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Between Secularity and Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Cultural Conflict between Hilonim and Haredim and Its Impact on Israel's Cultural Security

Między sekularyzmem a ultraortodoksją. Konflikt kulturowy pomiędzy Chilonim a Charedim i jego wpływ na bezpieczeństwo kulturowe Izraela

• Abstract •

This study deals with the dispute between secular Jews (*Hilonim*) and Orthodox Jews (*Haredim*) that is taking place in Israel today. Because of its nature – it concerns values, lifestyles, religion, worldview, and identity issues – it can be categorised as a cultural conflict. They represent one of the most significant challenges to cultural security. The case of Israel is no different. This paper looks closely at the determinants of the dispute between Haredim and Hilonim and the critical issues at stake. The discussion is placed in the context of Israel's major cultural security issues.

• Abstrakt •

Niniejszy artykuł dotyczy sporu między świeckimi Żydami (*Chilonim*) a Żydami ortodoksyjnymi (*Charedim*), który ma miejsce obecnie w Izraelu. Ze względu na swój charakter – dotyczy bowiem wartości, stylu życia, religii, światopoglądu i kwestii tożsamościowych – można go zakwalifikować jako konflikt kulturowy. Tego typu konflikty stanowią jedno z najważniejszych wyzwań dla bezpieczeństwa kulturowego. Nie inaczej jest w przypadku Izraela. W tekście uwaga koncentruje się na determinantach sporu między Charedim i Chilonim oraz krytycznych kwestiach, które wchodzą w grę w tym przypadku. Dyskusja została umieszczona w kontekście głównych kwestii bezpieczeństwa kulturowego Izraela.

Introduction

In research on state security, much attention is paid to its military and political dimensions. However, cultural issues are also crucial to the security (Han, 2014, p. 1). That is because culture is the bonding and integrating factor of a state, it is one of the elements of national identity (Krasivskyy & Pidberezhnyk, 2021, p. 472), and it also influences its international image. It is also valuable for building a state's power and influence in the international arena. For social groups such as nations and ethnic and cultural minorities, culture is a fundamental cohesive factor, and their survival depends on preserving cultural identification and heritage. History is replete with examples of countries that did not survive due to a lack of shared identity among citizens, cultural differences and conflicts, and nations that survived without a state thanks to their culture. The latter includes the Jewish nation. Today, having its state, it faces numerous security challenges, including those in the area of cultural security. These include the growing conflict between the *Haredi*[1] and *Hiloni*[2] communities, which can be described as a cultural conflict. This paper aims to analyse the relationship between Orthodox and secular Jews, identify the most critical interfaces that allow the conflict between them to be defined as cultural and outline the relevant dividing axes affecting Israel's cultural security.

The study proposes the following basic research hypotheses:

- The tension between *Hilonim* and *Haredim* is one of the most serious conflicts threatening Israel's cultural security.
- Due to the dominant lines of conflict, it can be categorised as a cultural conflict.
- The intensity of the dispute between secular and ultra-Orthodox Jews cannot be expected to decrease in the near future.

These are complemented by the following research hypotheses/side hypotheses:

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[1] The term *Haredi* (Hebrew חרדים) or *Haredim* (plural) comes from Hebrew and means "fearing God" or "trembling before God".

[2] *Hiloni* (Hebrew חִלּוֹנִי) or *Hilonim* (plural) is a Hebrew term used to name secular Jews.

- The nationalism of the Zionist movement has become the new glue of the Jewish community somehow displacing Judaism and its previous role for Jewish self-identification.
- The emergence of the State of Israel gave rise to the challenge of reconciling two inconsistent values – Jewish spirituality and the values of Judaism, and Israeli citizenship and secularism.

The research questions accompanying the outlined hypotheses will address the following:

- What are the historical grounds for the differences between secular and ultra-Orthodox citizens of Israel?
- How and why was the *modus vivendi* between the secular state and *Haredim* established?
- What are the most significant levels of dispute?
- Which of these prompts the designation of this dispute as cultural?
- How does this dispute affect Israel's cultural security?
- Are there opportunities to merge the two identity profiles into one coherent model of Israel's cultural core?
- How do internal divisions among the ultra-Orthodox influence the formation of the political scene of the State of Israel?

The paper relies primarily on the historical method and, to some extent, uses institutional-legal analysis and quantitative methods. It is divided into three main sections: a theoretical chapter, a section presenting the historical background to the formation and characteristics of the two groups, including demographic issues, and a part devoted to describing the main points of contention.

The identity of the various sectoral groups in Israel has received relatively considerable attention from Israeli – and non-Israeli – scholars in the social sciences and humanities, and for this reason, the issue is relatively well described (Kosiorek, 2022; Picard, 2017). Considerable attention has also been paid to the Orthodox population living in the Diaspora (Don-Yehiya, 2005) and Israel (Munro, 2021, 2022). In addition to strictly identity issues, issues concerning the rights and obligations of *Haredim* in critical areas of social life are also addressed. This group is 'grossly' privileged due to the institutionalisation of religion in the state, which is highlighted in this context (Shafir & Peled, 2002). What is noticeable, however, is the scarcity of publications that are tempted to analyse this issue in the context of Israel's cultural security and as a cultural conflict. According to the authors, it is worthwhile to look at the dispute between *Hilonim* and *Haredim* from the perspective of a conflict over values, worldview and the place of religion in Israel because of the challenges it poses to various sectors of the security of the Israeli

state, including precisely cultural security. The authors, therefore, intend this text to fill this gap.

