**Religious-Secular Multiculturalism – A Renewed Perspective on the Interrelation Between Religion, Secularism and Culture: Israel as a Test Case**

**Topic**

In many countries today, the relations between religious, traditionalist and secular citizens and institutions find themselves under renewed strain stemming from the widening dichotomy between religion and secularism over the past few decades. Individualization, on the one hand, and ongoing processes of globalization, on the other, have amplified the need for personal and communal identity, thus contributing to the rise in popularity of religions and traditionalist frameworks and lifestyles. Nevertheless, and despite the dissipation of the militant side of secularism, especially following the fall of Marxism and its various reincarnations, the secular lifestyle is still increasingly dominant. The present research examines these phenomena in the special context of Israel as a basis for proposing a concept of religious-secular multiculturalism that relies on updated definitions of religion and culture, in order to enable the easing of tensions and the creation of a bridge between the two poles of religion and secularism.

The State of Israel, defined legally as a Jewish and democratic state, perceives itself as the nation state of the Jewish people. Founded in 1948, it was the realization of the vision the Zionist movement had conceived in the last decade of the nineteenth century, with the express purpose of establishing a state for the Jewish people in the Land of Israel as a solution to the plight of Jews around the world and that of European Jewry in particular. The definition of Jewishness as a national identity was influenced by the emergence of modern nationalism in nineteenth-century Europe, which involved processes of general modernization and secularization. It provoked controversy among the Jews themselves between those who equated Jewishness with Orthodox religious Judaism and were not necessarily nationalist, and those who perceived it as an ethnic nationality. On the background of this dispute, Zionism, from its very beginnings, adopted a stance that did not content itself with defining Jewishness as an ethnic nationality but also did not accept the notion of the religious factions that joined the movement, for whom Jewishness was equated with Judaism and defined as a national religion (HaMizrahi). The approach espoused by Zionism defined Jewishness as an ethnically-grounded cultural nationalism that must be molded, developed and consolidated in light of the deep secularization crisis of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and as an answer to the deep assimilation processes of Jews in their respective environments. In Israel’s political and social reality, which has been shaped, among other things, by tools of political compromise (status quo) and parliamentary legislation, tensions between religion, nationalism and secularism have become acute points of ongoing friction. The concept of Jewishness-as-culture, shaped by secular Zionist figures with a deep affinity for Judaism such as Ahad Ha’am, Hayim Nahman Bialik, Chaim Weizmann, Martin Buber and others, has been perceived over the years as a distinctly secular idea and therefore understood by religious and traditionalist circles as a rival alternative to their conceptions of Jewishness. The current Israeli reality indicates that the concept of Jewishness-as-culture in Israel has failed to solidify a strong secular Israeli Jewish identity equivalent to the religious Jewish identity, as envisioned by its originators, and has likewise failed to serve as a bridge between religious, traditionalist and secular Jews. The assumption has always been that since the cultural definition of Jewishness is based on the value of human equality, it therefore has the power to propagate this value in society at large and reduce the exclusion of minority groups. Yet, in practice, the abovementioned failure has led to an intensified narrowing-down of Jewish nationalism in Israel to blatant ethnocentricity, on the one hand, and on the other hand, bolstered identification with religious and Messianic fundamentalism as an expression of Jewish nationalism.

The first part of the present research will focus on the Jewish people and the State of Israel, and will consist of three chapters, to be presented in further detail later on (a discussion of the history of ideas and the relevant sociological and anthropological research). The second part will be largely theoretical. Given the current stagnation of secularization theory alongside the ongoing prevalence of the secular lifestyle, the present paper aims to propose a general theory of religious-secular multiculturalism based on the discussion of the singular case of Israel to be presented in its first part. Our assumption is that this approach can contribute to alleviating tensions between religious, traditionalist and secular entities around the globe. (A discussion based on the fields of religious, cultural and secularization studies using various disciplinary and interdisciplinary tools: philosophy, sociology, anthropology and psychology of religion).

Due to the paper’s high degree of complexity, each stage of discussion to follow will include a presentation of the present state of research, preparatory work done, as well as theories and methods.

**Historical background and present state of research**

The ideas of eighteenth century Enlightenment, as well as the concept of culture that took shape in the 1770s in Central and Western Europe,[[1]](#footnote-1) were transformed in the socio-cultural reality of the nineteenth-century into nationalist and/or socialist secular ideologies that changed society. Nietzsche's proclamation that God is dead[[2]](#footnote-2) reflected the spirit of the time and tore the remaining shreds of religious appearances off the face of Christian Europe.[[3]](#footnote-3) The founders of sociology, Emil Durkheim and Max Weber, devoted major works to describing the process of Europe's disengagement from religion and its implications both in the formation of a civilian religion on the one hand and in the emergence of social differentiation that reflected the decline of established religion in most areas of life. The secularization thesis formulated at the beginning and questioned at the end of the twentieth century, argued that the processes of secularization were irreversible. The modern nationalism that swept through Europe in the nineteenth century led to the formation of new nation-states. At the same time, the socialist movements that emerged in the late nineteenth century and especially in the early twentieth century, culminating in communist revolutions in Russia, Eastern Europe, China and elsewhere, brought about far-reaching changes in terms of attitudes toward religion.

