, though still popular in Israel today, could not but ring hollow in much of the Diaspora, despite their overwhelming support for the Jewish state.

The absolute negation of the *Galut* did not survive these contradictions as more than a general Israeli prejudice and as a feeling of superiority over Jews who fail to join them in the nation-building enterprise. A more positive relationship to the *Galut* began to develop with the valorisation of the religious tradition as a treasure house of elements affirming Jewish unity and confraternity in the post-1967 civil religion. Liebman (1983:132) explains that this new civil religion, "accords respect to Diaspora Jewry and it recognizes the past and present Diaspora as intimately connected to, and interrelated with, the Jewish state, yet possessed of a legitimate authority". This is certainly true but this more positive attitude is undermined somewhat by the image of the Jews as "a nation that dwells alone" propagated by the same civil religion, a vision that leads many Israelis to see the Diaspora as inherently doomed by the eternal enmity of the world. Nonetheless the more open attitude to *Galut*

Jewry, and the 'Americanisation' of Israel, make the stated intent of PM Sharon and the Jewish Agency to work towards the immigration of one million 'Western' Jews within the next ten years seem more than a little ridiculous.

Attitudes to the Diaspora are actually quite different depending on the country from which immigration, or non-immigration, eventuates. Significant racism exists with some believing that Jews (and non-Jews) from Western countries are insane for wanting to live in Israel, while East European, Ethiopian, and other immigrant communities are treated as economic refugees, spongers off the state, and as questionable Jews. This exists alongside a surprising amount of prejudice against past and present Diasporic Jewry which emerges in the responses of Meretz activists to questions on the issue. In the first excerpt we see traditional anti-Semitic imagery being brought up in the description of Jewish influences on Israeli behaviour, while the second proposes a Jewish cultural degeneration in the centuries before Zionism:

Hadar: Yes, it's different times because when Herzl was it was the *Galut*, the only place was not in Israel and the Jewish people were a lot different [than] today. They were like slaves in a way, they couldn't go like this. It's an amazing thing I heard that in Israel every Israeli citizen thinks how... I'll not be a sucker, how can I take more from the government. It's like in the *Galut*. The *Galut*, it wasn't their country, they didn't feel like they are equality so they always thought how to get from the Tsar or from the king... I don't want to be ashamed of being Jewish. I don't want to be like the ones in the *Galut*.

Idan: I'm not proud that I look at the Jews in the last 500 years before the Zionists. I don't proud of what they were like... The *Galut* was very long, but the part that that I am talking about is when we were in East Europe and that we're doing exactly what the rabbis said without thinking at all. The rabbi was the leader, he was the *Gaon* ['genius'] and he knew what God wanted.

D: The arisal of *Hasidism*?

I: Yeah, yeah, and that is the horribilist time of Jewish culture...

D: There was always a lot of interpretation and debate in *Halakha* wasn't there?

I: Yeah, yeah, yeah there was, but now the Orthodox expects only one answer, and that we

follow and it's very wrong... I think it is very difficult... to think that you are a Jew, to be a Jew not in Israel.

D: ...what's the difference between being a Jew in the Diaspora and being a Jew in Israel?

Amnon: You are living in a normal nation and you have also the benefits and the problems of a normal nation. And the Jews in the Diaspora, I don't know generally what are they waiting [for], what do they want... they should come here. Of course they have the right to live where they want to... it's like they are waiting, if everything is good they are asking "What"? If something is wrong... they count on it that they can run away to here. Generally I don't like it much, but of course it is their right.

Galut negation themes in Amnon's excerpt include the belief that the Diaspora is ill-fated, that Jews should come to Israel, and that Jews overseas do not have the same degree of personal sovereignty they would possess should they immigrate to the Jewish state. Michael takes this further, expressing his belief that life in Diaspora communities is tainted by memories of the anti-Semitic past:

D: What about if the communities in the Diaspora were under threat, for example, would you feel stronger about that?

Michael: Well, I guess I would... in the end Israel was created to be their home or their shelter... not because they're Jewish by religion but because they are Jew, they are part of my people... maybe I would have more feelings towards a person who is Jewish, I can't really tell... there is a Jewish experience which is foreign... I don't like that experience, OK. I wouldn't like to be living in France now as a Jew... or living in Poland for example... the whole foreign Jew nationality, identity... has a lot of negative associations with like the Holocaust or persecution.

Aviv is a new immigrant. Drawn to Israel by his Zionist beliefs he feels that living a full Jewish life in the Diaspora is impossible. He speaks of an identity crisis and the fear of assimilation in the community he comes from, a crisis he believes leads to a 'mental ghettoisation':

Aviv: ...in the Jewish community in Britain[35] people in my generation are living through a kind of identity crisis... a good deal of them came back to religion in different degrees of...

D: [interrupts] Right. Do you think that's because religion is the main way to express yourself as Jewish in the Diaspora?

A: Yes... of course you are absolutely true, the main reason of this phenomena of going back to religion is an identity crisis... it's not a purely religious thing... they didn't wake up one day and say "Wow, I saw God". No, no, they come back one day, two days, and three days and say "OK, that's because I'm Jewish but I'm like my neighbour, OK, I look like him, I have the same clothes so what makes me so different? What is it to be Jewish?... and the whole Jewish community in Britain is getting more and more religious and closer and closer... it's kind of what I call mentally ghetto... why, because they are afraid of assimilation... and I have to admit that assimilation is not a wrong fear... my grandmother was the only [one] from our family to marry a Jew... all of her sisters married Gentiles... in one of the cases they did convert to Anglicanism. So the cousins of my mother are Anglicans and I remember that I went to a wedding... in that same part of the family in the church, it wasn't only a civil wedding but a religious... Anglican wedding... I don't say "OK that's bad", OK, that's not for me... In my opinion assimilation is a natural process in Diaspora. You speak the language like everyone else and Britain is a very strong assimilative country, OK, that's very strong... I knew that for me being Jewish was so important that I could never assimilate... even if I said to me "OK, being Jew is too complicate, now I'm not a Jew".... Some young man that in the age of 20, 22 tried to convert to Judaism and to have *brit mila*... at that age... That's to show you the depths of the identity crisis they went through... Mental ghettoisation. We will see the world like this... you have the Jews, us, and the rest of the world. The rest of the world mainly is enemies... I really hate it... on the other hand I had to admit in spite of my left wing orientation that I was a part of it because I was really... obsessed about Israel... I thought that it was crazy because being a Jew in the Diaspora... made me an obsessive person and a narrow-minded person... So, in a few words the reason of my being here is that I want... to reconcile to be also a Jew and also a human being.

---

[35] Country and other details changed to protect identity.

Moshe discusses the different attitude of Israelis to immigrants from Russia and the United States and relates his own conviction that a full national life is only possible for Jews in Israel, without condemning those who choose to remain in other countries:

Moshe: If we're talking about Jews who come from Russia then... they treat them the same way that they treat the *Galut*... always... and also you can say that they are coming here just to benefit things and they are not really super Zionists like we are and therefore they deserve all the bad attitude which we can give them.

D: Do you think there's a different orientation towards the Americans?

M: Definitely, because many people here would have liked to live in the States and make lots of money like everybody is making there. And so it depends, you hate the poor and you love the rich.

D: Do you think that people still think... that the only true form of Jewish existence though is living in Israel and wanting to build the state?

M: ...there is a minority who thinks that this is the aspect. I believe that for having a full national Jewish identity you should live in Israel, but... since I see always the person who is in the middle of things then I say that it is for the person for building his own identity and not for building the country for the heroism of the Jewish culture or nation.

While Meretz activists tend to relate to Jewish tradition in building their own understandings of Jewish identity, this positive evaluation of tradition does not relate closely to opinions on Diaspora Jewry which are still characterised by a surprising animosity, testament both to Zionist rejectionism and the influence of an increasingly particularistic civil religion.

The Army

Not by the hands of an angel, and not by the hand of a seraph... but by the hands
of the IDF [were we saved] (from Aharon Megged's *Haggadah* cited in Liebman
& Don-Yehiya 1983:116).

The IDF is the most successful institutional elaboration of the Zionist movement. It is still considered by most Israelis to be the leading symbol of Jewish national independence and as an indispensable tool for immigrant socialisation and the amelioration of social cleavages in shared service to the state. Its leaders are still guaranteed careers post-IDF, as the elite of the political-military-business complex shifts effortlessly between military, commercial and political leadership positions. This phenomenon is less true for Meretz in which the oligarchic leadership is a hangover from the Mapai left, the kibbutz movement, and the first generation of peace activists. Nonetheless, Meretz' number two, Ran Cohen, was a lieutenant-colonel in the artillery and MK Abu Vilan was a commander in the elite *Sayeret Matkal* unit. A number of political leaders have emerged from this unit including Ehud Barak and the current IDF commander-in-chief 'Boogie' Ya'alon. Ya'alon's is very much a political position given the media profile of the IDF commander and the fact that the previous incumbent immediately became Defence Minister. This is a good example of how the system works. Such is the prestige of ex-generals in Israeli society that they are indispensable to political debates, with each side trotting out their generals to support their security arguments (Garfinkle 1997:111). Below, Tali talks of having to nominate generals on forming a Meretz-associated NGO:

Tali: To make a board which will be official... I can put the names... I put some generals... that's one of the good thing I think of the Israeli society... the good and the bad thing for sure; the army... is involved because the army was helping to create this country... and to keep it survive and the fact that... I think this is the only army in the world that most of their generals are lefty people... I don't see... a lot of armies that they care for peace like... our army...

D: So do you feel quite proud of the army?

T: Yeah, I have a lot of criticisms for sure... but in a way I'm really proud... It's very proud to talk about the army and that I'm... sometimes very proud of what my army do and I think that the fact that I have an army that [I] can depend on it could be very, very good.

Here Tali alludes to the code of *taharat neshek* ('purity of arms') which is still seen by many Israelis as characterising the operation of their army (Garfinkle 1997:115). Garfinkle (1997:113-114) points out that the common military experience of most Israeli Jews leads to a general acceptance of both government secrecy and the attenuation and violation of human rights. The army is seen as an important socialising mechanism and extreme efforts are undertaken to inculcate recruits with the values of the civil religion - particularly elements of the religious tradition - as a unifying force to build commitment and Jewish solidarity. These labours include the army chaplaincy's 'Awakening Campaign'. This includes ceremonies where troops use elements of the Orthodox religious liturgy, songs and symbols to learn more about Jewish tradition (Liebman & Don-Yehiya 1983:177-180).

Idan and Boaz criticise the obsession of Israeli society with the leadership of generals. Boaz also relates to the growing interference of parents in ensuring their children are not mistreated in the army, a development ameliorated by the near universality of cell phones:

Idan: ...generals... were in the army for a long period and they think militarily. And they don't think about human rights, they don't think about Israeli culture, they don't think about the community... but because of what we've gone through all these years we didn't have a country I think that our confidence is very low and when we put ourselves in the hands of a general we feel very much safe... I think the power of the generals will go down but it will take a very long time to do so... the army should not be destroyed... We have to be the strongest army.

Boaz: Yeah. That's one of the good things that happened. Like people here are complaining about how much influence the parents have now over... the army... we had a discussion in a family dinner like half a year ago and... my grandmother said... to my mother, "We would never dare to interfere in anything and you would". And my mother said that "Yeah, because I was in the army. I know what goes on there. I know it's a pile of crap. And you know you had this kind of respect, you came from Poland after the war and you were so proud to have your own army [laughs] so... you were not really critical about it". But criticism is a good thing and if the army has to check itself it's a good thing and if those generals feel that they have no moral support from the public and... they're very worried

about it that's a good thing. They shouldn't feel like they have moral support because they shouldn't have. The army is a bad thing, it should be looked upon as a necessary evil and not as like a good cause... even Ehud Barak... in his campaign showed himself like wearing uniforms and he was such a hero and everything... but... I don't like heroes and even less I like heroes that... brag about [laughs]... the fact that they were heroes.

D: I mean, you saw those big posters with him getting the hostages off the plane.

B: I was like "Oh God, give me a break". A Prime Minister does not need to be a hero he needs to be more sensitive to, to social issues.

D: Do you see an end to conscription in sight? [pause] Do you think it would be a good thing?

B: No, because there's something about everybody has to do the same thing which is a value in itself... it's important.

The domination of high ranks by men has a major impact on women who, while they serve, do not participate in the 'old boys' networks that are an integral feature of Israeli society and are vital to career advancement:

Tamar: A lot of people that getting out of the army have this certain way of organising and everyone think that this is the right way. Women do things a little bit different, although a lot of women are doing things as men are doing in the army. And... there's the army culture of men sitting together scratching their balls... And they have scratching balls talks and, even inside Meretz it was so easy for men to still do it because they're used to it.

Boaz: ... [people think] the army is something very good and very important and if you were in a high rank in the army then you have already proved that you are a great person... to do anything. And you can do anything because you were an officer... people will say like "No, he served his years, he was a soldier he made his sacrifice. And they feel... they should compensate you and women don't have that. And women don't have this network of connection that like "Oh, you were there, I remember, I served in this unit".... the connections that are formed between men in the army helps them later. And it's true even

for me... Women tend to be in the army, serve like as a clerk or just... making coffee and that doesn't really form any connections.

Below, Yarou explains the psychological importance of the military to Israelis. He also argues that it is impossible for a civil society to develop soon in a state characterised by excessive militarism, a point Raz agrees with:

D: Right, do you think a civil society could develop in society any time soon? Yaron: Not soon. The military is just too much of an important aspect of young people's lives here. It just models too much of who you are... You have to remember that you had the Holocaust and then you had the country surrounded and I think in Israel it's called the Massada syndrome... and the Massada syndrome is very, very strong in Israel. I definitely think it's weakening... if we'll go into Biblical parables again, it's called the 'desert generation' in the Bible, there were people who had to die between Egypt and Israel because they said that the people who went out of slavery weren't ready to bring up the new nation... people who experienced '73 still have... I think a very deep inward trauma of being thrown back to the sea.

Raz: Israelis continue to... have an apotheosis of the military and... the threat of annihilation. And I think if we gave the military as a mechanism and the military ideology less importance, less urgency, then perhaps things would change.

The army has a profound impact on the development of prejudices towards the Palestinians, and Arabs in general, placing young people, directly out of school, in situations of great personal danger and giving them authority over a subject population. Most soldiers tend to move to the right politically during their service which leaves them "thinking green", as one friend puts it. Benny agrees:

Benny: I was... a brainwashed soldier... I believed then in peace and everything, but when you are in the army you are brainwashed.

Nonetheless, many Meretz activists see army service as an important experience and as vital to the protection of the country. Here we see the continuing influence of the Zionist collectivist ethos, which is still strongly supported by Meretz through the party's condemnation of conscientious objection as a form of protest against the current war (November 2003) - though many Meretz activists and supporters are objectors. In the passages below we see elements of what I will call a 'classical' Zionist orientation to military service:

Aviv: it was really hard basic training... I understood what is it to be an Israeli... the army for me was... really was one of the most impressive experiences in my life.

D: OK, what was specifically Israeli about your upbringing then?
Gilad: What was Israeli? I think all of the serving your country... like you have to contribute something for your army. I think the thing that shows it most is that once I was 18 it was pretty obvious for me that I was going to go into the army but... I thought for a period... maybe I will do something with my life... being a basketball player or studying. Although it was always in the back of my head that the army's going to cut it off... I remember doing a discussion with my sister when I was about 17 about it... I knew I was going to join the army but I wasn't quite sure... I think that I had to fully accept it inside and we had this discussion about everything and I remember... it was quite emotional. At the end I really quite accepted that I'm going to go to the army, that I'm going to be in a fighting unit. I think that this is the main thing about being Jewish that you have to do some things for your country, that you have to defend it.
D: Do you think that this is an Israeli thing rather than a Jewish thing?
G: Yeah, sorry, I think it's an Israeli thing, not exactly Jewish.
D: Do you think that conscription is going to end at some stage?
G: Yeah, I don't think it exists now actually and it's going to end in a way. I think it is and I think then the Israeli people are going to have to find some... other kind of common ground. This is going to be a big problem... it's quite a shock when you go out and you see people who think, "I'm not going to go to the army. I don't care about the country". It is quite a shock so... I won't be surprised if it's going to... from my point of view,

deteriorate, that people will say "We don't care, we won't go to the army, let other people take it".

Avi: I really think that we should not disparage... anyone of our leader, and I'm talking about Barak, because Barak... is a really true hero... he is involved in every... security occasion of Israel from the middle sixties. And I am saying also about Ariel Sharon... Arik Sharon is very controversial, he cannot be the leader of the country because of the '80s and the Lebanon war, but before the Lebanon War he did a great deal of things... He is a truly Israeli hero. He fought in '56... he conquered the Suez Canal in '73, you know. He did great things for Israel... So not disparaging, to respect.

The classical Zionist orientation was common in answers to questions on the army, but a majority of Meretz activists took an approach to the IDF that stretched from extreme criticism to an outright refusal to serve. It is unlikely that interviewees would have felt as comfortable talking about issues related to conscientious objection had I been an Israeli researcher. On a couple of occasions I actually found myself acting as a counsellor for *Noar* who were torn about their imminent induction into the army, and shared with them my own ideas on the importance of objection, or avoidance of service, as a legitimate and ethical alternative.

Amir: It's really important for my parents that I go to the army because my father even though he wasn't a Zionist he came over, got married and he said, "OK... I'm obligated, now I have to go to the army"... it started... as a national obligation... for me anyhow and then it became just, it's really important for my family. Which is probably the worst reason to join the army, but I still have to consider it because I don't want to hurt their feelings and it's really important to them... I mean, my Mum posted the letter I got from the army on the fridge as soon as she got it, "My son's going to the army let's go buy bags, let's buy shoes"... I felt like... I contributed more to society [with *Noar*] than if I go to the army now... I was raised on all this myth about Jewish warriors... it was interesting as a myth but I never took it as... Trumpeldor and stuff like that. You heard of all the story... "it's good to die for our country"... It was really interesting but... I never took it as my way of life. I

was always afraid of the army... it's hard for me... to be the next Trumpeldor... to go to the army be... the man. That's the way Israel goes...

D: What's the impact of the army?

A: Well, the fact that you hear on the radio there's a storm and people run out on the streets and buy gallons of water. OK, that's war going on all the time. The fact that people every day hear about someone dying in Lebanon... it became such a... natural part of life that people don't... see it as something different... when friends of mine from, from the US come over and see people in uniform and they see people on... the bus walking with guns and stuff like that, "Hey what's going on here". It's... totally normal for me... Something's totally fucked up with this country, people don't see it... someone my age in Chicago will be in the middle of his first semester in college and I'm getting prepared to wear my uniform.

Ran: I think that if I... went to the army right away, I [would have been a]... thoughtless soldier. Now... if I'll be a soldier with my opinion got changed from one side to the other... on the... peace process issues and human rights and how... the army does things... I'm not sure now... if I'll join to the army... and in the beginning of the year I went to the elite... unit testing... and if I want... I can still goes... to the elite units so now... I even don't know if I want to go to the army... I really don't know if I want to go to combat unit.

D: ...Would you feel comfortable going to the West Bank as well?

R: No, no, not, not in *Yuda* and *Shomron* [Judea and Samaria, the West Bank]... and not in Lebanon... I won't feel good. I think that's... something that the army does and I really don't... agree with it... there are all kinds of options. First of all you can go... to Profile 21, that will be out from the army... if I'll decide that I don't wanna go to the army... I'll check the options.

It should be remembered that those who directly defy the army through conscientious objection usually end up in military prison (from March 2004 C.O.s have also been sent to civilian jails) and many have been kept in solitary confinement for prolonged periods in an effort to break their will. Amir did enter the army but was released shortly thereafter after a torrid time. I lost touch with Ran after he left the *Noar*. Below, Ophir talks of his own

military experience and his recent decision to refuse to do *miluim* (reserve duty); typically one month a year for men but now extended by the second intifada. Following this, Roni describes how he avoided military service:

Ophir: Look... we live in a... militaristic society... and learn to praise the army and the heroes of all the wars.

D: Right, so you learned about Tel Hai, and about Massada, and Bar Kochba, and stuff?

O: Yeah. The Six Day War. Israel has the strongest army in the area and, of course, the Entebbe Operation. You know, it made me go to... the best unit I could get to in the army... the last year in the army I had a girlfriend who tried to convince me to quit the army. By the way, she convinced me to vote Meretz... it took me a long time. It's very hard... to free yourself from the norms, without the education you're brainwashed... you accept everything they tell you... now it all seems bullshit... I didn't object yet but I do intend to object. And I'm working on it for a few months... I already wrote the letter to the... Minister of Defence, which happens to be the Prime Minister, because he is the one who has the legal authority to release people on grounds of... Conscientious objection, according to article 46A in the *Hok Sheroot Bitachon*, the law that obliges you to be in the army. So I sent them a letter and I should be sent to some kind of committee and it's a long story, and at the end of this story I'll probably find myself in jail or something... I'd rather be in a jail than be in a situation I'd have to kill someone.

Roni: ...my parents are like so-called Zionists and they got really offended from me not going to the army... it was about like a month or two months after Rabin's death and I went there... and I said I want to see, it's called like the mental health officer... he's allowed dismissing people from the army. And I get there and he was like "Are you that religious" [speaks slowly, with slur] like I'm a *nahal* [literally 'shoe', means an idiot]... And I just like sit there... and I said everything I thought about Yigal Amir and all his friends including all their homosexual way of being and he... listened to me... for ten minutes... he was... silent... I threw it all in his face and then I took a form, signed, go [laughs]... I really, really, really, really offended him... and I liked it [laughs].

The Holocaust

The *Shoa* (Holocaust) is ever present in Israeli life and constitutes the root experience of modern Jewish identity (Emil Fackenheim cited in Goldberg & Krausz 1995:11). It looms in the background as a symbol, a warning, an expression of worldview, a polemical weapon, and above all as a reality of unbelievable horror and profound national trauma. Most Ashkenazi Israelis lost family to it, many escaped it and others survived it, but most Jewish-Israelis still live the fear it engendered, aided by the Holocaust's centrality to the new civil religion and the host of remembrance and educational activities associated with it.

Michael: I dream about the Holocaust, I think that's very Jewish... my mother stores food, I think I will do that myself... so, if there's a blockade on... I care about the way my... shelter looks like... I learn a lot about the wars... I know a lot about what happened to the Jewish people... I feel connected.

Yuval: There were some minutes in my life that... mainly when I open the refrigerator and see that most of the times it's not empty [laughs] Then I think, "Wow... so much, why? ...I think that maybe the most observed thing I can see myself is that I have a different passport that I keep just in case.

The cultural production of Holocaust remembrance did not start immediately thereafter. At first the Israeli state was loath to be associated with communities it believed had gone to their deaths like a lamb to the slaughter, blaming the victims for their fate; "Hitler alone is not responsible for the death of the six million - but all of us and above all the six million. If they had known that the Jew has power, they would not have all been butchered... the lack of faith, the ghettoish, exilic self-denigration... contributed its share to this great butchery" (Kibbutz *Haggadah* cited in Liebman & Don-Yehiya 1983:102).

The Eichmann trial of 1960 saw the public airing of the personal stories of victims for the first time and began a shift in public attitudes to a more compassionate understanding of the horrors suffered and a softening of the negation of the *Galut*, particularly among the younger generation (Liebman & Don-Yehiya 1983:107). In keeping with Labour-Zionist ideology, the agency of those who resisted the Nazi liquidations was emphasised "out of all

proportion" to actual events when the state finally fixed on the appropriate means of remembering Holocaust Day in 1959 - the memorial day itself had been established in 1952 (Liebman & Don-Yehiya 1983:101).

The following passages record Meretz activists speaking largely without framing questions on the importance of the Holocaust to them. The opinions are diverse, but together demonstrate the centrality of the *Shoa* to the lives of Jewish-Israelis and its importance as a binding force in a society riven by social conflict - though the shared trauma of the *Shoa* does not heal these divisions.

Naaman's grandmother survived one and a half years in Auschwitz, while his grandfather spent much of the war in a Polish camp. His father is a *Shoa* baby. He told me that he "loves" the period and has done a lot of "projects" exploring his interest into how an entire people can be turned into murderers. He tries to think about the *Shoa* academically and believes that it is important to talk, and even laugh about it (the latter he describes as a particularly Jewish vehicle for remembering), so that the *Shoa* isn't forgotten by subsequent generations. He has been on a tour of Poland, visiting Holocaust sites. The place where the *Shoa* truly hit home for him was Maidanek, next to the city of Lublin where the camp itself is "two metres from their homes, how couldn't they know?" There was a huge tombstone which at first he couldn't make out the import of. He was smoking a cigarette and when he realised that the tombstone contained a pile of Jewish ash it hit him and he tapped the ash from his cigarette, "one Jew, two Jews" then sat and cried. He says that the only way to handle the enormity of the *Shoa*, as experienced during his visit, was to drink. Several Meretz activists reported reading voraciously on the *Shoa*:

Tamar: I don't know if as a Jew, but as an Israeli I read a lot about the Holocaust... I don't know if I'm so affected by the *Shoa* because I'm a Jew and it was my people or just because as a Jew and an Israeli I had all these books about the *Shoa* and I read a lot about the *Shoa*... as a kid I was very obsessed with Holocaust books... especially stories of children, and I used to have nightmares... when I read books I'm inside the book, so in some way I was in the Holocaust as a child... Because when you read stories, especially stories of children at my age or a little bigger than me... terrible stories about children who tried to survive the camps... It's about people who made factories of death and tried to make it more efficient

every day to create more death. And it's a whole nation that took part in it, and other nations because we all know that all the other countries in Europe who are having their own Holocaust Days they took part in it too, even when looking from the other side. And I think it's all very, very important to remember that humans were able to do this. And it is very important to remember that people are still able to do it.

Tamar's failure to differentiate between the Allied and Axis European powers is unsurprising given that the central message of the Holocaust centred civil religion is that all Gentiles are against the Jewish people. Little is taught of the historical events of World War II that is not directly related to the Jewish experience therein.

Danny: My grandmother is a Holocaust survivor. She was in Mauthausen for a short while and then she was taken to the east, which was very lucky for her because not many survived Mauthausen... It was a labour camp... near Vienna in which they literally worked people to death doing stupid jobs like carrying rocks from one side to the other... And she was very lucky actually... to stay there even though she didn't know that... she was very fortunate that her husband, my grandfather, was thought to be a German. He had a very Aryan look about him so everyone thought that he was a German and that he was sent to camps because he was married to a Jew. That was a crime in Germany. So they went easy on them.