The article draws on the literature on *Haredim* and *Hilonim* in Israel. It was also valuable to use material from German, American or Israeli research centres dealing with international security issues and contemporary world trends, including the demographic context. Such centres include the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, the Pew Research Center, the Israel Democracy Institute and the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research. Academic journals that address identity issues in Israel are also a significant source base. These certainly include the "Israel Studies" or the "Journal of Jewish Languages" used in this article. The aggregation of the collected materials will help to verify the hypotheses and research questions outlined and will make it possible to analyse the main dividing axes affecting Israel's cultural security. It also seems desirable to situate and embed the dispute between Orthodox and secular Jews in the identity profile of the Jewish State, which is determined by different internal configurations of often conflicting parties. Primarily, they represent a different vision of the arrangement of inter-communal relations. This model is perfectly reflected in the scale of tensions between secular *Hilonim* and *Haredim*, which is very high. It seems reasonable to say that if it were not for the conflict with the Palestinians, this would be the most considerable area of contention in Israel.[3]

The idea of a Jewish State was a project pursued and supported primarily by secular representatives of that nation. Increasing numbers of Jews, the vast majority of whom were Zionists, were coming to the area of Palestine. It was in these lands that they wanted to build their own state. Nevertheless, a small representation of ultra-Orthodox had settled (or had previously lived) in the area. In order to persuade the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine to make a recommendation enabling the creation of a state, David Ben-Gurion decided to prepare a coherent and unified position of all Jewish circles. To convince the leaders of the *Agudat Israel* party of this idea, he promised guarantees regarding respect for such religious traditions as the observance of the Sabbath, the kosher principle, the application of *halakhic* law in matters of civil status and the autonomy of religious education

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[3] Opinion polls in 2013 show that nearly 72% of Jews consider the tension between Jews and Arabs high (only 3.3% define it as low). The perception of tension between the two extreme groups of Jews is very similar, i.e., 62.5% of *Hilonim* consider it high, and almost the same percentage of *Haredim* think the same (62.8%) (Hermann, 2013). The results of another poll are also telling. More than 33% of ultra-Orthodox Jews would be concerned if their neighbour was a Jew who did not celebrate the Sabbath, and nearly 32% of secular Jews would not want to live next door to a *Haredi* (Hermann, 2013).

(Stein, 2022). This agreement was an attempt to arrange relations between secular and religious Jews. However, it generated a great deal of controversy. Yoav Peled and Gershon Shafir have noted that the agreement adopted in 1947 developed four spaces of dispute:

a) The problem in defining a 'Jew';
b) Military service;
c) Civil law;
d) Religious education (Shafir & Peled, 2002).

Today the catalogue could be expanded by

e) Relationship to the democratic state.

Due to the requirements of the limited volume, the paper will only briefly outline the various components in dispute.

Definitional issues

Issues falling within the scope of cultural security have accompanied humankind since the dawn of time. However, the dynamic development of cultural security research only began in the last decades of the 20th century. That resulted from security studies recognising the impact of socio-cultural issues and the fact that its subject is not necessarily only the state but also individuals and social groups, including ethnic and cultural minorities. Pioneers of this approach to security include researchers representing the Copenhagen, Welsh, and Paris schools.

There needs to be consensus in cultural security research regarding in which area of security it should be placed. According to some researchers, it should be combined with the state and is then one of the sectors of national security, just like environmental security, social security, military security, health security, and others. Others link it to the individual and human communities and situate it within human security. There are also researchers for whom it is connected to soft power issues (Krupocin & Krupocin, 2020, p. 6). When analysing the essence of cultural security, one can point to its essential components – culture and cultural heritage, including language and identity. The objective of the cultural security actor will be the protection of cultural identification and tangible and intangible heritage, as well as their development.

The subject of cultural security can be the state, but it can also be social groups and individuals. It is due to the dual nature of this security. That is because it relates to the state sphere (state cultural security) and the social sphere (cultural security of individuals and communities), while cultural security in the state sphere is not

always the same as security in the social sphere. Non-democratic countries are an example (Włodkowska-Bagan, 2009, pp. 148–149), where cultural security at the state level is associated with strict cultural control, censorship and manipulation activities in the cultural sphere and restrictions on freedom of access to culture and freedom of creation. At the same time, from the perspective of the social sphere, the security in question is associated with the freedom of information flow, access to cultural values and goods, and creative freedom. This situation is currently taking place, for example, in Russia or Belarus. Furthermore, non-democratic states also discriminate against minority communities and, in extreme cases, destroy their culture (Szyszlak, 2021). However, the dissonance between the cultural security of the state and cultural security at the societal level can also occur in democratic states, e.g., when the preservation by minorities of their culture and cultural identity intact poses a threat to the security of the state and its citizens. A prime example of this is the problem of culturally motivated crimes, including the so-called honour killings (Heydari, Teymoori, & Trappes, 2021; Baak et al., 2022),[4] which occur in immigrant communities in Western European countries.

Concluding on the fact that there are a considerable number of definitions of cultural security and given its dualistic nature, it is possible to identify factors determining which aspects receive special attention in the context of cultural security. These include historical experiences, especially those related to existential threats in the past in the sphere of culture and identity. The second group of factors will be those related to processes and phenomena occurring in the contemporary world that arise in the area of culture, or are closely related to it, led by globalisation, westernisation, migration, and experiences with multiculturalism. It is also worth mentioning the importance of political issues, including the international aspirations of the state/nation and the expectations that are associated with culture in this context.