The encounter of the Jews with the various incarnations of modernity starting as far back as the late Middle Ages and continuing on into the Modern Era, led to different reactions.[[4]](#footnote-4) Much has been written in recent decades on the impact of nationalism and socialism on the integration of European Jews into their non-Jewish environments. The study of the Jewish Haskalah movement and the processes of Jewish secularization have sharpened our understanding of the secularizing factors present in Jewish society since the end of the eighteenth century.[[5]](#footnote-5)

From a religious (theological-philosophical) perspective, the secular rift within the Christian European world widened with the Kantian revolution, which had cut the ground from under Christianity’s religious dogma. The rise of science and technology also significantly contributed to a retreat from the Christian preference of spirit over matter. Despite the processes of religious internalization that took place in the Hassidic movement in parallel with the creation of the modern self in Western culture,[[6]](#footnote-6) more and more young Jews found themselves drawn to Jewish Haskalah, an offshoot of European Enlightenment.[[7]](#footnote-7) For these young people, their break with religion meant first and foremost the loss of faith in the idea of divine revelation as the basis of the religious law (embodied in Judaism in the concept of the Torah as descendent from heaven), and therefore likewise the end of religious commitment to Halakhic laws. Kant showed that the heteronomy he attributed to Jewish law made it unworthy and inferior, and must be replaced with a commitment to the autonomy of human reason as the legislator of morality. This perception was most influential in the German-speaking Jewish world, especially among the educated classes. Belief in divine law became impossible for Jewish intellectuals, despite the basis of their education being very much religious, and no less so for the masses of people who looked to progress and science as the products of intellectual reason, as opposed to religious thought where the rational and the irrational could coexist side by side. By the end of the nineteenth century, the complete rejection of religion by Marx and others was undoubtedly a catalyst in these processes.

Many Jews were swept up by the blowing winds of European nationalism, nurtured by the Romantic philosophy that contributed significantly to its crystallization, and identified with the national spirit of the peoples among whom they lived.[[8]](#footnote-8) However, as they started to notice the rise of a new secular and particularly virulent strain of anti-Semitism in the German-speaking sphere, a national secularized Jewish consciousness began to develop in parallel with ongoing processes of assimilation. Writings about the history of the Jews by the *Wissenschaft das Judentum* movement, including works by such authors as Jost, Graetz, and later Dubnow, made it possible to understand the Jewish religion as a product of historical developments that were also reflected in the religious sources. Exposure to fine literature that drew on medieval European folklore, emboldened Jewish authors to develop their own folkloristic style and write about their own culture, as evident in the writings of Mendele Mocher Sforim, Sholem Aleichem and I. L. Peretz. As many Jews liberated themselves from the religious way of life, especially in Eastern Europe, where most of them lived, they came to identify with the Haskalah’s definition of Jewishness-as-culture. Jews engaged in the development of literary, musical, and visual arts that reflected their secular and religious lives without commitment to the laws of the Halakhah and its authority.

In his latest book,[[9]](#footnote-9) Eliyahu Stern argues that the Jewish cultural shift in Eastern Europe was based on the revolution of ideas led by Jewish intellectuals in Eastern Europe in the 1870s. These intellectuals formulated a new conception of the Jewish people that transformed the notion of Judaism as a spiritual religious tradition into a material consciousness.[[10]](#footnote-10) The resulting theoretical infrastructure was shared by the members of Hibbat Zion and their successors, the secularized Zionists, as well as by the socialist (Bund) and cultural circles (led by the Jewish historian Simon Dubnow), which later also fed into various Jewish movements in the United States that not aspire to territorial Jewish nationalism.[[11]](#footnote-11) That being said, one of the key goals of the present research is to examine additional ideological points of origin, ones perhaps more closely related to the counter-Enlightenment, in particular the philosophical ideas proposed by Johann Gottfried Herder.[[12]](#footnote-12)

The consideration of the Bible in the modern Jewish thought of the second half of the nineteenth century has its roots in the Mendelssohnian turn toward scripture. While it expresses a longing for a more down-to-earth Judaism, it also reflects other formative factors. For example, the need for a text that would allow for a dialogue between the new Jews and the secular Christian culture that drew on the biblical text was a significant motive in Mendelssohn’s biblical works. There was a Dionysian element in this turn, from the Nietzschean point of view, in contrast to the Apollonian element that took over rabbinic Judaism with its tendency to over-rationalize. At the basis of the appeal to the Bible was, of course, the idea of renewing the Hebrew language, which was repressed in later Talmudic literature in favor of Aramaic. This element was dominant in the cultural pre-Zionist movement of Hibbat Zion, but marginal in the eyes of the Bundists and the Autonomists who chose Yiddish as the language of the Jewish people, to later trade it in for English in the United States.

