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Religious and Secular Knowledge on the Draft in Israel

Cover Page Footnote

Thank you to everyone who participated in this research. Thanks to my advisor, Johanna Vollhardt, and to my other defense committee members, Rashmi Nair and Rachel Falmagne. Thank you to the Israel Religious Action Center in Jerusalem for their insight into how religious-secular issues are addressed. And thank you to my friends and family for their support through this process.

Religious and Secular Knowledge on the Draft in Israel

Laina E. Pauker



Laina Pauker is a recent Clark graduate from New Haven, CT. She spent a year in Israel before beginning her undergraduate studies at Clark, inspiring her focus within the research on Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation lab and her Psychology major. With a minor in International Development and Social Change, she is interested in where the two disciplines intersect. Laina also pursues her exploration of these topics through the fine arts and film. She is currently working towards her certification in mediation, a form of conflict resolution, and is organizing screenings of her debut documentary film, “Year in Motion.”

Abstract

This research seeks to understand religious and secular knowledge on the question of military draft in Israel within the Jewish population. With recent legal changes in conscription policy, there has been much controversy over the role of Haredim [ultra-Orthodox] in the army. Drawing on feminist standpoint theory, this study uses thematic analysis of a qualitative (open-ended) online survey to examine what Jewish Israelis of different religious orientations think and know about the draft issues as well as how they legitimize their ideas. In analyzing Jewish Israeli knowledge, this research draws on the historical, philosophical division as well as the contemporary religious-secular divide in Israel to contextualize the responses of participants. The research aims to foster a greater understanding of the complexity within and between epistemological communities, and within Jewish Israeli knowledge on the draft specifically.

Religious and Secular Knowledge on the Draft in Israel

The issue of the draft is a controversial point of division between the secular and ultra-religious Jewish communities in Israel. Due to the policy of mandatory conscription, the draft is a central aspect of Israeli society. This paper looks at the ways in which Jewish Israelis understand the issue of the draft and how these ideas speak to their broader understandings of the Jewish state. Using an open-ended, qualitative survey (Krosnick, 1999), I sought to examine participants’ beliefs while recognizing the contextual and ideological roots of their arguments. In studying both the ideas and the sources of knowledge that participants drew on, I grounded the analysis in feminist theory, which

situates the thinker in their political and social context (Harding, 1993). I also drew on Bar-Tal’s (2000) social psychological definition of societal beliefs, including their complexities in the context of Israeli society. In order to understand what perpetuates the religious-secular polarization, I examined how religious and secular people understand the draft, how they react to opposing ideologies, and the ways in which they legitimize their ideas. The purpose of this study is to bring understanding of different perspectives and rationalizations related to the contentious social issue of the draft in Jewish Israeli society.

Societal Beliefs and Their Splintering

Daniel Bar-Tal (2000) describes beliefs as, “basic units of

knowledge categories such as ideology, values, norms, decisions, inferences, goals, expectations, religious dogmas, or justifications” (xii). Accordingly, “Societal beliefs fulfill the elementary epistemic function of providing knowledge about society” (48-49). Bar-Tal theorizes about the over-arching beliefs that citizens share regarding society and their role within it; he discusses how beliefs give meaning to experiences in order to produce knowledge. The collective experiences relevant to everyone in the society are transmitted and negotiated into societal beliefs. This can take various forms, ranging from interpersonal interactions to institutionalized channels of information based on cultural, political, and societal sources. Bar-Tal describes security as central to the ethos of Israeli society, dating back to the pre-

state Jewish settlements and continuing today. This regard for security is reflected in public agenda, political debate, and media concern. He uses the theme of security as an example of a prevalent belief that informs many aspects of Israeli society.

In closely examining the Israeli context, there is much splintering in societal beliefs based on different ideological orientations to the state itself. Beyond the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Israel is fraught with internal divides on many societal levels (Yonah, 2005). The country is made up of religious and secular citizens, ashkenazic and sephardic Jews, sabras and immigrants, politically right wing and left wing people, as well as many other deep and relevant divisions. Steeped in different discourses, religious and secular Jews have very different orientations toward the meaning of the state. Multiple ideologies within the Israeli context inform understandings of the country and the role of religion within it. As a result, religion is a division through which polarization often unfolds (Cohen & Susser, 2000), leading to political clashes and societal conflict. In examining the beliefs of ultra-religious and secular Jewish communities in Israel, each differs in their understanding of the Jewish nature of the state itself.

