

**Education, Religion and National Identity in Israel: The Politicisation of Religious
Values in Israel's Formal and Informal Education System**

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Abstract

The present study uses the school system in Israel as a microcosm and a lens through which to understand the wider divisions that exist in Israeli society and how these have developed in recent years. The research is concerned primarily with the growing divide between religious and secular Jews in Israel and the diverse perceptions of Judaism and Jewish identity that exists among Jewish Israelis. Indeed, the intense and ongoing debate about the nature of Jewish identity is also central to the battle that is taking place around educational issues in Israel.

The study is based on fieldwork carried out in Israel during January and February 2017, alongside analysis of news sources, government and non-governmental reports, and educational materials. The research addresses the religious and nationalistic approach to citizenship in Israel as promoted through civic education in state secular schools, as well as the increasing emphasis on 'Jewish identity' through intensified religious/Jewish studies in these schools. Whereas existing research tends to deal with these subjects separately, this study analyses the two subjects together, thus providing a more holistic analysis of the intersection between education, religion and nationalism in Israel. Crucially, through applying this methodology, the research reveals the central drive by key officials within the Ministry of Education to shape state secular education to reflect a religious and nationalistic worldview. The primary data is particularly significant in uncovering the Ministry of Education's strategy across the curriculum, and refuting the claims

of government officials that only minor changes are being made to the state secular school system.

The research thus demonstrates how the complex relationship between religion and nationalism in Israel has been exploited by the Ministry of Education to introduce religious and nationalistic policies that reflect the ideological agendas of right-wing parties.

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Glossary

Aliyah (plural **Aliyot**): Successive waves of modern Jewish immigration to Palestine from the 1880s onwards.

Bnei Akiva: The main religious Zionist youth movement.

Gush Emunim: Far-right non-parliamentary religious Zionist settlement movement.

Hadata: Hebrew term used to describe the religionisation process that is taking place in Israeli society.

Hadlata: Hebrew term used to highlight the nationalistic elements that have also become a prominent part of the wider religionisation process in Israeli society.

Halacha: Jewish religious law.

Hand in Hand Schools: Network of Jewish-Arab integrated bilingual schools and organised communities run by Hand in Hand Centre for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel.

Haskala: Jewish Enlightenment.

Im Tirtzu: Right-wing Zionist non-governmental organisation.

Keshet Schools: System of schools that provide education for diverse religious and secular populations in Israel.

Maskilim (singular **Maskil**): Term used to identify followers of the *Haskala* movement.

Meitarim Schools: System of schools providing integrated Jewish pluralistic democratic education for religious and secular students in Israel run by the Meitarim Network for Inclusive Jewish Education.

Mizrachi: The first established religious-political Zionist movement.

TALI (Hebrew acronym and short for 'enrichment of Jewish studies'): The TALI network of schools offer an enhanced programme of Jewish studies with a Conservative, rather than an Orthodox, approach to Judaism.

Yeshiva (plural **yeshivot**): School for advanced Jewish religious studies.

Yishuv: Pre-state Jewish community in Palestine.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Research

The main focus of the thesis is on the religious and nationalistic approach to citizenship in Israel as promoted through civic education in state secular schools, as well as on the increasing emphasis on 'Jewish identity' through intensified religious/Jewish studies¹ in these schools.² The study uses the school system in Israel as a microcosm and a lens through which to understand the wider divisions that exist in Israeli society and how these have developed in recent years. Since the State of Israel was established in 1948, education has been considered, by the public as well as educators and policy makers, a key feature in creating a unified nation from a diverse mix of people from far-flung communities. However, in recent years, the religious/secular divide in particular has been growing and continues to impact the education system in Israel. The research, therefore, also addresses the growing divide between religious and secular sections of Israeli society and the related Jewish/democratic debate which is a prominent feature of

¹ Religious studies is used in the present study to refer to the teaching of Bible/Torah and Judaism, analysis of which is provided in Chapters 2 and 3. The term Jewish studies is used to refer to the separate subject that was introduced into state secular schools during the 2000s. The curriculum and content of the subject, along with the specific name ascribed to it, has changed over the years depending on the ideology of the Minister of Education of the time. Civic education is used throughout to refer to the formal civic education curriculum within Israel's state secular schools. The official name for the subject in Israel is 'civics' (*ezrahut*), hence the use also of the terms civics/civics curriculum. Specific details of both subjects and the significant changes that have been made to the curriculum of these subjects are analysed in detail in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

² Although the official names for the two state systems are 'state' (*mamlachti*) and 'state religious' (*malmachti dati*), the state (*mamlachti*) stream has become identified and commonly labelled as state secular education. The latter will thus be used throughout the study to refer to 'non-religious' state schools. The structure of the education system is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

controversy in Israel.³ Based on secondary research as well as field research, the study provides a religious studies analysis of the socio-political situation in Israeli society, highlighting the complex and contested role of religion as a vehicle for ideology in Israel.⁴

Background/Context of the Research

The Palestine-Israel conflict is one of the most complex, enduring and seemingly intractable conflicts of modern times. It is central in the international relations of the Middle East and continues to threaten peace in the region. At the core of the conflict are the claims of both the Jewish and Palestinian national movements to the land of Palestine,⁵ but attempts to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict are complicated by, among other things, inter-Arab relations and by the involvement of major world powers.⁶ Numerous militant terrorist groups and also governments

³ The Jewish/democratic debate centres on the relationship between the 'Jewish' and 'democratic' features of the state, which are seen as either conflicting or compatible principles.

⁴ The secondary research includes analysis of government and non-governmental reports, news sources and educational materials — which complements the primary data gathered from interviews.

⁵ 'Palestine' is used here to refer to historical Palestine that existed before the State of Israel was established in 1948. Whilst there is no internationally recognised State of Palestine today, the declared Palestinian goal is to establish a Palestinian state in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem.

⁶ US foreign policy has had, and continues to have, a significant impact on the trajectory of the Palestine-Israel conflict, providing Israel with billions of dollars in grants and loans, military assistance and continuing political support, bolstered by the Christian Zionists in Congress as well as the pro-Israeli lobby, American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). J. J., Mearsheimer and S. M. Walt, 'The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy', *Middle East Policy*, 13.3 (2006), 29-87 (pp. 30-31); N. Chomsky, 'The Charade of Israeli-Palestinian Talks' *truthout*, 6 December 2010, <http://www.Chomsky.info/articles/20101206.htm> [accessed 4 June 2018]; A. Shlaim, 'The Rise and Fall of the Oslo Peace Process', in *International Relations of the Middle East*, ed. by L. Fawcett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 241-61; C. Chapman, *Whose Promised Land: The Continuing Conflict Over Israel and Palestine* (Oxford: Lion Books, 2015); J. Frieden, 'The Root

seeking legitimacy place the Palestine-Israel conflict at the forefront of their agenda. Moreover, the continuing failures to resolve the Palestinian question have served to mobilise Arab and, more generally, Muslim opinion effecting a ‘West versus Islam’ opposition (certainly in some media depictions).⁷

The Middle East is unique in that it is the birthplace of all three Abrahamic religions. Even for Jews and Palestinians who do not identify as traditional or observant, religious tradition remains fundamental to their identities and these religious identities are often drawn into conflict and violence.⁸ Moreover, the religious dimensions of the Palestine-Israel conflict often serve to intensify the conflict as religious traditions are invoked to justify and support nationalistic claims on both sides.⁹ The focus of my study, however, is on the role of Zionism and the increasingly religious overtones that are used to support Jewish nationalism in Israel. Zionism has used religion to its advantage, mobilising religious symbols, rituals and sacred texts to justify nationalist claims, ethnic division and, at times,

Causes of Enduring Conflict’, in *Israel and Palestine: Alternative Perspectives on Statehood*, ed. by J. Ehrenberg and Y. Peled (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), pp. 63-76.

⁷ M. Litvak, ‘The Islamisation of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: The Case of Hamas’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 34.1 (1998), 148-163; K. Aarabi, ‘The Fundamentals of Iran’s Islamic Revolution’, *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*, 11 February 2019, <https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/fundamentals-irans-islamic-revolution> [accessed 26 June 2019].

⁸ Y. Landau, ‘Healing the Holy Land: Interreligious Peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine’, *United States Institute for Peace*, 2003, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/pwks51.pdf> [accessed 3 June 2019]. Given the significant influence religion continues to have on the Palestine-Israel conflict, Yehezkel Landau highlights the potentially important role religious leaders can play by encouraging cooperation between religious communities. It is important to note, however, that religious figures and leaders have also contributed to the conflict — justifying their actions with religious language.

⁹ *Ibid*; M. Abu-Nimer, ‘Religion, Dialogue, and Non-Violent Actions in Palestinian-Israeli Conflict’, *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 17.3 (2004), 491-511 (p. 496). Mohammed Abu-Nimer also highlights the potential power of interreligious organisations and initiatives to promote understanding between people of different faith and thus ease tensions on the ground. Abu-Nimer suggests that there is also a need for ‘a joint non-violent resistance movement’ working alongside interfaith efforts in order to provide political and religious solutions to counter violence in the region.

violence against Palestinians. The 1967 War¹⁰ provided the impetus for the emergence of Zionist religious radicalism in Israel and since that time Zionist ideology has gradually shifted until its most pronounced expressions in Israeli society have become overtly religious. Religious and theological considerations now form an integral part of the Zionist discourse.¹¹

The Palestine-Israel conflict continues to fester as a chronic source of humiliation, radicalisation and destabilisation in the Arab world. Moreover, given not only the persistence of sudden eruptions of violent events but also the immense global impact of the conflict, it is vital that intensive multi-disciplinary and up-to-date research is conducted in the region so that the complex issues involved continue to be responsibly investigated. Toward this endeavour, my study first synthesises existing research on both the immediate historical context and the religio-political currents surrounding education in Israel. Secondly, it provides direct insights from teachers, academics, Ministry of Education officials, journalists and politicians, obtained through field research and, thirdly, it navigates the abundance of polemical voices and education-related sources in the media and in the public sphere, particularly those using religious language and imagery in their ideological discourse.

¹⁰ The 1967 War refers to the war that took place in June 1967 between Israel and the neighbouring states of Egypt, Jordan and Syria. The conflict is also known as the Six-Day War, the June War or the Third Arab-Israeli War.

¹¹ N. Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians: The Politics of Expansion* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 105; M. Prior, 'Zionism and the Challenge of Historical Truth and Morality', in *Speaking the Truth: Zionism, Israel, and Occupation*, ed. by M. Prior (Massachusetts: Olive Branch Press, 2005), pp. 13-51 (p. 38). The reasons for the shift in the relationship between religion and nation in Israel are discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

Whilst my study focuses on the relationship between education, religion and national identity *in Israel*, the analysis is relevant in informing an understanding of comparable processes in other political/international contexts. Religion continues to be a powerful contributory factor in conflicts throughout the world and nationalism has been central to international politics particularly since the beginning of the twentieth century. Indeed, in the twenty-first century wars fought around the question of national and religious difference are becoming increasingly prevalent.¹² It is therefore essential for scholars in religious studies to engage with the issues of religion, peace and conflict in a way that offers a sustained analysis and can be included in the dialogue which takes place between the academy and the political sphere.¹³ One of the ways this can be done is through engaging in a multi-disciplinary approach and methodology, which is why my study incorporates historical, political as well as cultural perspectives into the religious studies analysis of contemporary society in Israel.

My study is also significant in highlighting how the changes to the civics and Jewish studies curriculum in state secular schools in recent years reflects the Ministry of Education's right-wing religio-nationalistic ideology — uncovering many developments which are not fully transparent or easily accessible to the public. The

¹² J. Fox, 'The Rise of Religious Nationalism and Conflict: Ethnic Conflict and Revolutionary Wars, 1945-2001', *Journal of Peace Research*, 41.6 (2004), 715-731.

¹³ There has been growing awareness of the potential benefits of including religious institutions and their members in diplomatic efforts alongside formal political and economic diplomacy to build lasting reconciliation in conflict-affected societies. Particularly since the attacks of 11 September 2001 in the US, there has been an increased interest in Interfaith dialogue (IFD), which encourages dialogue between people of different faiths in an attempt to aid mutual understanding and/or co-operation between peoples in conflict-affected regions — with the potential to contribute to peacemaking and reconciliation. M. Abu-Nimer, A. I. Khoury and E. Welty, *Unity in Diversity: Interfaith Dialogue in the Middle East* (Washington DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2007).

relevance and significance of the subject that my research sets out to investigate is highlighted further by the dramatic public debate which began to unfold in 2016 in response to the changes to both civics and the Jewish studies curriculum, which were announced as I was conducting my research. The Israeli news media, a key site for religious debates and conflict, has thus provided an additional and invaluable source of information, enabling my study to engage with events as they unfolded on the ground — adding further to the timeliness of my research.

My research explores the complex relationship between religion and nationalism in Israel and, importantly, how this relationship has developed over time. The study traces the major transitions that have occurred in Zionist ideology which have impacted the relationship between religious and secular sections of Israeli society. These developments also shed light on the intense and ongoing debate in Israeli society about the nature of Jewish identity — which is also central to the battle that is taking place around educational issues in Israel. The following discussion will, however, first locate my study within a wider setting by engaging with the broader academic discussion on the relationship between education, religion and national identity.

Education, Religion and Nationalism

Religious nationalism has been used by various state governments, both past and present, around the world, to define national identity, with the education system serving as the most effective state mechanism to promote and spread nationalist

religious ideologies.¹⁴ Given the complexity of the interaction between these three key concepts — education, religion and national identity — it is necessary at this point to provide a brief exploration of the terms and their usage in the academic literature.

Debates in academia around the conception of nationalism — and the related concepts of nation, national identity and national consciousness — are both complex and passionate. Following the early scholar of nationalism Hans Kohn,¹⁵ Herbert C. Kelman provides a useful description of nationalism as the ideology of

¹⁴ M. D. Barr and A. R. Govindasamy, 'The Islamisation of Malaysia: Religious Nationalism in the Service of Ethnonationalism', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 64.3 (2010), 293-311; E. Zambeta, 'Religion and National Identity in Greek Education', *Intercultural Education*, 11.2 (2000), 145-156; M. Lall, 'Educate to Hate: The Use of Education in the Creation of Antagonistic National Identities in India and Pakistan', *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 38.1 (2008), 103-119 (p. 104). Studies focussing on education and national identity in Pakistan and India are pertinent in relation to my study as, like Israel, these societies have also struggled to resolve socio-political and religious tensions since gaining independence from Britain, with each witnessing periodic eruption of nationalist passions based on ethnicity and religion. Turkey also provides a particularly interesting case in relation to Israel and the relationship between religion and national identity — given that the Republic of Turkey was founded on strict secularist principles but during the last decades has seen political Islam gain significant political power by promoting its interpretation of Turkish national identity. E. F. Keyman and T. Kanci, 'A Tale of Ambiguity: Citizenship and Democracy in Turkey', *Nations and Nationalism*, 17.2 (2011), 318-336. The main focus of Emin Fuat Keyman and Tuba Kanci's study is on the ambiguities in the relationship between Turkish nationalism and citizenship/democracy in Turkey. The article highlights the swings between ethno-centric and civic-political understandings of citizenship in Turkey and how these oscillations in nationalism coincide with the ruptures that characterise the making of modern Turkey — modernisation, democratisation, globalisation and europeanisation. Significantly, in relation to my research, Keyman and Kanci's study maps the oscillations in Turkish nationalism through the analysis of school textbooks and curricula.

¹⁵ H. Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background* (London: Macmillan, 1944). In this seminal work, Kohn analyses the dichotomy which he identifies between Western nationalism and Eastern (or non-Western) nationalism — making the distinction between civic-liberal Western nationalism and ethnic-illiberal Eastern nationalism. Kohn's distinction between 'civic Western' and 'ethnic Eastern' nationalisms has been criticised for being too simplistic and ignoring the nuances within each nation and each nationalism — where there is likely to be a mix of both civic and ethnic elements of national identity. Kohn's typology nevertheless remains influential within academic discourse. A. D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991); B. Yack, 'The Myth of the Civic Nation', *Critical Review*, 10.2 (1996), 193-211; D. Brown, 'Are There Good and Bad Nationalisms?', *Nations and Nationalism*, 5.2 (1999), 281-302; R. Brubaker, 'National Minorities, Nationalising States, and External Homelands in the New Europe', *Daedalus*, 124.2 (1995), 107-132.

the modern nation state which 'provides a justification for the existence of a state defining a particular population, and that prescribes the relationship of the individual to that state'.¹⁶ Nationalism thus draws heavily on patriotism to instil a sense of national identity that corresponds to the state and political community it represents.¹⁷ In the present study, nationalist identity is understood as 'a form of national pride and national belonging based on both political and ethno-cultural aspects, combined with a belief in the national superiority in one's own nation'.¹⁸ The promotion of national identity therefore ultimately involves the classical divide between 'us' and 'them'.¹⁹

The relationship between religion and nationalism is extremely complex — resisting simple generalisation.²⁰ However, the alliance of nationalism and religion

¹⁶ Given that national/ethnic groups preceded the formation of nation states, nationalism can also refer to expressing a sense of belonging to a nationality. H. C. Kelman, 'Nationalism, Patriotism, and National Identity: Social-Psychological Dimensions', in *Patriotism in the Lives of Individuals and Nations*, ed. by D. Bar-Tal and E. Staub (Chicago: Nelson Hall Publishers, 1997), pp. 165-189 (p. 166).

¹⁷ Patriotism relates to loyalty to one's country of residence, defined for instance by territory and government, whereas nationalism relies on loyalty to a national group (nation), with common ethnic characteristics, language, customs — including religious affiliation and customs.

¹⁸ M. Hjerm, 'Education, Xenophobia and Nationalism: A Comparative Analysis', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 27.1 (2001), 37-60 (p. 47).

¹⁹ In their study exploring the curriculum and national identity in Pakistan, Naureen Durrani and Mairead Dunne demonstrate how the school curriculum can be used 'to create an image of "us" (and inevitably "them") in order to manage issues of regionalism, maintain national integration, and seek legitimacy for the government's ideology'. The paper provides a useful exploration of the ways in which education impacts on social cohesion and relations through identity construction. Significantly, in line with my own research analysis, Durrani and Dunne highlight the negative impact of schooling when used for ideological transmission. N. Durrani and M. Dunne, 'Curriculum and National Identity: Exploring the Links between Religion and Nation in Pakistan', *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 42.2 (2010), 215-240 (pp. 218, 224).

²⁰ E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 71. Hobsbawm examines the development of nationalism since the European Enlightenment, highlighting the various ways in which nationalism has been used in various contexts to legitimate the ideological interests of groups and governments. The work also assesses nationalism's transformation to a mass ideology from its beginnings as a political movement.

can perhaps be explained, at least on one level, by the fact that the new mass political movements — nationalist, socialist, confessional or other — were competing for the loyalty of the same masses and so were willing to accommodate all their various appeals, which often combined both social and national demands.²¹ Religion was not therefore considered a threat to the nations' sole claim on its members' loyalty. Rather, the universal nature of 'the notion of religion' — which serves to bridge ethnic, linguistic, political and other divides — meant religion could be utilised by national movements to act as a kind of cement for nationalism.²² Nationalism often invokes sacred properties around which national identities can be moulded and maintained.²³ Religious symbolism clearly has the ability to provide legitimacy and inspiration to national identity. As biblical scholar Michael Prior notes, 'national groups invariably constructed a fundamental narrative consisting not only of historical memories but of myths of origin, and where possible and desirable, religion was mobilised to sacralise national sentiment'.²⁴

There is indeed often a close alliance between national consciousness and religion. In Pakistan, for example, 'the symbols of nationalism do not simply have features analogous to the symbols of religious mythology but are themselves meant to be

²¹ Ibid, p. 124.

²² Ibid, p. 68.

²³ Ibid, p. 156.

²⁴ Prior, 'Zionism and the Challenge of Historical Truth and Morality' p. 35; J. Coakley, 'The Religious Roots of Irish Nationalism', *Social Compass*, 58.1 (2011), 95-114; B. Potter, 'The Catholic Nation: Religion, Identity, and the Narratives of Polish History', *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 45.2 (2001), 289-299; I. Ivekovic, 'Nationalism and the Political Use and Abuse of Religion: The Politicisation of Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Islam in Yugoslav Successor States', *Social Compass*, 49.4 (2002), 523-536.

part of a religious structure and meaning'.²⁵ The identification of nationalism with religion is hardly surprising, however, given that 'religion [like national identity] is an ancient and well-tried method of establishing communion through common practice and a sort of brotherhood between people who otherwise have very little in common'.²⁶ For nationalism scholar Anthony D. Smith, it is only where sacred properties are 'widely diffused in an ethno-national population [that] the resulting national identity has been, and will continue to be, particularly powerful and resilient, creating a sharp boundary between the members and outsiders [...]'.²⁷ Even if religion is not considered a necessary mark of modern nationalism, historian Eric Hobsbawm contends that the holy icons nevertheless remain a crucial component of it, with their significance 'demonstrated by the universal use of simple pieces of coloured fabric — namely flags — as the symbol of modern nations, and their association with highly charged ritual occasions or acts of worship'.²⁸ There is a prolific use of religious symbols on national flags. In fact, almost a third of the world's countries — sixty-four out of a total of one hundred and ninety-six — include religious symbols on their flags. Christian symbols appear

²⁵ The national flag of Pakistan, for instance, features the star and crescent symbol of Islam. The dark green colour, which is traditionally associated with Islam, is used to represent the Muslim majority of Pakistan, whilst the vertical white stripe represents the religious minorities. The state emblem also includes traditional Islamic symbols — it again features the star and crescent symbol and is also predominantly green in colour. Indeed, the state consciously promotes Pakistani identity as synonymous with Muslim identity. B. Metcalf, 'The Case of Pakistan', in *Religion and Politics in the Modern World*, ed. by P. H. Merkl and N. Smart (New York: New York University Press, 1983), pp. 170-190 (p. 170). Building on this notion, Rogers Brubaker discusses four approaches to the study of nationalism. The first deals with religion and nationalism as analogous phenomena, the second sees religion as a cause or explanation of nationalism, the third suggests religion is intertwined with nationalism, and the fourth takes religious nationalism as a distinctive kind of nationalism. R. Brubaker, 'Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches', *Nations and Nationalism*, 18.1 (2012), 2-20.

²⁶ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 68.

²⁷ A. D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p. 156.

²⁸ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 72.

on thirty-one national flags (48%) whilst Islamic symbols are found on the national flags of twenty-one countries (33%). Israel is alone in its use of Jewish symbols on its national flag.²⁹

Although the exact relationship between religion and nationalism remains elusive and the concept of nationalism itself is elastic, the importance of nationalism in education systems is generally accepted.³⁰ This is largely due to the fact that education is a central feature of national socialisation.³¹ As Hobsbawm asserts, ‘a man’s [sic] education is by far his most precious investment, and in effect confers his identity on him’.³² Nation states therefore use schooling for promoting a distinct national identity, with the national curriculum serving as a vehicle for the

²⁹ The national flag of Israel features two horizontal blue lines on a white background, which symbolise the tallit (traditional Jewish prayer shawl), and the Star of David, which is an ancient and globally recognised symbol of Judaism. See Appendix A for the images of all sixty-four national flags that feature religious symbols. A. E. Theodorou, ‘64 Countries Have Religious Symbols on their National Flags’, *Pew Research Centre*, 25 November 2014, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/11/25/64-countries-have-religious-symbols-on-their-national-flags/> [accessed 17 March 2018].

³⁰ N. Hans, ‘Nationalism and Education in Asia’, *Comparative Education Review*, 2.2 (1958), 4-12 (p. 4). The subject of ‘Staatsbürgerkunde’ (civics and politics) in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), can be used to demonstrate the vital role played by national identity in the socialist education of students. The curriculum for the subject was given a new political-ideological emphasis in the 1970s in order to remove the reliance on teachers’ own personal ideological convictions to transmit the values/advantages of Marxist-Leninism. This attempt to further regulate the teaching of civics did not, however, result in any major changes to pedagogical practices. B. Blessing, T. Grammes and H. Schluss, ‘Civics Courses in the German Democratic Republic: A Case Study in the History of Curriculum and Educational Research’, *Journal of Social Science Education*, 11.2 (2012), 85-105 (p. 13). There was also a notable elision of religious education in schools in the former GDR. This mirrored the removal of religion from the wider public sphere, which was replaced with the new state ethos (Marxist-Leninism). D. MacNeill, ‘Religious Education and National Identity’, *Social Compass*, 47.3 (2000), 343-351 (p. 348).

³¹ E. Gellner, ‘Nationalism as a Product of Industrial Society’, in *The Ethnicity Reader: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Migration*, ed. by J. R. Montserrat Guibernau and J. Rex (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), pp. 64-78 (p. 77). Guibernau and Rex’s selection of readings focus on the ethnic components that operate within nationalism, multiculturalism and migration in a variety of contexts, including the United Kingdom, United States, Germany, Middle East and Quebec, amongst others. The collection also highlights the connection between international relations, violence and ethnic conflict.

³² Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 37.

transmission of the established socio-political ideology.³³ As Alan Smith explains, 'education is a powerful tool for ideological development — for nation building as well as indoctrination'.³⁴ The process of industrialisation and modernisation are of course also widely recognised as playing a central role in the emergence of modern nationalism. According to nationalism scholar Ernest Gellner, nationalism is a product of industrial society and its distinctive structural requirements — the success of which hinges on the education system.³⁵ Hobsbawm agrees that the education system is a crucial feature of industrial society as it is essential to ensure that a unified generic culture is produced: 'even in countries in which important parts of the educational machine are in private hands or those of religious organisations, the state does take over quality control in this most important of industries, the manufacture of viable and useable human beings'.³⁶

³³ C. Antal, 'Reflections on Religious Nationalism, Conflict and Schooling in Developing Democracies: India and Israel in Comparative Perspective', *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 38.1 (2008), 87-102 (p. 87). Antal's study highlights the impact that the over-reliance on textbooks and the teacher centred pedagogy of 'read-recall-recite' in developing nations has on students' notions of citizenship. Given that such teaching methods inhibit the development of critical thinking skills, Antal concludes that students who are exposed to religious national ideology in these settings are more susceptible to accept outright exclusionary citizenship discourses. Significantly, in relation to my own research, Antal also draws attention to the negative impact that religiously motivated (exclusionary) citizenship discourses have on democratic ideals. However, whereas Antal's study focuses on the relationship between schooling and interreligious conflict, the focus of my research is on the religious/secular divide and how this is reflected and shaped through the school system in Israel.

³⁴ The project of nation building has been central to India's education policy since the independent state formed in 1947. Given that 'a nation's identity is inevitably enmeshed with its historical consciousness,' the history curriculum has been central to any reorientation of education that has taken place in India. Antal, 'Reflections on Religious Nationalism', p. 91. Education can, of course, also be used more positively for the development of liberal, progressive and democratic ideas. A. Smith, 'Education and Conflict: An Emerging Field of Study', in *Education, Conflict and Reconciliation: International Perspectives*, ed. by F. Leach and M. Dunne (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2007), 19-32 (p. 21).

³⁵ Gellner, 'Nationalism as a Product of Industrial Society', p. 66.

³⁶ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 38.

Civics, history and religious education, in particular, are used in schools as tools for building national identity.³⁷ Given that these 'national subjects' are regarded as essential for constructing and maintaining the 'imagined community' of the nation, they are also often tightly controlled by governments.³⁸ The national curriculum, and crucially, how it is delivered in schools, can therefore cause problems if it does not address issues of unity and diversity — particularly in conflict-affected societies such as Israel where education towards peace and humanistic values is most urgently needed.³⁹ Indeed, given the potential power education has to shape democracy in Israel, as elsewhere, the present study is more pertinent than ever.⁴⁰ As noted, the rationale for my research's focus on civics and Jewish studies in Israel's state secular schools is that both of these subjects promote Jewish national and religious identity. Furthermore, the controversy that often surrounds the approach taken to the teaching of the two subjects in the state secular school system also reflects the wider tensions that exist in Israeli society about how to approach Israel's dual Jewish and democratic identity. In order to situate the

³⁷ Civics education is particularly crucial in the production of national identity as it constructs and defines the relationship of the citizen with the nation state. Given that citizenship provides the state with a 'way of defining who does and who does not belong to the state or nation', it can therefore be assumed that notions of citizenship affect nationalist sentiment and xenophobia. Hjerm, 'Education, Xenophobia and Nationalism', p. 39. Civics education is grouped together with history and geography and called 'social studies' in both Pakistan and India. Civics is taught as a separate subject in Turkey.

³⁸ Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities' states that a nation is a community socially constructed, imagined by the people who view themselves as part of that group. As Anderson explains, 'it is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 6; Durrani and Dunne, 'Curriculum and National Identity', p. 218.

³⁹ Smith, 'Education and Conflict', p. 22.

⁴⁰ Education policy and national curricula in Israel, as elsewhere, are the transmitters of officially selected and organised knowledge and are therefore indispensable sources for assessing the political and social order. Keyman and Kanci, 'A Tale of Ambiguity: Citizenship and Democracy in Turkey', p. 319.

findings of my study within the existing body of research on education in Israel, a brief review of the pertinent literature follows.

Literature Review

Jewish Studies

Jewish identity is extremely complex and many suggestions about the most appropriate way to approach this subject have been proposed by academics and educators over the years: as a culture, as a religion, as a nationality, as a tradition. The question of how to approach Jewish studies in schools has thus also been a central concern since the earliest days of Zionist educational thinking and has continued to be a focus of controversy throughout the history of education in the State of Israel.⁴¹ Indeed, when the State Education Act (1953) officially established two separate state education streams — state (secular) and state religious — a new issue emerged regarding how to approach Jewish studies in the ‘non-religious’

⁴¹ I. B. Berkson, ‘Jewish Education in Palestine’, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 164 (1932), 139-154; E. Simon, ‘Hebrew Education in Palestine’, *The Journal of Educational Sociology*, 22.3 (1948), 190-205; R. Elboim-Dror, ‘British Educational Policies in Palestine’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 36.2 (2000), 28-47; S. Shamai, ‘“Cultural Shift”: The Case of Jewish Religious Education in Israel’, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 21.3 (2000), 401-417; N. Chamo, ‘On the Partial Awareness of “Judaism” in the Curriculum of Secular State Education in Israel’, *International Journal of Jewish Education*, 5.6 (2013), 119-144; The Avi Chai Foundation Israel, ‘Assessing Needs and Directions for Jewish Educational Activity in the State (Non-Religious) School System’, December 2012, <https://avichai.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Executive-Summary-of-Full-Report-English-final.pdf> [accessed 25 June 2019]; S. Valler, ‘Approaches to Jewish Studies in Secular Israeli Society’, in *Study and Knowledge in Jewish Thought*, ed. by H. Kreisel (Be’er Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2006), pp. 297-308 (p. 297).

schools.⁴² Attempts to find solutions to accommodate the teaching of Jewishness in a way that would be meaningful to the secular school population have been persistent, with various committees commissioned by the Ministry of Education over the years to address the issues involved. The majority of the committees established have, however, called for reinforcing Jewish studies in state secular schools and have often associated Jewish studies with (Orthodox) religion — thus sparking criticism from the secular sector.⁴³

The supposed inadequacy of Jewish studies in state secular schools is also a long-standing concern that is reflected in numerous studies which address Jewish education in Israel. Israel education specialist Nurit Chamo, for instance, suggests that the set of concepts and symbols relating to the fundamental question of Jewish identity in state secular schools is ‘complex, vague and confused’.⁴⁴ Chamo’s central argument is that the curriculum in these schools is ‘neither “completely” nor “partially” secular’, but operates primarily as a Jewish studies curriculum, which is embedded in the general curriculum both explicitly and implicitly.⁴⁵

⁴² The education system in Israel is divided into four groups: state (secular) schools; state religious schools; Arab and Druze schools (with instruction in Arabic); and private schools, which operate under various religious and international auspices. See Chapter 3 for further details.

⁴³ Valler, ‘Approaches to Jewish Studies’, p. 304. Valler provides a useful overview of the teaching of Jewish studies in state secular schools. Of particular relevance in relation to my research is Valler’s assessment of the impact that the various attempts by religious figures, including Education Ministers, to increase the teaching of Jewish studies in state secular schools has had on the subject. As Valler acknowledges, such efforts have politicised the subject resulting in a reduction in the academic teaching of the subject as the teaching of Jewish studies is increasingly left to religious individuals. As my study highlights, the subject has become a site of conflict for religious and anti-religious politics. See Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of key developments in Jewish studies in Israel.

⁴⁴ Chamo, ‘On the Partial Awareness of “Judaism”’, p. 119.

⁴⁵ Chamo’s argument is supported by qualitative-interpretive research on seventeen schools (six elementary, four middle, seven high) which were designing new syllabus relating to Jewish identity and culture as part of their involvement in a school twinning programme, which is a component of

However, according to Chamo, this 'Jewish genome' that she suggests runs throughout the school curricula, does not work to strengthen the Jewish identity of students, but rather gives rise to 'a surface definition of Jewish identity that is only partially aware of its depth'.⁴⁶ Chamo therefore calls for expanding and deepening Jewish identity in schools. Such calls to strengthen Jewish identity in state secular schools have, however, also frequently raised concerns amongst both secular educators and parents about religious coercion, which is always an issue in fractious Israeli society.⁴⁷

Concerns about religious coercion were raised once again following the most recent major government appointed Committee that was tasked with examining the supposed inadequacy of Jewish studies in state secular schools — based on, according to history of education scholar Yuval Dror, 'the correct assumption that that there were many moral and identity problems in the non-religious sector'.⁴⁸ The 1991 'Shenhar Committee', headed by Professor Aliza Shenhar of Haifa University, was appointed by then Minister of Education Zevulun Hammer.⁴⁹ The Committee's report, which was submitted to the government in 1994, claimed that students in state secular schools were becoming alienated or detached from Judaism. The report therefore recommended the intensification of the study of

the Jewish Federation's Tel Aviv/Los Angeles Partnership. The study used content analysis of curriculum themes, material written by school principals and reflective writings of students relating to their partnership experiences. Chamo, 'On the Partial Awareness of "Judaism"', p. 122.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 137.

⁴⁷ These issues are analysed in detail in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

⁴⁸ Y. Dror, '50 Years of Committees to Reinforce Jewish Studies and Jewish Consciousness in Israel's Non-Religious Sector: Conclusions from Historical Curricular Research', in *Abiding Challenges: Research Perspectives on Jewish Education*, ed. by Y. Rich and M. Rosenak (London and Tel Aviv: Freund Publishing House, 1999), pp. 161-188 (p. 164).

⁴⁹ See Appendix B for a full list of Education Ministers from 1948 to present.

Jewish heritage from a pluralistic point of view that allows for a variety of options for Jewish Israeli cultural existence, 'independent of Jewish religious law (*halacha*), and that builds on attachment to the history and creation of the Jewish people using a critical, pluralistic and innovative perspective'.⁵⁰

However, despite advocating for a pluralistic approach to Jewish studies in state secular schools, the Shenhar Committee's recommendations actually resulted in an increased number of outside organisations — with clear political-ideological agendas — being brought in to guide and deliver Jewish education in state secular schools.⁵¹ Crucially, in relation to my own research, the overwhelming majority of organisations interested in intervening in this area were, and have remained, religious groups determined to impose religious education on the state secular system.⁵² As my research demonstrates, this trend has increased exponentially over the past ten years in particular, with Orthodox religious groups being increasingly supported, both ideologically and financially, by the Ministry of Education.⁵³ The Shenhar Committee can therefore be seen as paving the way for the ruling religious (Orthodox) parties to establish control over Jewish education in state secular schools.

⁵⁰ The recommendations made by the Shenhar Committee were accepted but never fully implemented by the Minister of Education at the time, Amnon Rubinstein. Thus, rather than adding additional hours for the teaching of Jewish studies in state secular schools and providing the necessary training for teachers to deliver the content (which would have required significant financial investment), the Ministry of Education opted to allow outside organisations to enter schools to teach the subject instead of teachers. O. Ichilov, G. Salomon and D. Inbar, 'Citizenship Education in Israel – A Jewish-Democratic State', *Israel Affairs*, 11.2 (2005), 303-323 (p. 310).

⁵¹ Valler, 'Approaches to Jewish Studies', p. 306.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 306.

⁵³ See Chapter 5 for a detailed analysis of specific religious organisations operating in state secular schools.

The fact that state secular education does not have an independent pedagogic council comparable to that which controls the content delivered in the state religious sector is a key factor in explaining why such intervention has been possible.⁵⁴ Professor of Sociology of Education Shmuel Shamai's study highlights this peculiar situation, where secular education is non-autonomous, whilst religious schools are autonomous — despite both streams being funded by the secular majority.⁵⁵ Furthermore, as Shamai notes, 'the lower state intervention in the schools, the higher the level of funding' — meaning that ultra-Orthodox schools have enjoyed full funding together with the greatest autonomy.⁵⁶ Shamai's study also explores the 'cultural shift' that has occurred in Israel that has enabled such a situation to develop — that is, 'the cultural advance of the religious groups, and the "cultural surrender" of the secular group' — illustrated today by the fact that religious education is clearly apparent in state secular schools, whilst civic studies are not permitted in ultra-Orthodox education.⁵⁷ For political scientist Charles Liebman, the fact that secular Jews rely on religious Jews to guide them in 'affirming a culture of responsibility and loyalty' to the Jewish people — which he suggests secular Jews (lacking the will or self-discipline) are not able to commit to by themselves — helps to explain the primary position religious groups hold in Israel.⁵⁸ Political scientist Yoav Peled and media culture researcher Horit Herman Peled identify such reliance as a key feature of the religionisation process that is

⁵⁴ The Religious Council tightly controls what is allowed to be taught in religious schools.

⁵⁵ Shamai, "Cultural Shift", p. 401. Shamai's study addresses the subject by way of a critical sociology of education. Critical theories of education are concerned with identifying perceived inequalities in education and seeking solutions to these issues. Such an approach thus often prioritises the relationship between social structures, power and educational practices.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 401.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 409.

⁵⁸ C. S. Liebman, 'Secular Judaism and its Prospects', *Israel Affairs*, 4 (1998), 29-48 (pp. 44-45).

taking place in Israeli society — particularly in the education system — analysis of which also forms a crucial part of my research.⁵⁹ Existing research relating to Jewish studies in Israel has been overwhelmingly preoccupied with addressing the perceived inadequacy of Jewish studies in state secular schools. However, the historiography has not tended to focus on the intensification of Jewish studies in those schools. My study thus provides an original contribution to the existing research as I explicitly analyse the *intensification* of Jewish studies in state secular schools, and the national-religious ideology that is driving this trend.

Civic Education

Whilst approaches to Jewish studies in Israel's education system have always been contentious, the controversy surrounding civic education emerged only when the subject began to shift its focus from the formal and legal aspects of state institutions and citizens' obligations, to concern with democratic aspects of citizenship and citizens' rights. As will be explored in detail throughout this study, the subject of civics education in state secular schools in Israel has become an increasingly polemic subject over the years, with the most recent changes to the curriculum provoking particularly intense concern amongst academics and

⁵⁹ Peled and Peled, *The Religionization of Israeli Society*, p. 15. I provide a detailed analysis of the religionisation of Israel's state secular schools in Chapter 5. The process of religionisation that is taking place in Israeli society is a much under-researched area in Anglophone literature on education/religion in the country. Peled and Peled's analysis of the religionisation of Israeli society highlights the growing influence of religious agents and religious themes throughout Israeli society. The study focuses on four key social areas where religious Zionism has made notable inroads and thus where the process of religionisation is most evident: the education system, the military, visual arts (including film) and the media. However, whilst Peled and Peled provide a useful assessment of the increasing religious influence on the education system, their major focus is on the religionisation of the visual fine arts.

educators — which is reflected in the increasingly vocal public debate on the subject. The data gathered from the interviews I conducted during my field research in Israel clearly demonstrates the intensity of feeling surrounding the issues involved — providing a rich account of the passionate debate taking place on the ground, which I was able to observe and document as events were unfolding.

It was during the 1990s that civic education in Israel experienced some rather dramatic changes as the Ministry of Education began to recognise the need to promote democratic education in schools.⁶⁰ This came in response to the political and social tensions that started to increase in Israel during the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the new liberal citizenship discourse that began to develop from the mid-1980s onwards.⁶¹ In response to these developments, the Ministry of Education, headed by the liberal Amnon Rubinstein, set up the Kremnitzer Committee in 1994 to provide recommendations for a new civic education curriculum for state secular schools. The Committee's report, which was submitted to the government in 1996, provided an overview of the major issues and problems concerning citizenship orientations within Israeli society and ultimately set a new agenda for the teaching of civics in Israel's state secular schools. The report concluded that citizenship education 'should aim at the acquisition of knowledge, and the inculcation of attitudes, values and motivations, as well as the necessary civic competences'.⁶² It also recommended that the subject should stress the universalistic aspects of

⁶⁰ Ichilov, Salomon and Inbar, 'Citizenship Education in Israel', p. 308. Civics was added to the curriculum as a separate, mandatory subject of study for Jewish high schools in 1976 (and several years later in Arab schools).

⁶¹ A detailed analysis of the civics curriculum is provided in Chapter 4.

⁶² Ichilov, Salomon and Inbar, 'Citizenship Education in Israel', p. 311.

democratic regimes and human rights and promote a shared civic identity across all sectors of Israeli society.⁶³

A new civics curriculum, which for the first time unified the teaching of civics across secular Jewish and Arab state schools, was thus developed along with a core civics textbook — both of which were introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2000 (2001 in Arab schools). Professor of Sociology of Education Orit Ichilov's 1999 study focussing on the teaching of civics in Israel, draws on the Kremnitzer Committee's report, alongside analysis of instructional materials and special programmes used in civic education.⁶⁴ She also conducted interviews with educational staff employed in the state Jewish and Arab education system to help provide a comprehensive description of civic education in Israel at the time and to demonstrate how the subject has been impacted by the changing socio-political conditions in Israel over the years.⁶⁵ As Ichilov explains, the primary objective of the study was to 'provide an up-to-date picture of the major characteristics and problems of Israeli society

⁶³ O. Ichilov, 'Citizenship Education in a Divided Society: The Case of Israel', in *Civic Education Across Countries: Twenty-Four National Case Studies from the IEA Civic Education Project*, ed. by J. Torney-Purta, J. Schwille and J. Amadeo (Amsterdam: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 1999), pp. 371-394 (p. 383-384).

⁶⁴ Ichilov's research was conducted as part of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Civic Education Study. The special programmes analysed in the study were run by the Jewish-Zionist Institute which was established in 1975 to promote Jewish and Zionist education and provide enrichment programmes regarding issues of national identity. Ichilov, 'Citizenship Education in a Divided Society', p. 387. Ichilov's theoretical perspective is informed by consideration of citizenship from a broader and more dynamic perspective that aims at global awareness, rather than traditional patriotism or conventional nationalist ideology. Her work thus focuses on political education and political socialisation.

⁶⁵ The interviews were conducted with seven officials from both sectors. The interviews with officials from the Arab sector were conducted in order to gain information regarding their perceptions of particular issues affecting citizenship education in the Arab sector. The interviews with officials from the Jewish sector gathered information regarding their views on the objectives and place of civic education in schools, as well as the training provided to prospective teachers to prepare them for educating future citizens. Ichilov, 'Citizenship Education in a Divided Society', p. 382.

and their relationships to the various practices and issues related to citizenship education'.⁶⁶ My research extends on Ichilov's study to provide an updated analysis of the key features and problems of Israeli society and how they relate to the current debates surrounding the teaching of civics *and Jewish studies*. Indeed, the most recent changes to the civics and Jewish studies curriculum are to be viewed against the backdrop of the current political discourse in Israel that delegitimises domestic dissent — with what is happening in state secular schools being both a reflection and a cause of the narrowing of boundaries of debate in wider society.⁶⁷

Ichilov's study highlights the intricacies involved in inculcating a shared civic identity in such a complex social reality as exists in Israel. She notes in particular the difficulties involved in accommodating particularistic and universalistic aspects of citizenship, which often conflict with each other and add to the challenges involved in implementing a unified curriculum throughout the state secular school system. As a result of such difficulties, Ichilov concludes that the formal civics curriculum offered 'unsystematic and sporadic treatment of citizenship education'.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, a later study by Ichilov, published in 2005, assessing the major milestones of civic education in Israel, which was conducted alongside education psychologist Gavriel Solomon and Professor of Education Dan Inbar, found that civics was still a marginal subject and remained an 'eclectic and fragmented endeavour' incapable of fostering 'the emergence of a shared identity that would bridge national, cultural, ethnic and social divides within Israeli

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 391.

⁶⁷ D. Waxman and I. Peleg, 'The Nation-State Law and the Weakening of Israeli Democracy', *Israel Studies*, 25.3 (2020), 185-200 (p. 194).

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 390.

society'.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, Ichilov, Solomon and Inbar did acknowledge that some progress had been made in civic education towards recognising concerns of minority groups and human rights.⁷⁰

In a 2007 study, sociologist of education Halleli Pinson similarly acknowledged that the civics curriculum and textbook that were introduced in the wake of the Kremnitzer Committee 'were set to offer a more inclusive civic education that would stress ideas such as pluralistic and democratic citizenship'.⁷¹ However, Pinson's analysis of the core civics textbook, employing a critical sociological perspective, found that civic education still worked to promote ethnocentric values.⁷² Hence, whilst identifying instances where the textbook, particularly in comparison to previous texts, adopted 'a critical perspective designed to highlight the complexities inherent in the notion of Israeli citizenship and the definition of Israel as both Jewish and democratic', the study found that the content nevertheless still reinforced 'the hegemonic Zionist account which defines membership in the civil collective in terms of ethno-national belonging'.⁷³ Pinson concludes, therefore, that 'civic education in Israel is set to justify the national

⁶⁹ Ichilov, Salomon and Inbar, 'Citizenship Education in Israel', p. 319.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 320.

⁷¹ Pinson's study draws on a discursive analysis of the curriculum materials for state secular high schools and interviews with thirteen officials from the Ministry of Education involved in designing and implementing the curriculum. The study is based on the 1994 curriculum guidelines and the official civics textbook which was published in September 2000 (2001 in Arab schools). H. Pinson, 'Inclusive Curriculum? Challenges to the Role of Civic Education in a Jewish and Democratic State', *Curriculum Inquiry*, 37.4 (2007), 351-382 (p. 351).

⁷² Ibid, p. 351. Adopting a critical sociological perspective in Israel is most often associated with challenging Zionist historiography and the dominant Zionist discourse which shapes Israel's political culture.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 373.

Zionist project — the right of the Jewish people over the Land of Israel and maintaining Israel as a Jewish state'.⁷⁴

In line with Pinson's analysis, lecturer in education policy and politics Ayman Agbaria also highlights the ways in which civic education promotes an ethno-national definition of the state.⁷⁵ Whilst asserting that there are numerous 'examples of the dominance of the ultra-ethno-nationalistic trend in Israeli education', the study places particular emphasis on the Ministry of Education's most recent revisions of the core civics textbook published in 2016.⁷⁶ Agbaria's main conclusion is that the revisions to the text 'reflect a clear shift from the attempt to mitigate and balance the conflict between the Jewish and democratic characteristics of the state to a strong adherence to an ethno-nationalist approach that prioritises the Jewish characteristics of the state'.⁷⁷ Significantly, in relation to my own study, Agbaria also recognises that there is a 'strengthening of the ideological education in the Jewish education system, so that it will be kept in line with the right-wing political agenda'.⁷⁸ Agbaria is primarily concerned, however, with how the curriculum impacts Arab education in Israel — more specifically how it works to 'preserve the excluding ethnocentric political regime, which controls Arab education in Israel under conditions of subordination and inequality'.⁷⁹ Agbaria's concerns were echoed by academics and civics teachers who petitioned the Supreme Court of Israel over the treatment of Arabs in the newly revised civics

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 373.

⁷⁵ A. Agbaria, 'The "Right" Education in Israel: Segregation, Religious Ethnonationalism, and Depoliticized Professionalism', *Critical Studies in Education*, 56 (2016), 1-18 (p. 1).

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 24.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 6.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 3.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 3.

curriculum. Particular concerns were raised about the content of the civics guide that accompanies the textbook — which the Supreme Court criticised for presenting Arab citizens of Israel as hostile to the state.⁸⁰ The petitioners also protested the disproportionate emphasis that is placed on the Jewish nature of the state in the new civics programme.⁸¹ One of the two Arab Members of the Ministry of Education’s professional advisory Civic Education Committee (or Civics Committee)⁸² also resigned over the way Arabs were treated in the discussions held by the Committee itself.⁸³

Pinon’s 2019 study also focuses on the most recent revisions to the civics curriculum, drawing on textbook analysis of the newly revised textbook.⁸⁴ In line with Agbaria’s analysis, Pinson is also primarily concerned with how the revised textbook serves to marginalise Palestinian citizens of Israel through its neglect of

⁸⁰ The civics handbook contains key concepts and terms and is used as a guide to assess the civics matriculation exam. The content and use of the civics guide is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

⁸¹ Y. Zur ‘High School Civics Glossary Says Israel is Jewish, Arabs Are Hostile’, *Haaretz*, 17 July 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-high-school-civics-glossary-says-israel-is-jewish-arabs-are-hostile-1.5494637> [accessed 23 July 2019].

⁸² Each subject taught in schools has a professional advisory committee whose members are appointed by the Ministry of Education and include academics, teachers and Ministry of Education officials.

⁸³ Y. Skop and C. Levinson, ‘In Act of Defiance, Arab Educator Quits Israeli Education Ministry’s Civics Board’, *Haaretz*, 5 June 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-in-act-of-defiance-israeli-arab-quits-education-ministrys-civics-panel-1.5480325> [accessed 23 July 2019]. The inequalities in Arab education that Agbaria refers to were also confirmed by the results of the most recent test carried out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to measure the ability of fifteen year-olds in reading, mathematics and science. The OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) exposed the extent of the gap in achievements between Jewish and Arab students in Israel. Whilst the scores of Hebrew-speaking students remained relatively stable between 2015 and 2018, the scores of Arab-speaking students fell dramatically — twenty-nine points in reading, twenty-six points in science and twelve points in mathematics. S. Kadari-Ovadia, ‘Poor PISA Scores No Surprise to Arab School System Officials’, *Haaretz*, 5 December 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-poor-pisa-scores-no-surprise-to-arab-school-system-officials-1.8224358> [accessed 9 December 2019].

⁸⁴ H. Pinson, ‘The New Civics Curriculum for High Schools in Israel: The Discursive Construction of Palestinian Identity and Narratives’, *Education Citizenship and Social Justice*, 14.1 (2019), 1-22 (p. 2).

Palestinian identity and narratives.⁸⁵ My research also extends the approaches of both Agbaria and Pinson — whose research highlights the ethno-national definitions of the state that are promoted through civic education. Agbaria and Pinson apply a critical approach to their analyses of the education system in Israel to highlight the ways in which the dominant Zionist nationalist narrative is used to subjugate and marginalise the Palestinian population. However, I build on this approach to show how education based upon the religion and ethnicity of students works to increase tensions within Jewish Israeli society itself, perpetuating the religious/secular divide, and ultimately weakening the chances for a peaceful solution to the wider conflict in the region. Importantly, my study also demonstrates how the Zionist narrative has developed to emphasise the religious elements of Jewish identity, minimising the cultural aspects and promoting a religious (Orthodox) way of life as the most authentic — thus creating a hierarchy between secular and religious identity. Crucially, through combining historical research with contemporary fieldwork my study is able to reveal the societal changes in Israel that have transformed the direction of Judaism in Israel towards particularism and ethnocentrism, rather than universalism and political liberalism.

Furthermore, whilst there is a high number of studies that utilise textbook analysis to inform research on civic education in Israel, my research builds on this approach whilst also engaging with the perspectives of key figures working in education in Israel.⁸⁶ I was able to conduct interviews with principals and teachers, Ministry of

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 2.

⁸⁶ N. Peled-Elhanan, 'Layout as Punctuation of Semiosis: Some Examples from Israeli Schoolbooks', *Visual Communication*, 8 (2009), 91-116; N. Peled-Elhanan, 'Legitimation of Massacres in Israeli School History Books', *Discourse and Society*, 21 (2010), 377-404; N. Peled-Elhanan, *Palestine in*

Education officials, academics involved in designing curriculum content for both civics and Jewish studies, organisations tasked with producing core textbooks for Jewish studies, as well as journalists and politicians. My research data is therefore particularly unique in informing the reader of the diverse range of views and opinions relating to the issues involved, from both sides of the political spectrum — left and right — and across the religious/secular divide. Furthermore, whilst educators and scholars, especially in Israel, have examined various aspects related to the teaching of civics and Jewish studies in state secular schools, they have tended to examine each topic separately. My study, however, analyses the two subjects together, thus providing a more holistic analysis of the intersection between education, religion and nationalism in Israel. Crucially, through applying this methodology, I have also succeeded in uncovering the central drive by key officials within the Ministry of Education to shape state secular education to reflect a religious and nationalistic worldview.

Analysing the most recent changes to the civics and Jewish studies curriculum and placing contemporary events in historical context, my study explores cutting edge issues that have not been tackled by existing studies — thus providing a fresh perspective and original insights on the relationship between education, religion and national identity in Israel. Importantly, my research demonstrates how the intense and ongoing debate about the nature of Jewish Israeli identity is central to the battle that is currently taking place around educational issues in Israel. My

Israeli School Books: Ideology and Propaganda in Education (London: I.B Tauris, 2012); H. Pinson, 'At the Boundaries of Citizenship: Palestinian Israeli Citizens and the Civic Education Curriculum', *Oxford Review of Education*, 33.3 (2007), 331-348; E. Podeh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks: 1948-2000* (Westport: Greenwood, 2002).

study also reveals the intensity of feeling that the most recent changes to the civics and Jewish studies curriculum have generated, the vociferous opposition from the secular camp and the unprecedented amount of direct action taken against the policies that are being imposed on state secular schools — thus refuting claims from the Ministry of Education that only minimal changes are being made.

Significantly, through combining historical research and contemporary fieldwork to inform the analysis of education policies for their wider social and political significance, my study also works to highlight the various groups that have been dominant at different stages in Israel's history and, crucially, how their ideologies are translated into what is taught in schools. This is achieved by looking at policies manifest in curricula past and present — which signal the values of society, or, rather, what the dominant group in society values. The study is therefore also relevant in a variety of other contexts, given that education systems are used in numerous countries throughout the world to transmit dominant socio-political ideologies as a key tool of national socialisation and to instil acceptance of the official vision in the next generation.

Methodology

Research Design/Questions

Although national identity is disseminated through various instruments of state socialisation in Israel, as elsewhere, a major tool in this process is the education

system and its textbooks.⁸⁷ My study thus focuses on the state Jewish education system at elementary and high school level and on the way religious/Jewish studies and the civics programme are taught, in order to highlight the increasing politicisation of Jewish values in Israel's state secular education system.

Other questions which the study sets out to answer are:

1. Does education in Israel encourage religious radicalism/extremism?⁸⁸
2. To what extent is religious education in Israel used as a vehicle for promoting the political/ideological agendas of right-wing parties?
3. What responses do ideologically fuelled initiatives in education spark?⁸⁹

Through studying the education system in Israel, I am therefore able to contribute new knowledge on the extent to which national-religious trends, which could be described as extremist, are exerting greater influence in Israeli society. This is

⁸⁷ J. W. Meyer, 'The Effects of Education as an Institution', *American Journal of Sociology*, 83.1 (1977) 55-77.