It is in the context of these in-depth processes that one must understand the writings of Asher Ginzburg, known as Ahad Ha'am, an essayist and important literary editor in Odessa and one of the leaders of the Hibbat Zion movement operating in Russia before the founding of political Zionism by Theodor Herzl in Basel in 1896. According to Ahad Ha’am, the shaping and refinement of Jewishness as the modern culture of the Jewish people is not only an enterprise of paramount importance, but should also be the principal purpose of the Jewish epicenter the Zionist movement intended to establish in the Land of Israel.[[13]](#footnote-13) While Ahad Ha’am’s individual notion of Jewishness-as-culture is not the central topic of this study, it was key in charting the direction and path others would later develop in various forms, from the establishment of a Hebrew university and Hebrew art institutions, to Martin Buber’s non-Halakhic concept of religiosity. How were these perceptions different from the perceptions developed by intellectuals who were not interested in promoting territorial Jewish nationalism in general or in the Land of Israel in particular? To what extent did these steps toward establishing a Jewish culture shape and solidify the rift between religious and secular Jews, a rift that is evident today in Israeli society? Or is this rift conversely, to some extent, an expression of their failure? What is the nature of the different versions of the religious, nationalist and nationalist-religious conceptions of Judaism that have emerged over recent decades – for example, traditionalism, peoplehood, and multicultural pluralism – and how do they compare with the religious-secular multiculturalism proposed in the present research? These are the questions that will serve as our focal points of inquiry for the three chapters constituting the first part of this paper.

**Part one**

**Chapter one – A comparative historical-ideological analysis of the origins and evolution of the concept of Jewishness-as-culture in Jewish society at the end of the nineteenth – beginning of the twentieth centuries, and its various iterations including Zionism, Jewish socialism and cultural autonomy. The discussion will focus on the years preceding the establishment of the State of Israel (history of ideas)**

This chapter will begin by examining the roots of the concept of Jewishness-as-culture going back to the Enlightenment in general, and to German Counter-Enlightenment in particular,[[14]](#footnote-14) as well as the processes of secularization that European Jews underwent at the turn of the twentieth century. Our goal will be to investigate the elements of Jewishness-as-culture that were inspired by the concept of culture as formulated by European Enlightenment thinkers and by the theories of national culture as put forth by Herder and his successors. The vast amount of literature written about the history of biblical and Jewish studies (*Wissenschaft das Judentum*), as well as the cultural discourse of the Enlightenment movement will provide data that will enable us to reconsider the building blocks of Jewishness-as-culture in general and the particular notion of Jewishness-as-culture developed within the Zionist framework. We will examine the common elements and the differences between the Zionist perspective (territorial nationalism), and American reconstructionism, which drew its inspiration from Kaplan, as well as the more anti-territorial or conciliatory approaches such as the Bund and Dubnow’s Jewish Autonomism. These will be compared according to the following parameters: linguistic preference; attitude toward religious sources; sources of intellectual influence; attitude toward ethics and its origins in Judaism; perceived components of the culture; and attitude regarding the issue of statehood and Jewish law.

The concept of Jewish secularism bears explaining because both the spiritual Zionism championed by the likes of Ahad Ha’am and the Jewish culture of the Bundist and Autonomist circles were founded on secular concepts and the assumption that secular Judaism is a viable option. Orthodox Jewish thinkers and scholars, on the other hand, disagree and question its possibility to this very day.[[15]](#footnote-15) The vitality of Jewish secularist movements stems from the fact that they was promoted by Jewish public leaders and intellectuals who felt that, due to the general secularization processes they had undergone, they could no longer hold on to the Orthodox religious conceptions of Judaism as before. However, neither did they wish to be completely detached from the world of Jewish content that had shaped their Jewish identity despite its traditionalist infrastructure. From the point of view of this study, these movements actually refused to settle for a biological-ethnic definition of Jewish affiliation, as reflected directly or indirectly in Theodor Herzl's concept of the Jewish state.

According to Ahad Ha’am, the purpose of establishing a modern Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel was to establish a spiritual center for the Jews. In other words, the Jews who would settle in the Land of Israel would serve the spiritual cultural elite living there and form a modern Jewish culture that would ensure the continued existence of the Jewish people throughout the world despite the increasing secularization that had rendered Judaism no longer viable as a common infrastructure for the Jews as a people. The rationalism advocated by Ahad Ha'am is the rationalism of the Haskalah, but it is also influenced by the Romantic philosophy of Herder, Kant's rebellious disciple. Ahad Ha’am maintained that each nation has its own unique character. Accordingly, the Jewish people also have a unique national character whose core, according to Ahad Ha’am, is the moral element that emerges from biblical and Midrashic literature. In his view, the fundamental value this literature holds up above all others is the principle of justice. The special character of the national culture of the Jewish people therefore, according to Ahad Ha’am, is sensitivity to justice, rooted in biblical stories and laws. He expected this cultural element to be revealed through artistic work that drew on the academic and non-academic study of Jewish sources. There were different aspects to this approach. The champion of the cultural-artistic aspect was the Israeli national poet, Hayim Nahman Bialik. The cultural-spiritual aspect, based on Georg Simmel’s concept of religiosity, was spearheaded by the philosopher Martin Buber. In the U.S., the Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan founded an alternative religious movement called Reconstructionist Judaism, the spirit of which lives on in the United States to this day both in religious form (Arthur Green) and in the secular idea of peoplehood.

The alternative historical approaches that favored this Yiddish language, both that of the Bund and that of Dubnow's successors, the Autonomists, will be examined in light of the historical studies devoted to their analysis. This examination will provide us with much needed infrastructure based upon which the next two chapters will discuss the successes and failures of the cultural movement in Israel, and the alternatives currently offered to it.