D: What's Jewish about the *Shoa*?

Dy: It couldn't have happened... to any other people... Jews tend to ignore the fact that not only Jews were killed in the Holocaust... Gay people were also killed and Gypsy people were also killed... And Slavonic peoples, socialists, cripples... I was... in a trip to Poland when I was in high school and we went to... Auschwitz... when we went in I saw the patches that they forced people to wear... So I see... a yellow David's Star for Jews, and there's a red triangle for socialists and a pink triangle for gay people. And you know that a Jew socialist would get... a David's Star made from one yellow triangle and one red triangle so I think "Hmm, what are they going to put on me [laughs]". It's like they'd need a whole complex [laughs].

D: Not enough triangles [laughs]. So was it... an eerie experience being there? What did you feel when you were there?

Dy: I felt very, very good to be Israeli. There was a part when I actually held the flag and sobbed into it... Well, it's not that before Nazism there wasn't anti-Semitism. My... grandfather's father was killed in Poland by Polish people... He was travelling from one city to another with four other people and they just jumped them and killed them all.

Adi displays sensitivity to the suffering of other groups in the Holocaust and raises an important point in his final discourse. To understand its impact on Israel and Israelis it is important to place the Holocaust within a history of anti-Semitism and related atrocities stretching back through the centuries, and the Israeli experience of interminable war, and to realise that the Holocaust is viewed as the apogee of a constant, endlessly recurring chain of anti-Semitic historical events. Individuals have different relationships to this central myth of Israeli civil religion - particularly on the left where a more reflexive critical attitude is generally extant - but must relate to it whether in acceptance, rejection or partial belief.

Noam: ...the sister of my mother die in the Holocaust. My grandfather married the sister of his wife because... she died in the Holocaust and so on, so... it's something from your identity as well. All the time I think how such a thing... [can] happen in Germany... So barbaric... I don't understand it... yes, it's an integral part... of my identity.

Avi: I have... a lot of family, of relatives who died in the Holocaust. First because in the history of the Jewish people it's... the biggest tragedy... I know that what happened is a part of my history as Jewish and we have to remember it very good so things like that won't happen again.

Yossi shares the opinion of many both inside and outside Israel that the Holocaust led directly to he creation of the state and that there may not have been an independent Israel without it - an understanding at odds with Zionist claims of Jewish agency:

D: OK, is the Holocaust part of your identity as a Jew and in what way?
Yossi: Yeah, it is 'cause... it's part of the history, it's part of the reason that I'm here 'cause I guess if it wasn't I'm not sure if the Israeli state would have been established... it's a very

strong trauma... for the Jewish people... when I see movies I cry and... it's very difficult to see it as the point of a humanistic person and then to see... all the suffering, the... people hurt... of this evil. And it's very, very difficult to deal with it... it should be difficult to everybody but when you say "Well I could have been there... only because I'm a Jew, or only because I was born to a Jewish mother"... that's even more difficult.

Hadar recounts her feeling of being haunted by the Holocaust and relates to the radically different interpretations made of the genocide by competing political camps. The commodification of the Holocaust in political discourses, both domestically and internationally by the Israeli government, is seen as problematic by many activists (Margolis cited in Goldberg & Krausz 1995:333).

D: Is the Holocaust part of your identity?
Hadar: Very much... my grandparents are here. They ran away before the war but all their family died... I have something very deep that I cannot release from this, that I always have thoughts about, I'm sitting in my house and Nazis come and take me out and separate me from my family. Which is amazing because I didn't was in the Holocaust but I heard stories from someone close to me. But it's very inside of me that it can happen... it affects in two opposite ways... I think, because of what we suffered in the Holocaust, that we don't want to do it to other ones. And the opposite way because we suffered in the Holocaust that we must do it to other ones that it won't happen again. We must kill all the bad guys so that we can live here, it's amazing. But I think that a lot of Israelis have it.

Amir: I went to Poland over a year ago and it was just amazing... So we went to Thereisenstadt just next to... Prague... I had a few names and I asked them to look my names up and they took me to this really huge library with all the book... from the Holocaust and they have like lists and lists of people who moved through Thereisenstadt... So I actually found all the names of my family... who were in Thereisenstadt and... we never knew their full names, we never knew when, and why, and where... they left Thereisenstadt... And of course, they didn't return.
D: How did this affect you?

Dy: I felt very, very good to be Israeli. There was a part when I actually held the flag and sobbed into it... Well, it's not that before Nazism there wasn't anti-Semitism. My... grandfather's father was killed in Poland by Polish people... He was travelling from one city to another with four other people and they just jumped them and killed them all.

Adi displays sensitivity to the suffering of other groups in the Holocaust and raises an important point in his final discourse. To understand its impact on Israel and Israelis it is important to place the Holocaust within a history of anti-Semitism and related atrocities stretching back through the centuries, and the Israeli experience of interminable war, and to realise that the Holocaust is viewed as the apogee of a constant, endlessly recurring chain of anti-Semitic historical events. Individuals have different relationships to this central myth of Israeli civil religion - particularly on the left where a more reflexive critical attitude is generally extant - but must relate to it whether in acceptance, rejection or partial belief.

Noam: ...the sister of my mother die in the Holocaust. My grandfather married the sister of his wife because... she died in the Holocaust and so on, so... it's something from your identity as well. All the time I think how such a thing... [can] happen in Germany... So barbaric... I don't understand it... yes, it's an integral part... of my identity.

Avi: I have... a lot of family, of relatives who died in the Holocaust. First because in the history of the Jewish people it's... the biggest tragedy... I know that what happened is a part of my history as Jewish and we have to remember it very good so things like that won't happen again.

Yossi shares the opinion of many both inside and outside Israel that the Holocaust led directly to he creation of the state and that there may not have been an independent Israel without it - an understanding at odds with Zionist claims of Jewish agency:

D: OK, is the Holocaust part of your identity as a Jew and in what way?
Yossi: Yeah, it is 'cause... it's part of the history, it's part of the reason that I'm here 'cause I guess if it wasn't I'm not sure if the Israeli state would have been established... it's a very

strong trauma... for the Jewish people... when I see movies I cry and... it's very difficult to see it as the point of a humanistic person and then to see... all the suffering, the... people hurt... of this evil. And it's very, very difficult to deal with it... it should be difficult to everybody but when you say "Well I could have been there... only because I'm a Jew, or only because I was born to a Jewish mother"... that's even more difficult.

Hadar recounts her feeling of being haunted by the Holocaust and relates to the radically different interpretations made of the genocide by competing political camps. The commodification of the Holocaust in political discourses, both domestically and internationally by the Israeli government, is seen as problematic by many activists (Margolis cited in Goldberg & Krausz 1995:333).

D: Is the Holocaust part of your identity?

Hadar: Very much... my grandparents are here. They ran away before the war but all their family died... I have something very deep that I cannot release from this, that I always have thoughts about, I'm sitting in my house and Nazis come and take me out and separate me from my family. Which is amazing because I didn't was in the Holocaust but I heard stories from someone close to me. But it's very inside of me that it can happen... it affects in two opposite ways... I think, because of what we suffered in the Holocaust, that we don't want to do it to other ones. And the opposite way because we suffered in the Holocaust that we must do it to other ones that it won't happen again. We must kill all the bad guys so that we can live here, it's amazing. But I think that a lot of Israelis have it.

Amir: I went to Poland over a year ago and it was just amazing... So we went to Thereisenstadt just next to... Prague... I had a few names and I asked them to look my names up and they took me to this really huge library with all the book... from the Holocaust and they have like lists and lists of people who moved through Thereisenstadt... So I actually found all the names of my family... who were in Thereisenstadt and... we never knew their full names, we never knew when, and why, and where... they left Thereisenstadt... And of course, they didn't return.

D: How did this affect you?

A: I was just frightened. I cried for most of the day, too much. But it was important because it was... all the stories... Whatever that was me was there... it was more getting back to my roots, finding who I am... not getting back at anyone... not revenge, not "I'm here, I'm Jewish"... But it was really, really interesting... to actually find my connection... I felt more, more me, more a part of my family after this happened. And, of course Auschwitz and we went to Treblinka... Yehuda Poliker.

D: OK, I have heard of him.

A: So his parents were in the Holocaust and he has this song... talking about him as a child and his parents taught him that a good boy leaves an empty plate... and that's what I grew into too because you have to finish all your food... my grandma made me finish all my gravy and stuff, the rest of the salad and whatever because its food and you can't throw food away because people were hungry and... my family starved... that's part of it.

Holocaust Day

As noted above, Heroes and Martyrs Remembrance Day was instituted on the 20th of *Nissan,* close to the anniversary of the Warsaw Rising, to emphasise the resistance of Jews to the Nazi genocide. In doing so the state set *Shoa* commemoration apart from traditional mourning festivals by positioning *Yom HaShoa* in a chronological position prior to Memorial Day and Independence Day, with an obvious theme of repression leading to the fight for freedom and then its achievement. Through these 'national pagents' the state seeks to rekindle patriotism, and forge a collective sense of unity and shared destiny. However the annual media focus on the non-observance of commemorative sirens by many ultra-Orthodox tends to undermine this somewhat (Arian 1998:374). I asked interviewees about their own observance of *Yom HaShoa* in order to ascertain their response to state-sanctioned interpretations of the Holocaust and to gauge the impact of official commemorative activities.

D: What do you feel on Holocaust Day... is it a day that affects you? Or do you feel it's manufactured emotion?

Tamar: It is a manufactured but it is also important... because this is something that we should never, never, never forget... I'm trying on this day to think more about the

Holocaust, but the Holocaust is part of me because it is part of my political beliefs and it's part of everything. And I think it's important that we will have this day. I think it's more important that they'll have the Holocaust Year that we had in school... on the ninth grade there's the Holocaust Year as a project and through the whole year we learn about the Holocaust, and we do projects about it, and it's much more important than one day... emotionally it depends, some days that I was able to connect to the feelings and some days that I couldn't. It's very shallow, if I'm too busy on this day then no, I'll try to think about it by the time we have to stand... and if there's good movies about the Holocaust, very moving, then I'll watch them.

D: Is *Yom HaShoa*... important to you?

Hadar: ...It's really important to... remember that something like that was in the history and to know how not to do that to other people. And I sit on *Yom HaShoa* and watch all the programmes.

Tamar and Hadar mention one of the features of *Yom HaShoa*, the closing down of all TV not broadcasting programmes on the *Shoa* and the effort made by many to watch a number of these documentaries and films recounting the harrowing details of the genocide as a way of personally experiencing the Day. Personally, I found that this inundation had a very powerful impact. Some take a universalistic, humanist approach in using the day to muse on the continued prevalence of similar atrocities:

D: What's the experience of *Yom HaShoa*... for you? Do you feel particularly that you concentrate on the Holocaust on this day?

Ophir: Yeah, I do... it just amplifies my everyday feelings about the atrocities in this world...

D: So do you take a wider universal significance with the *Shoa* rather than just a Jewish experience?

O: Yeah, yeah, yeah, of course.

Boaz profoundly dislikes Holocaust Day due to the particularistic message of Gentile enmity encouraged by official interpretations, which he sees as encouraging racism and intolerance towards other peoples. Notice his comment on the lessons to be learnt from the Holocaust, a pre-occupation in Israel given the politicisation of the genocide in relation to events in the Territories. Amir doesn't feel that the Day speaks to him:

Boaz: No, I don't like them, any of them. I don't like memorial days... I can see why it's necessary, I can see why we should honour it but I don't like it. I really hate Holocaust Day... I think that the entire way Israel as a state, the education system in Israel is dealing with the Holocaust is wrong.

D: What's happening with that?

B: ...they're using the Holocaust as a justification for the state of Israel, as a proof that the world is anti-Semite... and what they're doing by this is breeding prejudice and intolerance towards other people... it's the opposite of what they should do and they totally not look at the lessons of the Holocaust... it's not done in a way that... I can be proud of... when I look at the Holocaust Day in Israel like everybody is... talking about how bad the Germans are... and how like nobody should... tell us because where were your people when the Holocaust happened... it's not relevant anymore... not this way at least... what's relevant from the Holocaust is to learn that racism is dangerous, and look at the extreme right and what it can do, and look at the violation of human rights and keep that from happening anywhere... I think that the mentality in Israel is always looking out... and it never looks in the... mirror.

D: How do you normally feel on Holocaust Day, do you, are you thinking about the *Shoa* all day?

Amir: No, I never do... I could sometimes stand in the middle of the street and be reminded of something but... not at Holocaust Day.

D: Do you feel it's necessary though?

A: I feel it's necessary but I... don't find me in that.

Unsurprisingly, responses to official commemorations are highly individuated and cannot be easily categorised. The best that can be said is that Meretz activists take a highly reflexive attitude to produced remembrance activities and tend to be extremely critical of attempts to reinforce Jewish particularism through these.

Having established an understanding of the different constituents of secular Jewish-Israeli identity and of the past and present nature of the Jewish *kulturkampf* it remains to narrow the focus of discussion to Meretz as a political protagonist, identity community and engine of cultural production in the Israeli culture war.

Chapter 8: Meretz As Identity Community
And *Kulturkampf* Protagonist

In this chapter we will discuss Meretz' role as an identity community and protagonist in political battles concerning the issue of religion and state. We begin with a brief history of Meretz and its antecedents, describing the social and political milieu that led to the formation of this left-liberal party. Research participants then relate to questions concerning Meretz' role as an engine of cultural identity production before giving their reasons for being involved in the party. They then comment on the effectiveness, or otherwise, of Meretz in its areas of concern and ideological commitment, and speak of the impact the party's successes and failures have had on their own opinions of the party.

Genealogy

Meretz came into being in 1992 through the coalescence of three left-liberal parties with very different pedigrees but similar contemporary opinions on the peace process and religious-secular issues. Mapam (The 'United Worker's Party') was the oldest of the three constituent parties and possessed the greatest institutional support through their kibbutz movement, *Hakibbutz Ha'artzi* (founded in 1927) itself a product of the leftist *Hashomer Hatzair* (founded in 1916) youth movement, the party's newspaper *Al Hamishamar*, and power base within the *Histadrut* labour federation (Garfinkle 1997:187; Eisenstadt 1985:248; Kimmerling 1983:245; Marmorstein 1969:97). Mapam's strong collectivist ethos, predominantly Ashkenazi *kibbutznik* membership, and Marxist orientation prevented the party from building a base amongst the urban proletariat or middle classes.

In 1946, as the UN decision on the future of Palestine loomed, the Executive Committee of Hashomer Hatzair (1946:7, 136) came out in favour of a bi-national Arab-Jewish state, while arguing for the legitimacy of Zionist settlement as the only answer to the Jewish problem and accurately forecasting a future of particularistic ethno-nationalist irredentism should partition emerge from the British mandatory authority. This bi-nationalist stance and the commitment of Mapam to class struggle and the establishment of a worker state did not long survive the socio-economic changes of the post-Independence

period, though the party continued to demarcate the extreme left of the Zionist movement until the new social movements of the 1970s took on this mantle with regards to the peace process and religious-secular issues. A gradual decline took place in the party's electoral fortunes from an initial high in 1949 of 14.7% of the vote through the hiving off of the constituent *Achdut Ha'Avodah* in 1954 over Mapam's support of the Soviet Union[36], the *Maapach* ('Alignment') coalition with *Mapai*, to the near extinction of the party as a Knesset faction in the 1988 elections (Avishai 1985:201, 213, 255; Aronoff 1993:33).

Shinui was the smallest of the three parties to join Meretz in 1992 with only two mandates and a precarious 1.7% of the vote in the 1988 elections (State of Israel 2004). The electoral threshold was then 1%, and is now 1.5%. The party itself has a liberal-capitalist orientation and was established in 1973, under the leadership of ex-Tel Aviv University law professor and constitutional expert Amnon Rubinstein, as an expression of the disgust and disillusionment felt by elements of the Ashkenazi professional classes towards the moribund *Mapai* both prior to and in the wake of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. In 1977 Shinui joined The Democratic Movement for Change (DASH) in unseating *Mapai*, resisting the decision of DASH to coalesce with the Likud and surviving the catastrophic collapse of DASH as a minor party in the Knesset (Eisenstadt 1967:438-440; Peretz & Doron 1997:103-105; Schnall 1979:195-198). It remained the only liberal-centrist party throughout the 1980s with Rubinstein serving as Minister of Communications in the post-1984 unity government (Peretz & Doron 1997:104).

Alongside its liberal-capitalist orientation Shinui expressed the mildly dovish opinions common amongst the party's constituency, and it was this area of commonality that allowed its eventual inclusion in Meretz in 1992 as a junior party dwarfed by the larger membership and institutional framework of RATZ and Mapam. The relative proportions of each party were reflected in the new party's initial constituent bodies wherein the split was 5-3-2 for RATZ, Mapam and Shinui respectively. Indeed, this division was not unkind to Shinui. It was this relative powerlessness in relation to RATZ and Mapam influence over policy that provided the excuse for the eventual sundering of ties with Meretz in 1998 by one faction of Shinui (Rubinstein and many ex-Shinui members stayed with Meretz). Interestingly,

---

[36]*Mapam* later broke with the Soviet Union over the anti-Semitic Stalinist 'Doctor's Plot' & Shansky Trials (Schnall 1979:107).

Meretz' Shinui inspired neo-liberal economic platform bears little resemblance to its more leftist Knesset activism on social issues. The breakaway faction proceeded to reconstitute Shinui as an independent party with a new, radical emphasis on opposition to ultra-Orthodox coercion, an opposition that came to be perceived by many in Meretz as bordering on anti-Semitism.

The Citizen's Rights Movement (RATZ) was the first and only representative of the 'new social movements' phenomenon, which radically changed Israeli political culture from the 1970s, to achieve Knesset representation. Karsh (1997:50) describes how the pioneers of what was to become the Israeli peace movement reinterpreted the traditional Labour-Zionist formulations of Israeli identity through the prism of 'New Left' ideology. This seriously undermined the already teetering buttresses of Labour-Zionist identity politics through an appeal to wider universal civil and human rights which were viewed as both pre-existing and superseding the claims of Zionist-Jewish particularism. From this new ethical base they passed judgement upon actions and beliefs at variance to the ideal of a just, rights-based society built on the sovereign citizen. This was a radical departure for Israeli political culture which was and, to an extent still is characterised by a collectivist orientation.

Corporatist values remained, with the old Zionist conceptions of Herzlian normalisation and of Israel as a perfected society and "light unto the nations" still an influential factor in idealisation. However, the limited democratic understanding of 'statist' Israel with its reification of the state and army and the ability of both to limit the freedoms of citizens was rejected outright by proponents of the new politics which spawned a wide variety of protest movements across the political landscape in Israel, both left and right wing (Laskier 2000). Such is the abundance of new organisations engendered by this movement that Israeli public life is now characterised by a protest politics unrivalled in any Western democracy (Peri 2000:303-328). This proliferation also testifies to the advanced state of paralysis and impotence of official organs of government in solving the myriad problems facing Israeli society.

RATZ itself was founded by Shulamit Aloni in 1973 following her acrimonious exit from *Mapai* in 1973. Aloni had received an unrealistic list place in response to her attacks on the party's leadership and policies (Aronoff 2000:118). RATZ entered Knesset with

three seats in 1973, and coalition in 1974, before departing with Rabin's inclusion of the NRP in his governing coalition shortly thereafter (Reich & Gershon: 1991:11). Politically RATZ was less interested in socio-economic issues than Mapam, espousing a militant brand of secularism in opposition to perceived religious coercion. This had long been an issue for Mapam but was one that the party had largely failed to act on. RATZ was also a strong advocate for women's rights and other human and civil rights, and increasingly promoted the extension of such protections to the Palestinian public on both sides of the 'Green Line'. RATZ developed a dovish orientation which was strengthened with the assumption of membership by "additional forces" from Peace Now in 1988 but, as with Mapam and Shinui, the party proved unable to garner sufficient support to constitute a significant Knesset faction until the formation of Meretz in 1992 (Peretz & Doron 1997:94).

Meretz was successful in attracting the support of a slightly larger segment of the middle-class, Ashkenazi, dovish, secularist public than had backed the independent parties, appealing particularly to women and younger voters. In 1988 the three parties had combined for 8.5% of the vote and 10 seats in Knesset, and this rose to 9.6% for the tripartite coalition in 1992. As is often the case for smaller coalition partners, Meretz was blamed for the failures of government in 1996 (7.5%, 9 seats) and 2003 (5.21%, 6 seats) (State of Israel 2004). The drop off in support for Meretz was largely due to the failures of the Rabin/Peres and Barak governments in peacemaking, which Meretz had, rather unwisely, become the most vociferous advocate of, to the detriment of its other policy 'flags'. The party's failure to make an impact in the area of religious coercion and willingness to sit with Shas in coalition also played a role.

Reuven (Arian & Shamir 1999:78-79) notes that in 1992 Meretz was the only Jewish party that ran on the pro-peace foreign affairs platform subsequently taken up by the Rabin government, though this platform was never as radical as opponents and public opinion came to believe. For example, the party takes no official position on the thorny issue of Jerusalem. The party's founding charter equivocates on the matter of the ideal future boundary between Israel and Palestine, stating that under a future peace settlement "Israel will be obliged to vacate most of the territories... The main considerations in determining borders should relate to security and demographic concerns" (Meretz 1997:2). Nonetheless,

it is the general movement of the Israeli political centre to the 'left' with regards to security in subsequent years - including the previously unimaginable rhetorical support of the Likud for a Palestinian state - that is Meretz' greatest legacy to Israeli society.

After this initial success the party seemed to lose its radical edge somewhat and shifted focus to the religious-secular *kulturkampf*, to issues concerning civil and human rights and, to a lesser extent, towards social policy. Meretz' secularist views attracted by far the most attention, gaining the support of the dovish, secularist left and opprobrium from virtually every other sector. The 1999 Meretz election campaign was designed to build on secularist resentment against religious coercion in both propaganda and activism. This focus was confirmed by the party's campaign manager at a *Tzerie* seminar I attended. The campaign slogan was taken directly from *Hatikva*, "To be free in our country", with its intended referent being freedom from religious coercion, though coterminous freedoms were espoused in campaign ephemera (Appendix C).

This strategy backfired somewhat with the reconstituted Shinui outflanking Meretz on secular issues due to the inability of Meretz to rack up significant achievements with regards to *kulturkampf* issues in two terms of government. Indeed, a survey of newspaper clippings from 1999-2003 on Knesset debates and legislative proposals shows Meretz doing very little to change laws relating to religious coercion, focusing almost exclusively on parliamentary activism against the settlement movement, for the advancement of civil and human rights generally with little relation to religious coercion, and increasingly on social policy issues. During the Barak government the Meretz MKs reasoning was that the coalition with Shas must be maintained at all costs in order to give Barak the time to reach a peace agreement with Syria and the Palestinians - a posture that failed to convince many on the Meretz Council and Board, though motions opposing coalition-maintenance were easily defeated or otherwise sidetracked. The party's Knesset quiescence stands in stark contrast to *Tzerie* and *Noar* activism which, in my experience, was almost exclusively related to issues to do with the *kulturkampf*. Nonetheless, Meretz *Noar* and *Tzerim* displayed a significant interest in the other 'flags' of the party when considering their own motivations for political involvement.

Ideology

Rather than focusing on the stated platform of the party I chose to place the emphasis, in interviews, on the personal beliefs of activists and their reasons for becoming and remaining politically active. It is important to point out here that ideology and committed activism are closely related for most Meretz *Tzerim* and *Noar*. Many take significant time off work or study during the months prior to general elections to work full or part-time for the party, and are faced with verbal abuse daily in the course of street activism and with the constant threat of physical attack. It takes both courage and a profound commitment to one's belief system to be a Meretz street activist and I would like to pay tribute here to their fortitude and dedication which were inspirational. Most interviewees spoke of an interest in more than one area of Meretz ideology, a fact that should be kept in mind when reading the survey of opinions below, which I have shaped through categorising responses under the sub-headings of peace, *kulturkampf*, civil and human rights, social issues and environmentalism.

The Peace Process

Meretz activists share a strong commitment to the need for a just and comprehensive peace with the Palestinians. Interviews were largely carried out prior to the failure of Camp David II in 2000 following which most Meretzniks I talked to felt a profound sense of shock, disappointment and even disillusionment, though most retained their belief in the justice and necessity of a full and final peace agreement.

Ehud: All efforts... have to be put into the peace process...Meretz was always... and is now the engine. And some parts played a major role and other parts were the engine, but Meretz... always has put the process at one step further than what the public attitude was. And in that sense... it made a vast contribution... to the peace process.

Ophir: Well, Meretz... supported all of the steps toward the peace process, all of the peace treaties. In the streets, in the public it has organised many demonstrations for the peace.

Roni: Yeah, it [Meretz]... built itself... upon saying that... we want peace with the Arabs. They talked about giving back the Occupied Territories a lot before anyone even dreamed about it, when people who even said that were considered enemies of the state and traitors they did it, they had the guts. Yossi Sarid had the balls of saying this stuff 20 years ago, which he should be admired for that. But now when we do have peace, OK, when Meretz she start to look for other things to say I see the whole house of cards starting to fall.

Roni expresses a common feeling among *Tzerim* and *Noar* that Meretz had started to flounder and lose direction somewhat with the assumption of many of its pro-peace beliefs by the political centre. Racheli complains of a lack of vision and radicalism in Meretz' contemporary activities and attitudes concerning peace:

Racheli: RATZ and Mapam people really... was involved in saying that we should be in favour of a Palestinian state really before everybody did... I can't see the vision that was then now... Probably with age, with the fact that they are... and were part of the government, it became more grey, it became more national [nationalistic] and it seems that I don't connect... I have an opinion about Jerusalem.

There is a general sensibility that after spearheading the move towards peace Meretz activists and the party as a whole suffered a great deal for its association with the peace process without gaining popular recognition of their vital role.

Idan: Meretz was the torch... we paid a very huge price for it because many years they thought of us as "He loves Arabs he don't love Jews". That's why we get now ten mandates and not more... because the issue of peace is still the first issue.

Boaz: ...voicing the voice of reason even before other people are like doing it... So they're... maybe the minority but still the important voice of people who are against any kind of military action against civilians.