⁸⁸ Although there is no universally agreed definition for radicalism/extremism in academia, the following definitions provide some clarification on the usage of the terms here. Extremism can be described as an ideological position that is characterised by intolerance to those with different interests/beliefs and unwilling to compromise with a diversity of opinions. There is a tendency for individuals/movements who embrace this ideology to glorify the use of violence as a means to achieve their own supremacy — in place of constitutional democracy, the rule of law and human rights for all. As a political doctrine, radicalism is also opposed to the existing order of society and ideologically committed to promoting/achieving political change. However, whilst necessarily uncompromising with respect to their ideals, radicalist ideologies do not seek to impose authoritarian rule in the same way that extremist ideologies do. A. Böttcher, 'Towards Academic Consensus Definitions of Radicalism and Extremism', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 11.4 (2017), 73-77.

⁸⁹ The types of initiatives that I will investigate include, for example, the Education Ministry's increasingly apparent desire for civics studies to focus on strengthening Jewish, rather than democratic, identity. This emphasis is evidenced in the guide published for civics teachers by the Education Ministry (October 2015), which states that democratic political culture 'is not a necessary condition for defining a state as democratic'. O. Kashti, 'More Judaism, Less Democracy: Israel's Education Ministry Rewrites High-school Civics', *Haaretz*, 15 November 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/Israel-news/.premium-1.686096> [accessed 16 November 2018]. These policies are explored in detail in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

achieved by exploring the role of education from a conflict perspective, which views schools and educational systems as tools of society that provide legitimacy for the dominant state-sanctioned discourse, whilst undermining others — thus having deeply powerful implications for society as a whole. Providing analysis of the political environment surrounding education, the formulation and implementation of policy, the organisational and structural features of the state school system, and issues related to education practice and innovation, the thesis seeks to determine the impact certain initiatives have on the wider social and political situation.⁹⁰ In addressing such issues, the study makes an original contribution to the existing literature on Israel by examining the extent to which the current education system is driven by political ideologies (and the extent to which this has changed over time). Furthermore, it raises important questions about the content of religious/Jewish studies and civic education, and the potential impact on relations between social and ethnic groups more widely.

Data from educators forms a key part of the primary research, given the significant role they play in mediating the curriculum and the values (both implicit and explicit) it transmits.⁹¹ In order to gather this crucial data, I conducted interviews

⁹⁰ A. Smith, 'Education in the Twenty-First Century: Conflict, Reconstruction and Reconciliation', *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 35.4 (2005), 373-391 (p. 377). Smith assesses the potential of educational interventions in conflict-affected societies to increase or decrease tensions. He also argues that considerations regarding education planning and investments in these areas should be analysed from a conflict perspective. However, Smith's use of 'conflict perspective' refers to being 'conflict-sensitive' — that is aware of the varying impacts of conflict on education in different contexts — when providing education in conflict-affected societies.

⁹¹ In his study mapping the relationship between education and conflict, Smith highlights the positive impact that teachers can have on relations between peoples in conflict-affected societies when they are trained in human rights education to promote equality and are able convey positive messages to students. Smith, 'Education in the Twenty-First Century', p. 381.

with school principals and teachers employed in the state school system. From there I mapped views and practices regarding the nature and goals of religious/Jewish studies and civic education, and the way these practitioners view their role in this endeavour. The study also examines the extent to which the curriculum for these subjects is used to import national Jewish values and to promote the national Zionist narrative.

In order to provide analysis of the political environment, policy formulation/implementation, organisational/structural issues and practice and innovation in education, I also conducted interviews with officials from the Ministry of Education, academics responsible for designing the Jewish studies and civics curriculum, heads of organisations responsible for delivering Jewish studies in state secular schools, as well as key journalists and politicians.

These methods were designed to measure the following:

1. Differences/similarities between views of Ministry of Education officials/those involved in curriculum design and teachers/educators working within schools in relation to the ideology driving the most recent revisions to the civics and Jewish studies curriculum.
2. Differences/similarities between secular and religious interpretations of Israeli national identity.
3. Religious education's role in articulating and maintaining contemporary national identity in Israel.

The reason the study focuses on the civics programme, as well as religious/Jewish studies, is that the former is the only programme in the Israeli education system that teaches issues of democracy, human rights, equality and universal principles of citizenship — and which all students must study in order to pass the matriculation (*bagrut*) exam.

Data Collection

The research methods were designed to ensure both rigour and appropriate flexibility. Given the purpose of the research, the study used non-probability purposive sampling in order to construct a sample of key individuals involved in religious/Jewish studies and civics education in Israel that would be able to generate the most useful insights possible into the issues being investigated.⁹² The research therefore focuses on an in-depth study of a relatively small number of participants to enable the development of much more complex insights than a larger scale study would have allowed.

The majority of the primary research data was gathered over the five weeks I spent in Israel in January and February 2017. Whilst in Israel, I was also enrolled at Tel Aviv University studying on an *Ulpan* programme.⁹³ Not only did this enable fuller immersion in Jewish Israeli culture during my stay, but it also facilitated interaction on a deeper level with research participants and, crucially — through engagement

⁹² Non-probability sampling does not use random selection (whereas probability sampling does). Non-probability sampling thus usually involves selection that enables the researcher to satisfy the specific needs of the research project. C. Robson, *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), p. 263.

⁹³ Hebrew language training.

with Hebrew language texts and documents — allowed for analysis of how Jewish religious principles and practices have impacted on Jewish education.

I contacted schools in advance of my travel to Israel. I selected schools from the state sector — which follows the state curriculum and is under the auspices of the Ministry of Education — in order to create a snapshot of the current situation within the Israeli state education system and its role in articulating and maintaining national religious identity. I used the Ministry of Education’s official website to find the website addresses for each municipality in Israel — from which I was able to access lists of all elementary schools, junior high schools and senior high schools in the respective municipalities. I selected from these lists all state schools and used the school websites to access the email addresses of the principals of each school. I then approached principals directly in a contact email for circulation among teachers in the relevant subject areas. The email contained, in succinct form, all relevant information about myself, the aims/purposes of the research and what would be required of participants should they choose to take part. Potential participants working within the Ministry of Education and other relevant organisations involved in education (which I had identified whilst conducting the initial stages of my research) were also contacted via an email containing similar information.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Given the huge public debate that erupted over the issues I was investigating, the media proved a particularly useful source for identifying key figures and organisations.

As a result of these efforts, I succeeded in securing interviews with the following participants, all of which were conducted in person during my time in Israel:⁹⁵

- Nati Stern — Principal of a state secular high school located in Tel Aviv. Interview conducted in Tel Aviv, 5 February 2017.
- Ron Margolin — Professor of Modern Jewish thought at Tel Aviv University and head of the Committee that drafted and approved the new Jewish studies curriculum. Interview conducted in Tel Aviv, 6 February 2017.
- Merav Kala — Bible Studies teacher in a state secular primary school located in Modi'in.⁹⁶ Interview conducted in Modi'in, 6 February 2017.
- Inas Deeb — Director of the Education Department at the Hand in Hand Centre for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel. Interview conducted in Jerusalem, 9 February 2017.
- Assaf Malach — head of the Ministry of Education's Civics Committee and responsible for the majority of the revisions to the newly revised civics curriculum/textbook. First interview conducted in Jerusalem, 9 February 2017. Second interview conducted in Jerusalem, 22 February 2017.
- Sivan Nachliel — teacher at a state secular high school located in Jerusalem.⁹⁷ Interview conducted in Jerusalem, 14 February 2017.

⁹⁵ All interviews were conducted in English and took place in the participants' places of work.

⁹⁶ Although Kala teaches in a state secular school, she is herself religious.

⁹⁷ Nachliel is a religious (Orthodox) Jew teaching in a state secular school. She is also a member of the right-wing political party, Habayit Hayehudi (Jewish Home Party), and lives in a West Bank settlement. My research was conducted whilst Naftali Bennett was leader of Habayit Hayehudi

- Daphna Poskanzer — supervisor of students at David Yellin Academic College of Education in Jerusalem and responsible for managing schools affiliated with the College. Interview conducted in Jerusalem, 14 February 2017.
- Ronit Gur Arye — Bible Studies teacher in a state secular primary school located in Jerusalem. Interview conducted in Jerusalem, 14 February 2017.
- Dena Thaler — Director of the Department of Educational Resources at TALI.⁹⁸ Interview conducted in Jerusalem, 14 February 2017.
- Shira Ackerman Simchovitch — Director of Early Childhood Education at TALI.⁹⁹ Interview conducted in Jerusalem, 21 February 2017.

I spoke off the record with a further two notable Israeli academics, whose work on education is very well respected in Israel, but who did not want to appear formally in my research data. Their insights nevertheless added much to my understanding of the field.

(2012-2018) — during which time he also served as Minister of Education (2015-2019), hence the significance of both in relation to my research. Habayit Hayehudi openly supports West Bank settlements and is against the formation of a Palestinian state. Bennett was also the Director of the Yesha Council (2010-2013) — which is responsible for overseeing the establishment of settlements in the West Bank.

⁹⁸ The TALI network of schools offer an enhanced programme of Jewish studies with a Conservative rather than Orthodox approach to Judaism. The TALI programme was adopted by the Ministry of Education in the early 1990s in an effort to encourage Jewish education within state secular schools. The Educational Resources Department is responsible for producing TALI's books, games, educational kits and educational websites for elementary and middle schools. See Chapter 3 for further details on TALI.

⁹⁹ Simchovitch is also an Educational Consultant for the Israeli version of Sesame Street (Rechov Sumsum).

After returning from my fieldwork in Israel I continued to contact significant figures associated with education in Israel in an attempt to gain additional primary data. As a result of these efforts I managed to arrange three further interviews, which also proved invaluable to the study and added much to the significance of the research. These interviews were conducted in English via telephone with the following participants:

- Rabbi Michael Melchior — founder of the Meitarim Network for Inclusive Jewish Education, former Member of Knesset (Israel's Parliament) and former Minister of Social and Diaspora Affairs, as well as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. Interview conducted 29 May 2018.
- Or Kashti — *Haaretz* journalist who has been reporting on the religionisation of the Israeli education system for a number of years. Interview conducted 17 February 2019.
- Dan Avnon — Professor of Political Science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem where he founded the Gilo Centre for Citizenship, Democracy and Civic Education (2001-2007). Avnon is also an advisor for the Secular Forum in Israel, Chair of the Israeli Ministry of Education's Political Science Curriculum Advisory Committee and head of the Academy of Hebrew Language's Committee for Political Science Terminology. Interview conducted 7 October 2019.

My study's use of government and non-governmental reports, news sources and educational materials complements the primary data gathered from interviews —

enabling me to produce an intricate, up-to-date analysis of the content of the civics and Jewish studies curriculum and of the conflict over how these subjects are taught.¹⁰⁰

I consulted select written primary sources for my research — such as government/non-governmental reports and media reports — because these provide an excellent barometer for assessing the mood on issues relating to religion and public life in Israel. I used the research questions (outlined above) to guide the selection of the specific sources used. Once I had selected the most relevant sources, I analysed them in order to identify common themes. Using an inductive approach, the themes were derived as they emerged from the data. I followed the six steps suggested by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke for conducting thematic analysis: familiarisation, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and narrowing themes and writing-up.¹⁰¹ I then compared and contrasted these themes with those identified in the data gathered from interviews. This enabled a thorough, in-depth examination of the key issues under investigation — applying triangulation to increase the reliability and validity of my findings and to enhance the overall rigour of my research. I also applied analysis of written primary sources to inform the selection of interview questions — which were arranged into three main categories: civic education, Jewish studies, and religion and public life. Given that the interviews I conducted were semi-

¹⁰⁰ The study was approved by the University of Leeds Ethics Committee (PVAR 15-002). I received permission from all but one participant to record the interviews. All recorded interviews are stored in accordance with the University of Leeds data protection and management policies. Whilst one of the interviews was not recorded, permission was granted by the interviewee for me to take detailed notes. All interviewees consented to the use their names and interview data in the study.

¹⁰¹ V. Braun and V. Clarke, 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3.2 (2016), 77-101.

structured, the questions were used as a guide only during interviews in order to allow interviewees to talk freely and openly. Reports on research carried out by non-governmental organisations, such as the Pew Research Centre's survey of Israel's religiously divided society, proved particularly useful when I was selecting research questions relating to religion and public life in Israel, whilst media reports were especially useful when selecting questions addressing the civics and Jewish studies curriculum — indicating the key features of controversy surrounding the teaching of the two subjects.

Concepts and Context — Defining 'Religious' and 'Secular'

Whilst the meanings attached to the terms 'religious' and 'secular' in the Israeli context are of most relevance to my research, it is important to acknowledge first the long-standing debate about what in fact constitutes 'religious' and 'secular'.¹⁰² Although this is not the place to recount the numerous and extensive discussions on the definition of 'religion', it is pertinent to briefly outline here the position I take in the present study. There are two broad types of definitions that are generally used in the study of religion: firstly, substantive definitions — which focus on what religion is (i.e. the substance of religious thoughts and values); and secondly, functionalist definitions — which highlight what religion does for its adherents (i.e. the function of religion in the human psyche, society or culture).¹⁰³

¹⁰² G. D. Chrystides and R. Geaves, *The Study of Religion: An Introduction to Key Ideas and Methods* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. x.

¹⁰³ Sociologist Peter Berger distinguished between the two types of definitions of religion. One early example of a substantive definition provided by the pioneering anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917) defines religion simply as 'belief in supernatural beings'. Protestant Christian

My own stance, however, is more in line with a constructivist approach, which maintains that there is no universal definition of religion that is applicable in every context throughout time. As Jeremy Menchik notes, ‘given that religion is an embodied and discursive tradition and given that its content is contingent, the interests of religious actors must be defined and understood locally’.¹⁰⁴ I therefore pay close attention to heterogeneity, context, and local conditions.

My approach also recognises the limitations of any attempts at a single definition of secularism and thus adopts a very broad understanding of the secular as being concerned with ‘this-worldly’ or ‘profane’ matters.¹⁰⁵ In Western democracies, secular groups/individuals are, however, generally associated with a liberal ideology that promotes equality and freedom and are against the undue influence of religion in the public sphere, whilst not necessarily engaging in direct criticism of religion.¹⁰⁶ I nevertheless remain acutely aware of the need to be sensitive also to ‘secularism’ in the particular context in which it exists. I therefore consider both terms — secular and religious — useful, whilst recognising that such fluid concepts

theologian Paul Tillich's (1886-1965) idea that one's response to religion is the focus of ‘ultimate concern’ reflects a functionalist approach — as does the notion of religion as the socialising power of society. The wide variety of definitions that have been proposed over the years have, however, all faced criticisms — most often on the basis of them being too narrow, or conversely, too wide. Chryssides and Geaves, *The Study of Religion*, pp. 14-23.

¹⁰⁴ J. Menchik, ‘Review: The Constructivist Approach to Religion and World Politics’, *Comparative Politics*, 49.4 (2017), 561-581 (p. 565).

¹⁰⁵ Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) argued that all societies are divided up into sacred (holy) and profane (everyday life) aspects. Durkheim viewed religion as a social phenomenon that functions like a ‘social cement’ binding people together. The word religion derives from the Latin *religere* meaning ‘to tie/bind together’. Chryssides and Geaves, *The Study of Religion*, pp. 49; 61.

¹⁰⁶ This stands in contrast to religious fundamentalism which aims to subject all aspects of life to exclusive religious authority. G. Ben-Porat, *Between State and Synagogue: The Secularisation of Contemporary Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.xii.

are understood in different ways by different people and so must be applied with caution.

Significantly, in relation to the present study, William Cavanaugh points out that the very distinction between religious and secular accompanied the international development of nationalism and the nation state.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, the complexity of religious/secular relations in Israeli society today stems from the intricate relationship between religion and nationalism that emerged in the formative years of Zionism. This relationship was institutionalised with the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 as the authority to govern aspects of every-day life was handed to religious institutions — ultimately welding religion in Israel to the spirit of nationality.¹⁰⁸ This reality has led Guy Ben-Porat to suggest that Zionism was in fact only a ‘secular movement in the challenge it presented to Jewish religious authority’, as religion remained ‘a significant force in social and political life’.¹⁰⁹

The secular Zionism that brought about the establishment of the State of Israel certainly did not fit entirely with the conventional understanding of secularism in Western democracies — which, as noted above, generally maintains that religion should not impact on political and cultural spheres. Nevertheless, in the formative years of the state, it was the national aspects of Jewish identity (culture and history) that were emphasised, rather than religious values/belief, in order to assist

¹⁰⁷ W. T. Cavanaugh, ‘Religious Violence as Modern Myth’, *Political Theology*, 15.6 (2014), 486-502 (p. 489). George Holyoake (1817-1906) was the first to define the concept of ‘secularism’ in 1846 to refer to any social order that was separate from, but not directly critical of, religion. B. S. Turner, *Religion and Modern Society: Citizenship, Secularisation and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 129.

¹⁰⁸ Ben-Porat, *Between State and Synagogue*, p. xi.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 32.

the creation of a new national (Jewish Israeli) culture. However, as my study demonstrates, the religious component of Jewish identity — in its Orthodox form — is now promoted as central to Jewish identity in Israel. Judaism as a national culture, as we shall see, has thus been replaced with Judaism as a religious culture.

Religious and Secular in Israel

In order to understand the complex social situation that the Israeli education system operates within, it is important to recognise the deep divisions that exist within Israeli society and which directly impact on the social texture of Israeli schools.¹¹⁰ These divisions include the rifts between religious and secular groups, between political left and right, between rich and poor, and between Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel. However, the divides that separate the positions of religious and secular Jews on key issues relating to state and society are particularly stark and are the source of considerable tensions within Israeli society — and it is this conflict with which the present study is most concerned.¹¹¹ It is

¹¹⁰ Ichilov, 'Teaching Civics in a Divided Society', p. 220.

¹¹¹ Pew Research Centre, 'Israel's Religiously Divided Society', 8 March 2016, <https://www.pewforum.org/2016/03/08/israels-religiously-divided-society/> [accessed 28 March 2019]; T. Hermann, O. Anabi, E. Heller and F. Omar, 'Israel Democracy Index (IDI) 2018', *The Guttman Centre for Public Opinion and Policy Research*, 2018, <https://en.idi.org.il/media/12170/the-israeli-democracy-index-2018.pdf> [accessed 28 March 2019]. Although the 2018 IDI report found that the Jewish public in Israel perceives that the tension between the political right and left is highest, this also relates to the religious/secular divide as there is a strong correlation in Israel between political allegiance and levels of religiosity, with religious Jews being the most likely group to lean to the political right. Whilst Jews in Israel who self-identify as being either on the political right or left in Israel, express a wide range of views on various issues, they can be most clearly defined by their views on the occupation and prospects for peace. For instance, of those who identify as being right-wing, 29% say that a two state solution is possible and 62% believe that settlements help security, whilst 86% of left-wing Jews favour a two state solution and only 13% say settlements help security. Pew, 'Israel's Religiously Divided Society', p. 57.

necessary therefore, for the purpose of clarity, to outline here the specific meanings attached to the terms 'religious' and 'secular' in the Israeli context, as well as the diverse perceptions of Judaism and being Jewish/Jewish identity that exists among Jewish Israelis today.

Jewish Religious Groups in Israel

The most recent statistics on Israel's religious population, published in 2016 by the Pew Research Centre, reveal that the vast majority of Israelis identify as Jews (see Figure 1.1 below), virtually all of whom belong to one of the following four categories: Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) 9%, Dati (religious) 13%,¹¹² Masorti (traditional) 29%, Hilloni (secular) 49% (see Figure 1.2 below).¹¹³ Jewish identity in Israel is, however, extremely complex — encompassing religious, ethnic and national components. It is perhaps not surprising that one of the most fundamental issues which Israeli Jews disagree on is related to Jewish identity, and what it means to be Jewish. For instance, whilst most Haredi Jews (70%) consider Jewishness to be primarily a matter of religion, secular Jews (83%) tend to view Jewish identity as a

¹¹² Both Haredim and Datiyim are commonly considered Orthodox.

¹¹³ Pew, 'Israel's Religiously Divided Society', p. 67. These figures include 3% of Jews in Israel who identify with Reform Judaism and 2% who identify with Conservative Judaism. It is important to clarify at this point, however, that although the official name for the Conservative Movement in Israel is 'Masorti' this should not be confused with the wider categorisation of Masorti in Israel — which refers to traditional Judaism. Although there are a variety of Jewish religious groups/beliefs in Israel, Orthodox Judaism is the only stream which is officially recognised and thus considered to be the official religion in Israel — with a monopoly over all matters of an individual's personal status (marriage, divorce, burial etc) and determines a person's Jewishness according to *halacha*. M. Lipka, 'Unlike U.S., few Jews in Israel identify as Reform or Conservative', *Pew Research Centre*, 15 March 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/15/unlike-u-s-few-jews-in-israel-identify-as-reform-or-conservative/> [accessed 28 March 2018].

matter of ancestry and/or culture.¹¹⁴ This fact is reflected also in the priority each of these groups place on being Israeli or Jewish, with most Orthodox Jews (91% of Haredim and 80% of Datiyim) considering themselves Jewish first and then Israeli, compared to only 20% of the secular Jewish population.¹¹⁵

Israel’s diverse religious landscape

% of Israeli adults who identify as ...

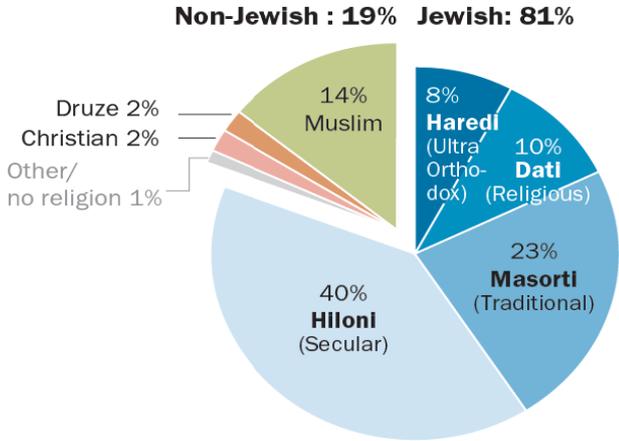


Figure 1.1: Religious/Secular Identity in Israel.¹¹⁶

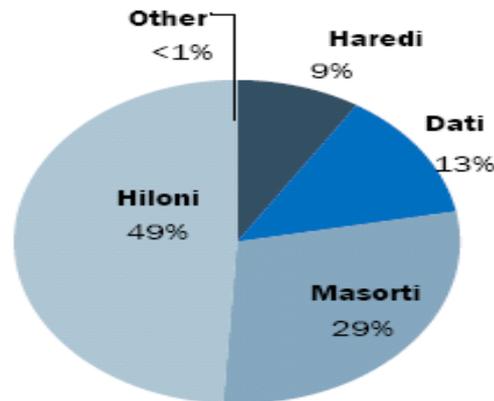
¹¹⁴ Pew, 'Israel's Religiously Divided Society', p. 72.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 72.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 5.

Breakdown of Jews in Israel

% of Israeli Jews who identify as ...



Source: Survey conducted October 2014-May 2015. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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*Figure 1.2: Jewish Religious/Secular Identity in Israel.*¹¹⁷

Each of the four Jewish Israeli religious groups identified above also display differing levels of religious observance and practice. Haredi Jews display the highest rate of religious observance, with secular Jews displaying the lowest levels. Although Datiyim also adhere closely to Jewish law, they are nevertheless generally less religiously observant than Haredim. Masortiyim, on the other hand, are more likely to display the most moderate levels of belief and practice.¹¹⁸ However, for the majority of religious Jews in Israel, regardless of the particular stream to which

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 67.

¹¹⁸ In relation to each of the four religious Jewish groups position with regard to Zionism — Haredi Jews are predominantly anti-Zionist, Dati combine Zionism with Judaism, whilst Masorti are more likely to ascribe the Jewishness of Israel to national and cultural elements. Ichilov, 'Teaching Civics in a Divided Society', p. 220.

they belong, 'Judaism is understood primarily as a *halachic* system comprised of beliefs and norms that pervade all aspects of public as well as private life'.¹¹⁹

Secularism in Israel

Almost half (49%) of the Jewish population in Israel self-identifies as secular. However, almost none of this secular population say they have no religion, with 56% actually declaring that they believe in God.¹²⁰ These findings illustrate the complex interaction between the religious and secular elements of Jewish identity in Israel and thus also highlights perfectly the need to be sensitive to secularism in the particular context/culture in which it exists.

The nature of secular Judaism in Israel is evidently extremely complex and is the source of considerable debate. Israeli sociologist Baruch Kimmerling, for instance, acknowledges the existence of Jews who identify as secular in Israel (and elsewhere), but questions whether there can really be such a thing as secular Judaism, given that the vast majority of Israelis (religious and secular) define their collective national identity by concepts, values, symbols, and collective memories that are rooted in the Jewish religion.¹²¹ Israeli journalist Boaz Evron is even more definitive in his analysis, asserting that secular Judaism is not possible given its inherent association with religion and that 'Jews have no secular (national) culture

¹¹⁹ C. S. Liebman, 'Reconceptualising the Culture Conflict among Israeli Jews', *Israel Studies*, 2.2 (1997), 172-189 (p. 174).

¹²⁰ Pew, 'Israel's Religiously Divided Society', p. 97.

¹²¹ B. Kimmerling, 'Religion, Nationalism, and Democracy in Israel', *Constellations*, 6.3 (1999), 339-363 (p. 340).

of their own [...]'.¹²² Similarly, for Israeli historian and journalist Tom Segev, 'anyone who says that he believes in God cannot be considered a total secularist'.¹²³ For Liebman, however, such assessments misunderstand the meaning of secularism in general and more specifically secular Judaism. According to Liebman, secularism should not be automatically equated with atheism (or agnosticism).¹²⁴ A secular Jew in Liebman's analysis is rather 'one who, at least in some aspects of his [sic] life, and most likely in the area of public policy choices, makes his decisions independently of *halacha* or of rabbinic decisions'.¹²⁵

The recent study by the Pew Research Centre illustrates perfectly the unique features of secular Jewish society in Israel. For example, 95% of secular Jews in Israel do not refrain from travelling on the Sabbath, whilst 85% do attend a Passover Seder once a year. Moreover, although 81% say being Jewish is important to them, 79% of this same secular Jewish population also say that religion is not important in their lives.¹²⁶ These individuals then are certainly not 'religious' in the conventional meaning of the word, rather, 'they are participating in a patterned form of observance that is not *halacha*, but which they have transformed into the folkways of secular Jewishness'.¹²⁷ These individuals are thus what one might call

¹²² B. Evron, *Jewish State or Israeli Nation* (Indiana University press, 1995), p. 62.

¹²³ T. Segev, 'Who is a Secularist', *Haaretz*, 25 September 1996 (in Hebrew) quoted in Liebman, 'Reconceptualising the Culture Conflict among Israeli Jews', p. 177.

¹²⁴ This view reflects a post-secular perspective. Post-secularism recognises that in modern society the secular interacts with, rather than excludes, religion from the public and private spheres. In this dynamic reality, individuals often fluctuate between religious and secular spheres. Turner, *Religion and Modern Society*, pp. 146-150.

¹²⁵ Liebman, 'Reconceptualising the Culture Conflict among Israeli Jews', p. 179.

¹²⁶ This includes either 'not too' or 'not at all' important. Pew, 'Israel's Religiously Divided Society', p. 73.

¹²⁷ Liebman, 'Reconceptualising the Culture Conflict among Israeli Jews', p. 184.

Jewishly-committed Israelis, or, to borrow Israeli sociologist Lehav Hagav's term, 'secular-believers'.¹²⁸

Structure

In this introductory chapter I have outlined the focus of the thesis, the main research questions I set out to address and the methods used to gather the data presented below. I have also outlined the rationale for embarking on the research, the gaps in the literature which my study will address and the social context in which my research is situated.

Chapter 2 will open with an explanation as to how the Zionist movement developed towards the end of the nineteenth century and proceed to focus on the complex and gradual shift in Zionist ideology from secular to sacred.¹²⁹ I thus provide detailed analysis of the complex interaction of religion and Zionism. I will also assess the specific impacts seminal events — such as the formation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the 1967 War — have had on Zionism's use of the

¹²⁸ L. Hagav, 'What do Secular-believer Women in Israel Believe in?', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 31.1 (2016), 17-34 (p. 17).

¹²⁹ The shift in Zionist ideology from secular to sacred referred to here relates to the transition from Labour/Socialist (secular) Zionism to religious Zionism — which, as demonstrated below, has become the dominant foundation of national identity in Israel. This transition was influenced by the social and political polarisation which has been rising in Israel since the late 1970s, following the erosion of the ideological consensus that was formed around the statist principle (*mamlachtiut*). This principle was promoted and maintained by David Ben-Gurion in the early years of the state, guided by the understanding that national unity trumped partisanship at a time when Israel was in the process of nation building and needed to create a common identity. The decline of the secular Zionist ideologies which dominated the pre-state Jewish *yishuv* community, and *mamlachtiut* that dominated in the formative years of the state, has encouraged the renewed attachment to Jewish religious tradition in the 'new civil religion'. E. Don-Yehiya, 'Changes and Developments in Israeli Civil Religion: 1982-2017', *Israel Studies*, 23.3 (2018), 189-196 (p. 191); Peled and Peled, *The Religionization of Israeli Society*, p. 2.

Hebrew Bible and its role in underpinning Zionist nationalism. The chapter demonstrates the sharpening focus on national religious identity over time in preparation for the further analysis I will provide in the ensuing chapters — which make use of my primary research data, collected during fieldwork in Israel, in significant ways. As a group that often relies on overt appeal to the Hebrew Bible to give credence to Israel's territorial claims over the entire land of Palestine, I also address in Chapter 2 the religious Zionist settlement movement. The significance of the movement in relation to my own research is its profound and ongoing contribution to the increased focus on national religious identity in Israel, particularly in relation to education.

After revealing in the previous chapter the significant impact that the development of religious Zionist educational institutions has had on the national religious camp, I provide a substantial review of the Israeli education system in Chapter 3, in order to identify the groups contributing to the rise of ultra-religious nationalism in Israel and the role of education in articulating and maintaining national religious identity. I also include in Chapter 3 an analysis of the new Jewish pluralistic schools that have been established in Israel, incorporating primary data from the founder of the movement, Rabbi Michael Melchior, who developed the new school system. These schools are particularly significant in relation to my own study as they go against the approach promoted by the Ministry of Education over the last decade, and instead strive to educate towards an inclusive and democratic worldview.

In Chapter 4 I analyse in detail the curriculum for civics and Jewish studies in Israel's state secular schools. Given the connection of both of these subjects with

the definition of Israeli collective identity, the chapter highlights the deep tensions in Israeli society about how to approach Israel's dual Jewish and democratic identity. Here, I make further use of government and non-governmental reports, news sources and educational materials, as well as primary research data, to analyse the content of the civics and Jewish studies curriculum and the conflict within Israeli society over how these subjects are taught. The main focus of the chapter is on recent changes to the civics and Jewish studies curriculum (from 2011 to the present) and the huge controversy these changes have sparked. Crucially, the interview data I present in Chapter 4 attests to the competing conceptions of citizenship that exist in Israeli society — between those who wish to emphasise individual rights and experiences, and those who wish to promote more nationalistic aspects relating the individual with the larger national entity. The conflicting opinions that emerged from the interviews I conducted thus provide crucial insight into the intense debate around the relationship between the 'Jewish' and 'democratic' characteristics of the state, which are seen as either conflicting or compatible principles.

I address in Chapter 5 the polarisation of public discourse in Israel over the increasing promotion of nationalistic and religious values in state secular schools, under the ambiguous guise of 'Jewish Identity'. I concentrate here on the religionisation process that is taking place in Israeli society — a subject which has become something of a hot topic in Israel in recent years. Whilst religionisation has manifested itself in various areas of social life in Israel, I reveal precisely why the education system is one of the most contentious and emotive areas affected by

this process. I will explore the implications of and reactions to the religionisation process that is taking place in Israel's state secular schools. I place particular focus on the religious content that is being inserted into the general school curriculum, as well as the outside organisations that are operating in these schools to augment the delivery of Jewish studies.

Chapter 2: Zionist Ideology — From Secular to Sacred

Introduction

The pioneers and founders of modern Zionism were almost all professed atheists, or at least religiously indifferent; hence, when political Zionism emerged in Europe in the late nineteenth century it too was basically secular in character.¹ Since that time, however, Zionist ideology has gradually shifted until its most pronounced expressions nowadays invoke religion, with religious symbolism playing a critical role in mobilising national identification in Israel.² The Hebrew Bible had, of course, been in the background as a source to legitimate the Zionist enterprise since the movement was established and the biblical notions of ‘Chosen People’ and ‘Return’ to the ‘Promised Land’³ had always been a ‘powerful driving force to gain international support’,⁴ but, as we shall see, overt appeal to the Hebrew Bible in

¹ Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians*, p. 105. The Bible translation used throughout this chapter is the New Standard Revised Version (NRSV).

² Ibid, p.106; A. Ceobanu and T. Sorek, ‘Religiosity, National Identity, and Legitimacy: Israel as an Extreme Case’, *Sociology*, 43.3 (2009), 477-496.

³ Whilst the doctrine of election emerges in the Hebrew Bible, the term ‘Chosen People’ is not biblical. The notion of election/chosenness finds fullest expression in the Hebrew Bible with the affirmation that Israel is a holy nation, chosen by God: ‘for you are a people holy to the Lord your God; it is you the Lord has chosen out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession’ (Deuteronomy 14. 2). The ‘Promised Land’ refers to the land that is promised by God to Abraham and his descendants: ‘for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever’ (Genesis 13. 15). Further discussion of the (disputed) boundaries of this biblically ‘Promised Land’ is provided below.

⁴ Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians*, p. 106. The use of the Bible to legitimate the Zionist cause and to gain international support could not be any clearer than in David Ben-Gurion’s statement to the British Peel Commission of enquiry in 1936 when he declared ‘on behalf of the Jews that the Bible is our Mandate, the Bible which was written by us, in our own language, in Hebrew, in this very country’. D. Ben-Gurion, ‘Testimony to Peel Commission 1937’, *Worldpeace365*, <https://worldpeace365.wordpress.com/2018/05/28/ben-gurion-testimony-to-peel-commission-1937/> [accessed 12 July 2019]. Further details of the Peel Commission are provided below.

underpinning Zionist nationalism was not prominent until the wake of the 1967 War.

The Jewish exile and return motif does have its roots in antiquity. This notion was formed in response to the Babylonian Exile in 587/586 BCE and the return during the Persian period (540-330 BCE). This paradigmatic statement was hence recorded as the norm 'in which every Jew from then until now, found its structure and deep syntax of social existence'.⁵ However, the pious longing for Zion is quite different to the desire to establish a national home for Jews in Palestine. Indeed, the concept of achieving redemption through human intervention, rather than waiting for divine intervention, remains a source of tension in Jewish eschatology, as does the division between secular and religious communities, with both subjects stirring intense debate within Israel to this day.⁶

Religious objections to human intervention intended to hasten redemption stem from the doctrine of the 'Three Oaths', which appears in the Babylonian Talmud. The doctrine was developed by rabbis in response to the crushing of the second Jewish Revolt (also known as Bar Kochba), launched against the Roman Empire in 132 CE, which resulted in thousands of Jews being killed and the majority of those who survived dispersing far and wide. Intended to act as a safeguard against a repeat of such events in the future, the rabbis cited three oaths that were made

⁵ It is important to note, however, that not all Jews went into exile, and not all who did returned. The story of exile and return was established by those who did return from exile, led by Ezra and documented in the first five books of the Bible. J. Neusner, 'Defining Judaism', in *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*, ed. by J. Neusner and A. J Avery-Peck (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 3-19 (p. 9).

⁶ Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism*, p. 152.

between God, the Jewish people, and the nations of the world following the Jewish

Exile:

One, that Israel should not ascend [altogether] like a wall; and
One, that the Holy One, blessed be He, made Israel swear that they would
not rebel against the nations of the world; and
One, that the Holy One, blessed be He, made the nations swear that they
would not oppress Israel too much (Ketubot 111a).

Based on a midrashic derivation of the verse from the Song of Songs, 'I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the wild does: do not stir up or awaken love until it is ready!' (Song of Songs 2. 7, 3. 5, 8. 4), and interpreted to mean that the Jewish people should remain in exile until God permits their return, the 'Three Oaths' have been accepted by rabbis throughout the ages as binding on the Jewish people.⁷ Religious Jews therefore objected to Zionism as it contravened the doctrine of the 'Three Oaths'. As noted above, the vast majority of ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Jews still maintain an anti-Zionist stance today — with a small sub-section (including Neturei Karta and Satmar Hasidism) who actively oppose the modern State of Israel.⁸ The establishment of the State of Israel thus created a significant divide within the Jewish community.⁹

The active movement for Jewish return to Palestine first appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century. This movement was a response to the challenge of

⁷ The 'Three Oaths' are based on an allegorical interpretation of the verse as an expression of a love relationship between God and the People of Israel — that should be left to take its natural course. A. Zephyr, 'The Three Oaths, Israel, and Ephraim', *Hebrew Nations Website*, <https://hebrewnations.com/articles/guest/the-three-oaths,-israel,-and-ephraim-by-alexander-zephyr.html> [accessed 29 November 2019].

⁸ Zionism is nevertheless embraced by mainstream Orthodox Judaism.

⁹ B. Brown, 'Orthodox Judaism' in *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*, ed. by J. Neusner and A. J. Avery-Peck (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 311-333; E. Gilad, 'If the Messiah isn't Here Yet, Does Israel Belong to the Jews?', *Haaretz*, 24 March 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/.premium-if-the-messiah-isn-t-here-yet-does-israel-belong-to-the-jews-1.5452608> [accessed 23 October 2019].

liberalism, secularism and nationalism that reverberated from the European Enlightenment and the French Revolution that had occurred in the centuries before. However, it was also seeking 'to provide a coherent answer to the questions raised by the historical context that produced anti-Semitism as a term of racial/national hatred'.¹⁰ The movement culminated in the emergence of Zionism as a true political force in the late nineteenth century and, eventually, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. This nationalistic movement secularised the Jewish religious myth, changing 'a passive, quietistic and pious hope of the Return to Zion into an effective social force, moving millions of people to Israel'.¹¹ Few national movements have transformed the history of a people as radically as Zionism has changed both the course of Jewish history and the relationship between Jews and the Land of Israel.

I will now move to explain exactly how and why Zionism came to be formalised and organised in distinctive ways in the late nineteenth century. I will then proceed to focus on the gradual shift in Zionist ideology from secular to sacred. My analysis, however, recognises that this shift in emphasis is particularly complex and nuanced. I therefore examine the complex interaction between the religious and secular elements of Jewish identity in Israel and how this relationship has developed over time. I will also assess the specific impact seminal events — such as the formation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the 1967 War — have had on Zionism's use of the Hebrew Bible and its role in underpinning Jewish nationalism.

¹⁰ M. Cohen, *Zion and State: Nation, Class, and the Shaping of Modern Israel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 44.

¹¹ S. Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism: The intellectual Origins of the Jewish State* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), p. 13.

Through this exploration, I will demonstrate the sharpening focus on national-religious identity in Israel over time in preparation for further analysis in the ensuing chapters. This historical background chapter is particularly important in setting the scene for the substantial review and analysis of the Israeli education system that I will provide in Chapter 3, demonstrating the profound impact that the increasingly prominent religious dimension and its association with nationalism has had on the Israeli education system.

The Emergence of Zionism

As noted above, secularisation and liberalism paved the way for the opening up of much of European society for Jews as equals,¹² but rather than providing a solution to the 'Jewish problem' the new situation brought with it a whole new set of dilemmas and predicaments for Jewish identity.¹³ As religion was increasingly relegated to the private sphere, a growing number of individuals and groups (Jews and non-Jews alike) identified less in religious terms, leaving some fundamental problems of identity. Nation subsequently emerged as a significant self-defining entity for many of the new movements, thus tempering the 'inclusivism of the

¹² Discrimination against Jews did not disappear, rather, it was transformed from its religiously based medieval forms into racial/national prejudice. Cohen, *Zion and State*, p. 43.

¹³ With Jewish people now generally permitted to participate in society on a more equal basis — including education, business, and social activities — they now had to find ways to accommodate their religious practices with the new demands of daily life in largely non-Jewish society. For example, a Jewish child's schooling in France was suddenly complicated by the fact that Jewish children could now be educated within the general school system. As these schools opened on Shabbat, the Jewish holy day where work is not permitted, Jewish families were now faced with a school system that conflicted with their Jewish beliefs and practices. Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism*, pp. 8-9; World Zionist Organisation, 'Zionism: Going Back to Our Roots', *World Zionist Organisation Website*, <https://www.wzo.org.il/index.php?dir=site&page=articles&op=item&cs=3320> [accessed 9 November 2019].

universalistic principles of the French Revolution' with 'the historicist exclusivism of much of modern nationalism'.¹⁴ The new problem set before the liberated, emancipated and secularised Jew required modern and innovative answers that traditional mores could not provide. These Jews thus set out on their own 'quest for self-determination and liberation under the modern conditions of secularisation and liberalism'.¹⁵ Just as other groups in Eastern Europe were doing, Jews began exploring their own history to create their own modern, national identity and, with the emergence of Jewish nationalism, 'Hebraism provided a unifying element linking a land, a language and a people'.¹⁶ The development of a modern literal Hebrew language that followed on from the Jewish *Haskala* (Enlightenment) was the first step towards the modern revolution in Jewish life.¹⁷ The Jewish *Haskala* movement began in the late eighteenth century. Its followers were committed to reforming traditional Jewish life and were instrumental in forming a secularised Jewish intelligentsia, which facilitated the development of a modern Jewish politics and the national secularisation of the Jewish religious myth.¹⁸ Indeed, many founding Zionists were themselves *Maskilim* or children of *Maskilim*.¹⁹

¹⁴ Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism*, p. 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 12; Cohen, *Zion and State*, p. 55. National movements were evolving at this time, for example, in Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia.

¹⁷ Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism*, p. 12. Followers of the *Haskala* movement identified as *Maskilim* (singular *Maskil*). The term *Maskil* is also used in the Bible to refer the wise or enlightened. The wise are said to shine like the sky (Daniel 12. 3), and King David is described as *Maskil* in all his ways (Psalm 32. 1-7). Sabbatism and Hassidism both predated the *Haskala* movement. Further details on Sabbatism and Hassidism are provided below.

¹⁸ Cohen, *Zion and State*, p. 54.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 55. Whilst the *Haskala* movement attempted to separate the nationalist components of Jewish identity from its religious elements and influenced the secular nationalism that was

The political Zionism of Leo Pinsker (1821-1891), Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) and Max Nordau (1849-1923) followed the Jewish *Haskala* and the development of a modern Hebrew literature.²⁰ Responding to the challenge of their own self identity, these pioneers were looking to acquire 'self respect in a society which had uprooted them from their traditional, religious background and not provided them and their likes with adequate answers for this quest'.²¹ The reshaping of Jewish political boundaries, traditional Jewish political authority and Jewish political culture is encapsulated well in the title of Pinsker's proto-Zionist pamphlet of 1882, 'Auto-emancipation', which argues that Jews must be responsible for their own fate and should no longer wait for the intervention of government or their own leaders. Pinsker's writing provided the ideological basis for the Hibbat Zion movement, which was officially activated at the Katowice Convention in 1884.²² Despite the political Zionism expressed in Pinsker's 'Auto-emancipation', Hibbat Zion came to represent 'practical Zionism' owing to its focus on the effort to encourage Jews to settle in Palestine, as oppose to Herzl's later concern with securing political rights for Jews in Palestine.²³ However, by the early 1890s, beset

promoted by the founders of the Zionist movement, my study demonstrates the transformation in Zionist ideology over the years, to the point where religion has become central to national identity in Israel today. The analysis provided below is therefore significant in explaining the key developments in Israeli society that have influenced this shift and the increasing fusion of religion into Zionism.

²⁰ Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism*, p. 12. Pinsker, (born Judah Leib Pinsker) was a Russian-Polish physician and Jewish nationalist pioneer; Herzl was an Austrian Jewish journalist and founder of the Zionist Organisation; Nordau (born Max Simon Südfeld) was a Hungarian-French physician, writer and Jewish nationalist who played a key role in establishing Palestine as a potential homeland for Jews.

²¹ Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism*, p. 13.

²² The Hibbat Zion movement was led by Pinsker, Samuel Mohilever and Moshe Leib Lilienblum.

²³ Cohen, *Zion and State*, p. 61.

by difficulties on the ground, this effort at practical Zionism was floundering.²⁴ Although influential thinkers such as Ahad Ha'am — the father of cultural Zionism — emerged from the Hibbat Zion movement, it was left to Herzl to elevate the Zionist cause in Jewish and world opinion.²⁵ Although many of his ideas were neither novel nor original, Herzl 'painted the Zionist solution on the canvass of world politics', and it has remained there ever since.²⁶ Herzl was not overtly motivated by pious notions of reclaiming the biblical homeland, nor was he reliant on biblical prophecy.²⁷ Herzl's primary concern was a state for the Jews, which he saw as the only way to end Jewish suffering.²⁸

However, whilst the political Zionism championed by Herzl sought to secularise the Jewish religious myth it was, as noted, still heavily reliant on religious symbolism. The examples below of delegate cards from two early Zionist Congresses provide a perfect illustration of the religious/secular dichotomy that persisted within

²⁴ This wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine is known as the first *aliyah* and is discussed in further detail below.

²⁵ Ahad Ha'am (born Asher Ginsberg) was a Russian Jew from an Orthodox background. He was highly critical of the political Zionism advocated by Herzl, emphasising instead the spiritual/cultural basis of Zionism.

²⁶ Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism*, p. 89.

²⁷ Herzl was nevertheless clearly aware of the appeal that the choice of target territory would have to those Jews who felt a deep connection to the land of Palestine and, crucially, how this could be capitalised on to achieve his political aims. Herzl thus asserted in his discussion about whether Argentina or Palestine would be most suitable for a Jewish homeland: 'Palestine is our ever-memorable historic home. The very name Palestine would attract our people with a force of marvellous potency'. T. Herzl, *The Jewish State* (Translation of *Der Judenstaat*) (New York: Dover, 1988), p. 96.

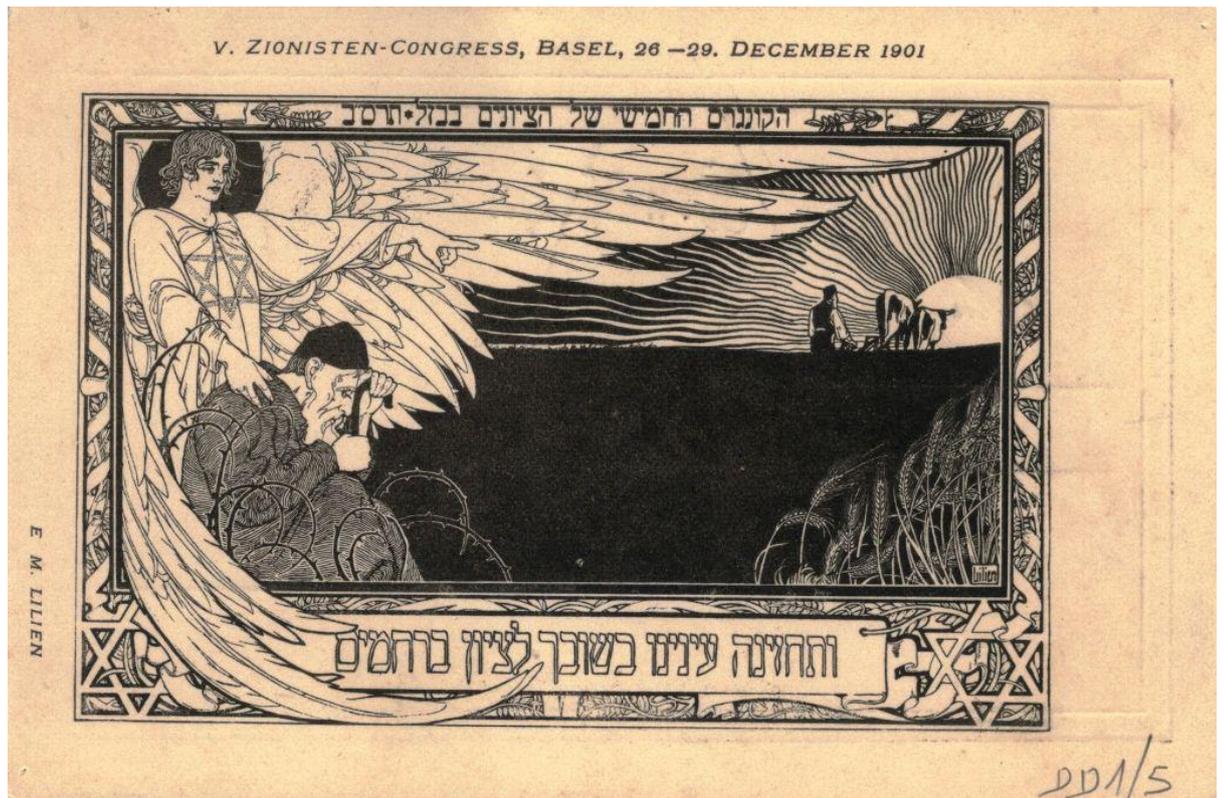
²⁸ The First Zionist Congress, which established and outlined the Zionist programme, took place in 1897 and was held in Basel, Switzerland. Despite Herzl's support for Uganda as a temporary alternative option for Jews fleeing persecution to settle — which was first proposed by British Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain in 1903, and discussed at Sixth Zionist Congress — Herzl was nevertheless careful to acknowledge once again the importance of the land of Palestine to the Jewish people — quoting from the Bible in his concluding address to the Congress: 'If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither' (Psalm 137. 5). The Uganda option was formally shelved at the Seventh Zionist Congress (1905). Herzl had died the previous year.

Zionism. On the one hand, the images encapsulate the Zionist ethos that originally aimed at transforming the religious base of Judaism into a modern secular national culture and building a new society in Palestine — which would become home to the ‘new Jew’, freed from the constraints of a religious (Orthodox) way of life that had characterised life in the Diaspora. On the other hand, however, the religious imagery that appears alongside the images of the ‘new Jew’ also demonstrates a reluctance to shed completely the religious aspects of Jewish identity — thus highlighting the long-standing tensions between religious and secular motivations within the Zionist movement.



Max Bodenheimer’s Delegate Card at the Second Zionist Congress, Basle, 1898 (A15\1).²⁹

²⁹ World Zionist Organisation, ‘The Zionist Congresses’, *World Zionist Organisation: The Central Zionist Archives (Online)*, <http://www.zionistarchives.org.il/en/Pages/DelegateCards.aspx> [accessed 29 November 2019].



Postcard of the Fifth Zionist Congress, Basle, 1901 (DD1\5).³⁰

As noted above, when Zionism first emerged in the late nineteenth century, the Jewish religious establishment bitterly opposed political Zionism. The Orthodox wing objected to human intervention presuming to hasten the coming of the Messiah — rather than waiting for God.³¹ Reform Judaism objected to the particularistic nature of Jewish nationalism — which stood in opposition to their

³⁰ World Zionist Organisation, 'The Zionist Congresses', *World Zionist Organisation: The Central Zionist Archives (Online)*, <http://www.zionistarchives.org.il/en/Pages/DelegateCards.aspx> [accessed 29 November 2019]. See Appendix C for further examples of delegate cards/postcards from the first seven Zionist Congresses demonstrating Zionism's use of religious symbolism from the earliest days of the movement. Significantly, it is this early reliance on Jewish religious symbolism that paved the way for the increasing blending of religion into Zionism. As my study demonstrates, the religious component of Jewish identity has now superseded the national aspects that were emphasised by the founders of political Zionism.

³¹ Traditional Orthodox Jews did not advocate for an active return to Zion initiated by humans. For these Jews Divine providence alone would be responsible for Jewish redemption from exile.

universalist vision of Judaism.³² There were, however, a minority who held alternative views and aligned themselves with the tradition of religious Zionism that had been established by rabbis, notably Yehuda Alkalai (1798-1878) and Zvi Hirsch Kalisher (1795-1874).³³ For these religious Zionists — who combined messianism with activism — the goals of political Zionism and the settlement of Palestine fitted with religious tradition and were in fact desirable.³⁴ Like political Zionists who believed the Zionist movement should refrain from cultural activity and concentrate on political efforts, these religious Zionists considered culture and education to be realms in which the World Zionist Organisation (WZO), which was predominantly secular, should not be involved.³⁵ Thus, when the Democratic Faction was founded at the Fifth Zionist Congress (1901) with the precise aim of creating a new secular Jewish culture in the Hebrew language, the religious Zionists felt compelled to act and thus merged to form a political organisation in 1902.³⁶ Led by Rabbi Isaac Jacob Reines (1839-1915), they were known as the Mizrahi —

³² N. Masalha, *The Bible and Zionism: Invented Traditions, Archaeology and Post-Colonialism in Palestine-Israel* (London: Zed Books, 2007), p. 135. A core belief of Reform Judaism at the time held that the Jewish people's mission — as a religious community and no longer a nation — was to 'serve as a light unto the nations', i.e. disseminate the universal message of ethical monotheism and a commitment to *Tikkun Olam* (healing the world).

³³ M. Brenner, *Zionism: A Brief History* (New Jersey: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2003), p. 103. Rabbi Alkalai first raised the issue of Jewish political independence in the land of Palestine in a pamphlet published in 1834 entitled *Shema Yisrael* (Hear, O Israel). Predating Theodor Herzl and the Zionist movement, he proposed the beginning of Jewish settlement in Palestine as a precursor to the Messianic redemption. Rabbi Kalischer published his work *Drishat Tzion* (Seeking Zion) in 1862, highlighting the human role in helping to bring about the beginning of redemption, which he believed would be spurred by Jewish return to Palestine. Mizrahi World Movement, 'Rabbi Yehuda Alkalai (1798-1878)', *Mizrahi World Movement Website*, <https://mizrachi.org/rabbi-yehuda-alkalai-1798-1878/>; Zionism and Israel, 'Biography of Rabbi Zvi (Tsvi) Hirsch Kalischer', *Zionism and Israel Website*, http://zionism-israel.com/bio/kalischer_biography.htm [accessed 4 June 2019].

³⁴ Brenner, *Zionism: A Brief History*, p. 103. Messianism is discussed in detail below.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 103.

³⁶ The Democratic Faction was led by Chaim Weizmann and Leo Motzkin and included a variety of other young Zionists including Martin Buber. *Ibid*, p. 103.

the first established religious-political Zionist movement.³⁷ Although the Mizrachi traces its roots to the Hibbat Zion movement, Dov Schwartz views the Mizrachi as revolutionary as this was the point at which the religious and rabbinic world entered institutionalised politics.³⁸ In becoming an established movement within the WZO, religious Zionism acknowledged that ‘the redemption of the people and of the land is led by a secular institution that strives to establish a secular regime and a secular culture’.³⁹

The Zionist Arrival in Palestine

Although Zionism began as a European nationalist movement, responding to European Jewry’s predicament, it experienced a significant change of orientation once its leaders decided on Palestine for the national revival of the Jews.⁴⁰ There was of course already a small group of Jews living in Palestine before the Zionist arrival. This group, later known as the old *Yishuv*, was concentrated mainly in the four holy cities of Jerusalem, Hebron, Tiberias and Safed and depended on *halukka* contributions from the Diaspora.⁴¹ It was the *aliyot* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, however, that brought about a notable change in the

³⁷ Literally ‘Eastern’, Mizrachi is derived from the Hebrew *merkaz ruhani*, meaning spiritual centre.

³⁸ D. Schwartz, *Religious-Zionism: History and Ideology* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009), p. vii.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. vii.

⁴⁰ It must be remembered that not all Jews, whether in Israel or outside, are Zionists. Some have been opposed even to idea of a Jewish state, while others have been very critical of the state’s actions/policies.