**Chapter two – The successes and failures of the Jewishness-as-culture approach in the State of Israel as a nation state and its gradual decline toward Jewishness as an exclusively ethnicity-based national identity (sociological and ideological analysis)**

The historical discussion of the development of Jewishness-as-culture in the first chapter will serve as a background for our discussion of the place it occupies in the State of Israel. The present chapter will focus on the application of the concept of Jewishness-as-culture in Israel’s social and political reality – its partial successes, its limitations, and its failures since the establishment of the state to the present day.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Despite the claims that the cultural movement failed to garner any significant influence in Israel, the state of affairs is in fact far more complex. Some of the stipulations put forth by Ahad Ha’am and other likeminded thinkers were accepted by the entire Zionist public and their leaders, chief among them his demand that the Hebrew language should be reinstated as the language of the Jewish people and the Jewish state. However, while in the early stages of Zionism the Hebrew language was perceived as the cultural factor that united the Jewish nation in the Land of Israel, this perception became problematic the moment that the non-Jewish citizens of Israel, representing a quarter of the overall population, learned to speak the language as well as its Jewish citizens. In the original Zionist frame of thought, the revival of the Hebrew language became a cultural marker of the Jews in the Land of Israel, which effectively distinguished them from its Arab inhabitants, non-Jewish Europeans, and ultra-Orthodox non-Zionist Jews who spoke Yiddish. In the State of Israel, on the other hand, it is ethnic origin that has become the main criteria for Jewish nationality. It turns out that in practice, the Hebrew language in Israel became an expression of the common Israeliness shared by all its citizens regardless of ethnicity, creed or national affiliation. This reality, in our opinion, contributes to the rising tensions between Jews and non-Jews in Israel, and likewise makes ethnic origin the only common denominator of Jewishness. The tension between Jewishness as a nationality and Israeliness as the civic citizenship of different nationalities is revealed first and foremost at this juncture. On the other hand, half of the world’s Jewry, who reside outside of Israel, do not speak the Hebrew language. Thus, we can say that the revival of the Hebrew language as a key element in shaping the concept of Jewishness-as-culture and as the basis of modern Jewish nationalism fails in practice to be a significant factor in the Jewish consciousness of Jewish Israeli citizens.

Various questions are raised in light of this fundamental fact. What is the status of Jewishness-as-culture in the eyes of the religious populace, as opposed to the traditionalist or secular populaces in Israel? To what extent is the Hebrew language today perceived by Israeli Jews as a Jewish cultural commodity, and conversely as nothing more than the official language of the state? What is the stance of religious Jews for whom Hebrew is also the holy tongue, namely the language of prayer? What remaining elements of the perception of Jewishness-as-culture in Israel, beside the Hebrew language, provide a source of Jewish secular identity for secular and traditionalist Jews? For example, what is the status of the Bible – designated by the founders of the State of Israel as a foundational text common to all the Jews in Israel – in the eyes of secular Jews in Israel? What is its status among religious and ultra-Orthodox Jews? To what extent are contemporary Israeli culture, its world of values, the beautiful literature written in Israel, the poetry and music, the unique food, the holidays, and the state symbols perceived today as expressions of Israeli Jewish culture, or conversely as simply Israeli culture? Do secular and religious Jews differ in opinion on these matters?

In recent decades, a series of anthropological and sociological studies have been conducted in Israel with the aim of mapping the components of Israeli society and their attitudes toward Jewishness on issues of religion, tradition and secularism. Data gleaned from existing studies will be summarized in order to answer some of the questions we have raised. Those questions to which existing research fails to provide an answer will serve as impetus for the completion of a study using questionnaires and qualitative research, to be conducted with the help of professionals whose work will be funded by the financial support raised for this research, as detailed below.

**Jewishness-as-culture in the Israeli educational sphere:**

The main means through which the architects of Jewishness-as-culture have tried to assimilate the concept into Israeli society are the public schools and the national education system. This chapter will examine the changes that have taken place in the Israeli education system’s commitment to the perception of Jewishness-as-culture and their implications for understanding this perception’s place in Israeli society. To what extent do the official curricula of the Israeli Ministry of Education in general state education and in religious state education shape perceptions of Jewishness-as-culture and perceptions of Jewishness as synonymous with Orthodox Judaism? We will examine why the perception of these institutions and their students as inferior in terms of their Jewishness has taken root in Israeli consciousness, as opposed to the traditional religious perception of Judaism, which is increasingly perceived as more representative of Jewish existence. We will also discuss the questions of whether this feeling of inferiority stems from difficulties in establishing a tradition of Jewishness-as-culture to be shared by significant sections of Israeli society or whether it is the product of ideological weakness. Does it originate from the lack of permanence and long-standing tradition of alternative secular rituals versus the antiquity of religious rituals?

**Jewishness-as-culture in the legal sphere in Israel:**

A number of basic Israeli laws speak to the perception of Jewishness-as-culture in Israel. The Law of Return, Israel’s special immigration law that discriminates in favor of every Jew and grants them automatic citizenship by virtue of their Jewishness, is directly related to the subject of this study. In the Law of Return, which serves as an inversion of the Nuremberg Laws enacted by the Nazis in Germany, the definition of what determines a person’s Jewishness was made to hinge on ethnic biological criteria.[[17]](#footnote-17) On the other hand, the Human Dignity and Liberty Law, enacted about twenty years ago, explicitly stated that Israel is a Jewish and democratic state and provoked a barrage of literature about the significance of this unusual combination necessitating the unpacking of the cultural connotations of what it means to define a state as Jewish and democratic.[[18]](#footnote-18) Recently, Israel enacted the Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People Law which has very blatantly re-stoked the tensions between Jewishness as a nationality and Israeliness as the civic affiliation of all its citizens, regardless of religion, ethnicity or gender. Together, these two aforementioned laws sharpen the need to perform the clarification and redefinition that are the aims of the present research. Since the question of the Jewishness of the State of Israel as a Jewish democratic state has provoked vigorous controversy, any answers that are not based on the dichotomy of religion versus nationality are of great importance.[[19]](#footnote-19)