In Boaz' description of Meretz as a voice of reason we catch a glimpse of the strong sense within the *Tzerim* and *Noar* that the party stands as a beacon for civil and human rights in a society characterised by repression, brutality, irrational ultra-nationalism and primitive religiosity. Below, Gal relates his frustration at the slow pace of peace negotiations and the effect this has had on coalition maintenance and the freedom of action of Meretz inside government. Ophir calls for Meretz to show more courage inside the Barak coalition (Meretz did eventually leave):

Gal: I am responsible for the freedom and the rights and for the suffering of the Palestinians and I don't feel good about it. In the other hand how many frogs we can swallow for that... we swallow the frog of the *Mafdal* in the government, we swallow the frog Shas is in the government but I don't want to be choked... Meretz is the compass of the left in Israel they change public consciousness, they change our views about peace, about the Arabs. When they are sitting in the government they are helping more, when we are in the opposition we change public views and it's important.

Ophir: ...the problem... of the left in general and of Meretz specifically is that it doesn't use its force... [Meretz MK] Haim Oron said... in some sort of meeting that every morning Meretz has three different reasons for leaving the coalition but it doesn't do it because this is the only government that can bring peace. I don't agree with that because... Barak uses that. He knows that all the votes of the left are in his pocket and he doesn't have to do anything... Maybe Meretz... should decide on more strict red lines... or principles that... if they are not obeyed or kept, yeah, then Meretz should leave the government.

By 1999 Meretz believed that the attraction of its peacenik orientation for new voters was limited and that focussing on the role and stance of the party with regard to the peace process in election campaigns could only be counter-productive. Omer hints at a shift to the centre in the party's attitudes towards peace:

Omer: The reason it wasn't pushed now - and that's the official reason and the non-official is another thing - it's because... it won't get... new people to vote Meretz.

The dragging out of the peace process over the past decade and the pressing need to address major socio-economic problems and *kulturkampf* issues has led to a gradual shift in focus from the peace process to domestic concerns. The preponderance of *kulturkampf* related activism both during and between election campaigns in Meretz testifies to this. The failure of Camp David II, the sense of hopelessness engendered by the failure of negotiations, and the attendant assumption of power by the right wing government of Ariel Sharon have exacerbated this trend. Despite this shift in focus, support for the peace process is still high in Meretz and remains a defining and unifying feature of party ideology and individual identification thereto.

Bring on the Culture War

Many *Tzerim* and *Noar* were attracted to Meretz by the party's opposition to religious coercion and feel frustrated at the relative inactivity of the party in Knesset with regards to this issue. It is probable that Meretz lost a large percentage of its electorate to Shinui due to its failure to have a significant impact on the nature of religious coercion and act unequivocally for a secular community increasingly concerned with *kulturkampf* issues. In 1999 Meretz attracted some new voters to replace those lost to Shinui but only garnered 0.1% more of the vote than in 1996 despite the left wing landslide. The party haemorrhaged 4 seats in the 2003 plebiscite. Within *Tzerie* and *Noar* Meretz there is a recognition that little will be done in Knesset concerning religious coercion while the peace process remains incomplete. However, Yaron reflects the views of many in arguing that the time has come for Meretz to pay much closer attention to the *kulturkampf* and social issues:

Yaron: I think Meretz, especially now, is... very much occupied with the peace effort and definitely... not occupied enough... with religious-secular issues, and not really with social issues... I think electorally it's a mistake they made in '92 and they paid dearly for it in '95 [means 1996]... Meretz keeps talking about having lots and lots of flags - running with one flag only is harming the party. I think we made some commitments when we went to the election especially... in the field of religious-secular that it's completely, utterly relinquishing altogether.

Yossi: Is it [Meretz]... not really effective. And that's a problem because the peace process... is always coming first.

In the interview excerpt below, Yonatan is extremely cynical, arguing that Meretz is not serious about combating religious coercion and uses its image as an opponent of the status quo to aid in the production of a polemic that hides its neglect of the issue, while gaining votes. I found that this was a common refrain amongst Meretz voters I met in the course of street activism, and socially, who, by 1999, seemed ready to shift their votes from Meretz to a party that would be more active particularly with regard to *kulturkampf* issues.

Yonatan: Honestly, they don't really want to change it... they use slogans... I don't see something basic... something fundamental that really want to change... they have a arsenal of slogans and... they see the situation they go to their arsenal, they say, "OK, this is the slogan... and let's use it".

Others were more forgiving, pointing to the impossibility of making headway on coercion issues in a Knesset in which mainstream secular parties don't tend to support legislation to change the status quo, the maintenance of which is written into most coalition agreements. Boaz points to Meretz' local and legal challenges to specific cases of religious coercion while applauding the party's substantial role in giving voice to growing secular frustrations. In the following passage, Moshe argues that Meretz, through its presence in government, has been able to block the further expansion of religious power and coercive legislation. Raz disagrees and rightly predicts the loss of a significant number of voters through Meretz' 1999 coalition with Shas:

Boaz: ...most of it is not actually by doing laws in the Knesset... More of it was done through the Supreme Court, by active struggle in the streets or... just in the municipalities... The Knesset, it's mainly bringing this thing into debate because people had nobody to turn to other than Meretz and Meretz made this thing an issue. Shulamit Aloni has made this thing an issue.

Moshe: ...unfortunately we cannot do everything which we want to do and there are also other things on our agenda... there is also what Meretz prevented others from doing. So during the Rabin government Meretz was not able to do anything but on the other hand Shas was not able to do anything.

Raz: While in opposition Meretz was very active. While in coalition they are bending their heads... I can understand the mathematics behind it but... I fear that being part of the last coalition with Shas we've harmed Meretz very much in the next elections unless something very crucial or important happens.

Amnon effectively sums up a climate of disillusionment within *Tzerie* and *Noar* Meretz regarding the party's inactivity on religious-secular issues in this impassioned appeal to the members of Knesset to show more courage in transforming the 1999 election victory into real change:

Amnon: But if you say something show people that you are serious for... believing you, because this way they believe you afterwards... And act bravely... Because... we did work for you to be there... I was working for it. I was working for a long time. I prayed for this night to be. Give me, give me the results, and fight, fight now!

Civil and Human Rights

Meretzniks' interest in civil and human rights protections relates closely to their antagonism towards the Occupation and the religious-secular status quo, and constitutes a principled and determined opposition to the widespread violation of such rights in a society still characterized by a strong collectivist orientation and a particularistic narrowing of perspective with regards to relations with non-Jewish communities and secular claims to individual freedoms. Here Meretz is heavily influenced, through RATZ, by the civil rights movements of the 1960s, and a worldwide shift in left wing politics from a socialist to a more liberal position with regards to the amelioration of social conflict and relations between the individual and state. The appearance of RATZ, the Democratic Movement for

Change and a plethora of small, allied NGOs from the 1970s was also a product of socio-economic changes with a struggling middle-class losing interest in the tenets of Zionist socialism and the leadership of the Labour elite and seeking improvements in lifestyle, and economic security modelled on a benevolent image of western consumer and political culture and related 'freedoms'. It was only later that the growth of Palestinian opposition to the Occupation and Israeli suzerainty developed a closer interest in human rights amongst a sector of the middle classes, following an initial interest in the extension of civil freedoms to that population.

Meretz still stands as the only party fully committed to the primacy of civil and human rights so its actions, or inaction, with regard to the promotion and protection of such rights is of great interest in terms, not just of the present reality, but also the projected future orientation of the state. A process of democratisation has taken place in Israel with a massive efflorescence of protest politics from the 1970s, the destruction of the one party monopoly on power, the rise in judicial activism with the passing of Basic Laws protecting civil rights, the increased questioning of military omniscience, and expansion of the media and its relative freedom from state supervision. However, the freedom of the domestic media is far from guaranteed given PM Sharon's assumption of ministerial responsibility for the Israeli Broadcasting Authority, a long tradition of party 'jobnik' selections therein, and the maintenance of military oversight and media self-censorship.

Meretz activists spoke repeatedly in interviews of the need for extending civil and human rights protections with regards to the *kulturkampf*, the Occupation, and the democratisation of Israeli society. Here are a few brief selections of direct discussions on civil and human rights:

Tamar: Definition. The Declaration of Human Rights, this is my Bible... I think that every human child, woman, old, have his rights... a state is not a structure that citizens should give and give... I believe that every man has the right to control... his life... I believe that you can educate people to... social responsibility... First minimum wage... to make it higher... to educate people... to be less corrupted.

It is interesting that Tamar relates civil rights to the 'freedom' from social inequality and corruption, showing how extensively the ideology of civil and human rights is extended in interpretation. Meretz' civil rights agenda tends to focus on the rights to education and opportunity, and on freedoms from state and religious coercion, reflecting the interests and prejudices of its liberal middle class electorate. Dalia speaks of the rights held by the sovereign individual in relation to the state, while Boaz argues for an expanded conception of human rights:

Dalia: Ideologically... we all talk about humanism... which is the idea that the individual's in the centre and free to do whatever he pleases in order to reach his full potential... I don't think the state can... interfere in... personal lives.

Boaz: ...if you talk about the history of human rights you have first the right to live... since the Magna Carta it's called the first generation of human rights. And then if you talk about the more modern concepts of human rights which include right to housing and for employment and that's totally a social-democratic ideology but that's also a part of human rights. And I think when you talk about human rights you kind of include everything in it.
D: OK. Do you think that the definition of human rights has been expanded... beyond its initial concepts of... the right to life, these things?
B: Yes, of course and I think it's a good thing... in the Western countries where you have a democracy it's expanding. And it's good that it's expanding because after you have the right to live you have to be able to live in dignity and that includes... the right for information... free speech all those things that are more than just the core of human rights... I think that the state should regulate... and make sure that nobody falls behind... making sure that consumer's rights... are always served. And we have to make sure that people have housing and... free access to education for everybody... there should be a maximum wage [laughs] I don't think there should be a minimum wage [laughs].

Below, Yaron speaks of freedom from religious coercion as a basic right alongside the state provision of education, housing, and health. As with Boaz, we see an appeal to universal, inalienable individual freedoms and rights with the state viewed as morally

responsible for the welfare of its citizens, rather than the traditional Zionist emphasis on the right of the collective to call upon the individual in state-building and protection. Meretzniks typically feel the pull of both contradictory ideologies, a fact displayed in the uncertain relationship of the party to conscientious objection and the uncertainty and torn feelings of many when faced with the prospect of military service in the Territories.

Yaron: Meretz stands for human rights... I automatically say freedom of religious, and freedom... of consciousness... which would be your religious Orthodox and secular problems. And I would also say what we'd call third level rights which we have social rights and you have your political rights...
D: [interrupts] What sort of social right would you consider being part of the human rights package?
Y: The right to housing, the right to education, the right to health.

Implementing Rights Reform: Meretz' Basic Laws

Meretz' greatest legislative success with regards to human and civil rights came in its first term in government with the passing of two Basic Laws in 1992, 'Human Dignity and Liberty' and 'Freedom of Occupation' which legislated for the first time judicial purview over Knesset legislation with regard to quasi-constitutional guarantees of individual rights in relation to the state and fellow citizens (Sprinzak & Diamond 1993:1).

Israel's founding fathers failed to pass a constitution for the state with various versions summarily rejected as unable to gain passage due to the insistence of religious parties that the Torah stands as Israel's constitution. Piecemeal constitutional legislation has since been passed through a series of Basic Laws concerning a variety of issues on which the Knesset has decided to take an unequivocal position. In 1992 Meretz gained passage for two Basic Laws. These were limited somewhat by religious opposition and later amendment and do not explicitly guarantee the freedoms of expression, association, belief or movement while stipulating that the status quo on religious-secular issues must be maintained (Diamond & Sprinzak 1993: 371; Cohen & Susser 2000:88). Nonetheless, they provide an opportunity for the radical re-imagining of the state-citizen relationship.

The 'Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty' was premised in "the recognition of the value of the human being, and the sanctity of his life and freedom". Its stated purpose was "to protect human dignity and liberty" against the violation of personal property, arbitrary arrest, and extradition or imprisonment and attacks on the "life, body, and dignity" of the individual (State of Israel 1992a). These terms are open to interpretation and - as with the guarantees of freedom of occupation in the second Basic Law - it was in the application of these rights through judicial intercession in cases of perceived violation that legal precedent was both to flesh out and make problematic the freedoms engendered.

The passage of these two Basic Laws was a stunning success for Meretz, one that should have marked the beginning rather than the limits of the party's parliamentary activism but in fact constituted the high tide mark. Thereafter, Meretz seemed to lack the courage of its convictions somewhat, acquiescing in the deportation of Hamas activists to the Lebanese border, signing up to a Pork Law that strengthened religious control over *kashrut* and allowing both Sarid and Aloni to be forced out of the vital Education Ministry by Shas politicking. Regardless, the Basic Laws passed by Meretz constitute a sizeable inheritance from a middle-sized party which at its height only garnered one-tenth of the Knesset's seats, and the legacy of these laws (pending repeal) will outlive the party itself due to the agency allowed under their statutes to the Supreme Court justices.

Diamond & Sprinzak (1993:370) relate that the Supreme Court "has gradually made itself a bastion of civil and individual liberties", a trend accelerated by Meretz' Basic Laws. Supreme Court judge Aharon Barak wrote that the two laws "have revolutionized the judicial and constitutional status of the basic rights of man in Israel" (Diamond & Sprinzak 1993:371). Since the passage of the laws the Supreme Court has been inundated by cases brought by left wing and liberal parties and NGOs on a wide array of matters including efforts at overturning aspects of the religious-secular status quo and demands for equal rights for Israeli-Arabs and non-Orthodox Judaism. Cohen and Susser (2000:89) fulminate that "For the first time in Israeli legal history, the sovereignty of the Knesset had been explicitly limited". Given that the judiciary is a branch of the state and thus shares the sovereignty of that entity, of which the Knesset is a pre-eminent branch but only a branch, this charge is a little extreme, particularly given that the Court has merely interpreted the Basic Laws in the spirit of their statutes. In the light of the continued military influence

over the courts - a sway maintained in matters relating to security issues, especially with regards to cases concerning IDF activities in the Territories - and the continued failure of the Court to protect the rights of ethnic minorities in its decisions, the charge rings hollow (Kimmerling 2002). If the Knesset were to regularly promote, support and protect human and civil rights in legislation Meretz' Basic Laws would be unnecessary but this has never been the case before or after the passage of these bills. The Court has been placed in the invidious position of protecting democratic freedoms and basic civil and human rights in direct opposition to the state's legislature, spawning a series of Supreme Court by-pass laws in Knesset and right wing plans for the establishment of a Constitutional Committee to severely curtail judicial authority.

Angered by Supreme Court decisions favouring secular attacks on aspects of religious control, the *haredi* parties organised a massive demonstration against the Supreme Court in 1999 with over 250,000 protestors taking to the streets in Jerusalem, opposed by 50,000 secular counter-demonstrators (Cohen & Susser 2000:94). United Torah Judaism MK Moshe Gafni described the head of the Supreme Court, Aharon Barak as a "persecutor of the Jews" while Agudat Israel MK Menachem Porush ejaculated that he would "sacrifice his life against Justice Barak" (Cohen & Susser 2000:94). Kimmerling (2002:1139) discerns "a recognizable retreat by the high court from this activist position" in the face of opposition from the Knesset, the academy, and the Israel Bar Association. Kimmerling attacks the stated purpose of the legislation, to "anchor in a Basic Law the values of the State as a Jewish and democratic state" (Kimmerling 2002:1139). Indeed most Meretzniks I talked to saw no essential contradiction in Meretz proposing the maintenance of a Jewish and democratic society. Research participants took great pride in the passage of the two Basic Laws and in the judicial activism these laws inspired:

D: ...So do you think that the Supreme Court has taken over the role that a constitution should be playing in defining what's correct in society and what's not? Idan: ...when the government is weak the Supreme Court has to be strong. But now I think that the Supreme Court will step off what it did in the last three years [till 1999] because now the government will be stronger. When you have a right [wing] government you have to have [laughs] a very strong Supreme Court if you want to maintain the justice.

Meretz Reds

I asked Meretz activists about their relationship to the party's socialist roots. Questions concerning this issue were intended to differentiate somewhat between socialists, social-democrats and those with a civil rights orientation not necessarily critical of capitalism as an economic system. Meretz activists provided a range of responses to questions on socialism and class ranging from those influenced by Marxist critiques of capitalism, a larger group with social-democratic tendencies, through to defenders of the capitalist status quo. Amongst those with a leftist orientation, critiques of class inequalities and governmental and party responses to these were often strident. Racheli accuses Meretz of complicity in backing the privatisation of state companies and services while bemoaning the popular prejudice against social welfare:

Racheli: I think that what the most serious problem in Israeli economical issue and the problem is that people, especially people in the government and the Knesset are looking to the American economy, or the capitalist economy and it's appealing to them. And it's not just appealing for them it's appealing for people on the street. People hear privatisation, it sounds good to them. They don't understand that it's the opposite of social justice and it's the opposite of any sense of equality or good life... People here say "Yeah right, they're right they have to cut the deficit of the budget" but they don't understand it's not like an overdraft in a personal bank account... sometimes more deficit in the budget means that you can make more growth and more growth then you can cut... I'm looking for this and just saying to myself "God, Marx was right people have false...

D: Consciousness.

R: ...They have false consciousness, they hear about privatisation, they hear about cutting the budget and they think it's a good thing and they don't understand that it's bad and it just makes me crazy. And I can't see it stop because even Yossi Sarid when he's talking about economics he's not saying... even close to my opinion... It is far, far away from the organised financial left... the economical left is moving to the right and no one is... talking about the welfare state... I don't want socialism according to Marx, it's not what I'm looking for. I'm looking for social democracy, I'm looking for at least a welfare state. And in Israel these days to speak about the welfare state is like to curse... they start talking

about you like a bloody communist or something like that... [Meretz] Platform... it took all kind of ideas... mixed them together and something went out on the economical issue... it say nothing against privatisation... we know that the person who bought the big industry in the big previous privatisation was well connected family... all the rich.

Following is a section from Meretz' 1999 platform concerning economic issues, and then Efrat speaks of the quandary of the left in Israel; that left wing political parties tend to appeal to peacenik sectors of the Ashkenazi middle classes while the poor support religious parties or secular nationalist parties with neo-liberal economic principles. In truth, it is unclear where Meretz stands on economic theory and policy given the 1999 platform's seeming support for privatisation and contradictory social-democratic activism in the Knesset with moves such as Ran Cohen's Housing Law, education reform and support for abused welfare beneficiaries pointing to a recent change in emphasis to the social sphere.

"An open market economy is an important principle, but it may work against those who cannot care for themselves, thus intensifying social polarization - unless society maintains mechanisms for adjustment and intervention... Meretz advocates the transfer of enterprises from the government to the public, but is opposed to the transfer of all assets and businesses to the ownership of a small number of individuals" (Meretz Platform 1999:48, 50-51).

Efrat: I was in Meretz and I... didn't have a social ideology that was really left. That was last year and then, it sounds corny, but I read Marx... how he looks at the world and then I got interested and I read the manifest ['Communist Manifesto'] and then I became a socialist so [laughs]... I just realised there's no such thing... as free choice... it's a situation in Israeli politics that people who are left [wing]... are not the proletarian. The proletarian are right so people who are left don't really know a lot about it... every healthy political debate has to be about social subjects and not about the Territories and not about religious coercion. So once we have that debate I think Meretz will fit right in on the true left...

D: Social structural change isn't really on the agenda for Meretz either is it?

E: I think it is; the Housing Law... and the Education Law... Free education from age three... to university.

Both Ran and Yonatan stand to the left of Meretz on social matters and display a more radical understanding of class related issues and their amelioration:

D: Were you ever interested in communism?

Yonatan: Yes... I was involved in some Trotskyist organisation.

D: What attracted you to those?

Y: They were more radical in the intifada time and... having more solidarity with the intifada, like in the school collecting clothes and money... I liked the connection they made between the national problem and social problem. I liked the attitude that said, "No, In order to make a change in the direction of peace you must apply to the workers, the working life on the level of talking about their problems"... After this I was involved in... the anarchist movement but now I was really not doing politics at all... I think the oppression is one on the society. If it is against Palestinians, or against workers, or against youth, it's one... It's trying to rule other people.

Ran: ...I've really changed... I'm not a Meretz fan... I'm a Hadash fan because when I started... to know more about other parties I realised that Hadash said much, much more... than Meretz about... the stuff I really care and that's economy... I don't think that Meretz doing enough in the economy... in the base of my ideology I am a socialist... Meretz... doesn't think socialist... In Israel... it doesn't work like this. Almost everybody is capitalist... I think that only Hadash is a socialist party... the state... doesn't gives enough opportunity for the poor people... the most important part as I see it is the education. I live in the south near Sderot, they don't have an equal... education as in Tel Aviv, Ra'anana, Herzliya or wherever... so they don't have the opportunity... to go where other people go.

D: Yeah, it's a class issue as well.

R: ...that's a pure example for lower class and upper class and, and about the non-equal opportunities.

Danny was the only other interviewee to describe himself as a socialist and gives his ideas here on what socialism should look like in practice:

Danny: I'm a socialist... I was ever since I was thirteen. Most of what I heard in holidays was argues about socialism-communism... Why was I a socialist? Because I thought it was right... I still do... Free education, free medical service, free basic utilities.

D: Do you believe in... class struggle for example?

Dy: Yes and no... I think the classes are pretty mixed these days... I know many struggling capitalists... and many well-to-do employees. So it's kind of mixed but... I still think that... the state should be the ultimate employer... I was pretty much drawn in my youth to Fabianism... Fabianism used to be the main social-democrat stream in England... it was defined as "socialists who can wait". It basically means large inheritance taxes, slow nationalisation of major factories... I think that if I'd stuck to the pure socialist part I'd be... in a problem with Meretz. Having members in the Knesset like Amnon Rubinstein who's not exactly socialist, I think that would be a problem.

Others also took the existence of socio-economic inequality as their starting point for a critique of society while evincing a less doctrinaire anti-capitalist stand. The extension of progressive taxation as a means for lessening income disparities was a common theme, while a taint of anti-welfarism began to appear in the responses of this group:

Erez: When people get a salary for a month like $50,000 and someone else get something like... I think that because we are a Jewish country... we have to be more close one to the other... this thing that you're rich too much...

D: So you take more taxes from the richer people?

E: Yeah, of course... more than that... people that don't work you don't have to pay them that they stay at home. You have to go find them a job.

Roi: So I think the country should give just the basic needs and not to give everybody. To give free education it's basic to give everybody... and there is poor people in the country so the country should help them but... she should help only them.

Aviv: For me capitalism... you have to limit it... I believe that man is not only an individual each man is part of a society. And it's not solidarity for social justice it's solidarity for itself... And here in Israel the social situation is catastrophic because the social gap is one of the biggest in the Western world.

Gilad and Tamar both support the maintenance of a comprehensive welfare system as a means of ameliorating the social suffering caused by capitalism, while rejecting changes in the economic system:

Gilad: I think the state should first of all make sure no one, as much as it's possible, go beneath a certain level. It shouldn't interfere too much in what's going on but it should put some sort of a lower barrier... I really don't want us to see this country something like the United States when you have too many homeless people on the streets.

Tamar: I think that there is something good about capitalism because I think that people should have the ability to have a good idea, try to do something with it, and gain something from it just because you had a good idea... But yet I think that there shouldn't be ever a child that doesn't have his meals... or a man or a woman that doesn't have a place to sleep, or decent salaries, or decent welfare.

Those *Tzerim* and *Noar* who explicitly rejected socialism tended to combine recognition of social inequalities with a call for the extension of equal opportunities through reform of the education system:

Omer: I never got into Marxism... I'm not a communist and I don't believe in his views, I think that's over the edge... people should have any support they need from the state. However, you still need some form of free market, some form of capitalism for people to evolve. If someone can make a lot of money he has the right to do that but... you... can't go the other way being completely capitalist and let people die from poverty and hunger because someone else can make a lot of money... the general means is just making sure

everyone gets the minimum wage which co-ordinates with the way people live... I believe in education I think that just reading is very important and if a kid doesn't have the way to read a book, doesn't have the physical way to read a book, then something's wrong... free medicine available. If someone needs a very complicated surgery, cancer or whatever... they should get everything they need to be healthy.

Tali: I don't like the socialism... I think that people... should help themselves but I think they have to have the opportunity... education is the basic because if you get education you can get everything... but on the other hand it's the obligation of the person to deal with it, you can't say all the time, "Oh, I'm fucked up. I'm coming from a bad neighbourhood". So what?... for me it's easy to say because I'm really coming from a very bad area.

The Public Housing Law: A Socialist or Elitist Party?

It could be argued that the introduction of a housing law that involves the privatisation of state housing hardly constitutes the act of a socialist party. As one Meretz activist put it "Margaret Thatcher did the same thing when she sold off council flats to their tenants. This is not about Left or Right" (Jerusalem Post, 2/4/99). However the measures outlined in the provisions of Ran Cohen's Housing Law make it clear that the intent is to alleviate social suffering, in particular the insecurity of possible privatisation or future rent hikes for public tenants by allowing them to own a home of their own and to pass it on to their family when they die. The bill is put into its proper context through an acknowledgement of the neo-liberal tendencies of both major secular parties and the possibility of a future sale of the billions of dollars worth of housing stocks to the highest bidder - as with kibbutz properties.

With the passage of the bill tenants were supposed to be able to buy their apartments for around 15% of their value, but very few had been sold before the freezing of the legislation by the government. The implementation of a watered down version by the Netanyahu administration had little effect as Israeli bureaucratic culture intervened with Amidar (the state company in charge of most public housing) employees stymieing tenant efforts to buy their apartments in order not to put themselves out of work (Jerusalem Post, 4/2/99). Despite mention of a return to the original legislation in the 1999 coalition

agreement between Meretz and Labour, Barak also stonewalled and the issue became one of many that Meretz felt a sense of frustration and even betrayal over in internal coalition politics.

The tenants themselves are largely poor Sephardim, a group traditionally extremely antipathetic to Meretz which they view as an Ashkenazi elitist party, too keen to give up integral parts of *Eretz Yisrael* to the Arabs. Ran Cohen is Sephardi and Meretz activists confided that he is the only Meretz MK able to 'press the flesh' with Sephardi voters in poor areas of cities such as Jerusalem that have been largely devoid of Meretz branches and activities in the past. The Jerusalem Post (2/4/99) reported that, in the wake of Meretz' championing of the Public Housing Bill, party branches had appeared in poor neighbourhoods in Ashdod, Kiryat Gat, Holon, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and ten other cities. This may well be the case but I saw little evidence of active support from the Sephardi poor during the 1999 election campaign.