Thus, while maintaining the basic scope of cultural security, differences in how an entity perceives the importance of an issue for maintaining that security may appear. For instance, Central and Eastern European nations that have experienced periods of loss of statehood and occupation in their history consider having a sovereign state as a guarantor of the survival of identity and culture particularly significant. Such an interpretation prevails in Poland or Ukraine, among others (Krasivskyy & Pidberezhnyk, 2021, pp. 472–473). In contrast, for example, in Asia and especially in Africa, due to both the experience of colonialism in the past and the contemporary problems faced by a significant number of states, cultural security will involve the

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[4] In reality, they are totally unrelated to honour and are a manifestation of oppressive cultural traditions directed at women (Heydari et al., 2021; Baak et al., 2022).

issue of marginalisation in the global cultural circuit while being vulnerable to the adverse effects of globalisation, led by the cultural imperialism of other states, the threat to language and the threat to local cultures. Finally, some states, such as Japan, see culture as one of the primary instruments for building their influence on the international stage. Cultural security is then interpreted in conjunction with soft power (Krupocin & Krupocin, 2020, pp. 1–7; Han, 2014, pp. 1–4). Meanwhile, minority groups demand that their cultural rights be respected, pointing to the constant confrontation between the majority and their own cultures. (Kymlicka, 2009, p. 145).

When taking measures to ensure cultural security, the state should consider the already mentioned dual nature of this security without neglecting its social dimension and the threats to the cultural security of minority communities. For this reason, its tasks include responding to conflicts that arise in the relations between different cultural communities – ethnic, racial, religious and confessional groups, which can be both dangerous to the cultural security of minority groups and the security of the state. There are many ways of defining cultural conflicts in the social sciences. They generally include those conflicts in which cultural boundaries separate the conflicting parties (individuals or social groups) (Avruch, 2002, p. 5; Jagiełło-Szostak, Sienko, & Szyszlak, 2018, pp. 9–13), and their principles and values differ significantly from each other. Cultural conflict occurs when there is contact between these groups (Berns & Atran, 2012, p. 635).

Cultural conflicts are associated with states where there are ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, religious groups, indigenous in nature or as a result of migration (Jagiełło-Szostak et al., 2018, p. 9). However, they cannot be narrowed down only to the countries where these minorities reside. Individuals generally belong to many organised (in different ways) social groups, including cultural groups, distinguished, e.g., by the degree of kinship (family, clans), by language, ethnic and regional origin, based on education, and others (Avruch, 2002, p. 5). These conflicts are an intrinsic part of culturally heterogeneous societies, but this cultural heterogeneity and consequent cultural conflict can take place at different levels and manifest differently. The history of the American religious group Branch Davidians can serve as an example. The rules and customs that prevailed within it differed from those of American society. One result was a mutual distrust which, in the case of the community's followers described above, resulted in a distrust of all state institutions, which ultimately proved tragic during an attempted forcible entry into the group's headquarters in April 1993 (Avruch, 2002, p. 7).

As Michelle LeBaron notes: "Culture is always a factor in conflict, whether it plays a central role or influences it subtly and gently. For any conflict that touches

us where it matters, where we make meaning and hold our identities, there is always a cultural component. Intractable conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir are not just about territorial, boundary, and sovereignty issues – they are also about acknowledgement, representation, and legitimization of different identities and ways of living, being, and making meaning" (2003).

On the other hand, culture, knowledge about it and cultural proficiency can become handy tools in conflict resolution, e.g., breaking the deadlock in relations between states.

Some researchers situate cultural conflict within social conflicts, treating it as one of their types (Jagiełło-Szostak et al., 2018, pp. 9–10). Indeed, the overlap of cultural differences (ethnic, racial, religious, or confessional) with social differences can intensify and exacerbate cultural conflict. Manifestations of these conflicts can be protests, demonstrations, riots, aspirations for territorial autonomy or separatist tendencies of individual ethnics or religious and confessional groups. They can also reveal themselves in voluntary or forced ghettoisation and marginalisation of a community that is one of the parties to the conflict, as well as in armed conflict. They can also manifest themselves in the form of state re-organisation.

These conflicts are undoubtedly one of the most significant challenges to the cultural security of the state.[5] And their effect may be a redefinition of the cultural security of the state, meaning identity changes, redefinition of the cultural code and changes in the gradation of objects of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, which should be specifically protected, developed and promoted.

The groups analysed in this paper are characterised by distinct cultural traits and – emanating from them and powerfully articulated – beliefs. This cultural difference also translates into a political divide. In this way, cultural conflict has become the basis for political dissent. For *Haredim*, internal relations should be based on religious principles, whereas *Hilonim* identify their identity profile based on state determinants (as will be discussed later in the text). We have a situation in which the cultural patterns shaped in times of Diaspora and represented by the ultra-Orthodox do not go hand in hand with the modern state model based on non-confessional criteria. That is one of the main reasons for the cultural conflict between the two groups. From the point of view of this text, it seems desirable to outline the history of this conflict.

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[5] There are many challenges to cultural security. These include armed conflict, globalisation, migration, natural disasters, terrorism, and vandalism.

Determinants of the dispute

1) The identity of Orthodox Jews

Social diversity has remained one of the attributes of the modern State of Israel since almost its inception. It is a feature that generates several challenges for the internal politics of the Jewish State because it touches upon many aspects of its political framework. The Jewish community is not a monolith; divisions relate to issues such as religion, values, ethnicity, political thought, and a vision for the arrangement of relations, relationships and communal ties. Within specific divisions, further divergences can also be singled out, complicating the depiction of a particular model for even one of Israel's social or religious groups. The reasons for these differences can be traced back to the history of the Jewish people living for years in dispersion. Even though Jews in different geographic locations shared the same regulation of social relations based on psychological, cultural, linguistic and legal ties, the difference in specific patterns of tradition is noticeable. It was shaped during Diaspora life and referred to the influences of the environment and surroundings where Jews lived over the years. The ultra-Orthodox (*Haredim*) population fits very clearly into the division outlined. It is reflected in the Israeli political scene, where there are currently two (main) Orthodox parties – *the United Torah Judaism/ Torah Party* (Hebrew: יהדות התורה המאוחדת, *Jahadut ha-Tora ha-Meuchedet*), and the *Shas* or *Sephardic Torah Keepers Party* (Hebrew: ש״ס). The former represents the interests of the Ashkenazi Orthodox population, while the latter means, as the name suggests, the Sephardic section of this community (Szydzisz, 2012, p. 175). Both groups define their profile based on confessional criteria, origin, and ethnicity.

However, the identity of the orthodox population is broader than the organisation of the communities mentioned above into political parties. It is necessary to point to the formation of divisions marked by sectarianism to understand the complexity of the differences between the various ultra-Orthodox groups. These divergences primarily concern the Ashkenazi *Haredim*. In the 18th century, Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, also known as the Baal Shem Tov, founded Hasidism, a movement based on mystical and pantheistic Judaism. It was characterised by spirituality, a religious ethos of love, religious emotion, ethics, and joy. After the rabbi died, a tradition developed based on the transmission of the doctrine of Hasidism in small groups of disciples who followed the leaders of the Jewish communities. Each leader became the founder of a different sect named after the place where he delivered his teachings (Munro, 2021, pp. 31–32). In this way, a model emerged based on Hasidic dynasties originating from other areas of, for example, present-day Poland, Ukraine, or Russia (the Hasidim of Bratslav, the Hasidim of Nowy Sącz,

the Hasidim of Vyzhnytsia, and others). In opposition to these trends were the *Mitnagdim*, or so-called 'Litvaks',[6] who presented different doctrinal assumptions. They opposed Hasidic mysticism and adopted a different vision of Conservative Judaism. The differences between the two Ashkenazic currents concern a different perspective, approach and theological issues, which corresponds to the Hebrew term *hashkafa* (Hebrew: השקפה) (Munro, 2021, pp. 31–32). Besides the Hasidim and *Mitnagdim*, the third element is representatives of Orthodox Judaism originating from North African and Middle Eastern countries – the Sephardic *Haredim* (Lintl, 2020, p. 13). It is also essential to bear in mind the Orthodox community living in the Diaspora, which also adheres to different rules and norms of social life. For example, *Haredim* of the United States differ in their approach to education or the use of mass media. Their approach, compared to other orthodox, is more liberal (Don-Yehiya, 2005, p. 179).

Initially, the ultra-Orthodox population was gathered around the organisation *Agudat Israel* (Hebrew: אגודת ישראל), formed in 1912, which was in opposition to the ideological assumptions of the Zionist movement (Shafir & Peled, 2002, pp. 139–140). However, it only rejected issues concerning the religious version of Zionism. In practice, it undertook a kind of collaboration with its opponents, firstly, to protect its own interests and secure certain advantages in the pre-state-forming Zionist administration and, secondly, it sought to minimise the likelihood of non-compliance with the core principles of Judaism and Jewish national codes in the newly forming society (Shafir & Peled, 2002, pp. 139–140). Given that, one can argue that the stimulus for *Haredim* involvement in political affairs was secularisation and, more specifically, the fear of the loss of religious values by secular Ashkenazi circles seeking to establish a Jewish national seat in Palestine. The factor that made the establishment of Israel possible in the first place was nationalism. It was thanks to the Zionist movement that it became possible to organise an efficient political apparatus that led to the proclamation of a state for the Jews. The conditions of secularisation necessitated the development of another value capable of replacing Jewish identity, which for years of life in the Diaspora had been the tradition of Judaism and religious issues. This value and thus the new glue of the Jewish community became nationalism (Munro, 2021, p. 29). Therefore, the Orthodox population faced the need to engage in political affairs. That was motivated by two considerations. The first was to secure certain benefits and protect their interests. The second was the need to promote its vision of the state and organise its internal politics, including regulating social relations on its own terms. Entering into cooperation with the

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[6] They originated from Lithuania.

Zionist movement was a sign of pragmatism on the part of *Haredim*. A complete rejection of the project of building a secular state would have entailed the marginalisation of the Orthodox population. It would have led to a situation in which sectarian issues and the tradition of Judaism would not have influenced the state's internal affairs. The construction of a political entity for the Jewish people based on the programme of the Zionist movement aroused resentment among the Orthodox, but without cooperation between the two communities, the existence of *Haredim* in the newly-forming Israel would most likely come into question.

2) *Haredim* and *Hilonim* – two different visions of the organisation of social life

The year 1948 and the establishment of Israel were politically and religiously challenging for Jews (Solarz, 2012, p. 131). This event highlighted the ideological divergence between secular and ultra-Orthodox Jews. There were severe inconsistency symptoms in defining the identity profile of the newly formed state. The Independence Day, dated May 14, was described as the most honoured day since the Exile and one of the three most memorable days in Jewish history (Liebman & Don-Yehiya, 1983, p. 113). The authorities and society of the Jewish State faced the challenge of reconciling two inconsistent and contradictory values – Jewish identity and Israeli citizenship. The first category concerned the pre-state self-identification of Jews, closely linked to Judaism and understood as a tradition of religion. The second, on the other hand, was not based on confessional determinants but on forming a secular national seat in line with Zionist ideas. This project also did not envisage a specific role for rabbis. This conflict of interest is the basis of the dispute between *Hilonim* and *Haredim*. It led to a situation where internally organising a harmonious life has been highly complex. The nation's identity, defined over the years through intangibles, was supplemented and thus somewhat modified by the state element. With the establishment of Israel, Jews were therefore faced with the challenge of reconciling spiritual, civic, religious, and secular values. David Ben-Gurion's letter to *Agudat Israel* in June 1947, mentioned in the introduction, was the first official attempt to reconcile the interests of the secular and religious communities. With the benefit of hindsight, after more than seventy years of Israel's existence, it can be concluded that this effort was inadequate. The conflict between the secular and the ultra-Orthodox part of society was not resolved. For one group, the compromise categories, as mentioned above, represent a severe obstacle to everyday life, while for the other, they are self-evident axioms that cannot be revised. In the context of the divisions among the Jewish population, this dispute resembles a Gordian knot. The Orthodox continue to reject elements of Israeli social life while emphasising their

separate identity. Language issues, among others, are an excellent example of this. The reason for this is the belief that it is a product of the Zionist movement and its ideological assumptions are incompatible with the *Haredi* worldview. Given this, the vernacular language of most Hasidic Jews is Yiddish (Munro, 2022, p. 178).

The situation in which a single political body represented the interests of the various ultra-Orthodox groups in Israel in the form of *Agudat Israel* continued until the 1980s. In 1983, the ethnic *Shas* party emerged from this faction. In 1988, Eliezer Menachem Shach left the organisation and founded his party called the *Torah Flag* (Hebrew: הרותה לגד, *Degel HaTorah*) (Picard, 2017, p. 18). In 1992, this faction merged with *Agudat Israel* to form the grouping of the current representative of Ashkenazi Orthodoxy – *United Torah Judaism* (Jewish Virtual Library, n.d.). Before the elections to the 25th Knesset, the groups came to an agreement and entered the elections under one banner (The Times of Israel, 2022). The splits among the ultra-Orthodox political group confirm this religious group's diversity in both doctrinal assumptions and issues of origin. However, this does not prevent *Haredim* from being constant and active participants in political life in Israel. Both Sephardic *Shas* and Ashkenazi *United Torah Judaism* are permanent fixtures on the country's political scene, and there is little indication that this situation is likely to change drastically in the foreseeable future.

3) The population growth of the ultra-Orthodox and the Israeli population

Among others, Baruch Kimmerling (2001) attempted to characterise the Jewish population in terms of attitudes to religion in his 2001 publication. For this purpose, he took into account six categories. The Orthodox (*Haredi*) population then accounted for just under 4% of Israel's Jewish population, religious Jews (*Dati*) – 11%, traditional Jews (*Masorti*) – just under 27%, secular Jews recognising some traditions of Judaism (*Hiloni hamekayem masoret*) – over 23%, entirely secular Jews (*Hiloni*) – around 30%. This researcher considered just over 4% of the population to be a non-religious part of the Jewish community (Kimmerling, 2001, p. 115). When juxtaposing these values with more recent data, one should note that the Orthodox population has a very high birth rate. More recent analyses refer to the share of specific religious groups in the entire population of the State of Israel, including the Arab population (Christians, Druze and others). Research conducted by the Pew Research Center[7] between October 2014 and May 2015 shows that

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[7] The Pew Research Center is a US-based interdisciplinary research centre concerned with issues and trends in the modern world. The Center conducts extensive research on demographic trends, public opinion or issues related to politics, media, journalism, science, technology, etc.

the Orthodox population already accounted for 8% of the Israeli people at that time (Pew Research Center, 2016). No other group has seen such an impressive birth rate. This increase is compounded by the fact that the demographic trends also include the non-Jewish population. It can therefore be assumed that if only Jews were included in the study, the share of *Haredim* in the Israeli population could be higher. In 2017, the ultra-Orthodox community in Israel was estimated at around 1,033,000 people, which already represented 12% of the country's total population (Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, n.d.). It is also worth pointing out the age structure of *Haredim*. Half of them were under sixteen at the time (Jerusalem Institute…, n.d.). According to projections at the time, this number was expected to increase to 2,000,000 in 2033, meaning that by then, the share of the Orthodox population in Israel would represent 16% of the country's total population (Jerusalem Institute…, n.d.).

The demographic trends of *Haredim* are influenced by four main factors. The first is the cumulative annual growth rate of 4% among Orthodox (Cahaner & Malach, 2021b). This percentage is higher than other population groups in developed countries. The second is the high fertility rate. The third is the young age of marriage. A final and very interesting issue that also affects the dynamism of the *Haredi* population is modern standards of living and medical care (Cahaner & Malach, 2021b). It may suggest that the orthodox population rejects selected elements of Israeli social life while benefiting from others, including health care and social assistance. The 2021 survey shows a steady increase in the demographic trend among *Haredim*. In that year, the number of this community was estimated at 1,226,000, meaning they made up 12.9% of Israel's total population (Cahaner & Malach, 2021b). It is noteworthy that, according to the data, 60% of them were under the age of 20 (Cahaner & Malach, 2021b). Projections for the increasing proportion of ultra-Orthodox in the country's structure were the same as for 2017, with the largest concentrations of *Haredim* currently located in Jerusalem, Bene Brak, Elad, Bet Shemesh, Modi'in Illit, Betar Illit and other localities such as Petah Tikva, Haifa, Ashdod, Rehovot, and Netanya (Cahaner & Malach, 2021b). Continued *Haredi* population growth may reinforce tensions between this community and *Hilonim*. In turn, the continued active participation of the ultra-Orthodox in Israel's political life may lead to the cementing of the role of religion in internal affairs, including in the legislation of the Jewish State.

Lines of conflict between *Hilonim* and *Haredim*

1) The problem in defining a 'Jew'

The newly formed state adopted a regulation in 1950 called *the Law of Return*. The first article of this law stated that every Jew had the opportunity to obtain citizenship as soon as they arrived in Israel. However, the issue was problematic: who could be considered a Jew? The Orthodox circles wanted to remain with the halakhic understanding of Jewry. Under religious rules, a Jew is a person whose mother is Jewish. This approach must have been controversial. By modern standards, it is reasonable to recognise that in the case of mixed marriages, the child has the right to identify with the father's nationality. In addition, the issue of conversion proved problematic. That is because the proponents of Orthodoxy did not accept that a person who converted to Judaism in the Reform or Conservative stream should be considered a Jew. Attempts were made to resolve this issue. In 1958, the Minister of the Interior, a left-wing politician, Israel Bar-Yehuda, issued a regulation according to which a person's bona fide declaration was sufficient to recognise an immigrant as a Jew (Pohl, 2014, pp. 37–38). This solution caused severe controversy and led to political turmoil. As a result, it was decided to withdraw this regulation (Pohl, 2014, p. 38). The breakthrough came only with an amendment in 1970, which clarified the provisions of the law. It stated that a person should be considered a Jew if they

1) *has a mother or grandmother on the mother's side who is a Jew,*
2) *has Jewish ancestry – having a Jewish father or grandfather,*
3) *has converted to Judaism, with the restriction that if one has converted in the Reform or Conservative stream, this can be recognised when it has taken place outside Israel* (*The Law of Return*, 1950).

The amendment adopted in 1970 does not solve all the problems. Orthodox Jewish circles continue pointing out that non-Jews also benefit from the Law of Return. The Israeli Rabbinate (composed of Orthodox Jews), in practice, undermines their Jewishness, for example, by refusing to allow them to marry according to *halakha* (Abrahamic Study Hall, 2017). Most controversial was granting citizenship to some people from the so-called Soviet aliyah. Some of them were not Jewish (e.g., non-Jewish spouses of immigrants), the Jewishness of others was considered non-halakhic by the Orthodox, and some falsified documents proving their Jewish roots (Matusiak, 2021, pp. 36–37). In 2020, Israel's Sephardic Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef did not hesitate to say that, using the Law of Return, "*hundreds of thousands of Gentiles*" had come to Israel, many of whom were religion-hating communists (Do Rzeczy, 2020). Conservative sections of the Jewish State also questioned the

Jewishness of the Falasha (Ethiopian Jews), the Karaites, the Samaritans, or the Indian Sons of Israel (Do Rzeczy, 2020).

It seems that ultra-Orthodox circles will not abandon the *halakhic* definition of Jew, while secular Jews will consistently oppose such a narrowing of the category.

2) Military service

During the formation of the state, Ben-Gurion agreed that, under the Torato Omanuto Agreement, yeshiva students (The Yeshiva) should be exempt from military service. Israel's first prime minister took this decision because he did not want to cause another dispute. Besides, at that time, the number of recruits from this community was so small that their absence from the army was not a significant problem (Heilman & Friedman, 1991, p. 18).[8] Until 1977, there was a formal limit of 500 people who could be exempted from compulsory service. After the *Agudat Israel* party entered the electoral coalition, this limit was abolished (1977) (Heilman & Friedman, 1991, p. 19).

Initially, the issue of dismissing young people from the *Haredi* community from the army was somewhat controversial. That was for two reasons; firstly, the dismissal still affected a not-very large group of people, and secondly, it was a community that was on the margins of social life and, in a sense, was not even noticed by the mainstream. The situation was changing as the number of ultra-Orthodox grew. It was becoming legitimate to ask why this group should be given preferential treatment. Since the 1990s, some liberal parties have emphasised the need to address this situation. Prominent politicians such as Yair Lapid and Avigdor Liberman are declared change supporters. In 2012, the Supreme Court (the High Court of Justice) also took a stand, ruling that the exemption of *Haredim* from military service is discriminatory to other recruits. Since then, the Israeli government has been preparing a law to regulate the issue comprehensively. Opposition from the ultra-Orthodox parties and political considerations have yet to adopt an appropriate regulation for over a decade. In a way, the situation is getting worse. In recent years, there has been a decline in the number of young ultra-Orthodox in the army and civil service. According to the Israel Democracy Institute, only 1,222 ultra-Orthodox men entered military service in 2019, and just 495 entered national civilian service in 2020 (Cahaner & Malach, 2021a).

Liberal and socialist politicians or even representatives of national religious parties tried to change this situation and pass the necessary law. All these efforts

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[8] According to Samuel Heilman and Menachem Friedman's estimates, there were about 550 of them at that time (Heilman & Friedman, 1991).

ultimately failed. The attempt to draft young *Haredim* into the armed forces is not only dictated by a shortage of recruits and the belief that every citizen should have the same responsibilities but also aims to deepen the relationship between this group of citizens and the state. The desire to pull teenage ultra-Orthodox out of their hermetic communities and present them with a different model of social life is also not insignificant. In addition, the Israeli military offers courses to help soldiers find better jobs. For *Haredim*, this would be particularly important. Such measures could reduce the high unemployment among this social group.

One cannot assume that it will be possible to get (coerce) the ultra-Orthodox into military service. For the time being, most *Haredi* leaders actively defend the status quo that is favourable to them. This attitude stems from the priorities that are important to this community. Talmudic study and literal observance of *halakha* are the primary tasks of a young ultra-Orthodox Jew. Obligations towards the homeland are treated as something secondary. That is also because some young ultra-Orthodox people do not fully identify with the State of Israel. Moreover, some community leaders are concerned that once recruits leave the yeshiva and are conscripted into the armed forces, there may be a process of acculturation and, thus, an erosion of their religious life (Cahaner & Malach, 2021a). Opinion polls from 2017 confirm the reluctance to change. According to them, "[m]ost (78.8%) [*Haredim*] say they could never agree to their son serving in the IDF [Israel Defence Forces], regardless of the circumstances. Only 5% of respondents said they believe their son should serve in the army, while 12% said they would accept their son serving in the IDF if he was not learning in yeshiva" (Rosenberg, 2017). A poll prepared by the Pew Research Center (2016) had similar indications, i.e., 83% of ultra-Orthodox were against military obligation, and only 13% were able to accept it. In contrast, as many as 90% of *Hilonim* argued that young *Haredim* should be sent to the army, while only 6% were prepared to agree to a continuation of the current arrangements (Cooperman, 2016, p. 9).

Some voices emphasise that *Haredim* being drafted into the army could contribute to building mutual respect and a sense of solidarity between different groups in Israeli society. Shlomo Black, an analyst at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), believes the ultra-Orthodox community would agree to military service for young yeshiva students if the state recognised "the importance of Torah study" and did not seek to "change [this population group] in the unique cultural/spiritual nature of ultra-Orthodox" (Black, 2021).

For the time being, however, there is no indication that more young people from ultra-Orthodox backgrounds will end up in the army. The presence of religious parties in the government makes any change in practice impossible. The gap between secular Jews and the *Haredi* community will, in all likelihood, widen.

3) The role of Jewish law

Another tension between secular Jews and ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups is the importance of religious law in contemporary Israel. Israeli governments seek to accentuate the modern dimension of the state. The message is about showing Israel's high technological development and its secular and progressive character in the moral and cultural dimension (e.g., by supporting LGBT communities).

However, it turns out in practice that the Jewish State is somewhat confessional. Accepting religious principles in the social space also stems from the consensus reached between the secular authorities and the ultra-Orthodox community during the formation of the state.

As a result of this agreement, the Israeli government promised to create conditions in Israel for the observance of Shabbat and kosher and that the jurisdiction of the rabbinical courts in matters of family and civil law would be accepted. This situation continues to this day. Part of secular society sees this as a restriction. *Hilonim* do not understand why they have to get rules they do not understand. They see it as a form of oppression. In practice, this means that public transport does not function on the Sabbath in Israel, there are difficulties in buying non-kosher products, and restaurants and shops are hampered.

The need for Saturday rest is denied by 60–78% of all Jewish Israelis, according to surveys. They demand the opening of cafés, restaurants, shops, and others, and the launch of local public transport on Shabbat (Lintl, 2020). The decision taken in December 2019 by the Tel Aviv authorities to open public transportation on Saturday is indicative of the extent of the split between secular and ultra-Orthodox Jews. Of all the city's Jewish residents, 71% supported the measure, while up to 97% of *Haredim* voted against the regulation (Staff, 2019). Nationally, these votes stack up very similarly. According to 2016 data from the Pew Research Center, 96% of ultra-Orthodox were in favour of banning the launch of public transport, while 97% of *Hilonim* supported lifting the restrictions (Cooperman, 2016, p. 8).

There is also much resistance to the powers of the rabbinical courts. Israel is one of the states where marriage can only be performed confessionally, and religious norms regulate the possibility of divorce and burial. The authorities of the newly formed state decided in 1953 to adopt a law that approved rules still from the Ottoman era (Fisher, 2016, p. 541). The norms that once empowered each religious community (they also apply to Muslims, Christians, and Druze) are today considered anachronistic. In practice, they result in traditional confessional solutions in a state that appeals to Western and democratic models.

The principles of *halakha* mean that every Jew, even a secular one, has to accept that marriage will only be possible under *chuppah* and that the principles of Mosaic

law will govern divorce issues. According to these, the dissolution of marriage is decided by the man, who hands the woman a *divorce letter*. Such a law puts the woman in a much worse position and prosecutes further problems (inheritance issues, child custody).

The Israeli authorities accept this state of affairs, although, at the same time, they create a gateway which, in practice, makes it possible to bypass religious norms. Firstly, the state "does recognise de facto civil unions (including for same-sex couples), with many of the same rights as marriage", and secondly, it formally confirms the validity of marriages concluded abroad (Sachs & Reeves, 2017, p. 6).

4) The education system

One of the conditions for the coexistence of the secular state and *Haredim* communities adopted at the time of Israel's independence was the agreement on the autonomy of ultra-Orthodox education. *Haredi* schools have a wide range of freedom. Among other things, it is expressed in the creation of curriculum content. In addition, *Haredi* education is not co-educational: boys and girls are educated in separate schools. Also, girls have a different curriculum.

For the modern state, separate *Haredi* education becomes a significant challenge. Curricula in which religious content is an essential element are incompatible with the demands of the contemporary labour market (Katz, 2002, pp. 5–6). The problem is becoming more severe as the number of pupils in ultra-Orthodox schools is increasing at a rapid rate. In 2000, 212,000 children were educated in these institutions; in 2018, there are already nearly 442,000 of them (Blass, 2018, p. 21).

From the point of view of the modern state, funding this type of education could be more efficient. Therefore, reform projects are emerging to increase the number of *Haredim* in the labour market. The authorities are trying to exert pressure on ultra-Orthodox schools and get them to teach subjects from the core curriculum (Staff, 2022a). However, it does not appear that the latest draft of changes proposed in 2022 by Finance Minister Avigdor Liberman will stand a chance of being implemented by a government with representatives of religious parties (Staff, 2022b).[9]

5) The attitude towards a democratic state

The fundamental issue that differs between the two communities (*Hilonim* and *Haredim*) is the approach to the principles to be followed by the modern Jewish State. Created by socialist leaders, Israel was to be both a Jewish state and a democratic

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[9] Even before the elections, Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu declared that after taking over the government he would maintain funding for ultra-Orthodox education (Staff, 2022b).

state. For ultra-Orthodox circles, the democratic nature of the state is of little importance. For some of them, even its existence is not necessary. (This issue relates more to the "meta-level" than to political matters). The *Haredi* environments sought, above all, to emphasise the importance of Jewish law. The secular authorities, wishing to preserve a fragile consensus, agreed not to enact a constitution (according to the ultra-Orthodox, the supreme organising act of life in the Jewish State should be the Torah). Thus, a relatively small community began to have a say in the solutions that organised, in some sense, the state system. Netanel Fisher noted that the distinctive approach to integration into Israeli politics is domination. These communities can demand the acceptance of religious norms in the public sphere through democratic tools, namely, legislation and administrative measures (Fisher, 2016, p. 541). That is best exemplified by the presence of ultra-Orthodox parties in the Knesset, and Israeli governments and their ability to defend their privileges.

That is despite the fact that democracy is not the core value for *Haredim*. In a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, 89% of *Haredim* indicated that in the case of a contradiction between *halakha* and democratic principles, the former value should be given priority (only 3% point to democracy). The exact opposite is true for 89% of *Hilonim* who are in favour of democratic rules, and only 1% opting for Jewish law (Cooperman, 2016, p. 7).

The 2013 survey is similar. It asked the respondents which component of their state was more important: Jewish or democratic. Secular Jews emphasised the significance of democracy (45%) or indicated that they considered both equally essential (37%). In contrast, ultra-Orthodox Jews highlighted the importance of Jewish values (72.5%) or identified equally with both components (21.3%) (Hermann, 2013, p. 64).

The differences between these communities are even more evident in answer to the next question. The survey preparers asked whether, in the event of a conflict, the respondent would side with democracy or religion. Secular Jews pointed mainly to democracy (67%) or said they would not know which value to prefer (16.9%). Only 8.7% of them would choose religion. The ultra-Orthodox were firmly in favour of faith (85%). Only 3.8% of those asked would hesitate about what to choose. The same percentage of *Haredim* indicated democracy (Hermann, 2013, p. 66).

The poll results illustrate the scale of the fracture. It would seem that such significant differences doom any hope of developing a shared model of social life. Unfortunately, imagining a mutually acceptable blueprint for coexistence is difficult. The survey clearly shows that each group identifies with different values and has a deep conviction that these are the most fundamental.

Summary

The issues presented make it possible to verify the formulated hypotheses and research questions. Identity issues pose a grave obstacle to defining a single, coherent model corresponding to all sectoral groups in the State of Israel. Reconciling the values of secular and ultra-Orthodox Jews seems even more challenging. The two formations present a completely different vision of the arrangement of social relations. For some, religious issues and the identity based on the principles of Judaic tradition are the most crucial point of reference, while for others, elements related to secularism are the most important. It should also be noted that there is little room for compromise in this cultural conflict. Attempts to reconcile religious and secular values have either ended in a declarative dimension or have failed to resolve the dispute. Moreover, it recedes the hope of defining a satisfactory legal order for both sides. For *Haredim*, confessional factors form the basis of their existence, while for *Hilonim*, it is a severe impediment to everyday life.

In view of that, the hypothesis based on the assumption that the tension between secular and Orthodox Jews is one of the most serious conflicts threatening Israel's cultural security should be confirmed. Nothing indicates that the intensity of the dispute between the two groups might decrease soon, which confirms another assumption of this paper. The issue of nationalism as a new quality in the self-identification of the Jewish people is evident insofar as it led to the emergence of a political entity for Jews, which would not have been possible were it not for the activities of the Zionist movement. Its ideological foundation was based on secular demands, which confirms that the proclamation of Israel gave rise to a cultural and identity challenge. The hypothesis based on the assumption that with the establishment of the Jewish State came the challenge of reconciling two inconsistent and even contradictory values – Jewish spirituality and Judaic tradition, and Israeli spirituality and secularism – should also be confirmed. That was evidenced by David Ben-Gurion's attempt (before 1948) to arrange relations between religious communities in the form of a letter addressed to the *Agudat Israel* organisation, which, as time has shown, was not more successful. The scope of Jewish identity was supplemented and modified by a state component. An implication of this challenge is the need for a unified and compact constitution for the State of Israel, which was intended to help achieve consensus. It also has not significantly resolved the cultural conflict. In answering the research questions presented in the introduction, one should point out that the historical basis of the differences between Orthodox and secular Jews relates to an ideological dispute between the two groups dating back to pre-statehood, in which *Haredim* undertook a kind of collaboration with the Zionist movement for

reasons of pure pragmatism. The assumptions of Zionism were iconoclastic for the Orthodox, but the Jewish national codes associated with Jewish spirituality and the tradition of Judaism needed not to be lost in the newly forming society. Another reason for arranging a *modus vivendi* with the Zionists was also the desire to secure certain advantages in the pre-state-forming Zionist administration.

The most significant interfaces of contention are the basic categories often discussed in the literature on the subject, namely, the problem of the definition of 'Jew', military service, civil law, and religious education. This catalogue also includes the attitude towards the democratic state, which is insignificant for the ultra-Orthodox, unlike the secular part of society. *Haredim* hold the view the Torah and not state legislation should determine the main principles. Given the above arguments, it is unlikely that the two conflicting groups will not even merge into a single identity profile, and they will reach a constructive and effective compromise. That is because there is a problem of harmonisation of immanent contradictions, which is significant, whereby these contradictions are not artificially constructed but have arisen 'naturally' as a result of different cultural, religious, and social identities. One may assume that the cultural conflict between *Haredim* and *Hilonim* will cement the divisions over time and thus negatively affect Israel's cultural security. Given the lack of prospects for developing a unified identity profile, the situation is also complicated by demographic issues and the continuing population growth of the ultra-Orthodox population. It may also affect the political consolidation of parties representing *Haredim*. The population aspect may have the effect of exacerbating differences and conflicts between *Hilonim* and *Haredim* and perpetuating the symbolic wall between the two communities, as well as increasing the role of religion in Israel's legal and political order.

The dispute between secular and ultra-Orthodox Jews is undoubtedly cultural and generates many complications ranging from the definitional catalogue of basic conceptual categories to questions of identity. This conflict resembles a Gordian knot and prevents the formation of a coherent cultural profile of the Jewish State.

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