**The influence of the notion of Jewishness-as-culture on Israeli attitudes toward the Other**

The Jewish Halakha consciously preserved the distinction of religious Jews from their environment, in the spirit of the verse: “And I have set you apart from the nations” (Leviticus 20:26). Religious belief in the Israelites as the chosen people also adds to this tendency for self-segregation. Some religious thinkers interpret the “choice of Israel” as attesting to the innate superiority of the Jews and not as a moral destiny as, for example, the proponents of Jewishness-as-culture understood it. Has the concept of Jewishness-as-culture succeeded in dealing with this issue in the Israeli reality? Has it weakened or strengthened this tendency in the attitudes of the Jews in Israeli before and after the establishment of the state toward the non-Jewish residents of their country? Does the fact that the Jewishness-as-culture approach merges Jewish values and principles with the universal principles of European Enlightenment, moderate in secular Israeli society the natural tendency for seclusion, segregation and rejection found within religious Jewish circles? Has the expectation that among secular Jews exposed to the perception of Jewishness-as-culture the value of human equality would hold a higher status than among religious populations proven realistic? Or does the separatist-nationalist element still prevail within the conception of Jewishness-as-culture over the principle of human equality? Do contemporary cultural views, which are pluralistic in nature, reduce alienation and hostilities on a biological-ethnic basis and moderate the religious idea of divine selection and superiority? Our assumption is that the cultural approach has the power to promote cultural pluralism, to bridge the tensions between religious, traditionalist and secular individuals in a society, on the one hand, and, by their very pluralistic nature, to reduce racism and hostility to those belonging to other cultures, on the other. To what degree can we make the connection between racist outlooks, Jewish Orthodoxy (either of the ultra-Orthodox or the nationalist varieties), and the sense of distinction from and superiority to people from non-Jewish backgrounds among those who hold ethnic-nationalism positions as opposed to those espousing cultural-nationalism attitudes?

Participants in the study will be recruited via two hundred graduates of the Ofakim program at Tel Aviv University, a program which trains high school teachers who will go on to teach Jewishness-as-culture. The program is attended by graduates of secular, religious, traditionalist and even ultra-Orthodox schools. We will divide the alumni population into segments and ask each one to pass the questionnaire along to twenty people from the same cultural background as them. The questionnaire will be constructed and analyzed using statistical tools with the help of a researcher from the Tel Aviv University School of Education. We will examine the correlation between racist attitudes toward groups within Jewish society and toward the non-Jewish residents of the state, on the one hand, and the perception of Jewishness-as-culture in its classical form, on the other. The premise of the study is that anti-racism organizations in Israel rely on the perception of Jewishness-as-culture, yet the limitations of this perception’s influence are reflected in its relative inefficacy. An alternative possibility is that the Jewishness-as-culture notion in Israel contains hidden, or perhaps even overt assumptions regarding overall Jewish elitism or the elitism of specific groups within the Jewish people, which can promote racist tendencies.

**Chapter three – A discussion of the strengths, weaknesses and significance of contemporary alternatives to the concept of Jewishness-as-culture: Jewish pluralism, peoplehood, and traditionalism versus Judaism as religious-secular multiculturalism (Sociological and ideological analysis)**

Based on the issues that have arisen in recent decades, this chapter will explore the possible alternatives to the perception of Judaism as a religion (orthodoxy) emerging in Israel that are not identical to the concept of Jewishness-as-culture discussed in the previous two chapters. These are notions that seek to change both the sense of weakness of the secular Jewish identity as opposed to that of religious Jews, who feel unambiguously superior in this regard, and the openness to groups that hold non-Orthodox religious and cultural perceptions who participate in Israeli society.

a) Traditionalism:[[20]](#footnote-20) An approach promulgated in recent decades by Israelis who are in large part descendants of families who immigrated to Israel from Islamic countries. In their view, a large percentage of immigrants who had come to Israel from these particular countries perceive Judaism as a religious tradition to which they are not bound absolutely as religious law but with which they have a dynamic and selective relationship. The discussion of traditionality in this chapter will contribute to the clarification of the uniqueness of this approach both in light of the existing statistical studies and in light of the current literature produced by its proponents. The relation of the traditionalist approach to the cultural approach discussed above will also become clear in this part, specifically in light of the fact that defenders of the traditionalist way of life do not see themselves as secular, unlike the people of the Jewishness-as-culture camp who never attempted to hide their secularism.[[21]](#footnote-21)

b) Peoplehood:[[22]](#footnote-22) This definition of Judaism that has emerged over recent decades in the United States has also been discussed in Israel, especially in the educational and political contexts. What difficulties does it raise with the religious and cultural approaches? Why is there a need to shape it and to what extent can it influence the cultural approach? Is peoplehood a form of reductionist cultural nationalism that does not threaten American Jews’ affiliation to the American nation, and is therefore particularly suitable for them? Does it have a possible place in Israel, and if so, what is it? Can it be viewed as a reductionist iteration of Spiritual Zionism in the U.S. as put forth by Mordechai Kaplan?