We held a rally in a public housing project in Ashdod attended largely by Meretz *Noar* and *Tzerim*, though I did see a number of locals holding Meretz signs and flags. The inhabitants of the neighbourhood, many of whom were ultra-Orthodox, watched distrustfully from their balconies as the Meretz MKs spoke in the square below. However the usual extreme animosity encountered in daily activism from Sephardim and right wingers was totally absent from this march and rally.

The Ashdod march gets underway

A community worker interviewed for a Jerusalem Post (2/4/99) article on the Public Housing Law and it's impact on Sephardi attitudes towards Meretz explained that, "Many of these people still have a hard time warming up to Meretz, but I would say that, at least to a certain extent, they don't hate Meretz like they used to". Ran Cohen was effusive in praising public housing tenants; "They've figured out how to survive with hardly anything, in the face of the worst difficulties. They know more than 70 professors with all the degrees in the world" (Jerusalem Post, 2/4/99). In 2000 he was forced to champion a watered down version of the legislation offering discounted sales of between 30-60% percent dependent on the length of tenant tenure (Haaretz, 6/1/00). Racheli accuses Meretz of paternalism in its efforts concerning state housing:

Racheli: ...the Ran Cohen Law, it's an important law but it makes no social change and actually Meretz has no openness for people that are different than what Meretz is used to see... they are patronising people...

D: [interrupts] In what way are they patronising people?

R: ...it wasn't like "OK, let's go and let's call the people in the neighbourhood and let's together make the change". "We're coming to save you, poor people". God I hate... these things really, it will never work... Meretz is behaving like an elite.

I do not agree entirely with Racheli's critique. On social issues Meretz seems to face

An Ashdod Sephardi housing tenant waves the Meretz flag

criticism regardless of what it does. Public consultation has never been a strong suit of any party in Israeli politics and the legislation, as introduced, constituted a progressive and far-reaching solution to the insecurities facing the weakest sector of Jewish-Israeli society. The opposition of the Treasury and recurrent governments to the law serve to underline the importance of the bill both to the state (in terms of lost assets and revenue) and to residents

of the 110,000 housing units involved. The Law was also politically prudent with Haaretz (13/8/99) estimating that Meretz gained an extra seat in 1999 through votes from the Sephardi poor.

The party continues to be seen as elitist by a majority of young activists. In the first excerpt below Yonatan talks of Meretz' association with the alleged bohemian culture of Shenkin Street, which has replaced nearby Dizengorff Street in Tel Aviv as a symbol for religious and other social conservatives of the degenerative influence of Western consumer culture:

D: Do you think it's the party of the rich and intelligent or...

Yonatan: Not the rich, like the middle class... it's to have a Western image, Ashkenazi. Because it's very connected to Shenkin Street...

D: Is it materialist culture?

Y: Yeah materialist and free. Like liberal, more like the United States, more or less.

Yaron: ...a lot of people here... get anti talking abut social issues because parties like Shas sort of claimed that as their own flag... I think Meretz' electorate is not ready to do this. One of the biggest problems with Meretz, and this just came out full-blown in one of the... Meretz board meeting... Meretz is a member of the Socialist International and... they're observers at the Liberal International... One of the reasons leftists in Meretz will have a very hard time pushing the social agenda is that even if a lot of... Meretz members do believe they have a social agenda, they're not liberal they're still... upper classes. You know it, it just doesn't look right when you're sitting... in your big house and you're saying that we should give more to the poor.

Noam: Most of the rich people, most of the capitalists they vote for Meretz... or for the Labour Party.

D: So do you think that Meretz is a bit of an elite party then?

N: Yeah, of course... it's an elite party... the people here are what we call in Hebrew the *mimsad* ['establishment']... the old elites here... here at Meretz they are not... the big

money... not the nouveau riches but here are... the most integral part... of the government, and also let's say the big officials something like these professors in the university.

Despite it's largely 'Ahusal' leadership and electorate, Meretz has been increasingly active in Knesset with regard to social issues. A brief survey of newspaper clippings between 2000 and 2002 sees Meretz opposing state budgets due to cuts in social welfare and bringing no confidence motions in the government over the same when in opposition; championing prison reform and a rise in the minimum wage; introducing legislation to give 50% discounts to senior citizens on public utility bills; and focusing ministerial budgets on education reforms and poverty alleviation programmes in development towns, poor neighbourhoods and the Arab sector (Jerusalem Post, 5/5/00; Haaretz, 10/5/01; Haaretz, 7/6/02; Haaretz, 20/9/01). Perhaps this places the party at variance with the class interests of its overwhelmingly middle class electorate but while the party is still on the peacenik left of the Zionist movement and the Occupation remains a primary concern it is likely to retain at least the rump of peacenik support it was reduced to in 2003. The retention of this support base following a putative peace settlement with the Palestinians relies on the party becoming far more active on *kulturkampf* issues, as the meteoric rise of Shinui has shown. It is unlikely that Sephardim will ever vote for Meretz in large numbers as, regardless of its social activism, the party will remain the embodiment - alongside Labour - of the loathed Ahusal elite. Currently positions in Meretz' leadership are only available to party-swapping MKs and those already in Knesset, allowing no political base to pretenders from poor neighbourhoods and development towns.

Flower-Children?

Environmentalism is one of Meretz' 'flags'. It is something of an ideological poor cousin with the party and most activists viewing environment problems as both important and postponable until after the resolution of more pressing security, civil and human rights, and social concerns. Meretz' environmentalism springs from the party's liberal tendency. Appeals tend to be couched in the language of the civil rights movement and are highly critical of past and present government's acquiescence to commercial interests:

Meretz insists on the basic right of every individual to live in a healthy, harmonious environment... Since its inception, the State of Israel has prioritized development and economic interest at the expense of environmental concerns. The consequences are manifest: rivers of sewage, mountains of garbage and refuse, contaminated aquifers, industrial pollution, noise pollution, enormous destruction of natural resources on sea and land, as well as loss of open spaces to wasteful and thoughtless development projects (Meretz Platform 1999:91).

Yossi Sarid was the first Minister of the Environment in the 1992-1996 Rabin/Peres government - a ministry created, at least in part, at Meretz' behest. His tenure is described by many Meretzniks as a golden period for the furtherance of environmental concerns although none could provide me with specific examples of his achievements in that office:
.
Racheli: He was the first Environmental Minister... he built this office, he asked for this issue which was... quite a move in itself... without doing anything afterward. And he didn't solve big... environmental issues in Israel but he put it into the consideration, which is quite an important thing and now no one would think to cancel the, the Ministry of the Environment... which is the big step for Israel I think in this issue.

Boaz: I think that in the previous Knesset when Yossi Sarid was a member of the Knesset he did a lot... And in the opposition he did a lot as a Knesset member... But I don't think that... there is anybody in the Knesset... that really takes care of those issues and he kind of left a hole... after him and that's very bad, it's very risky for Meretz to neglect that... There isn't much environment here to begin with, it's a very crowded country and you... also have to understand where it's coming from because... there was this ideology of building.

Boaz refers to the Zionist understanding of nation-building as a primary national priority, a mindset that is still difficult to overcome given the perceived demographic and geographic threat posed by the growing Israeli and West Bank Palestinian populations. With a vast array of Meretz youth activities associated with *kulturkampf* and peace activities there is little time or energy left for environmental campaigns. I did discern a

greater interest and involvement in environmental protection in the *Noar*, some of whom acted to physically prevent the construction of the Trans-Israel Highway. Several parties attempted to stop the construction of this highway but Meretz was the most prominent in protest activities. One of the more bizarre experiences of my fieldwork period came at an anti-Trans-Israel Highway rally where a NRP MK spoke out against the road's environmental impact and called for the creation of a movement of 'green *kippas*' [national-religious] to work in concert with pro-environmentalist groups to a bemused crowd dominated by Tel Aviv peaceniks used to seeing him on the other side of the barricades.

Below, Yossi speaks of his interest in the environment and opposition to the Highway, and reiterates the problems facing the 'green' movement in Israel mentioned above. Amir then describes a typical Meretz environmentalist activity; descending on a beach with large Meretz trash sacks to clean up for a few hours. I participated in two beach clean-ups during the 1999 election campaign:

Yossi: …you can say that I'm very green… that's a very strong part for me… Yossi Sarid… these issue is very close to him but… I know he doesn't have enough time to deal with it right now. There is a demonstration this Saturday that he's coming to it… as a representative… against… *Yisrael* the…

D: Trans-Israel Highway in English.

Y: And I'm extremely against it… there are… many kinds of pollution and I don't think… any of it… is being really treated in really a serious way; air, land and sea, and water. It's not. And Zehava Galon is doing a little bit on this subject but… not much and for me… they're not doing much… it's because these problems seem very, you know, "OK we have… the peace, we have soldiers being killed in Lebanon… we have the religious people they want money and all that and then the 'green', OK, OK, sometime we'll do that". But they don't realise that the amount of people that are dying… from these problems not being treated… We're not talking about all the problems with animals… I used to act a little bit on that subject but unfortunately I don't have the time.

Amir: ...we did all kinds of stuff in Herzliya[37] and we went to the beach and we started cleaning there with Meretz shirts. And people were really impressed because they never see Meretz do anything about the environment and then they see. So I think it mainly depends on... the youth movements doing stuff... you do see us all over the country doing stuff like that every once in a while.

Self-Criticism or Self-Evisceration?

Throughout the world left wing movements have a propensity for internal criticism and schism. This is understandable given that the individuals attracted to such parties tend to be ideologically highly motivated and are thus easily disappointed by the compromise inherent in politics and the general absence of high principle among its true proponents. Both *Tzerim* and *Noar* expressed disappointment at the compromises made by the party in coalition, but this unease was particularly palpable among the *Noar* probably due to the greater experience of *Tzerim* in the internal politicking and inevitable coalition kowtowing of the party. The line between healthy griping and damaging self-criticism - testifying to fundamental flaws with the leadership and constitution of the party - is difficult to draw and I will not attempt to do so here, but it seems likely that where the same criticisms on major issues are repeated by a large number of committed party activists, grievance can turn from disappointment to mass disassociation and this seems to have taken place to a certain extent with Meretz.

We have discussed above activist disappointments with regard to specific matters directly related to ideology, here we will briefly survey other common criticisms of Meretz before launching a discussion on the most damaging; allegations of corruption. Speaking in 1999, Roni correctly predicts that Meretz will lose a large number of seats in the 2003 elections due to its unwillingness to take radical positions on matters of import to its electorate:

Roni: ...the Labor Party now calls themselves like Israel One... and I believe Meretz is becoming like Israel Two... the Green Party, the *Yerukim*, are much more involved in ecology matters. Tommy Lapid of Shinui hates religious people much more than us. The

---

[37] City changed to protect identity.

weed party is much more cooler than us... Hadash are much more left wing than us. We don't have any opinion in the Jerusalem issue... the only thing that Meretz has to suggest is like "Well we're not Israel One"... at the next elections I'm not so sure that there will be... more than three or four mandates

Boaz, Moshe and Efrat criticise the party's leadership as a gerontocracy bent on self-preservation rather than the ideological and pragmatic rejuvenation of Meretz. The failure to allow the passage of youth to leadership positions is a common complaint amongst *Tzerim* and *Noar*, backed by the fact that the predominance of youth activists is not recognised within the official bodies of the party with *Tzerie* and *Noar* receiving only 30% of the vote in the Council and Conference and less on the more important Board.

Boaz: You can't have a party... that its target is young people having old leadership and that would have to change... Yossi Sarid... is like one of the oldest Knesset members... it's not about ageism it's just that he's been in there so long. And of course he has a lot of experience. However it doesn't allow for change and new ideas and new concepts... this... rejuvenation process is needed in a party. I don't think that's good.

D: How does Meretz need to change?
Moshe: ...I think that it is important that some new leadership, young leadership will grow inside Meretz so that it will be possible to replace Yossi Sarid eventually... Meretz used to be a young party and the people who were young grew older and younger people did not come.

By 1999 there was a pervasive sense that the *Tzerim* and *Noar* were taking a necessary oppositional role within Meretz to prevent the party from abrogating it's responsibilities as an ideologically committed movement:

Ariel: I think that Meretz could raise 15 mandates if they only say what they... really mean by doing things... it's not Meretz, it's the youth of Meretz who really protect it.

Raz: I understand that when a party's in coalition it needs to accommodate itself and be pragmatic. However, Meretz in both times it was part of the coalition, in '92 and now, makes far too many concessions... they expelled 450 Palestinians to Lebanon. And then when the entire party considered to let Shula Aloni leave the [Education] Ministry... And they never... advanced any laws regarding gay issues. I am completely totally disappointed at their impotence... they are in coalition as chickens... I think that you can be part of the coalition, be pragmatic, be clever, and still be adamant with your ideology and principles. And if your ideology is to promote gay equal rights or, if you want to say, gay liberation either you don't go into government with Shas or you say to Shas or whomever your partners are "These are my principles"... If I don't [see]... personnel changes in the party I will not vote for Meretz.

Is Meretz Corrupt?

Meretz prides itself on being a party free of the corruption that pervades many political parties in Israel. The image of Meretz as an unimpeachably 'clean' party is vital to its electoral success as any taint of corruption would be seized upon by the media and rival parties as a sign of ethical degeneration and gross hypocrisy given the party's forthright stance on vice.

My intention in asking Meretz activists whether corruption exists in the party was to see how allegations or actual occasions of such improprieties would act on identification with Meretz as an identity community, rather than to investigate the party itself for possible moral turpitude. However, the prevalence of corruption allegations made by activists, the obvious desire of many to relate these to me, and the damaging impact of perceived corruption on identification with Meretz requires an examination of these accusations with regards to their impact on continued affiliation. In relating the accusations of corruption below I have made a particular effort to hide the identities of informants and of those accused changing locations and even details of events in order to avoid the identification of those involved while giving as close an approximation as possible of the allegations made. All names are excised and replaced with randomly selected letters, the author retaining D. I make no claims here as to the truth, or otherwise, of the charges made.

The most striking aspect for me in interviewee responses to the question "Is Meretz corrupt", was that very few answered in the negative, and if they did so sought to deny the existence of graft by referring to extant allegations as examples of normal party politicking, and through reference to the perceived corruption of other parties, individuals, and Israeli politics and society in general. In the first excerpt C answers by referring to the expulsion of MK Dedi Zucker from the party following charges of financial impropriety:

C: ...people here are very aware of that [corruption] and are very careful... not to get dirty. I mean, one of the flags that Meretz holds... is fighting against corruption and people here know that this is the thing that can totally, totally kill them... we had one Knesset member that got entangled, Dedi Zucker, he was a wonderful Knesset member... he got paid by 'Camera Obscura', which is a school for the Arts in Tel Aviv and he shouldn't have, a Knesset member shouldn't get another salary. He got into this thing that was like not entirely legal and... he wasn't being prosecuted or anything because it wasn't like that important or that much of money or anything... it was enough for him not to be chosen.
D: So that's why he left to form the Greens, or to lead the Greens?
C: Yeah, yeah, he wasn't elected.

Both A and B reject the possibility that Meretz is corrupt, although A equivocates somewhat while relating to a common perception within Meretz that if sleaze exists it is insignificant in comparison with other parties. He argues that allegations arise through the greater sensitivity of Meretzniks to the issue:

A: I would not say that there is corruption in Meretz. There are things that you always have in politics like different groups which are against each other... And deals and all this stuff but not really corruption.

B: I think basically the people who come to Meretz are more honest... and they talk about these values... you can't say they're not, they' re... politicians, but it's less corrupt.

In his interview, E told me that corruption exists in Meretz and when he found out about it; "I liked it". He believes that Meretzniks are seen by others as *yife nefesh* ['beautiful souls'] and said that when you get to know what the party is really like you see that corruption exists. E went on to argue that for "little politicians" corruption qualifies you for higher office as it shows an ability to handle the higher stage. Politics is compromise; "What I get for giving you this, and that's how it should be". E's response shocked me at the time due to its brutal honesty and lack of condemnation. It speaks to a political pragmatism that I didn't expect to find in Meretz with regard to corruption.

F explains why Meretz cannot allow corruption to thrive within the movement and gives the example of member buying by moneyed candidates for internal party positions as an example of contemporary improprieties, while denouncing the party's leadership as being primarily motivated by self-interest. G explains why 'buying' voters and employing campaign workers is vital for gaining political clout in a party the size of Meretz:

F: ...the problem is that Meretz cannot afford itself to be just like any other party, whether in Israel or the world. You can't strive for peace and fight for social justice and equality... if you don't have your conscience like pure... That's a basic issue and unfortunately Meretz has gone a long, long way from what I want to see... the leaders in Meretz, the only care they have is about themselves. They don't have any care about others... it's a show, it's a game... they are announcing and calling for certain values but underneath it they don't even care about it... I would expect that the majority of the people in Meretz would be different. I'm sorry to say it's not... one of my mistakes was that... I've had a belief that... in Meretz, that people who are involved in politics, of course they are idealistic. And I was very surprised to find out that most of them are not... It's very problematic because there's this huge gap between the image and the actual state... And my fear is that if Meretz gets corrupted it won't be distinguished from any other party... there was a dispute at Meretz regarding the fee, the member fee... how much a Meretz member would need to pay on an annual basis. Some of the leaders in Meretz insisted that the fee would be reduced from 60 shekels annually to 30 shekels annually. Think about it, 60 shekels annually, every month just to pay five shekels... Now we need to distinguish between the public purpose and what's the underneath purpose. So the public purpose was that we need Meretz to be

stronger and wider, and people need to join from all parts of the country, from all parts of society, etc., etc. The underneath source was that if people... pay for other people then they could get more people to be members and that would increase their power... the parallel action to that decision was to allow people to pay cash money. Now if you are able to pay cash money, if you have 30,000 shekels... you can put 1,000 people... member, that's a lot of power.

G: ...money has a lot of impact in Meretz. If you have money to have people lobbying for you when you run... for primaries election... if you want to get elected from the local branches you've got to get as many people as you can to become Meretz members... so they'll vote for you... if you have a lot of money then... you don't have to work and you can spend your money getting people to *mitpaked* ['recruit'/'member'], and when the Council comes round you could give people nice shiny postcards of you saying... this is my agenda, this is me, and it helps.

H speaks of a related phenomenon, alleging the false declaration of candidacies for Conference and Council positions in the formation of faction lists:

H: ...when we had the Haifa city... elections what was it the *Moatza* [Council] the *Veida* [Conference], the elections two months ago faked some candidacies. He submitted people's names without asking them ..."Yes, I am a member of Meretz. I never wanted, and I do not want to be part of its institutions for a variety of reasons. I was shocked to find my name", and in at least one or two cases "I was elected to be on the *Moatza* or the *Veida* against my will". He not only violated Meretz laws, regulations but... criminal law... taking the identity of somebody else... teaches me at least a lesson that when you get some power you want more power and if you want more power it necessitates using unlawful, or unethical, or just unfriendly means. And so it's corrupt.

In our final excerpt, K gives an example of perceived vote buying, with new members signed up who do not support Meretz through the largesse of a particular faction in order

for that faction to win internal elections in a major party branch. She finishes by accusing the head of the party of ignoring the democratic norms of the party.

K: ...who go to development towns... when they had[38], you know. And he helped them, she brought them food and then... she brought them to Meretz to be members...

D: Most of them wouldn't be natural left, would they, they'd be *Shasnikim*?

K: Yeah, they came to vote for Yael to chairman of *Snif* Haifa and... they shouted at us "You son of a bitch Meretz, you *smolanit* ['lefty']", and they came to vote for Meretz. What's going on, it's amazing. When we have internal elections...To pay people that they can be members, if they don't have any money or if they don't want. To pay for this. You have to lie... We have the *Hok HaTakanon*, the book of rules, OK? So in this book they say that Yossi Sarid had the right to bring five more people to the *Hanhalah*. So he bring nine more names even though it is against the regulations. But he's the king, he can do whatever he wants... he brought names of people who were in the elections and got 20 votes... it was very dirty, I didn't think he'd do something like this.

I cannot relate with any certitude to the charges of vote and membership buying above except to note that such accusations are so common that they must have a significant impact on the commitment of ideologically motivated activists to the party. This was borne out for me in the fact that a number of friends I worked with in Meretz in 1999 had become so disenchanted with the party that they decided not to vote Meretz in the next election. For some this decision had already been made by the time I came to interview them in 2000.

Second-hand reports from those who attended internal investigations into irregularities portrayed the relevant body as administering very light censures to those found guilty of graft and seeking to keep vestiges of corruption dangerous to the party from being publicised. I make no claims as to the veracity of this image having never sat in on a meeting of this body but the appearance of irresolution and impotence in punishing improprieties is itself damaging to activist identification with Meretz.

In closing, it is important to note that I believe Meretz to be a committed, ideologically-motivated party, relatively free from the corruption that disfigures the Israeli

---

[38] Details changed and excised to protect identity.

body politic. As a recent activist and supporter of Meretz it is my earnest hope that the airing of the grievances mentioned above will lead to a renewed sensitivity to the damage done to the party as an identity community by perceived inactivity with regards to preventing corruption.

Meretz and Jewish Identity Politics

Political parties are powerful bodies with regard to culture identity politics in societies where ethnicity is both controversial and a basis for claims against the state. Where this competition produces systematic dysfunction and *kulturkampf* the party as identity community becomes a defining characteristic of the political landscape and political parties become powerful engines of cultural production looked to by their voters not just for the pursuance of their social and economic interests but also for a reified extrapolation and representation of self and community. This is increasingly true of Israeli politics which has seen an explosion of ethno-politics since the 1980s and the redrawing of political boundaries to more accurately reflect ethnic divisions and differing *kulturkampf* interests within Jewish-Israeli society.

Meretz itself is a representative of a secular Jewish identity politics that has existed in an unbroken line from the *Haskala* to the present and still reflects the desires of the first reformers to create a new Jew with a specific identity both at harmony with and differentiated from an idealised image of progressive 'Western' pluralistic liberalism. The party, both in a conscious and unconscious manner, re-presents for its adherents an understanding of a Jewish self and community as intellectual, cultured, Ashkenazi, determinedly secularist, liberal-progressive, peacenik and righteous. It is in this sense that we can understand the party as both an engine of cultural identity production in helping to maintain a self-aware identity community, and as a representative of this community's interests. Meretz has played a key role in the shaping and reassertion of a militantly secular Jewish identity in conflict with religious and traditionalist particularistic Jewish identity politics.

However, we should not overstate the impact of one organisation on society. Meretz is more a product of its milieu than a creative factor therein, filling the vacuum left by the death of Labour-Zionist ideology. The party's existence is predicated upon the growing

opposition of many secular Israelis to the Occupation and perceived religious coercion. Meretz' 2003 election defeat shows that a large sector of this public no longer views the party as able to act forcefully on these issues. As we have seen from activist responses to questions on the party, even the staunchest supporters of any political party often have a love-hate relationship thereto, an attitude that seems particularly true of Meretz voters who tend to come from the more highly educated, critically reflexive sector of society whose expectations have met many reverses since the party's formation.

I asked interview participants directly whether Meretz is playing a part in creating a new form of Jewish identity, with most arguing in the negative - an estimation I disagree with. What was interesting from many responses was that interviewees tended to see identity production as an important role for the party but believed that the party was not doing enough on this. Some bridled at the mention of Jewish identity, preferring that the party act to create a new Israeli identity. Moshe and Noam were forthright in rejecting the possibility of Meretz playing a part in Jewish identity production:

Moshe: I don't think so. I think that probably many people said to you that yes is the answer but I think that it is an arrogant answer. Meretz is a political party and it has a political agenda, not creating new social and identity.

Noam: No, no… they have no idea about this.

Amnon and Naaman disagree, though they prefer that Meretz become active in the area of Israeli identity politics. Naaman seems to confuse Jewish and Israeli, imagining the two as virtually synonymous, with the perceived difference being that Jewish identity necessarily has a religious dimension:

Amnon: I don't think so. I think it's more involved in maybe shaping a new Israeli person with its political views, and making them a reality, encouraging different ways for the general public to believe in them, to follow them and to make them effect.

Naaman: Not a new Jewish identity, a new Israeli identity, the "secular, intelligent Jew". Even Meretz's identity has a religious aspect.

In the excerpts below Ehud relates his belief that Meretz is doing little with regards to identity, while Idan talks of Meretz as representing in itself a comprehensive re-imagining of Jewish identity in the spirit of the nations founding fathers:

D: Is Meretz playing a part in creating a new form of Jewish identity?

Ehud: I think it has the potential... I have no doubt that one day this is going to be one of the major fields... [where] Meretz is going to be a major player. But at the moment... I don't think it's such a major factor.

Idan: I told you, there is no new Jewish man, there is nothing like that, there is only new Judaism. And I think that Meretz is the new Judaism... if you could talk to Ben Gurion today and you asked him... which group in Israel symbolise what he wanted to do in this country he would not say *Avodah* he would say Meretz.

Yaron argues, in the spirit of the *Haskala*, that the creation of an alternative secular identity is vital for preventing discord and incongruence between the modern world and Jewish identity politics. The conviction that religio-traditional identity and lifestyles are incompatible with the modern age is prevalent within Meretz:

Yaron: No, not really... not enough.
D: Do you think it's got the possibilities.
Y: Definitely... these are the alternatives as I see them now; you have your very religious-Orthodox community which is difficult for people who want to live in the twenty-first century because... it's just pretty outdated the way I see it.

Avi sees the expansion of the public's understanding of the legitimate Jewish identity community to encompass secular Jews as a vital role for the party to play, both in affirming secular Jewish self-identity and in propounding an alternative vision of what it is to be

Jewish. Yossi gives concrete examples of how Meretz MKs have been active in identity politics, while recognising the highly individuated nature of identity:

Avi: Yeah but not enough because... Meretz has to reach for the... recognition, yeah. That we are Jewish, not religious, but we are Jewish as much as anyone else and to say it to the public, and to ourselves the member [of the] party and... really to start to build... a non-religious... strong identity that we are Jewish, we are unreligious and we study, we respect Jewish history and... all that's connected... because we are intellectually open. And we want the Jewish to know our part of the history. So to do seminars about it, to have talks about it... We don't do it enough and I'm very sorry about it... we have to do more in order that more people will think that it's not to be, "He's a rabbi so he's Jewish and I'm not a rabbi so I'm not Jewish. He knows about religious and he can tell me what to do".

