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Shlomo Deshen, Charles S. Liebman and Moshe Shokeid, Editors, Israeli Judaism: The Sociology of religion in Israel, Studies of Israeli Society, Volume VII, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick NJ and London, 1995. Pp. xiv + 386

The main concern of these notes is objectivity. The demand of traditional rationalism for absolute objectivity is excessive; the license of hermeneuticists and post-modernists to replace objectivity by frank ethnocentrism by endorsing local prejudices is unfortunate. Most social observers still attempt to overcome ethnocentrism, by the use of statistics and of the field method of participant observation and of other means, knowing that no guarantee is possible. As the volume at hand concerns the sociology of one religion in one place, it may serve as a case study. A little objectivity should prevent the camouflage of the deterioration of religious life caused by discrimination.

The secondary concern of these notes is the inadequacy of the functionalist theory of religion as a mere social cohesive: at most, functionalism might account for the general features shared by all religions, not for their diversity, not for the difference between traditional and Israeli Judaism. Religious oppression and friction, such as in Israel, are excluded by functionalism. Therefore, the functionalist bias in this book is replaced in a pinch by the view of religion as sincere faith.

Folk wisdom says, the best means of escape from religious discrimination is the separation of church and state. Not so. Britain and Denmark use their state religions to minimize religious discrimination. Syria separates church and state yet it discriminates against Jews and women. In Israel religious discrimination and gender inequality are constitutionally banned, yet they are systematically and openly practiced. The volume at hand performs the amazing feat of camouflaging discrimination by the use of diverse received research methods.

Israel is the only democracy in the region yet it neither separates state and church nor has a state religion. It was conceived as a state for the Jews and became a Jewish state instead. Political discussion there,

which is a national sport, rests on popular preference for a Jewish state over a state for the Jews, though most Israeli citizens are not religiously observant and one fifth of them are non-Jews. Religious style in Israel ranges visibly between the "fundamentalist" and modernist: some women cover their heads and others dress attractively. The unstable compromise drives bearded Jews in seventeenth-century Polish clothing to throw stones at passing cars on the Sabbath.

Israeli Judaism is a collection of 18 reprints plus a new editorial introduction. Its running themes are political sociology, ultra-orthodoxy, nationalist orthodoxy, and Sephardi and secularist Judaism. The last terms invite explanation. Secular means worldly, devoid of religious import. Secular Jews do not observe Jewish Law. In the West, their Jewishness is ethnic; not so in Israel, where officially, regardless of personal preference, every citizen belongs to some nation and some denomination; most Israelis belong to the Jewish nation as well as to the Jewish denomination. This fact is ignored in this book, thus confusing the readers who should be warned that in it Jewishness is a nationality and a religion shared by utterly irreligious people. Also ignored by this book is the way Israeli Jews view ethnicity. The public associates ethnicity with country of origin, yet officially the ethnic division of Jews is into Ashkenazim and Sephardim, since only these two communities have chief rabbis (an inheritance from British Palestine). Traditionally communities are identified by the vernacular: "Ashkenazim" means Germans and denotes communities of originally speakers of Yiddish (based on mediaeval Frankonian); "Sephardim" means Spaniards and denotes communities of originally speakers of Ladino (based on medieval Castilian). All non-Ashkenazim, then, are officially Sephardim, including such non-Sephardim as the Iraqi, Syrian, and most of the Maghreb Jews, denoted in this book as "Middle Eastern", and including the Italians, Yemenites, Persians, Bucharites, and Ethiopians, whom this book overlooks. Regrettably, it follows the official division, not the socially recognized one (with the exceptions of some marginal observations of rituals in holy grave-sites and of the status of American Jews). This is justified by the fact that the Ashkenazim are the recognized social elite: discrimination against Sephardim is noted in this book. The book distorts Israeli Judaism as it insinuates that secular

Jewishness is mere ethnicity, that Israelis are ethnically subdivided into Ashkenazim and the rest, and that there is no discrimination against Israeli non-Jews.

