**Dialectic Environmental Awareness Among Haredi Women in Marginal Groups: A case study from Bet Shemesh, Israel**

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**Abstract**

The seeds of the environmental discourse were planted in the 1960s. This global environmental movement has undertaken efforts over the years to stimulate worldwide public awareness of various ecological issues. Over the past two decades, the environmental cause has increasingly occupied an important place in Israel; environmental organizations have influenced public life, both in terms of policy decisions as well as the daily practices and habits of citizens. However, despite the ravages of the ecological crisis and the ever-growing body of environmental knowledge, it seems that certain segments of Israeli society, particularly the Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) population, are far from integrating and adopting environmental practices.

Israel’s Haredi population is perceived as a cultural group that does not hold the environmental cause close to its heart. Haredim account for 11 percent of the Israeli population and are comprised of many diverse subgroups. Within these groups, Haredi women hold significant potential for developing environmental awareness, since they have far-reaching influence in their families and communities. In recent years, the status of Haredi women has been shifting. There is a tension between women’s commitment to traditional roles and their increasing role as household breadwinners, which is transforming the community’s discourse and balances of power in many ways.

This study examines environmental awareness among Haredi women who belong to two marginal groups in Haredi society: newly religious, low-income Mizrahi families and middle-class, Anglo-Saxon new immigrants. It focuses on women from two distinctly different neighborhoods in the city of Bet Shemesh, Israel, which has become an attractive destination for the Haredi population in recent years. The halakhic patterns of action that these women sustain in their homes and, particularly, in the family kitchen, are examined in this study in order to discuss theoretical and practical issues of environment and sustainability. In the conclusions of this study, it is found that these women take dialectic positions within the environmental discourse, and that the tension between their various courses of actions, with regards to the environment and sustainability, are dynamic.