Yossi: I'm not sure... if Meretz as a party but the individuals in Meretz... like myself and I guess many of the other people you interviewed, each one of us has... his way of viewing the subject... Maybe if you are a member of Knesset or if you have a lot of influence to hundreds, thousands and, and more.

D: So you can represent those people more?

Y: Represent or change... their way of thinking... the identity issue... I think if you ask all ten members [of Knesset] each one of them... there will be... some differences... Meretz represents... the secular part... to be Jewish first of all you are Jewish, second of all you don't have to be a religious... you can connect and it's important... and Yossi Sarid says as the Minister of Education that it's important that kids in Israel will be connected to the Bible and... to the Jewish tradition... not from... the religious side, from the cultural side. So I think... that's basically the main idea but... everyone has his different ways... of seeing these things.

Their Jewish identity is important to both Aviv and Ariel. Aviv relates his surprise and pleasure at finding out that so many fellow activists were deeply interested in Jewish identity and explains how the right wing has tried to paint Meretz as anti-Jewish due to the party's opposition to religious coercion, with some success. With the new civil religion's

ethnocentric emphasis have come efforts to retract the limits of Israeli political legitimacy from the 'Zionist consensus' to excise non-Jews and those opposed to the new particularistic orientation.

Aviv: I knew that for Israelis from my generation being a Jew is not so a big issue... Sometimes I think... it's more true with Meretz people but I did meet Meretz people who were like me. Meretz people who were... born here in Israel and... for them being Jewish... was something important... they do have a kind of Jewish feeling even if they are left wingers... that's the wrong image of Meretz in the religious and right wing population, that Meretz, the party or the people, we don't care about our Jewishness. But no, we do care about our Jewishness but in a different way and we want to be Jewish and human... it's really hard because sometimes when you've heard some of the right wing leaders in Israel they give you the feeling that for them being Jewish is being strong... "we are Jewish so... we're stronger than the Arabs and we will show them".... do you remember when Netanyahu said, did you hear of the old rabbi Kedourie... Once Netanyahu when he was Prime Minister said to him "The left wingers forget what it is to be Jews, they forget to be Jew". Unfortunately for Netanyahu there was a microphone from the radio.

Ariel: I think that the moment I describe myself as a Jew and I'm doing things, and everyone who does it is creating a new thing for Judaism. And I think it's time for that. I think I don't leave anything behind...
D: So you are building on the tradition and changing it in your own way?
A: Of course. Tradition can be sexy, tradition can be great you just have to find the right thing.

The role of Meretz in the extrapolation and championing of secular Jewish-Israeli identity politics is difficult to describe and thus open to contestation but exists nonetheless as an essential calling and pragmatic reality, best seen in *kulturkampf* discourses and conflicts. It is to one such struggle that we now turn our attention through an account of the 1999-2000 culture war battle between Meretz and Shas.

Chapter 9: Shas v Meretz

Covering Shas exposes the primitive mindset that is flourishing in our midst...
Shas is a true and present danger for which there is no solution in sight. There is
a place for "Shasphobia" on the part of right-minded people of all persuasions:
Ashkenazim and Sephardim, secular and religious. All must unite in the common
goal of saving society (Yoram Bronowski, Haaretz, 15/9/00).

Shas: It's not a platform, it's an identity (Shas election slogan 1996 in Kamil
2000:1).

Our discussion ends with a description of the intense *kulturkampf* battles between Shas
and Meretz in the Barak government, focusing specifically on the opposition within Meretz
to the 1999-2000 coalition and the battle between the two parties over the control and
funding of Shas' education system.

The startling success of the ultra-Orthodox, Sephardic Shas party from the 1980s on
has generated an unprecedented wave of hatred and paranoia amongst the secular
population. An offshoot of the *AgudatYisrael* political party, Shas grew exponentially, once
it freed itself from Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox tutelage, under the spiritual leadership of Rav
Ovadia Yosef and the political leadership of Aryeh Deri, and now Eli Yishai. The party's
spectacular success has come from its ability to appeal to and motivate its predominantly
poor Sephardi constituency (both ultra-Orthodox and traditionalist) through an emphasis on
poverty alleviation, its advocacy of a Sephardic cultural renaissance, and a moderate stance
regarding *Halakhic* observance, while emphasizing the primacy of Torah and the religious
tradition.

Shas became the first ultra-Orthodox party to break free from the limited *haredi*
constituency to appeal to a traditionalist public that was previously thought to be in the
pockets of the Likud but were more than open to the appeals to Sephardi religio-
traditionalist ties made by Shas. The reason for this openness is simple; the inability of
recurrent secular governments to alleviate the social distress of residents of poor
neighbourhoods and development towns and to allow for the same integration and

celebration of Israel's Sephardic history and cultural traditions as that afforded the secular, Ashkenazi-Zionist past.

Israel's Sephardi population is not homogenous and monolithic. It is cleft by ethnic and class divisions. A significant sector of the Sephardi population has achieved middle class status and the appeal of Shas to this group is probably limited (although I have not seen studies or polls to confirm this), while nationalist politics retains appeal. However, the vast majority of the Jewish lower classes and lumpenproletariat are Sephardim or Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox and, despite significant state efforts at acculturation, retain an abiding cultural legacy from their North African and Near Eastern countries of origin that, although greatly reduced and changed through their half century in Israel, remains a potent force for political mobilisation as proved by the rise of Shas. The creation of a religious Sephardi party with widespread popular appeal would have been impossible without the gross neglect of their urban quarters and development towns by successive secular governments, a neglect that perpetuated grinding poverty and an abiding sense of injustice expressed at first through the support of the Sephardi poor for the Likud and then Shas. It has been extraordinary how quickly the transition from support of the Likud to Shas has taken place.

Travelling around both religious and traditionalist Sephardi neighbourhoods throughout the country during the 1999 elections Shas was omnipresent in stickers, banners and photos of Shas and other Sephardi rabbis with the Likud virtually invisible in many places. This lack of visibility corresponded with voter preferences. The Likud was virtually wiped out in poor towns and neighbourhoods throughout Israel in 1999, though it did claw back 6 seats from Shas in 2003 due to the extraordinary context of that election, which was held in the middle of the second intifada. The Likud retrenchment is unlikely to last beyond the course of the present conflict unless the drop off in support for Shas signals a deeper disenchantment with the corruption and inactivity of the party.

What is beyond dispute is that the rise of Shas, its conflict with Meretz, and the attendant perceived extension of religious power and coercion has had a radicalising effect on the Ashkenazi secular public. Shas, Agudat Yisrael, Meretz and Shinui have a vested interest in heightening tensions and the perception of all out *kulturkampf* to gain the electoral affinity of those wavering in their support for the Likud or Labour. The fact that engagement in the religious-secular conflict guarantees electoral support is of profound

import with regards to the intensification of this conflict and shows how far the Israeli political landscape has shifted during the 1990s from an obsession with security to an almost equal concern with an unrelated internal Jewish-Israeli conflict. The secular and religious Israeli media's fixation on *kulturkampf* battles has heightened public interest and done a great deal to expand the scope of the conflict and persuade religious and secular of the malevolent nature of the other.

The 1999 Meretz election campaign was punctuated by activities and demonstrations targeted specifically at Shas, including a demonstration in front of the Tel Aviv headquarters of the party in Yitzhak Sadeh St. to protest the failure of Shas leader Aryeh Deri to resign from the Knesset following his sentencing to four years in jail on corruption charges. The demonstration itself was designed to catch the Shasnikim off guard, however, Shas activists started to arrive in strength within fifteen minutes of the first chants of "Deri, Deri *tikbateh* [resign]". A long hall led to the upstairs Shas offices and this was the focal point of the demonstration until we backed off onto the pavement outside due to our small numbers and the increasing strength and volatility of the Shasnikim standing directly opposite us. This group stood very close to us and began singing religious songs interspersed with chants of "Aryeh, Aryeh, Aryeh", though the increasingly frenzied activists on either side were kept in check by their leaders. With the arrival of the police the Shasnikim were herded inside and continued a tirade of abuse from an upstairs balcony. At one stage something was thrown on the Meretz activists below, though I didn't see what it was as fellow activists had forced me to stand away from the demonstration itself once the police arrived with 'paddywagons'. As with most demonstrations this one meandered along from this initial conflict, eventually ending a couple of hours later with the Meretz group packing up and heading back to the headquarters to prepare for the night's activities.

A similar confrontation occurred later in the campaign at a Meretz counter-demonstration against a huge Shas rally in Petah Tikva, at which the party's governing Council of Torah Sages was seated on stage. As the night wore on our highly visible counter-demonstration (large anti-religious coercion banners were hung where we stood on the adjacent long traffic island), garnered more and more attention until we had a small group from the rally screaming at us and being held back by police from crossing the road to physically attack our group. As we were driving away, a young Shas supporter hit our

van with a stick, something which was of little concern given the hammering we gave the unfortunate vehicles ourselves in the course of campaigning.

Imbuing Hatred

The current Israeli *kulturkampf* is characterised by extreme expressions of mutual loathing, incitement, and gross stereotyping of the religious or secular other. A significant sector of the secular public has found, in Shas, the perfect target for its fears of a religious takeover of state and society; a party of Sephardim (ethnic stereotyping plays an important, though largely unheralded role in 'Shasphobia'), with a pragmatic parliamentary agenda aimed at self-aggrandisement through the 'theft' of state monies. Many see Shas as a racist organisation intent on limiting the boundaries of the Jewish collective according to *Halakhic* prescriptions and on marginalising or expelling non-Jews. It is also perceived to be a 'backward' religious movement intent on expanding the reach of its education network into poor traditionalist neighbourhoods, with no role for women in the party or public life, and under the control of a religious sage not known for his reticence on the perceived depravity of secular Israel.

Avraham Hassid, Shas' election co-ordinator in Gilo spelled out Shas' intentions clearly in a post-election comment following Shas' 17 seat victory in 1999; "This shows, blessed be God, that the nation wants religion. All Jews, whether they have a kippa on their head or a ponytail or an earring, it's all the same to us. We want to bring them all back to religion" (Jerusalem Post, 18/5/99).

Meretz' first leader, Shulamit Aloni, described Shas as "a regional mafia that puts money ahead of the nation and spreads ignorance" (Jerusalem Post, 9/5/00).

> We want Enlightenment, knowledge, humanism, and they want introversion, preservation of the accumulated statutes to which they are attached, internal degeneration. This is not the Zionist movement and this cannot be allowed to happen in a sovereign state (Aloni cited in Haaretz 25/8/00)

She concluded that:

People despair and withdraw into their personal bubble... But, I think that instead of despair should come anger. Because there is great strength in anger, anger is a marvellous driving force in war". (Aloni cited in Haaretz 25/8/00)

In the same Haaretz (25/8/00) article Menachem Ben described Shas' attitude to foreigners as that of, "a fascist body, decidedly proto-Nazi" with "one goal - to seize power by increasing the number of Shas supporters... Shas, want a Levantine culture here, an Arab culture". Note here the association of Shas with the cultural transformation of Israel from a Western to a "Levantine" society. The influence of 'Orientalism', with regards to the perceived cultural superiority of the Ashkenazi Jewish tradition, plays a part in building the image of Shas and its supporters as repugnant, primitive fundamentalists intent on destroying secularity. In fact, Shas is a fascinating mix of Sephardic and religious populism; religious moderation within the ultra-Orthodox tradition; political pragmatism; and borrowed Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox modes of rabbinical authority, dress and behaviours. It is a very modern movement in that it developed as a response to the environmental milieu of its supporters, is a highly sophisticated political player, uses modern media to good effect, and engages in the championing of an alternative identity politics based in a desire for power and for a cultural reawakening and reorientation.

Despite Shas' repeated assertions that it accepts the democratic system, the party is dedicated to the extension of the *Halakhic* education system to all Israeli children and to the ideal of a *Halakhic* theocracy. Shas has used the ministries under its control to try to impose a definition of Jewish identity in keeping with *Halakha* and has systematically plundered ministerial budgets. This is not new to the Israeli political system; Israeli governing parties have, since the inception of the state, misappropriated state funds for their own benefit and to maintain patron-client relations with supporters. Likewise, religious parties have never recognised the primacy of the democratic system or secular education. The difference with Shas has been the size of its vote, its growth, the political skill of its leaders in wringing concessions out of secular governments in coalition formation, and the perceived threat the party seems to pose to 'Ahusal' predominance. Shas is explicit in its desire to overthrow Ashkenazi hegemony, often exhibiting a strong racist sentiment. An aide to Eli Yishai, Yitzhak Sudri, speaking as the Barak government was about to fall due

to Shas leaving the coalition, railed, "We'll shake off Ashkenazi domination and elitism. If Barak wishes he can set up a minority government, a government in exile in Shenkin where he can hold sway over all the sushi-eating Ashkenazis" (Jerusalem Post, 13/6/00).

In reality, Shas has little scope for growth beyond its plateau of 17 seats in the Knesset in 1999, having exhausted its potential electorate amongst the Sephardic poor who may well be turning against the party due to Shas' unwillingness to add legislative muscle to its purported social agenda. Meretz activists often claim that Meretz has done more to alleviate poverty than Shas in Knesset.

Adding to the exaggerated image of Shas as a demonic force bent on the destruction of secular Israel is the uninhibited mode of expression of party leaders. The spiritual head of Shas, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, is notorious for his attacks on seculars, Ashkenazim, Arabs, the Supreme Court and anyone else who earns his displeasure. In a Purim address, carried to supporters via TV and radio linkups, Yosef condemned Meretz leader and then Education Minister Yossi Sarid who was trying at the time to ensure proper ministerial oversight over Shas schools:

> MK Yossi Sarid is the 'Dark Side.' He is Satan, may his name and memory be erased. How long do we have to suffer this wicked man? God will extirpate him, the way he will extirpate Amalek... He must be uprooted from the seed of Israel... Just as revenge was wrought upon Haman, so will it be wrought on him" (Jerusalem Post 20/3/00).

The meaning of this speech was very obvious to most listeners, that Yossi Sarid deserved to die, and despite Yosef's hurried 'clarification' (no doubt influenced by the pending criminal investigation into his speech) that he did not intend that anyone should commit violence against Sarid, the Shas placard at a heated confrontation between Meretz and Shas activists outside the rabbis house the next day spoke for itself; "A saint proposes and God disposes" (Jerusalem Post, 20/3/00). Indeed a survey of Shas voters taken in the aftermath of Yosef's comments showed that 5% that the rabbi was putting a contract on Sarid (Haaretz, 7/4/00). Sarid's personal security was greatly increased thereafter with the Meretz leader forced to drive in an armour-plated limousine (Haaretz, 7/4/00). Prior to

Yosef's speech Sarid gave another activist and I a ride back to Tel Aviv from a college election. Even then his driver was checking under the car for bombs before Sarid was allowed anywhere near it. I counted three direct, publicised death threats against the Meretz leader during and immediately after the 1999 election.

Yosef's quietude did not last long, the rabbi describing Sarid as Pharaoh shortly after his controversial speech (Jerusalem Post, 31/3/00). That Purim an effigy of Sarid as Haman was hung in the ultra-Orthodox Bukharan Quarter of Jerusalem. Writing in her Jerusalem Post column (24/3/00) later in the week, Tallie Lipkin-Shahak portended doom and called on secular Israelis to realise the danger posed by religious extremism and to actively oppose it - notice her use of the term "culture war":

But the most frightening aspect of this was the apathetic response of society as a whole... These are the ones who do not understand the depth of the evil which has befallen us... The claim that secular Jews simply do not understand the Shas leader's terminology only strengthens the impression that we are in the midst of a deepening culture war. Likewise, the explanation offered to minimize the effigy of Yossi Sarid: Every year the religious neighborhoods are filled with such dummies, representing Israeli leaders who are fit to be hanged. And in the synagogues, curses are heaped on those leaders during the reading of the Megilla [the Purim story]. If this is true then the gap is becoming even wider.... Even if peace agreements are signed soon, the real war is still in front of us, and time is running out (Jerusalem Post, 24/3/00).

This was not the first time that Yosef had expressed his opinion on a Meretz leader, having said of Aloni in February 1993 that "the day Aloni dies we will declare a celebration and hold a banquet" (Jerusalem Post, 20/3/00). In a further commentary on Meretz, Health Minister Shlomo Benizri charged that Meretz are "using the same tactics and the same hatred" as the Nazis with regards to the Shas education system. Sarid replied wearily that, "First it was Haman, then Pharaoh, and now Nazis. I think by now people understand who I'm dealing with" (Jerusalem Post, 13/6/00).

Where Shas' invective and that of their religious confreres often tends to be direct and unequivocal in denouncing secular Israel and its leaders, secular Israelis also tend to have a no less jaundiced view of "those black guys", the *djukim* ('cockroaches/bugs', I never heard this used in Meretz]. Incitement to hatred is common to the discourses of both sides, is a proof of *kulturkampf,* and functions through exaggeration and stereotyping to generate mutual fear and hatred. The isolation of secularists and religious from each other geographically and socially exacerbates this conflict.

"Rak Lo Shas": Meretz & Shas in Coalition 1999-2000

Noam: When I heard the results I don't know if to become happy because Barak win or to become sad because Shas, I was shocked, yes. It's something that you understand that you don't know your country, the people in the country. You think everybody elect if not the Labour, if not the Meretz then they vote to the Likud and now *Mafdal* but you saw the Shas which is opposed to all the things you believe, yes, I was shocked.

The May 1999 election victory of the Israeli left seemed to herald the dawn of a new era for Israel with the promise it held of comprehensive peace accords with both the Palestinians and Syria. The joy of victory was tempered somewhat on the night by the strong showing of Shas which outperformed all expectations in winning 17 seats on the back of a campaign based solely on the perceived persecution of their charismatic leader Aryeh Deri by the Ashkenazi elite. Prime minister elect Barak was immediately faced with the quandary of setting up a government reliant on the Israeli-Arab parties or rejecting this option for a broad left-centre-religious coalition. He never considered the former, vowing unequivocally on election night in Rabin Square that he would be "everyone's prime minister", thus rejecting the possibility of a narrow coalition without right wing and religious elements. This statement was immediately met by a Meretz-led chant from the crowd of "Rak lo Shas" [just not Shas']. This refrain was repeated by Yossi Sarid shortly thereafter when he rejected the possibility of Meretz' joining a coalition which had Shas as a constituent party, asking TV viewers to "read my lips" on Meretz' absolute disassociation from Shas. He was soon forced to back down in a humiliating manner that didn't impress many activists and supporters:

Nir: I don't like him... he's a big talker... he's a very smart man... It's one of the most important positions of all [Education Minister], I mean and he's suddenly got a woos [wimp]... the most stupid thing he ever said that we'll not go in to Shas because he knew that we're gonna go in [with]... Shas, he knew it since the beginning of time... and he was stupid he said "Yeah, I'll probably get some people to like me 'cause I'm so powerful and I'll say cool stuff like "read my lips".

By the time of the Meretz Council, Sarid and most of the party's MKs were committed to going into coalition with Labour even though it was obvious that Shas would also sign up immediately thereafter. Both the *Noar* and *Tzerim* stood firm against going into coalition with what they saw as a corrupt and dangerous party and held a protest both outside and inside the building with large banners and flyers calling on delegates not to vote to go into government with Shas. One *Noar* member used his speaking slot to advocate for Meretz entering coalition and was heckled vociferously by the *Noar* delegation. As the final vote came in I was standing at

Figure 15: Sarid shown kissing *haredi* ass at the decisive Meretz Council meeting

the back of the auditorium and saw the dismay on the face of many *Tzerim* and *Noar*, one of whom vowed to leave the party.

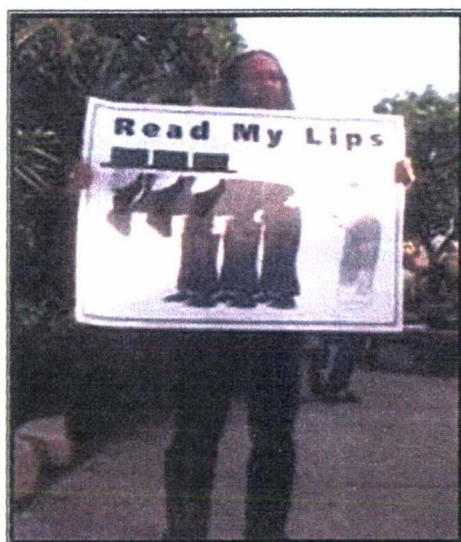In our interviews I asked activists to give their assessment of the wisdom of going into coalition with Shas. Some reported that they were in favour of the coalition but the preponderance of replies was against. I also asked whether the growing strength of *haredi* parties such as Shas poses a threat to democracy:

Yossi: I was sure we had to do that move... because... the question was not... if Shas is going to be in the coalition the question was if Meretz because Shas was already in there... I felt... that our voters voted for Meretz so that we can influence, a real influence... I couldn't agree... that there will be a Barak government... without Meretz and with...

Shas... we can say it almost on every day... they're threatening... to unpack the government... Shas are enjoying the democracy very, very much, they like it... I don't think that they would like a dictatorship unless they would be the dictators.

Yuval: Yes... I think some issues... we have more the same ideas, social issues for example.

Yuval makes an interesting point in postulating the existence of shared interests between Shas and Meretz. Indeed, the two parties often vote together on social issues but I did not find any evidence of organised co-operation in Knesset - though this may exist. Dalia's response is more typical in pointing to the influence Meretz could have on society through coalition membership:

Dalia: I'm happy we have the Ministry of... Education... and I'm happy like we're gonna have influence but when you look at the whole list of... what Shas are getting... they're getting all the social... what I keep saying to myself about why... it's OK if we sit with Shas is because inside the government... we can have an influence on them... what I think about Shas is that basically... if you take just the wrapping... I think they're OK. I mean, they are for... the lower...
D: The lower socio-economic classes.
Da: Exactly... and what they're doing... to help them out is... providing them... with education... and workplaces... which is good... but the only problem is... those educational systems they're not helping people get out of it they're just... Creating a cycle and they're doing it in a way that's really damaging... the people going into the system.

Vered: I didn't really fight with the Youngs [*Tzerim*] about not going with Shas because I think it will be a sin to leave them the Education [Ministry] as well... I really don't think... that we could go create a government without Shas. I wish we could. I would do anything... if I believed it could happen, but I don't believe it can.

Tamar argues that Shas and other religious parties should be banned due to their stated preference for a *Halakhic* state rather than a democracy based on civil law. She rightly predicts that Shas' inclusion in government will leave Meretz in the invidious position of being forced to pay off their political rivals to maintain the coalition. Yaron agrees that Shas poses a significant threat to democracy and adds that parties with a racist ideology should not be allowed in a democracy, rightly predicting that Shas will not support the peace process in order to not alienate their supporters. Moshe then describes Shas's utilisation of state resources to fund an "army" of election workers and its education system:

Tamar: I think that every party which is not... democratic is not allowed. I know that it is not democratic to say this, but I think that a democracy, as we've learned, has to protect itself... and when you are talking about Shas it's not just the party, it's the educational system, it's the religious system, it's everywhere... it's anti-democratic, and it gets lots, and lots, and lots of money... from the state to teach others to hate democracy. For them democracy is bad, so it's the biggest hazard of democracy that we have now since Israel established... They're buying people's mind. It's possible to buy people's mind... They have other coalition agreements with Barak that we don't know about. They have secret coalition agreements, and we will be in the government that gives them money.

Yaron: ...I believe that they're definitely a threat to Israeli democracy... you obviously cannot outlaw Shas but if you read the Israeli laws concerning... parties... I don't think that Shas passes the test that...any political party which is against Israel being... a democratic nation and a Jewish nation, and anybody with a racist ideology is not allowed to be. And I believe that Shas' politics is part racist and definitely not democratic...
D: Did you support us going into the coalition with Shas?
Y: No, I didn't... I was very much against that because... I imagined the coalition would look like what it would look like now... I don't believe that Shas will support... the peace agreements because their electorate is generally right wing.

D: Is Israeli democracy threatened by the rise of anti-democratic *haredi* parties such as Shas?

Moshe: Yeah, definitely. Well, Shas has its educational system - or so-called educational system... Shas and also other religious parties have like this army of activists without wages, or with very small salaries which the state pays not the party. And these people... spread the ideology of this party and the ideology which is spread by these people, and by the so-called educational system, is anti-democratic because it is theocratic. It says that there is a God, and there is the *Halakha* and Israel should be a state without this stuff of democracy. It should be run in a similar way that Shas is run; there is the chief rabbi, he appoints the ministers.

Ophir: I sent a letter to Barak saying that... he shouldn't put Shas in the coalition... It was just proved in the last months; Shas has... no place in this government...

D: Is Israeli democracy threatened by the rise of anti-democratic *haredi* parties such as Shas?

O: Oh yeah, oh yeah, sure. I'm not sure this is a democracy any more.

While Ophir argues that those who opposed the coalition were proved correct by subsequent developments, Danny is concerned both with the impact on Meretz of going with Shas and with the general passivity of the party on issues related to religious coercion. It should be noted here that the 1999 coalition agreement between One Israel and Meretz allowed Meretz the freedom to vote according to its conscience on religious matters following consultations with Barak, a right that was never exercised by the party during the course of the coalition due to an obsession with maintaining the integrity of the government for peace-making:

D: So did you support going into the coalition?

Danny: No... on the practical side it's bad for the party. It will be very difficult to convince people to vote for Meretz again... it kind of proves Shinui's point about Meretz... That Meretz is not serious about fighting, it only says that it fights religious coercion and doesn't really invest the, the energy in it... I think Meretz could do more...

D: Is democracy threatened in Israel by the rise of Shas, etc.?

Dy: Oh yeah, yeah, definitely... there are elements, even in the government, that don't see democracy as a value... They see it only as a facilitator something that will aid them to control Israel... I was appalled about how well Shas did.

Below, Roni speaks of a small demonstration held (prior to the Council) to oppose the party hierarchy's decision to go with Shas, and the play made on this and other demonstrations of youth opposition by the local and later the national media concerning the difference in ideological commitment between Meretz' youth and leadership:

Roni: I really don't think we have nothing to do in this coalition, let's stay out and be... good opposition... we have a meeting here in Haifa[39] here with Yossi Sarid. After the meeting the newspaper they wrote that you can see the difference between the ages in Meretz... a few members of mine came with Meretz t-shirts and we brought a sign "Without Shas".