⁴¹ Brenner, *Zionism: A Brief History*, p. 68. *Yishuv* is the Hebrew term for the Jewish community in Palestine (consisting of around twenty-five thousand people in 1890). *Halukka* was the organised collection and distribution of funds from sympathising Jews in the Diaspora for the residents of the *Yishuv*.

composition of the Jewish population in Palestine.⁴² The arrival of Zionists in the first *aliyah*, the new *Yishuv*, began a fresh chapter in the settlement of the land, and for the history of Zionism.⁴³ Prompted by the wave of pogroms that swept through south-western Imperial Russia⁴⁴ (1882-1884) following the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, the first *aliyah* (1882-1901) saw around thirty-five thousand Jewish immigrants arrive in Palestine.⁴⁵ As noted, members of Hibbat Zion in Europe and the BILU⁴⁶ movement were the mainstays of the first *aliyah*, defining their goal as the political, national and spiritual resurrection of the Jewish people in Palestine. These groups focussed on agricultural settlement and helped establish the agricultural sector of Jewish *moshavot*.⁴⁷ However, practical as well as financial obstacles meant that by the end of the 1890s almost two-thirds of the Jews that had immigrated to Palestine during this period had left the country.⁴⁸

⁴² *Aliyot* is the name given to the successive waves of modern Jewish immigration to Palestine from the 1880s onwards. Each of the five waves is characterised by its own significant features. D. Vital, *Zionism: The Formative Years* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 384. *Aliyah* is a Hebrew word that means 'ascent' or to 'go up'. Although the term '*aliyah*' does not appear in this sense in the Bible, it is nevertheless biblical. The prophets spoke of *aliyah* in reference to God's plan to restore Israel: 'Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the Lord, when it shall no longer be said, "As the Lord lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt", but "As the Lord lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he had driven them". For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their ancestors' (Jeremiah 16. 14-15). The term *aliyah* is also used to refer to the historic ascent to the Temple in Jerusalem. The use of the term *aliyah* therefore further highlights the centrality of biblical language in Zionist thought.

⁴³ Brenner, *Zionism: A Brief History*, p. 69.

⁴⁴ Modern day Ukraine and Poland.

⁴⁵ There were two main influxes during the first *aliyah*: 1882-1884 and 1890-1891. Vital, *Zionism: The Formative Years*, p. 372. Several hundred Jews also arrived from Yemen during this period.

⁴⁶ BILU is an acronym derived from the Hebrew initial letters of a verse in Isaiah (2. 5): '*Bet Yaakov lechu ve nelcha* ("O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us go")'.

⁴⁷ A *moshava* is a form of rural settlement in Israel established mainly during the first two *aliyot*.

⁴⁸ Although substantial aid was provided by Baron Edmond de Rothschild and Baron Maurice de Hirsch, they were still heavily dependent on support from the Diaspora. Rothschild was a French member of the Rothschild banking family who strongly supported Zionism, both ideologically and financially. Hirsch was a German-Jewish philanthropist who also founded the Jewish Colonisation

The catalyst for the second *aliyah* (1904-1919) also lay in Russia as further pogroms and the ensuing eruption of anti-Semitism encouraged many Jews to immigrate to Palestine.⁴⁹ With many of the new arrivals being young, and politically and socially motivated, this second wave of immigration was to have a profound impact on the character and development of modern Jewish settlement in Palestine — despite the somewhat modest increase in the land's Jewish population.⁵⁰ As David Vital points out, 'the immediate significance of the second *aliyah*, and more generally, of the rise of the socialist trend within Zionism — was its internal effect on the movement'.⁵¹ It was during this time that many mechanisms of the rural settlement enterprise were established, including: 'national farms' where rural settlers were trained; the first kibbutz, Degania (1909); and Ha-Shomer, the first Jewish guard/defence system for Jewish settlements in the *Yishuv*.⁵² With the revival of the Hebrew language as a spoken tongue and the publication of Hebrew literature and papers, along with the formation of political parties and workers' agricultural organisations, these pioneers laid significant foundations for the future Jewish society in Palestine and provided the political elite of the young State of Israel.⁵³ Nevertheless, absorption difficulties and the absence of a stable economic

Association which sponsored Jewish immigration to Argentina. Initiatives on the part of Rothschild and Hirsch were administered in Paris by institutions such as the Alliance Israelite Universelle and the Jewish Colonisation Association. Given that these groups were developing similar schemes in North and South America they were keen to avoid association with Herzl's political plans for a Jewish state. Brenner, *Zionism: A Brief History*, p. 74.

⁴⁹ The failed Russian Revolution of 1905 also encouraged many Jewish socialists to aim for the construction of a classless society in a land they could call their own. Ibid, p. 74.

⁵⁰ The Jewish population in Palestine increased from fifty thousand to around eighty thousand. Ibid, p. 74.

⁵¹ Vital, *Zionism: The Formative Years*, p. 410.

⁵² What was to be Tel-Aviv was also established. Brenner, *Zionism: A Brief History*, p. 78.

⁵³ The Zionist Workers' Movement was central to Jewish political life in Palestine during the 1920s and 1930s. Notable immigrants include the future Prime Ministers David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973)

base caused a majority of the thirty to forty thousand immigrants to leave Palestine.⁵⁴

The First World War proved a turning point for the Zionist movement in Palestine as it saw the British Empire move to support the Zionist programme, and thus provided the military and political power that was needed for the project to succeed. As the war began the Zionist leaders moved quickly to persuade Britain, who had invaded Palestine in 1917-1918, that establishing a Jewish colony there was beneficial to British interests.⁵⁵ Official negotiations with the heads of the Zionist movement began in 1916 and on 2 November 1917, Jewish nationalist aspirations were boosted when Lord Balfour declared British commitment to establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine, despite having made conflicting obligations to Arab leaders.⁵⁶ In 1919 Zionist officials toured the country inspecting it for land to purchase and new Jewish settlements were subsequently

and Levi Eshkol (1895-1969), as well as Yitzhak Ben-Zvi (1884-1963) and Zalman Shazar (1889-1974), who were to become presidents. Various other socialist establishment figures also arrived at this time. *Ibid*, p. 75.

⁵⁴ It was those members of the second *aliyah* that remained that had such a great impact on the country. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Aliya and Absorption', *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2002, <https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutIsrael/History/Zionism/Pages/Aliya%20and%20Absorption.aspx> [accessed 18 November 2019].

⁵⁵ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land Two Peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 67.

⁵⁶ A. Balfour, 'Balfour Declaration', 2 November 1917, UK Government Document, available at: UNISPAL, <https://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/E210CA73E38D9E1D052565FA00705C61> [accessed 14 November 2019]. Britain had already promised an independent Arab state in the same region in return for Arab support in the First World War, known as the McMahon-Hussein Agreement. However, the agreement was later disputed by the British Government and Arab independence in the region was never delivered. M. MacDonald (Secretary of State for the Colonies), 'Report of a Committee set up to Consider Certain Correspondence between Sir Henry McMahon [His Majesty's High Commissioner in Egypt] and The Sharif of Mecca in 1915 and 1916', 16 March 1939, available at: UNISPAL, <https://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/0/4c4f7515dc39195185256cf7006f878c?OpenDocument> [accessed 14 November 2019]. Britain was granted a Mandate to govern Palestine in 1920 by the newly formed League of Nations, once the First World War had ended.

established.⁵⁷ The primarily middle class third *aliyah* (1919-1923) set about a significant transformation in the country. During this time institutions such as the Palestinian Commission, the Anglo-Palestine Bank, the Palestine Land Development Company, and most notably, the Jewish National Fund (JNF) all worked to achieve the same goal: 'to purchase as much of the land of Palestine as possible for the Jewish population'.⁵⁸ Moreover, it was in the wake of the third *aliyah* that concrete attempts to establish religious Zionist settlements were made — thus adding religion to the mix of nationalism and socialism.⁵⁹

The group of religious Zionist labourers that spearheaded the founding of religious Zionist settlements were members of Ha-Po'el ha-Mizrachi. They were inspired by socialist ideas and determined to play an active role in the pioneering effort.⁶⁰ The movement was officially founded in 1922 after these idealistic religious youths,

⁵⁷ This marked the beginning of the struggle between the Zionist settlers and the indigenous Palestinian population and, as we shall see, as immigration increased so too did the conflict. Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, pp. 76-77.

⁵⁸ Brenner, *Zionism: A Brief History*, p. 77.

⁵⁹ Although Reines and the early religious Zionists tended to minimise the messianic features, thus enabling them to harmonise religious Orthodoxy and nationalism, the catastrophic events of the First World War led religious Zionists to develop messianic hopes. Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook's (1865-1935) 'comprehensive, messianic interpretation of historical events' fitted well with the thinking of the time. Kook's thoughts began to hold sway in the 1920s as the First World War encouraged the perception that the course of history was running in accordance with a divine plan that would ultimately lead to apocalyptic redemption. As we shall see in the discussion below, Kook was the key figure in modifying interpretations of classical Orthodoxy — aligning secular Zionist ideology with traditional Jewish Orthodoxy. *The Zionist Bible: Biblical Precedent, Colonialism and the Erasure of Memory* (Durham: Acumen, 2013), p. 201; Schwartz, *Religious Zionism*, p. 35; Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism*, p. 152. The roots of religious nationalism can thus be traced back to the early years of Zionist settlement in Palestine. Significantly, through tracing the early interactions between religion and Zionism and how this relationship has developed over the years, my research demonstrates the progression towards the religionisation of Jewish Israeli society, to the point where the Jewish religious component has now become central to Jewish Israeli identity.

⁶⁰ Although from the mid-1930s in particular Ha-Po'el ha-Mizrachi adopted socialist-Marxist elements, the centrality of the Torah in the movement's ideology distinguished it from international, revolutionary socialism. Schwartz, *Religious-Zionism*, p. 46.

who were unhappy with the Mizrachis' indifference to the ideal of *kibbush ha-avodah* (the conquest of labour), had put pressure on the Mizrachi to involve them in the pioneering effort.⁶¹ It was only after a long struggle against the bureaucratic institutions of Zionism (the Department of Land Settlement, the Zionist Executive, the Jewish National Fund, and others), however, that religious Zionist settlements finally became a reality in 1927. During the 1920s and 1930s the Mizrachi and Ha-Po'el ha-Mizrachi had also been expanding their activities in Europe, particularly in Poland and Germany.⁶² The socialist ideas that were flourishing in Germany influenced the youth there, while in Poland they were encouraged by the *Torah va-Avodah* idea and by the settlement struggle of Ha-Po'el ha-Mizrachi.⁶³ These groups of young people — who fused Torah, Zionism and socialism — aimed to create an ideal kibbutz structure that they hoped would allow them to lead a utopian religious life.⁶⁴ The first organised group of young immigrants arrived in Palestine in 1929, towards the end of the fourth *aliyah* (1924-1929).⁶⁵ The first religious kibbutz, Tirat Zvi in the Beit She'an valley, was established in 1937 — during the Arab Revolt.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 43.

⁶² The vibrant Mizrachi activity in Poland is evidenced in the many numerous Zionist publications (*Ha Mizrachi* weekly, *Ha-Kedem*, *HaShomer ha-Dati*, and others), the youth movements (Ha-Shomer ha-Dati and Bnei Akiva), the young girls' organisation (Beruriah), as well as extensive efforts in education. Schwartz, *Religious-Zionism*, p. 57.

⁶³ The *Torah va-Avodah* movement was led by Shmuel Hayyim Landau. For Landau the Torah was central to the nation and the national spirit. Similarly, *avodah* (labour) was promoted by Landau as central to the national revival/resistance and presented as the ultimate expression of religion. Both Torah and *avodah* are thus considered essential to Jewish nationalism: 'a full realisation of the Torah through a productive life resting on manual labour'. For Ha-Po'el ha-Mizrachi the Torah includes everything (all ways of life) and God is revealed through manual labour. Schwartz, *Religious-Zionism*, pp. 46-47.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 65.

⁶⁵ The fourth *aliyah* brought mainly middle class Polish immigrants escaping the economic crisis and anti-Jewish policies there, and also as a result of the tight immigration quotas introduced by the US.

The struggle between the Zionist settlers and indigenous Palestinian population that had begun in the wake of the building of new Jewish settlements in Palestine had worsened as immigration increased. By 1936 the situation in Palestine had become untenable and tensions erupted in open Arab rebellion against the British Mandate authorities and Zionist settlers.⁶⁶ Responding to the unrest in Palestine, Britain's 1939 White Paper explicitly rejected a Jewish state and restricted immigration.⁶⁷ As Bill Hillier notes, 'the Zionists saw this as a betrayal and concluded what had been clear from the beginning: that the Jewish state could only be established by force'.⁶⁸ Zionist resistance initially consisted of clandestine illegal immigration (Aliyah Bet 1939-1948) but, as the British blockade intensified, the Zionists also engaged in active resistance.⁶⁹ The ensuing violence culminated in the summer of 1946 when the Irgun (the National Military Organisation) blew up part of the King David Hotel which housed the British administration. By 1947 Britain had finally had enough and referred the problem to the United Nations

⁶⁶ The drastic changes to rural Palestine that colonial policies had brought as well as worsening economic conditions contributed to the outbreak of the Arab Revolt in 1936.

⁶⁷ This followed a Royal Commission of Enquiry headed by Lord Robert Peel, and the subsequent Peel Report, published in July 1937, that had recommended that most of Palestine be annexed to Transjordan and designated a small portion of land for a future Jewish state. However, given the approach of war and the need to protect oil supplies, Britain changed its approach to soothe Arab opinion. British White Paper of 1939, 'Palestine: Statement of Policy', 1 May 1939, UK Government Document, available at UNISPAL, <https://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/EB5B88C94ABA2AE585256D0B00555536> [accessed 19 November 2019].

⁶⁸ B. Hillier, *Israel and Palestine* (London: Housmans, 1968), p. 15.

⁶⁹ The years between 1939 and 1948 were also the most important years of JNF's activities, with purchases almost doubling between 1939 and 1946. By 1940 the JNF had purchased 516,000 dunams of land, rising to 936,000 dunams by May 1948 (in Palestine, 1 dunam of land is equivalent to approximately 1000 square metres). D. Leon, 'The Jewish National Fund: How the Land Was "Redeemed"', *Palestine-Israel Journal*, 12.4 (2005), 115-123 (p. 119).

(UN), which voted on 29 November 1947 in favour of the partition of Palestine.⁷⁰

Israeli historian Ilan Pappé notes how 'the Palestinian refusal to accept a UN solution provided a pretext for implementing a systematic expulsion of the local population within areas allocated for a Jewish state' and twelve days after the adoption of the UN Resolution the process began.⁷¹ In March, 1948, the war with the Arab armies began in earnest and on 14 May of that year the State of Israel was declared.⁷²

Political necessity prompted the initial alliance that the Labour Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion sought with religious Zionism when the State of Israel was first declared. This was done primarily to stabilise internal politics but also to secure international recognition — thus cementing the 'unholy alliance between Jewish

⁷⁰ The United Nations' Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) was the body appointed to examine the fate of Palestine, arriving there on 15 June 1947. During the three months it spent the region, the body was presented with a ready-made partition plan by the highly organised Zionist representatives. The Arab side objected to the proposal but did not present an alternative plan. Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 123; UN Partition Plan – General Assembly Resolution 181, 29 November 1947, UNISPAL, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/7F0AF2BD897689B785256C330061D253> [accessed 3 October 2019]. There was also partition controversy among Zionists. The majority of Mizrahi leaders maintained their opposition to partition, largely due to the fact that it conflicted with their messianic vision (that the 'redemption' of the 'whole Land of Israel' would hasten the coming of the Messiah). In order to resolve the dilemma that the UN's decision favouring partition presented, the ideologues of the movement claimed that redemption is gradual. Schwartz, *Religious-Zionism*, p. 84. This again highlights the complex relationship between religious and secular elements of Jewish identity in the State of Israel, and illustrates the importance of understanding how this relationship has developed over the years. Indeed, as my study demonstrates, the religious and secular elements of Zionism have become increasingly intertwined over the years.

⁷¹ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, pp. 123-124.

⁷² By August, successful Israeli campaigns had led to their complete control over Palestine, apart from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Given the extent of the military conquests the Arab states had little choice but to enter into dialogue with Israel, under UN supervision. The negotiations produced the armistice lines that lasted until 1967, in the case of Syria, Jordan and Egypt, and until 1978 in the case of Lebanon. Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 135.

secular and religious parties'.⁷³ Many state-building decisions were therefore made out of political expediency, and although Ben-Gurion would not agree to the establishment of a state 'according to the Torah', a compromise was reached that secured Orthodox political recognition.⁷⁴ The decision to maintain the status quo with regard to religious jurisdiction meant that matters of personal status would remain under the authority of the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate.⁷⁵

The Zionist use of the Hebrew Bible after 1948

Although, as noted, the Bible had been in the background as a support to legitimate Zionist claims for a homeland in Palestine, it was during the early days of statehood when familiarity with Bible became integral to the formation of a new Jewish Israeli identity.⁷⁶ As Yairah Amit notes, 'the purported ability of Bible study to create identity achieved mythical proportions'.⁷⁷ Although the Talmud had

⁷³ O. McTernan, *Violence in God's Name: Religion in an Age of Conflict* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 2003), p. 112.

⁷⁴ The religious establishment threatened to denounce the establishment of the new state at the UN if certain stipulations were not agreed to by Ben-Gurion, including: recognising Shabbat as an official day of rest; ensuring that kosher food would be mandatory in all state institutions; placing marriage and divorce under rabbinic jurisdiction; exemption from military service for yeshiva students and ultra-Orthodox women; and guaranteeing autonomy (along with state funding) for the ultra-Orthodox education system. This is commonly referred to as the *status quo* agreement. McTernan, *Violence in God's Name*, p. 113.

⁷⁵ From the beginning there were tensions between those who advocated a strict division between religion and state, those who believed *halachic* Judaism should be the guiding principle of the state, and those who sought a middle ground. S. L. Stone, 'Religion and the State: Models of Separation from Within Jewish Law', *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, 6.3-4 (2008), 631-661 (pp. 641-642).

⁷⁶ Y. Amit, 'The Study of Hebrew Bible in Israel – Between Love and knowledge', *Jewish History*, 21.2 (2007), 199-208 (p. 199).

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 199. With the apparent realisation of the 'return to Zion' (Psalm 126. 1), the biblical story of exile and return 'became an inspiring commentary on the present'. U. Simon and D. Louvish, 'The Place of the Bible in Israeli Society: From National "Midrash" to Existential "Peshat"', *Modern Judaism*, 19.3 (1999), 217-239 (p. 218).

always been used in traditional Jewish education, it had little to offer in support of the Zionist project.⁷⁸ As Prior points out, the Talmud ‘had no glorious story of a nation, few heroic figures, and little narrative of a glorious past. And, most critically, it did not promote any particular relationship to an ancient homeland, nor advance the sentiment of longing to return’.⁷⁹ Indeed, the Talmud is concerned with observance of Jewish Law in all aspects of daily life, wherever one may be. The Bible, in contrast, provided the vital ingredients of a ‘master narrative’ to support the establishment of a state for Jews in Palestine.⁸⁰ Bible study was thus seen as essential for the realisation of the Zionist programme.⁸¹ As historian Anita

⁷⁸ A. Shapira, ‘Ben-Gurion and the Bible’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 33.4 (1997), 645-674, (p. 647); M. Prior, ‘Zionism and the Challenge of Historical Truth and Morality’, p. 35.

⁷⁹ Prior, ‘Zionism and the Challenge of Historical Truth and Morality’, pp. 35-36.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 36. Ben-Gurion’s use of the Bible in order to justify the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine became increasingly evident in his writings after 1948, declaring that the Bible is the Jewish peoples’ ‘sacrosanct title-deed to Palestine [...] with a genealogy of 3,500 years’. D. Ben-Gurion, *The Rebirth and Destiny of Israel* (London: Thomas Yoselof, 1959), p. 100. Another example from a speech in which Ben-Gurion was addressing the third World Congress for the Study of Judaism (Jerusalem, 1961) expresses even clearer the spirit of biblical exclusivism, stating that, ‘the Jewish vision of redemption has two aspects: the ingathering of exiles and the continuation of the Jewish people in its land as a Chosen People, and as a light to the nations’. D. Ben Gurion, *Ben Gurion Looks at the Bible*, trans. by J. Kolatch (New York: Jonathan David, 1972), p. 111.

⁸¹ The Bible has, of course, also been used to support other colonial endeavours — for example the European colonisation of Latin America and North America, the British conquest of Ireland and Australia and in supporting the ideology of Apartheid in South Africa. The lack of concern for the indigenous populations in such instances reflects the belief that, according to the Bible, God sanctioned the extermination of the Canaanites, thus interpreting the land as a gift from God. Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism*, p. 39. The Book of Deuteronomy is particularly useful in providing justification for colonialism with its division of nations and prohibition of mixing with indigenous populations (Deuteronomy 4. 37-38; 7. 7-8; 10. 14-15). Religious authorities, particularly Catholic and Protestant institutions, supported the imperial powers’ colonisation schemes. Religious missionary therefore accompanied the expansion of territorial boundaries and economic resources. Theologies of colonisation were thus used to erase specific peoples’ histories, identities, and agency. S. Lachenicht, L. Henneton and Y. Lignereux, ‘Spiritual Geopolitics in the Early Modern Imperial Age. An Introduction’, *Itinerario*, 40.2 (2016), 181-187. The Bible has, however, also been used in the development of liberation theologies. The biblical theme of Exodus has been appropriated by Latin American liberation theologians and subsequent indigenous theologies as a paradigmatic model of emancipation from oppression. This usage is somewhat problematic, however, for certain indigenous peoples who have suffered as a result of colonisers that have used the same theme of Exodus and ‘Promised Land’ negatively to oppress and colonise. Palestinian

Shapira notes, ‘anything that could serve secular nationalism had been retained, anything with a dominant religious-traditional streak had been obscured and blurred’.⁸²

The Zionist narrative thus emphasised the Bible as a source of historical evidence for the existence of an ancient Jewish nation with exclusive rights to the ‘Land of Israel’.⁸³ The covenant between God and his people was essentially demoted, elevating instead the bond between the ‘Land of Israel’ and the Jews as a nation in order to legitimise the Zionist movement and its quest for land.⁸⁴ Presented as ‘the first chapter in the biography of the Jewish people’, the Bible was an indispensable source for strengthening common historical roots, and the key bearer of national consciousness — as promoted by official Zionist discourse.⁸⁵ As Amit notes, ‘being an Israeli meant being familiar with biblical literature, knowing its texts and its historical narrative, identifying with some of its protagonists, applying its core values, quoting its verses, touring the biblical land and growing intimate with its paths’.⁸⁶ Approaching the Bible from a historical angle also characterised the first

Liberation texts, for instance, move away from the text of Exodus to produce a theology of liberation grounded in specific local and political conditions. Palestinian Christians’ experiences today living under Israeli occupation are therefore likened to those of Jesus and his followers under Roman occupation. Jesus can thus be seen as having also lived as a Palestinian under occupation. N. Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation* (New York: Orbis Books, 2010), p. 11.

⁸² Zionism sought to ease religious restrictions on Jewish life, and the Bible presented a new genealogy for anyone who rejected the authority of Oral Law. A. Shapira, ‘The Bible and Israeli Identity’, *Association for Jewish Studies*, 28.1 (2004), 11-41 (pp. 12-15).

⁸³ T. T. Shimony, ‘Teaching the Bible as Common Culture’, *Jewish History*, 21.2 (2007), 159-178 (p. 162).

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 162.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 159-162.

⁸⁶ Amit, ‘The Study of Hebrew Bible in Israel’, p. 200.

national curriculum for state secular schools in Israel, which dates from 1953.⁸⁷ As in other countries, the education system in Israel was to play a central role in shaping the next generation, and from the outset Jewish studies were elevated in the curriculum, starting with the Bible.⁸⁸ Indeed, the Bible was to become a prime agent in promoting a collective identity in the Jewish society that was coming into being.⁸⁹

The historical approach to Bible study stemmed from the reality of pioneering Zionism which was motivated by a national, rather than an overtly divine, imperative.⁹⁰ Jewish study was thus freed from tradition, placing scripture over oral tradition in order to create what Uriel Simon and David Louvish refer to as a ‘secularising national *midrash*’, which ‘aims to assume the national yoke while throwing off the religious yoke’.⁹¹ Simon and Louvish explain how the Zionist *midrash* was achieved through the Zionist manipulation of the Bible, neglecting the ‘theological, ideological and literary aspects of the Bible’ in order to provide a

⁸⁷ The law introduced a national curriculum in order to determine guiding principles with regard to the content and procedures of state education — state (secular) and state religious. Jewish Virtual Library, ‘Education in Israel: Principal Laws Relating to Education’, *Jewish Virtual Library*, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/principal-laws-relating-to-education-in-israel> [accessed 14 March 2018]. See Chapter 3 for further details

⁸⁸ Shimony, ‘Teaching the Bible as Common Culture’, p. 161.

⁸⁹ A. Shapira, ‘The Bible and Israeli Identity’, p. 11.

⁹⁰ Simon and Louvish, ‘The Place of the Bible in Israeli Society’, p. 220.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 224-225. The doctrine of the dual Torah (written and oral) emerged from Rabbinic Judaism between the second and fifth centuries CE. However, in the centuries before, Jewish law and traditions were preserved as an oral tradition, passed down through the generations. The written Torah is believed to have been dictated by God and is now contained in the Pentateuch. The Oral Torah (Mishnah) is enriched by the writings of the sages of each generation and essentially provides legal commentary on the written Torah to guide the fulfilment of the latter’s commandments — it has been ‘transmitted through the sages and their disciples from Moses and Joshua to the most current generation of rabbis today’. Much of what is written in the Torah could not be comprehended without the oral tradition/law — hence the emphasis in traditional Judaism on the Oral Torah. *Meriam Webster’s Encyclopaedia of World Religions*, ed. by W. Doniger (Springfield, US: Merriam Webster Inc., 1999), p. 597.

'scientific-rationalistic justification for the secular view of the Bible'.⁹² Biblical values were thus sanctified whilst the 'plain meaning of passages concerned with the revelatory source of the text' were rejected to enable the new generation to truly engage with the text.⁹³ As Simon and Louvish note, the secular youth 'could ardently embrace such verses as "doing work with one hand while the other held a weapon" (Nehemiah 4. 11), but was puzzled and repelled by such words as "you shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy" (Leviticus 19. 2)'.⁹⁴ This secular-material view of the Bible, and its central role in shaping the new Israeli society also provided a social motive for school children to study the Bible as they instinctively felt the subject prepared them to participate in the collective discourse.⁹⁵

However, Israeli psychologist Georges Tamarin's pioneering research on the use of the Book of Joshua in the Zionist socialisation of school students clearly highlights the potential dangers of approaching the Bible without employing a critical perspective. As Tamarin notes, an uncritical approach to Bible studies in schools 'no doubt profoundly affects the genesis of prejudices (at least as a disposition) even among non-religious students, in accentuating the negative-hostile characters of the strangers (idol worshippers, etc)'.⁹⁶ Tamarin's research, which was conducted in 1963, investigated the effect of chauvinism/ethnocentrism on moral judgement from the following aspects:

⁹² Simon and Louvish, 'The Place of the Bible in Israeli Society', p. 225.

⁹³ Ibid, p. 221.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 221.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 225.

⁹⁶ G. R. Tamarin, *The Israeli Dilemma: Essays on a Warfare State* (Rotterdam: Rotterdam University Press, 1973), p. 189.

- a. The presence of prejudices in the ideology of the youth.
- b. The effect of uncritical teaching of the Bible on the propensity for forming prejudices (particularly the notion of the 'chosen people', the superiority of the monotheistic religion, and the study of acts of genocide by biblical heroes).⁹⁷

In order to gather the necessary data, Tamarin conducted a pioneering survey investigating how the Book of Joshua was interpreted by Israeli school children.⁹⁸

The Book of Joshua was chosen on account of the special position it holds in the Israeli educational system, 'both as national history and as one of the cornerstones of a modern national mythology, with such concepts as "the generation of the desert", etc'.⁹⁹ The study asked the students to comment on the extermination of an out-group as described in the following passages from the Book of Joshua:¹⁰⁰

So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpets, they raised a great shout, and the wall fell down flat; so the people charged straight ahead into the city and captured it. Then they devoted to destruction by the edge of the sword all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys (Joshua 6. 20-21).

Joshua took Makkedah on that day, and struck it and its king with the edge of the sword; he utterly destroyed every person in it; he left no one remaining. And he did to the king of Makkedah as he had done to the king of Jericho. Then Joshua passed on from Makkedah, and all Israel with him, to Libnah, and fought against Libnah. The Lord gave it also and its king into the hand of Israel; and he struck it with the edge of the sword, and every person in it; he left no one remaining in it; and he did to its king as he had done to the king of Jericho. Next Joshua passed on from Libnah, and all Israel with him, to Lachish, and laid siege to it, and assaulted

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 185.

⁹⁸ The initial study involved nine groups of pupils — ranging from eight to fourteen years of age and from fourth to eighth grade. The students were from various schools/educational establishments in Israel. Ibid, p. 186.

⁹⁹ The Book of Joshua is taught in the fourth grade for the first time and for a second time in seventh grade. Interestingly, the research found an increase in the overt form of extreme prejudice in the seventh grade — coinciding with the re-learning of the Book of Joshua. Ibid, pp. 185-187.

¹⁰⁰ The Book of Joshua presents its protagonist, Joshua, as the successor to Moses who has been chosen by God to lead the Israelites across the Jordan River and take possession of the Promised Land. God declares that as long as the Israelites observe His commandments, He will guarantee their victory in the military campaigns and allow them to remain in the land. The Book of Joshua describes the destruction of the Southern and Northern cities of Canaan and the killing of all living inhabitants — as instructed by God.

it. The Lord gave Lachish into the hand of Israel, and he took it on the second day, and struck it with the edge of the sword, and every person in it, as he had done to Libnah (Joshua 10. 28-32).

Based on the above passages, Tamarin asked the following questions:

1. Do you think Joshua and the Israelites acted rightly or not? Explain why you think as you do.
2. Suppose that the Israeli Army conquers an Arab village in battle. Do you think it would be good or bad to act towards the inhabitants as Joshua did towards the people of Jericho and Makkedah? Explain why.

A control group¹⁰¹ was provided with a 'Chinese version' of the text which substituted Joshua for the character of 'General Lin'— who is described as having lived in ancient China and also commanded by his 'war-God' to kill all the inhabitants of the cities that were conquered during fighting. Crucially, the study found a 'striking difference in the approval of the genocide by Joshua, as compared to 'General Lin', leader of an out-group'.¹⁰² For Tamarin, the results prove unequivocally 'the influence of chauvinism and national-religious prejudices on moral judgement'.¹⁰³

The research brought Tamarin and his work totally unexpected fame and, what became known as the 'Tamarin Affair', clearly demonstrates the controversy that can be aroused when certain potentially sensitive subjects are investigated on the ground — particularly when the results do not reflect especially favourably on the establishment. Indeed, Tamarin's demonstration of the influence of the Israeli education system as a source of religious and nationalist prejudice proved to be a

¹⁰¹ The control group consisted of seventh and eighth graders from one school in North Tel Aviv. Tamarin, *The Israeli Dilemma*, p. 186.

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 187.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 187.

particularly sensitive issue.¹⁰⁴ Research focussing on society in contemporary Israel obviously needs to present a balanced picture of positive and negative aspects, but as Tamarin points out, this ‘does not impact on the legitimacy of publication of studies dealing with the specific subject of prejudices’.¹⁰⁵ Tamarin thus strongly encourages continued investigation in this area, noting the importance of research in the ‘field of prejudices’.¹⁰⁶ As my research demonstrates, the issues raised by Tamarin’s research concerning religious and nationalist prejudices in the Israeli education system have certainly not been resolved, with the passing of time witnessing the growth of ethnic, racial, and religious hatred in Israel, often taking violent forms. Hence my investigation into such issues, provided below.

The promotion of a religious and nationalistic narrative is becoming increasingly prevalent in Israel’s schools and is working to delegitimise ‘other’ identities and, in extreme cases, transform them into enemies. By instilling such religious nationalistic particularism in students, the seeds are being sown for further tensions to grow in Israeli society — not only between Jews and non-Jews, but between religious and secular Jews in Israel. The need for research in this area is therefore critical as ideologically politically motivated politicians continue to dilute democracy in Israel’s schools and exacerbate the tensions in wider society around these issues.

¹⁰⁴ The findings of Tamarin’s study caused considerable unrest in the Ministry of Education and cost him his post at Tel Aviv University, where he had been a lecturer in psychology.

¹⁰⁵ Tamarin, *The Israeli Dilemma*, p. viii.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. ix.

The Impact of the 1967 War on the Zionist Use of the Hebrew Bible

One of the reasons Bible study enjoyed such a prominent position in the secular school system was the special significance attached to the text amongst the majority of Israelis, whether as a revered religious document or an agent of Zionist acculturation.¹⁰⁷ However, the role of the Bible in cultural life in Israel has changed significantly over the years, particularly since the 1967 War, the impact of which I will assess below.

With the conquest of the West Bank, the State of Israel was now in control of the land described in the Bible as 'Judea' and 'Samaria'.¹⁰⁸ Biblical tales now became title deed to Israeli territory and created a new relationship with the land. It was religious Zionism that emerged to 'appropriate and concretise the Bible' in relation to the tangible areas named in the Bible.¹⁰⁹ As Ehud Ben-Ezer notes, 'religious groups surrendered to the impact of the biblical tales with almost idolatrous

¹⁰⁷ Shimony, 'Teaching the Bible as Common Culture', p. 174.

¹⁰⁸ At the end of the 1967 War Israel not only occupied the West Bank but also controlled the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights. The largest area was the Sinai Peninsula, but it was the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in particular that were regarded as the biblical heartland, and thus necessary for the realisation of the Zionist dream. Pappe, *A History of Modern Palestine*, pp. 185-186. The southern part of the West Bank is known as Judea whilst the Northern area is referred to as Samaria. The use of the biblical terms 'Judea' and 'Samaria' for the West Bank today is dictated more by politics than by geographic considerations. Nevertheless, the area is considered by many religious Jews to be the cradle of Jewish civilisation and is the site of significant events in the Hebrew Bible. According to the Hebrew Bible, the Israelites captured the area known as Judea and Samaria from the Canaanites and divided them among the tribes of Judah, Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh), Benjamin, Dan, Simion. The conquest of the land is recounted in Joshua (2. 1-12; 24) and the division of the land described in Chapters 13-21, with most attention given to what later developed into the Kingdom of Judea. The conquest of Canaan is justified by its identification with the 'Promised Land' — the land promised by God to the Israelites. From c. 920 BCE to 597 BCE the area was divided into two kingdoms — Israel to the North and Judah in the South. The Israelites formed their capital in the city of Samaria whilst Jerusalem remained the Judeans capital. Gaza was captured by the tribe of Judah (Judges 1. 18) and was included in the territory ascribed to Judah (Joshua 15. 47). Gaza is also significant in the biblical account of Samson (Judges 13. 16).

¹⁰⁹ Shapira, 'The Bible and Israeli Identity', p. 33.

rapture, but without the qualifications of the *halachic* law of Diaspora Orthodoxy'.¹¹⁰ This ultimately resulted in 'extreme religious readings of biblical injunctions that had previously been considered anachronistic and meaningless'.¹¹¹ A literal reading of Deuteronomy (7. 1-8), for example, could be used by religious extremists to justify expulsions of Palestinians from the 'Land of Israel', and even to support calls for ethnic cleansing:

When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy, and he clears away many nations before you — the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations mightier and more numerous than you — and when the Lord your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy (Deuteronomy 7. 1-2).¹¹²

Just as the renewal of the Hebrew language had allowed readers to engage with the literal sense of the text and informed the secular Zionist reading of the Bible as a cultural text and powerful 'national epic', religious Zionism now embraced the literal understanding of the Bible as 'legitimacy for a raw nationalism decreed from on high'.¹¹³ Most significantly, in relation to education in Israel, the appropriation of the Bible by religious Zionism was accompanied by a 'slow but sure infiltration of traditional commentary into secular Bible teaching'.¹¹⁴ Indeed, there was a growing tendency to read the Bible as a sacred text, leaving little opportunity for critical

¹¹⁰ E. Ben-Ezer, "Anahnu, Be-Yisrael, Hinenu Ha-Yehudim Ve-Ha-Yahudut", *Maariv*, 5.6 (1987), cited in Shapira, 'The Bible and Israeli identity', p. 41.

¹¹¹ Shapira, 'The Bible and Israeli identity', p. 34.

¹¹² Being primarily a Law Book, the centrality of observing God's Commandments is emphasised throughout Deuteronomy.

¹¹³ Shapira, 'The Bible and Israeli Identity', pp. 33; 41.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 34.

approaches in schools.¹¹⁵ The Bible text subsequently became increasingly identified with national and religious radicalism, thus increasing cultural polarisation — which has been steadily intensifying in Israeli society since 1967.¹¹⁶

As suggested above, arguing that the Zionist programme is simply working to restore the divinely ordained land to the Jews relies on engagement with certain traditions of the Hebrew Bible (especially the Books of Exodus, Deuteronomy and Joshua) and with a literal understanding of its land traditions and particular prophetic texts (for example, Ezekiel 36. 8-12).¹¹⁷ It was the promise given to Abraham¹¹⁸ and Isaac that was reiterated to Jacob (Genesis 28. 12-14) which formed the basis of the ancient Israelite theology of land and today is the foundation of the current Jewish religious justification for settling the Occupied Territories. As Naim Ateek notes, ‘from a Zionist perspective, all the land confiscations in the Occupied Territories and the building of settlements have hinged on Genesis promises and other texts in the Torah’ — as well as Tanakh texts, for example, Joshua 1. 6-12.¹¹⁹ For the right-wing religious fundamentalists

¹¹⁵ Religious scholar Nehama Leibovitz was particularly influential in rekindling interest in traditional Bible study — with no room for a critical approach. Leibowitz was extremely successful in transmitting this perspective to her students, who themselves went on to shape the next generation of students. The inevitable result over time was that ‘the Bible, as educational material, came to resemble a religious text’. Shapira, ‘The Bible and Israeli Identity’, p. 34.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 35.

¹¹⁷ M. Prior, ‘The Bible and the Redeeming Idea of Colonialism’, *Studies in World Christianity*, 5.2 (1999), 129-155 (p. 133).

¹¹⁸ The promise that his progeny would inherit the land of Canaan (Genesis 13. 15).

¹¹⁹ Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation*, p. 61. The explicit use and application of Bible texts for Zionist purposes was demonstrated recently when Danny Danon, Israel’s Ambassador to the UN, addressed the UN Security Council in April 2019. Defending and justifying Jewish entitlement to the ‘Land of Israel’ and the right to settle in the West Bank, Danon declared, Bible in hand, ‘this is our deed to our land’. Danon continued to explain Israel’s historical and biblical rights to the land, including the West Bank: ‘from the book of Genesis; to the Jewish exodus from Egypt; to receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai; to the gates of Canaan; and to the realisation of God’s

the entire land has been promised by God to the Jewish people, hence the quest for Jewish sovereignty over the 'whole Land of Israel'.¹²⁰

The Israelite tribes' connection with the land of Canaan is presented in the biblical narratives of Genesis and Exodus. However, as Nur Masalha points out, 'the enormous efforts of several generations of scholars have not been able to uncover any historical evidence for the existence of the events and personages referred to in these texts'.¹²¹ Following the seminal works of Thomas L. Thompson (1974) and John van Seters (1975), and the emergence of new 'Holy Land' archaeology and critical biblical scholarship, there is no academic consensus relating to the notion of a historical 'patriarchal age'. Rather, biblical texts about the patriarchs are believed to have been composed at a later period, likely during the Iron Age, and thus speak more about the era in which they were written than the period they purport to reflect.¹²²

The 1967 War was watershed moment in the history of the State of Israel, giving renewed faith in the Zionist ideal and the state. The relationship between religion and nationalism was strengthened as both religious and secular Israelis felt united by their 'shared historical and cultural rights based on the sanctity of the Jewish

Covenant in the Holy Land of Israel; the Bible paints a consistent picture. The entire history of our people, and our connection to *Eretz Yisrael*, begins right here'. T. Lazaroff, 'Bible is Jewish Deed to Land of Israel, Settlement Envoy tells UNSC', *The Jerusalem Post*, 30 April 2019, <https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Israel-defends-right-to-West-Bank-settlements-at-UNSC-watch-live-588178> [accessed 4 November 2019].

¹²⁰ Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians*, p. 5.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, p. 2.

¹²² M. B. Moore and B. E. Kelle, *Biblical History and Israel's Past: The Changing Study of the Bible and History*, (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), p. 19.

heritage [of the Torah]'.¹²³ The astounding Israeli victory in 1967, however, was seen by many in Israel as more than just a military achievement — it 'assumed a sacred meaning' and was viewed by religious Zionists as a clear sign of God's support for the Jewish people.¹²⁴ It highlighted the success of Zionism and the 'highly effective mobilisation of neo-Zionist, Jewish fundamentalist political and social forces in Israel' that followed the war contributed significantly to the resurgence of the expansionist instincts of 'Greater Israel'.¹²⁵ The war elevated the role of the biblical narrative within Zionist ideology, with the biblical model placed at the centre of a revitalised programme.¹²⁶ Indeed, without appeal to religious values, Prior notes how "'Greater Israel'" would be little different from the fruits of old-fashioned colonial plunder', but supported by religious rectitude, 'religious Zionism could appeal to its divine provenance and be fuelled by eschatological fervour'.¹²⁷

The theology that unites the array of radical Jewish religious groups in Israel is based on four specific elements and is summarised by Yosef Gorny as follows:

¹²³ Z. Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism and the Making of the Jewish State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 335. The following statement by Moshe Dayan, who was Minister of Defence during the 1967 War, illustrates the religious sentiment that overtook even secular Israelis in order to explain the victory and to justify holding on to the newly captured territory: 'we have returned to all that is holy in our land. We have returned never to be parted again'. Moshe Dayan quoted in Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians*, p. 15.

¹²⁴ McTernan, *Violence in God's Name*, p. 113.

¹²⁵ This is often referred to in Israel as the messianic force or religious fundamentalism. Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians*, p. 17.

¹²⁶ Prior, 'The Bible and the Redeeming Idea of Colonialism', p. 133. Holocaust Theology was also mobilised and developed after 1967 by figures such as Elie Wiesel, Emile Fackenheim and others. Holocaust Theology addresses God's role/presence in history and emerged as a response to the *Shoah*, which brought into sharp focus theological problem of theodicy — that is the challenge of reconciling evil alongside the existence of a just and all-powerful God.

¹²⁷ Prior, 'The Bible and the Redeeming Idea of Colonialism', p. 135.

(a) messianic fervour related to the belief in the 'sanctity' of 'Greater Israel'; (b) the building of the Temple on the site of the Muslim shrines in occupied East Jerusalem; (c) the ethos of a religious utopia, reflecting the desire to build a theocratic Jewish state based on the *halacha*, as a substitute for Western-style liberal democracy; (d) the establishment of Jewish political sovereignty over the 'whole Land of Israel'.¹²⁸

The messianic burst of energy that followed the 1967 War was particularly potent in the religious youth of Israel.¹²⁹ These religious Zionists interpreted the 1967 Israeli victory as a sign that the messianic process was reaching fruition and 'God's sign that every inch of land was holy'.¹³⁰ Driven by a sense of 'territorial messianism', their impact on the course of politics in Israel would prove particularly significant.¹³¹ For these radical religious Zionists, in order to comply with God's law, the Torah, not one inch of the newly occupied land was to be relinquished and many began working for the achievement of 'Greater Israel'.

¹²⁸ Y. Gorny, *The State of Israel in Jewish Public Thought* (New York University Press, 1994), p. 150. It is important to note, however, that although Judaism is often characterised as a messianic religion, the idea of a messiah as redeemer is not explicit in the Hebrew Bible and there is no suggestion that ancient Jews of first century Palestine were awaiting a messiah. As William Scott Green and Jed Silverstein note 'Judaism's scripture, the Hebrew Bible, contains no doctrine of an eschatological redeemer and does not use the term "Messiah" to refer to one'. Whilst the category of messiah exists in rabbinic writings and synagogue liturgy, the messiah is not a central feature of the Jewish religion in ancient and medieval times. A shift occurred in this position, however, with the Sabbatean movement and the movements that followed. The Sabbatean movement was named after Sabbetai Zvi (1626-1676), who was proclaimed to be the Messiah by Nathan of Gaza, who himself adhered to Lurianic Kabbalah. Named after Issac Luria (1534-1572) who was key to its development, Lurianic Kabbalah emerged as a powerful ideology in the mid-seventeenth century. Its central claim was that the final redemption was on the verge of occurring. Nathan of Gaza was thus led to declare in 1665 that it would be Sabbetai Zvi who would inaugurate this final redemption. W. S. Green and J. Silverstein, 'The Doctrine of the Messiah' in *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*, ed. by J. Neusner and A. J. Avery-Peck (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 247-267.

¹²⁹ I. Zertal and A. Eldar, *Lords of the Land: the War over Israel's Settlements in the Occupied Territories, 1967-2007* (New York: Nation Books, 2007), p. 5.

¹³⁰ McTernan, *Violence in God's Name*, p. 113.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, p. 113.

Religious Zionism thus transformed itself into a movement of settlement in the Occupied Territories.¹³²

The first settlers, Hanan Porat and his allies, were members of the national religious camp and shared the redemptive outlook of their mentor Rabbi Zvi Yehudah Kook (1891-1982).¹³³ As noted, however, the culture of a Jewish renaissance had been laid down by the latter's father, Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook.¹³⁴ For the elder Kook, the Zionist movement, even in its most secular form was a divine instrument in bringing about redemption. He claimed, as Israeli historian Idith Zertal and journalist Akiva Eldar note, that 'the motivation for the national rebirth and the return to the land were profoundly religious, even if their religious character was denied or repressed by secular Zionists'.¹³⁵ According to Kook the father, the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Israel will lead to redemption and the messianic era — Jewish sovereignty over the entire biblically 'Promised Land' was therefore essential.¹³⁶ Following the 1967 War, this belief was

¹³² The rise of religious radicalism in Israel following the 1967 War was demonstrated, for example, by the formation of the extremist Kach party, which is discussed below, by Rabbi Meir Kahane in 1972. A further example of the rise of 'eschatological Zionism' in the aftermath of the 1967 War is the formation of the Movement for the Greater Land of Israel, which was established to ensure that the newly acquired territory would be not be surrendered. Its founders included Labour Zionists, Revisionists, writers and poets. Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism*, p. 161.

¹³³ One of Hanan Porat's cousins, Mordechai Yogev, served as a Minister for Habayit Hayehudi-Ichud leumi (2013-2020).

¹³⁴ Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook was a Latvian Jew who migrated to Palestine in 1904. He became the first Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi of the Jewish community in Mandate Palestine between 1920 and 1935.

¹³⁵ Zertal and Eldar, *Lords of the Land*, p. 195.

¹³⁶ The Bible is in fact vague as far as borders are concerned — there is no exact historical or even religious map of the scope and boundaries of the 'Land of Israel', and no precise Jewish religious definition of the borders. The various delineations of the boundaries of Israel in the Bible include from Dan to Beersheba (Judges 20. 1-2; Samuel 3. 10; 1 Kings 4. 25; 2 Chronicles 30. 5) as well as from the Nile to the Euphrates (Genesis 15. 18; Numbers 34. 1-12). The Deuteronomic vision of Israel is much more ambitious, however, and is thus especially useful in support of Zionist

interpreted by his son to apply particularly to 'Judea' and 'Samaria', the biblical heartland, and thus became the focus for religious Zionist settlers.¹³⁷ The teachings of the Kooks provided the theological underpinning to religious Zionism, integrating the pious longing for Zion with secular settler Zionism — thus creating a comprehensive fundamentalist nationalist-religious ideology.¹³⁸ It was Kook the son, however, the single most influential ideologue of Ashkenazi¹³⁹ fundamentalism, who created a political platform for messianic neo-Zionism immediately after the 1967 War.¹⁴⁰

Rabbi Yehuda Kook used the Merkaz HaRav Yeshiva in Jerusalem, which was founded by his father, to support his programme of messianic-political activism and to develop this new form of religious nationalism that equated territorial security with traditional piety.¹⁴¹ Zertal and Eldar explain how, 'by removing the barriers between the theological and the political, the road was open for Kook the son and his followers to endow the existing state with messianic holiness and to declare sacred all its concrete actions, phenomena and symbols'.¹⁴² The Merkaz HaRav Yeshiva soon became closely associated with West Bank fundamentalist settlers and has remained a focal point for the neo-Zionist messianic movement in

expansionism: 'every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the River Euphrates, even to the Western Sea, shall be your territory' (Deuteronomy 11. 24).

¹³⁷ Zertal and Eldar, *Lords of the Land*, p. 196.

¹³⁸ Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians*, p. 113.

¹³⁹ Ashkenazi refers to Jews who originated in Central and Eastern Europe. Shephardic Jews, by contrast, are from Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East. Shephardic Jews are often subdivided into two separate groups: Shephardim, descending from Spain and Portugal, and Mizrahim, from North Africa and the Middle East.

¹⁴⁰ McTernan, *Violence in God's Name*, p. 114.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 114.

¹⁴² Zertal and Eldar, *Lords of the Land*, p. 196.

Israel, imbuing followers with ‘an explosive mixture of Zionist territorial expansionism, militant nationalism and religious fundamentalism’.¹⁴³

Settling the Occupied Territories

Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories were to have far reaching implications. Religious groups soon began settling near sites with biblical significance. The first settlers were determined to rebuild a kibbutz where their parents had once lived in an area known as the Etzion Bloc, which had fallen in 1948,¹⁴⁴ and eventually succeeded in eliciting recognition from a hesitant Israeli Prime Minister, Levi Eshkol (1963-1969).¹⁴⁵ Although the Prime Minister was told in no uncertain terms by Theodor Meron, the Legal Counsel of the Foreign Ministry, that ‘civilian settlement in the administered territories contravenes the explicit provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention’, by late September 1967 building on the first settlement in the West Bank, Kfar Etzion, had already started.¹⁴⁶ As Israeli

¹⁴³ Rabbi Yehuda Kook’s disciples founded and currently run several major yeshivot in the West Bank which have contributed significantly to the rise of the religious and nationalistic ideology of neo-Zionism. Virtually all students serve in military units. Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians*, p. 112.

¹⁴⁴ The Etzion Bloc refers to the group of settlements located south of Jerusalem that were established, after a struggle, between 1943 and 1947. These four settlements were destroyed during the 1948 War, with the entire area coming under Jordanian rule. The loss of these Jewish communities was one of the most painful traumas in the Israeli collective memory from 1948 to 1967. L. Friedman, ‘Gush Etzion’, *Americans for Peace Now*, 11 November 2005, <https://peacenow.org/entry.php?id=10152#.XnEXCtSLRkh> [accessed 6 August 2019]. The Etzion Bloc’s battle became a symbolic event in Israel and for religious Zionists in particular: ‘it was proof that they had fought and bled as well as anyone’. Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967-1977* (New York: Times Books, 2006), p. 20. The area is also significant as it encompasses the land between Hebron and Bethlehem, cities of the Bible, associated with Abraham and King David respectively.

¹⁴⁵ See Appendix D for a full list of the governments of Israel from 1948 to present.

¹⁴⁶ T. Meron, Legal opinion ‘Re: Settlement in the Administered Territories’, 18 September 1967, document quoted in Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire*, p. 99; United Nations, *Israeli Settlements in*

historian and journalist Gershom Gorenberg suggests, ‘sentimental attachment to a place where Jews had once lived overcame legal constraints, and the way was opened to further settlement’.¹⁴⁷

Eshkol’s initial hesitancy reflected the wider division in Israeli politics relating to the status of the Occupied Territories in the wake of the 1967 War. On the one hand there were the ‘custodians’ or ‘doves’ who believed that Israel should keep the territories in return for recognition and peace,¹⁴⁸ initially through dealing with Jordan, due to the lack of faith in the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) as a negotiating partner.¹⁴⁹ More extreme ‘doves’, represented politically by the Arab parties, the Communist party and Mapam (a left-wing Israeli socialist party) were ideologically committed to returning the territories and advocated for the

Gaza and the West Bank (Including Jerusalem): Their Nature and Purpose, prepared for, and under the guidance of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, (New York: United Nations, 1982), available at: <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-205221/> [accessed 12 November 2019], p. 2. The Movement for the Greater Land of Israel, the National Religious Party and the Etzion Bloc settlers launched a campaign of pressure on Eshkol urging him to renew settlement in the Etzion Bloc, which succeeded in modifying his view. Zertal and Eldar, *Lords of the Land*, p. 10.

¹⁴⁷ G. Gorenberg, ‘And the Land was Troubled for Forty Years’, *The American Prospect*, 21 May 2007, <http://prospect.org/article/and-land-was-troubled-40-years> [accessed 7 January 2018]. These developments are significant to my study as they demonstrate how religious Zionists began to wield more influence in Israeli society and politics following the 1967 War. The impact of the actions taken by the settlers and the government’s response to them can hardly be overstated as they paved the way for the transformation of the socio-political situation in Israel in the following years — with all governments since choosing to sanction and fund settlement expansion and the continuing occupation of the Palestinian Territories.

¹⁴⁸ The dove is also a symbol of peace in the Bible. The image of the dove holding an olive branch as a symbol of peace originates from the flood story (Genesis 8. 8-12). The dove is used by Noah on three occasions to determine whether the flood waters have receded. The first time Noah sends the dove out from the Ark it returns with nothing. The second time, the dove returns with a freshly plucked olive leaf — a sign of life after the flood and marking the end of God’s punishment. When the dove does not return from its third trip, Noah knows it is safe to return to land.

¹⁴⁹ Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, p. 131. The PLO was formed in June 1964 by the Arab League in Jerusalem as the body representing the Palestinian struggle for independence. Today the organisation includes more than twenty Palestinian resistance groups. Among them, Fatah (Palestinian National Liberation Movement), now led by Mamhoud Abas (Abu Mazen) following Yasser Arafat’s death in 2004, is the oldest, largest, and most influential.

establishment of a Palestinian state.¹⁵⁰ Similar to the Labour party, more pragmatic ‘doves’ generally adopted the ‘land for peace’ formula on security grounds — although also favouring a Jordanian, rather than a Palestinian partner.¹⁵¹ ‘Redeemers’ or ‘hawks’, on the other hand, employed biblical longing for ‘Judea’ and ‘Samaria’ and advocated the Occupied Territories’ integration into Israel proper on historical, national and security grounds.¹⁵² Although all hawks/redeemers were in favour of settling throughout *Eretz Yisrael* (Land of Israel), there were also divisions between more extreme groups amongst them, who viewed settlement as a religious and national obligation, and the more moderate, who considered the occupation vital for ‘security’.¹⁵³ New political alliances were also formed in the aftermath of the 1967 War, bringing together groups that despite being ideologically opposed were united in their desire to reclaim Jewish control over the newly conquered lands.¹⁵⁴ Religious Zionists, who sought an Israeli state based on their religious beliefs, were thus joined by secular Revisionist Zionists to work for a state that would cover both sides of the Jordan.¹⁵⁵ It was those in Israel who were imbued with a double feeling of mission — religious

¹⁵⁰ Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, p. 131.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p. 131. The ‘land for peace’, formula was incorporated into UN Security Council Resolution 242 on 22 November 1967, and has been central to all subsequent peace negotiations. UN Security Council Resolution 242, 22 November 1967, UNISPAL, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/7D35E1F729DF491C85256EE700686136> [accessed 12 September 2018].

¹⁵² Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, p. 131.