c) Pluralism and multiculturalism:[[23]](#footnote-23) These notions, originally formulated in the United States and Canada, have made their way across to Israel in recent decades as possible means of correcting the lack of acceptance that exists between various groups that make up Israeli Jewish society. Pluralism has been adopted by moderate Orthodox religious circles as a way of accepting alternative religious movements such as Reform Judaism and Conservative Judaism , which have been rejected by the Orthodoxy and large sections of Israeli society (Shalom Hartman Institute).[[24]](#footnote-24) At the same time, multiculturalism has been adopted as a way of overcoming the discrimination and lack of acceptance experienced by Israeli members of Jewish communities of Middle Eastern, African, and Asian origins at the hands of Jews of European and American descent.[[25]](#footnote-25) What are the advantages and what are the limitations of this approach? Is the critique of multiculturalism in the world also valid in the case of Israel?

d) Religious-secular multiculturalism:[[26]](#footnote-26) The final discussion we will undertake in this chapter will touch on the budding notion of Jewishness as a religious-secular multiculturalism and its advantages as a means of easing secular-religious tensions over the perception of Jewishness-as-culture and the other alternative approaches presented above. Unlike Jewishness-as-culture, this conception proposes a new understanding of the concepts of culture and religion as we shall clarify below. Instead of viewing culture as innately superior to religion, religious-secular multiculturalism recognizes partial, non-absolute values that can be attributed to both culture and religion. This approach assumes the inclusion of religion in the concept of culture without reducing religion to culture in recognition of the unique elements of religion. Jewish society is heterogeneous both in terms of the cultural background of the Jews who originate from different and diverse countries, and in terms of their relationship with Judaism as a religion and a religious tradition. Jews from Islamic, Asian, European and American countries, having been raised in different cultures, are all split on the question of whether Judaism should be viewed as a religious or cultural – and therefore also secular – phenomenon. This question completely cuts across the boundaries of cultural background. Jewish religious-secular multiculturalism seeks to replace conceptions of Jewishness as a culture or as a religion with an approach that, similarly to multicultural pluralism, sees the idea of culture as an infrastructural concept, without abolishing the particularity of the religious notions contained within it.

This discussion will also serve as the pragmatic basis for the second part of the present study, which lays out a general theory of religious-secular multiculturalism.

**Part two**

**Theory of religious-secular multiculturalism as a way of normalizing the relations between religiousness and secularism today (a discussion based in the fields of religious, cultural and secularization studies using various disciplinary and interdisciplinary tools: philosophy, sociology, anthropology and psychology of religion)**

The Israeli-Jewish case illustrates the difficulty that many religious people experience faced with the original elitist meaning given to the concept of culture by the Enlightenment. It would be a highly dubious claim to say that the multiculturalism movement, which was greatly influenced by the ostensibly objective and non-judgmental anthropological research of the twentieth century, has managed to rid itself completely of the value superiority attached to the original term.[[27]](#footnote-27) The theory to be developed in this section assumes that the solution lies not in artificially displacing value judgments, which are an integral part of human consciousness, but in developing the ability to appreciate the unique specificity of each of the phenomena discussed (secular culture versus religious and traditionalist culture). One may appreciate and accept a cultural phenomenon while retaining a critical view of it, even if it is not overt. The anthropological study of culture, which reached the height of its popularity in the middle of the twentieth century, brought about a profound change in the understanding culture as it was conceived in Europe since the Enlightenment. From a rational concept that had been granted value priority over the concept of religion, in the hands of anthropologists culture became a descriptive concept that assumes a parallel and equivalent existence of different cultures.[[28]](#footnote-28) This upheaval also underlies the emergence of the concept of multiculturalism and the processes that led to the introduction of multiculturalism as a key to resolving cultural tensions created in different countries due to waves of incoming immigrants from different cultural and religious backgrounds.[[29]](#footnote-29) Since the rise of the multiculturalism approach in the early 2000s, it has been presented with a number of critical objections, some of which have been mentioned above.[[30]](#footnote-30) The theory of religious-secular multiculturalism to be developed in this section, proposes a multiculturalism that distinguishes between secular, traditional and religious cultures from an angle that seeks to highlight common denominators as well as significant non-mutually-reducible differences. This approach segments culture not latitudinally, i.e. cultures whose source of differences is geographical in nature (even different cultural groups that exist today in the same geographical space, such as in the United States, differ from each other in terms of their historical geographical origins), but longitudinally. That is to say, each geographically defined cultural group can itself be segmented into groups along the cultural lines of religiousness, traditionalism or secularism. The theory of religious-secular multiculturalism necessitates a reformulation of both the concept of culture and the concept of religion. The concept of culture assumes a basic identity with secularism, since it is not possible to imagine secular characteristics that are outside of culture. The concept of religion requires a reexamination focusing on the distinction between the cultural elements of religion and the uniquely religious elements that can be identified across different religions (even if not all elements appear in all religions). The latter elements, in other words, would be components of religious life that cannot be simply reduced to secular culture. That is not to say that these elements cannot be translated into secular language, but that they are ostensibly non-essential from the point of view of secular culture.