Overview Of the Jewish Israeli Context and the Origins of Religious-Secular Division

In tracing the origins of the contemporary religious-secular divide and the evolutions of the ideologies that inform perspectives on the state, one place to begin is the Jewish Enlightenment in Europe during the 1700s and 1800s. During

the Haskalah [Enlightenment], there was a shift from traditional observance to secular study, assimilation, and rationality (Schoenberg, 2014). Haskalah philosophies rejected the centrality of the messiah in the Jewish religion and asserted that exile was not divine intervention, but rather a consequence of history (Cohen & Susser, 2000). With the escalation of anti-Semitism during this time, Enlightenment ideas fostered Jewish nationalism. Out of the Haskalah grew Hibbat Zion, a pre-Zionist movement in the 1880s which sought to bring Jewish life back to the Land, beginning with the foundation of agricultural settlements ("Hibbat zion", 2014).

Modern Zionism grew out of this Haskalah period, developing multiple strands ranging in their tactics as well as their relationship to traditional Judaism. Schweid and Hadari (2008) distinguish between Political Zionism, Spiritual Zionism, and the Hebrew Labor Movement, each with diverging approaches to Zionist philosophy. As secular, civil religion developed from these different streams, thinkers like Achad Ha'am (who was a proponent of Spiritual Zionism) separated further from the orthodoxy of traditional Judaism. Deshen, Liebman, and Shokeid (1995) write, "It was clear to Ahad Ha'am and his leading disciples that the appropriate custodians of Jewish tradition were Jewish scholars and Hebrew writers rather than rabbis. This point of view was inevitable since, in their eyes, the Jewish tradition was a national and not a religious one" (352).

Liebman and Don-Yehiya (1983) write that the traditionally Jewish world view is centered in ultimate reality, a spiritual dimension beyond direct, physical experience. Alternatively, they describe that

civil religion in Israel is based on "the sanctification of the society in which it functions" which manifests culturally and politically rather than religiously (Liebman & Don-Yehiya, 1983, 5). In the case of religious and secular Jews in Israel, beliefs and conceptions have evolved from fundamentally different understandings of reality, and of the state as a Jewish entity.

Contemporary Israeli Judaism

Analyzing the current demographics of Jewish Israeli religious practice is complicated by the discrepancy in what categories are used and how they are understood. While numbers describing Haredi populations are more consistent, there is much variation in the ways traditional versus secular Judaism are understood and measured for surveys. This may reflect the fact that the latter contains much more individual variation in practice where the ultra-religious communities follow a code of strict religious observance. Because of the complexities of the various forms of civil religion, which have developed as a national culture, statistics may limit our understanding.

Today, Jewish practice takes a wide range of forms in Israel (Sharot, 1990). Jews who identify as secular may take part in practices such as Jewish holidays because they are part of the nation's culture and norms rather than because of religious obligation. An equivalent would be having the day off for Christmas in many European countries. Complicating the religious-secular division are many factions within each group as well as overlap between groups, geographical differences, and different understandings of categories. Though Judaism is not the formally

or explicitly recognized state religion,² the Basic Law of Human Dignity and Liberty establishes rights as a “Jewish and democratic State” (Shetreet, 2014). In Israel, religion has been institutionalized in many ways (Sharot, 1990) ranging from the Israeli flag, which contains the Star of David, to the Law of Return, to the Rabbinic monopoly over marriage, and divorce through religious courts (Yonah, 2005). As discussed, the tension between religion and state historically developed in societal divisions that continue today. This study analyzes the army as a central example of religious-secular division.

Military Conscription as a Focal Point for Analysis

As demonstrated, traditional Jewish and Zionist philosophies have manifested in a contemporary religious-secular divide which raises many issues about the Jewish nature of the state. Speaking to broader questions about religious and secular knowledge bases, the draft can be used as a window into the ways these two polarized groups understand the state and their own civic or religious roles as Jews within it.