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 131.

¹⁵⁴ Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians*, p. 21.

¹⁵⁵ Revisionist Zionism was founded in 1925 by Vladimir (Ze’ev) Jabotinsky and advocated militant Jewish nationalism. Their traditional slogan was ‘both banks of the Jordan — this is ours and that one is also’. Support for settlement and territorial expansionism in post-1967 Occupied Territories is also the result of adherence to Jabotinsky’s ‘Greater Israel’ ideology: concern for the territorial integrity of an imagined biblical Israel. Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians*, p. 19.

and military — however, who made the most progress.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, it was not until the end of the 1973 War that religious Zionism emerged as a powerful activist force at the centre of Israeli political life with the formation of the settler movement Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful).¹⁵⁷ Its members dedicated themselves to fulfilling the territorial ambitions of religious Zionism and believed they had a ‘divine mandate’ superior to any state law.¹⁵⁸ They were also opposed to very notion of trading ‘land for peace’¹⁵⁹ and given their xenophobic tendencies, characteristic of most far-right groups in Israel, displayed open hostility and even violence towards Palestinians.¹⁶⁰

Gush Emunim’s ideology has strong roots in the national religious camp and, as Ehud Sprinzak, a prominent expert on Gush Emunim and Israel’s radical right notes,

¹⁵⁶ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 199. These developments are particularly significant to my own study because they signal the beginnings of the rivalry between religious and secular elements as they strive for hegemony in Israel. As my study demonstrates, it is the former that has won out, with religious Zionist ideology now established as the dominant narrative in Israeli society — reflected most obviously today in the curriculum of state secular schools.

¹⁵⁷ The founding fathers of the movement include Rabbi Moshe Levinger, Hanan Porat, Gershon Shafat, Eliezer Waldman (of Kiryat Arba), Yoel Ben-nun, and two Members of Knesset for the National Religious Party (NRP), Zevulun Hammer and Yehuda Ben-Meir. Significantly, Hammer went on to become leader of the NRP and served three terms as Minister of Education (see chapter 3 for further details). Gush Emunim was formally established in February 1974 as a non-parliamentary movement, in preference to remaining a pressure group within the NRP. The influence that extra-parliamentary groups wield in Israeli society and the significant impact they have on political discourse is a particularly notable aspect of the Israeli body politic. Indeed, it is precisely because of its independence of all political parties that Gush Emunim has been able to exercise tremendous influence on all governments in Israel. Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism*, p. 157.

¹⁵⁸ McTernan, *Violence in God’s Name*, p. 114. As McTernan’s research demonstrates, this sentiment still persists amongst ideological religious settlers in the West Bank: ‘the government could not deport us from Beth-El. Even the formation of the mountains here, when looked at from space, spells the name of God’. Religious settler quoted in McTernan, *Violence in God’s Name*, p. 117.

¹⁵⁹ The ‘land for peace’ formulae was central to US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s ‘shuttle diplomacy’ among the Arab countries in the aftermath of the 1973 War promoting the plan for the separation of forces and the withdrawal in Sinai.

¹⁶⁰ McTernan, *Violence in God’s Name*, p. 114; Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism*, p. 158. The far-right in Israel refers to groups and movements in Israel whose primary goal is the creation of a ‘Greater Israel’.

'is only the tip of an iceberg of a broader religious subculture, which started its meteoric development in the 1950s'.¹⁶¹ Indeed, these disciples of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook 'were not isolated individuals who discovered the light through mystical revelation'.¹⁶² Rather, its members came from the religious Zionist current that began expanding in the 1950s and 1960s, based in the religious school system and Talmudic academies.¹⁶³ What was to become a remarkable educational achievement for religious Zionism began with the Kfar HaRoeh Yeshiva near Netanya. The yeshiva was founded by a religious elite of Bnei Akiva¹⁶⁴ members in their early teens who wished to concentrate on serious study of the Torah, and were committed to 'revolutionising Bnei Akiva and religious youth culture among more pious lines'.¹⁶⁵ It is here, in the Kfar HaRoeh Yeshiva, that Professor of sociology and anthropology Gideon Aran finds the 'unmistakable portents of Gush Emunim on the horizon'.¹⁶⁶ In 1952 — in response to the institutionalisation of secularism at state level and the 'disdainful and dismissive treatment religiously

¹⁶¹ E. Sprinzak, 'The Iceberg Model of Political Extremism', in *The Impact of Gush Emunim: Politics and Settlement in the West Bank*, ed. by D. Newman (London: Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 27-45 (p. 27).

¹⁶² E. Sprinzak, *The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 48.

¹⁶³ M. Rosenak, 'Jewish Fundamentalism in Israeli Education', in *Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education*, ed. by M.E. Marty, and S.R. Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 374-414 (p. 394).

¹⁶⁴ The religious Zionist youth movement Bnei Akiva ('children of Akiva') was founded in Jerusalem in 1929 and is based on the principles of *Torah va-Avodah*. The movement takes its name from Rabbi Akiva who is highly revered in Jewish history as one of the greatest rabbinic sages. Bnei Akiva was originally sponsored by the Mizrachi religious workers party Ha-Po'el ha-Mizrachi. When the Mizrachi party and Ha-Po'el ha-Mizrachi merged in 1956 to form the National Religious Party (NRP), Bnei Akiva became the youth movement of the NRP. Bnei Akiva has always viewed settlement as its aim and has played a central role in religious settlement throughout the years, encouraging its members around the world to make *aliyah* to Israel.

¹⁶⁵ Rosenak, 'Jewish Fundamentalism in Israeli Education', p. 394. See Chapter 3 for a detailed analysis of religious educational institutions in Israel.

¹⁶⁶ G. Aran, 'Jewish Zionist Fundamentalism: The Bloc of the Faithful in Israel (Gush Emunim)', in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. by M.E. Marty, and S.R. Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 265-345 (p. 270).

observant Jews were subjected to in the early days of the state' — a group of teenagers from the yeshiva formed the religious pioneer group Gaheret.¹⁶⁷ Notably, along with its increased religiosity, the group sought to deepen their nationalism. Observing 'the constant decline of Israel's secular pioneering and public spirit and the growth of materialism and self-interested individualism', Gaheret began working for a spiritual and cultural transformation of the nation that they hoped would redefine the relationship between religion and state.¹⁶⁸

Members of Gaheret were thus inspired to enrol in the Merkaz HaRav Yeshiva where 'they found the philosophical-religious foundations that would feed their nationalist ambitions'.¹⁶⁹ The group became devoted students of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, who introduced them to the thought of his father. Aran notes how they 'immediately adopted [the elder Kook's] thought as their ideology and presented it as if it had motivated them from the very beginning of their quest'.¹⁷⁰ These students not only succeeded in elevating the teachings of Kook the father among a young and enthusiastic public but, by adopting Rabbi Kook the younger as their spiritual mentor, also 'propelled him from the status of a forgotten, ridiculed figure

¹⁶⁷ T. Persico, 'Settler Politics as God's playing Field', *Haaretz*, 5 April 2013, <http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/week-s-end/settler-politics-as-god-s-playing-field.premium-1.513685> [accessed 11 April 2019]. *Gaheret* literally means 'glowing ember'. As a Hebrew acronym, it stands for *Garin Halutzim Lomdei Torah* — 'cadre of Torah-learning pioneers'.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*; Sprinzak, *The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right*, p. 49. *Hesder* yeshivot, which are discussed in Chapter 3, were a key factor in bringing about this social change in the religious Zionist community.

¹⁶⁹ The group included some of today's most significant religious Zionist rabbis, including, Zephaniah Drori, Yaakov Filber, Zalman Melamed and Haim Druckman. Persico, 'Settler Politics as God's playing Field'.

¹⁷⁰ G. Aran, 'The Father, The Son, and The Holy Land: The spiritual authorities of Jewish-Zionist fundamentalism in Israel', in *Spokesmen for the Despised: Fundamentalist Leaders of the Middle East*, ed. by S. R., Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 294-322 (p. 320).

at the margins of the Torah and Zionist worlds into an outstanding Israeli personality with a magnetic influence on a broad circle'.¹⁷¹

Right-Wing Victory

Just as the 1967 Arab defeat and Israel's subsequent territorial expansion brought a whole new set of dynamics into play on both sides of the Palestine-Israel conflict, so too did Egypt and Syria's surprise attack on Israel in 1973. The 1973 War, known in Israel as the Yom Kippur War, was a painful event and its impact reverberated throughout Israeli society — weakening the hegemony of the Israeli political elite and eroding the sense of common purpose within Israeli politics and culture.¹⁷² Even though Israeli forces fought off the surprise attack from its neighbours, Israeli intelligence was caught unprepared and the fact that Israeli forces were almost defeated shook the entire political system. The leading Labour government was blamed for the failures and the huge loss of life that resulted — contributing to the demise of the historical Labour movement in Israel.¹⁷³ Israel's aura of invincibility crumbled and, as Pappé notes, 'while some saw this as a good reason to become

¹⁷¹ Aran, 'Jewish Zionist Fundamentalism', p. 270. It was these members of the Gahal group that were to become the spiritual leaders of Gush Emunim and the settlement movement more widely. Zertal and Eldar, *Lords of the Land*, p. 189.

¹⁷² Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 207.

¹⁷³ Ibid, p. 206. The military and political outcomes of the 1973 War also provided motivation for embarking on the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, aimed at eradicating the PLO and rearranging the Middle East map to fit with Israeli interests. Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians*, p. 15. The PLO had been recognised at the Arab League Summit (Rabat Conference) of 1974 as 'the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people' and in 1975 the UN Council had allowed PLO participation in the Arab-Israeli question.

more insistent in the search for peace, others turned to God, toughening their positions on peace and territorial compromise'.¹⁷⁴

The growth of religious nationalism paved the way for the seismic shift in Israeli politics that occurred when the right-wing Likud party, led by Menachem Begin, and representative of the Revisionist Zionism, won the 1977 election.¹⁷⁵ It marked the end of both the ideological hegemony and the political dominance of Labour Zionism which had been promoted by Ben-Gurion around the statist principle (*mamalachtiut*) — which, as noted, prioritised state-building and the need for national unity.¹⁷⁶ The consensus had begun to erode, however, following the 1967 War and was compounded by the events of 1973. As Pappé notes, it was an alliance of frustrated Israelis that brought Begin to power: 'Mizrachi Jews suffering from years of discrimination, religious Jews feeling marginalised in the Jewish state, Labourites shocked by the 1973 surprise Arab attack, and expansionist Jews

¹⁷⁴ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 207. The events of the 1973 War resulted in a loss of confidence in the political and national security elite, headed at the time by Prime Minister Golda Meir and Minister of Defence Moshe Dayan, who were blamed for not heeding the warnings about a possible attack. Despite the charges and counter-charges concerning inadequate military preparedness, Meir's government nevertheless returned to office only to be forced to resign four months later, resulting in a succession crisis and the departure of Labour's veteran party leaders. Yitzhak Rabin replaced Meir as leader of the Labour movement. Gush's resolve to settle throughout 'Judea', 'Samaria' and Gaza was also strengthened. The umbrella organisation of the settlements, the Yesha Council — which took over the pragmatic settlement and political work of Gush Emunim — was founded, and the settlers' primary official publication *Nekudah* was launched. Ines Gabel's study of *Nekudah* explores the publication's role in constructing the settler community's collective identity/historical memory. Gabel's research highlights how the discourse stresses 'the continuity of Jewish presence in the Land of Israel since biblical times and reinforces the image of the Jewish victim in the Diaspora'. I. Gabel, 'Historical Memory and Collective Identity: West Bank Settlers Reconstruct the Past', *Media, Culture and Society* 35.2 (2013), 250-259.

¹⁷⁵ Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, p. 132. These developments transformed the socio-political situation in Israel and clearly demonstrate how religious Zionist elements were able to gain increasing influence in Israeli society during this period. These events are therefore highly relevant to my own research, illustrating the circumstances that allowed for the increasing bond between religion and Zionism.

¹⁷⁶ Gush Emunim's influence also increased further after the 1977 elections.

(both secular and religious) hoping Begin would impose Israeli rule over the Occupied Territories'.¹⁷⁷ As a result of the upheaval there was now in place an Israeli government staunchly committed to Jewish settlement in the Occupied Territories.¹⁷⁸



Figure 2.1: Members of Gush Emunim rally in front of the Prime Minister's office demanding legal status for the settlements in the West Bank, March 1980.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Pappe, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 212.

¹⁷⁸ Dowty. *Israel/Palestine*, p. 132. A settlement 'Master Plan' for the period 1983 to 1986 was published by the World Zionist Organisation and the Ministry of Agriculture in April 1983 which envisaged an additional eighty thousand settlers in the West Bank by 1986 along with forty six new settlements. Although the population had only reached fifty-one thousand by the end of 1986, the settlement enterprise continued to flourish during the subsequent period of the Labour, Likud and unity governments. D. Drobless, *Master Plan for the Development of Settlement in Judea and Samaria, 1979-1983* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organisation, September 1979), annexed to Letter dated 18 October 1979 from the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of Security Council. (A/34/605-8/13582), available at: <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/76B24E9B635C44C185256D5C004C5C4C> [accessed 12 April 2019]; Y. Lein, 'Land Grab: Israel's Settlement Policy in the West Bank', *B'Tselem: The Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories*, May 2002, https://www.btselem.org/download/200205_land_grab_eng.pdf [accessed 12 April 2019]. Not all settlers were ideologically motivated, many were also attracted by the cheaper housing, due to government subsidies. Pappe, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 200.

¹⁷⁹ Image credit: Chananya Herman, Israel Government Press Office. Image printed in T. Persico, 'The Movement That Saw Israeli Settlements as Redemption for Jews and the World' *Haaretz*, 22

Unlike the settlement strategy of the Labour government which was decided — at least officially — on security grounds, the Likud, like Gush Emunim, favoured settling near allegedly historic biblical sites and began employing messianic discourse about 'Judea' and 'Samaria, presenting settlement in these areas as central to hastening redemption.¹⁸⁰ As Pappé notes, 'one of Menachem Begin's first acts was to instruct government personnel, including members of the media, to use the biblical terms for the Occupied Territories'.¹⁸¹ Begin's government adhered to the 'Greater Israel' ideology and aimed towards the goal of a homogenous nation: 'any decrease in Palestinians or increase in the number of Jewish settlers in the Occupied Territories was seen as likely to make the dream a reality'.¹⁸² It may seem peculiar then that Begin, 'the super hawk', responded favourably to Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's peace effort in 1977.¹⁸³ Nevertheless, from Begin's point of view the peace dialogue with Egypt, which led to the gradual evacuation of the Sinai Peninsula and the Israeli-Egyptian Peace Treaty of 1979, did not present such a problem. As Alan Dowty explains: 'Israeli territorial hawks did not have the same kind of attachment to the Sinai that they had to the West Bank, and the chance to detach Israel's most powerful enemy from the opposing coalition was a strategic opening that no Israeli government

June 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-the-rise-and-fall-of-zionism-as-a-religion-1.5486927> [accessed 12 November 2019].

¹⁸⁰ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, pp. 200-201.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 200.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, p. 195.

¹⁸³ Sadat had promised the Palestinians that he would link the bilateral agreement to a settlement of the Palestinian question, but he never succeeded in doing so before being assassinated in 1981. Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, p. 136.

could pass up'.¹⁸⁴ The government intended, however, to keep the West Bank and Gaza Strip forever.¹⁸⁵

Significantly, these developments also generated Jewish terrorism in the Occupied Territories from the late 1970s and into the 1980s and 1990s. Conflict resolution practitioner Oliver McTernan points out that, much like their Muslim or Christian counterparts, 'these militant Jewish groups have no problem in using their religious traditions and scriptures to sanction violence in the pursuit of religious goals'.¹⁸⁶ In 1984 the Israeli security services foiled a plot by a group of Gush Emunim leaders and activists, who became known as the Jewish Underground (HaMahteret HaYehudit), to blow up the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount.¹⁸⁷ Their intention was to herald the building of the Jewish Temple and 'to provoke Muslim anger on such a global scale that it would lead to the ultimate war and the coming of the Messiah'.¹⁸⁸ In addition to Temple Mount related groups, Gush Emunim was also reportedly linked to a variety of other

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 136.

¹⁸⁵ It has been suggested that Likud returned Sinai so that the West Bank and Gaza would be sidelined in any peace negotiations, Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, pp. 213-214.

¹⁸⁶ McTernan, *Violence in God's Name*, p. 31. These groups differ from Palestinian Islamic fundamentalist groups as they are not generally motivated by socio-economic or political marginalisation, with members coming from middle class backgrounds and inspired by Zionist elites, and coalition politics. Masalha, *The Bible and Zionism*, p. 141.

¹⁸⁷ The Temple Mount in Occupied East Jerusalem, known in Arabic as Haram al-Sharif (the Noble Sanctuary), is where the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock currently stand. Following the capture of East Jerusalem by Israeli forces in the June 1967 War, the Israeli government prohibited Jews from praying on the Temple Mount. It was decided the Jews would be able to pray at the Western Wall below the Mount. The Temple Mount compound is currently under the jurisdiction of the Jordanian Waqf (Islamic religious trust), although Israel maintains security control of the site.

¹⁸⁸ McTernan, *Violence in God's Name*, p. 30. Their terrorist activities also included the attempted murder of two Palestinian Mayors on 2 June 1980, which injured both; an attack on the Islamic college in Hebron in July 1983, the murder of three students, and an attempt to place bombs under five Arab buses in Jerusalem in April 1984. Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians*, p.123.

extremist groups including Kach,¹⁸⁹ Terror Against Terror (TNT) and the Sicarites.¹⁹⁰

Viewing themselves as subject to divine law and therefore above the laws of the state, such groups have remained committed to following the advice of their spiritual leader, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook: ‘we cannot evade this commandment, Torah, war and settlement — they are three things in one and we rejoice in the authority we have been given for each of them’.¹⁹¹

The ongoing centrality, influence and impact of the teachings of the Kooks and the Merkaz HaRav Yeshiva cannot be overstated. Significantly, this ideology has made considerable inroads into mainstream Zionist circles in recent years, to the point where religious Zionism has become the hegemonic sector in Israel today, with religion promoted as central to Jewish Israeli identity.¹⁹² The religio-political ideology promoted by the Kooks through the Yeshiva is therefore highly relevant to my own study as it has contributed considerably to the religionisation of Israeli society.¹⁹³ Many of the Kooks’ most well-known students are now religious Zionist rabbis and wield profound religious and political influence as leaders of West Bank

¹⁸⁹ As noted, the Kach party was formed by Rabbi Meir Kahane in 1972. Kahane, was a major contributor to the rise of militant messianic theology in Israel in the post-1967 period. For Rabbi Kahane and his followers the Torah (which was to be interpreted in a literal sense) was the justification for, and basis on which the State of Israel was formed, and there was thus no place for (Western) democracy. Kahane called for the expulsion of Arab Palestinians from Israel. He particularly objected to Islamic presence in Jerusalem and thus also advocated the destruction of the two Mosques on Temple Mount. Kahane also called for extensive Jewish settlement throughout the Occupied Territories, in accordance with expansionist readings of the biblical borders (which, as noted, are in any case vague). He believed, like the Kooks, that such settlement would accelerate the coming of the Messiah. Kahane was elected to the Knesset in 1984 and continued to be active until 1988 when, due to his calls for violent methods and his offensive language, was banned from standing in elections. He was assassinated in New York in 1990.

¹⁹⁰ Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians*, p. 122.

¹⁹¹ This sentiment is captured in the religious Zionist slogan, ‘the Land of Israel, for the people of Israel, according to the Torah of Israel’. Ibid, pp. 106; 110.

¹⁹² Peled and Peled, *The Religionization of Israeli Society*, p. 2.

¹⁹³ The religionisation process that is taking place in Israeli society is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

settlements, Bnei Akiva, *hesder* yeshivot and religious high schools.¹⁹⁴ In order to demonstrate the considerable impact of the Kooks and their teachings, below are the details of some of the most prominent leaders influenced by the Kooks.

As a founding member Gush Emunim, and the ideological force behind Jewish settlement in Hebron, Rabbi Moshe Levinger was a leading figure in the religious Zionist settler movement following the 1967 War — and is recognised in Israel as one of the most extreme right-wing settlers.¹⁹⁵ Rabbi Levinger was arrested many times over the years by the Israel security forces and convicted in 1988 of ‘death by negligence’ after randomly opening fire on shops in Hebron and killing a Palestinian shopkeeper.¹⁹⁶ Nevertheless, following his death in 2015, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wrote a letter of condolence to Rabbi Levinger’s family describing him as ‘an outstanding example of a generation that sought to realise the Zionist dream, in deed and in spirit, after the Six-Day War’.¹⁹⁷ Despite his death, Rabbi Levinger’s legacy lives on through his son, Malachi Levinger, who now heads the Kiryat Arba Regional Council (for Jewish settlements) in Hebron.

¹⁹⁴ *Hesder* yeshivot and religious high schools are discussed in Chapter 3.

¹⁹⁵ Hebron is home to the Tomb of the Patriarchs (al-Ibrahimi Mosque) — the burial place of Abraham, Issac, Jacob and their respective wives, Sarah, Rebekah and Leah. The site is holy in Judaism, Islam and Christianity. In the late eighteenth and early twentieth century Jews and Arabs lived peacefully alongside each other in Hebron. However, tensions began to rise during the 1920s as Jewish immigration to Palestine increased. The conflict peaked in 1929 when sixty-seven Jews were killed by Muslims during a riot in the Jewish Quarter of Hebron and the remaining Jews were evacuated. The incident became a central part of the Jewish narrative, and thus a focus for the ideological settlers after the 1967 War.

¹⁹⁶ Levinger accepted a self-defence plea-deal and served only three months of a five month prison sentence. I. Kershner, ‘Moshe Levinger, Contentious Leader of Jewish Settlers in Hebron, Dies at 80’, *The New York Times*, 18 May 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/19/world/middleeast/moshe-levinger-contentious-leader-of-jewish-settlers-in-hebron-dies-at-80.html> [accessed 23 November 2019].

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*



*Figure 2.2: Rabbi Moshe Levinger, left, and Hanan Porat in 1975 after the Israeli government ruled they could establish a Jewish settlement in Hebron in the West Bank.*¹⁹⁸

Rabbi Haim Druckman is another preeminent figure in the religious Zionist community, and notably, in relation to my own study, exercises substantial power in the field of education as the head of the Bnei Akiva Yeshivot and Ulpanot — the leading religious Zionist educational network in Israel. Indeed, many of the most prominent religious Zionist rabbis hold key roles in religious Zionist education and thus have considerable influence over religious Zionist youth. For example, Rabbi Yoel Ben-Nun, who was also a founding member of Gush Emunim and co-founder of Har Etzion Yeshiva, went on to establish the Michlelet Yaakov Herzog which trains Jewish studies teachers. Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, one of the spiritual leaders of religious Zionism, is also the head of Yeshiva Ateret Kohanim in Jerusalem.¹⁹⁹ The Ateret Kohanim organisation that runs the yeshiva works to acquire houses in the Old City of Jerusalem and in other neighbourhoods throughout East Jerusalem in

¹⁹⁸ Image Credit: Moshe Milner, Israel Government Press Office. Image printed in, Kershner, 'Moshe Levinger, Contentious Leader'.

¹⁹⁹ Yeshivat Ateret Kohanim, 'From the Rosh Yeshiva', *Yeshivat Ateret Kohanim Website*, <https://www.ateret.org.il/english/about/rosh-yeshiva.asp> [accessed 14 October 2019].

order to populate them with Jewish residents.²⁰⁰ A further notable graduate of the Merkaz HaRav Yeshiva is Rabbi Yisrael Ariel, the founder and leader of The Temple Institute — an organisation which seeks the destruction of the al-Aqsa Mosque and its replacement with a Jewish Temple on the Temple Mount. The Institute is of particular significance to the present study as it has received long-running support from the Ministry of Education to provide lectures and workshops for both religious and secular students.²⁰¹ The Temple Institute was founded by Rabbi Ariel in 1987 and promotes itself as a non-profit educational and religious organisation. Rabbi Ariel is, however, well known in Israel for his extreme views, having once run in elections for Rabbi Meir Kahane's extremist Kach party. Members of the Temple Institute are actively working to reconstruct and recreate all the necessary material elements for the functioning of a Third Temple. The organisation's short term goal, however, is 'to rekindle the flame of the Holy Temple in the hearts of mankind through education'.²⁰²

Although longing for a Third Temple was once consigned to the messianic fringes, Temple Mount related activism has made huge strides towards the mainstream. This can be seen in the proliferation of movements focussing on the Temple Mount, increasing public support for Jews to be able to pray on the Mount, as well

²⁰⁰ S. Surkes, 'Supreme Court Rules for Jewish Group in Battle over Old City Church Leases', *The Times of Israel*, 12 June 2019, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/supreme-court-rules-for-jewish-group-in-battle-over-old-city-church-leases/> [accessed 23 November 2019].

²⁰¹ Between 2010 and 2015 the Ministry of Education provided 2,200,000 shekels (\$602,000) of funding to the Institute. The Israeli government also sends young women doing their national service to work there. U. Blau 'Netanyahu Allies Donated to Groups Pushing for Third Temple', *Haaretz*, 9 December 2015, <https://www.haaretz.com/netanyahu-allies-donated-to-groups-pushing-for-third-temple-1.5434678> [accessed 14 May 2018].

²⁰² The Temple Institute, 'Home', *The Temple Institute Website*, <https://www.templeinstitute.org/main.htm> [accessed 29 June 2019].

as the increasing number of government ministers who support Temple Mount related groups.²⁰³ In the past, the *halachic* ban (for reasons of religious purity) on Jews visiting the site meant that there was virtually no support amongst rabbis or religious public figures for sanctioning Jews to visit the area.²⁰⁴ An increase in support for visiting the Temple Mount has been particularly noticeable over the last ten years, however, as a growing number of rabbis have withdrawn their ban on visiting the site. The reasons for the shift in rabbinical opinion on the issue and the resulting change in attitude within the religious Zionist community are multifaceted. However, they are largely due to the setbacks that the religious Zionist community has encountered in their efforts to settle the Occupied Territories and the subsequent developments in *halachic* literature which has seen the reinterpretation of certain Jewish laws.²⁰⁵ A renewed sense of pride and self-confidence has, however, also been growing in the religious Zionist community.

²⁰³ The objectives of the dozens of Temple Mount movements range from making practical preparations for the building of the Third Temple to campaigning for Jews to be able to pray on the site. N. Hasson, 'One Third of Israeli Jews Want Temple Rebuilt in Jerusalem, Poll Finds', *Haaretz*, 12 July 2013, <https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-rebuild-the-temple-30-say-yes-1.5294558> [accessed 15 May 2018]. Examples of Members of Knesset who support either allowing Jews to pray on the Mount or the rebuilding of the Temple on the site include: Rabbi Eli Ben Dahan (Habayit Hayehudi), Moti Yogev (Habayit Hayehudi), Uri Ariel (Habayit Hayehudi), Miri Regev (Likud), Tzipi Hotovely (Likud), Zeev Elkin (Likud). A particularly prominent Temple Mount activist is former Member of Knesset for Likud Yehuda Glick, who is the key figure behind the movement to allow Jews to visit and pray on the Temple Mount. Glick is also a former leader of the Temple Institute.

²⁰⁴ The ban was formerly justified on the basis of religious purity regulations, particularly the law that only the high priest can enter the Holy of Holies (even this was only permitted on Yom Kippur). The danger of touching the former location of the Holy of Holies was one reason for all Jews avoiding the entire Temple Mount area. As long as there is no red heifer that can be burned, and whose ashes can be used to purify, it was forbidden to ascend to the Temple Mount due to its sanctity.

²⁰⁵ Particularly significant events that paved the way for the renewed focus on the Temple Mount as central to fulfilling the messianic expectation include the evacuation of Jewish settlements in Sinai in 1982 and, most notably, Gaza in 2005, which radicalised certain elements within the settler community and marked a further turn to fundamentalism. N. Hasson, 'Temple Mount Faithful: From the Fringes to the Mainstream', *Haaretz*, 4 October 2012, <https://www.haaretz.com/temple-mount-faithful-go-mainstream-1.5176091> [accessed 23 June 2019].

This is particularly evident amongst the religious Zionist youth, who are less likely to accept the authority of ultra-Orthodox rabbis (the vast majority of whom still vehemently oppose Jews visiting the Temple Mount). As former Member of Knesset for the right-wing National Union party, Aryeh Eldad, explained to *Haaretz*, ‘what had been marginal once upon a time is gaining momentum. [The] Temple Mount is [now] perceived as avant-garde. It attracts the young. Maybe older people had become accustomed to Temple Mount belonging to the Arabs and waiting for the [Third] Temple to fall from the heavens’.²⁰⁶ The shift in attitude was demonstrated most recently in the figures on the numbers visiting the Temple Mount, released by the organisation Yeraeh, which promotes such visits: from September 2017 to July 2018, twenty-two thousand Jews visited the Temple Mount — the highest number since Israel took control of the site in 1967.²⁰⁷

This alarming trend only looks set to continue into the next generation as the topic ‘Love of the Land and Temple’ forms part of the mandatory social studies curriculum in state religious schools. As reported in *Haaretz*, the subject requires students to detail their level of engagement with various demands, including ‘prayer from the bottom of my heart for the Temple to be rebuilt and to have the privilege of carrying out [ritual animal] sacrifice there’.²⁰⁸ Whilst the official social studies curriculum is written by professionals from the Religious Education

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ N. Hasson and N. Landau, ‘Netanyahu Decides Lawmakers May Visit Temple Mount Once Every Three Months’, *Haaretz*, 3 July 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-netanyahu-lawmakers-may-visit-temple-mountain-once-every-three-months-1.6242499> [accessed 29 June 2019].

²⁰⁸ The subject is defended by proponents as a legitimate part of Jewish belief. Kashti, ‘Religious Public Schools Teach Children to “Long for the Third Temple”’, *Haaretz*, 1 November 2015, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-how-religious-kids-learn-about-the-third-temple-1.5415514> [accessed 4 May 2018].

Administration, the supplementary online material for the subject is written by Nehemiah Kuperschmidt of the Orthodox educational organisation Aish HaTorah. The extract below from Kuperschmidt's online material provides an insight into the nature of the curriculum being taught in state religious schools:

none of the conflicts from which the Jewish people are currently suffering — the existential threats, disagreements between religious and secular, rising assimilation, confusion and discord — would have bothered us if we had the Temple in our vicinity. When the Temple existed, there was no question as to who had the right to the Land of Israel and Jerusalem. No one cast doubt over the existence of the Lord.²⁰⁹

Kuperschmidt's strong emphasis upon yearning for the Temple heavily influences the content of the curriculum in the schools, particularly the lesson dedicated to 'Longing for the Third Temple', which includes 'bringing together the reality of the revelation of the Lord through miracles connected to the Temple'.²¹⁰ Promoting this kind of redemptive connection to the building of the Third Temple is particularly concerning given the place that the Jewish Underground's plan to blow up the Temple Mount mosques still has in the collective memory of religious Zionism. As Ariel Picard, a research fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem has commented, 'I'm afraid that this heavy emphasis on yearning for the Temple and concrete study of the work of the Temple could spur rather good students to think about other practical actions'.²¹¹ The promotion of this kind of messianic ideology and, in particular the support shown by some government ministers — as the symbols and official voices of the government of Israel — highlights the significant strides that the Temple Mount movements appear to

²⁰⁹ Extract quoted in Kashti, 'Religious Public Schools Teach Children to "Long for the Third Temple"'.
²¹⁰ Kashti, 'Religious Public Schools Teach Children to "Long for the Third Temple"'.
²¹¹ Ibid.

have made towards positioning themselves as legitimate bodies. Such developments further demonstrate the increasingly right-wing orientation of Israeli society and the religious and nationalistic ideology that is driving this trend.

Conclusion

As noted, Ben-Gurion initially reached a compromise with the religious Zionists to ensure that the window of opportunity to declare independence was not missed. With political recognition secured as a result of the compromise, the national religious camp subsequently became an important part of the political landscape in Israel between 1948 and 1967.²¹² However, despite the systematic battle of religious Zionism against the secularisation of the young state, the lack of opportunity for religious Zionists to influence secular society at the time limited the opportunity for demanding a strict application of *halacha*.²¹³ The pragmatism of the Labour Zionist movement was to be over-powered, however, in the ensuing years as the political landscape was transformed by the 1967 War.²¹⁴ Indeed, following the events of 1967, the Labour Zionist movement was largely replaced by more militant religious Zionists and the Likud party as ‘the ferment within religious

²¹² Religious political parties emerged to play a prominent role in the political system of Israel, with both ultra-Orthodox and religious Zionist parties being essential partners in government coalitions since 1948. Indeed, the ultra-Orthodox party, Agudat Yisrael has featured in almost every government coalition since 1948. Similarly, the religious Zionist Mizrahi party, which, as noted, evolved into the National Religious Party (NRP) after uniting with Ha-Po’el ha-Mizrachi in 1956, was a prominent member of virtually every government coalition from 1948 until it disbanded in 2008, in order to form the new Party, Habayit Hayehudi. As we shall see, the latter has played a prominent role in the recent revisions to the civics and Jewish studies curriculum which form a key part of the present research. See Chapters 3, 4 and 5 for a detailed analysis of the revisions.

²¹³ Masalha, *The Bible and Zionism* p. 140; Schwartz, *Religious-Zionism*, p. 85.

²¹⁴ Masalha, *The Bible and Zionism* p. 140.

Zionism, following the passivity “forced” upon it during the first fifteen years of the State of Israel, raised to the surface’.²¹⁵

Significantly, as Aviezer Ravitzky points out, ‘the more the Zionist idea was translated into reality, the more insistently were messianic claims made for it by the religious Zionist camp’.²¹⁶ The messianic initiative adopted by proponents of religious Zionism necessarily brought them into conflict with the rabbinical leadership. Rabbis were largely thought of as unnecessary at the head of a political movement and their authority was thus limited to ‘purely’ religious matters. In recent years, however, the religious Zionist position regarding rabbinical authority has weakened, with many leaders accepting rabbinical authority and encouraging obedience to rabbinical opinion.²¹⁷ Notably, rabbis in turn have also taken on political leadership roles.²¹⁸ As demonstrated above, the relationship between Jewish religion and government policies has also strengthened, with the state increasingly promoting religious Zionist values — a shift which, for Kimmerling, was inevitable:

it was made captive from the beginning by its choice of target-territory for immigration and a place for its nation-building. For then, neither the nation nor its culture could be built successfully apart from the religious context, even when its prophets, priests, builders and fighters saw themselves as completely secular.²¹⁹

Indeed, Israel’s establishment as a ‘Jewish state’ ensured there would be a close connection between religion and state and within a few generations ‘political

²¹⁵ Schwartz, *Religious-Zionism*, p. 95.

²¹⁶ A. Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism and Jewish Religious Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 39.

²¹⁷ Schwartz, *Religious-Zionism*, pp. 6-7.

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 7.

²¹⁹ Kimmerling, ‘Religion, Nationalism and Democracy in Israel’, p. 339; Masalha, *The Bible and Zionism*, p. 140.

Zionism had been metamorphosed from being an anathema, and a repudiation of Judaism and the scriptures [...] to becoming a core ingredient of Jewish religious life [...]: it had moved from the secular to the sacred'.²²⁰

The following chapter will build on my analysis of the sharpening focus on national religious identity over time presented above, which has also revealed the significant impact that the development of religious Zionist educational institutions has had on the national religious camp. In the next chapter, I will thus provide a substantial review of the Israeli education system. I will work to identify the groups contributing to the rise of ultra-religious nationalism in Israel as well as the increasing politicisation of Jewish values in Israel's state secular schools. The chapter will make use of the rich primary research data I collected during my fieldwork in Israel, which also reveals the increasingly explicit role of religion in Israeli society.

²²⁰ Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism*, p. 156; Prior, 'Zionism and the Challenge of Historical Truth', p. 38. One can of course be an observant Jew and a Zionist, yet not be a 'religious Zionist' — an observant Jew is not required to believe that the State of Israel is the dawn of the messianic state. Many observant Jews, like other secular, modern and traditional Jews, believe that Zionism was and is a national movement to protect Jews from anti-Semitism and that the State of Israel is a state like other states.

Chapter 3: The History and Development of the Israeli Education System

Introduction

Since the State of Israel was established in 1948 child, youth and adult education has been considered by the public as well as educators and policy makers, a key feature in creating a united nation from a mix of people from diverse communities and from greatly varying social and economic backgrounds, speaking a 'Babel' of languages.¹ Indeed, 'throughout Jewish history education has been a central feature of Jewish life; a bridge linking past, present and future'.² The modern Zionist movement did not overlook this long and rich tradition of learning and teaching as it embarked, towards the end of the nineteenth century, on national revival in Palestine. Thus, alongside agricultural and economic development, the early settlers also focused on laying the foundations of the Hebrew school system. Despite the majority of the limited funding that was available for education during the British Mandate period (1920-1948) being directed towards Arab education,³ the new *Yishuv* managed, with the help of philanthropists, the Zionist movement and, in time, the self-taxation of the Jewish community, to establish the foundations of a modern education system — complete from kindergarten to

¹ Israel Information Services, *Building a New Generation* (Jerusalem: Government Printer, 1953), p. 3.

² *Ibid*, p. 3.

³ Arab education was not, however, universal and the degree of illiteracy was high, especially amongst girls.

university, and encompassing the majority of the Jewish child population at elementary level.⁴

I will outline in this chapter the major stages of development in the Israeli education system from 1948 to the present, highlighting the key role education plays in articulating and maintaining national religious identity in Israel. I will begin by tracing the early developments in Zionist education in Israel, in order to explain how the current structure of the education system came into being. I will then explore in detail the specific developments in religious/Jewish education in state secular schools, which are key to understanding the ideologically and politically motivated nationalist narrative that predominates the curriculum in these schools today.

Early Developments in Zionist Education

Although the State of Israel inherited the foundations of a modern education system,⁵ the more than doubling of the Jewish population between 1948 and 1951 created an entirely new situation in Israel.⁶ The education system now faced the

⁴ Whilst primary schools catered for 80% of students prior to statehood, there was a high drop-out rate, with only 20% of students completing eight years of study in some areas. Y. Iram, and M. Schmida, *The Educational System of Israel* (London: Greenwood Press, 1998), p. 17. Hebrew was also the language of instruction in school and often predominant in homes following its revival, after a struggle, led by Elizer Ben-Yehuda, that spanned from the late nineteenth century until the early twentieth century. Hebrew was recognised by the British authorities as the official language of Jews in Palestine in 1922, one month after Ben-Yehuda's death. J. S. Bentwich, *Education in Israel* (London: Routledge, 1965), p. 10.

⁵ Following the establishment of the State of Israel the responsibility for all education — Jewish and Arab — was transferred to it from the *Va'ad Leumi* (the governing body of the Jewish community in Mandate Palestine). *Ibid*, p. 30.

⁶ The population rose from 650,000 in May 1948 to 1,400,000 by the end of 1951. The majority of the immigrants came from the Middle East and North Africa but also included many from Eastern

enormous challenge of absorbing the huge influx of immigrant school children from over seventy countries, and therefore had many new problems to contend with in competition with existing demands that had to be met at a time when resources were limited.⁷ The government, however, regarded education as one of its key responsibilities and despite the major challenges facing the new state — war with the Arab states, immigration, food, housing — reforming the education system in Israel remained a priority.⁸ The Law of Compulsory Education was one of the first acts passed by the new state in September 1949. With the enactment of this law, education was made mandatory for all children between the ages of five and thirteen — one year in kindergarten for five year olds and eight years in primary/elementary school.⁹

Although many benefits came with inheriting an already functioning school system, there were also further issues that needed to be addressed. One of the main liabilities was the ‘stream’ system that had existed during the British Mandate period. The administration of Jewish education during the Mandate was divided into three ‘streams’: ‘General’, connected to the centrist parties, mainly the General Zionist party; ‘Religious’, affiliated with the religious Zionist parties Mizrachi and Ha-Po’el ha-Mizrachi; and ‘Labour’, operated by the workers union, Ha’Histadrut ha’Kelalit shel ha’Ovdim ha’Ivriyyim be’Eretz Yisrael (The General

Europe, Bentwich, *Education in Israel*, p. 33. Further details on immigration during this period and its impact on the education system in Israel are provided below.

⁷ Israel Information Services, *Building a New Generation*, p. 3.

⁸ Bentwich, *Education in Israel*, p. 34.

⁹ ‘Extracts from the Compulsory Education Law, 5709 – 1949’ in Israel Information Services, *Building a New Generation*, p. 36.

Federation of Jewish Labour in Palestine).¹⁰ Each stream had its own curriculum, educational emphasis and criteria in choosing teachers. Alongside these streams religious ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) non-Zionist schools operated which were connected to the Agudat Yisrael (Union of Israel) party. It was because of the financial backing given to each of these streams by influential political parties that schools were often blighted by the tactics of party strife.¹¹

Upon the establishment of the State of Israel, all three Zionist streams were recognised by the state, together with the separate ultra-Orthodox school system.¹² However, the problems raised by these different systems vying for power only became more acute and inflamed from year to year — particularly with the influx of immigrants between 1948 and 1951, which encouraged the different parties to compete for the immigrants' votes and for the chance to educate and socialise their children.¹³ As a result, in 1953, the government introduced reform legislation — the State Education Law — which reduced the number of streams to two: state (secular) and state religious.¹⁴ Given that Conservative and Liberal

¹⁰ In 1948, 52% of pupils belonged to the General stream, 22.5% to the Religious stream, and 27.3% to the Labour stream. A. Moaz, 'Religious Education in Israel', *Tel Aviv University Law School Law Faculty Papers*, 2007, 679-728 (p. 680), available at: <http://law.bepress.com/taulwps/art44> [accessed 2 March 2018].

¹¹ Bentwich, *Education in Israel*, p. 26.

¹² This recognition was the result of the *status quo* agreement, outlined in the previous chapter, which ensured the autonomy of Agudat Yisrael's education system.

¹³ H. Chapin Metz, ed., *Israel: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1988), available at: <http://countrystudies.us/israel/> [accessed 2 March 2018].

¹⁴ The legislation was originally designed to establish a single Jewish educational system but the draft legislation was altered to enable religious state schools alongside general (secular) state schools following religious opposition. In practice, systems still exist outside the two official streams which still benefit from state subsidies including: traditional religious schools, schools run by kibbutz federations and yeshivot devoted to Talmud study and operated by the ultra-Orthodox. Moaz, 'Religious Education in Israel', p. 683.

Judaism were not recognised in any sense in Israel at the time, religious meant Orthodox and as a result Orthodoxy and Jewish education came to be known as one and the same thing.¹⁵

The education system in Israel has since passed through various stages of major development,¹⁶ yet remains 'based on the ongoing need to absorb and integrate new immigrants and educate children from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds — Jewish, Arab and Druze, religiously observant and secular'.¹⁷ The official state education system is centrally controlled, with administration and financing shared by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Science and Technology and local authorities. The responsibility for curricula, education standards, teacher training and the supervision of school employees as well as school construction lies with the ministries, while school maintenance and purchasing equipment and supplies, is the responsibility of the various municipalities.¹⁸ The separate schools that are provided for Arab and Druze

¹⁵ J. Goldschmidt, 'Religious Education in Israel', *Journal of Jewish Education*, 28.3 (1958), 29-57 (p. 29); E. Kopelowitz and S. Markowitz, *Furthering Pluralistic Jewish Education in Israel: An Evaluation of the Meitarim School Network* (Jerusalem: Research Success Technologies, 2010), 1-28 (p. 1), <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=4525> [accessed 2 February 2018].

¹⁶ In addition to the Compulsory Education Law and the State Education Law, the current school system in Israel is based on the following additional laws and regulations: the Council for Higher Education Law (1958); the School Inspection Law (1968); the Special Education Law (1988); the Long School Day Law (1990); certain requirements passed by the Knesset; and amendments to existing laws. Iram and Schmida, *The Educational System of Israel*, p. 9.

¹⁷ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Letter from Israel: Education 2010', *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2010, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutIsrael/Pages/Looking%20at%20Israel-%20Education.aspx> [accessed 26 March 2018].

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

students, have a similar structure to those of the Jewish sector.¹⁹ The most notable differences are the language of instruction which is Arabic, rather than Hebrew, and the curriculum content which is intended to respect the distinct cultural heritage of the various Arab-Palestinian populations (Muslim, Christian, and Druze).²⁰ However, the separate schools — Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Druze — means that children can complete high school without having learnt anything about the other religions or cultures. Despite living in the same country and land, often in close proximity to each other, many Jews have never socialised with Arabs and this remains a central problem in Arab-Jewish relations.²¹

The Structure of the Education System

Israel's formal education system is based on four levels: (1) pre-school/kindergarten; (2) primary/elementary school; (3) junior and senior high school; and (4) higher education. Primary education originally comprised eight grades followed by four years of high school. However, the 1968 School Reform Act replaced the traditional school structure so that primary school lasts for six years (grades one to six) followed by three years of junior high school (grades seven to nine) and three years of senior high school (grades ten to twelve).²² This structural

¹⁹ This stream is not analysed in detail as part of my study because I focus specifically on the growing religious/secular divide in Jewish Israeli society which is perpetuated by the existing Jewish state school system.

²⁰ Iram and Schmida, *The Educational System of Israel*, p. 6.

²¹ Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty, *Unity in Diversity*, p. 52.

²² The reform applied primarily to the official education system — those institutions owned by the state. D. Sprinzak and others, 'Ministry of Education Culture and Sport: Facts and Figures' (Israel Ministry of Education Culture and Sport: Economics and Budgeting Administration, 2004), http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/planipolis/files/ressources/israel_facts_and_figures.pdf [accessed 30 February 2018].

change, introducing junior high schools which link primary and post-primary education, was intended to promote educational continuity and enhance integration of various socio-economic sectors, with special emphasis placed on the disadvantaged student population.²³ The law of post-primary education stipulated that 'every student was entitled to receive a broad and comprehensive general education in the curricular areas of literature, languages, mathematics and the sciences, at least until the end of high school'.²⁴ The law can thus be seen as an attempt to move on from what was predominantly an elitist and selective system of post-primary education, with highly selective academic high schools for the 'few' well to do of the population and another public system for the majority, to a system of secondary education for all.²⁵

Rather than the dual education system that had existed previously, comprehensive high schools were thus introduced 'which functioned as bilateral schools, housing both academic and vocational education under one roof'.²⁶ All students would thus be transferred from six years primary education into high school, without the process of examination and selection but with the curriculum arranged in different learning tracks according to ability.²⁷ However, despite government attempts to transfer from a mainly elitist and selective system to post-primary education for all, Yaacov Iram and Mirjam Schmida point out that 'academic high schools remain the most prestigious types of post-primary education, and students who acquire the

²³ Moaz, 'Religious Education in Israel', p. 683.

²⁴ Iram and Schmida, *The Educational System of Israel*, p. 38.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 39.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 35.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 44.

matriculation certificate [*Bagrut*]²⁸ are considered to be the future elite of Israeli society'.²⁹

Immigration and Education

At various stages in its history, Israeli society has been marked by demographic and social upheaval and the school system has always been used as a tool to cope with the social and cultural problems, including immigrant absorption, that have occurred as a result.³⁰ Education is thus promoted from as early as possible in Israel, not only to ensure early childhood development, but to deal with the social dilemmas faced by Israeli society.³¹

The mass immigration of the 1950s, mainly from post-war Europe and Arab countries, was followed by the arrival of a large number of Jews from North Africa in the 1960s. The 1970s witnessed the first notable numbers of immigrants arriving from the former Soviet Union, with smaller sporadic influxes before the massive wave of immigration in the 1990s. Indeed, since the beginning of the 1990s more than one million immigrants arrived from the former Soviet Union, with tens of thousands following each year.³² There were also two mass movements in 1984

²⁸ The *Bagrut* certificate is awarded by the Ministry of Education to pupils who graduate from secondary school and is a prerequisite for entry into higher education in Israel.

²⁹ Although not taking effect until 1978, the 1968 reform also included changes in the Compulsory Education Law. The reform extended the law to cover up until grade ten (inclusive) instead of grade eight. This brought the total period of compulsory education to eleven years, including one year of compulsory kindergarten. Iram and Schmida, *The Educational System of Israel*, p. 42.

³⁰ This has been reflected in the pupil population, with the rate of pupils from disadvantaged populations increasing over the years. *Ibid*, p. 15.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 8.

³² Russian immigration has been falling since the turn of the twenty-first century with Israel now seeing an average of between five and six thousand Russian immigrants per year. T. Levy, 'After 20

and 1991, when the state organised for the majority of the Jewish community of Ethiopia to move to Israel.³³ There was an increase of 55% in the number of students enrolled in secondary education between 1980 and 1990, and from 1990 to 2002 the total number of pupils grew by 34% — half of which was a result of immigration.³⁴ Along with having to meet the practical need for more classrooms and teachers, special methods and curricular aids were also developed to facilitate the absorption of children of new immigrant families, with varied cultural backgrounds, into the school environment.³⁵ Special programmes were thus designed to introduce immigrant children to unfamiliar subjects such as Hebrew language and Jewish history. Teachers were also given special training to deal with immigrant students, whilst immigrant teachers were retrained to assist their employment in education.³⁶ The Ministry of Education claims to be ‘involved in an ongoing process of bringing educational standards in line with modern pedagogic practices, such as mandating gender equality, upgrading teacher status, broadening humanistic curricula, and promoting scientific and technological studies’.³⁷ Providing equal opportunities for all children and increasing the pass rate in matriculation exams is said to be a key aspect of its educational policy.³⁸ The gap in the achievements between Jewish students of Middle Eastern and

Years, Why Has Russian Immigration to Israel Stagnated?’, *Haaretz*, 10 September 2009, <http://www.Haaretz.com/Jewish-world/2.209/after-20-years-why-has-russian-immigration-to-Israel-stagnated-1.8125> [accessed 26 March 2018].

³³ Many Jews from the Americas and other western countries have also settled in Israel.

³⁴ Sprinzak and others, ‘Ministry of Education Culture and Sport: Facts and Figures’, p. 64.

³⁵ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘Education: Challenges, 2010’, *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2010, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutIsrael/Education/Pages/Education.aspx> [accessed 26 March 2018].

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

African descent and Western students has, however, remained a constant issue in the Israeli education system.³⁹

Following the immigration from Middle Eastern and North African Countries between 1948 and 1953, the education system was 'instructed to integrate the diverse immigrant groups and eliminate the disparities between them'.⁴⁰ Haim Gazieli points out that, due to the standard of living in their countries of origin, many immigrants lacked 'the necessary skills and knowledge to integrate into all levels of Israeli society' and as a result many Middle Eastern and African immigrants (Mizrahim) were seen to fall behind immigrants of European and North American (Ashkenazi) descent, both educationally and economically.⁴¹ Despite the measures taken in the 1950s, integration remained a major problem and 'heading into its third decade of independence, Israel faced the urgent need to deal with the correlation that had taken shape between the ethnic differences and economic, educational and political disparities'.⁴² For Gazieli, the first signs of true equality

³⁹ A 2015 study based Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) data shows that 49.6% of Ashkenazim (Jews of Western origin) have a university or college degree compared to just 28.8% of second-generation Mizrahi immigrants (Jews of North African or Middle Eastern descent). O. Kashti, 'Study: Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Higher-ed Gaps Wider Than Ever', *Haaretz*, 9 November 2015, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-study-mizrahi-ashkenazi-higher-ed-gaps-wider-than-ever-1.5419232> [accessed 19 December 2018]; N. Dobrin, 'Equal Opportunities in Education Demographic and Socio-Economic Barriers', *Israel Central Bureau of Statistics – Chief Scientist Department*, 2015, <https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/publications/DocLib/pw/pw91/pw91.pdf> [accessed 19 December 2018] (in Hebrew).

⁴⁰ H. Gazieli, *Education Policy at a Crossroads between Change and Continuity: Education in Israel in the Past Decade* (Jerusalem: Institute for the Study of Educational Systems, 1993), p. 19.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 19. The majority of immigrants of Middle Eastern and North African descent that arrived in Israel between 1948 and 1952 came from the following countries: Turkey and Syria (34,608), Iraq (124,226), Iran (25,593), Yemen and Aden (48,375); Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria (52,584), Libya (32,129), Egypt (17,114). Jewish Virtual Library, 'Immigrants to Israel: 1948-1952', *Jewish Virtual Library*, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/immigrants-to-israel-1948-1952> [accessed 29 July 2018].

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 24.

and integration in official policy did not appear until the 1960s, 'based on awareness that the general social problems arising intrinsically from the country's ethnic composition could not be ignored'.⁴³ It was not until the 1970s, however, when the main focus was on the Reform Law and advancing integration, that reform became accepted educational policy. As Gaziel points out, this is the period when the 'Ministry of Education decided to adopt the idea of equal rights and integration, not only as a means of fulfilling educational objectives but as a national objective per se'.⁴⁴

Efforts made by the Ministry of Education in the 1980s and 1990s to narrow the gaps in educational achievement — the Free Secondary Education Law, upgrading the professional status of teachers and the extended school day — were countered to some extent by the economic realities of cuts in the budget for education, as well as by 'backdoor privatisation', with parents being encouraged to share a larger portion of the cost of their children's education.⁴⁵ Specialism also began to be encouraged once again, along with the development of specialised schools.⁴⁶ There also appeared to be a move towards community based education rather than

⁴³ Ibid, p. 30.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 31. Intra-Jewish inequalities and the discrimination against the Mizrahi community in Israel are well documented, with deep-rooted tensions existing between Ashkenazi Jews and Mizrahi Jews in Israeli society. G. Daniele, 'Political and Social Protests from the Margins: The Role of Mizrahi Jews in Israeli Grassroots Activism', *Ethnographica*, 23.1 (2019), 201-220.

⁴⁵ Gaziel, *Education Policy at a Crossroads*, p. 32.

⁴⁶ Separate schools were created for example that specialised, in subjects such as science or music as well as schools with enhanced Jewish studies, provided by TALI. The TALI organisation is discussed in detail below.

centralised education, with schools given additional freedom to choose their curriculum, make budgeting decisions and hire teachers.⁴⁷

In the following analysis of religious schools in Israel I will demonstrate how the intense use of education within religious Zionist society has contributed to the process of religious radicalisation in Israel. I will also use this discussion to explain how Israeli religious education more generally has moved in a fundamentalist direction, particularly over the past decade. The most recent developments in Jewish studies in state secular schools are therefore also discussed below as they clearly demonstrate the right-wing nationalistic narrative that is currently being promoted in these schools.

Religious Education

With regard to student numbers and professional staff, state primary education is the largest in the Israeli educational system.⁴⁸ Religious schools at the primary level are controlled primarily by the Ministry of Education, whilst post-primary religious institutions — state, independent, and private ultra-Orthodox — are all largely subsidised by the state in some way. However, despite the various streams of religious schools all being supported by the state budget, they do not follow the

⁴⁷ Gaziel, *Education Policy at a Crossroads*, p. 32.