The following are the six characteristics of culture essential for understanding the interrelations between culture and religion.

1. Identity. Religious and traditional affiliation reflects the deep yearning for identity and group affiliation in a globalized world that threatens to blur all lines of distinction, no less than that attributed to cultural groups outside of religious contexts. The new concept of culture recognizes the importance of the need for identity and belonging experienced by people all over the world, and therefore any form of belonging that gives people a meaningful identity must be granted recognition and legitimacy regardless of its actual content.[[31]](#footnote-31)

2. Myth and meaning. The study of myth has undergone significant evolution over the last century and has led to different insights from those characteristic of the early scholars of myth, who saw it as an irrational religious phenomenon of the past. Contemporary perspectives see myth as a way of conferring meaning and as a mediator between nature and culture.[[32]](#footnote-32) This outlook places religious myths on equal footing with the secular myths of modern times, myths that serve nationalism, socialism and Marxism, on the one hand, and capitalism, scientific-technological progress and the state, on the other.[[33]](#footnote-33)

3. Power of authority and social class construction. Many studies in the twentieth century have contributed to an understanding of the mechanisms of power and control in human culture and their significance. It is beyond the scope of the present paper to outline the roots of these studies, from Spinoza’s *Theologico-Political Treatise*,[[34]](#footnote-34) through Nietzsche's *Will to Power*, to the writings of Foucault. Despite the mystification that religious systems impose on the elements of power and authority contained within them, there is no doubt that the desire for control originates in human psychology and is common to the whole of human culture, including religious phenomena.

4. Ritualism. Developments in the field of ritual studies over the last century have also contributed to the understanding of the biological and psychological roots of ritual in human life. They have tempered the sharp distinction drawn by nineteenth century thinkers between religion as characterized by an intensely ritualistic lifestyle and secular life which was supposedly devoid of ritual altogether. Since Durkheim laid out the need for ritual as a means of creating social cohesion in modern civil society, psychoanalysis has revealed the role of personal ritual in as a way of dealing with neuroses, and increased awareness of the existence of secular rituals in the life of the individual and society in every culture.

5. Establishing order through legislation and the canonization of foundational texts. The religious phenomenon is characterized by oral or written regimentation not only of the community’s social life but also of the individual’s daily life. The literature that establishes this legal order gains a canonical status conferred on it in the religious system via sanctification. Despite the tendency of modern secular legal systems to reduce their scope of legislation to the public sphere, as opposed to religious law, which also concerns itself with the private sphere, the common cultural denominator between religious and secular legal systems and the canonization of their foundational books or constitutions cannot be denied.

6. Liminality. Victor Turner’s anthropological writings revealed the importance of liminal states as they are reflected, for example, in religious rites of passage. Awareness of the social role of liminal states reveals the importance of transitional spaces in general culture as well. It contributes to the understanding of secular cultural phenomena such as the Hippie rebellion,[[35]](#footnote-35) which anticipated many liminal phenomena that continue to exist in Western youth culture today. The concept of culture contains such liminal phenomena as sports games, and mass art and entertainment events in parallel with religious ceremonies that also take place in distinctly liminal fields, despite the obvious differences between them.

The concept of religion as formulated in Europe has received much criticism in recent decades. This study assumes that these critiques should not be accepted wholesale even though it is of great importance to review them and take them seriously.[[36]](#footnote-36) One of the main arguments against it maintains that the European concept of religion is a product Judeo-Christian culture, and as such it tends to extend its culture-specific notions to phenomena that do not fit within their definitions. This is a serious drawback that limits our ability to talk about a general religion whose definitions would be applicable to religious phenomena in different parts of the world. Unfortunately we cannot discuss this complex question at length within the scope of the present paper. The points I shall present briefly below do not pertain to all religious phenomena, either in the East or in the West, and yet it can be fruitful to discuss the particularity of the religious phenomenon in general terms. Some of the points distinctly correspond to certain religious phenomena, while others are more relevant to different phenomena. In the twentieth century there was a boom of religious theories that attempted to define religion by reducing in to one of the general fields of culture: society, economics, psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology and the like. Prominent figures in this movement included Tylor and Frazer, Freud, Durkheim, Marx, and to a different extent Weber, Evans Pritchard and even Geertz.[[37]](#footnote-37) Our discussion of the concept of religion, on the other hand, means to point out aspects that distinguish the religious phenomenon. The following elements are not perceived as essential to the existence of secular culture, which makes them fitting markers of the particularity of the religious phenomenon.

1. The religious experience. In his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*,[[38]](#footnote-38) William James made a clear distinction between institutionalized religion and personal religion, which corresponds to Simmel's distinction between religion and religiosity. This idea undoubtedly laid the foundations for the currently accepted distinction between religion and spirituality. However, beyond that, James maintained that the nature of institutionalized religion could be equated with that of secular political institutions and the like, while the characteristics of the religious experience were unique and different from the secular experience. It can be argued that without these unique experiences or part of them, a religion cannot claim to be a religion, even though some of these experiences also manifest themselves in the secularized world that has ostensibly freed itself from religious dogma. According to Rudolf Otto, the uniquely religious experience is irrationally numinous;[[39]](#footnote-39)James, on the other hand, argues that religious experience can be rationally formulated, but contains at its core an element of a different kind of experience, one that cannot be fully verbally abstracted. The nature of this experience will also be discussed here from other perspectives.