Military service entails a two to three year commitment (depending on gender) and encompasses a wide range of jobs from combat to volunteering in schools. It is compulsory for both male and female citizens of school-leaving age and includes reserve duty up to the age of fifty-one. It plays a huge role in Israeli society, socialization, and culture (“The State,” 2013). Religious males, who have formerly been viewed within the category of accepted exemption, were able to pursue their studies of Jewish texts as an alternative to national service. In order to regulate the widespread

deferment and exemption of yeshiva students, the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) passed the Deferment of Military Draft for Yeshiva Students Whose Occupation Is the Study of Torah Law 5762-2002 (Tal Law) in 2002. The Tal Law presented many alternatives to the crisis at hand, including a combined service, which allowed for both study and military service. When the law was up for review in 2012, the court found that it infringed on the right to equality and that, in practice, the law had further entrenched the tradition of exemption (Levush, 2012). On Wednesday, March 12, 2014, Israeli Parliament approved a law that will slowly integrate the ultra-Orthodox population into national service (Kershner, 2014). Amendment No. 19 to the Security Service Bill, also known as the Enlistment Bill and the Equal Service Bill, conscripts formerly excused yeshiva students (“Knesset approves haredi,” 2014). Until 2017, they will have some choice whether to pursue their religious studies, army, or other forms of recognized national service. Enlistment will remain voluntary during this intermediate stage. If the target of enlistment is not met, however, yeshiva students will be legally drafted, apart from 1,800 exceptional students each year (ibid).

This decision has caused vast protests in the ultra-Orthodox communities in Israel and the United States. Leaders spoke out against the decision and ultra-Orthodox politicians boycotted the vote in Parliament. Hundreds of thousands gathered in the streets of the Jerusalem area; tens of thousands gathered to protest in lower Manhattan (Kershner, 2014). However, for secular Jews who have long felt that they carried the burdens of citizenship, the decision was a relief (“Knesset approves

haredi,” 2014).

Military conscription is one issue that speaks to larger questions about how religious and secular Israelis understand the state as Jewish in that it makes transparent the differences in lifestyle, world view, and rationality. This issue enables analysis of the ways Jewish Israelis respond to religious and secular perspectives and also brings the focus to the role and responsibilities of Jewish citizens in a Jewish State. When a particular group claims a right to exemption, it creates tension with the rest of society. In examining how Israelis think about national service, this study analyzes sources of knowledge that people draw on in confronting the issue. Tracing the ideological roots of ideas about the Jewish nature of the state contextualizes the contemporary divide.

Knowledge is Situated

In trying to understand these radically different societal beliefs within Jewish Israeli society, it is useful to draw on work by feminist scholars who examine important contextual aspects of knowledge construction in a constantly changing social world (Falmagne, 2000; Harding, 1993). In her scholarship of epistemology—the study of knowledge and its relation to social practice—Sandra Harding (1993) is a pioneer in feminist theory. She writes about the necessity of addressing a web of factors to understand knowledge construction. Political power dynamics inherently structure society, determining social location and, consequentially the construction of knowledge. Harding situates thinkers, attentive to those in marginalized positions, within their political contexts who might otherwise be ignored. She illustrates that knowledge is situated within a social

matrix, looking at gender in particular as only one part.

The standpoint theory reflects a way of looking at epistemology that reflects these social standpoints. Falmagne (2000) writes, “The ideological formations (the conceptual frameworks and notions)... shape social practices, social institutions, and social subjects” (193). The epistemic norms established by each community define what constitutes knowledge for members of the respective social groups. Thinkers develop within systems and are products of their historically specific social location (Harding, 1993). This theory is relevant in analyzing thinkers of different social locations, making transparent factors that may affect knowledge production and giving value to different types of knowledge. Applying these ideas to the context of the debate around the military draft in Israel, this study examines the standpoints of religious and secular Jewish Israelis.

Looking at the origins of the ideological divide between traditional religious Judaism and nationalist Zionism situates the two communities in their historical and cultural context. The standpoint theory makes clear the assumptions underpinning different knowledge bases, deconstructing the conflict between the groups. Ultimately, this research studies the polarized ideas on the draft in order to bring a deeper, more complex understanding of different sociocultural perspectives and the rationalizations that inform them.

Methods

Participants

Thirty-one Israelis above the age of eighteen were surveyed for this research project. Ages ranged

from twenty to sixty-two years old, with a mean of 31.85 years old, (SD = 12.17). Eleven participants (35.48%) were male, seventeen (54.83%) were female, and three (9.68%) did not report their gender. Educational background ranged from high school to PhD, and occupations ranged from soldiers ($n = 4$) to teachers to engineers.