⁴⁸ Iram and Schmida, *The Educational System of Israel*, p. 17. State (Jewish) primary schools enrol approximately 53% of the primary school population (state secular schools 39%; state religious schools 14%), ultra-Orthodox schools comprise 22% and Arab state schools 25%. The considerable drop in the percentage of students enrolled in state secular primary schools today, compared to 1987 when these schools enrolled 70% of primary school students, highlights further the religionisation of Israeli society. L. Wolff, 'Education in Israel: Divided Schools, Divided Society', *Moment Mag*, 8 May 2017, <https://www.momentmag.com/education-in-israel-divided-schools-divided-society> [accessed 4 September 2018].

official curriculum provided by the Ministry of Education and struggles remain regarding the teaching of 'secular' subjects, as well as over school inspection.⁴⁹

Religious kindergartens, primary schools, and secondary schools all encourage religious sensibilities, imbuing a child 'with ideas, principles and values that mark him [sic] as an observer, in deed and in creed, of Jewish religion'.⁵⁰ However, the theoretical and practical principles behind such religious education vary depending upon the particular religious stream which the school belongs to (state, independent, or private ultra-Orthodox), and the particular ideology (ultra-Orthodox, Orthodox, traditional/Conservative or Reform) of each school within that stream. Given that Judaic texts such as the Bible as well as Jewish history and Jewish holidays 'constitute part of Jewish culture and history beyond their religious manifestations', these are taught in all schools — religious and secular.⁵¹ Indeed, the State Education Law specifically provides that the objectives of state education include 'teaching the Torah of Israel, the history of the Jewish people, Israel's heritage and Jewish tradition'.⁵² Informal education techniques are also used in addition to formal study programmes 'in order to guide youngsters toward a sense of themselves as Jews'.⁵³

The State Education Law (1953) also incorporated the state religious education system and ordered it to be administered by the Ministry of Education, however, it was also granted a large degree of autonomy — both administrative and

⁴⁹ Moaz, 'Religious Education in Israel', p. 707.

⁵⁰ Goldschmidt, 'Religious Education in Israel', p. 29.

⁵¹ In state secular schools the Bible is intended to be taught from a critical perspective and not as a book of divine origin or sacred status. Moaz, 'Religious Education in Israel', p. 683.

⁵² Moaz, 'Religious Education in Israel', p. 684.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 684.

ideological.⁵⁴ There is a separate Division of Religious Education in the Ministry of Education that, notably, has been elevated to an autonomous administration for religious education — responsible for the appointment of inspectors, school headmasters and teachers for religious schools. State religious education, as religious education scholar Zehavit Gross notes, has thus been ‘given a great deal of independence in shaping the lifestyle and atmosphere in schools, choosing curricula and selecting staff and pupils who are required to meet specific criteria of religious behaviour’.⁵⁵ Indeed, religious education must be conducted only by religious, observant Jews.⁵⁶ Although students attending these schools do not have to come from a religiously observant background, students study in an atmosphere of Torah observance and are required to respect and adhere to Orthodox religious norms, religious commandments (*mitzvot*), and to the values of religious Zionism when at school.⁵⁷

The State Education Law (1953) defines a state religious school as ‘an official education institution in which state religious education is being provided and which educate to a life of Torah and *mitzvot* (religious commandments) according to the

⁵⁴ Z. Gross, ‘State Religious Education in Israel: Between Tradition and Modernity’, *Prospects*, 33.2 (2003), 149-164 (p. 149).

⁵⁵ Gross, ‘State Religious Education in Israel’, p. 150.

⁵⁶ Religious in this sense once again means Orthodox.

⁵⁷ Although coming from a religious background is not a pre-requisite for attending these schools, it has been suggested that the school authorities expect that parents do respect religious values at home, in order to ensure a continuation between school and home life and to maintain the religious character of the school. Moaz, ‘Religious Education in Israel’, p. 689. Examples of how religious Zionist education attempts to integrate *mitzvot* into the curriculum includes equating biblical Israel with the modern State of Israel, emphasising it is in the same geographic location and highlighting the areas of *mitzvot* in the Torah that are in some way dependent upon the Land of Israel. This is intended to emphasise the centrality of Israel to Jewish life. Y. Eliach, ‘Teaching Religious Zionism in a Yeshiva High School’, *Ten Da'at: A Journal of Jewish Education*, 10.1 (1997), <http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/english/ten-daat/eliach-1.htm> [accessed 24 November 2019].

religious tradition and in the spirit of religious Zionism'.⁵⁸ Within state religious education, however, integrating Zionist education with religious education has often proved difficult. The major challenge faced by educators within the state religious system is finding an appropriate balance between tradition and modernity. This entails combining traditional Jewish religious education with modern (secular) Zionist education. Incorporating Zionist education was necessary in order to develop in students a sense of loyalty and belonging to the State of Israel, and adherence to its laws, thus ensuring that students are prepared for full participation in Israeli society. This poses a dilemma for teachers in these schools, however, when they are faced with the contradictory task of legitimising the secular state and its modern values and culture, whilst also encouraging students to maintain a fully religious way of life.⁵⁹ The difficulty in achieving a balance between tradition and modernity that suited the entire student population of state religious schools was reflected in the increase in the number of students being withdrawn from these schools during the late 1990s and placed in ultra-Orthodox institutions as some parents demanded a stricter religious curriculum.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ State Education Law, cited in Moaz, 'Religious Education in Israel', p. 688.

⁵⁹ In order to try and overcome this contradiction, the state religious system promotes an innovative religious Zionist approach to the State of Israel — viewing it as a necessary first step on the way to achieving Jewish redemption, thus clarifying students' religious and civic obligations. Gross, 'State Religious Education in Israel', p. 159.

⁶⁰ Between 1995 and 2000 the percentage of students in state religious primary schools dropped from 26.5% to 20% (as noted, this now stands at 14%). Moaz, 'Religious Education in Israel', p. 690; L. Wolff, 'Education in Israel: Divided Schools, Divided Society'; The number of students enrolled in the ultra-Orthodox system (across all levels of schooling) has increased rapidly over the years, with 24% of students attending these institutions in the school year 2015-2016. Israel Democracy Institute, 'Statistical Report on ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Society in Israel 2017', *Israel Democracy Institute*, <https://en.idi.org.il/media/10441/statistical-report-on-ultra-orthodox-society-in-israel-2017.pdf> [accessed 14 September 2018].

This demand for a more Orthodox atmosphere in school led to the establishment of a separate network of schools within state religious education that place more emphasis on religious (Orthodox) studies.⁶¹ The No'am-Zviya network, which stresses Torah studies, emerged to become the leading network with their model of schools becoming the dominant system within state religious education.⁶² The network, which Michael Rosenak describes as a platform for 'formal Zionist "radical" education', includes separate elementary schools for boys and girls, yeshiva high schools (called No'am) for boys, and Ulpanot (called Zviya) for girls.⁶³ Significantly, these No'am schools were inspired by MerKaz HaRav Yeshiva students, who, as noted in the previous chapter, adhere to the neo-Zionist messianic ideology of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook who founded the institution and his son Rabbi Zvi Yehudah Kook. Dov Schwartz points out how this alternative Torah education reflects the wider social religious changes that have impacted certain sections within religious Zionist society, where religious Zionism has incorporated the ultra-Orthodox ethos (despite major differences in theology and ideology) along with nationalism.⁶⁴ This combination of world views is grouped under the category of *Hardal* and is becoming increasingly popular among the religious sector in Israel.⁶⁵ The influence of this movement is reflected in the increasing *Hardal* influence in state religious schools — with members of the *Hardal* community demanding stricter religious observance in these schools.

⁶¹ Moaz, 'Religious Education in Israel', p. 691.

⁶² Ibid, p. 691.

⁶³ Rosenak, 'Jewish Fundamentalism in Israeli Education', p. 397.

⁶⁴ Schwartz, *Religious-Zionism*, p. 91.

⁶⁵ *Hardal* is a Hebrew acronym combining Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) and *dati-le'umi* (national religious). Ibid, p. 91.

Haaretz has reported evidence of a rise in religious strictness throughout the state religious school system — including, for example, gender separation and banning fathers from attending school performances featuring their daughters. The growing trend towards stricter religious demands has also led to the emergence of Talmud Torah schools, which are now officially recognised as part of the state religious education system.⁶⁶

Whilst the 1967 War undoubtedly strengthened the political radicalisation of the religious Zionist camp, the process had in fact begun earlier with ‘the growth and rapid development of a comprehensive system of nationalist yeshivot’ during the 1950s, which in turn had been made possible by the establishment of yeshiva high schools from the 1940s onwards.⁶⁷ As discussed in the previous chapter, this system of schools was established by a religious elite of Bnei Akiva members who wanted to encourage more stringent standards of religious observance. The alternative religious high school system set up by these Bnei Akiva members thus had much higher religious standards than in the usual state religious high schools and, from 1950, the curriculum of these yeshiva high schools included secular studies alongside intense religious studies.⁶⁸ By 1956 matriculation exams were

⁶⁶ In Talmud Torah schools up to half of the curriculum can be devoted to religious studies (compared to between 25% and 35% in standard state religious schools). The number of Talmud Torah schools doubled between 1996 and 2016 from thirty to sixty. O. Kashti, ‘State Religious Schools Face “Haredization”, as Private Education Sneaks in Back Door’, *Haaretz*, 15 July 2016, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/state-religious-schools-face-haredization-as-private-education-sneaks-in-back-door-1.5410717> [accessed 8 November 2018].

⁶⁷ E. Don-Yehiya, ‘The Book and the Sword: The Nationalist Yeshivot and Political Radicalism in Israel’, in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: the Dynamic Character of Movements*, ed. by M.E. Marty and R. S. Appleby (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 264-303, (p. 267).

⁶⁸ General studies in yeshiva high schools had previously been suppressed by Rabbi Moshe Zvi Neriah — a Merkaz HaRav graduate who pioneered these institutions. Schwartz, *Religious-Zionism*, p. 90.

integrated in the schools' curriculum, which was recognised by the Ministry of Education in 1959.⁶⁹ These new educational institutions, both secondary and advanced places of study, 'in which the identification with Zionism and the modern world would be combined with intensive socialisation into a traditional world view', quickly expanded as many within religious Zionist circles sensed 'failure and weakness' in the state religious education system.⁷⁰

The emergence of *hesder* yeshivot, combining Torah study with military service, alongside yeshiva high schools reflected the strong ultra-nationalism of this alternative school system.⁷¹ In these military yeshivot, which usually involve a five-year commitment, students begin by studying at the yeshiva, leave for their military service, and then return to complete their final round of intensive Torah study at the yeshiva.⁷² Although only one such institution existed before 1967, they were well established by the 1970s and have experienced a rapid expansion over the years, with more than thirty now in existence. The messianic fervour that erupted following the 1967 War, which was also discussed in the previous chapter, saw many more young Orthodox men joining the *hesder* yeshivot. This education imbued students with the 'theology of nationalism' and when they graduated they were ready for the ideology behind the establishment of, and still very much

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 90.

⁷⁰ The increased ability of parents to fund such education aided their growth, as did the increased public funding for religious education at secondary and advanced level. This was largely due to the favourable economic conditions in Israel from 1950 until 1965 when real Gross National Product (GNP) grew by an average annual rate of over 11%, and per capita GNP by more than 6%. Don-Yehiya, 'The Book and the Sword', p. 268; N. Halevi, 'A Brief Economic History of Modern Israel', *EH.net*, <https://eh.net/encyclopedia/a-brief-economic-history-of-modern-israel/> [accessed 7 September 2019].

⁷¹ *Hesder* yeshivot, as the name suggests, were established through a special 'arrangement' (*hesder*) with the Ministry of Defence.

⁷² Schwartz, *Religious-Zionism*, p. 91.

prevalent in, the settlements of the West Bank.⁷³ The government took advantage of this situation as a new way to enhance Jewish presence in the recently conquered territory — but in turn also appeared to provide state legitimisation for religious radicalism.⁷⁴ Significantly, many students of the *hesder* yeshivot who graduated during the 1980s filled the positions that were left as the existing ultra-Orthodox teachers from yeshiva high schools reached retirement.⁷⁵ This trend, as Schwartz points out, ‘was largely responsible for moulding religious Zionist youths during the 1990s, and lies behind the changes in the political orientation of religious Zionism’.⁷⁶

Whilst the *hesder* yeshivot are novel in their embrace of Torah and Zionism, they have nevertheless maintained many of the more detached, authoritarian characteristics of the traditional yeshiva. Given that *hesder* yeshiva students are inevitably exposed to secular youth during their military service, the heads of these yeshivot are especially keen to guide students’ worldview. The response of one *hesder* yeshiva Rabbi when tasked with addressing potential challenges for religious students serving in the army, illustrates the sense of disconnect from modern Israeli society that persists within these institutions: ‘the first dilemma which the Rabbi decided to address and devote his entire session to was whether it was permissible to share a bag of chips with secular soldiers, considering that the secular soldiers will not make a blessing on food prior to eating’.⁷⁷ Such examples

⁷³ G. Gorenberg, *The Unmaking of Israel* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), p. 141.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 141.

⁷⁵ Schwartz, *Religious-Zionism*, p. 92.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 92.

⁷⁷ S. Hammer, ‘O’ Leaders Where Art Thou?, *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 August 2015, <https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/O-leaders-where-art-thou-412638> [accessed 3 November 2019].

suggest that over the years these yeshivot have become less focused on harmonising *halacha* with the modern needs of the state, and more concerned with ensuring national religious youth remain dedicated to fulfilling a religious life.⁷⁸

Eliezer Don-Yehiya's analysis of these institutions is particularly critical, maintaining that the rabbis demand 'unquestioning compliance with their authority', discourage individuality, encourage uniformity in belief and practice and offer only one theological and political vision to their pupils.⁷⁹ Moreover, Don-Yehiya suggests that the expansion of the nationalist yeshivot has 'facilitated the penetration of a fundamentalist worldview into religious Zionist circles', and has created a generation of pious, self-assured religious youth who attempt to extend Orthodox Judaism's political influence on wider society, and who work vigorously for the achievement of 'Greater Israel', through continued settlement of the Occupied Territories.⁸⁰

Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Schools

As noted, when the State Education Law was enacted (1953), the ultra-Orthodox Agudat Yisrael party was allowed to keep the school system it had recently created — along with state funding but with minimal state intervention.⁸¹ When the new Sephardic religious political party, known in Israel as Shas, formed in 1984, they too

⁷⁸ The Economist Special Report, 'Israel's Army Is Recruiting Ever More Religious Officers', *The Economist*, 18 May 2017, <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2017/05/18/israels-army-is-recruiting-ever-more-religious-officers> [accessed 29 November 2019].

⁷⁹ Don-Yehiya, 'The Book and the Sword', p. 268.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 268.

⁸¹ Gorenberg, *The Unmaking of Israel*, p. 168.

set up their own ultra-Orthodox school system.⁸² The school networks associated with Agudat Yisrael and Shas — the Independent Education Network, and the Sephardic Centre, known as ‘The Fountain of Religious Education’ — currently form the two main ultra-Orthodox school networks in Israel.⁸³

Despite receiving generous assistance from the state, these schools are nevertheless exempt from basic educational requirements and are almost devoid of humanities as well as science subjects.⁸⁴ There have been two rulings by the Supreme Court in Israel stating that in order to uphold State Education Law and the principle of equality, a basic core curriculum for high schools must be set by the government, and they must stop funding ultra-Orthodox yeshivot that refuse to teach it.⁸⁵ However, a pre-emptive law was passed by the Knesset in July 2008, before the ruling was delivered — allowing the Ministry of Education to fund ‘unique cultural groups’, explicitly including ultra-Orthodox schools that teach only religious subjects.⁸⁶ Gorenberg points out how, by funding this religious subculture, the State of Israel is promoting education that does not prepare students to participate in the ‘real-world’ economy, with graduates remaining captives of a sectarian community incapable of participating in a democratic society.⁸⁷

⁸² Ibid, p. 176.

⁸³ Moaz, ‘Religious Education in Israel’, p. 698.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 728.

⁸⁵ Gorenberg, *The Unmaking of Israel*, p. 189.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 189.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 167; 189. Although there is no universal or agreed definition of sectarianism, individual sects are generally characterised by their particular ‘ideological base, system and agenda, providing members [...] with a particular code of conduct and a license to act based on the belief-system and concerns of the sect’. N. Mathie, ‘Jewish Sectarianism and the State of Israel’, *Global Discourse: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Current Affairs and Applied Contemporary Thought*, 6.4 (2016), 601-629 (p. 602). Whilst sects usually arise within or from a wider established religious organisation, cults

The preference of the ultra-Orthodox to live in segregated, homogenous communities also made them a natural fit for the West Bank settlements, which offer cheap housing, segregated communities, easy access to Israel with settlements close to the Green Line, as well as many other strategically designed incentives.⁸⁸ Today, the ultra-Orthodox community is responsible for approximately half of the settler population's annual growth and, as Gorenberg notes, in order 'to protect their own growing settlements, ultra-Orthodox parties are now essential partners in the pro-settlement coalitions of the right'.⁸⁹ The issue of education within the Jewish settlements in the West Bank is particularly interesting and revealing about the State of Israel's wide-ranging financial incentives supporting settlement. Within the settlements, not only does free education begin two years earlier than inside Israel, but the Ministry of Education also pays for extended school days along with free transportation to school (that includes military escort in some cases).⁹⁰ Given that religious settlers have always seen 'educating Jews from within the Green Line as both an ideological goal and a solution to the problem of livelihood', there is also a proliferation of settler educators working in Israel's state religious schools and other institutions

tend to emerge from outside the dominant religious culture. Both terms, however, are somewhat controversial and contested in religious studies, given the variance in internal and external conceptions of such groups. Chryssides and Geaves, *The Study of Religion*, p. 29.

⁸⁸ L. Friedman, 'The ultra-Orthodox Jews in the West Bank', *Americans for Peace Now*, 31 October 2005, <http://peacenow.org.il/eng/content/ultra-Orthodox-Jews-west-bank> [accessed 6 August 2019].

⁸⁹ N. Shragai, 'ultra-Orthodox Jews Deliver a Population Boom to the West Bank', *Haaretz*, 14 August 2007, <http://www.Haaretz.com/news/ultra-Orthodox-Jews-deliver-a-population-boom-to-the-west-bank-1.227419> [accessed 5 April 2018]; Gorenberg, *The Unmaking of Israel*, p. 189.

⁹⁰ E. Hareuveni, 'By Hook and by Crook: Israeli Settlement Policy in the West Bank', *B'Tselem: The Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories*, July 2010, http://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/201007_by_hook_and_by_crook [accessed 5 April 2018].

operating within the Orthodox Zionist community.⁹¹ Extra money is also given to the municipal government of settlements to pay for education, whilst settler teachers, whether working inside or outside the settlements, receive government incentives that can increase their salaries by up to 20%.⁹² Gorenberg highlights how secular politicians' collaborations with Orthodox settlers have underwritten 'the indoctrination of a new generation in radical religious culture' with 'the dangerous results [becoming] clear only as that generation has come of age'.⁹³

Jewish Studies in State Secular Schools

As highlighted in the opening chapter, the question of how to approach Jewish studies in the state secular school system has been a recurring theme in Israel, with various educators — both secular and religious — offering solutions.⁹⁴ However, given that the majority of concerns raised regarding the subject area relate to the apparent inadequacy of Jewish studies in state secular education, with protests often staged by religious people, 'the solution seekers tended to reintroduce texts with a specifically religious orientation into the [state] secular education system'.⁹⁵

Numerous programmes have been introduced by the Ministry of Education over the years attempting to address the issues, each of which has faced criticism from both religious and secular educators and parents. There were no less than five

⁹¹ Gorenberg, *The Unmaking of Israel*, p. 94. Such teachers are not, however, found only in state religious schools. As noted, one of the teachers I interviewed during my fieldwork, Sivan Nachliel, is a religious settler working in a state secular school.

⁹² Gorenberg, *The Unmaking of Israel*, p. 95.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 96.

⁹⁴ Valler, 'Approaches to Jewish Studies', pp. 297-308.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 300.

committees established by the Ministry of Education during the 1950s and 1960s to deal with reinforcing Jewish studies in state secular schools.⁹⁶ Despite such efforts, when Zevulun Hammer, leader of the National Religious Party (NRP) at the time, became Minister of Education and Culture in 1977 he remained concerned that not enough priority was being placed on Jewish studies in state secular schools and thus set up a another committee for the intensification of Jewish education.⁹⁷ However, as Valler notes, 'this very step politicised the issue, which resulted in a further reduction of the academic teaching of Jewish studies in the secular schools'.⁹⁸ When Hammer resumed the role of Minister of Education and Culture in 1990 he therefore moved quickly to appoint yet another committee to re-examine the strengthening of Jewish studies in state secular schools (the Shenhar Committee). As noted, despite the Shenhar Committee recommending a pluralistic approach to Jewish studies, it was Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox educational networks that received the largest sums of money to enhance Jewish studies. This resulted in objections from teachers in state secular schools regarding the approach been taken by the Ministry of Education to Jewish studies in state secular schools.⁹⁹ Concerns regarding the content of Jewish studies in these schools

⁹⁶ The committees included: The First Arnon Committee (1956) for Jewish Israeli Consciousness in the Curricula of the National School; The Shmeli Committee (1957), appointed to 'prepare a supplementary traditional curriculum for the national schools'; The Second Arnon Committee (1958) which set out to 'integrate [Jewish] experience and holidays into elementary school life'; and The Ben-Yehuda Committee (1964), which was appointed to design a plan for strengthening Jewish consciousness in secondary schools. The Ben-Yehuda Committee (1965) resulted in the establishment of The Centre to Foster Jewish Consciousness, which worked to carry out the recommendations of the previous committees in the following years. Dror, '50 Years of Committees to Reinforce Jewish Studies', pp. 169-173.

⁹⁷ As noted, Hammer was one of the founding members of the Gush Emunim settlement movement.

⁹⁸ Valler, 'Approaches to Jewish Studies', p. 300.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 306.

continued to be voiced by teachers as the various attempts made by the Ministry of Education in the following years to carry out the Shenhar Committee's recommendations failed to ensure that measures were introduced to promote a pluralistic approach to Jewish studies. Indeed, during Hammer's third term as Minister of Education, and that of his successor Yitzhak Levy, the politicisation of Jewish studies became gradually more apparent as the Ministry of Education increasingly tendered out responsibility for the teaching of Jewish studies in state secular schools to religious organisations motivated by political/ideological agendas.¹⁰⁰

When Yossi Sarid, then leader of Meretz, succeeded Levy as Minister of Education in 1999, he thus planned to make some considerable changes to the Jewish studies curriculum in state secular schools.¹⁰¹ Sarid's intention was to introduce a new subject — 'The Culture of Israel' — which would replace the teaching of Oral Law and Jewish thought, and place more emphasis on integrative studies that would focus on Jewish culture of the past two centuries.¹⁰² As Valler notes, the new approach to Jewish studies would entail 'a minimum of close reading texts, with a maximum of open discussion on identity, Judaism, common destiny and other such endlessly expandable subjects'.¹⁰³ However, the political upheaval of 2001¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 307. Hammer's third term as Minister of Education lasted from 1996 until his death in 1998. Levy took over from Hammer and retained the position until 1999. Both Hammer and Levy were religiously observant Ministers from the NRP, hence their inclination to involve religious organisations in the teaching of Jewish studies. As will be explored in detail in the ensuing chapters, this trend has increased exponentially over the past five years in particular.

¹⁰¹ Meretz is an Israeli political party formed in 1992 that defines itself as secular, left-wing and social-democratic. Sarid led the party from 1996 to 2003.

¹⁰² Valler, 'Approaches to Jewish Studies', p. 307.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 307.

resulted in the post of Minister of Education passing to yet another figure from the national religious camp, Limor Livnat, who proved unable to ‘differentiate between religious nationalism and national culture’.¹⁰⁵ Livnat’s flagship initiative for Jewish studies in state secular schools was the ‘100 Concepts in Heritage, Zionism and Democracy’ programme, which was launched in 2003 and taught in grades seven to nine. The programme was intended, according to Livnat herself, to reinforce ‘the strong connection that exists between the Jewish people and the land [of Israel] and its right to build itself and its institutions on this strip of land’.¹⁰⁶ Livnat’s programme was scrapped, however, when Labour’s Yuli Tamir became Minister of Education in 2006. The content of the new Jewish studies curriculum introduced by Tamir was formulated by a Committee headed by Professor Avi Sagi, of Bar Ilan University and Ron Margolin, Professor of Modern Jewish Thought at Tel Aviv University.¹⁰⁷ The Committee, which was appointed in 2008, was guided by the Shenhar Committee’s findings and thus ‘recommended establishing a broad cultural approach to Jewish sources from all generations and eliminating any

¹⁰⁴ Ehud Barak (One Israel) resigned as Prime Minister in December 2000 amidst failed peace negotiations and the outbreak of the second *Intifada* (uprising). He was replaced by Ariel Sharon (Likud). The second *intifada* broke out in September 2000 and ended in September 2005. It was Sharon’s highly provocative visit to al-Aqsa Mosque that sparked the uprising — which followed years of Palestinian frustration at the lack of progress in negotiations to deliver a Palestinian state.

¹⁰⁵ Valler, ‘Approaches to Jewish Studies’, p. 307. Limor Livnat served as Minister of Education from 2001 until 2006.

¹⁰⁶ Livnat quoted in S. Zaher, ‘The Prohibition on Teaching the *Nakba* in the Arab Education System in Israel’, *Adalah: The Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel*, September 2010, p. 3, <https://www.adalah.org/uploads/oldfiles/newsletter/eng/sep10/docs/Sawsan%20Nakba%20English%20final.pdf> [accessed 14 November 2019]. The programme was criticised for its emphasis on Jewish and Zionist aspects of national identity in Israel, with only one third relating to democracy and civic identity. A. Agbaria, M. Mustafa and Y. Jabereen, ‘In Your Face Democracy: Education for Belonging and its Challenges in Israel’, *British Education Research Journal*, 41.1 (2015), 143-175 (p. 152).

¹⁰⁷ Ron Margolin is also one of my research participants. Interview conducted with Margolin in Tel Aviv, 6 February 2017.

hierarchy of value between texts [such as between the Bible or Talmud]'.¹⁰⁸ The new programme, 'Jewish Culture', was subsequently developed based on these recommendations.¹⁰⁹ The programme, however, did not remain in place once Tamir left the Ministry of Education.

When Gideon Sa'ar replaced Tamir in 2009, he was determined to create a new Jewish studies programme for state secular schools that fitted with his own right-wing nationalistic worldview.¹¹⁰ Indeed, it was during Sa'ar's tenure as Minister of Education that the Israeli education system experienced an explicit turn to the right and an unprecedented process of politicisation that has continued to this day.¹¹¹ Tamir's programme was thus replaced with a new subject, 'The Heritage

¹⁰⁸ The Avi Chai Foundation Israel, 'Assessing Needs and Directions for Jewish Educational Activity', p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ The Ministry of Education allotted, for the first time, teaching hours of one hour per week for the teaching of the subject area. Ibid, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Sa'ar's wider initiative, intended to encourage 'familiarity and identity with Jerusalem, the capital of Israel and the Jewish people' and 'to encourage enlistment in the IDF [Israel Defence Forces] and national-civic service'. Zaher, 'The Prohibition on Teaching the *Nakba* in the Arab Education System in Israel', p. 3. He also initiated major revisions to the civics curriculum and textbook. These profound changes are central to my research and are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

¹¹¹ Barak, M., 'Toward the Revitalization of Civics', *Molad: The Centre for the Renewal of Israeli Democracy*, 18 September 2013, <http://www.molad.org/en/researches/Towards-the-Revitalization-of-Civics> [accessed 27 September 2018], p. 1. The ideological-political nature of Sa'ar's efforts to strengthen Jewish values is clear in his decision, for example, to introduce compulsory field trips to Jewish sites in the West Bank city of Hebron — including the Tomb of the Patriarchs (al-Ibrahimi Mosque), which is the site of the violent attack of 1994 in which Kach supporter, Baruch Goldstein, shot and killed twenty-nine Muslim worshippers praying inside (also known as the Hebron massacre). Sa'ar also quickly announced his plan to prohibit any reference to the *Nakba* — an Arabic term meaning 'disaster' which is used by Palestinians to describe the events of the 1948 War — in the state school curriculum. He also rejected the use of a dual narrative history textbook. The textbook was the result of the 'PRIME Peace Education Project for Israeli and Palestinian Youth', which was created by Professor Sami Adwan, who is Palestinian and Muslim, and Professor Dani Bar-On, who is Israeli and Jewish. The six-year long research project — 'Learning Each Other's Historical Narrative' — was an attempt to prove how educational efforts can break the cycles of fear, hatred and violence and succeeded in producing an educational booklet and curriculum for Israeli and Palestinian school children (aged fifteen to sixteen). The standard presentation of historical events in schools has resulted in both cultures being charged with bias: 'the heroes of one

and Culture of Israel’, focussing on the Jewish people’s connection to the ‘Land of Israel’, the Jewish religion and Zionism. The significance of Sa’ar’s changes can hardly be overstated. As Margolin confirmed during our interview, ‘fundamental decisions about the curriculum were made by Sa’ar — to mix traditional and Orthodox Judaism’.¹¹² Margolin went on to explain how he thought this approach was problematic as it was attempting to use Jewish religious texts as sources for nationalism, which he believed would lead to indoctrination. In Margolin’s opinion, ‘Jewish studies should be separate from Zionism’.¹¹³ Rather than change his approach, Sa’ar removed Margolin from the Committee.

The Jewish studies programme in state secular schools was to experience yet another change, however, when Shai Piron (Yesh Atid) replaced Sa’ar as Minister of Education in 2013. Piron re-appointed Margolin to head a new Committee to revise Sa’ar’s Jewish Culture and Heritage programme. As Margolin explained, the Committee was still formulating the new programme when the national-religious politician Naftali Bennett was appointed Minister of Education in 2015 and it was not completed until 2016.¹¹⁴ It is Bennett who has been responsible for overseeing

side are the monsters of the other’. The booklet therefore provided an alternative approach — allowing space for each side of the story to be told, with an empty space in the middle for students to write their own story. The project achieved global recognition and has been translated into Spanish, Catalan, Italian and French. It has, however, also faced criticism from some parents and has not received official government approval for use in schools. Nevertheless, the twenty teachers who helped to create the booklet did organise informal meetings with small numbers of students outside of school and are confident in its ability to ‘open kids’ eyes to the other side’. The project won the Goldberg Institute of International Education Prize for Peace in the Middle East in 2005. S. Adwan and D. Bar-On, ‘Booking Peace for Pupils: The PRIME Peace Education Project for Israeli and Palestinian Youth’, in *Beyond Bullets and Bombs: Grassroots Peacebuilding between Israelis and Palestinians*, ed. by J. Kuriansky (Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2007), pp. 245-252 (pp. 245-248).

¹¹² Interview conducted with Ron Margolin in Tel Aviv, 6 February 2017.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

and implementing the most recent sweeping changes to the Jewish studies curriculum in order to 'strengthen Jewish Identity'.¹¹⁵ The new 'Jewish-Israeli Culture' programme that was introduced during Bennett's term as Minister of Education forms a key part of my own research, and is thus analysed in detail throughout the remaining chapters of the present study.¹¹⁶ As we shall see, it is an area of education that remains a political battleground in Israel today, with Jewish studies increasingly seen as the flagship of religious politicians.

State Secular Schools and Reinforced Jewish Studies

The Ministry of Education continues to advocate for the strengthening of Jewish studies in state secular schools, despite the fact that provisions within the State Education Law already allow for reinforced Jewish studies to be introduced in these schools at the request of parents (if financed by them or the local council).¹¹⁷ Indeed, many such schools already exist with an enhanced programme of Jewish studies.¹¹⁸ Sponsored by the Conservative affiliated Schechter Institute for Jewish Studies, this network of schools — known as TALI — was adopted by the Ministry

¹¹⁵ *Haaretz* Editorial, 'Bennett's "Strengthening Identities" Program Undermines Israeli Secularism', *Haaretz*, 1 September 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/1.673888> [accessed 17 March 2018].

¹¹⁶ As noted, the primary research data presented throughout this study was collected during Naftali Bennett's term as Minister of Education and whilst he was also the leader of Habayit Hayehudi.

¹¹⁷ The State Education Law (1953) stipulates that the Ministry of Education can approve an additional curriculum comprising up to 25% of the existing curriculum, provided it is requested by at least 75% of the parents. Jewish Virtual Library, 'Education in Israel: Principal Laws Relating to Education', *Jewish Virtual Library*, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/principal-laws-relating-to-education-in-Israel> [accessed 14 March 2018].

¹¹⁸ Moaz, 'Religious Education in Israel', p. 695; S. Ilan, 'More Secular Parents Look to Schools to Provide Missing Jewish Education', *Haaretz*, 21 June 2006, <http://www.Haaretz.com/print-edition/news/more-secular-parents-look-to-schools-to-provide-missing-Jewish-education-1.193544> [accessed 5 March 2018].

of Education in the early 1990s in an effort to encourage Jewish education within state secular schools.¹¹⁹ Whereas in state secular schools Bible study is the only compulsory Jewish subject, the TALI network offers five other optional study tracks: rabbinic texts, familiarity with prayer, holidays, weekly Torah portion (*parashat hashavua*), and general Jewish values. The network also encourages daily prayers, although this is not a condition for joining TALI.¹²⁰ Their mission is defined as providing 'Israeli pupils with a Jewish, Zionist, and democratic education taught in an open atmosphere, sensitive to the spirit of the times, and based on the co-operation between parents and educators'.¹²¹ According to the Schechter Institute, 'this education aspires to shape a personality which embraces both Jewish tradition and general culture'.¹²²

Rather than establishing new schools, it is generally the case that parents and principals of existing state secular schools request TALI's involvement and then become affiliated with the TALI network.¹²³ With state resources also made available to TALI, this network of schools has become a semi-official strand within the state education system, with some ninety-eight schools and over one hundred

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 695. TALI is a Hebrew acronym and short for 'enrichment of Jewish studies'. TALI is associated with Conservative Judaism and thus 'combines loyalty to the Jewish tradition and *halacha* (Jewish law), with openness to democratic and humanist culture'. The organisation claims to combine modern Israeli life with traditional Jewish belief, while promoting equality and inclusion and freedom of expressing religious views. The Jewish Agency for Israel, 'The Masorti (Conservative) Movement', *Jewish Agency for Israel Website*, <http://archive.jewishagency.org/israel-your-community/partnership2gether/religious-streams/masorti-conservative-movement> [accessed 5 September 2018]; The Masorti Foundation for Conservative Judaism in Israel, 'Mission Statement', *Masorti Foundation Website*, <https://masorti.org/mission-statement/> [accessed 5 September 2018].

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ The Schechter Institute, 'TALI Principles, Written in Partnership with the Israel Ministry of Education', *The Schechter Institute Website*, <http://www.schechter.edu/Page.aspx?ID=877207720#Integration> [accessed 17 March 2018].

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ilan, 'More Secular Parents'.

and forty kindergartens operating with a student population of around forty-five thousand.¹²⁴ Director General of the TALI network, Eitan Chikli, attributes this revival of secular interest in Jewish education to parents wanting to keep the Jewish tradition alive, yet feeling ‘incapable of giving their children the same Jewish baggage that they received from their parents’.¹²⁵ The TALI school system thus provides the answer to those secular parents who view Judaism as a cultural, rather than purely religious, heritage.¹²⁶ Another possible reason for increased demand for such schools, according to Chikli, is the emphasis within the state secular school system on purely academic achievements at the expense of values education: ‘the assessment is that Jewish education can deepen values in general’.¹²⁷

I was able to find out much more about the work that the TALI organisation is involved in during my fieldwork in Israel. I managed to interview two key people from the organisation who shared a wealth of information with me that has enabled a much deeper insight into the network’s activities, the ethos behind their work and the actual programmes they provide for students. Dena Thaler, Director of the Department of Educational Resources at TALI,¹²⁸ spoke of how, in her view, Jewish studies is ‘very, very weak in the secular school system’ and ‘really very superficial’ — with students learning the same information about Jewish holidays,

¹²⁴ The Schechter Institute, ‘Map of TALI Schools’, *The Schechter Institute Website*, http://www.schechter.edu/JM_Lib/Tali2015.pdf [accessed 30 September 2018].

¹²⁵ Ilan, ‘More Secular Parents’.

¹²⁶ Moaz, ‘Religious Education in Israel’, p. 697.

¹²⁷ Ilan, ‘More Secular Parents’.

¹²⁸ As noted, the Educational Resources Department is responsible for producing TALI’s books, games, educational kits and educational websites for elementary and middle schools.

for example, in pre-school as they do in grade six.¹²⁹ As Thaler explained, ‘that’s where TALI came in, to enrich and to say, you know, we’ve got this very rich culture and the kids don’t know anything about it, and you don’t have to be religious in order to know the culture’.¹³⁰

The demand for the involvement of TALI in secular schools has increased dramatically since the Ministry of Education introduced the new syllabus for enriched Jewish studies in state secular schools in April 2016, with the organisation writing a wealth of material for the new ‘Jewish-Israeli Culture’ programme. Thaler acknowledged, however, that this subject has raised much attention in Israel: ‘it’s become very vocal, very complicated — it’s very interesting, it’s actually fascinating, because, how do you teach Judaism, you know, in a way that’s not going to be coercive’.¹³¹ Thaler went on to explain her concerns about organisations that are working in this area which are not pluralistic:¹³²

from the other side there are a lot of organisations that want to enrich Jewish education, which sounds just like us, but you know, they want to go one step further — and we are truly pluralistic in the sense that, honestly, I really don’t care what people do. I really want them to have the knowledge, I really want them to see that it’s relevant — that it can be relevant — and then whatever they do —

¹²⁹ Interview conducted with Dena Thaler in Jerusalem, 14 February 2017. I also interviewed Shira Ackerman Simchovitch, Director of Early Childhood Education at TALI (Interview conducted in Jerusalem, 21 February 2017).

¹³⁰ Interview conducted with Dena Thaler in Jerusalem, 14 February 2017.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² The exact definition of the terms ‘pluralism’ and ‘pluralist’ is dependent on the context in which they are applied but they are generally used to describe openness to religious diversity and, more specifically, ‘a particular kind of philosophical or theological approach to such diversity, one usually characterised by humility regarding the level of truth and effectiveness of one’s own religion, as well as the goals of respectful dialogue and mutual understanding with other traditions’. *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, ‘Religious Pluralism’, *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/rel-plur/> [accessed 3 August 2019]. Whilst TALI promotes equality and inclusion and freedom of expressing religious views, it does not include teaching about religious traditions that are not Jewish in its network of schools — thus highlighting Thaler’s narrow conception of pluralism.

truthfully I really feel that, and I don't think that people who are really Orthodox mostly feel that way, because they really feel for the most part that it's really important to them that Jews do keep Shabbat, you know, so from their perspective it's hard to be so open minded.¹³³

Thaler's account also revealed the difficulty involved in providing this kind of education given the current atmosphere in Israel, 'where there are all kinds of questions about democracy, about society going to the right, about anti-democracy'.¹³⁴ As Thaler explained:

people are concerned that this [new subject] is part of that and I completely understand, I really get it. So there are a lot of families who are saying, you know, I want a completely secular education for my kids, I don't want them praying — so that's where the complication comes in, you know, it's complicated.¹³⁵

Thaler also explained how her work faces criticism from both sides — religious and secular Jews in Israel — thus drawing attention to the deep ideological and religious tensions/divides that exist within Israeli society. Such divides were, in fact, frequently exposed during the interviews that I carried out during my fieldwork. The differences in opinion between 'religious' and 'secular' Jews were particularly noticeable when I asked interviewees about the compatibility of Jewish and democratic values. When I asked Merav Kala, a religious Jew who teaches Bible Studies in a state secular school, if she believes that Judaism and democracy are compatible at state level, she, whilst asserting that 'there is no democracy in the Bible', nevertheless maintained that the two can exist together as 'there are a lot of ways to connect the Bible and democracy'.¹³⁶ However, Kala also went on to

¹³³ Interview conducted with Dena Thaler in Jerusalem, 14 February 2017.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Interview conducted with Merav Kala in Modi'in, 6 February 2017.

declare that, for her, ‘the Bible is more important’.¹³⁷ Another religious (Orthodox) teacher I interviewed, Sivan Nachliel, was very quick and definitive in answering, almost before I had finished asking the question — do you think there is any contradiction between Judaism and democracy?: ‘No. And you can see it here in Israel — it’s living proof. Not everyone believes this, but I do’.¹³⁸

I certainly found quite a different view on this topic when I interviewed Nati Stern, a secular-minded principal in a state secular school.¹³⁹ Stern clearly believes that Judaism and democracy cannot exist together and when asked which he considered more important he replied with a smile: ‘obviously democracy — I think that’s obvious by now’.¹⁴⁰ Stern was clear, however, that he is very proud of his Jewish heritage but that his definition of being a Jew is very different from Bennett’s definition. Stern explained his own position: ‘I think it should be a cultural definition and not a religious one’.¹⁴¹ In Stern’s view, ‘once you start inserting morals, ethics and codes of behaviour — religious codes of behaviour — it’s impossible to be really democratic’.¹⁴² Stern used the example of the state law that prohibits the sale or display of bread and other leavened goods in public during Passover to elaborate on his point: ‘it’s not a normal thing, it’s drawn straight from the Jewish *halacha*’.¹⁴³ For Stern,

combining Orthodox rules with a modern state — with a state [law] — is something that is basically hurting major values and ideas of democracy —

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Interview conducted with Sivan Nachliel in Jerusalem, 14 February 2017.

¹³⁹ Interview conducted with Nati Stern in Tel Aviv, 5 February 2017.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

freedom and the right, the state's right [obligation] to avoid interference with one's beliefs. Once you do so, as I say, Israel is becoming ethnocentric.¹⁴⁴

The debate around the compatibility of Judaism and democracy inevitably also came up during my interview with Thaler, given that the TALI organisation she work for aims to teach Judaism in a democratic way.¹⁴⁵ When I asked Thaler if she considers there to be a tension between Judaism and the principles of democracy she revealed that she thinks there is an inherent problem with the two — but only if you approach them from an Orthodox stance: 'if you're going to go from an Orthodox perspective I think you will have an issue, but since we don't [hold Orthodox views] then we don't really'.¹⁴⁶ I also asked Thaler which of the two principles she considers most important, but she refused to be drawn: 'I won't say that one is more important than the other, I won't give up on either — absolutely not. You have to find a way to make it work'.¹⁴⁷ Thaler continued to elaborate on her point:

[...] and, you know, Judaism has always been pick and choose — like everything else. So people, you know, can't say Judaism believes that [one thing] — there's no such thing, so you can find everything in there — which is kind of wonderful, and scary, because people who are racist can find a lot of stuff to support them.¹⁴⁸

Thaler's last point about racism was particularly relevant at the time of my visit to Israel, given the report on racism in schools, written by then State Comptroller Joseph Shapira, that had been released in the month before I arrived in Israel.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Democratic in the sense of freedom of expressing religious views.

¹⁴⁶ Interview conducted with Dena Thaler in Jerusalem, 14 February 2017.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Shapira served as State Comptroller from 4 July 2012 until 3 July 2019.

The report is highly critical of the Ministry of Education and concludes that the education system in Israel is not doing enough to tackle racism:

[...] systematic assessment of the phenomenon of racism in the education system is not done; programs for creating a shared society have not been implemented and appropriate resources for their implementation have not been allocated; activities on the subject, in all its various aspects, have not been coordinated by it through a single field unit charged with leading processes for the promotion of the subject in the education system; education for a shared society and prevention of racism has been only partially and inadequately integrated in the education system; teachers for this important area have not been trained and activities in cooperation with voluntary organizations have not been exhausted.¹⁵⁰

The report thus urges the Ministry of Education to 'lead the education system without delay using messages and actions from pre-school through to the end of grade twelve, to deal comprehensively, intensively, methodically, compellingly and structurally with the subject of education for prevention of racism and for a shared society'.¹⁵¹

I learned during my interview with Inas Deeb, Director of the Education Department at Hand in Hand (Centre for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel),¹⁵² that following the release of the report, and just days before our interview, Bennett actually visited the Max Rayne Hand in Hand school in Jerusalem to observe how

¹⁵⁰ J. Shapira, 'Education for a Shared Society and Prevention of Racism', Special Report by the State Comptroller, September 2016, p. 5, https://www.mevaker.gov.il/he/Reports/Report_546/SummaryReport/summarypdf_2.pdf [accessed 23 May 2019].

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. 6.

¹⁵² Deeb supervises pedagogy, programme development, curriculum development and teacher training at Hand in Hand's six schools. Hand in Hand's mission is to create a strong, inclusive, shared society in Israel through a network of Jewish-Arab integrated bilingual schools and organised communities. Hand in Hand currently operates integrated schools and communities in six locations with 1,578 Jewish and Arab students and more than 8,000 community members. The organisation aims to encourage Jews and Arabs to learn together and live together, inspiring broad support for social inclusion and civic equality in Israel. Hand in Hand – Centre for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel, 'Our Mission', *Hand in Hand Website*, <https://www.handinhandk12.org/inform/why-we-exist> [accessed 31 August 2018].

the school deals with Arab-Jewish issues and racism. According to Deeb, Bennett was ‘extremely impressed with how the school’s integration sessions work’.¹⁵³ However, after my own research was carried out, details of Bennett’s visit to the Max Rayne School were reported in the Israeli press and the responses from teachers highlighted his disregard for preventing racism and promoting integration in reality. On the issue of racism, teacher Nadia Kinai explained to *Haaretz* that ‘the [Education] Ministry allocates the smallest budget to addressing racism and these issues are not dealt with’.¹⁵⁴ Kinai is clear, however, that ‘the solution to the problem lies in education’.¹⁵⁵ This view was certainly backed up by Shapira’s report on racism, which highlights the urgent need to combat racism among the country’s youth and to promote coexistence. As Shapira notes, ‘if Jews are taught that all Arabs are evil, and Arabs are taught that all Jews are evil, we will never be able to live together’.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, my interview with Nachliel revealed exactly the type of view that Shapira is calling on the Ministry of Education to combat:

I will tell you now, when I came into the class one day one of the kids said, “yeah, we should kill all the Arabs” and I had to tell him “no, we have to deal with them, understand”. I’m always having to pull them back to the middle, even though sometimes I can agree with them — not to kill all Arabs — but even if I agree with them I want a balance.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Interview conducted with Inas Deeb in Jerusalem, 9 February 2017.

¹⁵⁴ L. Dattel and D. Lutsky, ‘Jewish and Arab Students Cross Cultural Boundaries at Model Bilingual Jerusalem School’ *Haaretz*, 6 September 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/Israel-news/MAGAZINE-at-bilingual-jerusalem-school-teaching-from-both-perspectives-1.5448216> [accessed 31 August 2018].

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Y. J. Bob, G. F. Cashman and L. Gravé-Lazi, ‘Special Report: Israel Failing to Combat Racism in Schools’, *The Jerusalem Post*, 22 September 2016, <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Special-report-Israel-failing-to-combat-racism-in-schools-468418> [accessed 31 August 2018].

¹⁵⁷ Interview conducted with Sivan Nachliel in Jerusalem, 14 February 2017.

However, the fact that the extremist trend is most predominant among the religious youth in Israel is clearly reflected in the results of Maagar Mohot Institute 2010 study — which polled five hundred and thirty-six Jewish and Arab fifteen to eighteen-year-olds, looking at ‘their connection to the State of Israel, their attitude towards new immigrants, including Arab citizens, and their overall political views’.¹⁵⁸ As reported in *Haaretz*, the study found a major disparity between religious and secular youth in Israel. In response to the question of whether they would be willing to have an Arab friend of their age and sex, 81% of religious teenagers responded that they would not, compared to 21% of secular teenagers. Similarly, when asked if Israeli Arabs should receive rights equal to Israeli Jews, 82% of religious teenagers said that it was not necessary, compared to 39% of secular teenagers.¹⁵⁹ As Professor Daniel Bar-Tal of Tel Aviv University has commented, ‘the difference in the views between the secular and religious youths is increasing demographically. This should concern all of us because they will be the face of the country in 20-30 years. There is a combination of fundamentalism, nationalism, and racism in the worldview of religious youth’.¹⁶⁰ It is crucial to recognise, however, that this anti-democratic and ultra-nationalist trend filters down from the highest level of leadership.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Citizens’ Empowerment Centre in Israel, ‘The Youth of Today – The Future Face of Tomorrow’, *Citizens’ Empowerment Centre Website*, <https://cecisrael.wordpress.com/2010/04/01/youth-survey-ignites-serious-concern-at-ceci-conference/> [accessed 2 October 2019].

¹⁵⁹ A. Goodman, ‘Rabbi Perel’s Anti Arab Remarks Reflect how World Bnei Akiva Has Lost Its Path’, *Haaretz*, 4 July 2014, <https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/.premium-world-bnei-akiva-has-lost-its-path-1.5254472> [accessed 1 March 2018]; O. Kashti, ‘Poll: Half of Israeli High Schoolers Oppose Equal Rights for Arabs’, *Haaretz*, 11 March 2010, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5040299> [accessed 2 April 2018].

¹⁶⁰ Kashti, ‘Poll: Half of Israeli High Schoolers’.

¹⁶¹ Rabbis are highly influential within the religious Zionist community and those who themselves hold extremist views thus contribute significantly to the growing trend amongst religious Zionist

Alternative Approaches to Education

In contrast to the state secular school curriculum which, as evidenced above, some see as promoting a narrow nationalist religious and Orthodox outlook, Jewish pluralist schools are providing a vastly different system of education in Israel. Whilst the official state school system for Jewish students segregates religious and secular students, joint schools for religious and secular students have emerged precisely in an attempt to reduce the religious/secular divide in schools and create a framework in which children from different ideological backgrounds can learn together.

Leading the way in this Jewish pluralistic education is the Meitarim Network, which was founded in 2002 by Rabbi Michael Melchior¹⁶² in order to provide students with ‘an education in which there is no contradiction between Judaism, pluralism, humanism, and democracy’.¹⁶³ Rabbi Michael Melchior heads the organisation and,

youth toward racism and extremism. The Secretary-General of World Bnei Akiva Rabbi Noam Perel, for example, responded to the murder of three Bnei Akiva affiliated Israeli teenagers by a Palestinian by calling for violent revenge against the entire Palestinian community. Goodman, ‘Rabbi Perel’s Anti Arab’.

¹⁶² Rabbi Melchior immigrated to Israel from his native Denmark in 1986 and is the descendant of seven generations of rabbis. Since making *aliyah*, Rabbi Melchior, has lived in Jerusalem where he is the rabbi of a ‘dynamic synagogue’ — whilst also holding the title of Chief Rabbi of Norway. Rabbi Melchior is a well renowned Jewish leader, thinker and activist — working for social justice, education reform, interfaith peace and coexistence. Rabbi Michael Melchior, ‘Biography’, *Rabbi Michael Melchior Website*, <https://www.rabbimichaelmelchior.org/biography> [accessed 12 July 2018].

¹⁶³ Meitarim Network for Inclusive Jewish Education, ‘About Us’, *Meitarim Network Website*, <https://www.meitarim.org/en/about-meitarim/about-meitarim> [accessed 12 July 2018].

Aryeh Geiger, former principal of the pluralistic Re’ut school in Jerusalem, and Yossi Pnini, the former director of the education department of the TALM school network were also instrumental in establishing the framework for the Meitarim Network. Established by Geiger in 1999, Reut High School in Jerusalem was the first model for integrated Jewish pluralistic democratic education in the State of Israel. Since 2002, it has been a foundation of the Meitarim community, emphasising critical thinking, student leadership and volunteerism among its students. The pluralistic schools were initially formed as a result of parents groups working to establish alternative schools that

as a Member of Knesset representing Meimad from 1999 to 2009, worked tirelessly for the schools to be recognised in Law.¹⁶⁴ Despite the initial rejection of two past bills proposed by Knesset members to introduce a third Judaic-pluralistic strand of schools, legislation was finally passed by the Knesset Committee for Education Culture and Sport in February 2012 to enable state secular and state religious schools to become state pluralistic schools.¹⁶⁵ This does not however grant the schools a separate formal stream — schools still have to be affiliated with either the state secular or state religious stream. As Rabbi Melchior explained to me during our telephone interview:

most of [the schools] belong to general [state secular] stream of education, but some of them actually also choose the religious stream of education. It's a choice of the school, the schools are autonomous and decide themselves [...] there are

provide Jewish pluralistic education. These schools then became affiliated with the Meitarim Network when it was established in 2002. Meitarim Network for Inclusive Jewish Education, 'Introducing Meitarim's Schools: Reut High School in Jerusalem', *Meitarim Network Website*, <https://www.meitarim.org/en/meitarim-schools/featured-meitarim-schools/reut-school> [accessed 12 July 2018].

¹⁶⁴ Meimad is a Hebrew acronym for 'Jewish state, democratic State'. As a representative for Meimad, Rabbi Melchior initially ran with Labour's One Israel alliance and then with the Labour Party. Melchior held various positions including the very first cabinet minister for Social Affairs and World Jewry (in the governments headed by Ehud Barak and then Ariel Sharon) and the chair of the Education, Culture and Sports Committee (under Ehud Olmert's government). Although Meimad has not run in any elections since 2006, it still exists as a movement. There were talks about reviving the party prior to the November 2019 election in order to provide an alternative for 'left-wing' religious Zionists who were apparently seeking to rival the right-wing HaBayit HaYehudi. The party decided not to run in the election, however, as they were unlikely to get past the 3.25% threshold to enter the Knesset. J. Maltz, 'Disgusted by Far-right Policies, Some Religious Zionists in Israel Look Left for New Leadership', *Haaretz*, 9 June 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-disgusted-by-far-right-some-religious-zionists-in-israel-head-left-1.6156728> [accessed 10 June 2018]; A. Eldar, 'Religious Moderates Left Orphaned by Israeli Politics', *Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East*, 1 August 2019, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/07/israel-ayelet-shaked-united-right-messianic-Orthodox-knesset.html> [accessed 10 August 2019].

¹⁶⁵ Meitarim Network for Inclusive Jewish Education, 'Israel's Pluralistic Education Law to Be Implemented', *Meitarim Network Website*, <https://www.meitarim.org/images/news-english/Ministry-of-Education-Adopts-Pluralism-Law.pdf> [accessed 12 July 2018]. Rabbi Melchior dedicated the law to Geiger. The law followed the legislation which was first proposed by Rabbi Melchior in 2008, which called for a pluralistic track based on the Meitarim model.

lots of issues and this is one of the issues where every school decides for themselves.¹⁶⁶

The passing of the regulation to the State Education Law (Amendment Number 10) was significant as it secured government funding for the conversion of up to thirty schools in the first year (2012) and a further sixty schools in the following year.¹⁶⁷ The growth in the number of schools affiliated with the Meitarim is certainly significant, now including eighty-five institutions in twenty-nine different communities throughout Israel.¹⁶⁸

Despite Meitarim's self-declared mission to promote Jewish democratic education, it is important to note that Meitarim is affiliated with Meimad, the political party Rabbi Melchior represented in the Knesset. Whilst Meimad is a left-wing religious Zionist political movement, journalist Tamar Hausman points out the religious pluralism they speak about is nevertheless within the parameters of the Orthodox community and is thus a network that advises and helps finance schools that want to be 'pluralistic on the basis of *halacha*'.¹⁶⁹ Whilst Hausmann appears cautious about the extent to which a school can be pluralistic when working from an Orthodox perspective, the interview which I conducted with Rabbi Melchior was most enlightening and provided me with much more insight regarding his outlook

¹⁶⁶ Telephone interview conducted with Rabbi Michael Melchior, 25 May 2018.

¹⁶⁷ The Meitarim network continues to provide support for schools which are already part of the network, as well as facilitating the process for new schools to become affiliated with Meitarim. Meitarim aims to assist the government with teacher training and curriculum design and development. Meitarim Network for Inclusive Jewish Education, 'Israel's Pluralistic Education Law to Be Implemented'.

¹⁶⁸ The institutions currently affiliated with Meitarim include: forty-four pre-schools, twenty-two elementary schools, fourteen middle and High Schools, and five gap year pre-army preparation units. Meitarim Network for Inclusive Jewish Education, 'Home', *Meitarim Network Website*, <https://www.meitarim.org/en/home> [accessed 12 July 2018].