Amit correctly predicts that Meretz will not be able to stop Shas' "abuse of power" from within the government and that the party should leave the coalition with time to spare before the next election or face losing its electorate. Meretz did leave but, with the twin shock of the rise of Shinui and the failure of the peace process, was always going to suffer at the polls in 2003. Pay heed to Amit's uses of a terror metaphor in describing Shas:

Amit: I think Shas will abuse the power. We will not be able to do nothing. The only chance of us winning the next election is leaving the coalition, like after two years... and saying we want to keep our ideology, we cannot keep our identity with Shas, and giving Barak two choices, that if the government will drop because of this, never mind... it's like a method, its fighting Hamas... without the terror and killing people.

Amir: I'm gonna get back to my town and see all those people who I promised not to have Shas in the coalition, and stuff like that, and now I'm a representative of whatever.
D: Of the Shas coalition [laughs]?

---

[39] City changed to protect identity.

A: Yeah, so I'm not very proud of it.

Personally, I was in favour of Meretz going into government but the *Tzerim* and *Noar* were ultimately proved right on this matter as Shas did ultimately bring down the government, having extracted what they wanted out of Barak and totally outmanoeuvred and ousted Meretz from government after only a year in coalition (Jerusalem Post, 22/6/00). Meretz' second coalition with Shas badly damaged the party's credibility with its electorate and it played some part in the loss of votes to Shinui and other parties in 2003.

Meretz & Deri

"*El Ham'aayan, BaGanav Katan, HaJacuzzi Lo?*"

['To the lake came a little thief, does he have a jacuzzi?']

We sang the above ditty - a take-off of a Passover song - in various forms at demonstrations against Shas. It refers both to Shas' *Mayan* education system, and to the party's leader Aryeh Deri and the jacuzzi he bought with money garnered through bribe-taking. Shas supporter's use a three-fingered hand-sign with the forefinger and thumb meeting to form the letter *shin* in Shas in showing their support for the party. We aped this by holding up four fingers at anti-Shas demonstrations shouting in English, "Four more years" in reference to the four years jail Deri had just been sentenced to for fraud and bribe taking.

Figure 16: Anti-Shas sticker from post-election 1999 showing Shas hand sign. "Shas in the Government, Get him out" (aping words of Ovadia Yosef targeted at a secular journalist).

Deri's fall was highly consequential for Shas given that he personified the party to both its supporters and detractors and was a highly skilled and charismatic political operator who almost single-handedly transformed a minor religious party into a potent national political force. It was difficult to predict what the impact of his conviction would be on Shas' electoral fortunes in 1999. Shas ran a campaign focused entirely on trying to convince Sephardi voters that Deri was a victim of the Ashkenazi elite, using the absence of a significant censure in the similar bribery case of President Weizmann (who is Ashkenazi) to juxtapose the treatment afforded Sephardim and Ashkenazim in the Israeli justice system. Shas activists fanned out across Israel during the campaign giving away video tapes of their leader protesting his innocence entitled *J'Accuse* (a reference to the infamous Dreyfus Affair in which a Jewish-French officer was stripped of his rank and humiliated by anti-Semites within the leadership of the French army). The campaign was extremely effective both in garnering electoral support and in further reinforcing the malevolent image of the Israeli justice system in the eyes of a significant sector of the population.

Meretz has gained politically from portraying Shas as a corrupt, parasitic party intent on perverting Israeli democracy. In truth, this is not difficult given the myriad examples of Shas use of ministerial offices for its own purposes. For example, the party made a deal with the moshavim and kibbutzim to support the sale of their land - a subject that deeply divided Meretz. The deal stipulated that Shas would pocket 20% of the profits from the sale of land its ministers were able to rezone for development (Jerusalem Report 17/12/01). Similarly, the Jerusalem Municipality, under pressure from its Shas faction, planned the rezoning of a large park in the Har Nof neighbourhood for the development of a large residential compound by a company belonging to Ovadia Yosef's family. The expected profit for this company from apartment sales was U.S. $140 million (Haaretz, 19/10/01). Despite a ban on the use of amulets and rabbinical blessings and similar inducements to win votes, Shas continued this practice in 2003 with an "accredited certificate" that read; "Dear Israeli citizens, we guarantee Paradise for you. Just give us your vote in the upcoming elections and we will give you back an amulet, which protects the wearer against evil and envy, and an authenticated document carrying the party's seal, and the gates of Paradise will be thrown open for you" (Press International News Agency, 20/1/03).

Meretz seized upon the conviction of Deri, unsuccessfully seeking his immediate expulsion from Knesset in the lead-up to the 1999 election, then conditioning Meretz' entry into coalition with Shas on the absolute disassociation of Deri and Shas, Sarid vituperating that "We cannot be under the dictate of a criminal" (Haaretz, 5/3/99; Jerusalem Post, 18/4/99; Jerusalem Post, 10/6/99; Jerusalem Post, 16/6/99). Meretz quickly backed down on the demand for a "cooling-off period" in which Shas would prove Deri no longer ran the party, preferring a role in government once it had secured Deri's resignation as leader (Jerusalem Post, 10/6/99; Haaretz, 16/6/99).

Despite the political capital gained through Deri's demise, there was little joy in Meretz on the day he entered prison accompanied by a large crowd of supporters. Nonetheless, Meretz opposed efforts to pass a Likud-sponsored bill to allow parole for those half-way through their sentences, which was obviously inspired by a desire on the part of the Likud to win the support of Shas through the early release of Deri (Haaretz, 16/1/01).

The Education Kulturkampf

Meretz leader Yossi Sarid gained the Education Ministry in coalition negotiations with One Israel. It was obvious from the moment his appointment was confirmed that his would be a tenure marred by controversy and attacks from religious factions in Knesset bearing little relation to his actual performance as minister. These problems were predicted in the coalition agreement itself which allowed Meretz to introduce legislation on the universal institution of a compulsory curriculum without promising One Israel's support, and stipulated that Sarid should recognise the authority of his deputy-minister. According to the document, Sarid's deputy was supposed to come from the NRP but it was later confirmed that Shas MK Meshulam Nahari would take the position. Barak was also enjoined to favour Sarid as minister in disputes with his deputy (State of Israel 1999). This settlement was a recipe for disaster given the obvious desperation of Shas to gain extra funding for the maintenance and expansion of it's education system; Sarid's desire to purge the education system of the misappropriation of money and resources typical of many government ministries; poorly-targeted funding; and Barak's overriding desire to ensure the continued support of Shas in peace-making. Sarid was to cut a lonely figure as he fought a losing

battle against Barak and Shas for control of the ministry and for Meretz' continued participation in government.

Given the failure of Barak to support his Minister of Education, Sarid's achievements in his short time in office were extraordinary. Priority was given to the funding of state schools in poor neighbourhoods, development towns, and the Arab sector in an effort to equalise gaps in standards and funding and address the neglect suffered under previous education ministers, which left a significant breach exploited by the Shas education system. Extra funding was also allocated to special education with the money for this and the strengthening of schools in poor areas transferred from the privileged kibbutz and moshav schools and from the *haredi*, Shas and state-religious systems that had benefited in the past from politically motivated over-funding (Jerusalem Post, 14/1/00; Haaretz, 5/6/00).

It was Sarid himself who sparked the first round of what was to become a bitter struggle for control of ministerial funding and authority with a warning to Shas shortly after taking office that, "The party's over... Shas's school system must accept state authority like every other system... if not... let them finance themselves" (Jerusalem Post, 23/6/99). Shas' school system had seen spectacular growth throughout the 1990s with over 120 schools funded by the ministry and a 'paper' role of 27,000 students by September 1999. However, the threat of economic collapse was already hanging over *Mayan Hachinuch Hatorani* prior to the assumption of power of the Barak government. In July 1999 the Neeman Committee recommended paying off the system's NIS100 million debt, dependant on the implementation of fundamental reforms severely curtailing the ability of *Mayan* to offer the longer hours, transport and school lunches which had made Shas schools so appealing to poor secular and traditionalist families (Jerusalem Post, 10/9/99). Under the deal, the head of *Mayan*, Ya'acov Hemed was to be sacked and some schools would have to close while a comptroller was to be appointed to oversee the financial management of a system that had - as with other *Haredi* school systems - become renowned for misappropriation, over-funding and graft (Jerusalem Post, 10/9/99).

A second report in December 1999 (written by the appointed mediator Yossi Tamir) confirmed that debt repayment should follow systematic reform, including the funding of students rather than classes as demanded by Shas. Tamir's report was greeted as "reasonable and fair" by Sarid, who called on Shas leader Eli Yishai to meet with him to

discuss the report (Jerusalem Post, 24/12/99). Shas disagreed and threatened to leave the coalition on the 28th of December 1999, going so far as to tender an official letter of resignation, the withdrawal of which was to follow Barak's acquiescence to Shas' demand to have it's debts paid off. In what seemed a co-ordinated move, One Israel's Weizman Shiri attacked Meretz for the "anti-religious whiff" of its war against Shas, an attack described as "slanderous" by Meretz' Ran Cohen (Jerusalem Post, 28/12/99). With peace talks with Syria imminent and a state budget to pass, Barak caved in the next day effectively rescinding his coalition pact with Meretz in promising to pay off the majority of the debt directly, boosting the Shas system's operating budget by NIS27.5 million for 2000 in return for limited reforms, and providing an increase of over NIS350 million to the budgets of ministries controlled by Shas. Significant cuts to the Education Ministry's budget quickly followed. Meretz MK Zehava Gal-On responded to Shinui opprobrium by saying that Shas had agreed to run a "correct and accountable" organisation but it was plain to all involved that Shas had been allowed to ride rough-shod over Meretz with the active encouragement of One Israel.

The extent of the bribe paid by Barak to retain his grip on power is itself a condemnation of both the bastardisation of coalition politics in the Israeli political system and of his leadership. Characteristically, it also provided only a temporary reprieve. By April 2000 Shas was demanding that control of *Mayan* be placed in the hands of Deputy-Minister Nahari and that Shas' pupils be given equality of funding with state-school students (Jerusalem Post, 18/5/00). The claim that they did not have parity was highly dubious but served to extend the scope of the crisis allowing for future demands on the state purse.

On April 2nd Sarid rejected a compromise proposal, formulated by One Israel's Haim Ramon, which sought to promulgate Sarid's shared control of *Mayan* with Nahari. A source in Sarid's bureau described how the minister now saw himself as "the only one blocking gross mismanagement of funds" (Jerusalem Post, 3/4/00; Jerusalem Post, 12/4/00). By the 28th of April Barak was offering a budget advance to *Mayan* leading Meretz to threaten to leave the government, MK Cohen stating that "We won't stay in a government that issues corrupt checks" (Jerusalem Post, 28/4/00). Both Sarid and Shas refused the appointment of yet another arbitrator as Shas' list of demands rapidly grew with the party demanding the

legalisation of its pirate radio stations and the preservation of "territory in the Land of Israel" in peace negotiations (Jerusalem Post, 16/6/00; Jerusalem Post, 20/6/00). Shas again tendered it's resignation from government for seemingly the last time before Meretz did the same on the 22nd of June 2000 to allow Shas to re-enter the coalition, in the expectation that Barak would eventually call Meretz back into the government (Jerusalem Post, 20/6/00; Jerusalem Post, 22/6/00). He never did and Shas went on to toy with Barak, refusing to rejoin the coalition while winning ever-increasing concessions from the government, despite failing to support his government in Knesset.

The whole episode was a galling and humiliating defeat for Meretz which had again been forced out of the Education Ministry by Shas and, in this case, out of the government altogether (Haaretz, 31/10/00). The stakes could not have been higher - the possibility of imposing effective state control and oversight over a Shas education system determined to convert secular Jews to *Halakhic* observance, and the ability to influence the values and belief system of all state-funded education in Israel. Battles over the control of education provision and orientation have been fought since the beginning of the Jewish *kulturkampf*, dividing Jewish communities and leading to the victory of secularist, state, or liberal religious education in most cases. The reason for the centrality of the battle over education and its persistence as a point of conflict throughout the course of the Jewish *kulturkampf* is self-evident; control over education ensures group self-perpetuation and the ability to extend the reach of group identity attributes and values over the wider Jewish community, particularly in the era of state schooling.

Ultra-Orthodox education systems have thrived in Israel through the availability of state monies and resources due to the importance of religious parties to coalition formation. *Mayan* has been the most effective education network in what has become a movement for the conversion of secular and traditionalist Israeli youth to ultra-Orthodoxy - though there are many groups now engaged in recruiting secular children for *haredi* schools. This recruitment movement has contributed significantly to tripling the number of students in *haredi* institutions since 1990 with the aid of iniquitous funding allocations from the Education Ministry - as admitted by the ministry in 2002 (Haaretz, 1/1/02).

In many poor neighbourhoods and development towns Shas institutions have all but taken over from state schools. In Ofakim, by 1999 there were as many students in Shas

schools as in the state system (Jerusalem Post, 23/7/99). By 2002 the mayor of Beit She'an was reporting the flight of hundreds of students to Shas schools and talking of fighting a war to bring them back to state education: "To succeed in this war, I am fighting Shas over every free meal and their free transportation" (Haaretz, 5/7/02). The impact on the town of Shas efforts to take over the education system were beginning to tell with the ultra-Orthodox population reaching a critical mass where the heads of Shas were demanding that the town be closed on Shabbat. One resident lamented that "If the lousy situation here doesn't end soon, all of us will become newly observant... Beit She'an will be like Bnei B'rak. You'll come here and all you'll find will be synagogues and yeshivas" (Haaretz, 5/7/02). This transformation of lower class Sephardi society is confirmed by voting patterns. In the 1999 election Kiryat Malachi voted overwhelmingly for Shas, 34.6%, with the Likud only garnering 16.1% of the vote - though 2003 results probably (I do not have the figures) showed a spike in support for the Likud due to the intifada.

Those with doubts as to Shas' desire to take over the secular education system would have been disabused following the report of a dream to his followers by Ovadia Yosef in which the Messianic redemption was revealed as attendant upon the imposition of Torah education on secular children:

> I saw the Messiah coming to the Western Wall. There were many people at the Wall plaza. The [Messiah] told them: 'I have come because there are a million pupils who study at secular schools and do not learn Torah. I want all religious scholars to mobilize... to teach them Torah. There shouldn't be a single secular school without Torah' (Haaretz, 28/6/01).

Within the Shas education system itself girls and boys are kept physically separate. Hebrew, Torah, *Halakha* and *Mishna* make up the core of the curriculum with secular subjects taught in the three hour afternoon extension to the school day as an appendage to the curriculum, often by poorly educated teachers due to the speed of the system's growth (Haaretz, 15/9/00). Children are taught to revere religious sages, have little knowledge of the Zionist movement or important figures in the history of the state, and act as emissaries for Shas and *Halakhic* observance in their families as this student relates: "My parents are

totally secular, but I taught them to keep kosher and to light candles on Friday night. My father says the *kiddush* at the Friday night table. In the Knesset elections I convinced my parents, and even my aunts and uncles to vote Shas (Haaretz, 15/9/00).

Most secular parents who send their children to Shas schools do so due to the perceived inadequacies of local state school, the free transport, meals and long school-day available in the Shas system, and through an inchoate respect for religious education as fostering a more intimate association with Jewish identity and tradition. Over 80% of parents of pupils in the Shas school in Hatikva - a poor, largely Sephardic, south Tel Aviv neighbourhood - were secular in a 2000 investigation into education in the suburb (Haaretz, 15/9/00). Regardless of the parent's intentions, the result is the rapid 'haredisation' of previously secular and traditionalist neighbourhoods.

Meretz activists are keenly aware of the threat posed to the future of the secular state education system by Shas and of the importance of secular education in poverty alleviation and social integration. These points were made repeatedly in interview discussions on Shas with the issue of education usually brought up as a response to questions on the putative *haredi* threat to democracy. A picture of Shas emerges as a nefarious party hungry for political power, intent on self-reproduction through education and determined to destroy secular Israel. In the first interview excerpt below, Dalia describes the loss of children to the Shas system from her own experience working at a centre for troubled teens:

Dalia: I'm in... a sort of... day care centre. It's run by, by the Jerusalem[40] municipality and, and it offers people in elementary school ages a place after school until about six o'clock. And then these are kids that... if they weren't there they would be out on the street... or worse in their houses with their parents [laughs]... so one of the things working there and, and helping the people who run it, you really get a... real look at... what Shas does because... to the parents it's really very alluring I'd say because... when the municipality... is on strike... and the place is closed then, and the parents still go to work... And they have to do something and Shas doesn't strike. And... there are kids there who have been there... who their parents have sent to Shas... and the thing is it's these kids specifically that if they

---

[40] City changed to protect identity.

go... to the Shas system then they're lost... that's it, because Shas isn't going to provide them... with the special help... that this programme does.

Yossi echoes the thoughts of many in Meretz that control of the Education Ministry is vital to prevent Shas manipulation and corruption:

Yossi: ...I think that it's very important that Yossi Sarid is... the Education Minister. We have... to control... the education because that's the first key and the 'second... is money, where the resources are going. And we try and do it the best we can... I know Shas are fooling us; us, the law, the government, whoever you want, and I hope that they'll be punished for it... just two day ago I think it was published... in a television programme that... they were supposed to close some schools that... did not exist anyhow... and they got money... for closing it... all that kind of bullshit... we have... to control these two things the money going... to them and all of these... religious people who - how do you call the, the movement... when you become religious or become secular... we have to control these... all these crazy lunatics like Amnon Yitzhak [an ultra-Orthodox proselytiser] and all these other who just do whatever they want and get a lot of money.
D: Yeah, and try to convert seculars to religion.
Y: Yeah, with a lot of money that basically... we give them.

Vered and Michael present Shas as a power-hungry, socially-destructive movement. Meretz activists tended to have a distinctly Machiavellian understanding of the Sephardic party as a potent, evil force. This image both exaggerates the actual power of the party and negates the possibility that Shas might act in any sphere with benevolent intentions worthy of Meretz' support:

Vered: I believe that Shas do it because they need power... to educate someone to be Shas, its just about power... keep them in the right position to vote Shas.

Michael: Shas would give people the food but won't... teach them how to hunt. We'd like to teach people how to hunt... that's the main difference between us I guess... the state is deteriorating. Shas is creating a state within a state.

The most prevalent criticism of the Shas school network amongst Meretzniks was with regard to the actual standard and content of the curricula. Few provided relevant details to support their criticisms, though I would tend to agree with their ideas on the impact of a lack of attention to civil education on the knowledge base and analytical ability of graduates of the *Mayan* network:

Efrat: ...in the schools you don't give them tools for the future, that's what Shas does. You don't give them education that's gonna help them... you give them a warm bed and a warm meal but you don't give them something that they can get out of the ghetto. And once they realise that that's what Shas does and what the Likud does is just being capitalist... and not caring about them at all, they're going to have to see that the left... is the logical thing for them to vote.

Boaz: ...they don't get any kind of substantial education at all they just learn the Torah and that's it. But that's going to change too because they know that if they're going to, they want to get jobs and they're gonna get good jobs they're going to need to learn something.

Tamar: Shas is dangerous because of this cheap education because this is the same... education system that brings the children, give immediate answer to the parents. "OK, your children are not in the streets, which is very good... Basically we'll teach them nothing so when... they'll grow up they'll still vote Shas because they won't have the tools to find a decent... job, they won't have the money to send their children, they'll need us". And it's a circle.

Is Meretz Anti-Religious?

Due to its opposition to religious coercion it has been easy, and politic, for opponents of the party to portray Meretz as anti-religious. These accusations are reiterated repeatedly with such ferocity and seeming conviction by political adversaries that they have served to

constitute the public image of the party as eternally antagonistic towards religious Jews and even Jewish identity itself. A friend in the *Noar* confided that this image of the party has even attracted new members who are militantly anti-religious:

Amir: You have Tommi Lapid [leader of Shinui], he's preaching against religion, who hates religious... I think that's the way people see Meretz as preaching against. I don't preach against, I have nothing against religion... many of the *Noar* Meretz activists... see Meretz as anti-religion... that's the main problem... see it that way...' and agree with it... because if... enough Meretz youth will see... the party and the youth group as I tend to see it people would be less against Meretz.

I will not make unequivocal statements here with regards to the presumed anti-religiosity of Meretz beyond noting that very few Meretz activists expressed derogatory feelings to me regarding religion or religious per se. The party's humanist, pluralist ideology was reflected in interview responses where the dominant theme expressed was that if religion and state were separated, the right to live as secular Jews was recognised by religious, and if coercive religious controls on the private lives of the secular public and liberal Judaism were removed, Meretz activists would have no problems with religion. This view is backed by the persistent criticism of Shinui as a hateful and even anti-Semitic party bent on provocation and exacerbating the religious-secular conflict. Nonetheless, there were some expressions of anti-religious sentiment:

Roni: I actually hate everything... which is like connected somehow to religion... I know that my so-called hatred to anything which is Jewish or religious is an outcome of their behaviour... my image of Judaism is a very twisted one because the image that now the Orthodox Jews here have is a totally twisted one too... abroad you have... Conservative Jews, Reformic Jews... who drive with their cars to the synagogue... take for example the way Israeli religion treats gay people... this is very stupid, the way Israeli religion treats women.

Roni's comments are typical of those who made 'anti-religious' statements in blaming an inability to relate to the religious tradition on the behaviour and prejudices of Orthodox Israelis. Below, Ran acknowledges Meretz' seeming obsession with *kulturkampf* activism and blames this excessive concentration for his no longer supporting the party. Orna and Yehudit discuss the production of a flyer which apparently contained unacceptable anti-Semitic imagery:

Ran: Meretz should be moving... into more social issues rather than... getting the anti-religious sort of image that we're getting from doing these things... Sure... we can do anti-religious coercion work but it shouldn't be the primary thing, it's not that important work... almost all Meretz demonstrations are about this issue... it seems like Meretz don't care about the Arabs or the human rights or the women rights. It's like all Meretz does... is fight... the religion guy... I moved... my vote to Hadash.

Orna: But I... heard a lot of people here in Meretz, especially I must say from the Tel Aviv area, that sometimes drive you crazy because they don't know what they're saying a lot of the time they're using even anti-Semitism... I think it's something that you're not allowed. I know that last election... one of the flyer was connected with some kind of caricature that was horrible...

D: Was it a caricature... of a religious guy?

O: Ultra-Orthodox, ultra-Orthodox and it was gross and I saw it and I must say I don't care what they did... I just took it and throw it into the garbage... is one of the mothers[41] of a guy that returned to religious and her motive is hatred, is the same thing like parents of the ultra-Orthodox that don't accept their kids, she doing it the same way...

Yehudit: She was creating a flyer in the last municipal election... you saw buildings like that was Tel Aviv and a big huge *dos* [religious man] sitting on it and make it down... I said this is not something that I can... give to the activists... they made thousands of them. And the minute these flyers got into the headquarters I took them and I threw them so nobody would be able, they wanted to kill me...

---

[41] Name deleted & other changes made to protect identity.

O: Yeah, and I think that's a very, very problematic... they don't really understand the meaning because, I'm sorry, but their tradition is my tradition too. The fact that they stopped to development and I continued to develop... doesn't mean that that is not my heritage... And a lot of people doing it and I'm totally not agreeing with it.

Vered reports a conversation he had just prior to our interview with a religious proselytiser. While rejecting anti-religiosity he does paint a picture of monolithic ultra-Orthodox bigotry and primitivism that itself constitutes a common prejudice in Meretz. Danny then relates a common social situation (repeated in various forms in interviews and private conversations by several activists) where he surprised religious acquaintances with his superior knowledge of the Jewish tradition. This builds on a general impression within Meretz that religious Jews tend to be ignorant of Jewish tradition due to the narrow scope of Torah education:

Vered: I really think that the political government that are against Meretz created that thing that we are against religion. But we're not against religious... coercion, or whatever, that's the problem and that's what we're fighting the religious people in Israel, I think they're not real... Jewish because in the Bible you need to respect everything that God creates. And yesterday I talked to one of the religious ones, I sat and talked to him and he told me that he needs to save me because I'm sinking in the ocean and he needs to save me from being not with God like him and blah, blah, blah, blah. This is not what Judaism is all about. They don't respect anyone but them.

Danny: Yeah... I think Shinui's much more hateful [laughs]... than Meretz. That's basically the difference... But I think that I personally, without... seeming too arrogant, am more knowledgeable about Jewish traditions than most Israelis. When I served in the army I used to surprise - I served in a department that was mostly religious... I and another girl were the only non-religious people in that department.
D: So you would tell people about tradition they didn't know about?
Dy: Yeah, they were, "How did you know that?" It was very funny.

As mentioned above, Shinui was a favourite target for those opposing the representation of Meretz as an anti-religious party, with Meretz' pluralistic ideology often juxtaposed against the crudity of Shinui's anti-religious agenda. Gadi typifies the liberal propensities of most activists in condemning the institutions involved in religious coercion while differentiating between these bodies and religious themselves:

Gadi: I'm not religious but I'm not against religious people I'm just against religious institutions and especially against religious institutions that are funded by the state. I think... if somebody wants to be... religious, he can, he's more than welcome to donate his money... It's an important thing because right now the situation as it is, what's called the status quo, is very bad for the secular people... and it steps on them and there's a total injustice there and we should fight that. But I don't think... that we should instigate a fight... we shouldn't make like a huge thing like Shinui does... last week there was a demonstration in Ashdod[42] and we stood there with Shinui... there was this pool in a secular neighbourhood that they took from the seculars and made it different days [for men and women]... and the citizens there were pissed and they were right, I mean, it's their neighbourhood they don't want to get evacuated out of their houses and they want their pool.... and we demonstrated but then Shinui saw a religious guy, a young boy actually he was like thirteen or fourteen years old and they started to boo him. And then I just collected all our signs and I told all our people to get the hell out of there because... that's the worst thing... the minute they do something like this I would have to demonstrate against them, and we started just shouting at the Shinui people because... booing a little boy just because he's religious... and when he yelled he yelled "You are anti-Semites" and he was right... if you treat him like that just because he's wearing different and have a certain set of values then you're a racist... you're not fighting for freedom you're fighting against freedom... I think that Shinui now... they're playing with fire... they want us to look very bad so they need... to be more extreme than we did... they're dodging a very dangerous line because there's a fine line between fighting for freedom and, and just hating... if you're fighting for freedom and you're bullying a little boy then... you're not fighting for freedom you're just disgusting.