Participants’ religious background, schooling, neighborhood, and identification on a religious spectrum were used as indicators to assess participants’ religiosity on personal and communal levels. While the majority of participants who reported ($n = 27$) attended secular schools (45.16%), a slight majority lived in mixed neighborhoods (41.94%). Concerning participants’ self-reported religious identification ($n = 28$), there was only one Haredi participant in the sample. This group, which is at the center of the conscription debate, is not well represented in the present study and therefore, it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding Haredi knowledge on the draft. Five participants wrote in alternatives to the categories provided, including “cultural/traditional” and “no practice.” The results of the three indicators present a complex view of religious orientation reflecting a range of backgrounds in terms of schooling and neighborhood as well as self-identification on the religious spectrum.

Political party identification and self-identification on a political spectrum scale as indicators were used to gauge participants’ political affiliations. Only thirteen participants recorded with which political party they identified. The majority of participants ($n = 11$) identified as “center right”, followed by a tie between “center” and “center left” ($n = 4$ each). Overall, the sample leaned

towards the right both in political party identification and on the spectrum scale. However, many did not answer the questions or expressed difficulty and disillusion regarding Israeli politics. “They all lie,” wrote a twenty-seven year old Liberal Modern Orthodox female (Participant 13). A forty-two year old culturally/traditionally Jewish female wrote, “They all frustrate me right now” (Participant 8). These responses, in addition to the distribution of the sample, reflect some of the tensions in Israeli politics.

Procedure and Materials

The survey was hosted on Qualtrics, an online survey platform, and required an estimated time of fifteen to twenty minutes. It opened with a consent form in which the participants were informed of the researchers involved, the topic of the study, the IRB contact information, etc. (see Appendix B for consent form).

Recruitment, using snowball sampling, took place over the course of the summer and fall of 2014. Recruitment primarily happened during and in the aftermath of Protective Edge, an Israeli military operation during the summer of 2014, which may account for the small number of participants. The survey was posted in public Israeli online forums, such as a group for English speaking immigrants in Israel, as well as sent by e-mail to family, friends, and coworkers. Throughout the fall, a colleague and I continued to send the survey by e-mail to Israeli colleagues, associates, and family members. (See Appendix A for full recruitment script).

The participants were first asked to read a text that gave an overview of the conscription controversy and presented different

positions on the issue, in order to illicit responses (See Appendix C for text). Afterwards, participants were asked to respond to two questions about the text, one on each position. The quote by MK Yair Lapid,³ an advocate for the policy change that will incorporate Haredim into the army, asserts the belief that everyone should serve. The other quote, by a yeshiva student (which we attributed to a rabbinic leader for the purposes of the study to balance the levels of authority in the two quotes), asserts an alternative perspective, which advocates that Torah study is of equal value to army service (see full text in Appendix C). The order of the quotes was alternated to avoid bias or perceived bias that might occur from one question preceding the other. The open-ended questions following each quote read:

Do you think the argument is valid? Why or why not? Use evidence to explain your viewpoint on the issue.

The next set of questions asking whether participants discuss these issues, and with whom, were designed to understand the ways in which the ideas and beliefs of participants are constructed within larger knowledge communities. To assess if participants limited their exchange of ideas to people who were similar to them, or if participants were open to exchange with strangers, outsiders, or others who could potentially bring additional nuances to their ideas, we asked about commonalities and differences with friends, family, and community members. Similarly, another question asked whether participants shared views with most Israelis (see full survey in Appendix C). These questions were included in order to assess the perceived consensus (versus heterogeneity) of beliefs,

which is central to the formation of beliefs on a societal level (Bar-Tal, 2000). Two open-ended questions pertaining to authority followed. Epistemic authority, as discussed by Bar-Tal (2000), refers to sources of information that affect the knowledge formation of individuals, enhancing the validity individuals place on of those sources (as cited by Bar-Tal, Raviv, Raviv & Brosh, 1991; Kruglanski, 1989; Raviv, Bar-Tal, Raviv & Abin, 1993). Bar-Tal (2000) gives the example of political and religious leaders, who make decisions for their constituents based on a meaningful reality which they shape, asserting knowledge that may turn into societal beliefs (66). The two quotes used in the initial questions were attributed to leaders of secular (state government) and religious (rabbinical leader) communities. These statements were meant to reflect positions of people with political power, who potentially influence constituencies from different communities. By asking about who participants viewed as an ultimate authority over draft issues, we hoped to learn more about the sources of knowledge participants utilized.

Following the open-ended questions were several demographic questions, such as age, gender, place of birth, educational background, religious beliefs and practice, and political ideology (see full survey in the Appendix C). Finally, we also asked if participants had served in the Israeli Defense Forces, if participants identified as Zionist, and inquired if participants had additional ideas or information they wished to share at the end of the survey.