¹⁶⁹ T. Hausman, 'New Organisation Seeks to Spread Pluralistic Religious Education', *Haaretz*, 23 December 2001, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5466712> [accessed 10 July 2018].

and vision for the Meitarim schools, as well as his future hopes for Israeli society more generally. The analysis of the Meitarim network provided below, incorporating this data, is therefore able to provide a much more complex picture.

As Meitarim addresses the religious/secular divide in Israel, this particular pluralistic system of schools could have the potential to transform relations between the religious and secular populations in what is becoming an increasingly polarised society. This is due to the fact that the Meitarim model is different from any other pluralistic approach that currently exists in Israel, such as the TALI network's programme. Whereas the enhanced Jewish studies programme provided by TALI targets secular or 'liberal' Jews, Meitarim's goal is to attract both Orthodox and secular students and provide a shared environment in which all (Jewish) students can learn together.

Meitarim is also different from the Keshet system of schools. Although Keshet schools aim to attract equal numbers of religious and secular students, the system continues to segregate students during, for example, morning prayers and Jewish studies.¹⁷⁰ Thaler shared her own knowledge/experience of Keshet schools during our interview:

what they want to do is have a religious population — an Orthodox population — and a completely secular population studying together. I mean just on a totally personal note, at a certain point we were thinking of sending our first child to that kind of school, and in the end we didn't because the religion that we wanted to educate towards was a non-Orthodox. It wasn't either this, and it wasn't that — so we kind of felt that they wouldn't find their place.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ E. Wohlgelernter, 'Schools Proposed for Religious, Secular', *Forward*, 28 November 2003, <https://forward.com/news/7173/schools-proposed-for-religious-secular/?attribution=author-article-listing-19-headline> [accessed 29 August 2018].

¹⁷¹ Interview conducted with Dena Thaler in Jerusalem, 14 February 2017.

Meitarim schools are, however, committed to a fully integrated education for their students. Geiger, who established the pluralistic Re'ut school in Jerusalem explains the vision that drives this approach:¹⁷²

the very notion of trying to force someone to define oneself as either religious or secular is against our philosophy. All of our students in the morning have to be at prayer, whether you are secular or religious. You can't force people to pray — they don't have to pray. They have to be there, they have to have a *siddur* [prayer book] in their hand. Period. That's it.¹⁷³

This outlook was echoed by Rabbi Melchior during interview: 'you can't force anything, especially when it comes to identity'.¹⁷⁴ This issue led me to ask Rabbi Melchior to share his opinion on the Ministry of Education's recent push to strengthen Jewish identity in state secular schools. Whilst not overtly critical of the Ministry of Education's programme, Rabbi Melchior once again stressed the importance of not imposing anything on the school system — and how this ethos is central to Meitarim's unique approach:

I do think that [what] we're doing is something else because the inclusive schools are always initiated by the schools themselves — the parents, and by the teachers and the principles, by the community. So therefore when we go into a school it's always because the community wants this and therefore the ones who oppose it are often the bureaucrats. But the community, the school, the parents and all the surrounding community, they are always giving us backing and just want us to do more and more. Therefore it's a wonderful community experience and I think that's the best way to educate, to educate with a positive [...] you can't force identity down anybody's throat, you can only do it with the community.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Reut school, for example, does not record how many students are religious or secular because they do not want to force definitions on the students, rather they prefer to let them develop their own identities. Meitarim Network for Inclusive Jewish Education, 'Reut High School in Jerusalem', *Meitarim Network Website*, <https://www.meitarim.org/en/meitarim-schools/featured-meitarim-schools/reut-school> [accessed 12 July 2018].

¹⁷³ Wohlgelernter, 'Schools Proposed for Religious, Secular'.

¹⁷⁴ Telephone interview conducted with Rabbi Michael Melchior, 25 May 2018.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. Deeb raised similar issues resulting from bureaucrats working for the Ministry of Education. Deeb explained how the smooth running of Hand in Hand schools is dependent on the school supervisor that is appointed by the Ministry of Education. If appointed a supervisor who is supportive of their programme and 'willing to work with the school and its aims', the process can be

The integrated Jewish pluralistic approach is certainly attracting a growing number of followers, as the increase in the number of pluralistic schools attests. This may well be in response to the religionisation (*hadata*) that is taking place in Israeli society generally and which is particularly notable in Israel's state secular schools.¹⁷⁶ Rabbi Melchior was certainly in agreement with the notion that Israel's schools are taking a more religious turn in education when we discussed the issue.

As Rabbi Melchior commented:

today there is a whole campaign in Israeli society against the kind of religionisation of the [state] secular school system, so everybody is up in arms, but in our schools everybody knows that we're not trying to convert anybody or persuade anybody this way or that way, or the middle way.¹⁷⁷

Melchior nevertheless went on to explain how there has always been a level of resistance or fear towards Meitarim schools:¹⁷⁸

when we started off everybody was against it and everybody was afraid and this fear I think still exists and is the biggest challenge. We have to overcome the fear so that people really understand that the fear is the slippery slope and not the inclusive education. Because the truth is when you meet each other and when you feel confident with each other and when you learn together then there's nothing

made relatively easy. However, as Deeb continued, supervisors 'can also severely restrict and interfere with the working of the schools'. Deeb explained the situation she was facing at the time the interview was conducted — at which point they had a 'positive supervisor' at the high school level but a 'very unsupportive supervisor' for their pre-schools. The supervisor for the pre-schools for instance, would not allow their own curriculum (integrating lessons about each other's heritage) to be included. Nor would they allow the Hand in Hand organisation to provide training for the teachers working in the schools, insisting rather on training from the Ministry of Education. Interview conducted with Inas Deeb in Jerusalem, 9 February 2017. Deeb's experiences further highlights the power that key individuals within the Ministry of Education hold and the methods that are employed to shape state secular education in accordance with their own ideological worldview.

¹⁷⁶ The religionisation of Israeli society is discussed in detail in Chapters 5.

¹⁷⁷ Telephone interview conducted with Rabbi Michael Melchior, 25 May 2018.

¹⁷⁸ Rabbi Melchior suggested there is more fear today from the religious communities, whereas secular and traditional communities are becoming more receptive, perhaps as a result of the religionisation of the state secular school system and the reaction against this process. Ibid.

to be afraid of. When they're together, grow up together and feel comfortable with each other, they feel comfortable with the identity they have from home.¹⁷⁹

Whilst Meitarim schools are working to reduce the fear of the 'other' amongst religious and secular communities, the network does not provide an educational framework that includes Arab students. However, when I broached this subject during interview Rabbi Melchior was certainly not opposed to the notion — in theory:

in principle I would be for having [Arab students], although to have Jewish students together is a big mouthful and there are lots and lots of issues and it's very difficult and challenging, okay, and we're learning how to do it. I would think that it would be a good thing to have — there are some schools where Jewish and Arab students are together, very few, very very few, but we do have some, a couple of schools, but it's not [the norm]. I mean theoretically of course Arab students are welcome but that's not what happens in Israel in general so that dictates also our schools. In principle I would think that would be a good thing, but in Israeli society [the two communities do not generally mix].¹⁸⁰

The schools that Rabbi Melchior was referring to are the Hand in Hand schools, discussed above. Despite the differing missions of Meitarim and Hand in Hand schools, Deeb also stated how introducing students to each other's heritage (including all three religions — Jewish, Christian and Muslim) only works to strengthen their individual identities. In order to facilitate this meeting of cultures, Hand in Hand schools have developed a curriculum where students become teachers and have to teach each other about their own and others' heritage and traditions. Thaler also reported comparable results when I spoke with her about a similar programme TALI runs in partnership with the Jerusalem Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations, which encourages encounter between Jewish and Arab schools, including both Christian and Muslim students:

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

[the students] might not be interested in learning their own [tradition] at first, but when they have to start teaching somebody else, they become interested because they need to know what they're talking about. So it's ironic but in meeting the other you definitely get to know yourself — but that's the idea, that we do strengthen their own identity by encounter with the other — so that's you know really nice.¹⁸¹

Such initiatives are thus testament to the benefit of educating toward a shared society, with respect and tolerance for different cultures.

Conclusion

During the first years of statehood, the Israeli education system struggled 'between the melting pot policy, advocating educational uniformity and the demand for religious autonomy in the area of education [...]'.¹⁸² In the end, autonomy won through. However, this autonomy in schools in Israel has actually led to educational and cultural segregation, with the state failing to ensure that young people are being equipped with 'the necessary tools to become fruitful and successful members of society' with an appreciation for diversity and respect for other cultures.¹⁸³

As noted above, provisions that exist within the State Education Law also allow for reinforced Jewish studies to be introduced in state secular schools at the request of parents. This has resulted in the growth of organisations such as TALI, which describes itself as pluralistic, aiming to provide students with a Jewish Zionist and democratic education. However, as my research demonstrates, TALI does not include teaching about religious traditions that are not Jewish and is only narrowly

¹⁸¹ Interview conducted with Dena Thaler in Jerusalem, 14 February 2017.

¹⁸² Moaz, 'Religious Education in Israel', p. 728.

¹⁸³ Ibid, p. 728.

democratic in the sense of expressing religious views (within the Jewish tradition) — thus highlighting the organisation's somewhat constrained conception of pluralism. This also draws attention to the limits that are placed on organisations operating in state secular schools — and reflects the lack of space in wider society to operate outside the Jewish religious framework. As will be explored further in the following chapters, it is Orthodox organisations — which often conflate religious instruction with right-wing nationalistic politics — that now have the monopoly on providing Jewish education in state secular schools.

Education is a potentially powerful tool to change fundamental attitudes in society. It is therefore vital, from a liberal point of view, that schools strive to educate towards an inclusive and democratic worldview in an attempt to alleviate the religious/secular divide that characterises Israeli society as a whole, and is perpetuated by the existing state and state religious school system. As Shapira notes, 'separation from the age of pre-school through to the end of grade twelve prevents the groups from getting acquainted with each other and strengthens the social alienation and suspicions toward the other or those that are different'.¹⁸⁴ The Meitarim network has been working precisely to alleviate the religious/secular divide by providing schools where religious and secular students learn together. However, whilst they describe their mission as promoting Jewish and democratic education, and promoting religious pluralism, this network nevertheless operates within the confines of Jewish Orthodoxy. As will be explored in Chapter 5, these schools have in fact been accused by some academics of contributing to the religionisation of Israeli society.

¹⁸⁴ Shapira, 'Education for a Shared Society and Prevention of Racism', p. 6.

In the following chapter, I will build on my analysis of the significant developments in Jewish education provided above to explore in detail the most recent revisions to Jewish studies in state secular schools that aim to strengthen the Jewish identity of secular students. I will focus specifically of the new 'Jewish-Israeli Culture' programme that was introduced in 2016. I will also include analysis of the most recent revisions to the civics curriculum in state secular schools and the developments within Israeli society that have influenced these changes. I will again make use of use key primary data throughout.

Introduction

Civic education has become something of a political football in Israel in recent years — raising passionate debate from figures on both the left and the right of the political spectrum.¹ Much of the zeal on both sides stems from the link between the civics curriculum and Israeli collective identity.² Indeed, the debate around how civics should be taught reflects the deep tension in Israeli society about how to approach Israel's dual Jewish and democratic identity. The content of the civics curriculum has thus become a battleground, with one side fighting for Israel's Jewishness to be emphasised and the other for its democratic features to predominate.³ Civic education has not, however, always been such a site of conflict. It was only when the notion of citizens' rights, rather than the obligation of citizens, began to be discussed in relation to the civics curriculum that the subject became polemicised. In order to assess this transition, the current chapter will begin with a brief overview of the main reasons for the changes to the civics curriculum, which began during the 1990s in response to the new public discourse that was developing, as well as the impact of these changes. The main focus of the discussion, however, will concentrate on the most recent changes to the civics programme, from 2011 to the present, based primarily on my fieldwork in Israel during January and February 2017.

¹ A. K., Sommer, 'How Civics Class Became Israel's Hottest Political Football', *Haaretz*, 27 January 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/Israel-news/.premium-1.699897> [accessed 19 March 2018].

² S. Fischer, 'Religion and Education in Israel', in *Religious Education and the Challenge of Pluralism*, ed. by A. Seligman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 119-149 (p. 139).

³ Sommer, 'How Civics Class Became Israel's Hottest Political Football'.

The question of how to approach Jewish studies in the state secular school system has also been a recurring theme in Israel, as discussed above. Given the current controversy surrounding the most recent developments in this area of education and the rich data I gathered on this very subject whilst carrying out my primary research in Israel, I will also address the key issues involved in the debate. Particular attention will be paid to the new subject — ‘Jewish-Israeli Culture’ — which was introduced in 2016 by Naftali Bennett, who had been appointed Minister of Education the previous year.

Here, I make further use of government and non-governmental reports, news sources and educational materials, as well as my own primary research data, to analyse the content of the civics and Jewish studies curriculum, with a view to determine the extent to which religious education in Israel is used as a vehicle for promoting the political/ideological agendas of right-wing parties.⁴ The analysis to follow reveals the full extent of the phenomenon. Significantly, however, by addressing both civics *and* Jewish studies, I am able to reveal the strategy that is being applied across the curriculum (i.e. beyond ‘just’ religious education) by key Ministry of Education officials as they strive to shape state secular education to fit with their own ideological worldview. The conflict over the content of these subjects strikes at the heart of the political dispute within Israeli society around the compatibility of Judaism and democracy. I am therefore able to use my research findings to provide further insights into the wider socio-political situation in Israel.

⁴ The analysis provided below consequently answers one of my key research questions: namely, to what extent is religious education used as a vehicle for promoting the political/ideological agendas of right-wing parties?

Civic Education in the 1990s

Civic education in Israel underwent significant changes during the 1990s. Having originally concentrated purely on the acquisition of practical, governance-centred knowledge — with clear focus placed upon the legal and structural attributes of governmental institutions — civics was not, in earlier years, generally a controversial subject. However, the development of a new liberal citizenship discourse in Israel from the mid-1980s onwards was to have a considerable impact on civic education in Israel. A range of factors influenced the development of this new discourse including, as sociologist Shlomo Fischer notes, ‘globalisation, the successful integration of Israel into the world market economy, globalising citizenship discourse that separates citizenship from ethnic-national identity and the spread of a globalising human rights regime’.⁵ At the same time, significant social and political tensions came to bear on Israeli society in the 1980s and 1990s, which also influenced changes to the civics curriculum. There were increasing concerns over the threats to Israel’s democratic character following the murder of peace activist Emil Grünzweig, who was killed in 1983 during a demonstration against the war in Lebanon.⁶ This was followed by the election of the extreme

⁵ S. Fischer, ‘Religion and Education in Israel’, p. 119.

⁶ Grünzweig was killed when a hand grenade was thrown into a group of peace activists. They had gathered in Jerusalem to urge the Israeli government to implement the recommendations of the Kahan Commission’s report on the massacre that had taken place in September 1982 in the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps in Lebanon. The report was highly critical of the conduct of the Prime Minister at the time, Menachem Begin, and recommended that Ariel Sharon, who was then Minister of Defence, be fired. The incident further increased the tensions between the political right and left, which had been growing since Likud’s election victory in 1977. These tensions were particularly noticeable on university campuses, where right-wing elements were becoming increasingly violent and threatening against anyone who was critical of Likud. Significantly, such tensions on university campuses have come to the fore once again recently, with increasing attempts to restrict left-wing views. Indeed, Bennett’s determination to silence left-wing voices in

right-wing Kach movement to the Knesset in 1984.⁷ In response to these events, the Unit for Education for Democracy and Coexistence was established by the Ministry of Education in 1986 'to promote education for democracy, tolerance and coexistence at a time when youth from different sectors in Israeli societies were becoming increasingly radicalised'.⁸ However, although additional programmes of study were introduced, these were all extra-curricular. Moreover, with the outbreak of the first *intifada*⁹ towards the end of 1987, focus moved away from encouraging co-existence between Arabs and Jews and when Zuvulun Hammer (National Religious Party) became Minister of Education in 1990 he placed firm emphasis instead on Jewish and Zionist values.¹⁰

Political and social polarisation in Israel continued into the 1990s, with heightened tensions surrounding the signing of the first Oslo Accords in 1993.¹¹ Thus, in order

universities resulted in a 'code of ethics' being enforced — banning political views from being expressed during lectures and prohibiting any participation in, or support of, academic boycotts against Israeli institutions. Y. Gruenpeter, 'Revisiting Israeli Peace Activist Emil Grunzweig's Murder, 33 Years Later', *Haaretz*, 16 February 2016, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-revisiting-peace-activist-emil-grunzweig-s-murder-1.5405138> [accessed 12 September 2018]; S. Winer, 'Education Minister Defends Bid to Ban Politics in Universities', *The Times of Israel*, 11 June 2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/education-minister-defends-bid-to-ban-politics-in-universities/> [accessed 12 September 2018].

⁷ As noted, Kach was an extremist Israeli political group. It was listed as a terrorist organisation following the Hebron massacre in 1994.

⁸ Jewish Virtual Library, Building Bridges: Chapter 1 — Israeli Public Policy, (Unit for Education for Democracy and Coexistence), *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/building-bridges-chapter-1-israeli-public-policy> [accessed 23 March 2018].

⁹ The first *intifada* refers to the Palestinian uprising which erupted in December 1987 in response to Israel's military occupation. The first *intifada* lasted from December 1987 until September 1993 when the formal Oslo Peace Process began (see below for details).

¹⁰ D. Bar-Tal, 'Nature, Rationale, and Effectiveness of Education for Coexistence', *Journal of Social Issues*, 60.2 (2004), 253-271 (p. 263).

¹¹ The Oslo Accords are the set of agreements that were signed on the lawn of the White House by the Palestinian and Israeli leaders Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin on 13 September 1993, presided over by US President Bill Clinton. The agreements were intended to achieve peace based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). UN Security Council Resolution 242, 22 November 1967, UNISPAL,

to facilitate a deepening of students' democratic notions, the Kremnitzer Committee was setup in May 1995 by then Minister of Education Amnon Rubenstein. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the declared purpose of the Kremnitzer Committee was 'to develop a comprehensive scheme to teach school children civics, which would provide a foundation of values and conduct for all citizens of Israel to share'.¹² The assassination of the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995 provided further impetus for revising the civics curriculum and when the interim report was issued in February 1996 the recommendations were adopted by the government.¹³ A task force was formed to implement the Kremnitzer report (1996), which recommended that civic education emphasise the values of democracy, human rights and minority values, the limits of democracy and rifts within Israeli society — rather than focussing solely on the formal aspects of governing institutions and their activities.¹⁴ There is much dispute, however, as to the extent to which any of the central aspects of the recommendations were put into practice.¹⁵

Revisions were nevertheless made to the civics curriculum, with the new official curriculum finally approved and implemented by the Ministry of Education in

<https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/7D35E1F729DF491C85256EE700686136> [accessed 12 September 2018]; UN Security Council Resolution 338, 22 October 1973, UNISPAL, <https://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/7FB7C26FCBE80A31852560C50065F878> [accessed 12 September 2018]. The introduction of neo-liberal economic policies and the desire for integration into the world market economy also encouraged the initiation of the Oslo Peace Process. Fischer, 'Religion and Education in Israel', p. 128.

¹² Israel Ministry of Education, 'Being Citizens: The Committee', *Israel Ministry of Education* <http://cms.education.gov.il/EducationCMS/Units/Owl/English/Pedagogic/Being/The+Committee.htm> [accessed 2 April 2018].

¹³ The assassination of Rabin by an Israeli religious extremist, Yigal Amir, exposed rifts not only between Arabs and Jews but within Jewish Israeli society.

¹⁴ Bob, Cashman and Grave-Lazi, 'Special Report: Israel Failing to Combat Racism in Schools'.

¹⁵ Ibid; Shapira, 'Education for a Shared Society and Prevention of Racism'.

2000.¹⁶ A new civics book, *To Be Citizens in Israel: In a Jewish and Democratic State*, accompanied the new curriculum. The revised curriculum and textbook reflected a new emphasis on questions relating to human rights and basic principles of democracy — or as one of my interviewees, Assaf Malach, who heads the Ministry of Education’s Civics Committee, put it, ‘modern liberal democracy — from a very liberal point of view’.¹⁷ Indeed, despite being described by Pinson as reflecting an ethnocentric curriculum that glorifies the Jewish nature of the state whilst marginalising the idea of Israel as a state for all its citizens, the new curriculum and textbook were perceived by hardliners as too liberal.¹⁸ Given the perception that a more liberal approach was being taken towards civic education, the new curriculum and the textbook that accompanied it met with resistance from the more right-wing, conservative sections of Israeli society. As Fischer notes, nationalist critiques claim that such liberal textbooks and curricula ‘provide false and malicious information as well as undermine Israeli patriotism and the moral legitimacy of the Israeli state’.¹⁹ Of particular relevance to the current study are the complex responses that were elicited from religious Zionist elements, which continue to influence the state secular school system in Israel.²⁰ The impact of this on the official civics curriculum became clear following the election of 2009, which

¹⁶ The re-writing of the civics curriculum began in 1994, during Yitzhak Rabin’s (Labour) tenure as Minister of Education and Culture. The new curriculum was intended to promote a common Israeli civic identity and culture. Pinson, ‘At the Boundaries of Citizenship’, p. 340; Pinson, ‘Inclusive Curriculum?’, p. 360.

¹⁷ Interview conducted with Assaf Malach in Jerusalem, 9 February 2017. As noted, each subject taught in schools has its own professional advisory committee whose members are appointed by the Ministry of Education and include academics, teachers and Ministry of Education officials.

¹⁸ Pinson, ‘At the Boundaries of Citizenship’, p. 340.

¹⁹ Fischer, ‘Religion and Education in Israel’, p. 140.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 135. I refer here particularly to the responses from Zvi Zameret and Yizhak Geiger, which played a key role in shaping the new civics curriculum and which are discussed below.

was won by right-wing Likud, with Benjamin Netanyahu as Prime Minister. The Likud party was also now in charge of the Ministry of Education, with Gideon Sa'ar appointed as Minister of Education.²¹ Seemingly of the view that civic education was too liberal and leftist and therefore in need of limiting by a reinforcement of Jewish studies, Sa'ar not only appointed a new Civics Committee to oversee a revision of the civic education programme, but, as noted, also immediately declared that strengthening Jewish studies would be one of his top priorities.²²

Zvi Zameret was appointed by Sa'ar as the new chair of the Pedagogical Secretariat to oversee the body in the Ministry of Education responsible for all curricula and instruction.²³ Zameret agreed with criticisms from right-wing religious Zionist elements about the new civics textbook, accusing the book of being too critical of the state.²⁴ The most notable criticisms had been published in a report by far right-wing think tank, the Institute for Zionist Strategies.²⁵ The report was written by Yitzhak Geiger, an experienced civics teacher and member of the Institute for Zionist Strategies Strategic Forum — who had previously served on the Ministry of Education's Civics Committee.²⁶ The report accused the 2000 civics curriculum and

²¹ As noted, Sa'ar replaced Labour's Yuli Tamir, who had held the position of Education Minister from 2006 to 2009.

²² Y. Brandes, 'Head to Head Education Minister Gideon Sa'ar, Have You Given Up on the Bible?', *Haaretz*, 15 June 2011, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/features/head-to-head-education-minister-gideon-sa-ar-have-you-given-up-on-the-bible-1.367783> [accessed 29 March 2018].

²³ Fischer, 'Religion and Education in Israel', p. 139.

²⁴ O. Kashti, 'Education Ministry Revising Textbook for Being Too Critical of Israel', *Haaretz*, 29 August 2010, <http://www.haaretz.com/education-ministry-revising-textbook-for-being-too-critical-of-israel-1.310751> [accessed 19 March 2018].

²⁵ The Institute for Zionist Strategies has close ties to Im Tirtzu, a radical right-wing movement that aims to strengthen the values of Zionism in Israel. Im Tirtzu is discussed in Chapter 5.

²⁶ Fischer, 'Religion and Education in Israel', p. 139; U. Blau, 'Finding the Right Donors for Post-Zionism' *Haaretz*, 22 February 2012, <http://www.haaretz.com/Israel-news/finding-the-right-donors-for-post-zionism-1.414174> [accessed 29 March 2018].

textbook of downplaying Israel's character as a Jewish nation state, portraying it only 'in a negative light — as encouraging conflicts between the ethno-national majorities and the other minorities'.²⁷ Geiger's ultimate accusation was that 'the civics curricula had been "hijacked" so as to serve the liberal and post-Zionist interests of an ideological group in the educational establishment and in the academy'.²⁸ Taking on board all these accusations, Sa'ar delivered instructions for the revision of the civics curriculum and textbook (as recommended by Zameret).²⁹ This textbook was finally published in May 2016 amid much media attention.³⁰

The controversy over the newest civics textbook, which has retained the same name as the previous book, *To be Citizens in Israel: In a Jewish and Democratic State*, thus began almost ten years ago, with the changes that were initiated under Sa'ar's leadership now evident in the most recent civics textbook.³¹ Indeed, Malach

²⁷ Fischer, 'Religion and Education in Israel', p. 139.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 139. Although post-Zionism is understood differently depending on one's perspective, it generally refers to the problematisation of Zionist discourse. It questions the relevance of Zionism in the twenty-first century and challenges the historical narratives and social and cultural representations it produced. As the above example demonstrates, it is also used by the right to refer to more left-wing Jews and in this context is often used to associate the left with anti-Zionism — which is fiercely denied by proponents of post-Zionism.

²⁹ Sa'ar had already approved an alternative textbook, written by Avraham Diskin of the right-wing Institute for Zionist Strategies (see below for further details). The head of civics studies, Adar Cohen, was also fired by Sa'ar for apparently being too left-wing — a move which was celebrated by right-wing politicians and opposed by many educators and academics. Fischer, 'Religion and Education in Israel', p. 141; Sommer, 'How Civics Class Became Israel's Hottest Political Football'.

³⁰ See for example, M. Newman, 'Israel's Contentious New Civics Textbook Illuminates Country's Divisions', *The Times of Israel*, 26 May 2016, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/israels-contentious-new-civics-textbook-illuminates-countrys-divisions/> [accessed 29 March 2018]; *Haaretz* Editorial, 'Israel's New Civics Textbook Was Born in Sin and Must Be Opposed', *Haaretz*, 13 May 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/1.719396> [accessed 29 March 2018]; Y. Skop, 'Bennett's New Civics Book Meets with Israeli-Arab Furore', *Haaretz*, 12 May 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/Israel-news/.premium-1.719053> [accessed 29 March 2018].

³¹ The textbook was published during Bennett's tenure as Minister of Education. The new textbook and curriculum has thus been impacted by Bennett's input and through his newly shaped Civics Committee. Indeed, it was Bennett who pushed forward the process of revising the textbook. As

was keen to stress the view that ‘the most recent changes to the civics programme do not signal a real new direction, [they are] only about implementing decisions from 2011’.³² Malach went on further to say that ‘it is not even accurate to see [the changes of] 2011 as a new direction — [it was] only about making *corrections* to the old programme’.³³ As was further explained during the interview, these changes were ‘to create new balances between nationalism and human rights, between national interests and the minority, it’s only about balances, this is the real debate in Israel’.³⁴ The fact that Malach considers the changes to be only ‘corrections’ to the old programme is very revealing — as are the views shared about those who oppose the changes to the civics curriculum: ‘the people who lead the opposition are very extreme liberals — extreme left-wing — so they don’t represent large groups in society, but they co-operate with, especially *Haaretz* newspaper, to make a new catastrophe, like fascism and Nazis have started to take over [the Ministry of Education]’.³⁵

Although such fascist analogies were not used by any interviewees who expressed opposition to the current changes in civic education, my primary research did reveal a significant gap in opinion between those involved in formulating policy/curriculum and practitioners working in the field. In contrast to the portrayal above of the current changes as minor and being a consequence of changes

Malach, who was involved in revising the textbook explained, this was due to the fact that the agreement with the publishers was about to expire — so compromises between the differing sides had to be made quickly in order to meet the publishing deadline. Interview conducted with Assaf Malach in Jerusalem, 9 February 2017.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

initiated by Sa'ar, for principal Stern, Bennett, clearly has a 'more ideological agenda' and is 'creating policy that is more Jewish and less democratic — not just because he thinks it is good for votes — there is an agenda there that they are working hard to push forward'.³⁶ It was clear for Stern that 'Israel is becoming more ethnocentric'.³⁷

Professor Dan Avnon was also keen to highlight the ideological agenda that is driving policy in the Ministry of Education:

Assaf Malach represents an ideological perspective which originated in [...] religious Zionism, nationalist Zionism, with its hardcore — part of its hardcore — being part of the Jewish settlement communities in the West Bank. So in this respect he is not a lone ranger. He reflects their influence in the ruling coalition that began in 2011 and became really significant after the 2015 election (when Malach was appointed).³⁸

Thus, as Avnon continued:

the major objection of the current political administration is to inserting into the Israeli curriculum values that are considered to be associated with other forms of political culture, other histories, other you know, European based values that are not necessarily commensurate with those of the Jewish nation state or with the inferences of a Jewish nation state.³⁹

The contrast in views presented above by Malach on the one hand and Stern on the other, relates to the wider debate on the relationship between the Jewish and democratic features of the state that exists in Israeli society. The differences in opinions presented here stem primarily from the interviewees' different interpretations of democracy. Malach's majoritarian definition of democracy demands that core civic values that are taught in schools are subject to the politics

³⁶ Interview conducted with Nati Stern in Tel Aviv, 5 February 2017.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Telephone interview conducted with Dan Avnon, 7 October 2019.

³⁹ Ibid.

of the hour — therefore changing in line with the ideology of the incumbent government elected by the majority vote. However, Stern's more liberal interpretation of democracy holds that core civic values should be universal and therefore not driven by the ideological position of the party in power. Nevertheless, as Avnon asserted, the current administration is not concerned with universal values — promoting instead particularistic values that uphold the Jewish values of the state.⁴⁰ These issues are central to the current debate around the content of the civics curriculum and will be explored in detail in the following analysis of the current civics programme.

Main Areas of Controversy in the Current Civics Programme

Although those overseeing the most recent changes to the civics curriculum are at pains to stress the minimal nature of the changes made to the curriculum, and the fact that the majority of these changes are a result of alterations made to the curriculum in 2011, it is clear from my own research that the picture is rather more complex. It was indeed following the completion of the new civics programme in 2011 that work on the new civics textbook began, however, political developments since that time have certainly impacted further on the ideological direction of the new civics curriculum.

In 2013 new elections were held in Israel and although Netanyahu remained Prime Minister, the Ministry of Education, as noted, was handed over to Shai Piron from the centrist Yesh Atid Party. This resulted in an attempt to guide the civics

⁴⁰ Ibid.

programme more towards the centre and away from the previous right-wing approach. For this purpose, Piron appointed Yael Guron as the head of the civics programme — overseeing the civics curriculum on behalf of the Ministry of Education.⁴¹ What is significant here is the fact that Guron, who is considered an ‘extreme leftist’ by right-wing factions, retained her position as overall supervisor of the civics curriculum when Bennett took over from Piron as Minister of Education in 2015. The head of the Civics Committee was replaced, however, as Bennett appointed right-wing Malach to the position — meaning that two people from opposite ends of the political spectrum would now have to reach agreement on key curriculum decisions.⁴² As my interview with Malach himself revealed, what has caused considerable confusion in the system is the fact that he and Guron have actually managed to work together and reach compromises regarding crucial changes to the civics programme, thus sparking controversy amongst educators and academics regarding the balance between Jewish and democratic values in the new material.⁴³

⁴¹ As supervisor, Guron holds the most senior role in relation to the civics curriculum. Each educational field has its own supervisor.

⁴² Bennett also replaced the head of the Pedagogical Secretariat, Nir Michaeli, with Dalia Fenig — the figure responsible for the decision to ban the book *Borderlife* from the curriculum — fearing that the Jewish-Arab love-story portrayed in the book would encourage assimilation. O. Kashti, ‘Israel Bans Novel on Arab-Jewish Romance from Schools for “Threatening Jewish Identity”’, *Haaretz*, 31 December 2015, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-bans-novel-depicting-arab-jewish-romance-from-schools-1.5383970> [accessed 29 February 2019].

⁴³ Interview conducted with Assaf Malach in Jerusalem, 9 February 2017. Malach explained that before he joined the system it was easier for observers to understand the direction that was being taken, i.e. right-wing or left-wing. However, when he began to work alongside Guron and reached compromises with her on key elements in the curriculum, it appeared to some observers to blur the left and right-wing divide in the system which resulted in increasing opposition from right-wing newspapers against the process, as well as left-wing protests against Guron’s cooperation with Malach.

There are three areas to the civics programme which have proved to be most controversial — the new textbook, the new Committee and, perhaps most importantly, the *Musagon* — the short dictionary of terms (civics concepts) that accompanies the civics curriculum and which is used as a guide to assess the civics matriculation exam.⁴⁴ The purpose of the dictionary is, according to the Ministry of Education, to ensure parity in marking the civics exam throughout the country. Given that three different civics books were permitted for use in schools, there were nuances that needed to be clarified for the purpose of the exam.⁴⁵ Guron thus decided to introduce the dictionary of civics concepts, containing around one hundred terms and definitions to be used as a guide for teachers. The terms in the dictionary written by Guron, however, did not address the entire civics programme, which is made up of three main parts — Jewish State, Democratic State and Government and Politics. The dictionary focussed only on terms relating to ‘Democratic State’ and ‘Government and Politics’ — thus signalling that these elements would be the focus of the exam. As one might expect, the omission of terms relating to the Jewish state caused very deep anger amongst right-wing elements. What Malach did upon his appointment as the head of the Civics

⁴⁴ As Malach explained, each of these three issues proved controversial enough to reach the Supreme Court for debate. Interview conducted with Assaf Malach in Jerusalem, 9 February 2017.

⁴⁵ The three civics books are: H. Adan, V. Ashkenazi, and B. Alferon, *Being Citizens in Israel: In a Jewish and Democratic State*, (Tel Aviv: Ma’alot, 2001) (in Hebrew); A. Diskin, *Regime and Politics in Israel: The Foundations of Citizenship* (Jerusalem: Megiv, 2011) (in Hebrew); D. Shahar, *The Regime in the State of Israel* (Tel Aviv: Yesod Press, 1993) (in Hebrew). Although there are alternative books available to accompany the civics curriculum, all books nevertheless have to be approved for use by the Ministry of Education. Each book therefore subscribes to the same fundamental ideology ‘that takes as a given the historical rights of the Jews to Palestine; Zionism’s existence as the answer to the Jews’ 2,000-year-old longing for their country; the ongoing presence of anti-Semitism, Arab hostility and the Arab threat; and the need for a Jewish majority and Israeli control in order to maintain the character and security of the state’. N. Peled-Elhanan, ‘We and Only we are on the Map’, *Haaretz*, 19 November 2012, <https://www.haaretz.com/life/books/we-and-only-we-are-on-the-map-1.5199065> [accessed 29 March 2018].

Committee, in agreement with Guron, was modify the dictionary to include concepts relating to the 'Jewish State' element of the programme — increasing the number of terms from around one hundred to one hundred and sixty. As my interview with Malach confirmed, whereas Guron's terms were written mainly in accordance with the textbook that had been published in the wake of the Kremnitzer report, Malach's definitions are much more in accordance with the new, more right-wing, programme. The material has thus proved divisive among academics and educators, with some arguing that the curriculum focuses too heavily on 'Jewish values' at the expense of 'democratic values', and others arguing the opposite.⁴⁶

The reason that the dictionary has caused such uproar is because it is vital to students passing the matriculation exam, as the answers given in the exam need to correspond with the definitions found in the dictionary. As Malach explained:

it is in a way more important than the [civics] books, because books, you can choose other books, okay, so they say this new book is very bad, so they can take Diskin's [book] or Shachar's [book], but the dictionary it's much more important [...] the dictionary is like the Bible in every field of education.⁴⁷

This is precisely the reason why the use of the dictionary and its content has been challenged in the Supreme Court. One of the main objections raised about the dictionary was the portrayal of the Supreme Court and the presentation of the Basic Laws as controversial. As Malach revealed, the objection relates to issues surrounding the two Basic Laws that were introduced in Israel in 1992 — which were intended to secure equal civil and political rights, and that began to be

⁴⁶ Y. Skop, 'Israeli Academics Threaten Suit over Controversial Civics Textbook' *Haaretz*, 18 March 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/Israel-news/.premium-1.709551> [accessed 5 March 2018].

⁴⁷ Interview conducted with Assaf Malach in Jerusalem, 9 February 2017.

interpreted as having constitutional status.⁴⁸ According to Malach, only a minimal change was made to the discussion about the Supreme Court — inserting the notion that ‘there is a debate about the constitutional status of the Basic Laws’.⁴⁹ But, as Malach continued, this was enough ‘for them [the left-wing] to say we damage human rights, we damage the Supreme Court’.⁵⁰ Although the significance of this change was played down by Malach, this kind of approach to the discussion of democratic institutions is described by Mordechai Kremnitzer and Noam Lautman as posing ‘an unparalleled danger, since democracy — in its substantive sense — is not seen as the subject of broad consensus; rather, it has become a controversial issue embroiled in the world of political strife’.⁵¹

Indeed, the dictionary, like the textbook itself, has been widely criticised for minimising the importance of liberal democracy and human rights. However, Malach was keen to respond to this criticism and to defend the current civics programme, claiming that ‘what was happening before in civics was to try and influence the students to adopt ultra-liberal ideas [...] in my view [the] old programme was indoctrination and we tried to put it more in balance’.⁵² In an attempt to support this claim, Malach gave an example of how the old civics

⁴⁸ The introduction of the two Basic Laws — Basic Law: Human Dignity and Freedom, and Basic Law: Freedom of Occupation — was seen as a ‘constitutional revolution’ in Israel. As Justice Aharon Barak, the figure responsible for introducing the two Basic Laws, explains ‘by virtue of this basic legislation, human rights in Israel have become legal norms of preferred constitutional status’. A. Barak, ‘A Constitutional Revolution: Israel’s Basic Laws’, *Yale Law School Faculty Scholarship Series* (1993), http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/fss_papers/3697 [accessed 23 March 2018].

⁴⁹ Interview conducted with Assaf Malach in Jerusalem, 9 February 2017.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ M. Kremnitzer and N. Lautman, ‘Education for Democratic Values and Combating Racism through Education’, *Israel Democracy Institute*, 30 June 2015, <https://en.idi.org.il/articles/5178> [accessed 23 March 2018].

⁵² Interview conducted with Assaf Malach in Jerusalem, 22 February 2017.

programme 'emphasised the idea of natural rights and social contract' which, for Malach, is 'against national values and against religious values'.⁵³ Hence, in order to move away from the 'ultra-liberal agenda' that was supposedly found in the previous programme, the word 'theory' was added in the section on natural rights — so that the heading now reads 'theory of natural rights' — in order to teach students' that 'the idea of natural rights is not an absolute fact'.⁵⁴ According to Malach, students learn about the relativity of morality, as well as to question the ultimate source of morality, in other subjects they study but 'in citizenship [civics] studies we taught them about natural rights and social contract because this fits to the ultra-liberal agenda, so we added the word theory and this is enough to say we are against human rights, for the extreme left this is the new religion, the religion of human rights'.⁵⁵

The picture painted above by Malach, however, certainly did not fit with that of principal Stern, who expressed deep concern about the level of indoctrination in the current civics curriculum and the lack of space for critical thinking: 'critical thinking, it's hard to see if you can even do it, you need to be very careful what you do, they [the Ministry of Education] are certainly not encouraging critical

⁵³ Ibid. In contrast to natural law, which emphasises individual duties, natural rights emphasises an individual's entitlement to certain privileges or claims. The theory of natural law was popularised in the sixteenth century by thinkers such as Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and Samuel von Pufendorf (1632-1694). The theory of natural rights and natural law was also central to the political philosophy of John Locke (1632-1704). *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, 'Locke's Political Philosophy', *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (online)*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/locke-political/#NatuLawNatuRigh> [accessed 14 November 2019]. Social contract refers to the voluntary agreement among individuals in organised society that secures the right to mutual protection and welfare or regulates societal relations. It is intended to provide mutual benefit to individuals/groups and the government or wider society.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

thinking'.⁵⁶ Stern went on to explain how it might well be permitted to 'ask questions of students and encourage pupils to think, but not about issues that are in dispute [sensitive political issues]'.⁵⁷ In relation to this, Stern continued to explain how the Ministry of Education also encourages teachers to be neutral, but in his opinion 'schools should not be neutral, this is what school is all about, about pupils acquiring tools for critical thinking, analysing ideas, being able to decide what they want and what's important to them and to be able to explain — otherwise it's meaningless'.⁵⁸ According to Stern, 'if it was up to them [the Ministry of Education] they would prohibit teachers from expressing their opinions almost completely, they are trying to do things in the shadows. They say it's okay for teachers to express opinions, but when it comes down to it, it's not backed up'.⁵⁹

Another change to the civics dictionary which has caused particular controversy is Malach's decision to split one term relating to majority decisions in a democracy. Thus, what had once appeared as 'principle of the majority decision and tyranny of the majority' now appears under two separate headings, placing more emphasis on the importance of the majority decision, rather than on how the majority decision can be used to damage the rights of minorities.⁶⁰ According to Malach, 'this is only a very small nuance, but for the extreme left this is fascism, this is the Mussolini *Musagon*'.⁶¹ However, the head of the Academic Forum for Civics Instruction, Riki

⁵⁶ Interview conducted with Nati Stern in Tel Aviv, 5 February 2017.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Tyranny of the majority refers to the majority within a society forcing its will on the (disadvantaged) minority through the democratic process. The concept was popularised by political theorists Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873).

⁶¹ Interview conducted with Assaf Malach in Jerusalem, 22 February 2017.

Tesler, argues that, although only technically a minor change, the new emphasis means that:

students will learn that instead of government by the people (majority and minority) in which the state is committed to protect human rights and minorities, that democracy means the rule of the majority and the majority can harm the rights of groups and individual rights for the sake of national interest.⁶²

Despite Malach playing down the extent of the changes he has made to the curriculum, Avnon's analysis of Malach's role as head of the Civics Committee left a somewhat different impression. Avnon described the 'unprecedented manner' in which Malach 'managed to neutralise or minimise the impact of the entire Civics Committee, which has all kinds of different representatives, to almost singlehandedly change the content and the emphasis of the civics curriculum'.⁶³

Criticism of the new civics curriculum and textbook has also been frequently reported in the Israeli press, with teachers and parents, as well as certain politicians voicing their concerns.⁶⁴ Meretz Members of Knesset have even called on the government to shelve the new book completely. They accuse the book of containing factual errors and dealing 'a mortal blow to the pluralistic principles of state [secular] education by presenting reality in a one-dimensional fashion, as a reality with only national-religious attributes' thus sending 'a clear message that

⁶² N. Zevelov, 'Israeli Textbook Authors Yank Names in Protest of Right-Wing Bias', *Forward*, 16 May 2016, <http://forward.com/news/Israel/340532/distressed-at-new-textbooks-right-wing-vision-of-Israel-authors-pull-their/> [accessed 5 March 2018].

⁶³ Telephone interview conducted with Dan Avnon, 7 October 2019. See also, D. Avnon, 'The New Civics Curriculum: Ethnic, National, Majority', *Forum*, available at: https://www.academia.edu/36344727/2016_The_New_Civics_Giluy_Daat.pdf [accessed 29 November 2019] (in Hebrew).

⁶⁴ These politicians include, for example, Zehava Gal-on, who chaired Meretz from 2012 until 2018, and Dov Henin who, before resigning in January 2019, was the sole Jewish member of the Arab Joint List.

Jewish identity takes priority over civic identity'.⁶⁵ I experienced remarkably similar concerns about the revised textbook first-hand during my fieldwork in Israel, with one interviewee, Deeb,⁶⁶ expressing particular concern about the Jewish-Zionist education that the book aims towards.⁶⁷ In Deeb's opinion, Israel is losing its democracy and she sees this as being reflected in the new civics book: 'where is the democracy in Jewish and Zionist? It excludes all who are not Jewish and all who are not Zionist'.⁶⁸ Deeb certainly did not hide her feelings about what she described bluntly as 'a stupid book'.⁶⁹

One of the main criticisms levelled at the book is that it places Jewish values above democratic ones. However, this was vehemently denied by Malach, who was also responsible for overseeing many of the revisions to the new book. In my interview with Malach about the controversy that the new book has sparked in Israel, he argued that the book contains long chapters about such things as human rights, freedom, and equality. When I questioned Malach further about the accusations

⁶⁵ This Jewish identity is also seen as primarily in accordance with Orthodox and right-wing positions. L. Jonathan, 'Meretz Demands Revisions to Controversial Israeli Civics Textbook', *Haaretz*, 23 August 2016, <https://www.haaretz.com/Israel-news/.premium-meretz-demands-revisions-to-controversial-Israeli-civics-textbook-1.5428025> [accessed 5 March 2018].

⁶⁶ As noted, Deeb supervises pedagogy, programme development, curriculum development and teacher training at Hand in Hand.

⁶⁷ Examples of the Jewish-Zionist education which is emphasised by the textbook include, as reported in *Haaretz*, the assertion that Israel's Declaration of Independence is lacking reference to 'the fact that the Jewish people are entitled to establish a state of their own in the Land of Israel', and that this should have been included as this was 'God's promise'. The book also defends Israel's existence as a Jewish nation state noting, for instance, that 'many nations in the world, including Israel, identify with an ethno-cultural model of nationalism, and henceforth when we refer to the concepts of nationalism and nation state, it will be in the sense of the ethno-cultural model, unless otherwise stated', Y. Skop, 'Israel's New Civics Text Highlights God's Role in State's Creation, Dismissive of Arabs', *Haaretz*, 9 May 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.718778> [accessed 9 March 2019].

⁶⁸ Interview conducted with Inas Deeb in Jerusalem, 9 February 2017.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

that the book does not give sufficient attention to these very issues he replied emphatically:

yes, but this is absolute lies, *lies*, from beginning to end *lies*, absolutely, it's so easy I can show you this is lies, it's nothing else, it's lies — but this is the way of the 5% of the very left-wing, to say that we are fascist, but it's absolute lies.⁷⁰

Referring to the book in question, which he had displayed on his laptop screen to show me, Malach pointed to the chapter on human rights and explained how, in his opinion, 'the question is not about whether human rights are good or not, the question is only about whether they are an essential part of democracy'.⁷¹ As Malach continued to refer to the chapter on human rights he remarked:

you see here is a long chapter on human rights and they [the extreme left-wing] know this but they say we will cancel human rights, the importance of human rights, it's ridiculous, it's *ridiculous*, and you can see how these extreme people raise up or cause all these newspaper stories — especially the most left-wing one [*Haaretz*] — to describe the situation as a catastrophe.⁷²

However, Avnon once again presented a starkly different picture as he highlighted the ways in which the new curriculum and textbook emphasise Jewish values over democratic values (and confirmed Deeb's concerns about the Jewish-Zionist education promoted by the book). As Avnon explained:

this is reflected in two principal ways — [the first is in] the order of the teaching which begins with justification of Israel as a nation state, whereas in the previous curriculum it opened with justifications regarding the values that underline the system [which] were primarily orientated toward it been a liberal democracy; and second, in the shift in emphasis on content in the revised curriculum [which] grants more place to the distinction between majority and minority, with justification for certain privileges to the majority (which is the Jewish majority) in relation to minorities (which is Arab minorities in the Israeli political system).⁷³

⁷⁰ Interview conducted with Assaf Malach in Jerusalem, 22 February 2017.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Telephone interview conducted with Dan Avnon, 7 October 2019.

Avnon went on to explain how these changes reflect what is happening in Israeli society more widely where, according to Avnon, there has been ‘a shift from civic Israeli political system as pluralistic, liberal democratic, towards a system that is national with an emphasis on the primacy of Israel being a Jewish nation state’.⁷⁴

As Avnon continued:

the guide to the definition of democracy today in the ruling coalition from 2015 onward [...] is that democracy is majoritarian democracy [...] The general direction, [which is] more Jewish, less universal and more national and less liberal, is something that resonates well within what’s considered the right-wing electorate in Israeli politics, beyond those that voted for Bennett’s particular party.⁷⁵

This direction is perhaps reflected most obviously in the recent ‘nation state’ law (Basic Law: Israel – The Nation State of the Jewish People) that was passed in July 2018 and which, for Member of Knesset Michal Rozin (Meretz), ‘proves how ultra-nationalist, racist and dangerous this government is’.⁷⁶ Whilst proponents of the ‘nation state’ law argue that the legislation ensures that Jewish values and democratic values carry equal weight in law, critics see it as an attempt to fundamentally change the balance between the two values by strengthening the Jewish character of the state at the expense the democratic character.⁷⁷ The

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ L. Harkov, ‘Gutted Jewish Nation State Bill Heads to First Reading in Knesset’, *The Jerusalem Post*, 13 March 2018, <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Gutted-Jewish-nation-state-bill-heads-to-first-reading-in-Knesset-544957> [accessed 14 May 2018].

⁷⁷ There are now thirteen Basic Laws in Israel. These deal primarily with state institutions such as the Presidency or judiciary and the Knesset, whilst ‘Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty’ addresses the democratic nature of the state. The ‘nation state’ law is intended to take precedence over all other Basic Laws — should any of those laws conflict with the ‘nation state’ law — and permits judges to prioritise Israel’s Jewish character in their rulings. Certain elements of the ‘nation state’ law are particularly controversial and are considered by opponents to be discriminatory to Israel’s non-Jewish population. These include the right to realise self-determination being defined in the law as ‘unique to the Jewish people’ and altering the status of Arabic from an official language to one with ‘special status’. J. Lis, ‘Israel’s Contentious Nation-State Law: Everything You Need to Know’, *Haaretz*, 19 July 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-s->

passing of the law thus highlights once again the tension in Israeli society between secular and religious standpoints.

Main Areas of Controversy in the New Jewish Studies Curriculum

Similar concerns that democratic principles are being sidelined in schools have also been raised in relation to the new Jewish studies curriculum in state secular schools and Bennett's push to 'strengthen Jewish identity'.⁷⁸ For principal Stern, Bennett's emphasis on Judaism over democracy is clearly manifesting itself in the curriculum with the introduction of the new subject focussing on Jewish and Israeli culture which targets Israel's state secular schools.⁷⁹ However, when I interviewed Margolin (who is head of the Committee that drafted and approved the new Jewish studies curriculum) he explained the objectives of the programme rather differently: 'one of our goals in our project is to advance the alternative way of understanding the meaning of Israel as Jewish and democratic — because we don't think that Judaism and democracy or Jewish and democratic state are contradictory'.⁸⁰ Margolin went on to explain in some detail the rationale behind

contentious-nation-state-law-everything-you-need-to-know-1.6292733 [accessed 5 August 2018]; R. Wootliff, 'Coalition MK: Big Step for Jewish Identity; Opposition MK: Erosion of Our Democracy', *The Times of Israel*, 7 May 2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/reigniting-old-dispute-ministers-okay-new-jewish-state-bill/> [accessed 14 May 2018].

⁷⁸ Bennett increased the number of 'Jewish-Israeli Culture' instruction hours in elementary school from four hours to five hours per week. The number of hours dedicated to Bible instruction in state secular schools has not changed — remaining at ten hours per week. L. Dattel, 'In Israeli Schools, Less Science and English, More Jewish Studies', *Haaretz*, 5 September 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/Israel-news/business/.premium-under-bennett-less-math-and-science-more-religious-education-1.6450991> [accessed 1 October 2018].

⁷⁹ The new curriculum expands Jewish studies in state secular schools in order to provide a comprehensive teaching programme through grades one to nine. The new 'Jewish-Israeli Culture' programme replaces the Jewish Heritage and Culture element that was previously taught in grades five to eight.

⁸⁰ Interview conducted with Ron Margolin in Tel Aviv, 6 February 2017.

the new programme and one figure in particular who inspired the content, Haim Cohen, whom Margolin described as ‘maybe the most important teacher of the alternative [way of thinking about Judaism and democracy], a very important Jewish *Madrish*, a wise Jewish scholar’.⁸¹ Margolin explained how Cohen was ultra-Orthodox but became secular after the *Shoah* and went on to write much about the common values between Judaism and democracy, which is why Margolin and his team wanted to emulate his approach when designing the new curriculum:

when we decided what are the Jewish values that we want to put at the heart of our project, we used his system. We selected those ethical and human values that you can find in Jewish sources and they are the same values of modern democracy — dignity of man [sic], freedom of man [sic]. All these values are part of our project and our goal is to show that these values you can find in very important Jewish sources. We are selective, this is the meaning of the [state] secular system — we don’t put in those values or those situations that can be contradictive to democracy. Without this, yes, it can be understood as something else, as [giving] priority to Judaism, or priority to democracy instead of Judaism, and this is the problem of Israeli society. For me, if Israel wants to continue to be a Jewish democracy this is the only way.⁸²

However, despite the new programme being pluralistic to some extent in its approach to the different streams in Judaism, it does not include any interaction with non-Jewish religions or cultures. Margolin has nevertheless defended this omission in the media: ‘you cannot expect a state to develop a programme indifferent to its own existence. In an ideal world I may have been able to advance

⁸¹ Ibid. Cohen was also a former Supreme Court Justice in Israel and a human rights pioneer before his death in 2002. Many of his notable opinions were minority views on human rights issues — he was the first president of the Association of Civil Rights in Israel, a major human rights organisation. Justice Cohen was also Israel's UN representative for human rights and served as a member of the World Court in The Hague. The Associated Press, ‘Haim Cohen, 91, Israeli Judge and Human Rights Advocate’, *The New York Times*, 13 April 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/04/13/world/haim-cohen-91-Israeli-judge-and-human-rights-advocate.html> [accessed 5 March 2018].

⁸² Ibid.

a meeting with other worlds perhaps, but even at university we have to fight for the existence of a programme for science of religion'.⁸³

With the new curriculum, each grade has a different set of Jewish values and teachings to focus on. For example, one grade will focus on the legends of the sages (*chazal*), another on the Mishna.⁸⁴ An interesting point that was revealed in relation to this during the interviews I conducted was the fact that no organisation wants to take on writing the book to accompany the curriculum for the fifth grade — the focus of which is on Jewish prayer. As Thaler of the pluralist Jewish education organisation, TALI, explained:

no one wants to touch it because it's so hard to do a prayer book that is not in a religious way. In theory you could approach it by saying it's a text like any other, to learn about values, but it's really hard [to approach it in this way] when you are teaching about your own religion, it's hard to know how to teach it in a way that's not coercive.⁸⁵

As noted, the new Jewish studies programme is part of the wider initiative that is being taken by the Ministry of Education to strengthen Jewish identity from a young age. Bennett has made no secret of his desire to strengthen Jewish and Zionist values within the state secular education system, whilst also attempting to ease concerns by asserting that he 'will not allow religious coercion'.⁸⁶ The reality on the ground, however, suggests otherwise with interviewees' testimonies backing-up recent reports in *Haaretz* that at least 70% of the Education Ministry's

⁸³ O. Kashti, 'Who Benefits From Bennett's Jewish Studies Program for Israeli Schools?', *Haaretz*, 28 April 2016, <https://www.haaretz.com/Israel-news/.premium-who-benefits-from-bennett-s-jewish-studies-program-for-israeli-schools-1.5376866> [accessed 3 April 2018].

⁸⁴ Y. Skop, 'New School Program Will Bring Young Israelis Closer to Judaism', *Haaretz*, 20 April 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/Israel-news/.premium-1.715380> [accessed 3 April 2018].

⁸⁵ Interview conducted with Dena Thaler in Jerusalem, 14 February 2017.