---

[42]City changed to protect identity.

Moshe: Shinui is... a party which is based primarily on hating these black guys, and like sending them all to the army.

Dalia echoes the thoughts of many in expressing her relief that Shinui's exit from Meretz removed the most militantly anti-religious elements from the party. In the following excerpt, Gilad acknowledges his own anti-religious prejudices while stating strongly that Meretz does not share his opinions. It should be noted that, while seeking to promote equity in state expenditure and fighting religious coercion, Meretz has never displayed an explicitly anti-religious agenda and sees itself as open to religious members, as Efrat explains - though few join. Indeed the Reform and Conservative movements have worked closely with Meretz for a number of years.

Dalia: ...besides the electoral aspect of it I'm happy... that Shinui took all those people from us 'cause I think Meretz itself doesn't emphasise enough that that's not what we're talking about. We're talking about equality.

Gilad: Well, I'm completely non-religion... Once you talk about interrelationships between people tolerance is the most important thing. To be a democratic country you first of all have to accept the other... I think people outside Meretz think that... Meretz are against... the religious... which is wrong because Meretz are not against religious - although I am - but I don't think that Meretz is. Meretz is against the coercion of religion. Personally I am against, maybe on this point I am bit more extreme, I think religions... cannot lead to anything but extreme points of view.

Efrat: You don't need to be a secular person to be in Meretz, you just need to believe this has to be a secular state... People can shout from today till forever that Meretz is anti-religious but everyone knows that Meretz is anti religious enforcement. Meretz does not say anything about religion itself. Meretz does not say don't teach the Bible, Meretz does not say kill all religious people... or don't let them study. Meretz just says two things; one is to be a secular state... how the education goes, how the culture goes, all that. Two; everyone

should be a productive part of this state unless they're crippled, or blind, or whatever... everyone has a place here. We're not anti religious, we have religious people in Meretz

Meretz' leadership is quick to quash any party activities that might be construed as anti-religious:

Zohar: And I do a *peula*, it's like a youth group once a week... I did the debate there about... a Jewish Tel Aviv... And I had a map of Tel Aviv wrapped around... *tefillin*... it got me into big trouble because all the newspapers of the ultra-Orthodox... wrote terrible things about me and about this poster... And I remembered to ask someone before I did this because, if it's offended.
D: If it's offensive.
Z: If it's offensive. And she was a religious person, "But, you know, its OK, it's your opinion, you can do this"... Yossi Sarid responded saying, "Well they do mistakes" and I was unbelievably angry. And they [*Noar*] called me down and told me, "Don't do it, don't stir up more trouble...because we're going to get our budget down. You're going to ruin our budget. Keep quiet".

Having charted the history and nature of the Israeli *kulturkampf* and activist responses to a variety of associated themes and issues we now bring our discussion to a close with a summation of points made and prognostications concerning the future for Meretz and Israel.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

A Summation

The religious-secular *kulturkampf* constitutes the most dangerous threat to Israeli social cohesion, the secular and democratic mode of governance, and perhaps even the future viability of the state. The total absence of ameliorative discursive fields and political bodies and institutions capable of gaining the allegiance of the competing identity groups in order to elicit reconciliation bodes ill for the future.

The Israeli culture war is a prolonged moment of identity crisis in which the religious and secular communities compete to impose their understanding of Jewish identity and vision for the future make up of society in an atmosphere marked by increasing confusion, dysfunction and open conflict. Due to the popular nature of the struggle organisations and movements that would otherwise be neutral on religious-secular issues are compelled to take a stand in defending the interests of their supporters, further widening the perceived gap between competing communities and exacerbating the conflict further. Cultural identity is forged and re-forged at a speed unknown in non-*kulturkampf* societies due to the centrality of identity politics to the struggle. Social science has a key role to play in deconstructing and de-mythologising the Israeli *kulturkampf* in order to improve our understanding of the present conflict and its future trajectory. Here, comparative studies between Israel and other societies undergoing *kulturkampf* are useful, as is research centred on the opinions and self-understandings of the informed social actor within the competing communities.

In this dissertation the term *kulturkampf* is used to denote and describe a situation of increasing tension and conflict between religious and secular Israelis that stretches from issues of national importance to neighbourhood and community relations. Lifestyle and worldview differences have been transformed into signifiers of depravity and irrationality by both religious and secular and the antipathetic nature of the other has been restated in *kulturkampf* discourses to such an extent that this has helped shape a reality of fear and mutual animosity. Civil disobedience, vigilantism and significant violence have marked Israel's spiral into culture war and led ultimately to the murder of the head of state, widespread opposition to the country's judicial system, and popular disbelief in the ability

of the state to cope. The religious-secular status quo agreements have been expanded, violated and transformed into a tool for discursive attacks and the maintenance and extension of religious coercion, rather than acting in the mediating capacity intended by their formulators.

The intractable nature of this conflict and its consistency as an ongoing competition between opposed identity communities is demonstrated, in part, by the longevity of the Jewish *kulturkampf*. Efforts to define Jewish secularity as a separate identity aggregate date back to the *Haskalah*. The concerns of the *maskilim* are those of most Jewish Meretz activists; to locate a space for the expression and extrapolation of a secular Jewish identity forged through marrying the cultural legacy of Jewish tradition and the spirit and freedoms of the Enlightenment emancipation. The persistence of European anti-Semitism and associated strictures, particularly in Eastern Europe, led to the rapid development of the Zionist movement. The Zionists rejected the possibilities of integration and assimilation, returning to a particularistic understanding of the Jewish people as a hunted minority requiring communal sanctuary through political and/or cultural independence - an understanding that this dissertation proves to be still highly influential amongst Meretz activists. In Palestine, socialist universalism was quickly overcome by the exigencies of colonial life, co-option by the state, and the eventual ascendancy of particularist ethno-centrism in the civil religion of the post-1967 period, with the open assumption of elements from the religious tradition without transmutation. This transformation also saw the ascension of the Holocaust to primacy in Jewish-Israeli identity politics and as a prism for interpreting relations with non-Jews.

The process of identity change and the descent into a more militant *kulturkampf* were greatly aided by the slow death of Labour-Zionism as an ideological movement and the post-1967 national-religious leadership of the settlement effort in the Occupied Territories. This dissertation seeks to demonstrate the deep implication of national-religious militancy and messianism in the Israeli *kulturkampf* by demonstrating the profound impact of this sector on the identity politics of Jewish-Israelis (and, to a lesser extent, Diaspora Jewry). This occurred through their injecting a heady mixture of ultra-nationalist politics, racism, the reification of *Eretz Yisrael* as a pre-eminent religious and national value, and taking up the societally valued mantle of Zionist settlement filling the vacuum left by statist

normalisation and the death of Labour-Zionism. The peace movement and associated secularist tendencies developed in direct opposition to the new-found legitimacy of quasi-religious particularism and joined the *kulturkampf* fray through a reassertion of *Haskalah* values in a new liberal, humanist Jewish identity politics. The ferocity of the ensuing struggle over the correct understanding of what it is to be a Jew has left a profoundly divided society.

That the conflict over the Occupation is also an internal identity struggle is confirmed by the total lack of popular engagement between the Israeli left and Palestinians in the peace process, best exemplified by the moderate peacenik call for a disengagement due to the fear of a Palestinian demographic takeover. Meretz activists share this fear as demonstrated above and in the party's support for the 'Separation Wall' until its true route was demarcated. The Palestinian is to remain the symbol of the non-Jewish 'other' for the purposes of Jewish-Israeli identity politics regardless of the success or failure of the peace process or ascendancy of either *kulturkampf* opponent.

Nonetheless, the popular understanding of the religious-secular conflict is that the struggle is confined to matters of religious coercion as enshrined in the seeming permanence of the status quo agreements. The experience of religious coercion and opposition towards it differs markedly from issue to issue as we have seen from interviewee responses. The maintenance of *kashrut* restrictions is not widely condemned by Meretz activists and neither are *Shabbat* restrictions insofar as they don't impinge on the freedoms of movement and (to a lesser extent) consumption. Views are mixed on the *haredi* draft exemption while the issues of civil marriage, secular education, inequalities in the distribution of state monies between religious and secular, and opposition to the ultra-Orthodox 'invasion' of secular neighbourhoods loom large as issues of intense concern.

Most Meretz activists express an interest in Jewish identity maintenance, in establishing the legitimacy of secular Jewish identity, and in socialising their prospective children into an understanding of the Jewish tradition. It is argued here that the 'little tradition' of family, home and holidays constitutes the basis and provides the cultural 'stuff' for the extrapolation and experience of secular Jewish identity. Secular Jewish-Israeli identity is characterised by a high degree of individual voluntarism in selection and conception that lends it an idiosyncratic flavour not amenable to exertion in the face of

attacks from the more monolithic formulations of religious Jewish identity politics, which successfully represent themselves as the more authentic interpreters of Jewish tradition.

Attitudes towards Zionism are also explored. Activists tend to express a general distaste or disinterest in a caricatured image of postzionism, defining this intellectual movement as anti-Israeli while exhibiting many of the tendencies, positions and concerns that characterise its critiques. Most, while identifying as Zionists, effectively define Zionism as a more generalised mode of Israeli nationalism and national identification in the absence of a clear differentiation of Israeli and Jewish identity. For virtually all activists, the Holocaust plays a central role in mapping a sense of belonging to the Jewish people and, with the family, lies at the heart of secular Jewish-Israeli identity politics.

The Future for Meretz

Given the instability inherent in the Israeli political system and the rapid mutability of situations governing electoral affinities it is very difficult to predict the future for Israeli political movements. Meretz suffered badly at the polls in 2003 and has since decided to coalesce formally with Shahar (the liberal-peacenik movement of former Labour MKs Yossi Beilin and Ya'el Dayan) forming Yachad ('Together'). This had long been on the cards with persistent rumours about a Labour breakaway joining Meretz and the prior assumption of party membership by MK Roman Bronfman. Elements of the Mercaz had also been in negotiations to join Meretz following the collapse of that party in 2000 but were unable to obtain guaranteed list slots.

It is notable that the efforts of Meretz to grow through coalitions with centrist and liberal peacenik MKs and parties has been unsuccessful in increasing the electability of the party as Shahar brings few potential voters with it. There have been no efforts to coalesce or form an electoral bloc with the largely Arab and non-Zionist hard left and the flight of Labour's quiescent left still appears unlikely as the rump electorate of that party still provides the parliamentary seats far from guaranteed by Yachad. Nonetheless, recent polls (February 2004) show the new party obtaining 9-10 seats, returning Meretz to close to its largest representation in Knesset, probably due to the increasing problems of the Sharon government, its failure to bring peace and the continued floundering of Labour under Peres.

Meretz' 2003 electoral performance was largely due to the shift to the right caused by the second intifada and the party's close association with the failed peace process, but also reflects the problems described in this dissertation of perceived ineffectiveness on *kulturkampf* issues and a related, apparent ideological moderation over recent years. Yachad is likely to remain a small party in Knesset in the near future though its input will be vital when the peace process draws to, what I believe, is an inevitable close within the next decade, both as an advocate for a just settlement, and as a key player in ensuring the expansion of civil society and the full establishment of a civil, democratic state. This and the advocacy of social justice constitute the essential purpose of the party, in my opinion, and it will be the *Tzerim* and *Noar* of this and associated left and liberal movements that will be required to lead Israel towards a brighter future. I wish them luck!

Kulturkampf Prognostications

The future of the Israeli *kulturkampf* is difficult to predict. Significant changes are unlikely in the particularistic civil religion of the post-1967 period in the foreseeable future, and it is difficult to see any possibility of reconciling the diametrically opposed understandings of Jewish identity that underpin the conflict and play a key role in the formation of opposing factions.

Politically, the new-found electoral power of *kulturkampf* parties such as Shinui, Meretz/Yachad and Shas, and the interest of the NRP, Agudat Yisrael and, increasingly, Labour in taking unequivocal stances on the status quo and religious-secular relations, alongside the disintegration of the ameliorative consociational form of government, point to a deepening of societal cleavages along ethno-religious lines and the increasing unmanageability of the conflict. Media interest will continue to reflect the public's obsession with the inroads and impending victory of the other side with the status quo largely ignored, mutilated by ministerial decrees or direct attacks, and used as a political football. Shinui and Meretz/Yachad will continue to seek the ending of *haredi* privileges in the provision of social services, education and in institutional funding, and may well gain the support of the Labour Party, elements of the Likud and Russian MKs for the legislation of a full package of civil reforms. Education will be a key battleground as secularist parties follow Meretz' lead in seeking to limit the reach of religious school systems, imposing a

basic programme of secular studies therein while continuing efforts to bolster the ailing secular system. For their part, the *haredi* parties will continue to misdirect state resources for the expansion of their systems and to resist proper ministerial oversight over spending and student numbers.

If the right remains in power for a prolonged period the freedom of the judiciary is likely to be prorogued by legislative changes and the neutering of Meretz' Basic Laws as attacks on the Supreme Court and its limited efforts to protect civil rights continue. Neighbourhood battles over efforts to build religious institutions in secular and traditionalist suburbs, and over Shabbat road and shop closures, will continue and possibly worsen due to the rapid population growth in ultra-Orthodox areas. These neighbourhood battles and efforts to stop the *haredi* proselytisation of secular students will continue to pit Meretz/Yachad and Shinui against the various religious movements involved.

Civil marriage is still some way away from being realised in legislation but is inevitable given the massive resentment caused by the current regulations and the fact that thousands of Israelis are now married every year in civil ceremonies or overseas, effectively ending the monopoly of religious marriage. Shabbat and kosher restrictions are also being increasingly ignored by seculars with the availability of foods containing *hametz* in cafes at Passover, the increasing availability of non-kosher foods, and the opening of malls, restaurants and some movie theatres and *makolets* (small stores) on *Shabbat* all pointing to the growing secularisation of Israeli public life.

Kulturkampf conflicts will continue to deepen with secular Israel making gains on ending religious coercion and the ultra-Orthodox continuing to parley political clout into funding boosts and measures to block the secularisation of the Israeli street - the latter largely unsuccessfully, though the future of Israeli education remains moot. The feared theocracy will not eventuate with the likely scenario being a persistence of various culture war conflicts alongside a reduction in the prerogatives of the Rabbinate and a reduced form of religious authority over personal status issues. However, it is in the Territories that the most dangerous battle of the *kulturkampf* will be fought as the national-religious cling desperately to their redemptive vision in the face of government efforts to evacuate the Territories. Some violence is likely, but regardless the disengagement will provoke a massive societal upheaval in Israel that in the worst scenario could lead to civil war and at

best will leave a large sector of the population with a shattered worldview and a deep distrust of the state.

Appendix A: The research consent form signed by all interviewees.

<u>Research Consent Form</u>

1) I understand that my identity will be protected, should I desire this, in the collection and presentation of all material collected in this study.

2) I agree to <u>participate in</u> recorded interviews and understand that a copy of the interview tapes will be given to me if I want them.

3) I understand that any photographs taken of, or including me, by Dominic, will be made available to me for my approval before being used for any purpose.

4) I understand that <u>I have the right to refuse</u> to answer any questions asked to me by Dominic and recognise that I can also refuse to have photographs taken by me.

5) I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this research at any time and that all materials (tapes, photos, and photo negatives...) are my intellectual property.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

I, Dominic Moran, agree to abide by the guidelines of research stated above and undertake to carry out this study in a manner that complies with the stipulation of the Association of Social Anthropologists of Aotearoa/New Zealand that the interests of research participants must have primacy in undertaking ethnographic study.

Researcher: _____

Appendix B: The questionnaire used in most interviews.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

<u>Meretz Intro.</u>

How did you first become involved with Meretz?

Memories of first contacts with party.

What do you do in the party?

Why did you choose Meretz: **Ideology** (socialism, human rights, peace process, secular-religious debate **Social** -friends were members of youth wing, etc. - **Pragmatic** (activism, feeling like playing part in political struggles personally interested in).

What does Meretz stand for? What is the main emphasis of the party at the moment; peace, religious-secular issues?

How does this differ/equate with the direction you would like to see the party going?

<u>Socialisation and its impact on identity</u>

Are your parents involved in politics? Your siblings?

Do you celebrate Jewish festivals? How?

Is this a family time?

What is the religious importance of festivals to you?

What is Jewish about your own household and how does this differ/equate with your parent's house?

Do you want your children to grow up with the same sense of Jewishness as yourself?

How will you go about this?

What do you feel was specifically Jewish in your upbringing?

What was Israeli?

<u>Identity</u>

What does it mean to say you're Jewish?

What is the difference between Israeli and Jewish identity?

Do you feel more Jewish or more Israeli? Why?

Does Jewish identity necessarily have a religious dimension?

Can you separate this from a pride in Jewish tradition?

Who is a Jew? - *Halakha*, self-ascription, ethnicity, religious belief.

Can you become a Jew? If so how?

Is Meretz playing a part in creating a new form of Jewish identity?

What is it - 'Hebrew' man, Israeli, militant secular?

The Shoa and other national traumas

Is the Holocaust part of your identity as a Jew? In what way?

What impact did it have on Israel?

What impact did Rabin's assassination have on you?

How did the Gulf War change Israeli society?

Religious-Secular Division

Do you agree that religious coercion exists in Israel?

What is the nature of this coercion?

How does it affect you personally?

What changes would you like to see in the religious secular status quo?

How has Meretz worked to change the status quo?

Is Israeli democracy threatened by the rise of anti-democratic Haredi parties such as Shas?

What should the party's role be in the impending secular-religious debate?

Is a secular Jewish identity possible? How and what would/does it consist of?

Gender

Meretz prides itself on having 4 women in every 10 on its list. How are women treated within the party?

Is it more difficult for women to rise in the party hierarchy?

If so what is the nature of the opposition they face within the party?

Are such difficulties testament to the influence of masculine culture from the army and wider society?

Israel and the Peace Process

Are you a Zionist?

What is Zionism?

What is the relevance of Zionism to Israel and to you personally?

Should Israel retain the Zionist flag, national anthem and other symbols or should they
be changed to be more inclusive of the Israeli-Arab population?

Do you think that Israel should leave all the Occupied Territories? Why?

Should the Right of Return be extended to Palestinians and their families who left Israel
from 1948?

Do you support the creation of a Palestinian state?

Do Israeli-Arabs have equal civil rights?

If not what changes would you like to see?

Is Meretz helping Israeli-Arabs attain these civil rights?

Is Israeli politics corrupt?

Is there corruption in Meretz?

What has Meretz contributed to the peace process?

What does the party do well?

How does Meretz need to change?

Meretz Internal Politics

Describe Shinui, RATZ and Mapam and how they came together.

Which of these parties had the most influence on Meretz's ideology and party
platform?

Is Meretz a socialist party? If not what is its dominant ideology?

Does this equate with your own beliefs?

What do you think of Yossi Sarid and our other MKs?

Will the leadership be changing before the next elections?

What is the role of *Tzerie* and *Noar* in the party?

Do you agree with how these bodies are being run?

Does Meretz have the power to create meaningful change in this Knesset?

If so in what areas?

Should Meretz's focus be on the economy, social issues, the peace, religious secular debate...?

Did the party do as well as you expected in the election? What did we do well and where could we do better?

Did you agree when Meretz entered the coalition with Shas?

Were you shocked at how well Shas did?

What did you do during the campaign?

Were you threatened or attacked while campaigning?

Was the atmosphere during campaigning different from during other elections?

Did working with Meretz during the campaign strengthen your belief in what the party stands for? In what way?

Closing

Are you proud to be Jewish? What are you most proud of?

What do you personally get out of being in Meretz?

Appendix C: The English language version of a 1999 Meretz election flyer describing the freedoms espoused by the party.

Glossary

Abba: Father.

Achdut Ha'Avodah: A left wing Zionist party that was for a time a constituent of Mapam before breaking away due to that party's support for the Soviet Union.

Agudat Yisrael: Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox party.

Ahusal: A phrase coined by Baruch Kimmerling for Israel's governing Ashkenazi elite.

Al Hamishmar: Mapam's newspaper. Now closed.

Aliyah: 'To go up'. The Zionist term for the immigration of Jews to Palestine/Israel.

Ashkenazim: European Jews and their descendants.

Avodah Evrit: 'Hebrew/Jewish Labour'. The philosophy used to countenance the exclusion of Arab labour from wide sectors of the Palestinian-Jewish and Israeli economy.

Ba'alei Teshuvah: Converts to ultra-Orthodoxy.

Bet Knesset: Synagogue.

Bildung: Loosely translated as 'acculturation.' A key aim of the Prussian secular Jewish elite.

Brit: Covenant.

Brit mila: Circumcision.

Chanichim: pupils/trainees

DASH: 'The Democratic Movement for Change.' An electoral coalition of liberal movements which played a key role in ending three decades of *Mapai* governance.

Devarim: 'Sayings'. Part of the literary tradition of Judaism.

Djuk: 'Cockroach/bug'. Secular pejorative for ultra-Orthodox.

Dos/sim: 'Religious'.

Dybbuk: Mythical demon that enters the body of a living person and controls their behaviour.

Eretz Yisrael: 'The Land of Israel.'

Galut: 'Diaspora'.

Gaon: 'Genius'. Often used as a moniker for prominent rabbis.

Get: Religious divorce agreement.

Gibush: 'Togetherness', a collectivist orientation intentionally aimed at in youth socialisation and beyond.

Goyim: Gentiles, a pejorative.

Green Line: The 1967 ceasefire line between Israel proper and the West Bank identified by many supporters of the peace process as the basis for an international border between Israel and a future Palestinian State.

Hag: Holiday.

Haggadah/ot: The ceremonial text used at the Passover *Seder*.

Hakibbutz Ha'artzi: 'The Countrywide Kibbutz.' The left wing kibbutz movement founded by members of the *Hashomer Hatzair* Labour-Zionist youth movement. Closely allied to the Mapam political party and, thereafter, Meretz.

Halakha/Halakhic: Jewish religious law.

Hametz: Leaven.

Hanhalah/t: Board.

Haredi/m: Ultra-Orthodox.

Hashomer Hatzair: 'The Young Watchmen'. A left wing Zionist youth movement.

Hasidism: A branch of haredi Judaism focused on the person of wonder-working rebbes (rabbis) and heavily influenced by the kabbalistic tradition.

Haskala: The Jewish Enlightenment.

Hatikva: 'The Hope.' Israel's national anthem.

Hedder Ochel: Dining room.

Hiloni: Secular

Histadrut: The Israeli federation of trade unions.

Hok Hashvut: Law of Return.

Hok Sheroot Bitachon: The draft law.

Humrah: 'Stringency', when referring to Jewish religious observance and religious law.

Israel Achat: 'One Israel.' A coalition of centrist parties in the 1999 election comprising Gesher, Meimad and Labour, dominated by the latter.

Kabbala/Cabbala: A Jewish mystical tradition often seen as heretical by religious authorities but extremely influential in both the rise of Hasidism and in attracting secular Israelis to ultra-Orthodoxy.

Kaddesh: A prayer of praise.

Kedusha: Holy.

Kibbutznik: Member of a kibbutz.

Kiddush: Sabbath and holiday blessings.

Kollel/im: Adult Torah academy/ies.

Kulturkampf: 'Culture War'.

Ma'arach: 'Alignment.' An electoral coalition of left Zionist parties.

Mafdal: See NRP.

Mahapach: 'Upheaval', Used to refer to the Likud's victory in the 1977 general election.

Makolet: A grocery shop.

Mamlachtiut: Statism.

Mamzer: Bastard.

Mapai: The *Avodah*, 'Labour' Party.

Mapam: 'The United Worker's Party.' A socialist, Zionist party and a constituent member of the Meretz party from 1992.

Mapamnikim: Members of Mapam.

Maskil/im: 'The enlightened ones.' Followers of the *Haskala*.

Mayan Hachinuch Hatorani 'Source (Fountain) of Orthodox Education'. Shas' education system.

Me'atzben: Annoying.

Medinat Israel: 'The state of Israel', preferred by peaceniks to *Eretz Yisrael* as a moniker.

Megillah: The Purim story.

Mercaz Meretz: Meretz party headquarters.

Meretz: 'Energy.' Also the acronym for its constituent parties, Mapam, RATZ and Shinui. Israel's peacenik left-liberal Zionist party.

Metsada: Massada.

Mikveh/vot: Baths used for religious purification rituals.

Mimsad: 'establishment'/elite.

Mishna: Written commentary, part of the religious tradition.

Mitpaked: A paid member.

Mitzva: An obligatory religious commandment.

Mizrachim: Sephardim.

MK: Member of Knesset, parliamentarians.

Moatza: Council.

Moser: The Halakhic term for a Jew suspected of illegally providing non-Jews with sacred Jewish property, or of providing information leading to the same.

Moshiach: Messiah.

Nakba: 'Catastrophe'. The Arab term for the events of 1948.

NIS: New Israeli Shekel.

Noar: 'Youth." In Meretz, those of high school age.

NRP: 'The National Religious Party.' Political representatives of the national-religious sector and strong proponent of the settlement movement.

Olim: New immigrants.

Palmach: Elite Labour-Zionist military force.

Pessach: Passover.

Peula: A youth group session.

Rabanoot/Rabbinate: The theocratic state institution responsible for the provision of some religious services. Controls the religious courts.

RATZ: "The Citizen's Rights Movement.' Israel's civil and human rights party strongly opposed to religious coercion and a constituent party of Meretz.

Rav: Rabbi.

Rebbetzen: The rabbi's wife.

Rodef: A person who facilitates or plans the murder of a Jew and is punishable by death without trial, according to *Halakha*.

Rosh Hashanah: New Year.

Sabra: The name of a cactus. Refers to native born Jewish-Israelis the association being that they are prickly on the outside and sweet on the inside.

Seder: The Passover meal.

Sephardim: A term originally used to refer to exiled Spanish Jewry now referring to the descendants of this group throughout the world and to Jews and their descendants from North Africa and the Near East.

Shabbas: Yiddish for the Sabbath.

Shachar: A Yossi Beilin led political movement from the Labour left now coalescing with Meretz to form Yachad.

Shalom Akhshav: 'Peace Now'.

Shas: Sephardi ultra-Orthodox party.

Shinui: A liberal-capitalist party with an increasingly anti-Orthodox public profile. Past member of both the DASH and Meretz party coalitions.