Analysis and Results

We used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to interpret the qualitative data. By examining the open-ended responses in a

qualitative manner, we were able to look for themes and patterns that spoke to larger contextual and societal issues and to interpret the beliefs and substantiation of ideas with a great degree of detail. Using the process established by Braun and Clark (2006), we began by familiarizing ourselves by generating initial codes and searching for themes by gathering the relevant data. We reviewed themes by mapping out the relationships between them, refining the scope of different themes by defining and naming them, and finally producing a report with extended analysis and interpretation of the themes including examples and quotes. Because of the small sample size and the open-ended nature of the questions, we chose to use thematic analysis in particular, as opposed to other forms of analysis such as quantitative content analysis.

As described above, two quotes were provided to illicit responses in the first two questions. Because of the overlap in the themes of the questions, they were analyzed together, along with responses to other intersecting questions. Below is a brief description of the themes identified, which were analyzed in greater depth and detail in the full study.

Themes and subthemes supporting the argument for the draft included civic responsibility, the idea that Torah study is not a legitimate civic contribution, the threat of war, de-legitimization of Haredim, inequality in economic policy, and the social and cultural value of the army. A twenty-six year old male participant who identified as Conservative/Masorti wrote, "Every citizen should contribute to the country the best he can" (Participant 9). Similarly, a secular, non-practicing thirty-one year old male wrote, "it is legitimate

to expect everyone to give according to his or her physical and mental ability” (Participant 17), implying that religiosity should not interfere with service. Many other participants who articulated the value of national service echoed statements similar to these. However, these themes and subthemes contained many nuances as well, reflecting the complexity of the draft issue and the diversity of beliefs within a population who support the draft. Themes problematizing the argument for the draft included alternative army services, Haredi contribution as legitimate, and seeking to understand other perspectives. One example of a participant who problematized the draft issue was a fifty-seven year old Orthodox male who wrote that the “viability of the state of Israel is dependent not just upon our ability to defend ourselves physically, but also in our connection to tradition and values...that underlie the reason for the existence of the state of Israel” (Participant 24). This response speaks to the belief that Israel exists because of defense as well as its rootedness in tradition and attributes value to both. This is just one example. There were many diverse opinions within the population who spoke to themes problematizing the draft. Themes pertaining to the legitimization of ideas included no justification, distinct ideologies, personal practice as justification, Jewish Law/Halacha, national secular law, epistemological communities, epistemic authority, majority elected government, and both government and rabbis. These reflect the various ways in which participants sought to justify their beliefs on draft issues. By looking at the evidence participants use to support their arguments, I was able to analyze sources of knowledge which inform beliefs.

The majority of participants responded that they discuss draft issues with others, possibly indicating that they are drawing on normative ideas in their environment. Furthermore, it suggests that people care about draft issues and that the topic of the study was therefore personally relevant to most participants. Because I was looking at religious and secular knowledge bases participants were drawing on, I was interested in the exchanges Israelis of different backgrounds were having with others which could potentially reinforce and/or broaden their perspectives on the draft. A little over half of the participants discussed with friends, 48.39% discussed with family, 12.9% reported discussing the issues with coworkers, while 9.68% discussed with Americans or other outsiders. Sometimes this category overlapped with friends or family and was categorized twice in these cases. Other exchanges reported included community members or neighbors, soldiers, strangers, non-specific others, peers/schoolmates, and rabbis/educators. It seems as though participants are mostly engaging with people close to them in exchanges which are more likely to reinforce previously held beliefs.

Responses to whether participants shared the same beliefs as their friends, family, and community included twenty-six participants (83.87%) answering “yes”. Recognizing that knowing is not insular, we can see how friends, family, and community often shape ideas and beliefs. Fifteen participants (48.39%) answered “yes” to whether most other Israelis shared their beliefs on the issue. Considering that Haredim are a minority, this statistic may reflect the limitations of the sample, as not many Orthodox/Haredi perspectives are represented.

Briefly, I thought it was important to ask whether participants had served in the army, in order to situate what participants thought about the draft in relation to their own experiences (or lack thereof). Eleven participants were currently serving or had previously served in the Israeli army. Seventeen participants did not serve in the army. Three did not respond to the question. When asked what factors affected their decision to serve or not, some noted the gravity of the decision, especially for immigrants. One *oleh* [immigrant] wrote, “If I could do it all over I’d go even though I disagree with the Military policies about defending oneself” (Participant 25). Many were not drafted as immigrants because they were above the age limit. Others did not get drafted for other reasons not stated. A few participants had left Israel before the drafting age.