⁸⁶ L. Grave-Lazi, 'Education Ministry to Launch Jewish-Israeli Culture Curriculum for Secular Pupils', *The Jerusalem Post*, 20 April 2016, <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Education-Ministry-to-launch-Jewish-Israeli-culture-curriculum-for-secular-pupils-451796> [accessed 31 March 2018].

budget for Jewish identity programmes in state secular schools goes to Orthodox organisations.⁸⁷ As Thaler asserted, ‘where you will find a more Orthodox approach is in the new subject [Jewish-Israeli Culture]’.⁸⁸ Although in theory the syllabus is not Orthodox, Thaler confirmed that ‘the Ministry of Education is certainly more willing to fund Orthodox groups’.⁸⁹ Thaler explained she knew this for a fact as a result of having put in requests for grants and finding out that ‘Orthodox groups have got them — are getting them’.⁹⁰ Another example was provided by principal Stern, who also believes Bennett is imposing a religious view in state secular schools by funding Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and private organisations which have a strict Orthodox agenda that they bring with them into schools.⁹¹ The funding provided by the Ministry of Education means that these organisations are able to offer additional lessons and lectures in schools for little or no cost. But, as Stern explained, ‘nothing comes really for free, everything comes with a price tag — there is an agenda — in theory we have a choice what groups to work with but the funding isn’t there’.⁹²

Despite the reality presented above, officials involved in formulating and implementing the curriculum who were interviewed were insistent on the fact that there is no such Orthodox approach being promoted in schools. Indeed, Malach responded to the suggestion with astonishment: ‘it’s ridiculous, it has no basis in

⁸⁷ O. Kashti, ‘Israeli Orthodox Groups Take over Curriculum on Pluralistic Judaism’, 22 March 2017, <http://www.haaretz.com/Israel-news/.premium-1.778685> [accessed 6 September 2018].

⁸⁸ Interview conducted with Dena Thaler in Jerusalem, 14 February 2017.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Interview conducted with Nati Stern in Jerusalem, 14 February 2017. These organisations are explored in detail in Chapter 5.

⁹² Ibid.

fact — just lies. I could understand if they say right-wing, yes, but not Orthodox — this is lies'.⁹³ Another respondent, Margolin, was quick to blame principals, teachers and parents for the involvement of Orthodox groups in schools: 'my approach is first of all, it is the problem of the principal, the principal has the authority to prevent it and parents have the authority to resist it, to show resistance to the principals, there is freedom in the system'.⁹⁴ Although not personally supportive of Orthodox groups working with state secular schools, Margolin went on to explain how it is naive and unrealistic to expect Bennett and others like him to prevent such groups being involved with state secular schools when all the secular Education Ministers before him did not prevent these groups working in state secular schools. For Margolin, the situation is the result of schools being given autonomy: 'I spoke with them [the heads of the Ministry of Education] a lot who say that one of their principles is school autonomy — if you have this, [one] can't say okay but don't give permission to this group — I understand them, but I don't understand the principals, I don't understand the parents'.⁹⁵ Despite Margolin's view that it is difficult for the Ministry of Education to prohibit the involvement of certain groups within schools given their guiding principle of autonomy, the Education Ministry seemingly has had no problem in taking the decision to prevent 'leftist' groups such as 'Breaking the Silence' from entering schools.⁹⁶ A 'loyalty bill' was also proposed by former Minister of Culture and Sport

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Interview conducted with Ron Margolin in Tel Aviv, 6 February 2017.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Breaking the Silence is an organisation consisting of former soldiers who have served in the Israeli military since the time of the second *intifada*. They aim to 'expose the Israeli public to the reality of everyday life in the Occupied Territories' and 'to bring an end to the Israeli Occupation of the West Bank'. Breaking the Silence, 'About', *Breaking the Silence Website*,

Miri Regev in order to control artistic funding.⁹⁷ The bill, if passed, would mean that the Ministry for Culture and Sport would have enhanced powers to ‘allow it to condition funding for institutions based on their allegiance to the state and respect for its symbols’ — including declaring a commitment to performing in the West Bank settlements, which would eliminate any chance for Palestinian theatre or protest work against the Israeli government.⁹⁸ The right-wing group Im Tirtzu also produced a cultural ‘blacklist’ of one hundred and seventeen artists to support Regev’s efforts.⁹⁹ The list includes writers, performers and intellectuals it accuses of being ‘disloyal’ to the state — including human rights organisation B’Tselem, which monitors and reports on Israel’s activities in the Occupied Territories.¹⁰⁰

<https://www.breakingthesilence.org.il/about/organization> [accessed 27 September 2018]. Bennett initially (unofficially) directed principals to ban Breaking the Silence from entering schools in December 2015, but some principals persisted in inviting the group to talk to students and staff. Further legislation has since been initiated by Bennett (and signed by lawmakers from coalition and opposition parties) to unequivocally ban Breaking the Silence from schools. Further analysis of the law is provided in Chapters 5.

⁹⁷ Y. Ashkenazi, J. Lis, J. Khoury, and S. Pulwer, ‘Israel’s Nationalistic “Loyalty in Culture” Bill Passes Legal Test’, *Haaretz*, 25 February 2016, http://www.haaretz.com/Israel-news/.premium-1.705312?=&ts=_1493298574241 [accessed 31 March 2018].

⁹⁸ Y. Ashkenazi and J. Lis, ‘Israeli Culture Minister to Propose “Loyalty Bill” in Bid to Control Artistic Funding’, *Haaretz*, 26 January 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/Israel-news/.premium-1.699663> [accessed 31 March 2018]. The bill was scheduled to be put to a final vote on 26 November 2018 but was put on hold due to lack of support from coalition members. L. Harkov, ‘Cultural Loyalty Bill Combusts, Calling Coalition Stability into Question’, *The Jerusalem Post*, 26 November 2018, <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Regev-demands-culture-loyalty-bill-go-to-a-vote-attacks-Liberman-Kahlon-572841> [accessed 1 March 2019].

⁹⁹ The name of the organisation is derived from the frontispiece motto of Theodor Herzl’s novel, *Altneuland* (Old New Land): ‘if you will it, it is no dream’. T. Herzl, *Old New Land*, trans. by L. Levensohn (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2007). Im Tirtzu’s activities in education are discussed in Chapter 5.

¹⁰⁰ Im Tirtzu’s Moshe Klughaft, a close associate of Bennett who also ran Habayit Hayehudi’s election campaign in 2015, has been linked to the drafting of the ‘blacklist’, although Director of Im Tirtzu, Matan Peleg, denies this. B. Lynfield, ‘Blacklist of Artists and Intellectuals Published by Israeli Right-Wing Group Prompts Warnings of “McCarthyism”’, *Independent*, 28 January 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/blacklist-of-artists-and-intellectuals-published-by-israeli-right-wing-group-prompts-warnings-of-a6840416.html> [accessed 3 April 2019].

Interestingly, when the subject of government control over cultural content in schools was raised in the interviews I conducted, the issue elicited a mixed response. Principal Stern expressed deep concern over the restrictions imposed, describing how the situation is ‘getting worse every month’ with ‘trust going down as regulation goes up’.¹⁰¹ Similar concerns were shared by Thaler. Although the organisation Thaler works for would not be affected by the developments, she was ‘sickened by their [the Ministry of Education’s] approach to left-wing stuff like *Breaking the Silence*’.¹⁰² For Thaler, such developments are ‘very disturbing’ and clearly reflective of the ‘anti-democratic direction you see in the current government’.¹⁰³ However, teachers elsewhere were not so critical. One teacher interviewed, Kala, agreed with the restrictions on cultural content in schools, believing that ‘the people in charge of the Ministry of Education should have the ability to control’ what students are exposed to in schools.¹⁰⁴ Another teacher, Nachliel, felt even more strongly in favour of the government position, arguing that ‘if you take money from the government you have to obey their rules’.¹⁰⁵ Nachliel went on to explain her position quite clearly:

for example there was a play that was written through the eyes of a terrorist and they wanted the government to pay for this — excuse me! If you are ‘brave’ enough to fight against the government, don’t take money from the government — I don’t like the hypocrisy. If you want to be free, be free, but don’t put on this play and ask for the government to pay for it!¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Interview conducted with Nati Stern in Tel Aviv, 5 February 2017.

¹⁰² Interview conducted with Dena Thaler in Jerusalem, 14 February 2017.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Interview conducted with Merav Kala in Modi’in, 6 February 2017.

¹⁰⁵ Interview conducted with Sivan Nachliel in Jerusalem, 14 February 2017.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

The data gathered from carefully selected interviewees and reflected in the analysis above give voice to the considerable impact these interviewees perceive on the ground, in terms of politically and ideologically-driven educational policies. Importantly, my analysis combines multiple perspectives, in an attempt to provide a more comprehensive assessment of a complex social situation. What was most striking from the data collected during the interviews I conducted in Israel was the stark contrast in views between those with influence within the Ministry of Education compared to principals, teachers and other educators working within schools. Whereas those working in education on the ground all agree that an Orthodox approach is being encouraged by the Ministry of Education, officials involved in formulating the curriculum insist that no such approach is being promoted. Testimonies from teachers who support Bennett and his drive to strengthen Jewish studies in state secular schools, as well as from those who stand in opposition, all concur that the approach being taken is Orthodox. The interview data from education practitioners, expressing their own experiences and views on the most recent changes to the civics and Jewish studies curriculum presented above, thus complicates and challenges the picture painted by government officials — revealing both the true extent of the changes being made to the subjects, as well as the overwhelming emphasis on (Orthodox) Jewish values. This raises the question as to why officials deny that there is an Orthodox approach being taken, whilst also attempting to downplay the magnitude of the changes.

With regard to the denial of there being an Orthodox approach — I believe the reason to be simply that national content does not generally arouse as much suspicion amongst secular parents as (Orthodox) religious content in the state secular school system. This is clearly demonstrated, for instance, in the reactions of parents to the new Jewish studies curriculum which, as will be explored in the following chapter, has raised much more concern and direct action from secular parents than the new civics curriculum. As evidenced in the interview data presented above, education officials are nevertheless still eager to minimise the extent of the changes to the civics curriculum. In my view, the reason why Malach insisted during our interview that the curriculum changes are only minor is that he truly believes he is only ‘correcting’ the curriculum — that is ‘correcting’ what he sees as (liberal) faults in the previous civics programme. Malach was keen to present the changes as simply redressing the balance — moving in a right-wing direction that fits, as he sees it, with the ideology of the majority of voters who elected the government. Malach is not, after all, concerned with pleasing the political left-wing in Israel — and there are no objections from the right-wing nationalists about the new civics programme. Indeed, Malach openly admitted that he made the changes to fit with a right-wing agenda. It was clear from the interviews I conducted with Malach that he has deeply held convictions and is driven by his ideological beliefs — which are unswervingly right-wing and nationalistic. This ideology is certainly reflected in the changes he has made to the curriculum and textbook, which clearly emphasise Jewish nationalistic and (Orthodox) religious values over democratic principles.

The interview data presented above attests to the competing conceptions of citizenship that exist in Israeli society — between those who wish to emphasise individual rights and experiences and those who wish to promote more nationalistic aspects relating the individual with the larger national and religious entity. The conflicting opinions that were voiced by the interviewees also provide crucial insight into the intense debate around the relationship between the Jewish and democratic characteristics of the state, which are seen as either conflicting or compatible principles. The most recent developments in the civics curriculum, which have seen increasing emphasis placed on the Jewish nature of the state, demonstrate the ongoing threats to the quality of Israeli democracy, with concern amongst the secular population continuing to grow.

The above analysis has demonstrated that while religion is conflated with right-wing nationalistic politics in the new Jewish studies curriculum, nationalism is used as a vehicle to promote (Orthodox) Jewish identity in the new civics programme. Both subjects therefore present right-wing nationalist and (Orthodox) religious Judaism as the desired identity for students in state secular schools. My analysis of both civics and Jewish studies thus reveals the central drive within the Ministry of Education to shape state secular education to reflect a religious and nationalistic worldview. In the following chapter I set the changes in the curriculum of the two subjects within the broader context of the complex relationship between religion and nationalism in contemporary Israel. The chapter will also examine how and why this complex relationship is being exploited by education officials, and the implications for state secular education.

Chapter 5: Instruments of Religionisation in Israel's State Secular Schools

Introduction

As my analysis in the previous chapters has revealed, public discourse in Israel has become polarised in recent years over the increasing promotion of religious and nationalistic values in state secular schools, under the ambiguous guise of 'Jewish Identity'. Whilst the previous chapter reveals the extent to which religious education is used as a vehicle for promoting the political/ideological agendas of right-wing parties, the analysis to be presented next addresses the remaining key questions I set out to answer — first, does education in Israel encourage religious radicalism/extremism? and secondly, what are the responses to ideologically fuelled educational initiatives? Indeed, in an effort to fight back against the perceived 'widespread religious radicalisation' of Israeli society and schools, some concerned parents have united to establish the Secular Forum.¹ The battle over Israeli identity — what it means spiritually, culturally, politically to be Israeli — is thus being fought out in schools under the banner of 'Jewish identity'.² This issue

¹ The Secular Forum, 'Secular Public Education', *The Secular Forum Website*, <https://www.hiloni.org.il/the-secular-forum> [accessed 19 September 2018].

² The debate around the significance of Israel for Jewish identity outside of Israel has also become a much more contentious issue in recent years as Israel is playing an increasingly divisive role in Jewish Diaspora communities. Division in opinion on political issues relating to the State of Israel and the peace process are often cited as significant factors that are impacting relations. Bennett, however, has blamed the 'unprecedented crisis' between the Jewish state and Diaspora Jews on assimilation and the 'growing apathy among Jews in the Diaspora, both about their Jewish identity and their connection to Israel'. Whilst I am exploring the internal, rather than external, aspects of the topic, the controversy surrounding the subject that is growing outside of Israel further highlights the significance and wider implications of my research. Pew, 'Israel's Religiously Divided Society', p. 46; B. Weich, 'Naftali Bennett Criticises "Apathy" in the Jewish Diaspora', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 9 December 2018, <https://www.thejc.com/news/israel/naftali-bennett-benjamin-netanyahu-crisis-israel-diaspora-french-jews-aliyah-1.4737> [accessed 27 September 2019]; Molad: Centre for the

strikes at the heart of the political dispute within Israeli society over the shaping of the character of Israeli society and goes some way to explain why this subject is generating such a heated public debate. As Secular Forum member Michael Shalev-Reicher explains, many parents 'feel that the public school system and its leaders are betraying them and that the ultimate aim of introducing more religion into the state school system is to reshape the character of the secular public'.³ The Secular Forum's initial focus when it was established in 2011 was the preservation of a secular culture in Israel — primarily working to combat so called 'missionary' groups that encroach on the secular sphere. It was in 2015, however, that the organisation shifted its agenda to focus specifically on the education system in Israel — coinciding with the significant changes that were being overseen by the newly appointed Education Minister, Naftali Bennett. As Secular Forum leader, Dr Ram Fruman, explained to the *Jerusalem Post*, 'we see two main goals in our activities: to raise awareness of a secular culture in Israel, and to combat the religionisation in the education system'.⁴

The issue of religionisation, or *hadata* as it is known in Hebrew, has become something of a hot topic in Israel in recent years. Peled and Peled refer to the phenomenon as a consolidation of religious Zionist hegemony, which has resulted in 'the growing prevalence of the national-religious Jewish worldview in Jewish

Renewal of Israeli Democracy, 'Israel's Classroom Wars: The Religious Right's Attempt to Overtake Secular Education in Israel', *Molad*, 2017, p. 9.

http://www.molad.org/images/upload/files/Souls_ENG_080617.pdf [accessed 19 September 2018].

³ O. Kashti, "'Jews' Advantages to non-Jews": Religious Indoctrination Seeping into Israeli Textbooks', *Haaretz*, 22 April 2017, <https://www.Haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-Orthodox-ideas-seen-as-seeping-into-textbooks-1.5463494> [accessed 19 September 2018].

⁴ U. Shaham, 'NGO Takes on "Religionization" in Israel's Secular Schools', *The Jerusalem Post*, 12 July 2017, <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Secular-NGO-takes-on-religionization-in-Israelis-secular-schools-499439> [accessed 29 September 2018].

Israeli culture and public life'.⁵ Whilst religionisation has manifested itself in various ways in many areas of social life in Israel, the focus of the current chapter is on its manifestation in the education system — which is one of the most contentious and emotive areas affected by the religionisation process. In relation to the education system, the process of religionisation refers to the strengthening of the religious components of secular Jewish education and is an issue that generates strong reactions from all sides.⁶ Thus, whilst there is a growing push-back against the process by parents, activists and organisations such as the Secular Forum, Bennett, reflecting the opposite side of the argument, insists that 'this is not *hadata*, this is "auto anti-Semitism" [...] a social-psychological phenomenon in which a Jew develops obsessive contempt and hostility toward Jewish tradition, Jewish customs and traditional Jews'.⁷ Despite such denials, a recent study by Hiddush found wide agreement amongst the secular public that there is a process of religionisation taking place in the state secular school system.⁸ Moreover, all of these respondents oppose the process and wholeheartedly reject the claims of

⁵ Peled and Peled, *The Religionization of Israeli Society*, p. 19.

⁶ U. Regev and N. Lax, 'The 2017 Israel Religion and State Index', Hiddush – For Religious Freedom and Equality, September 2017, p. 28, <http://rrfei.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/IRSI-2017-Final.pdf> [accessed 19 January 2018].

⁷ S. Levi, 'Between Religious and Secular Learning', *The Jerusalem Post*, 28 August 2017, <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Between-religious-and-secular-learning-503569> [accessed 29 January 2019].

⁸ Hiddush (renewal) works to promote religious freedom and equality. The organisation monitors Israeli public opinion in the arena of religion and state in order to serve as a tool for decision makers, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), researchers, as well as the general public in Israel and in the Diaspora. The 'Religion and State Index' is an annual public opinion survey conducted by the Rafi Smith Institute. The 2017 index is based on a representative sample of eight hundred people representing the adult Jewish population of Israel (ages eighteen and over). It was conducted by telephone between 19 July and 23 July 2017. The report found that 69% of the secular public agree that religionisation is a feature of the state secular school system. Regev and Lax, 'The 2017 Israel Religion and State Index', p. 28.

those who try to deny its existence, justify the religionisation process, or attempt to minimise the harm it causes.⁹

Given the passionate debate that is currently taking place in Israel around the subject, I will use this chapter to examine the process of religionisation in Israel's state secular schools in order to assess the true extent and impact of the phenomenon. I will also explore the implications of, and reactions to, the religionisation process in these schools. Thus, having revealed in the previous chapter the Ministry of Education's strategy across the curriculum to reshape the character of state secular education, I will now concentrate on the specific methods that are being employed by Ministry of Education officials to promote Jewish religious and nationalistic values in state secular schools. I will assess how the use of religion to support nationalistic ideologies contributes to the politicisation of religious values in Israel's state secular schools and the ways in which religion is mobilised to support the political-nationalistic agendas of key individuals within the Ministry of Education. I will begin by analysing the religious content that is being inserted into the general school curriculum in state secular schools and how this works to shape a reality in which there is a close connection between religion and nationalism. I will then proceed to focus on the specific outside organisations that are funded by the Ministry of Education to deliver Jewish studies-related content in state secular schools — and the ways in which such groups conflate religious and nationalistic ideology. The chapter will thus demonstrate how the complex relationship between religion and nationalism in Israel has been exploited by the Ministry of Education in recent years to introduce

⁹ Ibid, pp. 28-29.

religious and nationalistic content that reflects the political priorities of the Minister in charge.

Instruments of Religionisation

As noted, the intense and ongoing debate about the nature of Israel's Jewish identity is key to the battle that is taking place around educational issues in Israel — in particular regarding the role of Jewish studies in state secular schools.¹⁰ In a country in which the presence of religion looms large, concerns amongst the secular public about increasing emphasis on religious identity in non-religious schools is perhaps not surprising. Indeed, suggestions to strengthen Jewish studies in Israel's state secular schools have often met with vocal opposition. The fervour around this subject reached new heights, however, when Bennett took charge of the Ministry of Education in 2015 — with the issue becoming an established part of public discourse in Israel. As Rabbi Melchior confirmed during our interview: 'today there is a whole campaign in Israeli society against [...] the religionisation of the secular school system [...] everybody is up in arms'.¹¹

One of the major concerns raised in relation to the subject is the fact that religious content is being inserted into the general school curriculum (i.e. beyond Jewish studies). *Haaretz* journalist Or Kashti has been following developments closely and reporting on instances of religionisation. As he explained when I interviewed him, 'all kinds of religious content' is being introduced into 'fields of activity which have

¹⁰ G. Hacoen, 'A Question of Identity', *Bar Ilan University: The Begin-Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies (BESA)*, September 2018, <https://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/israel-Jewish-identity/> [accessed 19 January 2019].

¹¹ Telephone interview conducted with Rabbi Melchior, 29 May 2018.

no relation whatsoever to the Jewish identity — we are talking about, for example, religious content in maths and science books!'.¹² Dan Avnon highlighted the very same issue during my interview with him. Avnon explained how, if you look across the curriculum of the past decade, you will find, 'in my opinion, strange examples of teachings that are what we call *hadata*'.¹³ Avnon continued to give the example of teaching related to agriculture where students 'are taught to pray to God [for rain]'.¹⁴ Avnon also highlighted how 'this is considered objectionable by secular and non-believing parents [who] don't think that their kids should be exposed to that kind of thinking in a general course of study'.¹⁵ Although the Ministry of Education has denied that there has been any directive to introduce Jewish content into textbooks for non-Jewish subjects, biochemist Dr Sarah Kliachko, who wrote the book that Avnon was referring to, told *Haaretz* journalist Nir Gontarz, that the Education Ministry asked her to augment the science with Jewish religious content:

it was a request of the Ministry of Education to introduce certain aspects. After all, this is the first grade, in second grade they start learning Torah, and the idea is for them to become familiar with customs [...] They said: put in elements of tradition and Torah and the like. That's something we were asked to integrate into the books.¹⁶

Given that the book in question was written before Bennett's tenure as Education Minister, Gontarz made sure to clarify with Kliachko the current position taken by

¹² Telephone interview conducted with Or Kashti, 17 February 2019.

¹³ Telephone interview conducted with Dan Avnon, 7 October 2019.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ N. Gontarz, 'Prayer is an Essential Part of Farming, Israeli Science Textbook Says', *Haaretz*, 25 August 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-prayer-is-an-essential-part-of-farming-israeli-science-textbook-says-1.5445440> [accessed 19 January 2019].

the Ministry of Education. Kliachko confirmed: 'it's not requesting its removal. On the contrary. It's intensifying these things'.¹⁷



Figure 5.1: An illustration from the first grade science textbook showing a farmer ploughing, planting seeds and praying.¹⁸

Some particularly stark examples of how religious messages are being inserted into non-Jewish subjects include verses from the Bible accompanying anatomical diagrams in science classrooms, as *Haaretz* journalist, Uri Misgav, reported: next to a picture of the heart on the wall of a classroom in Tel Aviv was a message reading, 'my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God' (Psalm 84. 2). Another verse was found next to a diagram of the digestive system reading, 'my heart is become like wax; it is melted within me' (Psalm 22. 1).¹⁹ In order to combat this trend, the Secular Forum is encouraging parents of children in state secular schools, for the first time, to examine their children's school books in order to identify any religious content in non-Jewish subjects. As Kashti remarked during our interview, 'it is quite an extraordinary thing because until two years ago this notion, the notion that we

¹⁷ The book, *Science Journey Alef*, was written in 2011. Parents were asked to purchase the book in 2017 for use as a compulsory text. Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ U. Misgav, 'Fight Religious Power in Secular Schools', *Haaretz*, 14 September 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-fight-religious-power-in-secular-schools-1.6470774> [accessed 19 January 2019].

must check, that parents must check into their children's textbooks, was unheard of'.²⁰

A further example of religious content being inserted into general study texts can be found in a first grade reading book that is used in state secular schools. In the book students are presented with a passage that describes a well-behaved child who is religiously observant, learns Torah and fulfils commandments according to the Torah. The second passage is used to describe the duties that the young boy in the story, Yosi, has to do every day — the focus is on learning Torah. The passage describes the different places where Yosi studies Torah and goes on to state that by learning Torah he is pleasing his Mum and Dad. Students are then provided with set questions to answer on how and why Yosi studies Torah. The implication is clear — children who behave well and are good students adhere to a religious (Orthodox) way of life.²¹



Figure 5.2: An illustration from the first grade reading book showing the two passages describing Yosi and the exercise for students to complete about his Torah study.²²

²⁰ Telephone interview conducted with Or Kashti, 17 February 2019.

²¹ The Secular Forum, 'Religion Reports', *The Secular Forum Website*, <https://www.hiloni.org.il/testimonials/mitzvot> [accessed 29 July 2019] (in Hebrew).

²² Ibid.

Another language book, also for use in state secular schools, presents students with a passage to read describing how festivals are celebrated in synagogue. Students are then asked to write their own passage describing how they participate in synagogue celebrations. The obvious problem here is the assumption that a secular student would attend synagogue to celebrate such events.²³



Figure 5.3: An illustration from the language book showing the exercise where students are asked to describe their participation in synagogue festivities.²⁴

In a third language book, also for use in first and second grade state secular schools, students are presented with a passage that suggests cycling on Yom Kippur hurts the feelings of others — implying that one should refrain from such activities on Yom Kippur. The Ministry of Education is thus accused by secular

²³ The Secular Forum, 'Religion Reports', *The Secular Forum Website*, <https://www.hiloni.org.il/testimonials/%D7%A9%D7%9E%D7%97%D7%AA-%D7%AA%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%94-%D7%91%D7%A1%D7%A4%D7%A8-%D7%A9%D7%A4%D7%94-%D7%A1%D7%A4%D7%A8%D7%95-%D7%A2%D7%9C-%D7%94%D7%A9%D7%AA%D7%AA%D7%A4%D7%95%D7%AA%D7%9B%D7%9D-%D7%91> [accessed 29 July 2019] (in Hebrew).

²⁴ Ibid.

parents of undermining secular lifestyles and attempting to guide students to adhere to a more religious (Orthodox) way of life.²⁵

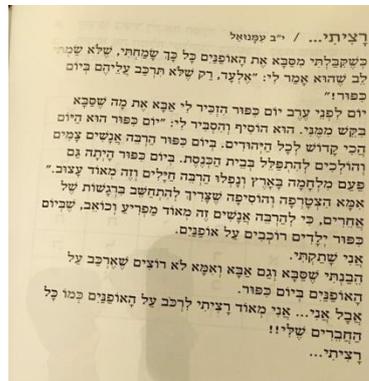


Figure 5.4: A page from the first and second grade reading book suggesting ideal modes of behaviour on Yom Kippur.²⁶

These examples epitomise the type of religious content that is being inserted into state secular education throughout the curriculum (beyond formal religious/Jewish studies), and which has caused considerable backlash from secular parents who feel that their secular way of life is being challenged — an issue which strikes at the heart of their own Jewish identity and that of their children. The content in the examples provided above is particularly concerning as the texts are for use in the earliest grades of school, when students have the least capacity to question what is being taught and is thus clearly veering toward indoctrination. These are just a few examples of many that clearly demonstrate the agenda that is being promoted by the Ministry of Education. As evidenced above, students are confronted from their earliest years of schooling with a one-sided presentation of what it means to be

²⁵ The Secular Forum, 'Religion Reports', *The Secular Forum Website*, <https://www.hiloni.org.il/testimonials/%D7%A1%D7%A4%D7%A8-%D7%A9%D7%A4%D7%94-%D7%9E%D7%9C%D7%9E%D7%93-%D7%9B%D7%99-%D7%A8%D7%9B%D7%99%D7%91%D7%94-%D7%A2%D7%9C-%D7%90%D7%95%D7%A4%D7%A0%D7%99%D7%99%D7%9D-%D7%91%D7%99%D7%95%D7%9D-%D7%9B%D7%99> [accessed 29 July 2019] (in Hebrew).

²⁶ Ibid.

Jewish in Israel. The worldview being promoted is clearly religious and, ideally, Orthodox. An Orthodox way of life is thus presented as the most authentic and students are given the impression that to be a 'good' Jew in Israel one must be religious and observe religious traditions/rituals according to the Torah. The Secular Forum's review of books used in state secular schools found 'a systematic, fundamental and ideological [push] to reshape the consciousness of secular children by promoting a Jewish (Orthodox) worldview in all textbooks'.²⁷

Nevertheless, whilst many secular parents and activists in Israel are against this process and are actively working to combat the increase in religious content in state secular schools, others, such as Member of Knesset for Shas Ya'acov Margi, are enthusiastic about the increase in religious content in state secular schools: 'do not cancel Jewish traditions! We need to be connected to our culture and traditions [...] why are there those who wish to prevent Israeli children from recognising their heritage'.²⁸ However, objecting to religionisation in schools should not be conflated with objecting to Jewish studies being taught in schools per se, as Fruman explains:

we have no problem with studies of Judaism, but what happens in schools today is much more than that [...] There is a huge difference between studying some basics of Judaism, especially when taught by secular teachers, to the current status where the balance between general studies to Jewish studies is distorted; where religious content is introduced to study books and materials in all subjects. This is what we call *hadata*, and it has nothing to do with studying some basics of Judaism.²⁹

²⁷ The Secular Forum, 'Religion in Textbooks: The Full Story', *The Secular Forum Website*, <http://www.hiloni.org.il/hadata-watch/books-details> [accessed 19 October 2019] (in Hebrew).

²⁸ Levi, 'Between Religious and Secular Learning'.

²⁹ Ibid.

Fruman's objections are thus directed against the mixing of Jewish studies content with secular studies, particularly those that are intended to form students' identity. Interestingly, as I discovered when interviewing Rabbi Melchior, this is the expressed intention of the joint secular-religious Meitarim schools (which were discussed in Chapter 3), where the idea is 'to have Jewish agenda pedagogically, not only in what's called Jewish studies, but also in other subjects — when you learn art, when you learn maths and so on'.³⁰ Peled and Peled thus argue that the development of the joint secular-religious school system is in fact a key part of the religionisation of Israeli society.³¹ When I raised this issue with Kashti, he also appeared somewhat sceptical about the effectiveness of joint secular-religious schools given that, in his opinion:

the chances that a teacher will provide a broad introduction to Orthodox, Reform, Conservative and secular Judaism are not very high. I think most teachers will be satisfied with the Orthodox and maybe during one class or two will stick in a lesson about the Reform or secular point of view.³²

Religious Organisations Targeting State Secular Schools

As noted, the new 'Jewish-Israeli Culture' programme — which has been accompanied by an influx of outside religious (Orthodox) organisations providing teaching on Jewish subjects in state secular schools — has also been identified as one of the most effective, and from a secular point of view, troubling features of religionisation. The Secular Forum's extensive research into the new 'Jewish-Israeli Culture' curriculum highlights how the programme contributes to the

³⁰ Telephone interview conducted with Rabi Michael Melchior, 29 May 2018.

³¹ Peled and Peled, *The Religionization of Israeli Society*, p. 18.

³² Telephone interview conducted with Or Kashti, 17 February, 2019.

religionisation process by ‘forcing secular students to engage with Jewish religious content that is inconsistent with their way of life, presenting secular Jewish identity as flawed, promoting a religious (Orthodox) worldview as superior to all others, and indoctrinating the secular student population’.³³ For Fruman, a balance between democratic and Jewish values is vital in order to provide students with the necessary critical thinking skills to enable students to evaluate religious practices. Jewish education should therefore be taught from a secular-critical position so that students ‘understand that not doing *Mitzvot* can be legitimate in our cultural perspective’.³⁴ Kashti is also adamant that the new subject is one of the key instruments of religionisation in state secular schools and explained why he has such strong objections to the subject:

I think that even though their intentions [referring to the figures who were responsible for writing the new curriculum] might have been good and I can sympathise with them, the final outcome is problematic — and here I am being understated, I am understating the issue — because the programme accepts that being religious, in its broadest sense, is superior to non-believing, to atheism. And you must also remember that there is a huge gap, an unavoidable gap, between the programme as the developers thought about it and the teachers who actually teach it in the classroom.³⁵

Indeed, religious teachers teaching in state secular schools are another crucial factor contributing to the religionisation of the state secular school system. As

Fruman explains:

³³ The Secular Forum, ‘Continuing the Struggle in the Jewish-Israel Culture Curriculum – Say “No” to Religionisation’, *The Secular Forum Website*, <http://www.hiloni.org.il/blog/6473> [accessed 19 January 2019] (in Hebrew).

³⁴ Shaham, ‘NGO takes on “Religionization” in Israel’s Secular Schools’.

³⁵ Telephone interview conducted with Or Kashti, 17 February 2019. The way in which Margolin described his own intentions when designing the new ‘Jewish-Israeli Culture’ curriculum compared to how it is being delivered in state secular schools certainly seems to support Kashti’s assertion. Interview conducted with Ron Margolin in Tel Aviv, 6 February 2017.

unlike the other way around, the [state] secular education system is allowing religious teachers to teach in its schools. In the past, these teachers knew that they were teaching in secular schools — they were acting carefully and taught according to the curriculum. Today, mainly because of the ‘spirit of the commander’ [Bennett], they let themselves guide the students to a more religious way of life, make all sorts of remarks and say stuff in class that are not pleasant to secular ears.³⁶

Once again, the opposition here is not to the teaching of Jewish studies per se — providing it is ‘taught in the state [secular] education system in a way that respects the Jewish identities of its students and their families, their ways of life, and a pluralistic worldview’.³⁷ What is being opposed is the way in which the subject is currently delivered and the messages that are being conveyed — namely, ‘the narrow-mindedness and the attempts at brainwashing by teachers, study materials, National Service volunteers, and Orthodox Jewish evangelising organisations’ that are funded by the Ministry of Education to strengthen students’ Jewish identity.³⁸

³⁶ Shaham, ‘NGO takes on “Religionization” in Israel’s Secular Schools’. One of the teachers I interviewed explained how she teaches an extra three hours of Bible studies per week (in addition to the two hours that is formally provided).

³⁷ Regev and Lax, ‘The 2017 Israel Religion and State Index’, p. 30.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 29. In addition to religious teachers being employed in state secular schools, the Education Ministry has also established a training programme for teachers and parents in secular schools that is run by the ultra-Orthodox Zionist organisation Binyan Shalem, which operates in elementary and high schools. The programme is jointly funded by the Ministry of Education and the Binyan Shalem Institute. According to an internal Education Ministry memo, the goal of the programme is to establish ‘a system of training, support and enrichment for parents and teachers on issues they encounter’. In reality, the organisation promotes a strict Orthodox worldview which is ‘fiercely debated even within the Orthodox community’. As someone closely associated with the organisation told *Haaretz*, the approach of the Binyan Shalem Institute, which is associated with the nationalist ultra-Orthodox wing of Habayit Hayehudi, ‘is very Torah-oriented. You have to obey the rabbis, strengthen Jewish family values and [support] the women whose husbands serve in the army’. The total budget for the programme is 283,000 shekels (\$82,505). The Education Ministry’s funding for the programme will be provided by the Ministry’s Psychological Consulting Service for teachers, students and parents. The programme is called a joint tenure in order to ‘avoid issuing a public tender or financial support through a budgetary rule which would require closer supervision’. This is a tool that has come to be used frequently in recent years. O. Kashti, ‘Education Ministry in

The religious organisations that target Israel's state secular school system often have close links with the right-wing national-religious political party Habayit Hayehudi. Despite members of such groups belonging to only a minority of Israeli society,³⁹ they see themselves as the country's spiritual and political elite on a mission to 'reshape the national cultural, moral and civic identity of the general Jewish public in Israel to suit their worldview'.⁴⁰ The rhetoric of these groups constantly refers to a lack or loss of identity among the secular population and reflects a deep fear that students' nationalist Zionist identity is eroding. As Molad (the Centre for the Renewal of Israeli Democracy) reported, for these groups 'by definition, the only worthy Jewish identity is religious Zionism'.⁴¹

In order to combat this apparent depletion of values and identity 'Centres for Deepening the Jewish Identity' have been established throughout the country by Zehut — an organisation that has been accused of operating as 'Habayit Hayehudi's Jewish education arm in Israel's [state] secular schools'.⁴² According to the former Chief Executive of Zehut, Itay Granak, 'the centres are full of mission

Talks with ultra-Orthodox Group to Train Secular Teachers, Parents', *Haaretz*, 29 September 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-under-education-ministry-plan-Haredi-group-will-train-secular-teachers-1.5454382> [accessed 19 September 2018]; *Haaretz* Editorial, 'Missionaries in the Schools', *Haaretz*, 1 October 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/missionaries-in-the-schools-1.5454586> [accessed 19 September 2018].

³⁹ In the 2015 election Habayit Hayehudi received 6.74% of the total vote. Government of Israel, 'Knesset Election Result: Twentieth Knesset', *Government of Israel: The Knesset Election Results* https://knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res20.htm [accessed 29 September 2019].

⁴⁰ Molad: Centre for the Renewal of Israeli Democracy, 'Israel's Classroom Wars: The Religious Right's Attempt to Overtake Secular Education in Israel', *Molad*, 2017, http://www.molad.org/images/upload/files/Souls_ENG_080617.pdf [accessed 19 September 2018], p. 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 3.

⁴² O. Kashti, 'Habayit Hayehudi's Jewish Education Arm in Israel's Secular Schools', *Haaretz*, 13 December 2015, <https://www.Haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-habayit-hayehudis-Jewish-ed-programs-in-state-schools-1.5437699> [accessed 19 September 2018].

and do holy work', and aim to change the culture of public discourse.⁴³ Zehut is currently the largest representative of religious Zionist organisations working in state secular schools under the supervision of the Torah Culture Department in the Ministry of Education, representing thirty-two associations and operating sixty-three centres for strengthening Jewish identity in one hundred and thirty-five councils throughout Israel. The majority of Zehut's activities are held in elementary and high schools, reaching over seven hundred in total. However, Zehut's activities also reach the wider community — including community centres, absorption centres for new immigrants and the disabled.⁴⁴ Zehut was formed by the individual associations running the 'Jewish Identity Centres' in order to provide an umbrella for the centres to operate under. The head of each association joins the general assembly that is Zehut, while management consists of a smaller number of decision makers. Zehut's role is to represent the individual 'Jewish Identity Centres' in matters of legislation, budgets and activities, as well as organising projects on a national scale. Zehut also provides training to support instructors, pedagogic staff and administrative staff within the centres.

The main (rather vaguely worded) focus of the centres, according to the organisation's website, is on 'creating experiences with a special added value, within the formal education system, through activities such as scheduled lessons in schools and activities relating to the Jewish calendar'.⁴⁵ Whilst different topics are

⁴³ Zehut – Centres for Deepening Jewish Identity, 'About', *Zehut Website*, <http://www.zehut.co.il/en/> [accessed 27 September 2018]. Granak was replaced by Israel Ben Pazi in 2018. Ben Pazi served as Deputy General of the National Union party — which joined Habayit Hayehudi in the run up to the 2013 Knesset elections.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

emphasised by each centre, depending on the community it serves, all centres apparently share the same goal of ‘strengthening and deepening Jewish identity in communities throughout Israel’.⁴⁶ The organisation’s self-declared goals are:

strengthening the solidarity and common interests between the different segments of the Jewish nation; turning Judaism and Jewish heritage into objects of pride, relation and identification; building a bridge and cultivating a connection between teenagers, both secular and Orthodox; shattering misconceptions, removing dividers and strengthening the common interests to create a sense of partnership and unity.⁴⁷

The key individuals who work to promote and strengthen this ‘Jewish identity’ are *Sherut Leumi* (National Service) ‘girls’⁴⁸ who Zehut claim ‘have a direct affect [sic] on dozens of students, deepening their Jewish Zionist affinity to the Land of Israel, bridging across divides and educating towards values’.⁴⁹ These young women receive only eight days of training before beginning their teaching, yet have ‘full creative control, and are at the frontline of the centres’ activities — carrying them out in the field’.⁵⁰ According to critics of Zehut, ‘it is these untrained individuals, operating on behalf of a political agenda who are increasingly fulfilling the role of teachers and educators in shaping the moral, spiritual and civic worldview of Israeli children’.⁵¹

The recent report by Molad, investigating the ‘infiltration of religious non-profit organisations into Israel’s state [secular] school system’, places these religious

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Although these figures are commonly referred to as *Sherut Leumi* ‘girls’, they are in fact young women aged between seventeen and twenty-four years — who are usually exempt from serving in the military for religious reasons. They therefore allow Zehut to run their activities with very low costs attached.

⁴⁹ *Sherut Leumi* ‘girls’ provide around two-hundred thousand secular children and teens with a fixed weekly hour of Jewish studies, values, Zionism and heritage. Zehut, ‘About’.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Molad, ‘Israel’s Classroom Wars’, p. 8.

Zionist organisations in the context of the settlement movement's longstanding attempts to 'settle in the hearts' of Jewish Israeli population.⁵² Indeed, Habayit Hayehudi is closely aligned with the settler movement, a fact which is clearly illustrated in the language often used by party leaders (many of whom live in West Bank Settlements) to explain the party's objective — to 'settle not only on the hills of the West Bank, but also "in the hearts" of their fellow Israelis'.⁵³ This political project is now being extended into state secular schools, using students as a captive audience. As the Molad report points out, 'mass indoctrination usually begins with the most susceptible members of society — children and teenagers'.⁵⁴

Kashti was also highly critical of the increasing involvement of outside organisations in schools since the new curriculum was introduced — which he confirmed 'have close ties to Habayit Hayehudi', and which he also sees as a major contributor to religionisation in state secular schools.⁵⁵ Kashti was particularly keen to highlight the significant role played by Granek, the former head of Zehut, in encouraging the involvement of Orthodox religious organisations in state secular schools. As Kashti explained:

Granek, was a member — an active member — of HaBayit Hayehudi, and at the same time was one of the most vicious advocates for letting in the outsiders, and I can't emphasise it enough — we are talking about outsiders to the school

⁵² Ibid, p. 4.

⁵³ J. Maltz, 'Why Israel Is Spending Millions on Orthodox Missionary Work — and How This Empowers the Settlers', *Haaretz*, 15 June 2017, <https://www.Haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-why-israel-is-spending-millions-on-Orthodox-missionary-work-1.5484236> [accessed 30 August 2018]. Examples of Habayit Hayehudi party members who live in West Bank settlements include Nissan Slomiansky, Bezalel Smotrich, Eliyahu Ben Dahan and Moti Yogev. As noted, Bennett was also the Director of the Council for Jewish Settlements in 'Judea' and 'Samaria' (Yesha) from 2010 until 2013 and supports the annexation of large parts of the West Bank.

⁵⁴ Molad, 'Israel's Classroom Wars', p. 7.

⁵⁵ Telephone interview conducted with Or Kashti, 17 February 2019.

community and to parents who come and teach *our* children the meaning of being a Jew and how to celebrate this holy day or Shabbat, and so on.⁵⁶

Kashti's outrage at the involvement of such groups became even clearer as he continued:

now this is *totally* unacceptable, not only because the secular Jews don't have [...] permission to enter Orthodox schools — this is of course relevant but it's not the main argument — the main argument is, and should be, that no outside organisation has the right to tell *my* children how to live and what a good Jew or a bad Jew is, or nonsense like this.⁵⁷

In Kashti's opinion, 'there should be a close affinity between the school, the teachers and the community that chooses to send its children to these schools'.⁵⁸

Despite the nationalistic religious drive, there are however some principals, as I found during my fieldwork in Israel, who remain committed to promoting freedom and equality as the main pillars of democracy and believe that school should be about 'pupils acquiring tools for critical thinking' rather than indoctrination.⁵⁹ Such educators are thus pushing back against these groups and refusing to allow any such involvement in their schools. The heated public debate that has been generated around this issue has resulted in the two municipalities of Tel Aviv and Givatayim largely refusing to co-operate with religious organisations that target their state secular schools.⁶⁰ The number of programmes run by religious organisations in these schools as a result of the action taken by the Tel Aviv

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Interview conducted with Nati Stern in Tel Aviv, 5 February 2017.

⁶⁰ The legislation currently applies to elementary schools but is planned to be extended to high schools. O. Kashti, 'Tel Aviv Cracks Down on Religious Influence in Schools', *Haaretz*, 5 July 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-tel-aviv-cracks-down-on-religious-influence-in-schools-1.5491825> [accessed 30 August 2018].

municipality has dropped sharply, from around forty in 2016 to just five in 2018.⁶¹ As one Tel Aviv principal commented in *Haaretz*, 'there is no justification for transferring responsibility for lessons [in Judaism] to outside bodies that have nothing to do with the spirit of the school and the community it serves'.⁶² This sentiment was echoed by Daphna Poskanzer, a senior lecturer at the David Yellin Academic College of Education in Jerusalem, whom I was fortunate enough to meet during my fieldwork in Israel.⁶³ Poskanzer accompanied me on a visit to an elementary school in Beit HaKeerem, Jerusalem.⁶⁴ During my visit, I had the opportunity to question Poskanzer about the very issue of outsourcing the teaching of Jewish studies subjects to outside religious organisations and, in her response, she was keen to stress that the school never allows outside organisations to teach lessons on Judaism. Poskanzer also highlighted the fact that this was in keeping with the area in which the school is located, which, as she explained, is extremely secular:⁶⁵ 'in fact probably the most secular in Jerusalem' and the

⁶¹ These figures are based on municipality figures obtained by *Haaretz* which show that Orthodox organisations were working in 70% of the city's fifty-five Jewish elementary schools in 2016 compared with 10% of these schools by September 2018. The teaching of Judaism is thus the responsibility of teachers and staff within the schools. O. Kashti, 'After Outcry, Tel Aviv Schools Outsource Fewer Lessons to Orthodox Groups', *Haaretz*, 28 September 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-after-outcry-tel-aviv-schools-outsource-fewer-lessons-to-Orthodox-groups-1.6513105> [accessed 30 September 2018].

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ The David Yellin College is an academic teacher training college. The College was established in 1913 and was the first institution to train teachers in Israel.

⁶⁴ The school is affiliated with the David Yellin Academic College of Education. During my visit to the school, where I spent the whole afternoon, I had the opportunity to observe a Bible class, which also provided fascinating insight into school life in Israel.

⁶⁵ Beit Hakareem is one of the few secular neighbourhoods remaining in Jerusalem, while large parts of the city are becoming increasingly ultra-Orthodox. This process is referred to in Israel as 'Haredization'.

students' parents would fiercely object to such groups entering the schools.⁶⁶

Poskanzer went on to point out how some parents even complain about Jewish and Bible studies being taught at all.⁶⁷

However, Poskanzer's approach and the similar policy that has been adopted by the Tel Aviv and Givatayim municipalities — restricting the involvement of religious organisations in their schools — is, again, not meant as an objection to religious content or Jewish studies per se. As the head of the Education Administration in Tel Aviv has pointed out, the move is rather aimed against religious groups that are not pluralistic and aim to instil in students a one dimensional view of Judaism that reflects their own ideology.⁶⁸ There are various reasons why such groups are used by schools, including, as the data from my interview with principal Stern revealed, the vast amount of money that they save principals, due to the extensive funding the groups receive from the Ministry of Education.⁶⁹ However, it also saves teachers and principals from having to present the content themselves, which can often be a problem for teachers who are not familiar themselves with the material they are required to teach and for which they have often not received the necessary training.⁷⁰ Shira Ackerman Simchovitch, who is Director of Early Childhood Education at TALI, raised this very issue when I interviewed her during my fieldwork in Israel. As Simchovitch explained, given that the state secular school

⁶⁶ Interview conducted with Daphna Poskanzer in Jerusalem, 14 February 2017. One of the conclusions of the Shenhar Committee's report was that Jewish studies in schools should be undertaken by teachers who are of a similar background to those in the school where they are teaching.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Kashti, 'After Outcry, Tel Aviv Schools Outsource Fewer Lessons to Orthodox Groups'.

⁶⁹ Interview conducted with Nati Stern in Tel Aviv, 5 February 2017.

⁷⁰ Kashti, 'After Outcry, Tel Aviv Schools Outsource Fewer Lessons to Orthodox Groups'.

system aims to approach Judaism from a national-cultural-heritage perspective, ‘teachers often have difficulty deciding how to teach the material related to Jewish studies as they are unsure how to present the information in a way that’s appropriate for a student who comes from a secular household’.⁷¹ Simchovitch related her own experience with teachers who are tasked with teaching material on such things as Jewish holidays and who think:

I’m not going to touch it, I’m not going to change it — even though it’s a very Orthodox, or traditional formulation of practice — I’m not going to touch it, it doesn’t matter that much if it doesn’t have that much connection to the student’s life.⁷²

Simchovitch explained how she believes that all teachers should be equipped with the necessary skills to teach about Jewish traditions, and how this is one of the central aims of the TALI organisation:

I think what we’re trying to do is, first of all, put it on a teacher’s radar that part of her [sic] job living in Israel and in the Jewish state and in the Jewish school system — which includes Judaic studies — is also to foster the Jewish Israeli identity. But you’ve got to get it on the radar before you can even talk about it. And then I think the second thing is to supply children — teachers, then children — with more knowledge and more exposure to the contents of the tradition and to the different ways it’s interpreted today, in the past, or whatever.⁷³

The predominant focus of TALI’s early years programme is therefore training teachers to deliver Jewish content — a process which Simchovitch described as:

deepening their knowledge and opening their hearts — in other words, because very often the teachers have themselves gone through the public [secular] school system and public sector teacher training, they don’t have a great depth of knowledge around the Judaic studies that are required of them [to teach the subject]. So that’s our kind of mandate. It would be a two-part mandate — one has to do with knowledge and environment, and the other has to do with accompanying the teacher in her [sic] attempts/experiments and thinking about

⁷¹ Interview conducted with Shira Ackerman Simchovitch in Jerusalem, 21 February 2017.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

how to implement, or how to integrate some of what she's learning into what she does with the children.⁷⁴

TALI thus aims to promote a pluralistic approach to Judaism in schools, which exposes students to the wealth of Jewish interpretations and approaches (including secular, Orthodox and non-Orthodox concepts). Elsewhere, however, critics claim that 'the teaching of content related to Jewish values and identity in state [secular] schools [is left] to ideologues of the religious right' — who present national-Jewish identity as being superior to democratic Israeli identity, and worse, force students to choose one or the other.⁷⁵ As noted in Chapter 4, the Ministry of Education has even been granted new powers in law to ban left-wing organisations from entering schools, which is a clear demonstration of the Education Ministry's downgrading of democracy.⁷⁶ The law has been dubbed informally as the 'Breaking the Silence law' — referring to the organisation that was seen as the main target in the initial instructions that were sent to principals to warn against allowing such groups to deliver activities in schools. Bennett initially sent out directives to principals, advising them against co-operation with such groups, before any official law was in place. However, Stern explained how, for him, it was nevertheless an 'obligation to obey [...] it's some kind of inner way for the [Education] Minister to impose his will on his staff'.⁷⁷ Stern went on to explain in some detail the content

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Molad, 'Israel's Classroom Wars', p. 7; Barak, M., 'Toward the Revitalization of Civics', p. 2.

⁷⁶ The law was proposed by Shuli Moalem-Refaeli, who was a Member of Knesset for HaBayit HaYehudi at the time. The law prevents any organisation that is deemed by the Minister of Education to be delegitimising the State of Israel, working against the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and its soldiers, or against the objectives of the Israeli education system from entering schools or meeting with students. G. Hoffman, "'Breaking the Silence" Bill Passed into Law', *The Jerusalem Post*, 17 July 2018, <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Breaking-the-Silence-bill-passed-into-law-562699> [accessed 20 July 2018].

⁷⁷ Interview conducted with Nati Stern in Tel Aviv, 5 February 2017.

of the directive, which had been distributed to school principals in December 2016, shortly before my fieldwork in Israel began:

it is very clear, although the name Breaking the Silence and other groups are not specified, it is very clear, it says very clearly schools should not host or give stage to any organisation that is undermining values of Israel as a Jewish state and it's banned to question [...] the legitimacy of main [state] institutions in Israel, like the army, the government. So critical thought [...] it's hard to see if you can even do it, because according to this form that we got, you need to be very careful what you do.⁷⁸

Stern's testimony clearly illustrates that, despite the Education Ministry's rhetoric apparently supporting and encouraging school autonomy, the oversight and monitoring of any organisation perceived to be critical of Israel is tightening, with the effect of suppressing freedom of thought and civic/cultural activity.⁷⁹

Since my interview with Stern, this guidance has been enshrined in law, thus giving Education Ministers extensive powers to limit freedom of thought in schools.⁸⁰ A last minute amendment was also made to the law that authorises the Education Minister to ban from schools 'any outside person or organisation whose activity stands in severe and significant contradiction to the goals of state education'.⁸¹ Thus, in effect, the law enables Education Ministers to prevent any organisation from entering a school that might contradict their own ideological worldview.⁸²

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ O Kashti, 'With Israeli Education Minister Bennett, a New School Year of Indoctrination Opens', *Haaretz*, 2 September 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-with-bennett-a-new-school-year-of-indoctrination-opens-1.6434587> [accessed 7 September 2018].

⁸⁰ *Haaretz* Editorial, 'The Education Commissar', *Haaretz*, 18 July 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/the-education-commissar-1.6289129> [accessed 30 September 2018]. This Editorial by *Haaretz* is highly critical of Bennett's attempts to stifle freedom of expression and the extent of power that the new law grants to Education Ministers — further demonstrating Bennett's determination to ensure all content in state secular schools fits with his political ideology.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

Nevertheless, despite this highly restrictive law being applied to prevent left-wing organisations working in schools, the Ministry of Education does not have any procedures in place to supervise the activities of right-wing organisations and the Jewish studies content they disseminate in state secular schools.⁸³

Religion and Nationalism

Whilst religious ideas are often included in the message conveyed by outside organisations that deliver Jewish content in state secular schools, it is suggested by Molad that ‘the overarching aim is not proselytisation (i.e. drawing secular children closer to religious observance). Rather, it is to reshape the way in which the secular majority views its identity, in accordance with the tenets of religious Zionism’.⁸⁴ Journalist Gideon Levy certainly agrees with this analysis, arguing that ‘the revolution that the Education Minister and his party minions are trying to foment is much more nationalistic than religious’.⁸⁵ Whilst recognising the importance of fighting for Israel’s secularism, for Levy, nationalism is much more of a threat than religionisation.⁸⁶ According to Levy, ‘Bennett doesn’t care if we wear a Kippa or not. He wants to establish the second apartheid kingdom, and that’s a lot more dangerous’.⁸⁷

⁸³ Molad, ‘Israel’s Classroom Wars’, p. 9.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ G. Levy, ‘Religious Indoctrination isn’t the Real Threat in Israel’, *Haaretz*, 15 July 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-religious-indoctrination-isn-t-the-real-threat-in-israel-1.5493623> [accessed 30 September 2018].

⁸⁶ As noted, nationalistic content nevertheless arouses much less suspicion amongst secular parents than religious content does in the state secular school system.

⁸⁷ Levy, ‘Religious Indoctrination’.

A similar view with regard to the promotion of nationalism rather than religion in schools was also shared by one of my interviewees, Malach, who, as head of the Civics Committee, is part of the Ministry of Education. As noted in Chapter 4, when I suggested to Malach (based on evidence from previous interviews), that Bennett is promoting a religious worldview and favours funding organisations that promote Orthodox values, he was insistent that there is no such Orthodox agenda — rather a right-wing nationalistic approach.⁸⁸ Malach was certainly not alone in this opinion. During my interview with Margolin, he was also keen to correct the charge that Bennett is promoting religious Orthodoxy through the new curriculum:⁸⁹

no, no, no — I must give you my explanation to this. Bennett is a very extreme political right leader [...] is so extreme. He is a very typical, very modern Jew from the heart of Israel (Raanana) but he thinks like other politicians about the elections [...] he was Netanyahu's assistant. It's clear he is trying to replace him and they are fighting [to win the support of] the same group of citizens. So in the eyes of the others he is very Orthodox, but he is not really very Orthodox.⁹⁰

With laughter in his voice, Margolin continued, 'you can see — his kippa is so small, and his wife is not Orthodox. So the facts are that the story is very complicated'.⁹¹ Margolin went on to explain further how, because there is often the assumption in Israel that 'right-wing' automatically means 'Orthodox', 'many seculars look at all his [Bennett's] decisions as Orthodox decisions'.⁹² However, for Margolin, the

⁸⁸ Interview conducted with Assaf Malach in Jerusalem, 22 February 2017.