Shmita: The fallow year according to *Halakha*, every seventh.

Smolani/smolanit: 'Lefty', used by right wingers as a derogatory appellation.

Snif: Branch.

Succa: The temporary hut or lean-to created for Succot.

Taharat Neshek: The IDF doctrine of 'purity of arms'.

Takanon: Regulations governing party functions.

Tallit: Prayer shawl.

Talmid Chakham: 'Wise student' or the 'student of a wise teacher'.

Talmud: Used variously to denote Torah and other elements of Jewish religious literature.

Tanakh: The Bible.

Tefillin: Religious phylacteries.

Tikbateh: Resign.

Tzerie Meretz/Tzerim: 'Young' Meretz/Members of 'Young' Meretz, aged 18-35.

Veida: Conference.

Yachad: 'Together.' The party formed in 2003 by the coalescence of Meretz and Shahar.

Yerukim: 'Greens.' The environmentalist party led by former RATZ and Meretz Dedi Zucker. Did not win seats in 1999.

Yediat Haaretz: Knowing the land. A focus of school and youth group education, typically involving nature hikes and trips to Massada and other important historical sites of the Jewish people.

Yeshivat Hesder: Army programme combining religious and military instruction.

Yife Nefesh: 'Beautiful souls.' Derogatory appellation given the peacenik left by right wingers. Equivalent to 'bleeding hearts'.

Yishuv: The Jewish community residing in the Land of Israel during the Diaspora.

Yom Ha'atzmaoot: Independence Day.

Yom HaShoa: Holocaust Day.

Yuda Shomron: 'Judea and Samaria'. Israeli term for the West Bank.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abdel-Malik, K. & D.C. Jacobsen (eds.) 1999 Israeli and Palestinian Identities in History and Literature. Macmillan. Basingstoke. Hampshire.

Andromidas, Dean 2002 Effi Eitam: The Face of the New Israeli Fascism. Citizens Electoral Council of Australia. Accessed 29/7/03, at http://www.cecaust.com.au/culture/jewish/p4/article13.htm

Arian, Asher 1998 The Second Republic: Politics in Israel. Chatham House. Chatham.

Arian, Asher & Michal Shamir 1995 The Elections in Israel 1992. State University of New York Press. New York.

Arian, Asher & Michal Shamir 1999 "Collective Identity and Electoral Competition in Israel". *American Political Science Review*, 93:265-277.

Arian, Asher & Michal Shamir 1999 The Elections in Israel 1996. State University of New York Press. New York.

Arieli, Yehoshua 1988 "On Being a Secular Jew in Israel". *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, 45:49-60.

Aronoff, Myron J. (ed.) 1984a Religion and Politics. Transaction. New Brunswick.

Aronoff, Myron J. (ed.) 1984b Cross-Currents in Israeli Culture and Politics. Transaction. New Brunswick.

Aronoff, Myron J. 1993 Power and Ritual in the Israeli Labor Party: A Study in Political Anthropology. Comparative Politics Series. M.E. Sharpe. Armonk.

Aronoff, Myron J. 2000 "The "Americanization" of Israeli Politics: Political and Cultural Change". *Israel Studies*, 5,1:92-127.

Aviad, J. 1983 Return to Judaism: Religious Renewal in Israel. University of Chicago Press. Chicago.

Avishai, Bernard 1985 The Tragedy of Zionism: Revolution and Democracy in the Land of Israel. Farrar Straus Giroux. New York.

Azaryahu, Maoz 2000 "McIsrael?: On the "Americanization of Israel"". *Israel Studies*, 5,1:41-64.

Barnett, Michael N. (ed.) 1996 Israel In Comparative Perspective: Challenging the Conventional Perspective. State University of New York Press. New York.

Barth, Frederick (ed.) 1969 Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organisation of Culture Difference. George Allen & Unwin. London.

Bassok, Moti 2003 "Findings Provoke Uproar in Settlement Leadership". *Haaretz*, Accessed 24/9/03, at http://www.Haaretz.com/hasen/spages/343489.html, no page numbers.

Bekerman, Zvi & Mark Silverman 1999 "Israeli Traditionalists and Liberals: A Social-Constructivist Perspective". *Israel Studies*, 4,2:90-120.

Ben-Ari, Eyal & Yoram Bilu (eds.) 1997 Grasping Land: Space and Place in Contemporary Israeli Discourse and Experience. State University of New York Press. New York.

Berger, Peter L. & Thomas Luckman 1967 The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge. Penguin. London.

Brubaker, R. & F. Cooper 2000 "Beyond "Identity". *Theory and Society*, 29:1-47.

Buber, M. 1948 Hasidism. Philosophical Library. New York.

Buckser, Andrew 1999 "Keeping Kosher: Eating and Social Identity Among the Jews of Denmark". *Ethnology: An International Journal of Cultural and Social Anthropology*, 38,3:191-210.

Bulmer, Martin 1998 "Conceptualizing fractured societies: the case of Israel". *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21,3:383-407.

Cohen, A. 1992 "Post-Fieldwork Fieldwork". *Journal of AnthropologicalResearch*, 48,4:339-354.

Cohen, Anthony P. 1994 Self-Consciousness: An Alternative Anthropology of Identity. Routledge. London.

Cohen, Asher & Bernard Susser 2000 Israel and the Politics of Jewish Identity: The Secular-Religious Impasse. John Hopkins University Press. Baltimore.

Cohen, Stuart A. & Eliezer Don-Yehiya (eds.) 1986 Conflict and Consensus in Jewish Political Life. Bar Ilan University Press. Ramat Gan.

The College of Judea and Samaria. 1999-2003 (About The College of Judea and Samaria). Accessed 21/8/03, at http://www.yosh.ac.il/About.asp

Columbia Encyclopaedia. 2001 "Haskala". Accessed 19/7/01, at

http://www.bartleby.com/65/ha/Haskala.html. No page numbers.

D'Alisera, Jo Ann 1999 "Fields of Dreams: The Anthropologist Far Away at Home".
Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly, 24,1:5-19.

Deshen, Shlomo 1982 "Social Organisation and Politics in Israeli Urban Quarters".
The Jerusalem Quarterly, 22:21-37.

Domb, Risa 2001 "Ideology, Identity and Language in Modern Hebrew Literature".
Israel Affairs, 7,1:71-86.

Don-Yehiya, Eliezer 1999 "Conflict Management of Religious Issues: The Israeli Case
in a Comparative Perspective". *Israel Studies*, 6,2:85-107.

Dowty. Alan 1999 "Is Israel Democratic? Substance and Semantics in the "Ethnic
Democracy" Debate". *Israel Studies*, 4,2:1-15.

Eisenstadt, S.N. 1967 Israeli Society. Weidenfeld & Nicolson. London.

Eisenstadt, S.N. 1985 The Transformation of Israeli Society: An Essay in Interpretation.
Weidenfeld & Nicolson. London.

Encarta Online Encyclopaedia 2001 "Moses Mendelsohn". Accessed 19/7/01, at
http//encarta.msn.com/find/Concise.asp?ti=01CC1000

Epstein, A.L. 1978 Ethos and Identity: Three Studies in Ethnicity. Tavistock. London.

Erspammer, Peter R. 1997 The Elusiveness of Tolerance: The Jewish Question
from Lessing to the Napoleonic Wars. University of North Carolina Press. Chapel Hill.

Esman, Milton J. & Itamar Rabinovitch 1988 Ethnicity, Pluralism and the State in the Middle East. Cornell University Press. Ithaca.

Even-Zohar, Itamar 1990 "The Emergence of a Native Israeli Culture in Palestine: 1882 1948". *Poetics Today*, 11,1:175-191.

Executive Committee Hashomer Hatzair Worker's Party 1946 The Case for a Bi-National Palestine. Hashomer Hatzair. Tel Aviv.

Flores, Toni 1998 "Taxonomy and the Music of Failure". *Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly*, 23,2:165-176.

Foucault, Michel 1988 Technologies of the Self. University of Massachusetts Press. Amherst.

Fox, R. (ed.) 1991 Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present. School of American Research. Santa Fe.

Fox, Richard G. & Orin Starn 1997 Between Resistance and Revolution: Cultural Politics and Social Protest. Rutgers University Press. New Brunswick.

Frankel, Jonathon & Steven S. Zipperstein (eds.) 1992 Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth Century Europe. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.

Friedman, Jonathon 1994 Consumption and Identity. Harwood Academic. Chur.

Friedman, Jonathon & Scott Lash 1992 Modernity and Identity. Basil Blackwell. Oxford.

Garfinkle, Adam 1997 Politics and Society in Modern Israel: Myths and Realities. M.E. Sharpe. New York.

Gavison, R.L. 1999 "Jewish and Democratic? A Rejoinder to the "Ethnic Democracy" Debate". *Israel Studies*, 4,1:44-72.

Geertz, C. 1966 "Religion as a Cultural System". In <u>Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion</u>. ed. by M. Banton. Tavistock. London. 1-46.

Geertz, C. 1993 <u>The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays</u>. Fontana. London.

Gellner, Ernest 1983 <u>Nations and Nationalism</u>. Blackwell. London.

Gellner, Ernest 1987 <u>Culture, Identity and Politics</u>. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.

Giddens, Anthony 1991 <u>Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age</u>. Stanford University Press. Stanford. California.

Gilbert, Martin 1998 <u>A History of Israel</u>. Doubleday. London.

Goldberg, David & Michael Krausz (eds) 1995 <u>Jewish Identity</u>. Temple University Press. Philadelphia.

Goldscheider, Calvin & Alan S. Druckerman 1984 <u>The Transformation of the Jews</u>. University of Chicago Press. Chicago.

Goodman, Hirsh 17/12/01 "My Word: Shattered". *The Jerusalem Report*. 11.

Gudeman, R.S. & A. Rivera 1995 "From Car to House (Del Coche a la Casa)". *American Anthropologist*, 97,2:242-250.

Hage, G. 1994 "Locating Multiculturalism's Other: A Critique of Practical

Tolerance". *New Transformations*, 24:19-34.

Halevi, Yossi K. 24/4/00 "The Truth About Shulamit Aloni". *The Jerusalem Report*, 24-26.

Hall-Cathala, David 1990 The Peace Movement in Israel. 1967-1987. MacMillan. London.

Hall, Stuart (ed.) 1980 Culture. Media. Language; Working Papers in Cultural Studies. 1972-1979. Routledge. London.

Hall, Stuart, David Held & Tony McGrew (eds.) 1992 Modernity and its Futures. Polity. Cambridge.

Hampshire, Stuart 1956 The Age of Reason: The Seventeenth Century Philosophers. Mentor. New York.

Handelman, D. 1990 Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.

Harkabi, Y. 1988 Israel's Fateful Decisions. Tr. by L Schramm. I.B. Taurus & Co.. London.

Hattis-Rolef, Susan (ed.) 1986 The Dilemma of Religion and Politics: Attitudes and Positions Within the Israeli Labor Movement on Religious Pluralism. Semana. Jerusalem.

Hattis-Rolef, Susan (ed.) 1987 Political Dictionary of the State of Israel. MacMillan. New York.

Herman, Simon N. 1970 Israelis and Jews: The Continuity of an Identity. The Jewish

Publications Society of America. Philadelphia.

Herman, Simon N. 1977 Jewish Identity: A Social Psychological Perspective. Sage
Publications. Beverley Hills.

Herzfeld, M. 1997 Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State. Routledge.
New York.

Herzl, Theodor 1946 The Jewish State. Tr. by Sylvie Avigdor. American Zionist
Emergency Council. Accessed 7/7/02,
at http://www.geocities.com/Vienna/6640/zion/judenstaadt.html

Herzog, Hanna 1987 Contests of Symbols: The Sociology of Election Campaigns
through Israeli Ephemera. Harvard University Library. Cambridge.

Horowitz, Dan & Moshe Lissak 1989 Trouble in Utopia: The Overburdened Polity in
Israel. State University of New York Press. New York.

Issacs, Harold 1975 Idols of the Tribe: Group Identity and Political Change. Harper &
Row. New York.

Jenkins, Richard 1996 Social Identity. Routledge. London.

The Jerusalem Report 5/6/00 "The Back Page: Is Israel any closer to resolving the
ultra-Orthodox draft dispute?". 56.

Kamil, Omar 12/2000 "Rabbi Ovadia and his "Culture War" in Israel". *Middle East
Review of International Affairs*, 4,4. Accessed 28/3/03,
at http://www.mafhoum.com/press/ovadia.htm. no page numbers.

Karsh, Efraim 1997 <u>From Rabin to Netanyahu: Israel's Troubled Agenda</u>. Frank Caas. London.

Katriel, Tamar 1991 <u>Communal Webs: Communication and Culture in Contemporary Israel</u>. Anthropological and Judaic Studies. State University of New York Press. New York.

Kee, A. 1986 <u>Domination or Liberation: The Place of Religion in Social Conflict</u>. SCM Press. London.

Kimmerling, Baruch 1985 "Between the Primordial and Civil Definitions of the Collective Identity: Eretz Israel or the State of Israel". In <u>Comparative Social Dynamics: Essays in Honour of S.N. Eisenstadt</u> ed. by E. Cohen, M. Lissak & U. Almagor. Westview Press. Boulder.

Kimmerling, Baruch (ed.) 1989 <u>The Israeli State and Society: Boundaries and Frontiers</u>. State University of New York Press. New York.

Kimmerling, Baruch 2000 Unpublished Paper Given at the Plenary Session on "Postzionism" of the Association of Israel Studies Conference. Tel Aviv. 27/6/00.

Kimmerling, Baruch 2002 "Jurisdiction in an Immigrant-Settler Society: The "Jewish and Democratic State"". *Comparative Political Studies*, 35,10:1119-1144.

Klein, Emma 1996 <u>Lost Jews: The Struggle for Identity Today</u>. Macmillan. Basingstoke.

Kleinman, S. & M. Copp 1993 <u>Emotions and Fieldwork</u>. Sage. Newbury Park.

Kniesmeyer, Joke & Danile Cil Brecher 1995 <u>Beyond the Pale: The History of Jews in Russia</u>. Accessed 3/7/02, at http://www.friends-partners.org/partners/beyond-the-pale/index.html

Kollatt, Israel 1977 "Eretz Israel Socialism and International Socialism". *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, 3:51-73.

Kook, A.I. 1978 The Lights of Penitence: The Moral Principles, Lights of Holiness, Essays, Letters and Poems. Tr. by Ben Zion Bokser. Paulist Press. New York.

Korbani, Agnes 1995. The Political Dictionary of the Modern Middle East. University Press of America. Lanham

Krauz, Ernest (ed.) 1985 Politics and Society in Israel. Transaction. New Brunswick.

Krausz, Ernest & Gitta Tulea (eds.) 1998 Jewish Survival: The Identity Problem at The Close of the Twentieth Century. Transaction. New Brunswick.

Landau, D. 1993 Piety and Power: The World of Jewish Fundamentalism. Hill & Wang. New York.

Laskier, Michael 2000 "Israeli Activism American-Style: Civil Liberties, Environmental, and Peace Organisations as Pressure Groups for Social Change, 1970s-1990s". *Israel Studies*, 5,1:128-152.

Lawrence, B.R. 1989 Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age. Harper & Row. San Francisco.

Lee, D. 1959 Freedom and Culture. Prentice Hall. Englewood Cliffs.

Lehman-Wilzig, Sam N. & B. Susser (eds.) 1981 Public Life in Israel and the Diaspora. Bar Ilan University Press. Ramat Gan.

Lehman-Wilzig, Sam N. 1990 Stiff Necked People, Bottle-Necked System: Th

Evolution and Roots of Israeli Public Protest. Indiana University Press. Bloomington.

Levy, Shlomit, Hanna Levinsohn & Elihu Katz 1993 Beliefs, Observances and Social Interaction Among Israeli Jews.Louis Guttman Israel Institute of Applied Social Research. Jerusalem.

Lewis, Hywel D. 1982 The Elusive Self. MacMillan. London.

Liebman, Charles S. (ed.) 1990 Conflict and Accommodation between Jews in Israel: Religious and Secular. Keter Books. Jerusalem.

Liebman, Charles & E. Don-Yehiya 1983 Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State. University of California Press. Berkeley.

Liebman, Charles S. & Eliahu Katz (eds.) 1997 The Jewishness of Israelis: Responses to the Guttman Report. State University of New York Press. New York.

Lipman, David E. no publication date "Moses Mendelssohn. Enlightener of the Ghetto. Accessed 26/1/04, at http://www.jewishgates.com/file.asp?File_ID=329

McLennan, G. 1995 Pluralism. University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis.

Maor, Moshe & Reuven Y. Hazan 1999 "Parties. Elections and Cleavages: Israel in Comparative and Theoretical Perspective". *Israel Studies*, 6,2:1-12.

Marcus, G.E. (ed.) 1998 Critical Anthropology Now: Unexpected Contexts, Shifting Constituencies, Changing Agendas. School of American Research Press. Santa Fe.

Marcus, G.E. & M.M.J. Fischer 1986 Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An

Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences. University of Chicago Press.Chicago.

Marmorstein, Emile 1969 Heaven at Bay: The Jewish Kulturkampf in the Holy Land. Oxford University Press. London.

Medding, Peter Y. (ed.) 1995 Values, Interests and Identity: Jews and Politics in a Changing World. Oxford University Press. New York.

Mendelsohn, E. 1993 On Modern Jewish Politics. Oxford University Press. New York.

Meretz 1997 Meretz: Basic Principles. Keren Printers. Tel Aviv.

Meretz 1999 Why Meretz? Keren Printers. Tel Aviv.

Meretz 2001 Meretz Party Platform. Jewish Virtual Library. Accessed 4/9/01, at http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/Politics/meretz/html

Mergui, R. & P. Simmonot 1987 Israel's Ayatollahs: Meir Kahane and the Far Right in Israel. Saqi Books. Jerusalem.

Meyer, Michael A. & Michael Brenner (eds.) 1996 German-Jewish History in Modern Times: Volume 1. Tradition and Enlightenment 1600-1780. Columbia University Press. New York.

Morris, Brian 1991 Western Conceptions of the Individual. Berg. Oxford.

National Union 2003 Basic Platform Principles for the 2003 Elections. Accessed 29/7/03, at http://www.leumi.org.il/en/index.html

Neuberger, Benyamin 1999 "Religion and State in Europe and Israel". *Israel Studies*, 6,2:65-84.

Newman, D. (ed.) 1985 The Impact of Gush Emunim: Politics and Settlement in the West Bank. Croom Helm. London.

Nietschmann, B. 1989 The Unknown War: The Miskito Nation, Nicaragua, and the United States. Freedom House. New York.

Peace Now 2003a (About Peace Now). Accessed 18/8/03, at http://www.peacenow.org.il

Peace Now 2003b "Settler Positions Towards Withdrawal From the Territories". Accessed 30/1/04, at http://www.peacenow.org.il/English.asp?Redirect=4&ReportID=527

Peretz, Don & Gideon Doron 1997 The Government and Politics of Israel. Westview Press. Boulder.

Peri, Yoram (ed.) 2000 The Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. Stanford University Press. Stanford.

Pfaller, Albert 2000 Social Democracy in the Globalised Post-Industrialised Society. Fredrich Ebert Stiflung. Bonn.

Pickering, W.S.F. (ed.) 1975 Durkheim on Religion. Routledge & Kegan Paul. London.

Pinsker, Leon 1916 Auto-Emancipation. Tr. by D. S. Blondheim. Federation of American Zionists. Accessed 8/7/02, at http://www.geocities.com/Vienna/6640/zion/pinsker.html

Pradip, Thomas N. 1997 "Communication and National Identity: Towards an Inclusive Vision". Accessed 14/1/04, at www.oneworld.org/wacc/media/vision/html

Pratkanis, Anthony B. & Malene E. Turner 1996 "Persuasion and Democracy: Strategies for Increasing Deliberative Participation and Enacting Social Change". *Journal of Social Issues*, 52,1:187-205.

Press International News Agency 20/1/03 "Give Us Your Vote & Guarantee Paradise: Israel's Shas". Accessed 29/7/03, at http://www.arabia.com/newsfeed/article/english/0,14183,362949,00.html

Rabinow, Paul (ed.) 1984 The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought. Penguin. Auckland.

Ram, Uri 1995 The Changing Agenda of Israeli Sociology: Theory, Ideology and Identity. State University of New York Press. New York.

Ravitsky, Aviezer 2000 Religious and Secular Jews in Israel: A *Kulturkampf?* Israeli Democracy Institute. Jerusalem.

Reich, Bernard & Gershon R. Kieval 1991 Israeli Politics in the 1990s: Key Domestic and Foreign Policy Factors. Greenwood Press. New York.

Rejwan, Nissim 1999 Israel in Search of Identity: Reading the Formative Years. University Press of Florida. Gainesville.

Rubinstein, Amnon 1984 The Zionist Dream Revisited: From Herzl to Gush Emunim and Back. Shocken Books. New York.

Rutherford, J. (ed.) 1990 Identity: Community, Culture and Difference. Lawrence & Wishart. London.

Sachar, H. M. 1998 A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time. Alfred

A. Knopf. New York.

Said, Edward W. 1978 Orientalism. Penguin. Harmondsworth.

Sarna, Jonathan D & Jonathan Golden 2002 "The American Jewish Experience through the Nineteenth Century: Immigration and Acculturation". Accessed 3/7/02, at http://www.nhc.rtp.nc.us:8080/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/judaism.htm

Satori, Giovanni 1999 "The Party Effects of Electoral Systems". *Israel Studies*, 6,2:13-28.

Salmon, M.H. 1997 "Ethical Considerations in Anthropology and Archaeology or Relativism and Justice for All". *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 53,1:47-64.

Schama, S. 1995 Landscape and Memory. Harper Collins. London.

Scheper-Hughes, N. 1995 "The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology". *Current Anthropology*, 36,3:409-420.

Schiff, G.S. 1977 Tradition and Politics: The Religious Parties of Israel. Wayne State University Press. Detroit.

Schnall, David J. 1979 Radical Dissent in Contemporary Israeli Politics: Cracks in the Wall. Praeger. New York.

Schoenburg, Shira 2003 The Haskalah. Jewish Virtual Library. Accessed 27/2/04, at http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/Judaism/Haskalah.html

Scweid, Eliezer 1994 Democracy and Halakhah. Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs. Jerusalem.

Segal, Eliezer 2000 Enlightenment. University of Calgary Press. Accessed 19/7/01, at http://www.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/363_Transp/03_Enlightenment.html

Shachar, R. 1993 "The Attitudes of Israeli youth towards inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic marriage: 1975 and 1990". *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 16,4:683-695.

Shafir, Gershon & Yoav Peled 1998 "Citizenship and Stratification in an Ethnic Democracy".*Ethnic and Racial Studies: Aspects of Ethnicity in Israel*, 21,3:383-449.

Sharan, Shlomo & Ervin Birnbaum 1999 State and Religion in Israel: Why the Separation of Church and Religion is Inappropriate for Israel. ACPR Publishers. Shaarei Tikva. Israel.

Sharansky, Ira 1996 Rituals of Conflict: Religion. Politics and Public Policy in Israel. Lyne Reiner. London.

Sharot, S. 1982 Messianism. Mysticism. and Magic: A Sociological Analysis of Jewish Religious Movements. University of North Carolina Press. Chapel Hill.

Silberstein, Lawrence (ed.) 1993 Jewish Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective: Religion. Ideology and the Crisis of Modernity. New York University Press. New York

Silberstein, Lawrence J. 1999 The Postzionism Debates: Knowledge and Power in Israeli Culture. Routledge. New York. Chapter 4. Accessed 22/11/03, at http://pluto.mscc.huji.ac.il/~mskimmer/zion.htm. no page numbers.

Sivan, E. & M. Friedman (eds.) 1990 Religious Radicalism and Politics in the Middle East. State University of New York Press. New York.

Smith, Anthony D. 1991 National Identity. Penguin. London.

Smooha, Sammy 1987 Social Research on Jewish Ethnicity in Israel: 1948-1986. Haifa University Press. Haifa.

Sorkin, David 2000 The Berlin Haskala and German Religious Thought: Orphans of Knowledge. Vallentine Mitchell. London.

Spinoza, Benedict de 1997 A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works. Tr. & ed. by Edwin Curley. Princeton University Press. Princeton.

Sprinzak, E. & Larry Diamond (eds.) 1993 Israeli Democracy Under Stress. Lynne Reiner. Boulder.

State of Israel 1992a (Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty). Accessed 2/2/04, at http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/basic3_eng.htm

State of Israel 1992b (Basic Law: Freedom of Occupation). Accessed 21/1/04, at http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/basic5_eng.htm

State of Israel 1999 (Coalition Agreement for the Fifteenth Knesset Between the Prime Minister and One Israel Party and the Meretz Party). Accessed 9/2/04, at http://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/heb/coal_meretz.htm

State of Israel 2004 (Knesset Election Results). Accessed 14/1/04, at http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res.htm

Sullivan, J.L., M. Shamir & P. Walsh 1985 Political Tolerance in Context: Support for Unpopular Minorities in Israel, New Zealand and the United States. Westview Press. Boulder.

Taylor, Charles 1989 Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity. Harvard University Press. Cambridge.

Thoreau, Henry David 1993 Civil Disobedience and Other Essays. Dover. New York.

Trepp, L. 1982 Judaism: Development and Life. Wadsworth. Belmont.

Weingrod, A. 1965 Israel: Group Relations in a New Society. Pall Mall. London.

Westwood, J.N. 1984 The History of the Middle East Wars. Hamlyn. London.

Wicker, H-R. (ed.) 1997 Rethinking Nationalism and Ethnicity: The Struggle for Meaning and Order in Europe. Berg. Oxford.

Wistrich, Robert & David Ohana (eds.) 1995 The Shaping of Israeli Identity: Myth, Memory and Trauma. Frank Caas. London.

Wolff, K. 1962 "Surrender As a Response To Our Crisis". The Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 2:16-30.

Wolff, K. 1964 "Surrender and Community Study: The Study of Loma". In Reflections on Community Studies. ed. by A.Vidich, J. Bensman & J. Stein. J. Wiley & Sons. New York.

Wolff, K. 1974 Trying Sociology. John Wiley & Sons. New York.

Zerubavel, Yael 1995 Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition. University of Chicago Press. Chicago.

Zucker, N.L. & N.F. Zucker 1973 The Coming Crisis in Israel. Massachusetts Institute

of Technology Press. Cambridge.