Finally, twenty-one participants identified as Zionists (we left the definition of the term up to the individual to interpret). Six did not. This could be informed by a range of ideological reasons, including a secular perspective that Jews have no inherent claim to Israel, not regarding the country as a Jewish state. An anti-Zionist religious perspective could be that Jewish sovereignty in the Land should only be established with the coming of the Messiah. Another reason could be a lack of inherent connection to Israel on a symbolic level by a minority of native Israelis. Because participants did not specify, it is difficult to know exactly what is informing their ideological affiliation. Four did not respond to the question.

Discussion

Participants’ responses on draft issues speak to a range of

understandings of Israel as a Jewish state. Many of the responses assert the concrete nature of the state of Israel, as expressed in themes articulating the value of physical protection by the army. As a twenty-five year old non-practicing male asserted, “prayers don’t stop bullets” (Participant 16). The army is a socialization network that brings together Israelis of many different backgrounds in addressing the physical needs of the country, primarily in relation to defense against a security threat that most Israelis recognize. The army itself provides a knowledge base, a set of societal beliefs that speak to a collective experience.

In opposition, the yeshiva system is also a socialization network. The Haredi yeshiva is a knowledge system that reinforces the value of Judaism, often above the physical value of the state. As Yoelish Kraus, the unofficial operation director of Eda Haredit articulates, “We [Haredim] are not Israelis. We are Jews” (“Israel’s other,” 2014). He continues, “We don’t have any connection to the state of Israel, we are Israelites [the nation of Israel]” (ibid). This statement articulates a dichotomy between Medinat Yisrael, the state of Israel, and Am Yisrael, the nation of Israel, which represents different ways of understanding the Jewish nature of Israel. The conscription controversy becomes extremely significant when the identity of Haredim as Am Yisrael, a spiritually bound nation, is central while Medinat Yisrael is prioritized in the physical demands of the army. This dichotomy was apparent in many of the responses, which discussed Israel drawing on these different concepts. A sixty-year old Orthodox female articulated, “the Land of Israel and the Country of Israel” specifying the multiple understandings in outlining

several compromises to accommodate the Haredi world view in national service programs (Participant 31).

The purpose of this research is to examine the complexity within the diverse knowledge bases in Jewish Israeli society in order to bring understanding of where people with different societal positions are coming from. The issue is far more complicated than a religious-secular polarization. Ideas of traditional Judaism and Zionism are not mutually exclusive. The survey responses further convey the range of sources drawn on within epistemic communities and the overlap between them. There are a myriad of ways to interpret religious and secular texts, which are drawn on as evidence by participants in this survey. There are rabbinical commentaries cited by participants supporting army service as well as secular arguments that oppose army service articulated within other responses. It is difficult to reconcile world views based in different philosophical justifications and forms of rationality. Furthermore, there is evidence of deep prejudice within the survey responses that used de-legitimization and dehumanization, where there is a complete lack of respect of alternative world views. Yet, there is also common ground and overlapping values, which communities who have very different realities can relate and build on. These are articulated in some of the survey responses and should be further developed in future research. In the case of ultra-religious and secular Jews in Israel, beliefs and conceptions have often evolved from fundamentally different understandings of reality and of the state as a Jewish entity. Recognizing the knowledge bases that inform beliefs is crucial for understanding

the perspectives of others who have been steeped in very different world views. In problematizing the survey responses, this thesis illustrates potential for building on common ground between divided communities, beginning with the overlapping sources and values.