⁸⁹ As noted, Margolin headed the Committee that drafted and approved the new Jewish studies curriculum.

⁹⁰ Interview conducted with Ron Margolin in Tel Aviv, 6 February 2017.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid. There is in fact a close connection between religion and politics in Israel. The Pew survey of religion in Israel (2016) highlighted the correlation between the two elements — revealing that many religious Jews hold political views that combine religious identity and nationalism and, as noted, tend to be more right-wing. Religious Jews (Datiyim) and are more likely than any other religious group in Israel to identify with the political right (56%), whilst secular Jews identify mostly as centre (62%). Ultra-Orthodox are equally likely to identify as centre (52%) and right (47%).

decision taken by former Education Minister, Gideon Sa'ar, that every school student should visit Hebron at least once, was much more of a disaster 'but no-one jumped or said anything because he is from Tel Aviv and a secular figure, but this is not right, it's not right'.⁹³

Although the opinions expressed directly above suggest, that the Ministry of Education is promoting nationalistic rather than religious ideology in state secular schools, religion is nevertheless being used in the service of nationalism — which explains why religious (orthodox) organisations working with schools receive disproportionate amounts of funding in comparison to more pluralistic organisations. Indeed, as noted, at least 70% of the Education Ministry's budget for Jewish identity programmes in state secular schools goes to Orthodox organisations — leaving pluralistic organisations to scramble for what is left.⁹⁴ An investigation into the Ministry of Education's budget by Molad also found that during Bennett's tenure as Minister of Education, the Ministry's budget for organisations and activities which focus on strengthening Jewish identity/Jewish Israeli culture increased exponentially — from 125,861,323 shekels (\$34,296,348) in 2013 to 176,999,461 shekels (\$48,231,140) in 2015 — reaching a record high of 211,000,000 shekels (\$60,216,826) in 2017.⁹⁵

Interestingly, only 8% of Jews in Israel (across all sub-groups) identify with the political left. Pew, 'Israel's Religiously Divided Society', pp. 19-20; 46.

⁹³ Interview conducted with Ron Margolin in Tel Aviv, 6 February 2017.

⁹⁴ Kashti, 'Israeli Orthodox Groups Take over Curriculum'.

⁹⁵ Molad: Centre for the Renewal of Democracy, 'Appendix A — Ministry of Education Support for External Organisations', *Molad*, 2017, http://www.molad.org/images/upload/files/Appendix_A.pdf [accessed 27 September 2018] (in Hebrew); O Kashti, 'With Israeli Education Minister Bennett'.

This is hardly surprising, however, considering Bennett's admission that 'studying Judaism and excelling in it is more important to me than studying math and sciences'.⁹⁶ This stance is clearly evidenced in the decrease in both the budget and the number of teaching hours for mathematics and science subjects compared to the increase in funding and number of hours dedicated to Jewish Israeli identity/culture when Bennett took charge of the Ministry of Education in 2015.⁹⁷ Whereas spending for the 'Jewish-Israeli Culture' programme increased dramatically, spending on Science and Technology subjects fell from 10,779,224 shekels (\$3,143,038) in 2010 to 10,587,272 (\$3,087,309) in 2015.⁹⁸ The reduction in hours dedicated to science and technology proposed in the Education Ministry's budget for 2019 in elementary schools was particularly stark — down from eighteen hours in 2012 to just twelve hours.⁹⁹

The Secular Forum has also compiled a list of over one hundred and eighty Orthodox-affiliated organisations that work with the Ministry of Education to deliver the 'Jewish-Israeli Culture' curriculum.¹⁰⁰ As noted in Chapter 4, my primary research in the field also confirmed that the majority of these funds are allocated to Orthodox organisations. The government is thus clearly taking a two-pronged

⁹⁶ Bennett quoted in, E. Prince-Gibson, 'Education Minister Thinks Judaism Trumps Math and Science — Here's Why That Matters', *Haaretz*, 14 September 2016, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-bennett-thinks-judaism-trumps-math-and-science-heres-why-that-matters-1.5433987> [accessed 30 September 2018].

⁹⁷ Dattel, 'In Israeli Schools, Less Science and English, More Jewish Studies'.

⁹⁸ Molad, 'Appendix A'.

⁹⁹ As reported in *Haaretz*, the Education Ministry said it would increase the minimum number of planned instruction hours for science and technology, following a query from *The Marker*. Dattel, 'In Israeli Schools, Less Science and English, More Jewish Studies'.

¹⁰⁰ The Secular Forum, 'Religious Organisations in kindergartens and State Schools — What Can be Done?', *The Secular Forum Website*, <http://www.hiloni.org.il/hadata-watch/amutot> [accessed 27 September 2018].

approach to education — religious and political — with the political often taking precedence over the religious as it aims to win over followers to the ‘Greater Land of Israel’ doctrine that opposes territorial compromise.¹⁰¹ As Tomer Persico, Lecturer in Comparative Religion at Tel Aviv University, confirms, ‘the idea isn’t so much to turn Israelis into Orthodox Jews, but rather, to get them to identify with the worldview of Habayit Hayehudi party’.¹⁰² This highlights once again the conflation between religion and nationalism, and how this relationship is being exploited by the Ministry of Education to introduce religious and nationalistic policies that reflect the ideological agendas of right-wing parties.

The exploitation of state secular schools as a platform for nationalistic political propaganda is further evidenced by the involvement of Im Tirtzu in state secular schools. The group’s involvement with schools is particularly concerning in light of a 2013 ruling by the Jerusalem District Judge, Rafael Ya’akobi, finding that the group’s positions have ‘a certain common denominator with certain principles of fascism’.¹⁰³ As Journalist Noam Sheiza notes, this verdict came as ‘a major blow to

¹⁰¹ Maltz, ‘Why Israel Is Spending Millions’. As suggested above, religion and politics are not significantly distinct categories. For instance, as Professor of Religious Studies Craig Martin acknowledges, hegemonic religious systems are often used to conceal political interference in state institutions which socialise citizens and thus have profound political effects. Furthermore, Martin suggests that it is not possible to separate church and state and that the distinction between religion and state has only served to mask ‘the circulation of power from one to the other’. C. Martin, *Masking Hegemony: A Genealogy of Liberalism, Religion, and the Private Sphere* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2010), pp. 30-38.

¹⁰² Maltz, ‘Why Israel Is Spending Millions’.

¹⁰³ C. Shalev, ‘Im Tirtzu and the Proto-Fascist Plot to Destroy Israeli Democracy’, *Haaretz*, 16 December 2015, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-the-proto-fascist-plot-to-destroy-israeli-democracy-1.5378187> [accessed 27 September 2018].

Im Tirtzu's efforts to portray itself as a mainstream, grassroots organisation'.¹⁰⁴ Despite the group's fascist tendencies their work in schools (and elsewhere) is openly supported — ideologically and financially — by Bennett and Habayit Hayehudi. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also voiced his support for the organisation when it celebrated its tenth year in existence:

mazal tov to the members of Im Tirtzu. You are celebrating ten years, ten years that you are fighting for the truth about Israel and Zionism — the truth abroad and the truth within. It is not an easy battle but there is no battle more worthwhile. Accept my blessings, accept the blessings of the citizens of Israel who like you care about the future of the State of Israel. *Mazal tov!*¹⁰⁵

Despite the Prime Minister's praise for the organisation, the ideology that is being promoted by Im Tirtzu, discussed below, will certainly do nothing to heal the major fractures in Israeli society that were revealed by the study carried out by the Pew Research Centre. The study found that roughly half of Israeli Jews (48%) say Arabs should be transferred or expelled from Israel, while a similar share (46%) disagree with this.¹⁰⁶

Founded in 2006 by Ronan Shoal and Erez Tadmor, Im Tirtzu is now the largest non-parliamentary Zionist movement in Israel. Im Tirtzu claims to have had 'a major impact on Israeli society, both in its role as the leading pro-Israel voice on Israeli [university] campuses and in combating anti-Zionist threats to Israel from

¹⁰⁴ N. Sheizaf, 'Jerusalem Court: Okay to call Im Tirtzu a "Fascist Group"', *+972 Magazine*, 8 September 2013, <https://www.972mag.com/jerusalem-court-okay-to-call-im-tirtzu-a-fascist-group/> [accessed 27 September 2018].

¹⁰⁵ B. Netanyahu, 'Prime Minister Netanyahu Congratulates Im Tirtzu on 10 years of Zionist Activity', YouTube, published September 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljzvlPkird4> [accessed 7 October 2018].

¹⁰⁶ Pew, 'Israel's Religiously Divided Society', p. 17.

within the country'.¹⁰⁷ *Haaretz's* English Editor, Avi Scharf, certainly seems to agree with the group's own assessment of its impact, asserting that 'Im Tirtzu has taken over political discourse in Israel, and injected into it the crazy idea of the internal enemy'.¹⁰⁸ The group has a separate youth division dedicated to working in high schools and seeking to inspire 'the young people of Israel to work towards the realisation of the Zionist vision'.¹⁰⁹ Im Tirtzu's programmes in high schools, as detailed on the group's official website, include: delivering classes on historical figures, events and ideas pertaining to Zionism; putting up Zionist bulletin boards; and distributing Zionist publications and participation in 'interesting lectures' on Zionist thought.¹¹⁰ The group also provides tours of the country, including trips to Hebron, in partnership with the Committee of the Jewish Community of Hebron, which represents the Jewish settlers who live there.¹¹¹ School trips of this nature have been accused by left-leaning critics of 'advancing a political agenda' and 'whitewash[ing] the occupation'.¹¹² However, these types of school trips are not uncommon, as evidenced below.

The Masa Yisraeli (Israeli Journey — known in English as Israeli Routes Odyssey) project is also heavily subsidised by the Ministry of Education and is one of the

¹⁰⁷ Im Tirtzu: Building the Zionist Dream, 'About', *Im Tirtzu Website*, <https://imti.org.il/en/about-us/> [accessed 27 September 2018].

¹⁰⁸ *Haaretz* Editorial, 'Declaring War on Academia' in *Haaretz*, 11 June 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/declaring-war-on-academia-1.5482617> [accessed 27 September 2018].

¹⁰⁹ Im Tirtzu, 'About'.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² O. Kashti, 'School Field Trips That Whitewash the Occupation', *Haaretz*, 30 October 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/school-field-trips-that-whitewash-the-occupation-1.5460474> [accessed 30 September 2018].

most successful projects of the religious right-wing.¹¹³ Established in 2006, the programme is run by the Mibereshit Foundation and was developed by the management of the Foundation's Masa Yisraeli department and the Ministry of Education.¹¹⁴ As noted on the Masa Yisraeli website, the 'educational process is based on preparation in the school itself prior to the trip, on the powerful experience of the participant during the Masa itself, and a significant follow-up and summary of the experience in the school following the Masa'.¹¹⁵ The programme is currently aimed at students in the eleventh grade of high school, but there are plans to expand the programme to include tenth grade students — as desired by the Ministry of Education. Indeed, Bennett expressed his support for the Masa Yisraeli when he spoke at the fourth conference of Masa Yisraeli in March 2017, vowing that within four years all eleventh grade students will go on the 'Jewish identity' journey.¹¹⁶ The value placed on the programme by the Education Minister was clearly articulated in his speech: 'I know this is an important venture [...] You are doing wonderful work here, helping to turn Israeli children into human beings

¹¹³ Between 2009 and 2017 the Ministry of Education invested 30,000,000 shekels (\$8,583,665) in the programme. Y. Skop, 'Bennett Promises: Within Four Years, All 11th-graders Will Go on "Jewish Identity" Trip', *Haaretz*, 22 March 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-bennett-all-11th-graders-must-go-on-israeli-roots-trip-1.5451626> [accessed 27 September 2018].

¹¹⁴ Mibereshit: The Foundation for Jewish Renaissance, works to strengthen Jewish identity in Israel for pre-school children, elementary school children, high school students and their families. Former Deputy Education Minister (2013-2014) Avraham (Avi) Wortzman of Habayit Hayehudi served as the Director General of Mibereshit from 2002 to 2008 and was one of the co-founders of the Masa Yisrael programme. Masa Yisraeli, 'The Masa – Types of the Masa', *Masa Yisraeli Website*, <http://masaisraeli.co.il/languages/english/the-masa/types-of-the-masa/> [accessed 30 September 2018].

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ The programme has already reached over one hundred thousand eleventh grade students from over two hundred schools throughout Israel. Molad: Centre for the Renewal of Israeli Democracy, 'Making Souls', *Molad*, 2017, <http://www.molad.org/images/upload/files/ZehutMasa.pdf> (in Hebrew), p. 11.

— *mensch*es — and we, for our part, are committed to backing you in this endeavour'.¹¹⁷

In line with the religious (Orthodox) organisations targeting state secular schools in Israel, the objectives and goals of the Masa Yisraeli are also meant to address the apparent 'crisis of identity' that Israeli youth are experiencing.¹¹⁸ The tours are intended to provide an antidote to this 'crisis' by strengthening participants' identity with and belonging to the land and State of Israel and the Jewish people — thus shaping their Jewish, Zionist and national identity.¹¹⁹ The trips last for six days, with each day covering a different 'sphere of identity'. The interviews that I conducted with teachers and principals in Israel confirmed the ideological nature of the Masa Yisraeli programme. Although the Education Ministry does not force the Masa Yisraeli on the schools, with each school deciding whether or not to participate, Stern explained how schools often find the offer of such a heavily subsidised trip hard to refuse — despite the unfavourable right-wing national-religious messages that are often conveyed through the journey:

my students are paying for basic trips, with no extras, for three days and two nights — 600 shekels (\$165). They might even have to take their own food for the first day. But then you can take the Masa Yisraeli for six to seven days with all the extras for less than 300 shekels (\$82). But someone is paying for this [and they have] an agenda — they pay teachers and guides who have an explicit agenda.¹²⁰

The programme is indeed loaded with political messages that indoctrinate towards the ideology of the settler right-wing. For example, the Green Line is not marked

¹¹⁷ Bennett quoted in Y. Skop, 'Bennett Promises'.

¹¹⁸ Masa Yisraeli, 'About Us', *Masa Yisraeli Website*, <https://www.masaisraeli.co.il/?lang=en> [accessed 30 September 2018].

¹¹⁹ Masa Yisraeli, 'Our Journeys – Schools', *Masa Yisraeli Website*, <https://www.masaisraeli.co.il/schools/?lang=en> [accessed 30 September 2018].

¹²⁰ Interview conducted with Nati Stern in Tel Aviv, 5 February 2017.

on the map of the journey that each student receives. Thus, when students arrive at the Gush Etzion settlement, which is part of the journey, there is no acknowledgement of the fact that they have crossed the Green Line and are actually in the Occupied Territories.¹²¹

The government in Israel is also embarking on relatively new territory in its funding of Orthodox ‘missionary’ work — also known as *chazarah b’tshuva* or *Kiruv* work. However, as Journalist Judy Maltz explains, ‘many of these activities and programmes [...] omit any reference in their official material to Orthodox Judaism, preferring to define their mission as *kiruv levavot* — bringing together Jews from all walks of life’.¹²² This type of missionary work is often carried out by Garin Torani (Torah Seed) groups, which were formed by Rabbi Rahamim Nissimi and are run by the Shaalei Torah network.¹²³ As Rabbi Nissimi explained to the right-wing *Arutz Sheva* media group, ‘Shaalei Torah has been working for 25 years now to bring a strong population to the periphery, and to bring religious Zionism to the “social periphery”’, adding that, ‘the goal is to bring another 300 families to the “social periphery” by this summer [speaking in 2014], from Katzrin (in the Golan) to Tzfat [in the north] to the distant south’.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Molad, ‘Making Souls’, p. 14.

¹²² Maltz, ‘Why Israel Is Spending Millions’.

¹²³ Shaalim, from the foundation of Shaalei Torah, is a nation-wide network which serves as a pioneer of the renewed Zionism. Rabbi Nissimi is a settler rabbi born in Sderot and is also a member of Habayit Hayehudi. He was convicted of blocking roads during protests against the 2005 disengagement from Gaza.

¹²⁴ M. Miskin, ‘Developing Israel’s “Social Periphery”’, *Arutz Sheva*, 13 February 2014, <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/177429> [accessed 27 September 2018].

The Garin Torani movement is funded by government ministries controlled by Habayit Hayehudi and is thus also both religiously and politically motivated.¹²⁵ The majority of the organisation's funding has come from the Housing and Agriculture Ministries — both of which have been run by Uri Ariel of Habayit Hayehudi. These ministries are also 'working to enlarge the budget for these seed groups' which they want to include in the government's annual budget.¹²⁶ Ariel's support for the movement is clear, as demonstrated by his comments to *Arutz Sheva* news: 'you can't imagine how much the religious "seed groups" add to a city. Israel needs to open its eyes'.¹²⁷ The Garin Torani movement, which began in the 1980s, has experienced considerable growth over the past few years, and has worked to encourage an increasing number of young Orthodox Israelis to move together to form groups in urban areas with the intention of operating religious, social and educational programmes.¹²⁸ Member of Knesset Moti Yogev of Habayit Hayehudi describes their mission as 'very Zionist and very complicated'.¹²⁹

The Religious Affairs Ministry's Jewish Identity Administration also places 'Jewish Identity coordinators' in community centres in the areas where Torah Seed groups operate. The programme was established during the 2013 to 2015 government, in

¹²⁵ Maltz, 'Why Israel Is Spending Millions'.

¹²⁶ B. Baruch, 'Mayors Want Religious People to Move to Their Cities', *Arutz Sheva*, 7 July 2017, <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/232675> [accessed 27 September 2018].

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Maltz, 'Why Israel Is Spending Millions'.

¹²⁹ M. Cohen, 'Garin Torani Members Spread "Hanukkah Joy" in Lod', *Arutz Sheva*, 18 December 2014, <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/188803> [accessed 27 September 2018].

which Bennett was, among other roles, the Minister of Religious Services.¹³⁰ The programme operates in partnership with the Orthodox Ohr Torah Stone Association and is designed primarily to target secular Jews. The municipality of Tel Aviv ceased collaborating with the Jewish Identity Administration's 'Jewish Identity coordinators' in November 2016, citing concern about the close alignment of the programme's coordinator with Habayit Hayehudi. As Michael Gitzen of Meretz has commented, the programme does not provide 'an open space for dialogue on Jewish identity, but rather a system of political indoctrination that comes to influence the formal and informal secular education system'.¹³¹ The existence of such programmes highlights further the fact that Bennett's promotion of Jewish identity in schools is not simply a promotion of Jewish values but part of a much wider and more sinister campaign to instil the notion of Jewish superiority within Israeli society and consequentially increase the divisions that already exist within the country.

Conclusion

My analysis of outside religious organisations operating in state secular schools to deliver the new enhanced Jewish studies curriculum, and the responses that such ideological initiatives spark, has further highlighted the polarisation of public discourse in Israel over the increasing emphasis on religious and nationalistic values in these schools that underpins the push to strengthen 'Jewish identity'. I

¹³⁰ O. Kashti, 'Tel Aviv Declines Religious Affairs Ministry's "Jewish Identity Coordinators"', *Haaretz*, 20 November 2016, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-tel-aviv-declines-state-funded-jewish-identity-coordinators-1.5464117> [accessed 30 September 2018].

¹³¹ Kashti, 'Tel Aviv Declines Religious Affairs Ministry's "Jewish Identity Coordinators"'.

have demonstrated how this emphasis reflects the political priorities of key individuals within the Ministry of Education — thus highlighting the increasing politicisation of Jewish values in state secular schools. Furthermore, through this analysis I have also uncovered how these developments impact and relate to the wider religionisation of Israeli society and why the education system is one of the most contentious and emotive areas affected by the religionisation process. This is evidenced most obviously in the responses from the secular public and parents who are working to defend the character of the state secular school system against the nationalistic religious political forces that control the Ministry of Education.

Conclusion

In Israel, (Orthodox) Jewish religion is increasingly becoming the predominant tool for attempts to procure and reinforce the younger generation's attachment to the state and the nation it represents, promoting an ideologically nationalistic approach to citizenship. This process increases the tension between national (religious) values and the fundamental principles of a democratic state. In order to understand the tensions that exist in Israeli society today, an understanding of the historical processes that have impacted on the region and its inhabitants is vital. My research thus began by examining the complex relationship between religion and nationalism that emerged along with the Zionist movement. The historical analysis provided in Chapters 2 and 3 is particularly important for understanding the current debates in Israeli society today concerning the relationship between the Jewish and democratic features of the state. As Chapter 2 shows, it was emancipation and the European Enlightenment that paved the way for the *Haskala* movement, which separated the national element of Jewish identity from its religious components. Whilst the Orthodox remained focused on the religious elements, there was now space for Zionism to emerge with its focus on Jewish nationalism. However, as my findings demonstrate, political Zionism increasingly came to rely on Jewish religious tradition and its symbols in order to gain the momentum needed to establish a state. Importantly, through building on my early analysis of political Zionism's use of 'religion' and 'the Bible' from the time the state was formed in 1948 — and before — I have revealed how the complex relationship between religion and Zionism has developed over the years, and most

significantly, how religion has come to be used in a particularly ideologically targeted way to promote a politically motivated religious and nationalistic ideology.

As my study has shown, some of the most rigorous and consistent attempts to promote this nationalist-religious ideology are to be found in the state secular education system — with the newly revised Jewish studies and civics curriculum serving as the primary vehicle to transmit this worldview. Programmes targeting state secular schools aimed at strengthening students' (Orthodox) Jewish identity, religious national service volunteers working in these schools to deliver extracurricular Jewish content, and the dramatic revisions to the core civics textbook, are just a few examples amongst the many I have identified in my research which demonstrate the ways in which the Ministry of Education has been working to promote its increasingly right-wing religious and nationalistic ideology. Government officials are nevertheless insistent that only minor changes, or rather, 'corrections', have been made to the curriculum in state secular schools.¹ However, the interview data I presented in Chapters 4 and 5 clearly refutes such claims — uncovering the Ministry of Education's strategy across the curriculum and the central drive by government officials to change the character of state secular education in Israel. Crucially, through my analysis of both civics and Jewish studies, I have succeeded in revealing how the most recent changes to the curriculum represent a concerted effort by key individuals within the Ministry of Education to shape state secular education to reflect a religious and nationalistic worldview.

¹ Interview conducted with Assaf Malach in Jerusalem, February 9 2017.

My research findings are particularly significant given that I was able to gather primary data on the subject whilst events were unfolding. Guided by three main research questions, my study set about exploring the following: 1. The relationship in Israel between education and religious radicalism/extremism; 2. The extent to which religious education in Israel is used as a vehicle for promoting the political/ideological agendas of right-wing parties and 3. The responses and reactions to ideologically-fuelled educational initiatives. In the course of this, my research has also succeeded in revealing the following, which will be summarised below:

- Education's role in highlighting the divide between religious and secular Jews in Israel, as well as the increasingly explicit role of religion in Israeli society more widely.
- The growing influence and significant impact of political ideologies on the education system in Israel — specifically the increasing politicisation of religious values in state secular schools.
- The significant gaps in opinions between those involved in formulating education policy/curriculum and practitioners working in the field with regard to the agenda driving the Ministry of Education.

The semi-structured interviews I conducted provided a flexible and adaptable way of gathering insights about the key issues under investigation. Indeed, the interviews proved to be an extremely effective way of gathering cutting-edge accounts of the current controversies and tensions within Israeli society, including how these impacted on daily life and, importantly, how they were viewed by

individuals on the ground. Whilst recruiting participants to take part in my study was one of the most challenging aspects of my research, the process was certainly worthwhile and my perseverance was greatly rewarded. I succeeded in securing interviews with particularly significant figures from the highest echelons of the Ministry of Education and academia, as well as from key organisations, and principals and teachers delivering the curriculum in schools. I was exceptionally pleased with how well the interviews went and with the rich data I was able to gather. Indeed, if I could change anything about the research, I would have spent more time researching in the field. The interviewees were incredibly generous and open with the information they were willing to share — for which I am exceptionally grateful. Whilst transcribing the interviews was a particularly time-consuming process, it was also extremely worthwhile. Having a written record of all the interviews allowed for an in-depth, detailed analysis of the data and facilitated the identification of common themes — which could then be compared to themes identified in the primary and secondary written sources. This enabled me to undertake a thorough examination of the key issues under investigation — applying triangulation to enhance the overall rigour of my research. Given the significance of my initial findings and the continuing importance of the issues investigated, a key area for future research would be to include students' own views on the situation in order to gain further insights from an alternative angle, and to measure the impact that the most recent changes are having on students' notions of citizenship, democracy and Jewish identity.

Given that history speaks as much to the present and the future as it does about the past, my study combines contemporary fieldwork with historical research in order to highlight how current events in Israel are shaped by historical narratives. Whilst the historical research informed my analysis of education policies for their wider social and political significance — highlighting in particular how the changing socio-political situation in Israel over the years has impacted on the approaches to teaching both civics and Jewish studies — the contemporary fieldwork enabled me to provide an up-to-date picture of the complex social situation that exists in Israel today.

Significantly, through applying this approach my study has also provided a fresh examination of (ostensibly) secular Zionism's complex and unresolved relationship with Jewish religion as a prelude to the religionisation (*hadata*) process that is currently taking place in Israeli society.² Indeed, my study has succeeded in highlighting how the current debate in Israeli society over the character of democracy — civic or ethnic — is rooted in questions raised by the classical Zionist figures in the formative years of the Zionist movement. The historical analysis demonstrated how the tensions between religious and secular motivations intensified with the formation of the state in 1948 — and have continued to be a source of controversy, to varying degrees, throughout Israel's history. Crucially, however, my research has revealed how the unresolved tensions between religious and secular elements of Jewish identity have been replaced by the subjugation of the secular to the religious — to the point where official state ideology, as

² Y. Yadgar, 'The Need for an Epistemological Turn', *Israel Studies Review*, 27.1 (2012), 27-30.

promoted in schools, strives to anchor Jewish Israeli identity exclusively in (Orthodox) religiosity.

Whilst the re-writing of the core civics book began in 2011 during Gideon Sa'ar's term as Minister of Education, and the new Jewish studies programme was initiated by his successor, Shai Piron in 2013, their introduction into schools came only shortly after I began my own research project — and the controversy that ensued proved quite remarkable. My research was thus gifted a unique opportunity to gather testimonies from teachers, academics, Ministry of Education officials, journalists and politicians, which enabled me to provide an original analysis of how developments have impacted the situation on the ground as well as the motives driving them.

It was April 2016 when the new 'Jewish-Israeli Culture' programme for state secular schools was announced by Naftali Bennett, with the aim of strengthening Jewish Israeli culture from a young age.³ However, it is clear from the analysis I have presented above that when Bennett spoke of Jewish values and strengthening Jewish identity, he was referring to national-religious and Orthodox Judaism, meaning a lack of support for pluralist organisations which offer content on secular Jewish culture or critical perspectives of Jewish history.⁴ As journalist Or Kashti explains, 'the Torah Culture Department's sponsorship of the [Jewish Identity] centres' activities in non-religious state schools reflects top Education

³ Bennett was fired from his post as Minister of Education in June 2019. See below for further details.

⁴ A. Eldar, 'How Education Became an Israeli Political Tool', *Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East*, 28 April 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/04/naftali-bennett-public-education-system-judaism-Orthodox-1.html> [accessed 29 May 2018].

Ministry officials' view that instruction in "values" and "tradition" should be conducted by private, mainly Orthodox Jewish organisations operating with minimal oversight'.⁵ Indeed, Bennett — who sought to build political power by disseminating nationalist, fundamentalist sentiments — appeared determined to advance national-religious doctrine over democratic values in the Israeli education system.⁶ As evidenced throughout my study, this religious and nationalistic approach to education is part of the wider religionisation process that is currently taking place in Jewish Israeli society.

The intense negative reactions that the most recent curriculum developments have elicited from secular parents and educators is testament to the magnitude of the changes taking place, with concerns reflected in the increasingly polarised public debate on the issues involved. Thus, not only have I witnessed the gradually rising process of religionisation taking place in state secular schools, but also the formation of a vociferous opposition from the secular camp. As the interviews I conducted confirmed, the strength of feeling that the curriculum changes have generated is particularly strong and have inspired much more direct action from the secular public than has been seen before. As noted, the Secular Forum, which was established to protect Israel's secular culture, is now working specifically to combat the strengthening of religious elements in state secular schools. Parents have even taken it upon themselves to fight against the involvement of religious organisations in their children's state secular schools in Tel-Aviv and Givatayim — succeeding in limiting the activities provided by these groups. However, in a final

⁵ Kashti, 'Habayit Hayehudi's Jewish Education Arm in Israel's Secular Schools'.

⁶ Eldar, 'How Education Became an Israeli Political Tool'.

imposition on the secular school system, Bennett removed one of the only remaining protections that parents had against the activities of outside religious organisations in these schools — seemingly attempting to ensure his efforts to strengthen Jewish religious identity amongst secular students continues long into the future. This move involved cancelling the existing requirement upon schools to inform parents when religious organisations would be providing educational activities in the school and, crucially, advising that it is not compulsory for students to participate.⁷

Whilst recognising that education in Israel, as elsewhere, will be used to some extent to promote nationalism and instil students with ideological beliefs that uphold the legitimacy of the state, the need to utilise education to maintain a democratic society must also be recognised. As former Minister of Education Yuli Tamir notes, ‘education is [...] crucial to prepare individuals to take part in both realms of discourse — the civic and the national’.⁸ The challenge is thus ensuring that there is a balance between the promotion of particularistic (Jewish) principles and the universalistic (democratic) principles of the state. In Israel, however, reaching agreement on how to achieve this balance is particularly challenging given the ongoing and intense debate around the relationship between the Jewish and

⁷ The decision was made unilaterally on the very day that the Knesset dissolved itself following the election that was held in April 2019 (see below for further details), without any public discussion or possibility of appealing the action. Bennett’s reasoning for eliminating the requirement was apparently to ensure that the data of parents and students is not passed to these organisations — despite the fact that it was the responsibility of the schools to inform parents, not the organisations providing the activities. O. Kashti, ‘Israeli Education Ministry Secretly Eased Religious Groups’ Access Inside Secular Schools’, *Haaretz*, 11 August 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-education-ministry-secretly-eased-religious-groups-access-to-secular-schools-1.7657284> [accessed 29 August 2019].

⁸ Y. Tamir, ‘Democracy, Nationalism and Education’, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 24.1 (1992), 17-27 (p. 24).

democratic features of the state, as well as the competing conceptions of citizenship that exist in Israel — reflected in the growing divide between religious and secular sections of Israeli society. Analysis of the divergent visions of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, which shape Israel's social and political culture, has thus formed another crucial element of my research. Using the school system as a microcosm and a lens through which to understand better such divisions has enabled me to make a truly innovative contribution to the field.

The wide range of responses I gathered from my interviews with key individuals involved in education, from both sides of the political spectrum — left and right — and across the religious divide, were particularly important in uncovering the ideological and religious tensions that are simmering below the surface in Israel. Significantly, my interview data revealed how the public debate surrounding the most recent developments in the Jewish studies and civics curriculum reflect (and have the potential to impact) the growing divide between religious and secular sections of Israeli society. Furthermore, as a result of my choice to study the two subjects in the school curriculum that are most obviously connected with the definition of Israeli collective identity, my research has also succeeded in highlighting the deep tensions that exist concerning the balance between Israel's Jewish and democratic identity, and how this is reflected in the controversy surrounding the increasing emphasis on religious and nationalistic values in state secular schools. Indeed, whereas existing research tends to deal with these subjects separately, my analysis of the two subjects together has enabled me to provide a more holistic analysis of the intersection between education, religion and

nationalism in Israel. The Ministry of Education's dual religious and political-nationalistic agenda that I found to be promoted in Israel's state secular schools was confirmed recently with the introduction of a new term into the national lexicon — *hadlata* — to highlight the nationalistic elements that have also become a prominent part of the wider religionisation process.⁹

Crucially, my research has succeeded in demonstrating how the complex relationship between religion and nationalism in Israel has been exploited by the Ministry of Education to introduce religious and nationalistic policies that reflect the ideological agendas of right-wing parties. Given the political and ideological aspects inherent in civics, as well as Jewish studies, both of these subjects are particularly susceptible to being exploited for ideological purposes — transmitting exclusive religious and political narratives that promote ideas, attitudes and behaviours that can encourage the development extremist ideas.¹⁰ Thus, whilst education is increasingly being recognised in academia as a potential tool to prevent extremism, my study has demonstrated how education could in fact encourage extremist ideas when it is exploited for political and ideological purposes.¹¹ As my analysis in Chapter 5 revealed, outside religious (Orthodox) organisations operating in state secular schools, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, are using education to indoctrinate young minds with what some

⁹ *Hadlata*, is an acronym which adds the element of *leumi* (national) to the term *hadata* (religionisation). N. Brenner Samia, 'Israeli Schools Teach Pro-settler Religious Nationalism Is the Only Way to Be Jewish', *Haaretz*, 31 October 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-how-israeli-schools-teach-religious-nationalism-as-the-only-way-to-be-jewish-1.8061651> [accessed 9 November 2019].

¹⁰ A. Halafoff, K. Lam and G. Bouma, 'Worldviews Education: Cosmopolitan Peacebuilding and Preventing Violent Extremism', *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 40.3 (2019), 381-395.

¹¹ R. Ghosh and others, 'Can Education Counter Violent Religious Extremism?', *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, 23.2 (2017), 117-133.

parents see as extremist ideology under the pretext of religious belief/values. These organisations conflate religious instruction with right-wing nationalistic ideology, promoting ethnocentrism and creating an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mindset that encourages religious extremism. Pluralistic, democratic and liberal values are seemingly being pushed aside, with the curriculum veering toward indoctrination and in turn working to produce the next generation of religiously and politically radicalised individuals. Indeed, many of the practitioners I interviewed expressed deep concern about the level of indoctrination in the new Jewish studies and civics curriculum and, crucially, the lack of space for developing critical thinking in schools — a tool which is vital in preventing the development of extremist ideologies.¹² This is particularly concerning as recent initiatives, also evidenced in my research, demonstrate that the Ministry of Education seems to ‘view critical thinking and openness to different opinions as negative, even bordering on treasonous’, with the government’s oversight and supervision of left-wing organisations tightening in a further effort to suppress freedom of thought and civic/cultural activity.¹³ The need for further research in this area is therefore also important as education in Israel remains a battleground for religious, political and

¹² Smith, ‘Education and Conflict’, pp. 19-32; Ghosh and others, ‘Can Education Counter Violent Religious Extremism?’, 117-133; H. Raihani, ‘A Whole-School Approach: A Proposal for Education for Tolerance in Indonesia’, *Theory and Research in Education*, 9.1 (2011), 23-39; J. Liht and S. Savage, ‘Preventing Violent Extremism through Value Complexity: Being Muslim Being British’, *Journal of Strategic Security*, 6.4 (2013), 44-66; L. Davies, ‘Educating against Extremism: Towards a Critical Politicisation of Young People’, *International Review of Education*, 55.2 (2009), 183-203.

¹³ *Haaretz* Editorial, ‘Independent Public Education’, *Haaretz*, 26 May 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/independent-public-education-1.7284498> [accessed 29 May 2019]. As noted, there is, however, no attempt to place similar control on right-wing religious organisations operating in state secular schools, with their involvement increasing exponentially during Bennett’s tenure as Minister of Education.

ideological movements determined to instil their particular views on the next generation.

In an attempt to protect against such ideological agendas being imposed on state secular school, a national council has even been established to defend the secular nature of these schools, demonstrating further the growing concern at the extent and potential impact of such influences. Founded in June 2019, the National Education Council intends to work to defend state secular schools from 'religious and ultra-nationalist driven interference by the Education Ministry' and to 'guide schools toward democratic, humanistic and liberal values'.¹⁴ The more specific goals driving this group of activist educators include the ability to help set the curriculum for state secular education and for the latter to be offered the same protection from interference by government ministers as state religious education. The group is thus seeking educational autonomy for state secular schools, including an independent pedagogic council.¹⁵ There is clearly a vital need for schools to educate towards an inclusive democratic worldview that promotes unity and celebrates diversity in order to reduce societal tensions. As highlighted in Chapter 2, former State Comptroller Joseph Shapira called for urgent action from the Ministry of Education to combat racism among Israeli youth and promote coexistence.¹⁶

¹⁴ O. Kashti, 'Israel Finds National Council to Defend Secular Schools', *Haaretz*, 26 June 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-finds-national-council-to-defend-secular-schools-1.7410811> [accessed 29 June 2019].

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Shapira, 'Education for a Shared Society and Prevention of Racism'.

Bennett's tenure as Minister of Education began only a short time after I had embarked on the present study and his departure, by happenstance, has coincided with its conclusion. As I conclude this study, the political situation in Israel remains fraught following an unprecedented cycle of inconclusive elections — during which time Rafi Peretz was appointed by Netanyahu as the interim Minister of Education in place of Bennett.¹⁷ Like Bennett before him, Peretz denied there is any attempt to increase religious influence in state secular schools.¹⁸ He also continued the tradition of double-speak used by Education Ministers to conceal their interference in state secular schools, declaring that he would be the Minister of Education 'for all the children of Israel', whilst at the same time announcing plans to give every student a Bible during a special ceremony at the Western Wall in Jerusalem and promising that the next generation will be 'loyal sons who will serve in the army and do everything in the most moral way possible'.¹⁹

Education is clearly tied closely to politics in Israel, with educational policies constrained by the ideological tendencies of the party in charge of the Ministry of Education. It is thus individuals from the national religious parties that consistently vie for control of the Ministry of Education — aware of the potential this precious

¹⁷ Peretz was appointed Minister of Education on 17 June 2019 after Bennett was fired from the post in an interim government cabinet reshuffle earlier that month. Bennett had already left Habayit Hayehudi, along with Ayelet Shaked, to form the new right-wing party, Hayamin Hehadash (The New Right) in December 2018. Peretz replaced Bennett as leader of Habayit Hayehudi. C. Levinson and Y. Berger, 'Political Drama: Senior Israeli Ministers Launch New Right-Wing Party', *Haaretz*, 30 December 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/ministers-bennett-and-shaked-to-announce-formation-of-new-party-1.6788899> [accessed 29 June 2019].

¹⁸ *Haaretz* Editorial, 'Israel's New Education Minister Warns Country Is Becoming Too Secular', *Haaretz*, 19 June 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israel-s-new-education-minister-warns-country-is-becoming-too-secular-1.7393373> [accessed 29 June 2019].

¹⁹ *Haaretz* Editorial, 'Religion, Not Statesmanship', *Haaretz*, 20 June 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/religion-not-statesmanship-1.7395199> [accessed 30 June 2019].

institution has to change the character of the future generation of the State of Israel, in line with their religious and nationalistic ideology. This was reflected in Peretz's motivation for approving an extended programme of trips to the West Bank. As Peretz explained, 'in order for couples to move here [to the Occupied Territories] when they're 30 years old, we need young people at 16 to visit here . . . that is the way we will build another new step to the settlement project'.²⁰ This sentiment is particularly concerning given that education is one of the most powerful mechanisms available to change fundamental attitudes in society. Indeed, my study has also highlighted the scale of the changes Education Ministers are able to impose on state secular schools and the impact that recent changes are having on society more widely, as the ethno-national characteristics of the state are increasingly being promoted in schools ahead of a democratic political culture and intensifying the divide between religious and secular sections of Israeli society. This trend clearly poses a threat for the future quality of Israel's democracy, with implications not only for relations between religious and secular sections of Israeli society but for the wider conflict in the region — thus highlighting the significance of the subject for the study of relations between social and ethnic groups more widely.²¹ Indeed, whilst the focus of my study is on Israel, the analysis is also relevant in informing similar processes in other international/political contexts.

²⁰ Brenner Samia, 'Israeli Schools Teach Pro-settler Religious Nationalism Is the Only Way to Be Jewish'.

²¹ Halafoff, Lam and Bouma, 'Worldviews Education', p. 390; The Editors, 'Bangladesh Tries to Bridge the Divide Between Secular and Islamic Schooling', *World Politics Review*, 15 September 2017, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/23158/bangladesh-tries-to-bridge-the-divide-between-secular-and-islamic-schooling> [accessed 14 October 2019]; The Editors, 'Why Education is at the Heart of Tensions over Dutch Multiculturalism', *World Politics Review*, 15 September 2017, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/23236/why-education-is-at-the-heart-of-tensions-over-dutch-multiculturalism> [accessed 14 October 2019].

This applies not only to those conflict-affected societies already highlighted — such as Turkey, Pakistan and India²² — but also to countries across Europe where right-wing populism is on the rise.²³ In these regions, where religion is still a significant factor in identity politics — regulated by the state through education — nationalist leaders are implementing their own systematic policies of exclusion.²⁴ The issues I explore in the Israeli context are therefore relevant in a variety of other contexts as unequal power relations continue to pervade societies throughout the world.

My research has highlighted the meaningful connections that exist between increased religiosity and intensified nationalism, and certain anti-democratic attitudes — clearly demonstrating the threats to Israeli democracy posed by the religious and nationalistic drive in education, as the ideology promoted works to downgrade the democratic features of the state, emphasising instead the particularistic elements of Jewish identity.²⁵ The tension between the Jewish and democratic features of the state was expressed most recently at government level with the passing of the ‘nation state’ law (Basic Law: Israel – The Nation State of

²² The situation in India is particularly pertinent given the new Citizenship Amendment Bill, which makes religious faith a condition of citizenship — ultimately working to exclude Muslim minorities from claiming citizenship.

²³ Examples of European countries where right-wing nationalism is on the rise include: Italy, with Matteo Salvini, who remains a key figure in Europe's nationalist scene despite the collapse of his ruling coalition with the anti-establishment Five Star Movement in August, 2019; Spain, which has seen the sudden rise of the far-right Vox party; Austria, where The Freedom Party (FPÖ) became the only far-right party in power in Western Europe when it joined a coalition with conservative Chancellor Sebastian Kurz in 2017; Sweden, where the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats (SD) made significant gains in the 2018 general election, winning about 18% of the vote. BBC News, ‘Europe and Right-Wing Nationalism: A Country-by-Country Guide’, 13 November 2019, *BBC News Online*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36130006> [accessed 15 November 2019].

²⁴ Zambeta, ‘Religion and National Identity in Greek Education’, p. 146.

²⁵ S. Fischer, ‘Yes, Israel is Becoming More Religious’, *Israel Studies Review*, 27.1 (2012), 10-15 (p. 14).

the Jewish People).²⁶ Most significantly, in relation to the present discussion it has also been announced by the Ministry of Education that knowledge of three clauses from the 'nation state' law will now be required for students to pass the civics matriculation exam, whilst the concept of a multicultural state will not be studied for the next two years at least.²⁷ This is yet another sign that the civics curriculum will remain a key tool used to express the political priorities of the Ministry of Education. A significant area for future research is therefore an examination of the more long-term impacts the politically-driven religious and nationalistic interference in the state secular education system will likely affect. As Tel Aviv's secularly-minded Mayor Ron Huldai declared recently, 'we cannot be silent when the educational system is being enlisted to undermine Israeli democracy'.²⁸

The school system in Israel has increasingly emphasised the need to promote national solidarity and Zionist values, rather than promoting the democratic features of the state. However, as education remains the primary mechanism for the socialisation and disciplining of populations, as well as an instrument for creating social change, it must also be acknowledged as a potential tool to reduce conflict and encourage peaceful coexistence in the region — rather than maintaining the status quo, which encourages the persistence of longstanding prejudices. Nevertheless, with a new unity government now finally in place and

²⁶ As noted, the controversial law states, for example, that only Jews have the right of self-determination in the country.

²⁷ O. Kashti, 'Israel's Civics Exam to Require Students to Memorize Controversial Nation-State Law', *Haaretz*, 26 October 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-s-civics-exam-to-require-students-to-memorize-controversial-nation-state-law-1.8029077> [accessed 30 October 2019].

²⁸ O. Kashti, 'Tel Aviv Mayor: Education Ministry Using Schools in Battle against Democracy', *Haaretz*, 27 June 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/tel-aviv-mayor-education-ministry-using-schools-in-battle-against-democracy-1.7413777> [accessed 29 June 2019].

Yoav Gallant (Likud) announced as the new Minister of Education, state secular education remains in a vulnerable position.²⁹ Given that Gallant supports annexation of the West Bank, considers settlements to be the new Zionism of the twenty-first century and believes that Israel's existence 'is based on the strength of the biblical forefathers', it appears that state secular schools will continue to be used to inculcate religious and nationalistic values, rather than highlighting the country's democratic and universal principles.³⁰ State secular education in Israel thus looks set to remain a key site for the battle between religious-nationalists and secular liberals.

²⁹ The new unity government was formed by current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former political rival Benny Gantz (head of Kahol Lavon) following the third inconclusive election (March 2020) and was sworn in on 17 May 2020. Netanyahu will continue as Prime Minister for the next eighteen months followed by Gantz who will serve as Prime Minister for the following eighteen months. Agreements have already been reached by the new government on bringing proposals to annex large parts of the West Bank to a cabinet vote. The struggle to maintain the 'democratic' within Israel's 'Jewish-democratic' character thus continues and the threats to Israeli democracy loom large. C. Levinson, 'Netanyahu, Gantz Sign Coalition Deal to Form Government', *Haaretz*, 20 April 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/elections/.premium-gantz-netanyahu-expected-to-sign-coalition-deal-on-monday-evening-1.8783533> [accessed 21 April 2020]; C. Levinson and J. Lis, 'Netanyahu, Gantz Agree on West Bank Annexation Proposal as Unity Deal Nears', *Haaretz*, 6 April 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/elections/.premium-netanyahu-gantz-agree-on-west-bank-annexation-as-unity-deal-nears-1.8745742> [accessed 7 April 2020]

³⁰ T. Lazaroff, 'Yoav Gallant Dismisses Palestinian State, Calls to Annex West Bank', 13 January 2019, *The Jerusalem Post*, <https://www.jpost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/yoav-galant-dismisses-palestinian-state-calls-to-annex-west-bank-577237> [accessed 21 April 2020].

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Appendices

Appendix A

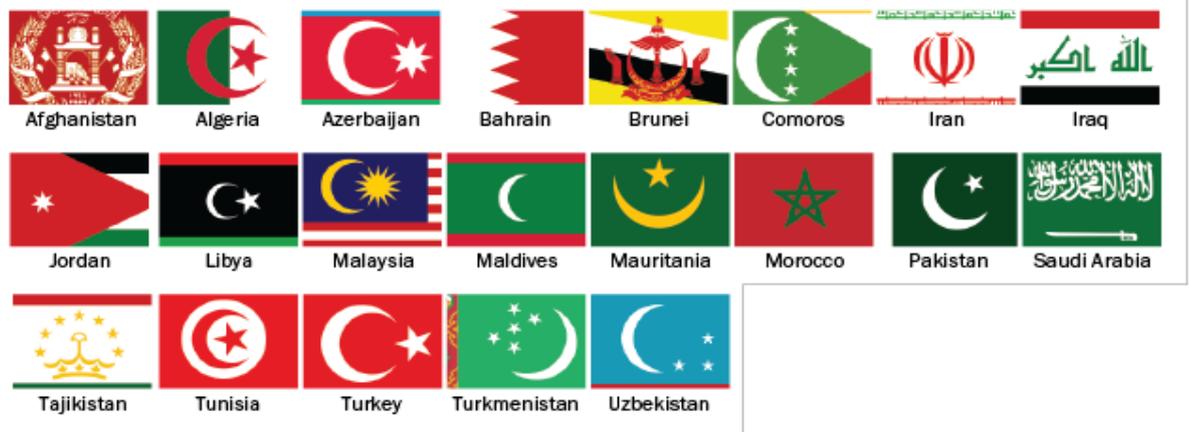
Religious Symbols on National Flags

A third of 196 countries worldwide have religious imagery in their flags.

Christianity: 31



Islam: 21



Other Religions: 6



Hinduism/Buddhism: 3



Buddhism: 2



Judaism: 1



Sources: constitute-project.org; CIA World Factbook; official country-specific government websites; Wikimedia Commons (flags). Some flags are cropped to highlight the religious symbols.

Appendix B

Israel Ministry of Education – List of Ministers				
Government Number	Term Start	Term End	Minister of Education and Culture	Political Party
1	10 March 1949	1 November 1950	Zalman Shazar	Mapai
2	1 November 1950	19 May 1951	David Remez (died)	Mapai
3	19 May 1951	8 October 1951	David Ben-Gurion	Mapai
3,4,5,6	8 October 1951	3 November 1955	Ben-Zion Dinur	Mapai
7,8,9	3 November 1955	10 May 1960	Zalman Aran	Mapai
9,10	3 August 1960	26 June 1963	Abba Eban	Mapai
11,12,13,14	26 June 1963	15 December 1969	Zalman Aran	Mapai, Alignment
15,16	15 December 1969	3 June 1974	Yigal Allon	Alignment
17	3 June 1974	20 June 1977	Aharon Yadlin	Alignment
18,19,20	20 June 1977	13 September 1984	Zevulun Hammer	National Religious Party
21,22,23	13 September 1984	15 March 1990	Yitzhak Navon	Alignment
24	11 June 1990	13 July 1992	Zevulun Hammer	National Religious Party
25	13 July 1992	11 May 1993	Shulamit Aloni	Meretz
25	11 May 1993	7 June 1993	Yitzhak Rabin	Labour
			Minister of Education, Culture and Sport	
25,26	3 May 1994	18 June 1996	Amnon Rubinstein	Meretz

27	18 June 1996	20 January 1998	Zevulun Hammer	National Religious Party
27	25 February 1998	6 July 1999	Yitzhak Levy	National Religious Party
			Minister of Education	
28	6 July 1999	24 June 2000	Yossi Sarid	Meretz
28	24 September 2000	7 March 2001	Ehud Barak	One Israel
			Minister of Education, Culture and Sport	
29,30	7 March 2001	14 January 2006	Limor Livnat	Likud
30	18 January 2006	4 May 2006	Meir Sheetrit	Kadima
			Minister of Education	
31	4 May 2006	31 March 2009	Yuli Tamir	Labour
32	31 March 2009	18 March 2013	Gideon Sa'ar	Likud
33	18 March 2013	4 December 2014	Shai Piron	Yesh Atid
34	4 May 2015	4 June 2019	Naftali Bennett	Habayit Hayehudi Hayamin Hehadash
34	23 June 2019	17 May 2020	Rafi Peretz	Habayit Hayehudi Ichud Leumi
35	17 May 2019		Yoav Gallant	Likud

Appendix C



Delegate Card at the First Zionist Congress, Basle, 1897 (DD1\1).



Max Bodenheimer's Delegate Card at the Second Zionist Congress, Basle, 1898 (A15\1).



Third Zionist Congress Invitation, Basle, 1899 (DD1\8).



Postcard of the Fourth Zionist Congress, London, 1900 (A150\3).



Max Bodenheimer's Delegate Card at the Fourth Zionist Congress, London, 1900 (A15\1).



Postcard of the Fourth Zionist Congress, London, 1900 (DD1\7).



Postcard of the Fifth Zionist Congress, Basle, 1901 (DD1\5).



Max Bodenheimer's Delegate Card at the Sixth Zionist Congress, Basle, 1903 (A15\1\4).



Seventh Zionist Congress Invitation — First Congress after Herzl's Death, Basle, 1905 (A150\3).¹

¹ World Zionist Organisation, 'The Zionist Congresses', *World Zionist Organisation: The Central Zionist Archives (Online)*, <http://www.zionistarchives.org.il/en/Pages/DelegateCards.aspx> [accessed 29 November 2019].

Appendix D

Governments of Israel				
Government Number	Date	Prime Minister	Political Party	Coalition Government
1	10 March 1949	David Ben-Gurion	Mapai	Left, Centre, Religious
2	1 November 1950	David Ben-Gurion	Mapai	Left, Centre, Religious
3	8 October 1951	David Ben-Gurion	Mapai	Left, Religious
4	24 December 1952	David Ben-Gurion	Mapai	Left, Centre
5	26 January 1954	Moshe Sharett	Mapai	Left, Centre
6	29 June 1955	Moshe Sharett	Mapai	Left, Centre, Religious
7	3 November 1955	David Ben-Gurion	Mapai	Left, Centre
8	7 January 1958	David Ben-Gurion	Mapai	Left, Centre,
9	17 December 1959	David Ben-Gurion	Mapai	Left, Centre, Religious
10	2 November 1961	David Ben-Gurion	Mapai	Left, Religious
11	26 June 1963	Levi Eshkol	Mapai	Left, Religious
12	22 December 1964	Levi Eshkol	Mapai	Left, Religious
13	12 January 1966	Levi Eshkol	Mapai	Left, Religious
14	17 March 1969	Golda Meir	Mapai	Left, Religious
15	15 December 1969	Golda Meir	Mapai	Left, Religious
16	10 March 1974	Golda Meir	Labour	Left, Religious
17	3 June 1974	Yitzhak Rabin	Labour	Left, Religious
18	20 June 1977	Menachem Begin	Likud	Right, Centre, Religious
19	5 August 1981	Menachem Begin	Likud	Right, Centre, Religious
20	10 November 1983	Yitzhak Shamir	Likud	Right, Centre, Religious

21	13 September 1984	Shimon Peres	Labour	Left, Right, Religious
22	22 October 1986	Yitzhak Shamir	Likud	Right, Left, Religious
23	22 December 1988	Yitzhak Shamir	Likud	Right, Left, Religious
24	11 June 1990	Yitzhak Shamir	Likud	Right, Religious
25	13 July 1992	Yitzhak Rabin	Labour	Left, Religious
26	22 November 1995	Shimon Peres	Labour	Left
27	18 June 1996	Benjamin Netanyahu	Likud	Right, religious
28	6 July 1999	Ehud Barak	One Israel	Left, Centre, religious
29	7 March 2001	Ariel Sharon	Likud	Right, Left, Centre, Religious
30	28 February 2003	Ariel Sharon	Likud	Right, Centre, Religious
31	4 May 2006	Ehud Olmert	Kadima	Centre, Left, Religious
32	31 March 2009	Benjamin Netanyahu	Likud	Right, Left, Religious
33	31 March 2013	Benjamin Netanyahu	Likud	Right, Left, Religious
34	6 May 2015 9 April 2019	Benjamin Netanyahu	Likud	Right, Religious
35	17 May 2020	Benjamin Netanyahu	Likud Kahol Lavan	Right, Centre, Religious

Main Left-Wing Parties: Ahdut Ha'avoda, Alignment, Labour, Mapai, Mapam, Meretz, One Israel, Rafi, Ratz.

Main Centre Parties: Centre Party, Dash, General Zionists, Israel Ba'aliya, Kadima, Kahol Lavan, Liberals, Progressives, Shinui, Telem, The Third Way, Yahad.

Main Religious Parties: Agudat Israel, Degel Hatorah, Hapoel Hamizrachi, National Religious Party, Po'alei Agudat Israel, Shas, Tami, United Religious Front, United Torah Judaism.

Main Right-Wing Parties: Herut, Likud, Moledet, Tehiya, Tsomet, Ichud Leumi, Yisrael Beitenu, Habayit Hayehudi.