2. Dissatisfaction with immanence and longing for transcendence. One of the central characteristics of secularism involves the transition from the religious focus – especially in monotheistic religions – on the transcendent deity to a focus on one’s immanent existence within the world. It was the Kantian revolution in the late eighteenth century that brought about an acknowledgement of the human inability to break beyond the limits of human consciousness. Since in Eastern religions, the focus of religiosity is on the immanent, and in the Western world, religious existentialism has recognized the limitations of Kantian philosophy, the dissatisfaction with immanence also includes the longing for transcendence within the immanent world, which characterizes the entire phenomenon of religion in general.[[40]](#footnote-40)

3. Aspiration to surpass the individual self. Different religions pose various challenges to their believers that force them to go beyond the limits of satisfying their own human existence and to strive to surpass them. The desire for the optimum utilization of human abilities is typical of modern secular culture and is understood in terms of self-realization. Religious thinking, on the other hand, poses challenges formulated in terms of transcendence of the human self. Faced with the tantalizing dimension of these challenges, believers are comforted by the assurances of grace and divine providence; however there is also a unique mechanism of personal elevation in the very desire to surpass the self.

4. Breaking up of routine via the sanctification of time, space and literature. Rudolf Otto, Mircea Eliade and others have insisted on the uniqueness of religious holiness,[[41]](#footnote-41) which is independent of the moral holiness added on by monotheistic religions, and which exists of course in secular culture as well. The importance of religious sanctity, among other things, is in its ability to break up the secular continuum of time and space, and thereby imbuing life with an added dimension and a longing to return to the beginning, to a world unspoiled by man.

5. Giving ultimate meaning to affirmation of life regardless of circumstances. Friedrich Nietzsche, who was mistakenly proclaimed by many to be the philosopher of nihilism, in fact warned his readers against the nihilism of modernity and insisted on the need to affirm human life. His main criticism was toward Christianity which traded in the affirmation of life in this world for glorification of life in the next world. Despite this critique, Christianity, which focuses on the redemption of the individual soul, even if it is at the expense of the quality of their life in this world, remains true to the religious principle of giving ultimate meaning to human life through religious belief. Not every religion affirms life in this world, but giving ultimate meaning to human life in different ways is a common denominator for most of the world’s religions.

6. Longing for personal and social redress. One of the specific attributes common to many religions is the consciousness of sin and guilt described by Freudian psychology as the source of religion but also as the source of unnecessary human suffering. However, looking at consciousness of sin as an expression of the desire to correct what is wrong with the world puts the phenomenon in a different light. It seems that modern secular culture, founded in the wake of the scientific revolution on descriptivism and the avoidance of judgment, has intensified the human penchant for individual indifference to flaws in our economic, political and social systems. Despite Karl Marx’s important critique of religion’s responsibility for perpetuating economic injustice, Marx himself was most likely nourished by a latent Messianic longing to fix the world, which he channeled into a utopian economic worldview. Despite our psychological awareness of the megalomania often disguised in the attempts of various religious figures to fix the world, the failure of Marxism had the inverse effect of rekindling admiration toward the restorative element of religious thought.

We assume, like Michael Walzer,[[42]](#footnote-42) that different countries undergo somewhat similar processes of evolving tensions between religion and secularism and therefore there is a point in comparing them. Unlike Walzer, however, we assume that because of the vast differences that exist between places and cultures in terms of their conceptions of religion and secularism, one must be careful to avoid overly crude generalizations that obscure the significance of these differences. In this study, we have employed a different process, by extrapolating an individual case (the test case of Israel) to a theory formulated in terms that strive to do away as much as possible with the local attributes of the test case so that they can apply to as many cases as possible despite the differences between them. The general characteristics of culture and of the singular phenomenon of religion within it, allow for modularity in examining the fit between the theory and the specific case. Such a theory will be formulated out of an awareness of the disparity between the specific and the general, and will require in its application an examination of local data, which must always be taken into account. Furthermore, in our opinion, the fear that a value discussion might violate the principle of equality should be treated with suspicion. More often than not, this fear is fueled by a desire to avoid value discussions, since, in practice, the tendency to view Western Enlightenment culture as intrinsically superior has not been eradicated from the academic world. Is it strictly necessary to avoid value discussions for the sake of tolerance and making space for the other? The new thinking underlying the religious-secular multicultural approach assumes that the relative values of each group must be considered in order to sustain mutual cross-fertilization while recognizing limitations and costs. The value discussion is legitimate because it is conditioned on the acceptance of the principle of equality as a necessary starting point for its very existence. It is essential for the prevention of the paralysis involved in absolute descriptivism, which prefers to avoid evaluating the unique contributions to human life found in both the religious and the secular cultural phenomena. The basic premise of this study is that the proposed approach would allow for a more dignified co-existence of religious, traditionalist and secular communities and would even encourage a more significant exchange of essential values between religious and secular groups to bring about a deeper cross-fertilization of ideas. In our opinion, this study will have broad implications in the field of relations between religious, traditionalist and secular communities. It may potentially be used to plant the seeds of resolution in the soil of sharp political conflict caused by the secular-religious dichotomy that separates liberal states from religious states, even in such cases as Iran.

**Plan of Procedure with time schedule**

**Proposed staff**

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