Reflexivity

As the researcher, I approach the data with assumptions based on my own standpoint as an American Jew who identifies as Conservative. Members of my family identify with the full range of religious categories used in this study (secular, Conservative, Religious Nationalist, Orthodox, Haredi, and other) and I have thus been exposed to a wide range of perspectives on Judaism and Zionism. I am twenty-two years old and grew up going to an egalitarian, Jewish day school in a mixed religious and secular neighborhood of New Haven. I attended religious or Zionist summer camps from the age of eight to seventeen, which greatly influenced my Jewish identity and my connection to Israel. I lived in Israel for a year before college and have been back multiple times, including this past summer when I interned at the Israel Religious Action Center in Jerusalem. The organization works to promote progressive Judaism in Israel by fighting racism, ensuring equality for women, and working towards the inclusion of non-Orthodox streams of Judaism. All of these experiences and identities influence the topic I have focused on in this research and the way I approach the research. Falmagne (2000) writes, “Crucially, the production of knowledge is always profoundly political: the choice of topics, the choice of methods, and the assumptions defining what counts as valid knowledge are political choices”

(197). What I know and how I think are informed by where I come from and this has political consequences in my research. This is a reflection of my socialization, education, personal interpretation, and numerous other factors. I hope to provide some transparency regarding my own standpoint in order to connect the research to the researcher and to identify any biases that influenced the data analysis.

Limitations

Because the survey was in English, the population sample was restricted to fluent English speakers and resulted in a disproportionate number of American-born participants. Additionally, only one Haredi person participated. The Haredi community is rather insular, and often children do not learn English (or sometimes even modern Hebrew) in their separate school system. Because the Haredi communities are largely segregated from the rest of the population, both physically—living in separate neighborhoods—as well as culturally, it is difficult to gain access to the distinct knowledge systems being produced. Future research might examine additional Talmudic arguments [backed up by Jewish law] to the ones discussed by participants for this survey in order to gain a better sense of religious rationality.

Another limitation for the sample is that it was restricted to Jews. There are many other religious groups within Israel, with different understandings of the draft and of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. This is based on the assumption that Israel is a Jewish state, but this belief may not be true for all non-Jewish Israeli citizens. There are numerous ideologies that inform fundamentally different understandings on the identity of the state. This

study is limited to the knowledge of only Jewish Israelis.

Lastly, the online format of the study influenced the type of data collected and limited the sample to those with Internet access, especially within the Haredi community where Internet may not be permitted. In-person interviews would yield different kinds of responses, perhaps with more substantive detail of personal experiences, which could shed light on the issues discussed. However, because of time constraints, this was not possible.

Future Research and Action

Future research might collect in-person interviews in order to gain more data with additional depth. Furthermore, future research could delve deeper into the beliefs of Haredim, if researchers have access to those communities through language skills and the necessary connections. More comprehensive information of Haredi perspectives can foster a better understanding of the sources that inform their knowledge bases, how ideas are legitimized, and ultimately, how to better work towards breaking down barriers between religious and secular communities in Israel.

In moving forward, I draw on the responses of participants who advocate for innovative solutions towards reconciliation and social change. From this research, it is apparent that change must be multilateral. Interaction between people on an interpersonal level is impossible to enforce but can help expose people to other world views and enable the development of ideas beyond the general arguments given in the communities to which they belong.

Communication between secular and religious leadership, which was discussed by some of the

participants and confirmed by Bar-Tal and Hammack (2012), can create more systemic changes in terms of policy, social structure, and societal discourse. Additional influence by the NGO sector can promote positive relations and a progressive balance of Jewish and democratic values. This research seeks to understand beliefs on the draft issue and the sources people draw on to legitimize their beliefs. I hope that this fosters a greater understanding of the complexity within and between epistemological communities, and within the Jewish Israeli knowledge on the draft.

Glossary of Context-Specific Terms Used in this Paper

Ashkenazic/Ashkenazim: Ashkenazic Jews are the Jews of France, Germany, Eastern Europe, and their descendants. The adjective Ashkenazic and corresponding nouns, Ashkenazi (singular) and Ashkenazim (plural), are derived from the Hebrew word Ashkenaz, which is used to refer to Germany.

Beit midrash: House of learning

Chalutzim: Zionist pioneers

Dina D'Malchuta Dina: The law of the land is the law; a Talmudic expression

Halacha: Jewish Law; draws on Talmud, which includes the written and oral law

Haredi: Ultra Orthodox

Hashem: The name; refers to God

Haskalah: Enlightenment (maskilim are followers of the Enlightenment)

Hesder: A yeshiva program that combines Torah study with military service

Kashrut: Religiously based dietary restrictions

Masorti: Traditional, refers to the Conservative Jewish movement in Israel which upholds both halacha and egalitarianism

Oleh/olah: Immigrant

Sabra: Native Israeli

Sephardic: Sephardic Jews are the Jews of Spain, Portugal, North Africa, the Middle East, and their descendants. The adjective Sephardic and corresponding nouns Sephardi (singular) and Sephardim (plural) are derived from the Hebrew word Sepharad, which refers to Spain.