One chapter is entitled "Religion in the Israeli Discourse on the Arab-Jewish Conflict". "Arab-Jewish" is distinct from both "Muslim-Jewish" (religious) and "Arab-Israeli" (political), and falls between state and community. Arab states protested officially: their enemies were "the Zionists", not "the Jews". Is that so? By what rule? Consider the quasi-religious marginal communities of secular Jews. Self-selected, in the West they deem their ethnic and cultural heritage stronger than their religion, in Israel they wish to be viewed as Jews devoid of creed. Intentionally or not, they sanction the functionalist view of religion as rituals of mostly socio-political import.

So much for general confusions and evasions. Now for details.

(1) The editorial introduction speaks almost exclusively of Judaism as a religion, ignoring it as ethnicity and as polity. The term "civil religion" is employed here for political rituals.

(2) Stephen Sharot describes Jewish Palestine at the time of Independence as the domicile of mostly secularist Zionists plus a small older community of devout Jews who opposed Zionism (p. 20). And "it was agreed between the political leaders and the rabbinate [to implement] formal institutionalization of Judaism in the institution of the state" and shun a state religion (p. 21). This will mislead even the expert: "secular" and "rabbinate" have significantly specific meanings here. As the term "secularism" designates here neglect of the Law, its use polarizes Israel religiously, even though she exhibits "a continuum of religiosity" (p. 22). "Rabbinate" traditionally designates men officiating as religious instructors in a very low church [and as opinion leaders, in the style of Katz and Lazarsfeld]; here it designates the clergy of an unusual high church. Usually state-employed clergy belong to a state religion where church and state tally; Israeli rabbis, chief rabbis included, actively undermine civil law, attempting to replace it with their own guidelines. Traditional Jewish Law bows to local civil law: "the law of the land is [Jewish] Law". This

entitles Judaism to the luxuries of extravagant if fictitious civil laws that display extreme intolerance and high messianism; in Israel, this is no longer fiction. This is a massive reform that was not intended. In writing of an agreement between the state and "the rabbinate" Sharot retrojects the new high Jewish church to a time before it was created and molded into its present condition.

Not surprisingly, the Israeli Ministry of Religions tries to circumvent egalitarian civil law and enforce discrimination against non-Jews and against women. One may still evade most religious rites there — at the cost of both discrimination and popular contempt. Banned are non-orthodox rites, orthodox rites not supervised by orthodox rabbis: non-orthodox rabbis are legally forbidden to officiate ("not recognized", p. 21; "but the major problem of the [non-orthodox] movements in Israel has been the indifference of the non-observant and the partly observant majority rather than the opposition of the strictly observant minority"; p. 28). Also forbidden is the withdrawal from a faith and the assistance in conversion out of Judaism. Sharot suggests that most Israelis are indifferent. Not true: they actively sanction the uncivil customs of "the strictly observant minority". Still, a small survey (in Hebrew) that I have co-authored suggests that perhaps there is some improvement here among the urban middle-class young.

The rise of Jewish "fundamentalism" is oddly explained as the result of the hostility towards the state (or "Statism", p. 25), though its adherents have declared the state itself holy (p. 26). The ultra-orthodox are said to reject the secular world and care only for members of their own local communities (p. 27) as if they do not try to impose their own reading of the Law on others by political intrigue and by throwing stones.

(3) Peri Kedem notes the peculiarity of Israeli Jews: they practice a "civil religion". No: Israeli Jews observe their Independence Day as American Jews observe and celebrate theirs. In both countries, state and congregation celebrate different holidays, thus showing the poverty of functionalism: the difference between religion and "civil religion" is that between congregation and nation. The peculiarity of Israeli Jews lies elsewhere. Usually the religiously non-observant are religiously indifferent.

Israeli non-observant ("secular") Jews disdain and support the rabbis simultaneously. As they wish to be the Chosen People and discriminate against non-Jews, they tolerate the rabbis. Their leaders hopelessly attempt to lighten the burden that this toleration of the intolerant inflicts on them.

(4) Shmuel Eisenstadt is the lion in this pack. He purports to present problems but does not. He suggests an intriguing thesis instead: the indigenous Israeli traditions, Judaism and socialism, share the collectivism that transforms decreasing socialism into increasing religion.

(5) Don Handelman and Elihu Katz, write on the symbols of the state holidays. They ignore their meaning in the non-Jewish Pale of Settlement. The presidential address to the nation on Independence Day includes a passage directed at the Israeli Arabs, pacifying them for their exclusion from the nation.

(6) Yochanan Peres discusses ethnic politics and centers on the first [Jewish] ethnic party. It has since vanished. Ethnic politics is a fixture in Israel: non-Jewish parties existed from the earliest days. Absent-minded Peres wipes them out of mind.

(7) If any essay here has to discuss the role of religious discrimination in Israeli religious practices, it is, to repeat, Deshen's "Religion in the Israeli Discourse on the Arab-Jewish Conflict". He too ignores Israeli non-Jews. This ensures constant distortion. Examples. The religious, Deshen observes, see themselves as superior (p. 115). This is trivially true everywhere; here it is a veiled admission that in Israel this superiority is generally conceded (see p. 352). National and religious identities are fused there, and so honoring one depicts both, especially since nationalism is often used to mask religious discrimination. The superiority of the observant is then justified in obscure allusions to discrimination. "Middle Eastern" Jews understandably find it useful to wear skullcaps.

Judaism was perennially liberal and peace loving. Not in Israel, where the extremists are militant and the orthodox are intolerant ritualists. The moderation, liberalism and love of peace that other Jews

display are viewed as non-religious ("nurturing alien values", p. 117; see also the bizarre comparison of American and Israeli liberal Jews there, n. 6). One underground religious leader, Isaiah Leibovitch, saw in discrimination and occupation violation of traditional Judaism. His teaching was utterly ignored. He is not mentioned here.

(8) Menachem Friedman's informative presentation of orthodoxy ignores the change from a self-selected open fraternity to an elite with powerful gatekeepers. Orthodoxy may now bring comfortable state-pensions and exemption from national service.

(9) Tamar El-Or reports on her heart-breaking observation of the total subjugation of Israeli orthodox women. Her observations do not comprise a participant observer's report, as she confines them to a study group, noticing religion minimally and in passing. This is justified, since total subjugation makes hardly important which religion these poor women are forced to practice.

(10) Aryei Fishman claims that religious kibbutzim enjoy economic success. He explains his claim by ascribing to them (spiritual?) "transformative potential" (p. 26). The claimed success is by comparison to other kibbutzim (p. 183ff.), all chronically in financial crisis; cancelation of tax exemptions and dwindling subsidies stifles collective ownership these days. And just here Weber's (ad hoc and vague) hypothesis about the "transformative potential" of Jews is deemed corroborated.

(11) Gideon Aran presents [militant] religious mysticism as a reinforced dogma. No. The phenomenon is at odds with the functionalist view of religion as a cement, as it is fabricated by extremists, on the hope that it will deliver the goods [territory]. When this hope is refuted the phenomenon will fade.

The hope may rest on a cargo cult and it may rest on the assumption that mysticism will strengthen the militants' cause. Clearly both grounds for hope interplay, and it would be interesting to learn this in empirical detail. Honoring the cheap militant ploy as sincere faith blocks such a study.

(12) Moshe Shokeid promises to tell us how "Middle-Eastern" Jews, mainly of North African descent, "express in religious terms their status in Israeli society" (p. 218). Their communities are neither orthodox nor irreligious (p. 219). True, but hardly a means to "express in religious terms their status in Israeli society". Regrettably a vain promise tarnishes an otherwise reasonable essay. It is rightly noted that the process was initially blocked by Israel's early and unsuccessful application of the American melting-pot theory. By then, incidentally, the United States itself was in the process of giving up the melting pot theory (see Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot, MIT Press, 1963). It was the impact of the Holocaust that pushed the two countries in opposite directions.

(13) The essay by Hannah Ayalon et al. on the rise and decline of secularization in Israel is too confused to discuss, as it identifies secularization with Israeli "secularism". Secularization is the decline of the social significance of religion and of religious institutions, as expressed, say, by the institution of civil marriage and by the decline of the number of church weddings. Israeli secularists support the rabbinate and its veto on all secularizing moves, including ones Jewish Law permits, such as legalizing civil marriage and erasing old disused cemeteries. Israel never witnessed any decline in the social significance of religion. As the data here produced corroborate, the decline is only of abstention from blunt traditional endorsement of ritual and from blunt radical hostility to it, regardless of social significance. Criticism of religious tenets is waning too; taking religion as significant, Israel bans the teaching of evolutionism on educational TV.

(14) Eyal Ben-Ari and Yoram Bilu explain the appearance of holy gravesites in Israel. They endorse prevalent anthropological views, adding to their discourse of this spectacle local color, and this goes by Jewish ethnic division by country of origin. This is significant: the excuse for the oversight of ethnicity by country of origin is that modernization tends to marginalize it, but the practice of worship at holy gravesites tends to enhance it. How important, then, is this phenomenon, and will it increase the significance of ethnicity by country of origin? This is hard to say, as the accent on country of origin is a matter of size: big spectacles of

worship on holy grave sites are more inclusive, yet there the mixed crowd tends to split to smaller groups, at times by country of origin.

(15) Susan Sered reports movingly on the domestic or folk religion of elderly women. The religion of the powerless, she says, transforms increasing parts of inter-personal ordinary relations into religion. She exposes as myth-ridden Nancy Gilligan's famous critique of Kohlberg's myth-ridden (Piagetian) theory of moral development and transforms it into a worth-while discourse by describing the logic of the situation of these lonely women: having hardly anything but their religion to serve them as means to break out of their loneliness, they tend to make it ever inclusive. However marginal one may consider such observations, they signify as illustrations of the poverty of the functionalist theories: social manifestations of religion vary, and their specific occurrence depends on individual actions.

(16) Eliezer Don-Yehiya describes the transformation of the Hanukkah story into a nationalist myth. How influential is the myth? The Israeli "religious right" revived an archaic word from the Book of Joshua that denotes the divinely ordained invasion of the Children of Israel to the Land of Canaan to denote settlement with the intent to appropriate territory. Did uncritical Bible teaching facilitate militarism? Early in the day an apprehensive psychologist studied this empirically and was penalized. A minister in the current Israeli government recently bragged that he had explained to a visiting American Secretary of State that Israel's treatment of her Arabs parallels America's treatment of her Indians. In Israel, Hollywood's mythical Old West is politically more potent than Hanukkah.

(17) Nissan Rubin describes mourning in "secularist" kibbutzim. Hostility to religion instigated a search for new rites. The still hostile still seek; the majority have returned to tradition. The usual confusion mixes here with insensitivity. Grief is particularly terrible for the kibbutz, where eagerness to volunteer for military assignments and readiness to suffer a high casualty rate clash bitterly with the love of peace.

(18) Ephraim Tabory and Bernard Lazerwitz discuss immigrants from the United States. This is intriguing, since only about one third of them are

orthodox and since Israel is the only country that imposes the services of rabbis who must be orthodox. The authors declare differences of denomination more-or-less the same as ethnic differences and they observe that Israelis tolerate ethnic pluralism. They admit that "Israelis appear to look askance at" the non-orthodox (p. 343). "Appear"; "look askance".

(19) Charles S. Liebman discusses Judaism and democracy. "Obviously," he says at the opening, were the Israeli parliament to pass a law contrary to Jewish Law, then "a religious Jew, by definition, would feel obliged to follow" Jewish Law. The key word is "obviously". Such laws exist, as in the Israeli law of gender equality. Israeli law also leaves marital matters to the rabbinical courts, which discriminate scandalously. Israeli law is thus inconsistent. The word "obviously" is here misused. So is the claim that a Jew is obliged to ignore secular law: "the law of the land is [Jewish] Law". The author admits: "conflict does occur" (p. 348), though concerning attitudes only. He does not say what, if any, is the difference here between Israel and any other democracy in this respect, nor what is the difference between attitude to Jewish and to other citizens. I found this paper so disturbing, I could not read it properly.

In sum: the book is informative, sometimes despite itself and only on close reading. It suffers from Israeli ethnocentrism and is apologetic. It should be used with caution.

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(2900 words)