Shabbat: Sabbath

Sheirut leumi: National service

Snivyut/tsnuah: Modesty

Torah: The Old Testament or the Jewish Bible

Yeshiva/yeshivot: Religious school

Zionism:¹

“Political support for the creation and development of a Jewish homeland in Israel” (Merriam-Webster).

“The national movement for the return of the Jewish people to their homeland and the resumption of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel” (Jewish Virtual Library).

“The national revival movement of the Jewish people. It holds

that the Jews have the right to self-determination in their own national home, and the right to develop their national culture. Historically, Zionism strove to create a legally recognized national home for the Jews in their historical homeland. This goal was implemented by the creation of the State of Israel. Today, Zionism supports the existence of the state of Israel and helps to inspire a revival of Jewish national life, culture and language” (Zionism and Israeli Information Center).

Footnotes

¹ There are many more, and varied, definitions of Zionism. Here, three very general definitions are provided to give the reader an example of some of the distinctions that exist.

² This may change as a result of a controversial ‘Jewish state’ bill, which has been proposed to Parliament in the past week with vehement opposition from the left (Ho, 2014). It did not exist at the time when this study was administered.

³ Note that MK Yair Lapid, who represents a leftist political party called Yesh Atid, had an instrumental role in the policy change.

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Appendix C: Survey

Please read the text below and answer the questions that follow:

On Wednesday, March 12, 2014, Israeli Parliament approved a law that will slowly integrate the Ultra-Orthodox population into national service. Amendment No. 19 to the Security Service Bill, also known as the Enlistment Bill and the Equal Service Bill, conscripts formerly excused yeshiva students to the IDF or national service program.

Many Israelis see the new law as legitimate, as the rest of country participates in mandatory service. Yair Lapid, Yesh Atid leader and finance minister recently said, “Is it too much to expect people who live here and whose lives are defended every day by soldiers ... to do their bit, no more or no less than any other Israeli citizen?”

However, many Haredim have protested against the new regulation. Yeshiva students, and the community they belong to, assert that the study of Torah is an essential contribution to society. A rabbinical leader at a recent protest stated, “It is not that we get an exemption, we serve in the army, a much higher army. That is our attitude towards Torah.”

In this article two different positions are presented. We would like to ask you questions about each one:

First, please consider this quote from the article above:

“It is not that we get an exemption, we serve in the army, a much higher army. That is our attitude towards Torah.”

Do you think the argument is valid? Why or why not? What could be said to support or contradict this argument?

Please consider a second quote from the article above:

“Is it too much to expect people who live here and whose lives are defended every day by soldiers ... to do their bit, no more or no less than any other Israeli citizen?”

Do you think the argument is valid? Why or why not? What could be said to support or contradict this argument? _____

Do you discuss this issue of the military draft with others? Yes/no

If yes: Who do you usually talk to? _____

Do friends and family have a similar view on these issues as the one you described above? Yes/no

Please describe the commonalities and differences: _____

Do other community members have a similar view on these issues as the one you described above? Yes/no

Please describe the commonalities and differences:

Do most other people in Israel have a similar view on these issues as the one you described above? Yes/no

Please describe the commonalities and differences:

Do you think there is one right answer to these questions? Yes/no
If yes: Who has the authority to determine that answer?

Thank you. Now as the last step, please answer some demographic questions:

1. Age:
2. Gender
 - ☐ Male
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Other
3. What country were you born in?
4. What type of school did you attend?
 - ☐ Religious
 - ☐ Secular
 - ☐ Mixed
5. Describe your educational background?
6. What is your current occupation?
7. What type of community do you live in?
 - ☐ Religious
 - ☐ Secular
 - ☐ Mixed
8. How would you describe your Jewish practice?
 - ☐ Secular Jewish
 - ☐ Conservative/Masorti
 - ☐ Religious Nationalist
 - ☐ Orthodox
 - ☐ Haredi
 - ☐ Other

If other, please describe:

9. What Israeli political party do you identify with? _____
10. How do you classify yourself on the Israeli political spectrum?

Left		Center		Right
*	*	*	*	*
11. Did you serve in the Israeli Defense Forces or national service program? (yes/no)
12. What were the ideological factors that affected your decision to serve or not serve?
13. Do you identify as a Zionist? (yes/no)

If there is anything else you would like to express or explain regarding the topic of this study or the questions asked, please do so here: