SHAS
The Sephardi Torah Guardians
and their Construction of
the New Jewish Israeli Identity

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Initial Remarks and Acknowledgements

My first visit to Israel was when I was 19 years old and worked as a volunteer in a kibbutz,[1] and travelled in the Middle East. I did not go to Israel because of any ideological or other links with the country, or with the kibbutz as such. I became interested in the state and region and as a result I have focused on the Middle East and Israel in my studies for Cand.mag.[2] Before I started my fieldwork for this dissertation I had spent about one year and three months in Israel, divided amongst my kibbutz experience and a summer studying Hebrew at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Consequently, I knew the language and the Israeli society from different angels and I was familiar with its infrastructure both geographically and socially. It was on this background my supervisor, Assistant Professor Bjørn Olav Utvik, suggested I should write about Shas in my dissertation for Cand.philol.[3]

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[1] A kibbutz is a Jewish collective settlement / cooperative community based on socialist ideas.

[2] Consists of four years of studies at Undergraduate level, equivalent to BA

[3] Equivalent to Master of Philosophy.

Synopsis

The Israeli party-movement Shas is usually described by academics as *Haredi*, (Ultra Orthodox). Based on data collected during fieldwork in Israel this dissertation questions this academic categorisation of Shas, and argues that it does not take into consideration the historical, sociological or religious roots of Shas, nor its interaction in the Israeli society and state. Shas was established in 1983 and is now the third largest party in the Knesset after the elections in 1999. In addition to being a political party, Shas operates a variety of institutions and organisations focusing on religious and other education, and welfare. Both the leadership and the supporters of Shas are mainly Jews from North African and Middle Eastern countries who immigrated to Israel in the 1950s and 1960s. These Jews have experienced discrimination from the national Ashkenazi establishment and from the Ashkenazi Haredi institutions. Shas is a *Sephardi* party-movement, i.e. the leaders and supporters follow the Sephardi edition of the *Halacha*, the Jewish religious law, and the Sephardi religious customs.

The Haredi identity refers to a particular Jewish relationship with modernisation formed in a European context in the 17th and 18th centuries, and developed further in Israel and other places. This identity and lifestyle is by academics characterised as anti-Zionist, segregated from the surrounding Israeli society, holding a passive attitude to historical development and aiming to duplicate a fixed type of observance of the religious law practiced in Europe before modernisation. The present study argues that Shas has a different relationship with modernisation than that described as Haredi. This is interpreted by investigating the relationship of Shas with individualisation, the party-movement's understanding and use of past and future, its relationship with the traditional religious power institutions and with the central state. Furthermore, this study looks into the various strategies applied by Shas to recruit supporters, the relationship of Shas with technology and with the social and economic situation of the individual, the new model for Sephardi women created by Shas, and finally the practical politics of Shas.

The "New Jewish Israeli" identity of Shas is Sephardi and *Torahni*, defined as following the Torah, which refers to religious and historical traditions that are reformed to the modern Israeli context of Shas. This identity opens up to all Jews who chooses to follow the Sephardi edition of the Halacha and to Jews with different levels of religious observance. The conclusion of this study is that Shas has an attitude of inclusiveness toward individuals and a future outlook, which reflects an active relationship with modernisation and history.

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1 Introduction

Outside the prison where former Shas Party Chairman Aryeh Deri is serving his three-year sentence for bribery and fraud, his supporters have organised an outdoor tent yeshiva. *Here they study Judaism in religious seminars during the day and have religious and cultural meetings in the evening. The yeshiva is called* Shaagat Aryeh, *The Lions Roar, reflecting the name of Aryeh Deri. Ultra Orthodox, religious, traditional and secular people, mostly of non-European origin, reflecting all kinds of religious commitments, gather to show support with and respect for Aryeh Deri whom they consider wrongfully sentenced by a secular court of Jews of European origin. The tents are visible from far away due to the electric bulbs in the trees and around the stage and as I get closer I can hear the music. In the entrance to the yeshiva area there is a little market were men and women are selling food, snacks, drinks, photos of revered rabbis, books on various religious subjects, tapes by religious singers, amulets, key rings, some jewellery and other small 'religious souvenirs'. They also have scarves similar to those football fans wear to football matches; black with 'Aryeh Deri' in white writing.*

I am dressed in my modest black costume and enter into the women's side of the area. There is a fence about twenty metres from the stage enabling women to see the stage from our side of the ground, and another fence on the left hand side covered with green plastic to separate the crowds of men and women, in accordance with the Halacha, *the Jewish religious law. Some people have binoculars to see the stage. Everywhere there are posters of Aryeh Deri. There are small boxes for charity to the yeshiva placed strategically around. During the evening many famous people associated with Shas; politicians and associated rabbis, speak in favour of the release and about the unfair treatment of Aryeh Deri. Popular religious singers sing their own songs about Aryeh Deri, the most famous one entitled 'He is innocent', and the men dance more and more ecstatically while the women watch from their side. Some stand on chairs to see across the crowd while others turn to look at the big screen put up so that we are able to follow what happens on the stage.*

Shas Knesset Member Shlomo Benizri takes the microphone and retells a conversation he has had with a secular politician about how the seculars need the Haredi, *the Ultra Orthodox, to survive, because the* Haredim *keep the Torah, and thus sustain the life of all Jews. The secular politician agreed to this, but said that the Haredim were also dependent on the seculars because they go to the military to protect the country and they*

support the Haredim economically. To this Shlomo Benizri answered:"[...] we do not need the government, we have an army but does it do anything good? Yeshiva studies protect better than soldiers. There will be peace through prayer and Torah. The military did not really do anything against the Intifada", he continues "[...] we do not get any money from the seculars; we donate money for ourselves, for education. Democracy in Israel is not for the Haredim, it is not a real democracy because of the discrimination against the Haredim, but we have a mouth we can speak with – to voice our situation."

The crowd cheer loudly and the singers burst into a sing-along. Then they rerun the tape of Aryeh Deri on the phone from inside the prison three days ago. All the hundreds of spectators, even the small children that are here, are quiet when Aryeh Deri says that he wants everybody, the whole Am Israel*, the people of Israel, to return to observance of Judaism. He asked for this to happen to everybody and for all to take care of their families and friends. Banners with Shas' slogan* Lehazair Atara le'Yoshna*, To Restore the Crown to Its Ancient Glory, sway in the night, reminding everyone to return to observance and help all of Israel return to the true* Sephardi *Judaism of rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the spiritual leader of Shas. People are crying and cheering and hugging and the men are dancing wildly round and round in their side of the ground. The music and speeches are still going on when I am leaving Shaagat Aryeh at one o'clock in the morning.*

1.1 Studying Shas

This dissertation is an interpretation of the Israeli political party and religious movement Shas. It will provide a broad macro-perspective on the phenomenon Shas, as opposed to a narrow and in-depth analysis of one issue in relation to Shas. The key question asked in this dissertation is: can Shas be described as a *Haredi* (Ultra Orthodox) expression similar to the European-originated Haredi political parties and religious movements in Israel? The present study is based mainly on data collected during my fieldwork in Israel and it is a qualitative study. In this introduction I will give a brief presentation of Shas, followed by an introduction of Shas' Sephardi identity and on the concept of Haredism, before I mark my delimitations and present the outline of this study.

Shas is the third largest political party in Israel after Labor and Likud in terms of voters, with 17 out of 120 Members of Knesset. Shas was established in 1983 and is organised hierarchically with a council of rabbis as its supreme decision-makers. The council is composed of Shas' spiritual leader, rabbi Ovadia Yosef, and two other rabbis.

The council and the rabbis composing it hold no formal political leadership positions. The rabbis constituting the council guides the politicians and the Party Chairman of Shas in accordance with their interpretation of the *Halacha* (the Jewish religious law).[4] In politics Shas advocates a more substansive position of Judaism as the religion of the state of Israel. The other major focus is ensuring state subsidies for the institutions and organisations constituting the movement around the party. The Shas supporters are by and large Jews from the Middle East and North Africa with different levels of religious observance, ranging from non-observant to very observant.

Besides the political party, Shas runs its own educational network that covers every level from kindergarten to high schools, its own *yeshivas* (religious seminars for men), separate welfare organisations for men and women, and it offers courses for returnees to observance, i.e. Jews who have converted to Orthodox Judaism from a secular background.[5] These organisations are either directly or more loosely connected to the party. In addition, Shas operates, and is represented at the local level through neighbourhood synagogues and their adjoined rabbis, and at the national level through public gatherings with diverse religious or political focus. Thus, Shas is more than a political party.

In Shaagat Aryeh, as presented above, almost all the different elements of Shas are observable. Shaagat Aryeh is organised in support of Aryeh Deri who resigned as Party Chairman of Shas in 1999, due to charges of corruption and fraud. The investigation and trial are the longest lasting in Israel and culminated with the imprisonment of Aryeh Deri in the autumn of 2000. On the stage at the Shaagat Aryeh, waging support for the former Shas Party Chairman were Shas' Members of Knesset, the Shas spiritual leadership, popular singers, other Sephardi personalities, and so-called 'charismatic rabbis.[6] The participants in the audience reflect all the various Shas supporters and, therefore, all levels of individual religious observance. Everyone is protesting against what they consider the unfair judgement of the Sephardi Aryeh Deri by a court composed of predominantly Ashkenazi Jews. I will discuss Shaagat Aryeh further in chapter 7.

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[4] The term *Halacha* is deduced from the Hebrew word *halach* that means "to walk" and denotes today all the aspects of Judaism that is concerned with the Jewish that rules and regulates how a Jew should "walk" through life.

[5] In Hebrew they are called *Hozrim b'teshuva* that means "Returned to" *teshuva,* which is "the process of repentance for transgression and return to the correct observance of Jewish ethical and ritual law" (Aviad, 1983: ix).

[6] Rabbis who have a missionary approach working towards a reinforcment of the observance of the Halacha amongst secular Jews.The 'charismatic rabbis' are described in detail in chapter 7.5.

1.2 Sephardim Observing the Torah

Shas differs from the other religious political parties and movements in Israel due to its ethnic, cultural and religious character. This is reflected in the name 'Shas', an abbreviation for *Sephardim Shomrei Torah*, which means Sephardim Observing the Torah in Hebrew.[7] In English Shas is usually called Sephardi Torah Guardians. *Sephardi* is derived from the Hebrew word for Spain, *Sepharad*. The term *Sephardim*[8] encompasses the descendants of the Jews who fled from Spain as a result of the Spanish Inquisition in the 15th and 16th centuries.[9] The Sephardi Jews resettled in the Ottoman Empire including Palestine, in Italy, in Morocco, and later in America and North West Europe. In theses places the Sephardim lived in an autonomous relationship with the local Jews and were careful to keep their own synagogue traditions, norms, customs and Sephardi values. Moreover, Sephardim often remodelled the local traditions and made the Sephardi tradition the hegemonic one, culturally and socially (Ben-Sasson, 1976).

Mizrahi[10] (Easterly) is a modern term that refers to Jews who immigrated to Israel in the 1950s and 1960s from North Africa, the Arabic peninsula, Iran, Iraq and the Levant and to their offspring.[11] The term includes Jews who are descendants of the Sephardi Jews from these countries. These Jews are often called 'Middle Eastern Jews' in English.

Ashkenazi Jews constitute the last group of Jews and is composed of descendants of Jews from Central and Eastern Europe.[12] Ashkenazi is derived from *Ashkan* which means German(y) in old Hebrew.

Both geographically and historically one might say that the Sephardim are in a position between the Mizrahim and the Ashkenazim; some Sephardim share the experience

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[7] *Shas* is originally an abbreviation of *Shisha Sedarim* that defines the six chapters of the *Mishna* and *Talmud*. The Mishna (teachings) is the oral Torah as compiled around second and third century CE, Talmud is the commentary to the Mishnah. There exist two Talmuds; the Jerusalem Talmud from Palestine and the Babylonian Talmud.

[8] Plural form of Sephardi in Hebrew.

[9] The Inquisition was originally a campaign against Christian heresy started in 1480, as part of the Christian Reconquesta of Spain. Over time it turned agaisnt Jews because Judaism was considered to be a deviation from "the right belief" (Groth, 2000: 120).

[10] The term should not be confused with the former religious Zionist political party called Mizrachi.

[11] Other ways of categorising the Jewish population of Israel is by continent of origin, but this disregards the exceptions such as the Sephardi Jews who emigrated to Northern Europe and North Africa. Jews from North Africa and Asia have been called "Afro-Asians", resulting in "inappropriate racial connotations" (Ben-Rafael and Sharot, 1991: 24) or "Oriental Jews", which is not a preferred term due to its negative connotations as opposite to "Occidental". Finally, "Far Eastern Jews" is sometimes used to describe Jews from Asian countries (see Shokeid, 1995).

[12] The Ethiopian Jews in many ways constitute a fourth group of Jews with their own traditions and long separation from other Jews. This dissertation does not focus on the Ethiopian Jews.

of European anti-Semitism with the Ashkenazi Jews,[13] while most Sephardim lived under Arab Muslim rulers in Spain and later in the Ottoman Empire and in Morocco, where they and the Mizrahim had the status as *dhimmi*[14] (people of the pact) that ensured them the rights to pratice their religion and exercise communal independence under certain conditions (Lewis, 1981:14).

Legal Tradition

In addition to the cultural and origin connontations, the two terms Sephardi and Ashkenazi also refer to two different editions of the Halacha. The Ashkenazi Halacha was developed in the Eastern European context, whereas the development of the Sephardi Halacha started in the Babylonian academies in the early Middle Ages, and continued in Spain and the Sephardi Diaspora around the Mediterranean.[15] Today both editions of the law acknowledges as authoritative the *Shulhan Aruch* (The Arranged Table), written by the Sephardi scholar Yosef Caro in the 16th century. However, the *Ashkenazim*[16] use their own version of Shulhan Aruch written by Moshe Isserles. The Ashkenazi version is called *Mapa* (Tablecloth) and includes explanations and supplements from the Ashkenazi traditions and customs.[17]

The basic law and acceptance of the major teachings and legal principles are the same for the two traditions. Divergences between them are caused by the different historical, cultural and social contexts. The divergences are most obvious in traditions and practice of Judaism such as style and content of prayer, dietary and clothing laws and regulations, use of and pronunciation of Hebrew and utilisation of the Bible in religious studies. The Mizrahim in general follow the Sephardi edition of Halacha and Sephardi customs.

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[13] For example the Jews of the Balkans were more or less exterminated during the Holocaust.

[14] Arabic term indicating non-Muslim subject of a Muslim state. Used to describe the status of Christians and Jews, whom the Muslims considered to have received the earlier revelations of God, but who would not accept the latest and true revelation, namely Islam as revealed through the Prophet Mohammad.

[15] It is important to be aware that there are differences also within the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi traditions of Halacha.

[16] Plural form of Ashkenazi in Hebrew

[17] According to Isserles, Yosef Caro had ignored the Ashkenazi Halacha and tradition in Shulhan Aruch, and to correct this Isserles added the prevalent Ashkenazi traditions in the text of Yosef Caro to make the Shulhan acceptable for the Ashkenazim. (Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1971, vol. 14:1475).

The Sephardi Identity of Shas

Shas has chosen the term 'Sephardi' to define its historical, cultural and religious identity. According to Shas' official spokesman Itzhik Sudri, the criterion for being considered Sephardi by Shas is to follow the Sephardi edition of Halacha, not to be a descendant of the Sephardi Jews. Itzhik Sudri explains that the story of the Sephardi identity started with the country of origin of the important rabbis. The leading rabbis of Shas build their interpretation of the Halacha directly on Shulhan Aruch. Because a Sephardi rabbi wrote Shulhan Arcuh, everyone who follows the Shulhan Aruch, and not the Mapa, is by Itzhik Sudri automatically considered Sephardi.[18]

Literally *Torah* means "The Teaching" and it is in the Shas slogan understood as the entire body of all the written and oral teachings of Judaism, thereby including the Halacha. As such, the Torah is synonymous with the Jewish religion. The term 'religion' is not an original concept within Judaism. Judaism concentrates on observance – Jews observe and perform their religion, or rather the religious law. The rabbinical Judaism is focused on religious jurisprudence, not on theology or individual belief. More accurately, Judaism is understood as a way of life focused on fulfilment of the commandments of God, as part of the pact he made with 'the people/nation of Israel'. A Jew is someone who belongs to this people or nation, by birth or conversion.

1.3 Questioning Religious Classification

Shas is usually characterised by academics, journalists and others as Haredi because of its religious focus and outlook and its leadership. The customary ways of describing the degrees of, and relationship with, religious observance by individual Israeli Jews: Ultra Orthodox (*Haredi*), religious or Orthodox (*datii*), traditional (*masorti*), secular but maintains some of tradition (*hiloni hamkayem masoret*), secular (*hiloni*) and finally anti-religious (Kimmerling; 1998:end-note nr 37).[19] Shas officials described Shas as Sephardi and *Torahni*, which they explain as "following the Torah". According to Efraim Avidani in Shas: "Torahni is to follow the Torah. Haredi is more fanatic, more strict".

Haredism

The term Haredi comes from the Bible: "Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble (Haredim) at His words" Isaiah 66:5. Haredism is a Jewish European product. It was

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[18] As explained above also the Ashkenazim use the Shulhan Aruch as starting point, but they follow the Mapa and later Ashkenazi interpretations and are therefore not considered Sephardim.

[19] There are different ways of defining religious identities among Jewish Israelis.

produced by the changes created by the process of modernisation, including industrialisation, urbanisation and secularisation, from the middle of the 18th century. During and as a result of the process of modernisation many Jews in the European countries moved away from Judaism and their traditional way of life. 'Emancipation' lead to a new situation for the Jews of Europe wherein they counted as individuals, not as a community or ethnic group. This gave the individual Jew a choice of self-definition, including deciding if or how to follow the Jewish way of life (Heilman, 2000:15). Traditional Jews understood assimilation as a threat to the Jewish way of life and tradition, because it lead to the undermining of the family unit. This, again, resulted in deterioration of the traditional patterns of socialisation. As a reaction to the changing and differentiated secular society, Jews who were against assimilation embarked on the road of what became different types of Orthodoxy.

Throughout Europe different Jewish reactions developed in order to cope with the new circumstances, and these live on in Israel and other parts of the world, today. It is important to emphasise that *Haredism* (Ultra Orthodoxy), is not one, but diverse responses to the new political and social situation. Furthermore, some of these responses and the groups who represent their schools of thought are in opposition to each other.[20] However, in this study I present the academic understanding of the common Haredi traits that constitute the core of the Haredi identity and way of life in Israel today.

According Menachem Friedman (1993), Haredim emphasise that in order to be truly Jewish one has to live a life based on public and private observance of the Halacha, and this Halacha has to be interpreted by the correct religious authorities. Haredi identity and values can be understood by Friedman's description of Haredim as a "society of scholars" (1993:182) in which Jewish learning is perceived as the tool to stop the moral decay of the Jews, and as a never-ending religious obligation (Heilman, 2000). The great scholars became increasingly important from the 17th century, as did the rejection of everything associated with secular modern life. However, Haredim are happy to use the modern technology that came with modernisation, such as railway system, telegraphs, books and

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[20] See Heilman and Friedman 1991 "Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Jews: The Case of the Haredim", Kirchenbaum 1993,"Fundamentalism: A Jewish Traditional Perspectiv" and Silberstein 1993 "Religion, Ideology Modernity: Theoretical Issues in the Study of Jewish Fundamentalism" for further reading Haredi developments.

newspapers and recently Internet and cellular phones, means which increase the flow of information and knowledge.[21]

One of the Haredi features is opposition to Zionism. According to Aviezer Ravitsky (1989:89), Haredim are "everyone who views and experiences life in the Jewish state of Eretz Israel as exile". *Eretz Israel* is the Biblical term for (the Land of Israel). This means that Haredim consider the state of Israel as a secular environment and identify the secular Jewish authority as similar to any gentile ruler. Besides reflecting opposition towards secularism, this attitude reveals the concern of the Haredim for any situation that might essentially change the Jewish people from being a people of the Lord, into a nation among nations. Further, it is impossible for Haredim to acknowledge the legitimacy of the practical, collective historical mass migration from exile. This would put the works of men over divine activity, because to be Haredi is to recognise that the destiny of the Jewish people, both spiritually and politically, are under the direct determination of God (Friedman, 1993:179). Haredim thus have a passive and static understanding of history relying on God's interference and waiting for the Messiah to take them out of Exile to Redemption. In Israel today the Ashkenazi Haredim try to have as little contact with secular Israelis and the state as possible. They have their separate educational system, their own radio and Haredi press, and their own system of transport between the major Haredi centres.

Before proceeding it is necessary to establish some delimitations and present the outline of the following study.

1.4 Delimitations

This dissertation is about a Jewish religious-political movement in Israel and will therefore not focus on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Moreover, when using and discussing terms such as democracy, equality and discrimination, I do not consider the situation of the Arabs living within the state of Israel. However, it is important to look into the relationship between Sephardim and Arabs. This will be addressed in chapter 9.4 while discussing the peace process.

This study concentrates on the religious and political leaders of Shas and they are all men – men using scripture and ideas formulated by other men within a patriarchal religion.

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[21] There is an ongoing debate amongst Haredi rabbis in Israel about how to relate to the Internet and what rules should regulate the users.

Therefore this dissertation will mostly discuss the opinions and positions of men, but women in Shas will be discussed in chapter 8.

1.5 Outline of Dissertation

This dissertation is presented in an investigative manner following the development of the interpretation. In chapter 2, I present my research question and the theories upon which this is developed. Then I introduce the scholars whom I found useful in developing my understanding of Shas as a party-movement in the Middle East. Chapter 3 presents and discusses the conduct of and results from my fieldwork, in relation to the method of fieldwork. Chapter 4 gives a brief presentation of the social, political and religious context of Shas, after which Shas is briefly portrayed – its creation, rise, political development, politicians and supporters. This is meant as a background chapter to give the reader a framework for understanding of the following examination.

Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 present and discuss the findings from my fieldwork in relations to the key question, and the approach to examine it as presented in chapter 2. These chapters all concentrate on different aspects of Shas and study these in order to investigate Shas' relationship with modernisation. Moreover, these chapters examine Shas's relationship with modernisation in comparison to that of the Ashkenazi Haredim, as presented by academics. In chapter 10, the results and conclusion of this examination is presented in relation to the question asked and the approach chosen.

Throughout the dissertation I will describe experiences and episodes from my fieldwork similar to the narrative from Shaagat Aryeh above. These episodes describe some of my encounters with Shas and are meant to give the reader a possibility to form a picture of my meetings with my informants and the movement in study. The pending narratives are placed in the beginning of chapters 7, 8 and 9 and are italicised.

2 Research Question

This study is asking if Shas can be categorised as Haredi in the same way that academics and others categorise Ashkenazi Haredi political parties and religious movements in Israel. By questioning the Haredi identification of Shas I will discuss Shas' relationship with modernisation. This dissertation is written in the context of the research project Religious Movements and Development in the Middle East (REMODE).[22] The aim of the research project is to find new perspectives for studying and understanding religious movements in the Middle East as part of the process of modernisation. The research question is; should the religious movements in the Middle East be considered as promoting or as retarding modernisation in its diverse aspects? Applied to the case in study here, the query will be whether Shas leads to modernisation or whether it is a continuation of traditional Jewish organisational pattern, represented by Haredism. The interesting task is to investigate what type of encounter with modernisation Shas represents. Does Shas represent an accommodation reaction towards modernisation, that is, a reaction aimed at equipping themselves and their tradition in assisting them to deal with modernisation? This implies recognition, if not positive acceptance, of the new circumstances. Or, does Shas represent the separating and withdrawal attitude of the Ashkenazi Haredim?

From a sociological perspective modernisation is described as a process by which traditional societies become industrialised modern societies, with a differentiated and complex social structure. The political implication of this process is a transition from traditional rule, through a period of upheaval, to state formation (REMODE). Modernisation expresses the global patterns of economic, social and political change in terms of internationalisation, development of political ideologies and relationship between man and God or religion. In addition modernisation is usually understood as a move towards something better that involves welfare, democratic state systems and peace, though this of course depends on whose set of values one refers to. In this study I will focus on certain issues, presented below, to investigate the particular relationship of Shas with modernisation. I will not discuss these issues, or their relevance for modernisation, theoretically, but empirically with examples from my fieldwork.

Shas' relationship with modernisation will be interpreted following the approach of Bjørn Olav Utvik, who has studied the relationship between Egyptian Islamists and

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[22] Bjørn Olav Utvik, Department of East European and Oriental Studies, heads the project.

modernisation. He 'measured' the modernising effects of this religious movement through these issues: the movement's relationship with individualisation and with the individual social and economic situation of its supporters, its understanding and use of past and future, its relationship with the traditional religious power institutions, its view of the central state, its strategies for recruitment, its relationship with technology, and the new model for women within the movement and finally the practical politics of the movement.

In This Study the Corresponding Issues Used to Establish Shas' Relationship with Modernisation are:

- Shas' Sephardi identity as understood by my informants as Shas' New Jewish Israeli identity. This is promoted as an alternative to the secular New Israeli identity of the Zionist establishment of Israel, and shows Shas' relationship with individualisation.

- The understanding of past and future of my informants as expressed through their understanding of their slogan 'To Restore the Crown to Its Ancient Glory'. What is the Crown, which past are they referring to and how would they like to restore it? Through looking into these questions I will investigate Shas' relationship with the traditional religious power institutions in Israel and with the central state. By interpreting the diverse understandings of the slogan I will discuss the consequences of the room for different opinions, as to what are the most important focus and diverse understandings of central perceptions, amongst my informants.

- Shas' mobilisation of its supporters. Shas' connection with the public through its institutions, use of and relations to charismatic rabbis and public gatherings and demonstrations and use of technology and modern communication systems. This will provide an opportunity to study the party-movement of Shas trying to understand its nature and show Shas' relationship with the social and economic situation of individual.

- Looking into the model and position of women in Shas; their role, education and future prospects. This is done in relation to the situation of Sephardi women before Shas and to Haredi Ashkenazi women.

- Authority and leadership in Shas investigating its structure of power and the nature of the leadership. The areas of interest are the organisation of the leadership, the

relationship between the religious and the political leaders and ways of recruitment to the leadership.

- Shas' practical politics, areas of interest and the reasons behind the different engagements. Looking into Shas' practical relationship with the secular democratic state of Israel and its involvement in politics.

These issues are reflected in the division of the following chapters 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. To the extent that it is possible, each issue will be contrasted and compared with the academic presentation of attitudes and policies of Ashkenazi Haredi.

2.1 Use of Terms

Haredi

Because Shas has a different relationship with modernisation than what is embedded in the Haredi categorisation of Ashkenazi Jews, I find it necessary to question the use of this analytical term to describe Shas. As explained in the Introduction, the term Haredi describes a Jewish development within the European Christian cultural, historical and sociological context, whereas Shas is composed of people and cultures from the Arab, Muslim world. Furthermore, Shas developed within the modern state of Israeli. The Israeli society is complex and it is important to be aware of the levels of abstractions when one as a researcher makes generalisations. Generalisations can lead to misunderstandings of the social phenomenon in study. This is an issue of more general academic interest; can we properly use analytical categories from another context to describe and interpret a social phenomenon? My point of departure is not theoretical, but empirical and the aspiration of this dissertation is not to prove or counter a theory or model, but to increase the understanding of the object, the religious-political movement in study in its social, religious and political context. I am questioning the accuracy of categorising Shas under a term that does not originate from the historical nor religious context of Shas, and thus leads to a misunderstanding of Shas.

The term Haredi has two connotations and it is important to be aware of these levels of abstraction when using this term: the first is the academic understanding of Haredi as presented in the Introduction. In the academic perspective Haredi is an analytical category used to describe a segment of the Israeli population, their historical development, their way of life and relationship with their surroundings. The other connotation of Haredi is when it classifies a certain level of religious observance and piety. People who consider themselves as Haredi use this identification to describe their conduct of life.

This dissertation is not in any way questioning the degree or sincerity of the observance or Orthodoxy felt and practiced by Shas leaders, rabbis or followers. When interpreting Shas through looking into its Haredi identity, I am not trying to interpret whether the people constituting Shas are more or less 'religious' or 'Jewish' than their Ashkenazi counterparts. Moreover, I am not questioning my informants' understand of their own identity, nor claiming that I understand them better than they understand themselves.

However, I am questioning the understanding and categorisation of Shas by academic researchers. In addition to the academic writings on Haredi Jews and Haredism, I will use examples from Ashkenazi Haredim in Israel to exemplify described Haredi traits and to compare actual Ashkenazi Haredi entities with Shas.[23] This is a complicated comparison, due to the different characters in the organisation and structure of the Ashkenazi Haredi parties and movements and that of Shas. The way I see it, this difference in character increases the relevance of the question as to whether Shas can be described as Haredi.

Party-Movement

The present study describes Shas as a 'party-movement' because the term is broad enough to include the party, its religious leaders who are not officially represented in the Knesset, and also the entire Shas body of religious, social and political activity and involvement. This is how Shas presented itself to me through my fieldwork. First of all it presented itself as a political party; I interviewed the spokesman and politicians including Members of Knesset and other officials. Secondly, around and intervened in the party is the movement: I visited officially Shas-related welfare and educational institutions where I interviewed the managers of Shas' school network. Moreover, I visited unofficially related organisations, such as the girl school *Naavot Israel* and public gatherings like Shaagat Aryeh. In addition there is the relationship between Shas and public personalities, such as the 'charismatic rabbis' who speak at public gatherings, in radio and TV shows and religious singers.

It is difficult to decide 'what is Shas' and 'what is not Shas'. I have chosen to follow the outlines and labelling pointed out to me by informants from Shas and other people studying Shas. Visible signs of connection to the body of Shas are economic support,

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[23] For this purpose I will draw especially on the Ashkenazi Haredi party *Agudat Yisrael*, (The Band of Israel), as presented in chapter 4.1.

informal ties to a rabbi associated with Shas or a an official representative of Shas, or the presence of Shas symbols, i.e. the slogan, photos of the leadership or Ovadia Yosef's books on Halacha. I will return to this dilemma in chapter 7 while discussing then relationship between the party and the movement.

2.2 Leadership Focus

This study interprets the understandings of Shas presented to me during my fieldwork by Shas officials, i.e. persons with an official position in Shas who can speak on its behalf. According to Peter Beyer (1997), focusing on the religious leaders has "the advantage of providing some real social actors who actually do things. Their actions and attitudes can be examined and compared with those of the general public, religious and otherwise." (Beyer, 1997:97). It is the religious leaders who shape the religion into a political religious movement and adapt Shas to its modernised reality. To define the leadership of Shas is complicated and what is more, to separate between religious and other leadership of Shas is intricate and does not reflect the realities in the structure of leadership of Shas. I will discuss this further in chapter 9.

2.3 Former studies of Shas

Most of the former examinations of Shas have focused on the supporters and the reasons for their affiliation with Shas, explaining the electoral development of Shas focusing on the ethnic and social reasons and background for its electoral and social success.[24]

In this study I use former interpretations and studies of Shas in a critical manner to display aspects of or perspectives on Shas that I have not been able to investigate myself, due to limitation set by the scale of this dissertation. I have especially drawn on the knowledge presented by the Israeli sociologist Neri Horowitz, on Ovadia Yosef and the developments within the Sephardi Orthodox community that lead to Shas. Furthermore, Nissim Leon and Aaron Willis have given me perspective of the Sephardi supporters of Shas and their contact and connection with the leadership, in their ethnographic studies on Shas. My perspective on Shas as a political participant in the Israeli democracy stems from the analysis of the sociologist Ezra Kopelowitz, and the Egyptian social scientist Omar

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[24] An example of studies focusing on the electoral success of Shas is the series *The Elections in Israel* edited by Arian and Shamir, containing analyses of election results.

Kamil has provided inspiring and alternative views on Ovadia Yosef and the ambitions of Shas.

In addition to these I use other analysis of Shas by the Israeli sociologist Baruch Kimmerling, educator and poet Sami Shalom Chetrit, the Israeli scholar Ricky Tessler, the Israeli political scientist Yoav Peled and Etta Bick. Finally, I draw on my interviews with the Israeli sociologist Menachem Friedman, the Israeli anthropologist Tamar El-Or, the Israeli scholar Zvi Zohar, author Sami Michael[25] and journalists Avirama Golan and Aryeh Dayan from my fieldwork.

The Haredi identity of Shas seems to me to be taken for granted by most of these scholars and journalists who write about Shas. This study thus questions this settled approach that determines the understanding of the religious identity of Shas, its position in the Israeli society and the motivating forces behind its actions.

2.4 Categorising Shas as Haredi – Reasons For and Arguments Against

The party-movement of Shas and its leaders naturally share many characteristics with Ashkenazi Haredim because of Shas' history in Israel and links to the Ashkenazi Haredi institutions and religious leaders. This dissertation does not aim to negate these links and shared features. The academic categorisation of Shas as Haredi stems from the party-movement's rise from within the Ashkenazi Haredi world, Shas' political position on issues of religion and state, and finally the outlook and focus of its welfare institutions and educational system that is similar to that of the Haredi parties and movements.

Some of the Reasons for Describing Shas as Haredi:

- A general understanding that Shas as a party, and Sephardi Orthodoxy in Israel, springs out from the Ashkenazi Haredi institutions. The background for this development is the immigration history of the Sephardim. Sephardi Jews had few yeshivas or organised religious institutions in Israel before the rise of Shas. Many people in Shas would modify this view by arguing that there was indeed Sephardi Orthodoxy in Israel before the 1950s.
- From the outside Shas officials look like Ashkenazi Haredim in black suits, black hats and beards, features they have picked up from the Ashkenazi Haredim.

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[25] See Michael 1988 *Refuge* for a literary perspective on the relationship between Askhenazi and Middle Eastern Jews in Israel.

- The similar structure of leadership with the Council of rabbis on top of the hierarchy is adopted from the Ashkenazi Haredi parties.

- The wish for a return to the past, as presented in Shas' slogan, is at first glance similar to the Ashkenazi Haredi agenda.

- Shas' focus on education and the religious focus of its institutions.

- The radio channels and separate press is similar to that of the Ashkenazi Haredim.

- The Shas party's position in politics is similar to that of all the religious parties, including the Ashkenazi Haredi parties.

Why Not Haredi

Shas is a unique party-movement sociologically, politically and in terms of Judaism and it has its own relationship with modernisation because of its historical and cultural background different from the Ashkenazi Haredim. Shas is something new in terms of its New Israeli Jewish identity, the newly unification of Sephardi observance and traditions, the thoughts of its spiritual leader Ovadia Yosef on interpretation of the Halacha and his practical rulings, and the involvements of Shas in the Israeli democratic state, amongst other matters. Shas' party-movement is not Haredi neither if one compares the identity, politics or behaviour of Shas with other Haredi parties, nor if one examines the constituency of Shas that is composed of all the various levels of observant Jews.

I have found that Shas does not operate with a strict categorisation between what it considers as an accepted observant Jew and less observant Jews. This gives Shas the opportunity to welcome supporters with different levels of observance and to interact with institutions and people with other levels of observance. The results of this room for different levels of observance are apparent through the different institutions related to Shas, in its political involvement, and in its attraction for, and including attitude towards, all of its supporters. Again, this is in contrast to the Ashkenazi Haredim who define observance according to their fixed regulations of observance.

If not Haredi – What is Shas?

During my interviews my informants would seldom characterise Shas or themselves as Haredi, unless I asked about this specifically. Rather, they would use the terms 'Sephardi' and 'Torahni' to define Shas, its identity and their own observance. These terms are built on Ovadia Yosef's Halachic position and rabbinical rulings, his development of thought and the shaping of Shas. This way Shas and Ovadia Yosef are building a new

Israeli identity on the traditions and customs of the Sephardi Judaism and accommodated to the reality of the state of Israel today.

From this study there appear four major issues of interests for Shas: to reform the Sephardi tradition, to increase the observance of the individual Jew in accordance with the Sephardi edition of the Halacha, to improve the socio-economical situation and social standing of the Sephardim in the Israeli society, including the Sephardi women, and finally to increase the position and status of Judaism in the state.

These issues indicate a party-movement with a relationship with modernisation that enables Shas to be open to supporters with different levels of religious observance and commitment. Through my fieldwork I found that Shas expresses an attitude that is embracing and inclusive towards all Jews, and an acceptance of individual opinions and situations. These underlying attitudes express what I have labelled the motive powers of Shas, i.e. the inspiration behind the ideology that encourages the identity, policies and actions of Shas. I do not understand the motive power as the final goal of Shas, in terms of political purpose, but rather as the force that impelled the leaders to Shas give the outlook and focus it has. These inspirational forces are also encouraging the further development of Shas – its actions within the Israeli society and its internal progress.

In practical terms, Shas is participating completely in the Israeli state and society, and, what is more, Shas wants to improve the political and social situation of its constituency. The improvement is enforced on the national level via the Knesset and democratic measures and on local level by the party-movement's welfare and educational institutions. Thus, Shas is not aiming to restore a lifestyle from the past, but is constructing a new lifestyle for the future in its Israeli context. A context Shas is trying to change by claming co-ownership to the Israeli democracy and utilising the channels in this democracy to enforce its policies.

This is different from the Haredi relationship with modernisation, which is characterised by an isolationalistic and withdrawing attitude, embodied in the opposition to Zionism and segregation from the surrounding secular society. This attitude is a result of the Haredi focus towards a historical past that they revere and want to remodel. Furthermore, the Haredim operate with a defined religious commitment and follow a specific religious observance, which they expect of their social group.

3   Fieldwork in Israel – Qualitative Method

In this chapter I will present my preparation for, collection and interpretation of the empirical data from my field trips in Israel from September to mid November 2000 and from April through May 2001. Here I wish to give proof of my method, argue for my use of sources, as well as present to the reader my expectations of possible obstacles and the actual experiences in my encounters with Shas.

All the officials from Shas talking in this dissertation are taken from my fieldwork if nothing else is noted. I will introduce my main informants below. When I say that something is the focus or intention, or similar, 'of Shas', this is a deliberate generalisation made to make the presentation of this study more easily accessible. The generalisations are made from the information given to me by my informants in Shas who are in a position to talk on behalf of the party-movement. However, it is possible that not everybody in Shas would agree to all the statements presented as statements 'of Shas' in this study.

In addition to the information gathered in interviews and observations of Shas and written material collected from Shas' offices, I have used secondary sources such as interviews and discussions with academics, intellectuals and journalists about Shas, as well as written material on Shas in my dissertation. I obtained almost all my reference material on Shas and Haredism in Israel, because most are unavailable in Norway. The method of using observation and other written sources in addition to the primary informants is called 'triangulating' and presupposes critical reading of all sources (Kaijser and Öhlander, 1999:26).

I asked my informants in Shas for all available written information about the party-movement and its activities. However, Shas does not have a party programme or any official documents about their representatives in the Knesset, nor about the internal organisation or about Shas' policies and activities. Shas official Itzhak Avidani gave me a brief introduction of all the Shas Members of Knesset and said I might as well use the official information distributed from the Knesset. Carmela Naor, manager of Shas' social and welfare organisation for women, gave me a sheet of writing paper with the organisation's name, address and main activities imprinted in the margin. The lack of written material also became obvious from my observations in Shas offices. There were photos of Ovadia Yosef and other prominent religious leaders on the walls together with the Shas slogan, but they do not have any brochures or other written documents for visitors or people interested.

The primary written material from my fieldwork consists of Shas' newspaper *Yom Leyom*, (Day to Day), the party-movement's weekly news letter *Maayan Shavoa*[26] (Spring of the Week), wall posters and flyers from Shas rallies and Shaagat Aryeh[27], a pamphlet from Shas marketing their school network, and an information sheet produced by *Kaof*, Orthodox Information Centre, about the situation of the Israeli Supreme Court and the overrepresentation of Ashkenazi, secular judges, given to me by Shas' spokesman Itzhik Sudri. Finally, Member of Knesset Nissim Zeev gave me a copy of two articles from Jerusalem Post International edition (in English) as information about Shas.

In order to throw light on Shas from other perspectives, I read articles and analysis from the newspapers Ha'aretz and Jerusalem Post in paper version whilst in Israel and their Internet editions in Norway. This gave me an opportunity to comprehend the position of Shas in the Israeli society politically and socially, as well as the way Shas officials interacted in this context. This was important especially in view of the situation that developed between the Palestinians and the Israelis in the autumn of 2001, which changed the internal political agenda.

3.1 The Political Scene in Israel

My fieldwork during the autumn of 2000 was limited by the political and military situation in Israel after the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising in October 2000, called the Al Aqsa Intifada, and the Israeli response to it. As a result of the new circumstances it became increasingly difficult to arrange to meet people. The political situation was constantly changing and it was complicated for me to travel due to fear of bomb threats on public transport. Many of my appointments were cancelled because my contacts and informants preferred to stay at home and the general atmosphere was tense.

Before the Intifada, Shas had been on the national agenda for many weeks. This was because of the imprisonment of former Shas Chairman Aryeh Deri, and the party's split from the Barak government coalition. Shas officials were in the newspapers and on TV programmes almost every day. This came to an abrupt stop after the eruption of the violent unrest. People were no longer interested in discussing Shas since they were preoccupied with the pressing circumstances.

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[26] For more details on the newspaper and newsletter, see chapter 7.6 on "Relationship with technology and modern tools".

[27] The tent yeshiva / protest outside the prison where former Shas chairman Aryeh Deri is imprisoned, for details se Introduction.

In addition to how the Intifada and the Israeli response affected my informants, it was a personal challenge for me to focus on my dissertation while people were killed everyday within kilometres of Jerusalem. Because of the uncertainty of the security situation and the burden this posed to my family in Norway, I went home one month earlier than planned.

When I returned to Israel in May 2001 to complete my fieldwork, I felt much more prepared than I was on my first trip. The material I had collected and my interpretation of Shas had matured. The Intifada was still going on.[28] But, people in Israel had grown more accustomed to the situation, which in general was calmer than it was in the autumn of 2000.

3.2 *My Main Informants*

Before I went to Israel I sent a letter to and e-mailed the Shas fraction in the Knesset presenting myself and asked to talk to someone in Shas and get their official papers. I never received any answer. Therefore, upon my arrival in Israel I had not pre-planned whom I wanted to talk because I had no idea who would talk to me, or what kind of structure of leadership Shas had. I started by contacting and interviewing academics and journalists who write about Shas. Then I went to the Shas main office in Jerusalem and introduced myself and asked to talk to the spokesman. For some weeks I called him without getting an appointment. Finally, I got an appointment through helpful contacts like journalists Avirama Golan and Motti Cohen, and the office of Member of Knesset Michael Melchior in the Knesset. After getting the first interview 'I was on the inside' and it was easier to call again and to ask my informants to put me in touch with other people to interview. This way, my list of informants is a result of accidental circumstances and contacts suggested to, and arranged for me, by Shas officials or above-mentioned contacts. Even though, in my opinion the list well represents the structure and culture of the leadership of Shas.

Almost all of my helpful contacts were doubtful as to whether Shas officials would talk to me, of two almost contradicting reasons: first of all because Shas officials generally are suspicious of people who write about the party-movement, due to experiences with unflattering descriptions, and secondly, because Shas officials are interested in publicity. In the last context, I, as a student writing something my informants did not fully comprehend,

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[28] As it still is while I am writing this dissertation.

and coming from a country far away, was thought not to be very interesting from my informants' point of view. However, on my second fieldwork in May 2001 the political situation was, in this perspective, an advantage for me, compared to the difficulties the it had created in the autumn of 2000. The reason was that because the security situation, and not Shas, was on the national agenda, Shas officials were able to spend more time on me than they were under normal circumstances. They seemed pleased that someone did not forget about them and still wanted to talk about the issues of their interest. This illustrates how dependent the researcher is on the surrounding society, and on situations that do not necessarily have a direct connection with the object in study.

Male Informants

My first interview was with Itzhak Avidani, senior advisor and Chief of staff for Member of Knesset Shlomo Benizri.[29] I interviewed Itzhak Avidani twice, first in the Shas main office and the second time in the Knesset, where he arranged for me to enter as a guest of Shas. Both interviews lasted two hours. He studied for three years in a yeshiva and told me he had passed a governmental test for being a rabbi, but he does not consider himself a good rabbi and does not plan to utilise his exam. He still serves as a reserve in the military. Itzhak Avidani speaks English well.

Itzhik Sudri is the official spokesman of Shas. I interviewed him twice in the Shas main office in Jerusalem for about an hour and a half each time. Itzhik Sudri quit his yeshiva studies to do his military service. His parents came to Israel from Morocco. He does not know any English. I interviewed him twice in main office of Shas, both interview lasted about one hour and a half.

Nissim Zeev is a Member of Knesset. Before he was Deputy Major of Jerusalem from 1993-1998. He is educated at the Sephardi Porat Yosef yeshiva in Jerusalem as a ritual slaughterer, a ritual circumciser and rabbi. Nissim Zeev has worked as a rabbi in the USA and in Mexico for Sephardi Jews. We spoke in Hebrew. I interviewed him for approximately one hour in his office in the Knesset.

Ephraim Avidani is Parliamentary Assistant to Nissim Zeev. He is a rabbi and has worked as Chief rabbi in Columbia, South America. He is the father of Itzhak Avidani. Ephraim Avidani speaks English well. We spoke before and after my interview with Nissim Zeev.

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[29] In this dissertation his title is shortened to Shas official for practical reasons.

Shlomo Benizri is a Member of Knesset and a lecturer in Judaism for returnees to observance. Shlomo Benizri speaks English. I was introduced to Shlomo Benizri on my first visit to the Knesset by Itzhak Avidani. I interviewed itself was conducted by telephone and lasted 20 minutes.

Except from Itzhik Sudri, all the Shas politicians presented above are rabbis. Being a rabbi denotes being a teacher of Judaism qualified to make decisions based on Jewish law (Jacobs, 1999:192). A rabbi is not a priest, but, next to teacher, primarily a spiritual guide, telling his followers how to act according to their interpretations of the Halacha. A rabbi is not ordained, or does not have any special ritual position – any Jewish man can perform the religious rituals without being a rabbi (Lewis, 1984:79). Being a rabbi does not eliminate other occupations or offices. Not all rabbis perform as rabbi, and the position as a revered and respected rabbi comes with experience and recognition, not from the title itself. This is the background for Itzhak Avidani's comment on his own incapacity to function as a rabbi. Itzhak Avidani explained to me that to be considered an important rabbi implies having a big yeshiva and the correct spirit.

Female Informants

I only interviewed two women in Shas, but this number well represent the actual gender division in the leadership. During my fieldwork women appear in the organisations and institutions dealing with women that I visited, as wives of important Shas men and as individuals I met whilst attending Shas-related events. In Shas women work mainly with other women, in institutions or organisations for women or children.[30] They seemed to accept and acknowledge the results of the segregation policies in Shas and the pre-dominantly masculine hierarchy of its leadership, as well as their own positions. This includes the fact that only men can represent Shas officially, and women are referred to the female arena only.

Carmela Naor is the manager of the Shas social and welfare organisation for women Em Margalit Israel. I interviewed her in the main office of *El Ha'Maayan*, (To/Towards the Well Spring)[31], the umbrella organisation for all of Shas' social institutions, in Jerusalem for approximately 45 minutes.

Shifra Zeev is the manager of Naavot Israel; the girls' school her husband, Member of Knesset Nissim Zeev, started and runs in Jerusalem. She speaks some English, but

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[30] For more details on women's position, role, education, and occupation see chapter 6.
[31] The name reflects a move toward Judaism, which is the Wellspring.

prefers Hebrew. I interviewed her for one hour, in addition to our conversation when she showed me the school's facilities.

3.3 Interview Situation

An interview is defined by Eva Fägerborg (1999:57) as a way of communication wherein someone is relating a story and answering questions to another person who registers what is being told. I used a theme guide to structure my interviews because, as Fägerborg (in Kaijser and Öhlander, 1999:64) notes, a theme guide gives the researcher an opportunity to follow up the natural development of the conversations with a possible new direction.[32] I prepared the theme guide before my interviews and altered it during my fieldwork when new situations or topics came up. This is a natural part of the development of the interpretation, because reality often looks different from what we expect from our presuppositions (Strøm, 1998:32). My interviews were thus not very strictly structured on my part, and I tried to keep in mind what Lena Gerholm (Gerholm, 1993:42) wrote about the researcher's part; namely to be an interested listener, but not to control the conversation.

Myself and the Informants – Religious Identity, Gender and Age

The sociological context of all my meetings with Shas was very important for my access to them and to what they could and would tell me or let me be part of. Gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, religious belonging and cultural identity determine the sociological context. As a young, non-Jewish woman I expected some problems with regard to access to my informants. I always dressed modestly, usually wearing a costume with the correct length and shirts with sleeves below my elbows. I knew how to dress from my observations of religious Jews and former experiences in Israel. I did not try to copy the female Shas officials, but rather to dress properly covered and never in trousers, as I knew of their custom against trousers for women.

As for my age, my informants thought I was younger and were shocked when they found out I was 27 and not married. I sometimes felt that my informants looked upon me as a 'youngster' and treated me with a sense of concern and responsibility one shows someone young and inexperienced. This feeling was increased by the fact that I am a woman and most of my informants were men.

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[32] See appendix I.

The fact that I am not Jewish was not a problem in my interviews – my informants respected my religious identity as a Protestant. Judaism is not a missionary religion, thus they were not interested in converting me.

According to the Haredi interpretation of the Halacha, men and women do not shake hands or touch anyone from the opposite sex, except from their spouses or children. The Shas officials follow this custom. Furthermore, Haredi men and women should not be in a room alone with someone of the opposite sex. Even though most of my informants were men, the Shas officials did not seem to be bothered by being in a room alone with me with the door closed. This was surprising. Another Halachic regulation forbids Haredim men and women to look someone of the opposite sex into the eyes. However, all my informants would look me into the eyes as we spoke, and their body language indicated to me that they were relaxed. As one example, the Hassidic assistant of Itzhak Avidani's avoided looking me into the eyes and answered my questions through his boss. This is relevant because it reveals the more relaxed social relations of the Shas officials compared to Ashkenazi Haredim. Strict observance of these customs of gender relations are an important part of the Haredi identity, but it seems not such an important part of the Shas officials' identity.

Language

Language is another important aspect for understanding. I have studied Hebrew in an *Ulpan* (a Hebrew language course)[33], at the University of Melbourne, Australia, and in a summer course at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. My Hebrew was usually better than my informants' English. For my informants it was an advantage to speak in their everyday language,[34] which increased their ability to express themselves. All the translations of my interviews and other more informal conversations are mine. In the process of translation I have concentrated on making the answers and utterances of my informants understandable, and therefore I have corrected obvious grammatical mistakes when they spoke in English. I dare say I have been true to my informants and the academic standard when translating and using my informants' utterances in my dissertation. I have consulted my advisor Bente Groth, who is fluent in Modern Hebrew, on some difficult translations. The tape recordings of the interviews were especially helpful in the process of translation and can also be used

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[33] Offered mainly to new immigrants.

[34] Hebrew is the mother tongue of most of my informants, but for some Arabic is their mother tounge.

as assurance, if anybody wishes to go back to the sources. All Hebrew words are written in phonetic transliteration suitable for English speakers' pronouncement. [35]

The fact that I know Hebrew made it easier for me to get in touch with, and interview, Shas officials from a social point of view. It seemed to make my informants more at ease with me personally and my intentions, and they were therefore able to trust me.

Almost all of my informants gave the impression of speaking without reservations. Most of my male informants are used to talking in public and with journalists. This can also be a disadvantage because talking to the press usually involves talking in short, precise, argumentative sentences. In most cases this "press-style" was avoided because of my clear signalling that I had 'the entire day to spend'. In addition, my level of Hebrew forced my informants to speak more slowly and with less extravagant and loaded words.

My Foreign and Western Culture

My informants were impressed that I came from Norway to study them. I represented the Western, European culture in my encounters with the Sephardi, Israeli Shas officials. It seemed as if this had few negative consequences for my ability to communicate with my informants. In terms of interaction with my informants, my different cultural background made them appreciate my interest in them even more than if I had been an Israeli. However, the lack of shared cultural and historical background between my informants and I should not be underestimated. This could complicate the flow of information and my ability to understand my informants, as well as restrict their answers if they thought my background would make it hard for me to understand.

Many people in Israel react in some way to the fact that I come from Oslo because of the Oslo Accords. In order not to make this a focal point in my interviews or meetings with Shas, I usually said I was from Norway. However, few of my informants were interested in these facts or my background in general.

I did not tell my informants I had spent a year in a kibbutz unless they asked directly and I felt obliged to answer. 'Kibbutz' is for my informants synonymous with Ashkenazi, secular Israeli culture, and thus not thought very highly of. I was afraid it could become an obstacle in the communication process. But, my informants were pleased that I had studied Hebrew at the Hebrew University.

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[35] See appendix II.

3.4 Observation of Informants and the Party-movement

Observation is part of the classical method of fieldwork in cultural anthropology and includes the study of informant's behaviour, language, dress code, communication and external reactions to all these issues (Lönnqvist, 1996:134). Whilst observing the researcher must use all of his or her senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and feelings (Kaijser and Öhlander, 1999:77). The idea is to study a cultural expression or group of people, and contemplate what these observations signify and represent.

My Residence in Jerusalem

I choose to have my base in Jerusalem because this is where the Israeli government has its most important offices and where the Knesset is. Shas has its office in this city as well as the major offices of its social institutions. Ovadia Yosef lives in Jerusalem close to his yeshiva and the synagogue where he has his weekly lecture after Shabbat is in a traditional Sephardi neighbourhood in Jerusalem.[36] Another reason for living in Jerusalem is the opportunity to discuss Shas with Shas supporters or sympathisers.

I did not live in the community of my informants, as an anthropologist probably would have. There are several reasons for this. First of all, Shas supporters generally do not live in one area or in separate neighbourhoods like the Ashkenazi Haredim, who usually live in ghetto resembling neighbourhoods in Jerusalem, the cities south of Tel Aviv and in the Haredi city Bnei Brak, outside of Tel Aviv. Neither does the Shas leadership who is the focus group of this dissertation. Therefore there was no natural place for me to live in order to be part of in my informants' everyday life. Secondly, I do not know if I could have been able to live in any of my informants' neighbourhoods as a foreign, non-Jewish woman.

Observation and Location of Interviews

When interviewing and observing it is important not to become a threat to the informants. They could easily regard me as a sort of spy scrutinising their behaviour and party-movement. Shas officials are used to journalists and others writing about them and Shas in unflattering terms. I did not want to be put in that category, but I also made an effort not to become their mouthpiece. I can never be sure of exactly how they considered me, nevertheless I never had the feeling of posing any threat or creating an uncomfortable atmosphere. This is sustained by the fact that I was allowed to be around when the Shas

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[36] Shabbat begins at sunset on Friday and ends by sunset on Saturday, in Israel the Shabbat ends between seven and eight in the evening and it is after this Ovadia Yosef has his lectures.

officials had discussions on internal matters, as well as on the political agenda of the day. This may have to do with my inferior status as a student and my apparent efforts to behave respectfully.

All of my interviews with Shas officials were set in their premises, whether it was their main office in Jerusalem, their offices in the Knesset or in the main office of El Ha'Maayan, the umbrella organisation for all of Shas' social and welfare institutions. I was their guest and they were in their own environment and this situation gave my informants the advantage of feeling at ease. This is, according to Anders Gustavsson (Gustavsson, 1999:4), one of the most important elements in order to be able to have a relaxed conversation with a two-way communication. Being in his or her everyday environment might also influence the informant to be 'extra convincing', because of ideological inspiration or perhaps to impress colleagues present.

From my observations of my informants and their surroundings during, before and after the interviews, I got an idea of how Shas operates its offices and how the Shas officials work and are organised. Before interviewing Itzhik Sudri and Itzhak Avidani in the Shas main office, I would sit in the front room observing the activities. The only women in this office were the secretaries operating the front room desk. They were modestly dressed and covered their hair. Men in dark suits went back and forth continually and there was a high level of activity. At some point all the men disappeared into one room gathering for the afternoon prayer.

The main office of El Ha'Maayan is organised in two corridors; one for female employees working in the division concentrating on women called *Margalit Em Israel* (Margalit the Mother of Israel)[37], and the other for male employees. According to Carmela Naor, this keeps them separate in accordance with the Halacha, and functions very well.

On my first visit to the Knesset as Shas' guest, Itzhak Avidani, senior Shas official, gave me a guided tour. We went the gallery above the Parliamentary hall to watch the Members of Knesset in action. In the gallery Haredi and Orthodox men sat in the rows on the right, including most Shas officials, and in the rest of the rows there was a mixed crowd. Itzhak Avidani sat next to me in the mixed crowd and did not appear uncomfortable.

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[37] The organisation is named after Ovadia Yosef's deceased wife, Margalit.

Observing and Attending Events

I observed Shas as a religious party-movement in the broader sense when I visited the Yassdin synagogue to listen to Ovadia Yosef's weekly sermon, on my trips to the tent yeshiva Shaagat Aryeh[38] and when Nissim Leon guided me on our visits to the local Shas synagogues outside Tel Aviv.[39] I also attended the celebration of the holiday *Lag B'Omer*.[40] This is not an exclusive Sephardi or Shas celebration, but there were many Sephardim and Shas supporters present, such as people from Shaagat Aryeh who had a stall advocating support for Aryeh Deri. They were playing the songs written for and sung at the Shaagat Aryeh and had large posters with photos of the former Shas Chairman.

Illustration 1. Outside the High court in Jerusalem on the day Aryeh Deri was imprisoned. Shas supporters organising to escort Aryeh Deri on his way to prison after demonstrating for his release. The banners read "Release Deri" (photo: Tilde Rosmer).

On most of my observation trips I was confined to the female arena. This was interesting, because when interviewing the Shas officials I was in the male arena. In the outdoor yeshiva Shaagat Aryeh the separation between the male and the female side was

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[38] The tent yeshiva/protest outside the prison where former Shas Chairman Aryeh Deri is imprisoned, for details se Introduction.

[39] As I said in the Introduction, some of these experiences are narrated throughout the dissertation.

[40] Lag B'Omer is the festival day in a period of mourning and according to the Halacha it is the only day in the Jewish month of Omer Jews are allowed to cut their hair, shave and get married. Since the 17th century it has been celebrated with a pilgrimage to the grave of rabbi Simon Bar Yochai at Mount Merom. At the gravesite and all over Israel people gather around bonfires.

organised with a plastic fence.[41] Because of the rather strict separation it was surprising that, when I was meeting the organiser Yehuda Azrad, he insisted I had to go into the male side and all the way up to the stage. The men looked at me with irritation and some told me to go to the female side.

On these trips my costume was too expensive looking, and people often asked if I was a TV or newspaper reporter. Women I spoke with would ask about my short hair and some wanted to know where I had bought my wig.[42] Predominantly married Ashkenazi Orthodox or Haredi women wear wigs, therefore this question implied that I was Ashkenazi and married. It was a little harder to explain to the women I met at these trips why I was there when I told them I was not Jewish, than it was to my informants.

3.5 Ethical Questions and Source Reliability

My informants did not seem to quite understand what I was doing. Often they would reply that if I had talked to this and this person, I had all the info I needed and I could go home and write my dissertation. According to the NESH (paragraph B.9) research ethical guide lines for social science, law and arts, the researcher is obliged to inform the informants about the purpose of the project and the consequences of participation.

I asked my informants if they would like to read what I wrote about them, but none of them were interested. The reason for this is that I do not write for an Israeli audience, thus they did not feel the need to counter or comment what I wrote. Furthermore, they did not consider me to be attacking or opposing them, and therefore felt safe about the outcome. Finally, they might not have been very concerned about what I wrote about them. Their lack of concern and interest may have a negative consequence for the information I gathered in my interviews. If my informants were not involved in my research, this could affect their participation and sincerity during my interviews and thus possibly decrease the value of the empirical data.

Interpretation of the information I gathered on my field trips is sometimes difficult. In NESH (paragraph B.17) research ethical guide lines it is written that the researcher has to show respect for the values and attitudes of the informants even though these may deviate from those of the researcher or from what is generally accepted. This means that I have to be prepared to handle with care utterances that are controversial. It is of utter most

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[41] See Introduction for details.

[42] The custom for married Orthodox and Haredi Jewish women is to cover their hair. The Ashkenazi custom is to wear a wig or a hat (or both). The Sephardi custom is to wear a scarf or hair net. Ovadia Yosef ruled that all Sephardi women should wear the traditional Sephardi covers and not wigs.

importance that I do not misuse the information I have gathered through interviews, based on trust and respect, by taking the information apart or out of context. If taken out of context I have to be aware of this; the structure of this interpretation is mine, not my informants'.

Birgitt Hertzberg Johnsen (lecture 3/2/00) points out another ethical stance the researcher has to remember: always believe what you are told, i.e. believe that the informant is telling you what he or she considers to be true. Accept the information given by people interviewed as "true" – a researcher is not a journalist trying to confirm his or her story. On the other hand the researcher must take care not to be used as a mouthpiece for the informants. This can be a difficult balance.

Yet another difficulty while interpreting is if the researcher should speculate in reasons and motives behind use of language and choice of topics. My approach of interpretation of my interviews is not attempting to go inside my informants' heads and figure out why they think like they do, but rather accept their answers as they are and try to understand what they mean. These are the hermeneutic problems I have met while interpreting Shas on the basis of the material collected on my field trips. My aim is to explain and make my informants and their actions understandable academically.

It has not been necessary for me to keep my informants' identities hidden. None of my informants asked to be anonymous. The reason for this is that almost all of my primary informants are officially linked to Shas in some way. They were speaking on the background of their position or office in Shas, or in organisations or institutions related to Shas. As such, their attitude was self-assured and persuasive in representing their ideology and politics. This attitude towards their positions and statements is reflected in their relaxed relationship with my use of a tape recorder. All my informants agreed to be recorded, some in return for my promise that the recording was only to be used by me, for my dissertation. The fact that all my informants were open about their position in and relation to Shas is an important point in the understanding of Shas. This is in contrast to Norwegian researchers' usual emphasis on privacy protection as exemplified by the tendency of hiding informants' identities.

3.6   Concluding Remark

It is of course impossible to know for certain whether my informants have provided me with the complete picture of Shas and its ideology. Is the data from my interviews carefully chosen and designed, or is it ordinary and standard? The tape recorder could have

had an impact in this context, as a possible hindrance for my informants' readiness to speak without restraint. However, none of my informants ever asked me to turn off my tape recorder or refused to answer questions on certain topics. On the other hand, since I almost always used the tape recorder, I cannot know if the information would have been different without it.

All things considered, my informants were not as preoccupied with my age, gender, religious identity or western cultural belonging, as I thought they might have been. These facts were less of an issue and created fewer problems than expected. My worries of possible difficulties in accomplishing my fieldwork, related to my person, were grounded in my knowledge about Ashkenazi Haredim. The Shas officials and supporters behaved differently from these expectations, and thus from the picture I have of Ashkenazi Haredim from academic sources. This is relevant and very important to the entire dissertation and its research question, namely questioning the use of a term describing Ashkenazi Jews to describe the Sephardi Shas. This observation is also an important reminder of how easy it is to generalise from one group to another. In addition, this tells me that most of my knowledge of religious Jews in Israel, prior to my fieldwork, was based on books and articles about Ashkenazi Haredim.

4 Presenting Shas and Religious Parties in Israel

This chapter is meant as background information for the reader to enable him or her to understand the following interpretation of Shas, its context and development. First I will present other religious parties and the religious institutions in Israel followed by a brief outline of the rise and development of Shas including its political history, presentation of the organisation of Shas, its affiliated institutions and its supporters.

4.1 Religious Parties

Agudat Yisrael

The Haredi Jews, those who did not perish during the Holocaust and not immigrated to the United States, immigrated to Israel where the organisation of *Agudat Yisrael* (The Band/Association of Israel) became a political party. The Hassidic and Lithuanian groups of traditionalist Jews in Eastern Europe formed Agudat Yisrael in 1912. The Hassidim were originally from Poland and their movement has a spirituality focus, as opposed to the Lithuanians who focus on stringent study and strict observance of the Halacha. With Agudat Yisrael the two groups wanted to reorganise their traditional leadership into an effective political actor that would be able to deal with, and hopefully halt, modernisation (Mittleman, 1993). Mittleman (1993) describes Agudat Yisrael as "an amalgam of modern democratic institutions and ancient hierarchical structures". Any Jew could join the movement if he recognised and followed the rules and regulations of the Torah. The structure was based on local associations that were unified at the national level, above which was the elected general assembly that again was controlled by *Moetzet G'adolei ha'Torah* (The Council of Torah Sages) (Mittleman, 1993:232). The Council's task was to make sure that none of the political actions or other activities of Agudat Yisrael were in conflict with the Torah. It had the right to veto all decisions.

In the state of Israel Haredim adopted a "de facto recognition of the state", that is they related to and cooperated with the state in a practical manner while they rejected it ideologically (Ravitsky, 1989). Ravitsky explains this as a median position wherein the Haredim regards the state of Israel neither as exile nor as redemption. As a result of this pragmatic attitude Agudat Yisrael joined the first government coalition in the state of Israel. Since then Agudat Yisrael have been involved in almost all coalitions, but prefers to support these without accepting any Ministerial positions. Gradually the party has

increased its political representation and involvement in terms of accepting more political positions and offices.

Agudat Yisrael's main concern has always been to make sure the government does not pass any anti-religious laws and that governmental funds are allocated to their institutions, such as the educational system. According to Ravitsky (1989), Haredim composing Agudat Yisrael have never fought for the establishment of a Torah state, i.e. a state governed by the laws of the Torah. However, Sivan (1990:5) says that Haredim in general signal the future order as a Halacha state, namely a state governed by the Jewish religious law. [43] To be exact: "an ideal polity in which the religious code covers the public and private realm" (Sivan, 1990:5).

There are diverse attitudes amongst the different Haredi rabbis towards the state and degree of involvement with the state – one has to remember that Agudat Yisrael is a confederation of different rabbinical schools, and the movement does not always represent the precise attitude of for example the Lithuanian rabbis. Inner differenciation between the Hassidim and Lithuanians lead to the split in Agudat Yisrael. The outcome was that one of the two presidents of the Council of Torah Sages, the Lithuanian rabbi Eliezer Schach (1898-2001), backed the establishment of Shas in 1983 and headed its Council of Torah Wise Men until Ovadia Yosef took over in 1992. Later Eliezer Schach broke away from Agudat Yisrael and established the party *Degel ha'Torah* (The Torah Flag), which got two representatives in the 1988 elections. Agudat Yisrael has usually had between four and six representatives in the Knesset, but as a result of the fragmentations this number decreased, up until 1992 when Degel ha'Torah and Agudat Yisrael ran together under the name *Yahadut Torah*, (The United Torah).

National Religious Party

In addition to Agudat Yisrael, the other major religious political party in Israel is the National Religious Party. It was founded in 1956 by a union of the two Zionist religious parties, and is thus considered a veteran party (Don-Yehiya, 1998:74). The National Religious Party attracts mainly traditional and religious voters. The party itself is concerned with the place of Judaism in the state and relations between the secular and the religious sectors of society (Horowitz and Lissak, 1989:57). National Religious Party politicians confer with their rabbinical authorities, but these are not in a position to make

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[43] The two concepts "Torah state" and "Halacha state" indicated the same.

decisions such as the Council of Torah Sages of Agudat Yisrael (Horowitz and Lissak, 1989:58). The politicians of the National Religious Party are elected democratically.

4.2 Ethnic Divide in Israel

The ethnic divides and patterns in the Israeli society originate in the Old Yishuv,[44] i.e. the Jewish Community in Palestine before the Mandate during the period of the Ottoman Empire. The Ashkenazi immigrants to the Old Yishuv did not join the existing Sephardi Jewish institutions in Palestine, but set up their own political organisations, settlements, schools and social institutions (Horowitz and Lissak, 1989:69). As a result of the increase in Ashkenazi immigration, the Sephardi fraction of the Jewish population steadily declined. The separate institutional framework for Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews continued during the New Yishuv, i.e. the time of the Mandate (1919-1949), up to the establishment of the state of Israel. In the New Yishuv the focus of the power struggles was on political and ideological issues, not ethnical cleavage. The latter became a source of problems with the immigration of Jews from North African and Middle Eastern countries in the 1950s and 1960s.

Since the establishment of the state of Israel 2.79 million Jews have immigrated, of which 67.4 percent were of European and North American origin and 31.4 percent of African and Asian origin (Timm, 2001:52). An important historical difference between these Jewish immigrants and the Ashkenazi Jews was that the Jews from North African and Middle Eastern countries generally had not experienced the process of modernisation, set forth by the Industrial revolution and Emancipation in Europe, like most Ashkenazi Jews had. Because of this there developed a generalised belief that upon arrival in Israel non-European Jews were 'backwards' and 'primitive'. The attitude and politics in receiving and integrating these new immigrants into the state of Israel were strongly influenced by this mode of thought. By and large, the new immigrants were considered to be in need of re-education and re-socialisation into the modern, secular and Zionist ideas and values of the state of Israel.[45] As a result they became victims of discrimination from the state and society in general (Samoha, 1995:24). It is correct that the majority of the immigrants from Middle Eastern and North African countries had a lower level of

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[44] *Yishuv* is short for *Ha'Yeshuv Ha'Yehudi*, the Jewish Community in Palestine (Horowitz and Lissak: 1989:318).

[45] See Massad 1997 "Mizrahi Jews and Ashenazi Scholarship", Ben-Rafael and Sharot 1991 *Ethnicity, Religion and Class in Israeli Society* and Elazar 1989 *The Other Jews, The Sephardim Today* for further reading on the Sephardim in Israel.

education, larger families, were more traditional and religious than Ashkenazim (Samoha, 1995:24).[46]

It is also important to remember the differences amongst these immigrants from different countries, as pointed out earlier. Many immigrants from Iraq and Egypt were highly educated people with high positions in the bureaucracy or prosperous merchants who kept their positions and status after immigration to Israel.[47] These immigrants are usually not Shas supporters, but the religious immigrants from these countries are leaders of Shas. The Shas supporters are more typically less educated and poorer immigrants from Morocco and Yemen.[48]

Whether the discrimination from the Ashkenazi establishment was deliberate or not, is not the focal point in this study, and will not be discussed. The important point is that the prejudice and inequality felt and experienced by the Sephardi population in Israel is an important component in understanding Shas and its supporters.

Protest Movement

Besides the Ashkenazi-Sephardi dispute in the Haredi circles, Shas is by many people considered to be the continuation of the social and political protest movements of Middle Eastern Jews such as the Wadi Salib disturbances in 1959, the Black Panthers movement in the 1970s[49] and the political party TAMI.[50] These protests were first of all against the discriminative behaviour of the government towards Middle Eastern Jews and agianst their resultant socio-economic situation. According to the leader of TAMI, the movement was intended for all Jews who considered themselves "followers of Israel's tradition" and would not exclude anyone because they did not observe all the precepts of the Halacha (Shokeid, 1995:226-227). It presented itself through both Israeli and Middle Eastern Jewish symbols and won three seats in the 1981 Knesset election with the slogan

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[46] See Shenhav 1997 "The Bond of Silence" for further reading.

[47] See Shohet 1982 *The Story of an Exile, A Short History of the Jews of Iraq* for further reading on the Jews from Iraq.

[48] See Deshen 1989 *The Mella Society, Jewish Community Life In Sherifian Morocco* for further reading Jews from Morocco.

[49] The Wadi Salib slum in Haifa was the place where demonstrations erupted as result of injuries of Middle Eastern Jews by the police. It is usually described as disorganised and spontaneous (Horowitz and Lissak, 1989: 78). The Black Panthers' political movement organised demonstrations around Israel and succeeded in more allocations to Middle Eastern Jews in the government budget of 1974 (Horowitz and Lissak, 1989: 78). According to Chetrit (2000, *Journal of Palestine Studies*), the ideological arguments of both these protest were demands to end "ethnic discrimination" and accept Middle Eastern as equal citizens of Israel. See Chetrit, 2001, "The Black Panthers, Thirty Years Later" for further reading.

[50] The initials stand for *Tenuat Masoret Yisrael*, The Movement of Israel's Tradition (Shokeid, 1995: 226).

"Stand Tall" – against humiliated pride (Chetrit, 2000).[51] Despite this the party disappeared after elections in 1984.

4.3   The Religious Institutions in the State of Israel

The religious institutions in the state of Israel include the Chief Rabbinate, the rabbinical courts and councils and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In the Chief Rabbinate there are two Chief Rabbis: one Sephardi and one Ashkenazi. The hierarchical organisation of the Rabbinate does not derive from Jewish tradition, but from the Millet system of the Ottoman Empire, in which all religious groups selected agents to represent them and to supervise internal religious affairs. This system is still functioning in Israel where matters of personal status are subject to the respective religious authorities. Thus, Israel does not separate between religion and state, but neither does it have one state religion (Horowitz and Lissak, 1989:60).

All of the religious institutions are dependent on the administrative, technical and political functions of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Most importantly, the Ministry selects personnel and distributes funds for the institutions. Consequently, political control over this Ministry is very important to religious parties.

The Chief Rabbinate of today was organised in 1921 and institutionalised by the Mandatory power, and later authorised by the Knesset in 1972 (Arian, 1989:244). It was then recognised as the supreme authority in Halacha matters. The Chief rabbis are presidents of the Supreme Rabbinical Courts of Appeals in Jerusalem. However, the Rabbinical Courts themselves are independent from the Chief Rabbinate. These courts have "the exclusive jurisdiction over all Jewish actions in the area of personal status law" and there are about twenty district religious courts spread around the country (Horowitz and Lissak, 1989:345). The local religious councils provide services subsidised by governmental means. All the above-mentioned Jewish institutions follow Orthodox Judaism, and are associated with the observance of the National Religious Party.

4.4   The Emergence and History of Shas

When I asked Shas Member of Knesset Nissim Zeev how Shas started, he gave me a copy of two articles from the Jerusalem Post International edition and told me to read them saying: "This is the start of Shas". In the first article (Jerusalem Post, April 22-28, 1983) Shas is described as "a new tribe in the camp of Israel – the Sephardi Haredim" and the

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[51] In his article in *Journal of Palestine Studies*.

party's appearance in the Municipal election of Jerusalem in 1983 is described as "overnight". Furthermore, according to the article, Nissim Zeev was the initiator of meetings with Sephardi religious leaders, the Sephardi *Gadolei Tora* (the Great Men of the Torah). Nissim Zeev asked for their support for the establishment of a Sephardi party. With their backing he was able to engage "the middle level of [Sephardi] leadership" and the heads of the Sephardi yeshivas. Shas won three mandates in the Jerusalem Municipality in 1983 and Nissim Zeev became Deputy Major.

Sephardi Jews in Ashkenazi Haredi parties

From the article, the reason behind the initiative to establish Shas was dissatisfaction with Agudat Yisrael and its leaders who were favouring Ashkenazim when distributing funds or positions in Haredi institutions. Nissim Zeev is quoted saying: "They got our votes, but gave us nothing". In the other newspaper article Nissim Zeev gave me (Jerusalem Post, 17/8/85), Shas is described as a party created to set right the injustice done to the Sephardim by the Ashkenazi dominated religious establishment. The Sephardi members of Agudat Yisrael and Sephardi religious leaders in general felt estranged and treated unfairly by their Ashkenazi counterparts. After immigration to Israel in the 1950s and 1960s many Sephardim went to the established Ashkenazi Haredi yeshivas mainly because they were not accepted in or invited to attend Ashkenazi national religious yeshivas.[52] In the Ashkenazi Haredi yeshivas the Sephardim adopted the Ashkenazi traditions of studying the Torah,[53] gave their allegiance to Ashkenazi rabbis and picked up other Ashkenazi customs, such as dress code and Yiddish.[54] Former Party Chairman Aryeh Deri is a good example of a poor Moroccan boy who was invited to the join the Ashkenazi yeshiva system. However, the Sephardim felt like second-class citizens within this system, because of what they consider to be patronising treatment in the Ashkenazi yeshivas. They were not appointed to important religious or political positions and few Ashkenazi Haredim would marry Sephardim, considering this to be marrying below their own standing.

The same feelings of being discriminated against prevailed towards Ashkenazi dominated rabbinical establishment of Israel. The Sephardi Chief Rabbis felt subordinated

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[52] The national religious yeshivas would probably have suited the traditional Sephardim better in terms of style of study and emphasis on observance of the Halacha.

[53] See description of Lithuanian yeshivas above.

[54] Dress code is the usual black suit with a black hat.

to their Ashkenazi colleagues. According to Omar Kamil (2000), the Shas party is the political means to address discrimination against religious Sephardim – to get back at the Ashkenazi political parties and rabbis, for ignoring Ovadia Yosef, and the Sephardim as a group.

The Spiritual Leader of Shas: Rabbi Ovadia Yosef

Illustration 2. Small poster of Ovadia Yosef with his title

Maran hagaon shar haTorah abir haroim harishon leTzion Ravi Ovadia Yosef shlita is the title of Ovadia Yosef and means "Our teacher, the greatest of our generation, chief of the Torah, mighty over the wicked, the first of Zion our rabbi Ovadia Yosef a person of leadership/we pray that he will live many long and good days."

"The first of Zion" is the title of the Sephardi Chief Rabbi in Israel. "Shlita" is an acronym for "he will live many long and good days" and as a word it is translated to mean that the rabbi in question is a person of "leadership".

The position and authority of Ovadia Yosef as the spiritual leader of Shas, and of its Council of Torah Wise Men, emulates from his rabbinical status. As a rabbi, his most important task is to give a Halachic response to his followers in their personal and social situations and by his legal rulings give his supporters guidelines to follow in their everyday life. Ovadia Yosef is considered the greatest Sephardi *posek* (Halachic arbitrator), in our times, and by some the greatest rabbi since Yosef Caro 400 years ago. Ovadia Yosef is 80 years old and has got eleven children. He was born in Iraq and came to Israel as a child, growing up in the Old City of Jerusalem. Ovadia Yosef published his first Halachic text at the age of 17; by the young age of 24 he was the head of a rabbinical court. When he was 27 he became the Chief Rabbi of Egypt, a position he held from 1947 until 1950. Since then Ovadia Yosef has written about 30 books on the Halacha and he received the recognised national Israel Prize amongst other prizes for his rabbinical production. He was the Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel from 1968 to 1990, and he has established his own

yeshiva. I will discuss to the position, thoughts and identity of Ovadia Yosef in chapter 5, 6 and 9.

Shas in the Knesset

In Shas' debut in the Knesset elections in 1984, the party got four seats of the total and was one of the coalition members in the Peres government and also in the government formed by Yitzhak Shamir (Likud) in 1986. In the 1988 Knesset election Shas got six seats and continued as member of the following two governments headed by Yitzhak Shamir. After the election in 1992 Shas entered the Yitzhak Rabin (Labor) government with six seats. Shas' number of seats increased to ten after the election in 1996 when it joined the Binyamin Netanyahu's (Likud) government. In the 1999 election Shas got 17 seats and was member of the Ehud Barak (Labor) government until summer 2001. Shas is currently a member of the Ariel Sharon government.
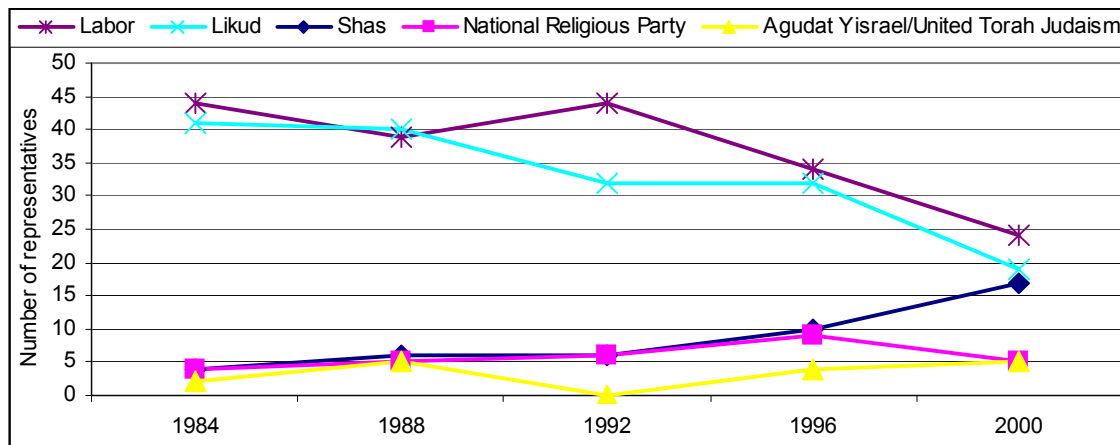
Illustration 3. Representatives in the Knesset from 1984-2000 (Source: Knesset Internet page http://www.knesset.gov.il/)

The figure above shows the increase in Shas representatives in the Knesset from its first participation in election in 1984 to the last election in 1999. I have included the developments of the other major political parties, Labor and Likud, and the two religious parties, Agudat Yisrael/United Torah Judaism and National Religious Party. These other parties give a perspective on the rapid growth of Shas and its size in comparison with the other religious parties.

The Shas Members of Knesset and politicians are all men. The average age of the current 17 Shas representatives is 55 and they have got between four and ten children.[55]

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[55] On the Knesset Internet page: www.knesset.gov.il/asp/mk/

Besides Hebrew, eight of the 17 speak Arabic, six speak English[56], two speak French, one speaks Russian, another Spanish, a third Georgian and lastly one speaks Bucharian.[57] The level of education of the Shas representatives varies from high school and yeshiva studies, to a BA at university level. Most are educated in religious institutions and many work within the sector of education. From the information on the Knesset Internet pages thirteen of the seventeen did military service. All Israeli men have to serve three years compulsory military service after which they must join the reserve troops. Israeli women have to serve two years. Married women are exempted regardless of level of observance. Haredi men are exempted from military service if they are conducting religious studies.[58]

The Shas Supporters

According to Neri Horowitz there are four circles of Shas supporters.[59] The inner circle close to Ovadia Yosef, the Council of Torah Wise Men and Shas leadership, is composed of Haredim. This is the smallest group of supporters in numbers. Before Shas was an option, the majority of this group voted for Agudat Yisrael.

The second circle is composed of people who consider themselves religious or who are in a process of becoming returnees to observance. In other words: "Jews who have converted to Orthodox Judaism from a secular background" (Aviad, 1983:ix). This involves living a life in accordance with Halacha.[60] The "back to religion movement" became increasingly popular in the 1970s and 1980s, and several famous Israeli entertainers and military officers abandoned their secular life style and became members of Haredi or religious communities (Horowitz and Lissak, 1989:140). Many of the supporters of Aryeh Deri and participants at Shaagat Aryeh belong to this category. These groups mostly voted for the National Religious Party before Shas appeared.

The third circle is, according Horowitz, made up of traditional Sephardim who practice and believe in various degrees of rituals and customs that are not part of the observance regulated by the Halacha. Most Sephardim in Israel will use the term *masort*

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[56] Some question the English abilities of Members of Knesset from Shas, claming the Party Chairman Elie Yishai refrained from participation at the Camp David negotiations summer 2000 because of his insufficient English.

[57] This is presumable the Tajiki-Jewish dialect of the Bukharan Jews from Bukhara, Uzbekistan (Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1971, vol 4: 1470).

[58] Ben Gurion as the first Prime Minister of Israel institutionalised this exemption. At the time the Haredim were a small and insignificant group generally considered to be diminishing. Today this exemption is one of the central issues in the debates between seculars and Haredim.

[59] Interview with Neri Horowitz 19/10/00.

[60] For definition see footnote in Introduction.

(traditional), when defining their religiosity (Shokeid, 1995:228). Shokeid (1995:234) explains this mode of religiosity as "spiritual" with focus on "emotional involvement" and "belonging", and sums it up with the expression: *masoret beit abba* (the tradition followed in/of my father's house). The traditional Sephardim make pilgrimage to burial sites of venerated rabbis and take part in the new phenomenon of ethnic religious celebrations around the country. These celebrations were originally family or community based, but upon immigration to Israel they changed into nationwide politically supported gatherings (Shokeid, 1995:228). This group of voters would vote for the National Religious Party or Likud before Shas was an option. Don-Yehiya (1998:81) characterises the traditional voters as educated in the state religious schools controlled by the National Religious Party, but not integrated into the religious Zionist culture or movements.

Finally, the forth circle is the circle of people who vote for Shas as a political protest against the discriminations towards the Sephardim by the government and society from the 1950s[61]. According to several academics there is a correlation between ethnic belonging and income, level of education, occupation, position in the military and governmental or other positions and the Sephardim occupy the lower socio-economical strata.[62] This ethnic gap continues into the second generation of Sephardi immigrants, especially in areas such as employment, education and housing density, as shown by Sami Samoha (1995).[63] The ethnic protest voters most probably supported Likud before. Once more I wish to emphasise that this does not include all immigrants from Middle Eastern or North African countries. The more affluent immigrants from Iraq and Egypt, amongst other, would not consider themselves as second-class citizen and would therefore not be part of this protest voting, nor would they need to use the Shas-related institutions or educational network.

One example of what one might call a 'protest voter' is Yaakov whom I interviewed in Kiryat Malakhi. Yaakov is in his late 50s and works as a teacher and manager in the national education program *Ometz*[64]. Yakov belongs to *Herut* ideologically, but he votes for Shas because Shas is Sephardi.[65] The reason is his childhood experiences of discrimination from the state and the Ashkenazi Jews. He insists that the Ashkenazi-

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[61] As I stated in the Introduction, I am not going into the debate about this discrimination, but it is worth mentioning that the Sephardim were also given some advantages in the period of integration.

[62] See for example Samoha, 1995, Shenhav, 1997 and Horowitz and Lissak 1989.

[63] Using figures from the 1993 Statistical Yearbook.

[64] Educational programme for children who drop out from school and have learning problems. Most of these children are Sephardi or Ethiopians, as are the inhabitants in the southern city Kiryat Milachi.

[65] Herut was the main opposition party in the 1950s that later became Likud (Horowitz and Lissak, 1989: 79).

Sephardi divide is still an issue. Moreover, he says he is not a *Shasnik*[66], because he would like to vote for someone else, but there is no [Sephardi] choice.

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[66] A *Shasnik* is someone who is politically or socially actively engaged in Shas, but who does not necessarily have a defined position. This person could be paid by Shas or have a job in addition to his or her engagement in Shas. According to Leon (25/5/01), it can also denote a Sephardi Orthodox person with a positive relationship to Ovadia Yosef. This he characterises as a 'religious Shasnik' who does not need be politically engaged. (The …*nik* ending in Hebrew is slang for a person belonging to a something, be it a political party or a community. For example someone associated with Likud is a *Likudnik*.)

5 New Jewish Israeli Identity

This chapter will present the Sephardi and Torahni identity of Shas as depicted to me by my informants. Then it will look into the Sephardi character of rabbi Ovadia Yosef before discussing the consequences of Shas' identity.

5.1 Sephardi Identity

To Shas officials 'Sephardi' is the description and the content of the 'New Jewish Israeli' identity they are constructing. This identity is an alternative to the secular, Zionist and Western identity of Ben-Gurion's 'New Israeli', part of his agenda to build the Israeli secular melting pot. According to Itzhik Sudri, the New Jewish Israeli identity of Shas is serving the culture, the tradition, the Halacha or in one word – Judaism. Their 'New Jewish Israeli' is a religious person with an identity built on Jewish tradition and culture.

In order to describe Sephardi values to me, Itzhik Sudri uses the, in his view, contrasting Ashkenazi capitalistic outlook, wherein the strongest succeeds and success is built on intelligence and money. In this system the strong grows stronger and the weak grows weaker, Itzhik Sudri explains, and illustrates the idea behind the Ashkenazi economical views with an metaphor: "It is like tying a man and throwing him into the water – if he can swim he survives, if he cannot swim he drowns. Shas on the other hand, teaches the man how to swim so that he may survive and succeed in life".

A Good Jew

Shas uses its educational system and social and welfare organisations to shape the individual Sephardi Jew.[67] Here I shall look into how exactly the Shas officials want a pupils to emerge from these schools – which values and perspectives should a person with a Sephardi identity hold, according to Shas? How is the way of life and what are the future prospects of Shas' New Jewish Israeli? To my question Itzhik Sudri answered that they want everyone to be what they want to be – what they are able to be. He said that parents send their child to the Shas schools and they are happy about the way their child develops, which is a child who loves his parents and behaves nicely towards them – he becomes a good Jew. Furthermore, a pupil educated in Shas schools emerges a religious person; a

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[67] The educational system in Israel was established in 1953 with the State Education Law, which included two state schools; one secular and one religious supervised by the National Religious Party (Peled and Shafir, 1996: 400). Additionally, the Haredi community was allowed to keep its own educational systems financed by the state, but governed by the Haredim. Shas' schools are defined as Haredi schools, thereby allowing Shas to supervise them and to receive financing from the state.

person who knows where he is from, why he is Jewish, what it means to be Jewish and why he is in the land of Israel.[68] The pupil knows all the Halacha and he fulfils the *mitzvoth* (the commandments and precepts of the Torah). This corresponds to the definition of a Jew by yeshiva student Akiva Aaronson (1997:17) who writes that in the Jewish tradition "[..] the first duty of a Jew is to know who he is; [...] how special and dear he is to *Hashem*/God [...], from whom he is descended; *Avraham Aveinu*/Abraham Our Father [...], and what his purpose is in the world; to maintain the name of Hashem in the world until the time when all will recognise Him". [69]

Modern Identity

Itzhik Sudri states that this pupil is also a part of the modern world; he knows all the subjects he needs to know to pursue a degree at university if that is what he wants to do. He can also become a rabbi if this is what he desires. Itzhik Sudri describes "[...] a person who studies modernisation, someone who does not remain only with the Torah and the Halacha, rather a person who studies Torah and economics."

Again Itzhik Sudri uses the Ashkenazi Haredi party Agudat Yisrael to illustrate the Sephardi identity of Shas; he says that in Agudat Yisrael nobody did the military service whereas16 out of the 7 Members of Knesset form Shas did their military service. To Itzhik Sudri this proves that it is possible to study religion and also become a man of a profession – to combine being Haredi and Sephardi. He says this is more or less the idea of the New Jewish Israeli: to do the military service and keep the religion.

In contrast, the Haredi society is past oriented and according to Sivan (1990) the basic Haredi goal is to re-establish the exilic Halacha governed autonomous community from Eastern Europe.

Against the New Israeli Identity

"Shas wants to shatter the work Ben Gurion started, because his path was a mistake, you cannot make a man into something different," Itzhik Sudri says, referring to Ben Gurion's 'New Secular Israeli' and the policies of 'Absorption of Immigrants' practiced in the 1950s and 1960s.[70] The underlying ideals and values of these immigration policies

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[68] Itzhik Sudri speaks in masculine terms only. It is difficult to know whether this has significance or if it is due to the Hebrew language in which unspecified singular is masculine. As discussed in chapter three, I do not indulge in discussions concerning the possible reasons for choice of words by my informants.

[69] *Hashem* literally means "The Name" in Hebrew and is a Jewish term for God.

[70] This was the name of the official policy best described with another name for the same process: 'Ingathering of the Exiles' (Cohen, 1983:111).

were rooted in European Zionism. The political establishment considered the immigrants from North African and Middle Eastern countries as 'the other' that had to be integrated and assimilated into the Ashkenazi Israeli culture (Silberstein, 1994:13). The new immigrants needed to adopt the values of the modern secular West, to become 'new' through a rebirth and a spiritual ascendance (Cohen, 1983:115).

Shas wants to reshape to the identity of the Sephardi Israelis on the basis of the Sephardi traditions and observance of the Halacha. According to Itzhik Sudri, Shas is replacing the identity forced upon them by the predominately Ashkenazi establishment. Shas is rejecting the identity of the 'New Secular Israeli' that does not have any roots in the Sephardi Jewish tradition or history, and creating an alternative identity. This alternative identity includes a return of the individual to an observant way of life and thereby rescuing him or her from the corrupt and alien identity of the secular Israeli.

Returnees to Observance

Itzhik Sudri continues to explain that Shas is assisting people who return to observance, or want to do so, through its institutions and organisations. The goal is to make the returnees more observant following the Sephardi edition of the Halacha. Itzhik Sudri emphasises that Shas is not in favour of forcing a level of observance or a life style on anyone. Moreover, according to Itzhik Sudri, in the institutions and organisations of Shas all Jews are considered as individuals doing something they believe in, everyone in his own way. To Itzhik Sudri, seeing a Jew eating pork hurts him, but he does not consider himself in a position to forbid anyone to eat pork. Each individual can do what he wants; he can drive to the beach on Shabbat and he can eat pork, but according to Itzhik Sudri it is much better if he goes to the synagogue on Shabbat and keeps *kosher*, i.e. eats according to the Jewish dietary laws. Through its institutions Shas want to help people to do just that. Itzhik Sudri describes these institutions and the people who work in them as "[…] workers to restore the tradition and culture" so that everyone will guard his tradition by studying modern subjects and being religious at the same time.

Itzhik Sudri insists that they accept people as they are, they want to change them, but if it is not possible to make a person religious, they are happy as long as they have brought him a little closer to religion. "We will not turn our backs on him if he is not religious enough", Itzhik Sudri says, "we want him to be as religious as possible, but if he does not become religious it is not something terrible". According to Carmela Naor, the manager of the Shas welfare organisation for women, a person will become more serious and demand

more of himself through Torah and the mitzvoth – the Torah teaches him that. She says, "to be religious, is to believe in one Source, in the Torah and in the mitzvoth. Everyone chooses his own way; one is stricter in charity, another is stricter in prayer, yet another is stricter in inner development, but the religion, the way, is the same".

Every Jew has got a free will and must choose to live a life in accordance with the commandments and prohibitions from God. According to the tradition, Messiah will come if all Jews keep Shabbat once and this illustrates the emphasis on living a life according to the Halacha. The same importance of keeping the words of God is behind Shas Member of Knesset Shlomo Benizri's claim that to study Halacha and pray is more efficient as a defence of Israel than the Israeli Defence Force.[71] The Jews believe they are making order and repairing the world by their individual keeping of the mitzvoth and moral. In this sense the individual is of great importance for the Jewish community and also for everybody in the world. The moral and conscience by which Jews follow and interpret the Halacha, the basic principle that is the foundation for all Jewish ideological development and ethics, is the belief that God made a covenant with the Jewish people and thereby made their lives, lived in accordance with the Covenant, holy (Groth, 2000:26). The rabbinical interpretation of the Halacha is a search to understand and explain how to live according to God's will in the Covenant.

5.2 Torahni Identity

As explained by senior Shas official Efraim Avidani, Haredi is more fanatic, whereas Torahni is to follow the Torah.[72] To be Jewish is, according to Itzhik Sudri, to be Torahni. He explained how in their Muslim home countries the Sephardim were Torahnim[73] and that is how they want Israel to be. It implies that Israel as a country is different, not a nation like other nations, because Israel has a uniqueness, *yehadut* (Judaism), unlike any other country where Jews live. According to Itzhik Sudri, "the word 'Jewish' has got a meaning, and we [Shas] are Torahnim and that is our fight". The fight is for their 'Torahnism' against the 'Civil Revolution' of Barak[74] and for restoring the observance and status of Judaism in the state of Israel.

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[71] See Introduction.

[72] See Introduction for details on utterance.

[73] Plural form of Torahni.

[74] This was at the time when Barak introduced his secular revolution, autumn 2000, which was target against Shas as its opponent.

Legitimacy from Haredi Identity

Shas Member of Knesset Nissim Zeev said in my interview that: "We are a Haredi party. Education and religion together. To be Haredi is something relative, not something static; Haredim are not all the same. The guiding principle is the Torah; we are subjects to the decisions and guidance of the Council [of Torah Wise Men]". Here I was confronted with the other connotation of Haredi, namely when it is used to describe a certain level of religious observance and piety, rather than an academic categorisation. Some of my informants would describe Shas as Haredi, even though they did not consider themselves as Hared, like Itzhik Sudri.

Shas has taken on the Haredi identity first of all to legitimise the religious standing and piety of the party-movement in the eyes of the Ashkenazi Haredi parties. When Shas officials describe themselves as Haredi, they place themselves within the Israeli religious context and describe their way of life. They use the Haredi concept positively to refer to the moral and piety of individuals, the relationship with the rabbi(s) and the outlook of their institutions. Secondly they want to be characterised as Haredi in the context of Israeli politics to receive as much economic support as possible, as exemplified with the categorisation of Shas' educational system as Haredi.

5.3 The Sephardi Rabbi Ovadia Yosef

According to Zohar,[75] "Ovadia Yosef is innovative compared to the Haredi rabbis". Zohar, then, does not consider Ovadia Yosef as a typical Haredi rabbi. Zohar explains the difference as a result of the starting point of the Ashkenazi Haredim, which as was a reaction to Reformist Judaism[76] and modernisation, and that the strictness of the Ashkenazi Haredi rabbis stems from this. Ovadia Yosef, on the other hand, was brought up, educated and worked within the conservative Sephardi institutions and traditions. According to Shokeid (1995:234), Sephardi religious leaders do not encourage isolationalistic or aggressive manifestations, but have an accommodating reaction practising religious tolerance and modest religious demands. This is opposed to the evaluation of the Ashkenazi leaders who do not give their followers room for selective observance and folkloristic religion. Ovadai Yosef was confronted with Ashkenazi Haredism as a rival and different type of observance whose influence in the Land of Israel he set out to combat. It

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[75] Interview with Zvi Zoar 2/10/00.

[76] Religious movement developed in 19th century Germany as a reaction to Emancipation wherein reinterpretation of Judaism in the light of Western values, culture and thought are essential (Jacobs, 1999: 200).

is true that over the years Ovadia Yosef has had close links to various Haredi rabbis and institutions, and he probably prefers them to any secular associates. However, as soon as he and Shas were strong enough, Ovadia Yosef separated himself and Shas from the control of Eliezer Schach, the Ashkenazi Haredi former leader of Shas' Council of Torah Wise Men. This happened after the growing conflict between Ovadia Yosef and Eliezer Schach over the leadership of Shas, escalated at a rally before the election in 1992, where Eliezer Schach described the leadership of Shas saying: "The Sephardim are not yet worthy of leadership". He thus implied that Sephardim need Ashkenazi leadership. After the election Ovadia Yosef and Party Chairman Aryeh Deri defied the instructions from Eliezer Schach, who said not to join the government, and became coalition members in the Rabin (Labor) government with the left wing party Meretz. Ovadia Yosef then became the leader of the Council of Torah Wise Men of Shas.

Ovadia Yosef is a product of Ottoman Sephardi Judaism and he emphasises this himself in his own explanation of why he has got a different and more relaxed relationship with modernisation. Ovadia Yosef moves within modernisation, not in opposition to it. He accepts and takes modernisation into consideration, not sealing himself off, but rather makes new adjustments to new circumstances. He is able to adapt to new situations as shown by his attitude towards the fact that most of his supporters watch TV.[77] This implies that Ovadia Yosef acknowledges that he lives in a modern world. This seems to me to be an accommodating attitude, which reveals the most important issue for Ovadia Yosef – to bring people back to Judaism, not to withdraw into isolationalism like the Ashkenazi Haredim.

Focus Group as Rabbi

The aim of Ovadia Yosef's work as a rabbi is to bring the "simple Jews" back to religion, and its consequential focus group, i.e. the simple Jews, is essentially different from the focus group of the Ashkenazi Haredi rabbis. To succeed in these goals Ovadia Yosef makes his religious and Halachic interpretations available by using an easy language comprehendible for the less educated and less rigidly religious. Rabbi Benny Lau (Shahar, 6/9/00) calls the Sephardi Halacha tradition of Ovadia Yosef "practical Halacha" that "deals in compromise rather than strict Ashkenazi interpretations of Halacha". This Halachic tradition centres on the everyday lives of people and is different from the style of

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[77] For details see paragraph below.

study in Ashkenazi yeshivas where they "study for study's sake", according to Lau (Shahar, 6/9/00).

An example is *Yalkut Yosef* (The Anthology of Yosef), the compilation of the rulings and interpretations of Halacha by Ovadia Yosef that serves as a guide for the Sephardi family. It is written in a style enabling everyone to read it and thereby to learn how to act in accordance with the Halacha.[78] One can find the Yalkut Yosef everywhere, in every Sephardi home and yeshiva, and it is inexpensive. Ovadia Yosef knows that most of his followers do not follow all his rulings, such as not having a TV set at home. He was aware that most of his constituency have got a TV set and therefore he customised his ruling to the situation and decided that one should not pray while watching immodestly dressed women on the TV.

Ovadia Yosef is generally more including and moderate in his rulings as a rabbi, as he was towards the Ethiopians, whose Jewishness the Ashkenazi Haredim rejected.[79] Also the way Ovadia Yosef makes himself available to his public is quite special. According to Itzhak Avidani: "Everybody, every citizen who wants to pray with Ovadia Yosef can come to his house. It is open to the public, not all of the house, but the synagogue inside the house. Besides every Friday you could go to his yeshiva and you could come to him with your requests, if you want him to bless you or you want him to find you a solution to any problem".

However, as pointed out by Leon, one has to keep in mind that Ovadia Yosef is an elitist.[80] "Ovadia Yosef is an intellectual who writes texts and thus creates reality […]", Leon explains and continues to say: "Ovadia Yosef think like Haredi rabbis, he acknowledges traditional observant people as Jews and he likes them, but he does not like their observance; he wants everybody to be Haredi." According to Leon, Ovadia Yosef uses popular language to bridge the distance between himself and the people as a favour to them; he wants to bring them closer to Judaism.

5.4   Consequences of Sephardi and Torahni Identity

It seems that there are many ways to interpret the choice and reasons for Shas to use Sephardi and Torahni as their identity denominators and the content and meaning

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[78] Ovadia Yosef's son, Itzhak Yosef, wrote Yalkut Yosef.
[79] See chapter 7.1 for details.
[80] Interview with Nissim Leon 4/11/00.

embodied in this identity. I interpret this as a sign of Shas' less strict and fixed religious identity and level of observance. The identity of Shas is more inclusive towards the individual Jew and more open to modernisation in terms of ideology and practical observance, than the more severe and isolationalistic identity of the Ashkenazi Haredim. It is also a result of a conscious choice to be different identity than the Ashkenazi Haredi identity.

Pride in Own Identity

In the perspective of the Israeli immigrant history, 'Sephardi', as opposed to 'Mizrahi', does not immediately give negative connotations in relation to the situation of the ethnic group in the state of Israel.[81] It was the Middle Eastern immigrants to Israel who experienced discrimination and lived in 'development towns', towns strategically positioned on the borders and in the Negev desert and populated by the government with these immigrants. 'Sephardi', on the other hand, refers to so much more than this part of history. Sephardi is a long tradition of great Jewish scholars such as Maimonides, Nachmanides[82] and Yosef Caro, and important works like the Cabbalistic book Zohar.[83] The Sephardi identity and cultural connotations for Shas fulfils the role pointed out by Ernst Gellner (1991), of a local tradition compatible with the modern world that gives its adherents a feeling of dignity. This way Shas' Sephardi identity represents a self-reform imposed in the name of their indigenous tradition and culture, to foster self-discipline and functionality in the modern Israeli society. Sephardi is in this context an identity filled with tradition and pride. According to Gellner (1991:285) ".. the drive towards self-discipline and self-reform can be imposed, not in the name of emulating the alien or in the name of a less than fully convincing idealisation of the local folk culture, but in the name of a genuine indigenous tradition, which at the same time has a kind of dignity and acceptability by the criteria of the modern world". Moreover, according to Gellner, this reformed local tradition can have the same function as nationalism, namely to be the high culture of which the general culture of a modern society is made up of. This enables the lower strata of the population to both reject their ignorant past, to criticise technological

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[81] See Introduction for details on Mizrahi.

[82] Also know under the Hebrew acronyms *Rambam* (Rabbi Moses Ben Maimon) and *Ramban* (Rabbi Moses Ben Nahman). See Sachar 1994 *Farewell Espania, The World of the Sephardi m Remembered* for further reading.

[83] *Zohar* (Illumination/Brightness) is the classical work of Cabbalah of Spanish origin.

leaders, and also to define themselves against foreigners. The reform of Sephardi identity and observance will be discussed below.

Illustration 4. A page in a pamphlet from Shas presenting great Sephardi scholars upon whom the spiritual leaders of Shas base their interpretations of Judaism. On the opposite page; the members of the Council of Torah Wise Men.

Creating Distance from Ashkenazi Institutions

To be Sephardi separates Shas from the Ashkenazi religious parties and organisations, a separation of importance to Shas for several reasons. First of all because they as Sephardim were discriminated against within the Ashkenazi Haredi communities, as described in chapter 4. This way the Sephardi identity can be seen as a response to the supremacy of the religious Ashkenazim in Israel up until the establishment of Shas. As such, the establishment of Shas is an effort to distinguish the Sephardi identity from the Ashkenazi customs and Halacha, through the line of thought and Halachic interpretation of Ovadia Yosef. This way the Sephardi identity is legitimised in that it gives a subdued group in society a cultural and religious tool-kit to use in the fight to achieve equality and self-respect.

The other consequence of separating themselves from the Ashkenazi Haredim is that the Sephardi identity can be presented as a modern alternative in which Jews can keep their religion and at the same time be part of the Israeli society. Itzhik Sudri illustrated this when

he said that being a Sephardi one could do the military, have a profession and keep the religion at the same time. This is very different from most Ashkenazi Haredim who refuse to serve in the military, and if they have a profession, only work within their religious communities. Shas' institutions are opening up to less religious people, and by accustomising their identity to the surrounding society they acknowledge modernisation and the changing possibilities for, and demands on, the individual in a modern society.

Embracing Identity

Shas' Sephardi identity has got another important consequence – it is inclusive, that is you do not have to be of any particular ethnic descent to be Sephardi, like Itzhik Sudri explained. As explained in the Introduction, the main criterion is to follow the Sephardi Halacha of Yosef Caro. If the main criterion had been to be Mizrahi, the ethnic identity of its constituency, it would not have been able to include supporters or returnees to observance of Ashkenazi or other ethnicities. A good example of this inclusive functionality is the Georgian Jews whom Itzhik Sudri describes as having an Ashkenazi mentality, yet he considers them as Sephardim because they follow Shulhan Aruch.[84] As an example Itzhik Sudri mentions Itzhak Gagula, who is a Member of Knesset representing Shas even though he is from Georgia and therefore Ashkenazi by descent.

Tolerant and Open

Shas' Sephardi religious identity is also open to individuals in terms of observance. All my informants from Shas stress that there is room for personal preferences on degree of observance. This implies that there are no fixed limits of how religious a person must be to be considered Sephardi. It seems that as long as one tries to live a life according to the Sephardi Halacha, everyone can be as traditional, religious or Ultra Orthodox as they choose and still be considered Sephardi. Also the Willis (1993) found, in his examination of Shas, that the Shas supporters have different individual identities in terms of political, religious and ethnic identity. This shows that there are many opportunities for individual preferences within Shas' identity when is comes to individualisation and the definitions of identification. According to my informants, Shas is there to help people become more religious, but the Shas officials will not turn their backs on anyone who does not ascend to their own level of observance. In fact there does not seem to be an established level to determine who is on the outside and who is on the inside.

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[84] For details on Shulhan Aruch see chapter 1.1.

One of the reasons for this religious leniency can be that Shas does not operate with a fixed set of rules and regulations that determine a person's degree of religious devotion and commitment. Within the party Shas and the organisations associated with it, there thus seems to be a certain freedom of individual choice and preferences. Other examples of this, in addition to those mentioned above by Shas officials explaining the attitude of Shas, is the more personal case when Itzhik Sudri says to me that he does not consider himself Haredi. This he feels free to say even though he is being interviewed as Shas' official spokesman in his office sitting underneath a photo of Ovadia Yosef.

Another example of what one might interpret as an acceptance of a personal degree of religious commitment and a flexible use of religious symbols is the way Shas officials dress. Itzhak Avidani would wear suits in discrete colours, as opposed to most other Shas officials who wore black suits. I never saw him wear the usual black hat. This is significant because it challenges the picture of the standardised Haredi official when it comes to appearance. A contrast is Itzhak Avidani's assistant, who belongs to the Hassidic[85] group of Ashkenazi Haredim, and had long side curls, wore knee breaches and visible ritual fringes.[86] To Ashkenazi Haredim, clothes regulations are part of their identity and their past oriented ideology that determines their dress code, which is similar to that of their forefathers in 17th and 18th century Europe. In contrast, to Shas officials, rules of modesty seemed to be the important point to follow.

This indicates the same relaxed attitude towards individual freedom and degree of commitment as Itzhik Sudri expressed above. It seems that as long as someone is 'with' them and not against them, it is of no great importance whether one is rigid or not when it comes to outward expressions of religious commitment.

5.5 Summing Up

As I said in chapter 2, the discussion of Shas' Sephardi identity and its content will describe Shas' relationship with individualisation, which is one of the 'measures' I use to examine Shas' relationship with modernisation. As discussed above, the room for private opinions and the reality of no fixed level of observance to be accepted within Shas, together with its outreaching and embracing attitude towards all Jews of all descents, is

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[85] See chapter 4.1 about Haredic groups. I do not know why Itzhak Avidani chooses to have an assistant from another Jewish religious and ethnic background than himself. He told me his assistant voted for and supported Shas.

[86] His suit was the customary clothes of his group reminiscent of the 18th Century European style. The fringes (*tzizim),* are fastened to the small ritual garment (*talit)*, worn under the clothes.

very different from the exclusive attitude of the Ashkenazi Haredim. Shas' attitude signals that it accepts the individual and the fact that each individual situation is different. Through Shas' religious courses it speaks to the individual Jew about responsibility for his or her observance of the Halacha, especially in relation to returnees to observance. In addition, Shas signalises an insight and interest in each of the individuals' social situation by constructing an identity that gives the individual Sephardi Jew a feeling of pride and belonging to his or her roots. This feeling of pride is in contrast to the feelings of discrimination and inferiority many Sephardim felt in the Ashkenazi Haredi institutions and in the Israeli society in general.

Shas is not building an identity in reaction to modernisation, but as a result of modernisation and in reaction to other results of modernisation, namely secularisation and Haredism. This is demonstrated in the emphasis on the Sephardi tradition as indigenous and dignifying to the Sephardi Jews and to Israel. The focus on the individual indicates a furthering of modernisation. So does Shas' focus and welfare institutions amongst Sephardim in Israel with focus on education and on the socio-economic progress of Middle Eastern Jews.

Shas' relationship with the modern society of Israel is exemplified by the fact that almost all Shas' officials did their military service and are proud of this. By adopting this secular status symbol, Shas is opening up to its surroundings and the surroundings of its individual supporters. What is more, Shas is creating an identity for the individual Israeli Jew that according to my informants is intended to be modern and Jewish. Shas is thereby furthering an identity religious identity for individual Jews in their surroundings influenced by modernisation, not an identity opposing these surroundings. This is different from most of the Ashkenazi Haredim who refuse to have any contact with the secular society and to who refuse to serve in the military.[87]

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[87] Because the Ashkenazi Haredi parties and movements have mostly Haredi supporters, and thus the immediate surroundings of their individual supporters is not secular, the Ashkenazi Haredi institutions do not need to be engaged in the secular Israeli society in order to acknowledge the individual situation of their supporters.

6 'To Restore the Crown to Its Ancient Glory' – the Shas Slogan

In this chapter I will present the slogan of Shas *Lehazair Atara le'Yoshna* (To Restore the Crown to Its Ancient Glory) and the various interpretations of the slogan by different people in Shas. The slogan is found on wall posters and stickers advocating Shas and its institutions and gatherings. Besides this, my informants, Shas officials and spiritual leaders use the slogan actively when they speak on all diverse issues. The slogan relates to several issues and understandings of these within Shas – to the status of the Sephardi Halacha and the Sephardi rabbis in Israel, to the individual Jew, to the state of Israel and to the socio-economic situation of the Sephardi population in Israel.

The slogan implies a return to something that was before and was 'glorious'. There seems to be two main understandings of what the Crown symbolises. It can be the Sephardi Halacha as interpreted by Ovadia Yosef, or it can be the observance of Halacha and way of life of the individual Sephardi Jew. The understanding of which glorious past to return to, varies in relation to the different understandings of the Crown. In relation to the Sephardi Halacha, Ovadia Yosef refers to a religious legal past, whereas in relation to the individual Jew and to the situation of the Sephardim in Israel, Shas officials refer to the 'glorious past' before immigration to Israel. The past can be real or imagined, or composed of different pasts from different times and locations; it depends on what issue it relates to and the context in which it is referred to. The last issue that is discussed as part of the restoration is the state of Israel and its Jewishness and in this context none of my informants referred to the past, as will be discussed below.

6.1 The Sephardi Halacha of Ovadia Yosef

For Ovadia Yosef 'To Restore the Crown to Its Ancient Glory' refers to the status and precedence of the Sephardi religious tradition and Halacha. The Crown is the Halacha and thus indirectly the Torah. Ovadia Yosef fights for the Sephardi Halacha, a fight against the leading position of the Ashkenazi Halacha and domination of Ashkenazi rabbis in Israel from the time of the Yishuv[88] to present times. Before the immigration of East European Jews in the 19th and 20th centuries, Sephardim were the dominant group of Jews in Israel and most rabbis followed the Sephardi customs and traditions. With the increasing number of Ashkenazim and Ashkenazi rabbis, the Ashkenazi customs and traditions got the stronghold and the Ashkenazi rabbis actively worked to form a unified Halacha for the

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[88] The Yishuv is the Jewish establishment in Palestine. See footnote in chapter 1.3 for more details.

Jews in Israel (Shahar, 2000). This unified Halacha was based on a melting pot idea similar to idea of the 'New Israeli', and this Halacha was dominated by Ashkenazi Halachic tradition. Ovadia Yosef is fighting for the status and honour of the Sephardi Halacha and traditions, in the same manner that Itzhik Sudri explained that Shas is a fight against the Ashkenazi secular new identity enforced on the Middle Eastern immigrants by Ben Gurion.

Following the Local Customs

Ovadia Yosef's argument is that according to the Halacha, a Jew has to follow the *minhag* (custom and tradition), of the place wherever he or she goes. When asked about the Ashkenazim who came to live in the Sephardi community in the Land of Israel in the 15th and 16th centuries, Yosef Caro, on whom Ovadia Yosef builds his understanding of the Halacha, replied unequivocally: "Because they [the Sephardim] were the first to settle in the city, all those that come to reside there (afterward) are subordinate to them....Even if the Ashkenazim were to outnumber the Sephardim, the Ashkenazim must follow the Sephardi customs, for the first Ashkenazim who arrived were secondary to those Sephardim and had to follow their customs, as I proved. If so, they are all Sephardim."(Kamil, 2000).

According to Ovadia Yosef, this same principle applies to the Ashkenazim that immigrated in the last centuries. From this follows that; because Israel was a Sephardi Halachic area when the Ashkenazim immigrated, the Ashkenazim have to follow the Sephardi customs in Israel. Itzhik Sudri told me that it is this situation his rabbi, Ovadia Yosef, intends to restore. Ovadia Yosef wants to reinforce the Sephardi Halacha in Israel. "We are not talking politics now", Itzhik Sudri emphasised. After the 1999 Knesset election Ovadia Yosef said: "I am not interested in this victory, 17 members in the Knesset. What interests me is that I have 34 000 children in my educational system, I have about 4-5000 Sephardi synagogues that are praying according to my version, to my liturgy – this interests me." (Horowitz). [89]

The Status of the Sephardi Halacha and Rabbis

The task Ovadia Yosef has taken on himself is to reinstall and adapt the Sephardi Halacha built on the tradition from Maimonides (1135-1204), Rabbi Alfasi, the Babylonian

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[89] Interview with Neri Horowitz 19/10/00.

ge'onim (heads of the religious academies in Babylonia)[90] and on Yosef Caro in today's Israel (Horowitz). According to Leon,[91] Ovadia Yosef has created a new paradigm for the Sephardi Halacha, by returning to the thoughts of Yosef Caro and thus changed the Halachic thought. The change itself is the exclusive Sephardi perspective on the Halacha and the bypassing of all sources between Ovadia Yosef himself and Yosef Caro. Ovadia Yosef's paradigm is the creation of a new Sephardi unified Halacha by using his *Daat Torah* (knowledge of the Torah and Halacha), as pointed out by Kamil (2000). Ovadia Yosef has constructed the new religious identity of the Sephardim in Israel. Leon goes as far as to say that: "Ovadia Yosef <u>is</u> the Sephardi Halacha".

This fight for the supremacy and status of the Sephardi Halacha is also a fight against the subordination of the Sephardi rabbis by the Haredi Ashkenazi rabbis and the rabbinical establishment of Israel. To summarise Ovadia Yosef's goal in his own words, from his book *Yabia Omer*[92]: "It is known that the Sephardi chief rabbis before me were subordinated to their colleagues, the Ashkenazi rabbis. And for the sake of peace, they said nothing, but I, who am not subordinate, praise God, will uphold my mission to restore the Crown to its rightful place and have ordered that the ruling of Maran [Rabbi Yosef Caro] be adopted." (Kamil, 2000).

The outfit that Ovadia Yosef always wears on formal and religious occasions symbolises his pride in his Sephardi traditions: a long black goldthread ornamented robe and a round hat both significant for Sephardi rabbis.[93] This robe is also the official robe of the Sephardi Chief Rabbi in Israel, and since he was forced, against his will, to leave his position as Chief Rabbi in year 1990, Ovadia Yosef continued to wear this robe. This clinging to the official robe has been interpreted as a deliberate act, symbolising his rabbinical position and powers, even though he is not Chief Rabbi, as well as symbolising his constant battle for the status of the Sephardi tradition.

Zohar explains that one can detect the development of Ovadia Yosef's religious thoughts in his writing ten to twenty years before Shas was established.[94] He describes Ovadia Yosef as a product of his Sephardi cultural, traditional and educational background that belongs to the conservative Sephardi framework of rabbinical traditions. Different

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[90] *Ge'onim* (excellency/pride) and was the title of the academy heads who were responsible for the Babylonian Talmud.
[91] Interview with Nissim Leon 4/11/00.
[92] "Expressing the Word", nine volumes on Halacha.
[93] See photo of Ovadia Yosef (Illustration 2 in chapter 4).
[94] Interview with Zvi Zoar 2/10/00.

from most of his younger colleagues and Shas officials, who studied in Ashkenazi yeshivas,[95] Ovadia Yosef studied in the Sephardi yeshiva Porat Yosef, in the Old City.[96]

Horowitz claims that Sephardi Orthodoxy existed already in Jerusalem in the 1930s, in the Porat Yosef yeshiva. There the scholars were able to sustain their Jewish and Halachic traditions and to be guided in their meeting with modernisation. According to Horowitz, this is where Ovadia Yosef and his contemporaries formed a group called *Nemanei Torah* (The Torah Loyalties) in the 1960s. The internal agenda of this group was dealing with the question of the place of religion in public life and the place of Sephardim in this society. Shas is a continuation of this line of thought, according to Horowitz, and thus epitomises the late encounter between Sephardi Jews and modernisation. This encounter takes place within the modern frame of the Israeli Jewish state as acknowledged by the initiators and founders of Shas.

New Sephardi Synagogue Traditions

From Leon's (1999) findings we can understand that Ovadia Yosef and his contemporaries were not alone with their thoughts about Sephardi religious traditions. In the 1950s-1960s rabbis from Middle Eastern countries started to mix different local traditions and built the Sephardi local melting pot. Leon calls this development 'Revolution of the Siddur' – *Siddur* is the book containing the daily and Sabbath prayers. The reason for this name is that one of the means used to fuse the new Sephardi unity, was changing the prayer book into one common for all Sephardim. The process included reorganisation of the Middle Eastern Jewish observance, i.e. establishing a hegemonic Sephardi piety, as opposed to the many different and competing traditions. Another goal was to change the moderate Sephardi religious culture into a stronger religious culture, i.e. more observant. In this process the local rabbi becomes a community leader in addition to religious teacher. Horowitz characterises these local synagogues as "quiet memory libraries" part of the quiet resistance against the Ashkenazi Haredi melting pot.[97] There were attempts to create local religious parties, but all of this activity was halted by the 1967 war that changed the agenda from internal to external politics. Horowitz characterises

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[95] See chapter 4.4 for details.

[96] The yeshiva was established and financed by rich Iraqi Jews 150-200 years ago and located in the Old City in Jerusalem. It burnt down in the 1948 war.

[97] Interview with Neri Horowitz 19/10/00.

this pre-1967 activity as the development of a Sephardi definition within the religious public in Israel.

6.2 The Individual Jew

The individual implication of the slogan refers to the ideas and ideals presented above concerning the identity and understanding of a Sephardi person; in short to be "a good Jew" by living in accordance with the Halacha and as part of the modern society of Israel. Itzhik Sudri says that Shas wants people to follow the Sephardi Halacha and understanding of being Jewish. This implies, amongst other regulations of life, keeping the Shabbat, maintaining kosher dietary laws and marrying Jews according to the Halacha. However, he explains that they do not want people to live similarly to the way Sephardim lived before, rather they want people to advance with the development of the modern world using modern technology and live in the 21st century.

Before Immigration to Israel

"When we lived in Morocco and in Syria, under the rule of Assad and Hussein,[98] then we knew what *Shma Israel[99]* was, and then we kept the Shabbat and kosher, we married only Jews within Judaism" Itzhik Sudri says. This he contrast to ways of life in the state of Israel today, where the majority of the population, including the Sephardim composing the majority of the Shas constituency, does not live a life in accordance with the Halacha. According to Itzhik Sudri, most Jewish children in Israel do not know the prayer Shma Israel.

Evidently, to Itzhik Sudri this fact is proof of a deterioration of the Jewish faith and traditional character of the Jews after they immigrated to Israel. 'The past' in this context therefore relates to the Jewish character of the Sephardi communities in the countries before emigration to Israel. Itzhak Avidani says that one of the possible understandings of the slogan is that it means to go back to the day when religious life was at the centre, like it was for his mother when she lived in Morocco. The community there was religious, but not Ultra Orthodox; "they prayed three times a day, they ate kosher and they married

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[98] This is what Itzik Sudri actually said. However, we know that not many Israeli Jews have lived under the rule of either Hafez al-Assad nor King Hussein of Jordan, and that none of these have anything to do with Morocco. Assad and Hussein in this context are symbols of Arab Muslim rulers under which the Jews in the Middle East and North Africa lived before they came to Israel.

[99] Shma Israel means "Hear Israel" and is the Jewish declaration of faith and most important prayer.

according to the Halacha – this is what we want to do in Israel", Itzhak Avidani concludes.[100]

Guarding Tradition Against Secularism

Itzhik Sudri explains that they are restoring the tradition and culture by defeating secularism, not the secular people, he emphasises, but the issues of secularisation. The bottom line is: everyone should guard his or her tradition. This is in opposition to the secular path of Ben Gurion, as presented above, which in this context is the anti thesis of Shas' slogan. According to Itzhik Sudri, Shas' slogan means "to do the opposite of what Ben Gurion started and the Israeli state has continued", namely to put an end to the secular melting pot of Israel with its "new Israeli" identity, "and create and spread the identity of the Sephardi Jew to make Israel a Sephardi (religious) melting pot. This is Shas' revolution."

When Shas uses the word "revolution" they are using the term to reflect a transformation both in the religious traditions in Israel and in the economic and social situation of the Sephardim in Israel. However it is not referring to an armed revolution. For Shas' officials their revolution is their fight for change, whether it is over the precedence of the Sephardi Halacha or the situation of the Middle Eastern Jews in Israel.[101]

Itzhak Avidani almost always returns to education when we talk about the future and the goals of Shas; to be able to educate their children their way is the most important work and the centre of Shas as well as of the Halacha of Ovadia Yosef. It is through this education they will teach their children how to become Sephardi Jews in accordance with Shas' return to the ancient glory of piety, observance of traditions and customs of Judaism. In this context of the individual Jew the Crown of the slogan that Shas set out to re-establish can be understood as Sephardi Jewish identity, traditions and values of the individual.

6.3 The Jewish State of Israel

"This country is unique because it is a Jewish state. We need to preserve our identity as a Jewish state. We are Torahni – this country is different. Israel is not a nation like other nations, the Israeli state is not like all the states in USA

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[100] Only Jewish men are obliged to pray three times a day, so this particular part of the religious life cannot refer to Itzhak Avidani's mother.

[101] We have to remember that my informants do not first of all associate 'revolution' in connection with its Western historical meaning, such as with the French revolution.

for example, or like France and Italy – it is not. Israel has uniqueness – Judaism. It is an Israeli state and a Jewish state at the same time. To the word Jewish there is a meaning and we are Torahnim and that is our fight. The state needs to preserve its identity. You need to feel that you are entering a Jewish state when you arrive at Ben Gurion [airport]. Today everything is the same; you do not feel that you are entering another country – except from the language everything is the same. We say no; in Israel nothing can be the same, the Israeli state is a Jewish state, therefore our slogan today is to 'Restore the Crown to Its Ancient Glory', to restore the Judaism of the state".

This is how Itzhik Sudri explains the goal of what he describes as the 'Shas revolution', as epitomised in their slogan. Shas wants Israel to be a Jewish, i.e. a Torahni state. In Itzhik Sudri's view Israel today is a secular country purposely educating pupils to be seculars, to be 'Israelis', and Shas wants to change this. He explains that Shas wants to take away the photos of Theodor Herzl in the schools and in the Knesset, because he symbolises secular Zionism, and look to the Torah, to the Shulhan Aruch and to the biblical forefathers Moses, Abraham, Isac, Yakob, and to the scholars and philosophers Maimonides and Nachmanides. I interpret 'the Crown' in this context to be Judaism, which Itzhik Sudri derives further to mean the rules and regulation of the Torah.

Yet, all Shas politicians are emphasising very strongly that they are against a Halachic state, i.e. a state run by the Jewish law, because they say it is forbidden according to the Halacha. Itzhik Sudri says; "We talk about something very general all the time. We do not talk about making the country into something Haredi; we talk about something more general, something lower and something more concerning identity. We fight for the identity of the country – the face of the country, that in the mirror it will be Jewish. We talk about something deeper; about the identity, the colour, about the smell of the country; that it will be Jewish. That it looks like a Jewish country – that is our fight."

Ithzik Sudri continues to explain that there are a lot of seculars who support this idea. He explains that many seculars vote for Shas because they want the country to be Jewish. According to Itzhik Sudir, this does not mean that these seculars intend to become observant. Rather, it means that they are in favour of a state that follows the Halacha in terms of outwardly symbols, such as keeping the Shabbat. "This is the idea of a Jewish state", according to him. In Israel today the state encourages people to drive on the Shabbat

and thereby violating it, he continues, "even though this is 'the country of the Jews' ". This encouragement from the state is what Shas wants to change.[102]

When I ask about the future and how Shas would like Israel to be in the future, none of my informants want to answer me directly. Itzhak Avidani says the media and the seculars claim that Shas wants Israel to be similar to Iran, that Ovadia Yosef wants to be "the Ayatollah of Israel", and that Shas wants Israel to be a religious country. This is not true, Itzhak Avidani says, and stresses "Shas does not desire all women to wear masks on their faces like they are forced to in Iran. This is not our way. We want the secular community to allow us do what we want in our homes and they can do what they want in their homes". When I asked Shas Member of Knesset Shlomo Benizri about the future he answered that he does not want to talk about the future and continued: "[...] people vote for us because they want a Jewish state", he said. I interpret this reluctance to address the future in the context of the state, as a way of being careful not to add anything to the stereotypes and fears of the secular society. This is addressed further in chapter 9.5.

Zionism

Knesset Member of Shas Nissim Zeev said: "To live in Israel is Zionism. All Jewish religion is Zionism. We came here because of Torah, not because of Ben Gurion or problems in our home countries, but because of the real religious Zionism. Why do people live in Hebron? Because of religious Zionism – nothing else. The land of Israel is our land, how better to express that than living here? Theodor Herzl was good for the Jewish people, he started the new land, but we were here before Herzl, we did not come here because of him". As pointed out Chetrit (2000:26),[103] Shas recognises the State of Israel and considers is it "a living fact".

Ovadia Yosef differs from the Ashkenazi Haredi rabbis in his relationship with Zionism and the state of Israel. Ovadia Yosef seems to be neither for nor against Zionism. This is shown by his position as Chief Rabbi in Egypt in 1948-1950, as pointed out by Horowitz.[104] In these years the state of Israel was in a situation of war with Egypt, and Ovadia Yosef's willingness and ability to be the Chief Rabbi in a state with such as relationship with Israel proved that he is not a Zionist. Nonetheless, Ovadia Yosef accepts

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[102] The public communication in Israel stops on Shabbat, except from in Haifa and Eilat. Itzhik Sudri is right when he says that each individual is not bound by driving restrictions on Shabbat, however, to say that the government encourages individuals to violate Shabbat is his interpretation.
[103] In his article on Shas in *News From Within*.
[104] Interview with Neri Horowitz 19/10/00.

the facts of the Israeli state as his political and practical surroundings. This is illustrated by Ovadia Yosef's acceptance of the positions as Sephardi Chief rabbi in Israel and Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, rabbinical positions paid and appointed by the state of Israel. These positions can be viewed as continuations of the tradition of Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem in the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Chief Rabbi was a position with traditional authenticity in the Sephardi area (Kamil, 2000). In this perspective Ovadia Yosef comes from the state establishment; he was a Chief Rabbi in the chain of the Chief rabbis from the 18th century. According to Kamil's (2000) conclusion: "Ovadia Yosef wants to impose Sephardi cultural identity not only on his flock [The Sephardim] but on all Israeli Jews. This identity should serve as the basic ideology of the state, instead of the Zionist secular belief. Ovadia Yosef seeks to redefine Zionism in terms of religion, not of secularism".

Kimmerling (2001) and Kamil (2000) look upon Shas as a counter-culture to the Ashkenazi Zionist culture of Israel. Kamil defines this counter-culture as a Zionism built on Sephardi version of the Jewish religion. He argues that to understand this Sephardi Zionism one has to move away from the traditional Israeli analytical categories of Zionist and non-Zionist religious movements, because these categories belong to the discussion of the Ashkenazi world, not to the Sephardi world of Shas. According to Kamil, Shas is not against the establishment; Shas does not want to cut the relations with the establishment. The Sephardi Zionism includes representation in the land of Israel in line with the traditions from the time of the Ottoman Empire.

According to Peled (1998:703), Shas has got an integrative ideology towards Ashkenazim and Sephardim, as opposed to separatist ideology,[105] and they want to "replace the secular Zionism with religious Judaism as hegemonic ideology of the Israeli society". To do so they use their new identity to mobilise the Sephardim against the dominant Labour Zionist establishment and thus redefine Israeli Jewish nationalism. However, according to Shlomo Fischer and Zvi Bekerman (draft:6), Shas rejects the central principles of Zionism as they reject its goals of a modern, Jewish, independent nation composed of 'New Israelis'. Further, as a tool for securing the welfare of the Jewish people, Shas replaces the state of Israel with faith in God and fulfilment of his commandments.[106]

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[105] Separatist in the ethnic Israeli context, i.e. concentrating on one group.
[106] The draft is to be published in the forthcoming "Restore the Crown to its Old Glory: Shas – the first fifteen years", ed. Yoav Peled, Tel Aviv.

Democracy

When I asked about Shas' relationship with democracy Itzhak Avidani answered: "We do not think that there is a problem with democratic life in Israel. We find ourselves in the life of democracy in Israel, we are part of that in the Knesset, in the Municipalities and we do not see any problem with it". But he does not deny that there is no democracy within Judaism: "No, in religious life there is no place for democracy; we have our Torah and there is no democracy in the Torah. We do exactly what is in accordance with the Torah, there are a few things that you, and even the rabbi could not understand the meaning of and one may wonder why we do it. There are some of the commandments that we simply obey, we do not know exactly why we obey them, it is only a few, but even in this place, when you have some commandments to follow, you do this – without democracy". To the same question Nissim Zeev simply answered, "We have to obey the rabbis". As for the future of the Israeli democracy Itzhik Sudri conveys: "The state will not be Israel, but a Jewish and democratic state, people understand it as an Israeli democracy, but we understand it as a Jewish and democratic state. First of all Jewish, after that democratic. This means that there are places and times when democracy needs to step down for Judaism and not the opposite, that Judaism will have to step down for democracy."

6.4 Sephardim in Israel

Itzhik Sudri explains Shas' slogan 'To Restore the Crown to Its Ancient Glory' as 'the revolution' of Shas that first of all is addressing social problems of the Sephardim in Israel. He says that Shas wants to change the public order: to make the situation of the Sephardim a central issue in Israeli political agenda. According to Itzhik Sudri, Shas is about two central issues: religion and community or society. In my interview Carmela Naor told me that in the social organisations belonging to Shas, they first of all use religion to solve people's problems. Social issues and their solutions can be found in the Torah according to her, and the society will be much healthier if it follows the ways of the Torah.

Knesset Member Shlomo Benizri said that Shas is "[…] first an ethnic party and second a religious party". He elaborated that by "ethnic" he means social politics, which is to take care of the Sephardim in Israel. "Ethnic means social" Shlomo Benizri explains "[…] and this is why we chose to be in charge of the Ministry for Labour and Health; we want to take care of people – the poor people in Israel are Sephardim. This is because of the crime of the state of Israel when they brought our parents and placed them at the

borders, so they could not succeed." According to Erik Cohen (1983:111), the veteran Ashkenazi pioneers held a symbolic dominant position controlling the strategy of integration. Furthermore, this position was defended with the principles of political Zionism aimed at hurrying the integration and the building of the state. However, Cohen (1983:116) concludes that although all Jews by law "are eligible to full membership in the state after absorption", the Ashkenazim who hold the key positions to ascendancy in society still informally prevent the new immigrants from this.

Shlomo Benizri continued to say, "The rabbi [Ovadia Yosef] said that we have to take care of these [The Sephardi] people by means of Shas. We want to bring people back to religion, like we say in our slogan; the Crown is religion. Ovadia Yosef formed Shas sixteen years ago. He wanted a party to help the Jewish people. For example 90 percent of the prisoners in Israel are Sephardim. 'Why is that?', Ovadia asked himself. 'Their parents were wonderful people. What has happened?' ". The Sephardim had left their principles and they were damaged when the Ashkenazim built the new Israeli identity. Now the Sephardim have to go back to the sources, to Judaism, to restore their situation. Shlomo Benizri explained to me: "The way to do this is by the Knesset; there we can get money, power and the law to help us – we need influence."

Political Influence

Itzhik Sudri explains how Shas has changed the political agenda of Israel by making the socio-economical situation of the Sephardim an issue all politicians have to take into consideration. To him, the greatest success of Shas is that today anyone who wants to be elected to Prime minister in Israel has to seek the support from the Sephardi section of the public. Without the support of the Sephardim a candidate would not be able to win the election for Prime Minister, Itzhik Sudri claims. He exemplifies further with the fact that Ehud Barak spent 80 percent of his campaign on social and community issues prior to the election in 1999. To Itzhik Sudri "[…] this is the result of Shas' revolution. A revolution carried out partly by social work – a field in which Shas is without competition". He says that nobody can compete with Shas when it comes to helping people, not even the leftist parties with a social agenda like Meretz.

The reason for this is that the mentality of Sephardim is different from Ashkenazim according to Itzhik Sudri. He gives the example of Meretz leader Yossi Sarid: there is no magnet between him and the Sephardim that may enable him to help them; only Shas can understand and help Sephardim, Itzhik Sudri concludes. Again, as he did in his explanation

of Sephardi values,[107] Itzhik Sudri explains the inability of the Ashkenazim to understand how to help poor people with their competition mentality where the strongest survive and the weak die.

Shas is giving Sephardim in Israel opportunities of education, jobs, housing and other needs to decrease the differences between Ashkenazim and Sephardim caused by the discrimination towards the Sephardim, according to Shas' spokesman. And they are succeeding, Itzhik Sudri is happy to tell: because of the work of Shas no one today can refuse to employ you because of your Sephardi identity. He gives the example of his own father who was told he could not get a job at the employment office 30 years ago because he was Sephardi. Another example he gives of discrimination against Sephardim is the way official people used to talk about Sephardim when his father was young: "even the Prime Minister used to call Sephardim slang words for criminals: 'people without culture and enlightenment' and 'people of the street' ".

Future Focus

The Shas officials tend to speak about the future in relation to the situation of the Sephardim in Israel, not referring so much to the restoration of an 'Ancient Glory', as they do when they talk about the issues of the Sephardi Halacha and the status of the Sephardi rabbis or the individual observance of Sephardim. The future situation of the Sephardim in Israel is what Shas is almost all about, both concerning Sephardim as an ethnic group and their status and socio-economic situation, and Sephardi as in the Shas Torahni identity. In contrast, my informants' were unwilling to talk about the future in relation to the state of Israel.

The natural explanation for this could be that the situation of the Sephardim in the Israeli state is a new context historically and thus socially that cannot easily be compared to other circumstances – neither in the past or in the future. If Shas was to refer to a return to a glorious past in this context, it would be saying that the situation of the Sephardim was better before they immigrated to Israel. Though Sephardim in Shas consider themselves discriminated against by Ashkenazi Jews, it might be too strong to indicate that the Arab rulers in their former home countries treated them better than their fellow Jews. However, saying that the Sephardim themselves were more observant, and therefore better Jews, under Arab rulers than they are in the Jewish state, is not complicated. This is because the

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[107] See chapter 5.1.

focus on observance reflects critique towards the Sephardi Jews themselves at the same time as it refers to the Ashkenazi Establishment who was responsible for the Sephardim's straying away for the observant life style.

6.5 One or Many Agendas?

It is interesting to note the many different foci in Shas officials' answers to what Shas is about and what their 'revolution' is concentrated on. Sometimes the social and economical situation of the Sephardim in Israel is pointed out as the most important issue, other times it is the Jewish character of the state or the supremacy of the Halacha of Ovadia Yosef over the Ashkenazi Halacha. Shas does not appear to have a set type of lifestyle people have to follow in order to be accepted as Sephardi or religious. They operate with room for personal preferences and accommodation. This is illustrated by the fact that Shas official representatives answered with their personal interpretation on different issues. An example is Itzhak Avidani's personal preference to have female representatives of Shas in the Knesset, another is Itzhik Sudri's way of formulating his answers: "I think this is what Shas means in this issue [...]" and "From my understanding [...]". The spokesmen do not express any uneasiness or feeling of deceiving Shas by these answers.

Moreover, between spokesman Itzhik Sudri, welfare institution manager Carmella Naor, Member of Knesset Shlomo Benizri and official Itzhak Avidani, there are at times direct contradictions in their understanding and explanation of what Shas is. Apparently, to my informants this diversity, and what might seem to the outsider as lack of a focal point (or points) and common ground, is not considered a problem. If I confronted them with the different or even contradictory answers of other informants, they would either see this as natural according to the position of the other person, privately or officially, or they would agree with the statement of the other informant and withdraw their own answer. This last type of reaction often occurred if the informant had a lower position in the hierarchy of Shas. He or she would then easily withdraw his or her statement with the explanation: "If such and such a person said that [...]", and seem to feel at ease with this. For example the Shas officials working with the Shas Members of Knesset would always concede to the positions of the Member of Knesset. And, if pointed out, everybody would agree with the statement of Ovadia Yosef if this was in disagreement with any of his or her own answers.

From these interviews it is complicated to deduce which agenda is the most important and what is the one unifying element in Shas. My informants have described

Shas as: "Sephardi", "Torahni", "Jewish", "religious", "Israeli", "Zionist", "not political", "there to help Ovadia Yosef reinforce the Sephardi Halacha", "modern", "against secularism", "against a Halachic state", "not extreme" and finally "Haredi". How should we understand a party-movement and the motive power(s) behind it when the people involved do not seem to have one answer or one major agenda they agree upon?

According to Willis (Willis, 1992:3), the pan-Sephardi identity, which is the result of the religious change Shas represents, creates a new sense of a common past backing a group identity that he calls "Sephardism" or "pan-Sephardi unity". This group identity is the drive behind the party, not any political ideology, and this is the reason why Shas is able to cooperate with different coalition partners from the right to the left. According to Willis, Shas is a product of identity politics, not of ideological debates.

In his new book Kimmerling (2001:194) writes that Shas is the most important new political-cultural movement in Israel and describes Shas as a "Mizrahi traditionalist-revivalist movement".[108] Kimmerling defines traditionalism as the relationship between religious beliefs and commandments to individual behaviour. In addition to this, traditionalism provides a separate belief system consisting of formal and popular/folk religion, wherein the folk religion represents the newly invented past, that is considered glorious.

An Created Past

When Shas refers to the past as 'glorious' and 'uncorrupted', it is, like many other religious movements in modern time, not necessarily referring to a real past, but rather to a created past, which again can be either of religious, theological, social or traditional focus depending on who is talking and the person's relationship with Shas. Kimmerling defines this past as an 'invented past' and according to him the believers might confuse the invented parts of this past with the real past, a common confusion for human beings to make while looking back to the past. According to Friedman (1993:48-164), the Ashkenazi Haredi consideration of the traditional Jewish community before modernisation and secularisation as the fullest expression of Jewish society, fosters "conservative fundamentalism". He characterises "conservative fundamentalism" as an anti Zionist Haredi movement. Heilman (2000:170) writes that Haredim perceives "the world in a process of moral decay" – "the ancient were always superior to the

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[108] Mizrahi here means Jews from Middle Eastern and North African countries, for detail on term see the Introduction.

contemporaries"(Heilman, 2000:234). The Haredim of today are keeping the memory of the venerated Jews from the past alive. According to Heilman (2000), to Haredim nothing is considered so old it is outdated, including the ancient lawmakers. The Haredim are looking and aiming for the pure and unadulterated Judaism.

In Shas there is more than one way to understand the concept of 'the past', whereas in Ashkenazi Haredi movements the past is more likely identifiable with a precise historical situation and circumstances in East and West Europe before the Enlightenment. This can be explained by the fact that Sephardim in Shas come from many different countries and thus have different experiences before immigration to Israel. Another important point is that the legal and religious traditional development of Ovadia Yosef is based on a desire of unification and wholeness, whereas the result of the Ashkenazi Haredi development was sectarianism and even competition among the different positions. Shas does not forfeit a conservative defence of Judaism, but rather use history and tradition politically to cope with the challenges of the present context. This is the policies and method of interpretation of the Halacha followed by Shas in customising the tradition to the new modern circumstances. Shas uses the Sephardi traditional culture selectively to be able to embrace a modern society and context. This practice is better characterised as 'self-renewal', instead of adopting the Western concept of 'modernisation'.

This part of the interpretation represents the reformation within the religion as understood by Gellner. In this case the ideology and Halacha of Shas is put together to represent a larger and more unified tradition and religious culture of the Sephardim in Israel, as opposed to ethnically divided traditions and congregations of Sephardim in the Diaspora and in the land of Israel before the establishment of the state. The formation of this new ideology also shows a selective use of the Sephardi and Jewish culture in producing new interpretations of the religion adjusted to fit modern society. Further, this part of the interpretation also corresponds to Beyer's (1997) explanation of how religious leaders find functional ways of making religion necessary and enlarge its domain in our modern global world, by providing norms, values and collective identity that no other institution in society can provide.

Future perspective

By referring to the past the slogan is also oriented towards the future, where the ideal and realities of the past, through Shas' work, will be materialised. Shas officials understand this materialisation as their "revolution", whether oriented towards the religious piety of

the individual Jew, the status of the Sephardi Halacha or towards the situation of the Sephardim in Israel; it is part of the transformation by Shas of restoring the glorious past in today's Israel. Shas officials concentrate on the Israeli society in their work "to restore the tradition and culture" as Itzhik Sudri put it, instead of going back to the situation before they immigrated to Israel. Whereas the Ashkenazi Haredim are organising their community in the reshaping of the organisational forms of the European ghetto, Shas is shaping Israel today.

6.6 Summing Up

In relation to this chapter the 'measures' used to investigate Shas' relationship with modernisation are its understanding of past and future and its relationship with traditional religious power institutions and to the central state, here understood as the Zionist ideology and the Israeli democratic system of government. Shas' relationship with the central state in terms of practical politics will be discussed in chapter 9. The crux of Shas' slogan is to restore the Sephardi tradition and culture in accordance with the wording: 'To Restore the Crown to Its Ancient Glory'. This refers to the Halacha and observance of individuals and to the socio-economic situation of the Sephardi population in Israel.

The Crown in Shas' slogan thus refers to different entities; it can be the Sephardi Halacha or the entire Torah, or the religious observance of the individual Jew. According to Shas, these entities have deteriorated in status or in the individuals' conduct, and they must be restored. The restoration implies a return to something in the past that is understood by Shas as glorious, in comparison with the situation today. However, as shown above, Shas does not operate with a given historical past, which should be copied or enacted, as the Ashkenazi Haredim do. Rather, Shas looks back to different historical and the religious legal ideas of Yosef Caro to set the ideals and values for the future, which they reinterpret into their political, social, economic and modernised surroundings. I interpret this to indicate that Shas looks to the future, not to the past and therefore can be said to promote modernisation. This difference from Ashkenazi Haredim is a result of the different surroundings in which the two Jewish identities have taken form.

By way of Shas, Ovadia Yosef wishes to undo the discrimination he and his contemporaries have experienced from the Ashkenazi Israeli traditional religious power institutions, both from the national religious institutions of Israel and the Haredi institutions. Shas' relationship with the Haredi religious establishment is complex, especially in terms of the connotation of Haredi that classifies a certain level of religious

observance and piety, that Shas sometimes uses to define its religious level. Another issue is the historical fact that, albeit the discrimination Sephardim felt in the Ashkenazi Haredi institutions, they were welcome into these institutions after their immigration to Israel. Also Shas' relationship with the national religious institutions is complex because of the dominance of Ashkenazi traditions in the unified Halacha for Israeli Jews. Ovadia Yosef and Shas fight for equal, or rather complete, emphasis on the Sephardi Halacha and traditions for Israeli Jews. At the same time Ovadia Yosef and Shas have an established relationship with the national religious institutions, compared to the Haredim. The consequences of this is that Shas can use its influence on two levels: the national religious level and in its own institutions. Thereby it reaches more people, and a greater variety of people, than the Ashkenazi Haredim, and moreover Shas is thus part of the decision-making of the national agenda. This partaking in the national centre is also pointed out by Chetrit (2000:26)[109] as one of the major differences between Shas and Agudat Yisrael.

As discussed, the consequences of the room for different opinions and individual interpretation expressed by my informants in their diverse understandings of the centrality of the foci of Shas' slogan, as to what is the most important focus, showed that Shas does not operate with one set agenda. As pointed out in this chapter, the individual opinion has to step down if it is in conflict with that of Ovadia Yosef or of other more prominent leader figures. I interpret the diverse foci, with the adjoined different references to the past and Shas officials' freedom of opinion, to indicate Shas as a party-movement in the making that has not fixed a particular set of ideology and policy, but rather is developing this as it interacts in the Israeli society. This again is in contrast to the Ashkenazi Haredim who have had their set agenda since the establishment of their parties and organisation, namely to work against modernisation. Shas is creating modernising effects in this context because it is looking to the future that it is aiming to mould.

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[109] In his article on Shas in *New From Within*.

7 Mobilisation of Supporters

Givat Ain is a small, upper middle class town near Tel Aviv. The majority of the population are not Sephardim and the secular inhabitants do not know about the Shas yeshiva across from their café. "If they knew they would protest against it", Leon says. I ask why the secular inhabitants do not know about the Shas yeshiva. Leon explains that they do not understand the signs or the codes of Shas; the posters with the religious blessings and the way the posters are written and decorated, the small stickers of Ovadia Yosef and the Cabbalist Itzhak Kedouri on the doorpost saying Baroch ha'Baim, *Welcome, – these are all signs of Shas. "Shas influences the religious life of the Sephardim here. However not all the Sephardim go to synagogue, only the religious people, not the secular Sephardim who vote Likud or Labour", Leon says. "This synagogue became a yeshiva after 'Shas came' - that is Shas as a culture not as an organisation", he continues. "Aryeh Deri does not know about this particular synagogue", Leon says to illustrate the vague relationship between the people and the organisation of Shas. Inside the synagogues there are a lot of books, weaved carpets and electric candelabras. Four men with black skullcaps are sitting in the front rows. I am sitting in the back row in the section for women. There are no other women present. One of the men is reading the Maayan Shavoa leaflet from Shas.*

We are watching the weekly satellite transfer from the Yassdin synagogue in Jerusalem. Right now Ovadia Yosef's son Itzhak Yosef, the author of Yalkut Yosef, is lecturing before Ovadia Yosef. Some of the men in the synagogue are sleeping. "This is accepted, they come to the synagogue to see friends and sleep and relax", Leon explains and adds that this particular lecture is very boring. On our way out we meet a young yeshiva student whom Leon knows from before. The student tells me that he and his family returned to observance about seven years ago and since then he has only studied at the yeshiva. He is 19 years old, has got a beard and wears a hat and a black suit. I ask what Shas is to him - how he sees Shas, and he answers: "Shas is a Torah movement and organisation, not just a party".

In the Tikva neighbourhood in Tel Aviv-Jaffo almost all residents are Shasniks, as opposed to in Givat Ain. It is a poor neighbourhood inhabited by Sephardim and immigrants from Russia. There is a lot of crime and drugs in this neighbourhood. According to Leon this, like the Bucharian neighbourhood in Jerusalem and other poor neighbourhoods in Israel, is "the land of Shas": "Here Shas is an organisation like the

Red Cross - they help people. All the Sephardim here are influenced by Shas in their religious identity through the Sephardi Halacha. The rabbis are Shasniks and this is the revolution!" The Esther ha'Malcha synagogue and yeshiva look like a run-down warehouse building from the outside. Inside there is a courtyard with chairs organised in piles, books lie on the tables and in one of the adjoining houses there are bathrooms and other study rooms. Everything looks very clean. In the main building housing the synagogue there is place for the women on the second floor, but Leon and I are standing outside watching the satellite transmission of Ovadia Yosef through the windows. There are no other women present to watch the transmitted lecture. This is probably because they cannot see anything from the second floor where the women's section is. "In these neighbourhoods of Tel Aviv men are more active", Leon has observed. There are about 30 men in the yeshiva; quite a few arrive just before Ovadia Yosef is supposed to speak. Not everybody is wearing black skullcaps. One man is sitting in the doorway halfway outside listening to his small transistor radio. I ask Leon why and he says it is probably "[...] to hear all the words Ovadia Yosef is saying. This man cannot afford to buy a Walkman.

A young boy comes to look through the windows for a while accompanied by a friend without skullcap. Leon points the two boys out to me with excitement saying that the religious boy is showing his non-religious friend Ovadia Yosef's lecture. Through the sermon the Tikva synagogue and its supporters merge with Ovadia Yosef and the Yassdin synagogue in Jerusalem through singing, laughing at Ovadia Yosef's jokes and nodding in agreement with his preaching. When Ovadia Yosef is leaving the Yassdin synagogue in Jerusalem, we can see on the screen that all the men there are standing up to honour him. So are the men here in the Esther ha'Malcha synagogue as they join in the applause and outcries expressing the intimate and cheerful atmosphere.

What do the different ways in which Shas mobilise their supporters tell us about Shas? Or to view the issue from another angle: to what is Shas mobilising its supporters – to a political party, to Haredi observance, to Sephardi traditions and culture or against the Ashkenazi hegemony, be it secular, Zionist or Haredi?

7.1 Local Synagogues and Rabbis

Shas operates on different levels in the Israeli, mainly Sephardi, society: at a local level through local synagogues and their adjoined rabbis and on the national, or at least regional level, through public gatherings or rallies with various religious or political foci.

Their social and religious institutions are thus represented on both local and national level. This strategy of presentation and activity on more than one level of society simultaneously is one of the reasons why Shas can be described as a movement. According to Willis (1993), in this perspective Shas is using ritual practices and contexts to form their movement as the cultural norm. Willis (1993) understands Shas as a movement fighting against the dominant Israeli values and the fight takes place at the everyday and local level, where Shas have made its appeal heard and found ground for mobilisation behind it.

Ovadia Yosef and Traditional Jews

As discussed in chapter 5, one of main foci of Ovadia Yosef and Shas is the return to traditional religious values through education. According to Horowitz,[110] Ovadia Yosef's worldview and thereby his focus group as a rabbi, as presented in chapter 5.3, was shaped during his years as Chief Rabbi in Egypt. There he was confronted with a society of Jews consisting of three main groups; a small religious Orthodox group, a larger group of traditional Jews who were open to modernisation, and lastly an elitist Zionist group, says Horowitz. Ovadia Yosef concentrated on the second group of traditional modernised Jews and his rulings as a rabbi reflected this focus (Horowitz). Leon[111] stresses the same point when he says that the political and cultural project of Shas and the 'spiritual revolution' of Ovadia Yosef is: "to control the traditional Jews". Ovadia Yosef tried to adjust religion to the situation of the group of Jews he concentrated on.

An example of Ovadia Yosef's practical oriented rulings adapted to the changing surroundings in society, is when Ovadia Yosef in the 1970s ruled that the Ethiopian Jews[112] are Jews according to the Halacha, whereas the Ashkenazi Haredim demanded the that the Ethiopians went through a conversion ceremony and did not welcome them into their institutions. On the background of Ovadia Yosef's ruling the Ethiopians were brought to Israel and there Sephardi institutions opened their doors to them (Shahar, 2000). Ovadia Yosef's Halachic view is based on his focal point of bringing people back to Judaism and thus his Halacha has got a practical focus based on compromise.

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[110] Interview with Neri Horowitz 22/10/00.

[111] Interview with Nissim Leon 19/10/00.

[112] Because they have got different and pre-rabbinical Jewish traditions there have been serious doubts as to their authenticity as Jews and therefore there were debates about how to accept their Halachic status as Jews.

A Sephardi Neighbourhood

I got a glimpse of the everyday local level on my visit to the Hatikva neighbourhood in Tel Aviv-Jaffo, as described above. Working class immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa originally inhabited this densely populated neighbourhood. According to a resident, only one Ashkenazi family ever lived in Hatikva and that was in the 1950s (Jerusalem Post, 22/6/01). The Sephardi inhabitants are very conscious of their ethnicity and open about the economic gap between themselves and the Ashkenazim. They are considered to be politically right wing and traditional or religious when it comes to religious affiliation. These last observations are obvious from the mere fact that synagogues here are frequently visited (Jerusalem Post, 22/6/01). Today a lot foreign workers join the Sephardim in Hatikva in addition to the new Russian immigrants.[113]

According to Leon,[114] "the revolution of Shas" is found first of all in the local synagogues. Here 'the revolution' is present in the relationship between the local rabbi and the synagogue congregation. Furthermore, it exists in the network of local Shas synagogues in Israel. Here he finds the relationship between Sephardi individual and group identity. The local synagogues are informal institutions of Shas. They are not registered as Shas affiliated in any official offices, and the individuals in the local synagogue are not necessarily aware of the larger context it is a part of. The people who attend the local synagogues are mostly traditional or religious inclined. According to Kamil (2001:50), these synagogues are part of the Israeli "civil society" composed of "[..] groups, clubs and organisations acting as a buffer between state power and citizens".

The local synagogues are emotionally in a close relation to Ovadia Yosef as a spiritual leader. In the Esther ha'Malcha synagogue, I observed a feeling and atmosphere of closeness between the attendants and Ovadia Yosef, as presented above. The attendants there were participating in the sermon as if they were present in the synagogue from which the satellite transfer of the sermon was sent. However, in reality, as pointed out by Leon above, not all of the local synagogues are in close to relations to him or the leadership in Shas. Carmela Naor sums up the relationship with Ovadia Yosef and local synagogues this way: "Surely he has got a connection with a percentage [of the synagogues], when we have a meeting in Jerusalem we invite rabbi Ovadia Yosef to talk. But personal connection with him is not possible." This seems to be in contradiction to the description by Itzhak Avidani

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[113] The last large group of Jewish immigrants to Israel is from the former USSR and these immigrants are termed "Russian".

[114] Interview with Nissim Leon 5/5/01.

that the home of Ovadia Yosef is open to everybody.[115] One interpretation of inconsistency is that Carmela Naor was talking about the local synagogues, not individuals who wants to meet the rabbi. Another interpretation is that Itzhak Avidani was talking on the background of his experiences with the availability of Ovadia Yosef that might be different to those of Carmela Naor. Yet another interpretation is that the understanding of how available Ovadia Yosef is, depends on who is talking, on the position this person has in Shas and, finally, in which context he or she is talking.

7.2 Contact with the Public

I asked Itzhak Avidani "What does it mean to be in Shas?" and he answered: "Shas, the centre of the work in Shas, our secret is the good connection with the public. Everyone, all the members of the Knesset, all the Ministers – anyone from the public could get to him all the time, any day, any place he wants, spontaneously, and tell them about his problem, and he [the Shas official] would do anything to solve their problem, even if the problem is not in his area of work. For example, there are hundreds of health problems; sick people, hundreds of job problems; somebody wants a job and they ask a Shas official to help them, to do something".

Shas appears to be the only party in the Knesset that is actively working to fulfil its election campaigns promises in between the campaigns in its supporters' local neighbourhoods and everyday life. Shas keeps in touch with individual supporters in numerous ways through its religious and social institutions, the local synagogues and personal contacts. One Hassid I met at a Haredi radio station told me he votes for Shas. I was surprised that he does not vote for a Hassidic Ashkenazi affiliated party and he told me he voted for Shas because they care for him. I asked how, and he said they keep in personal touch with him on a regular basis.

This leads to the conclusion in an article in Ha'aretz (4/1/2001), which read; "no other party has so successfully catered to its constituency". This is given a further dimension when Itzhak Avidani says: "Shas helps people; we help everybody if they are Arab or non-religious. Aryeh Deri helped the Arab villages a lot when he was Interior Minister in 1982; this is the reason for their support in the following election".[116]

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[115] For details see chapter 5.3.

[116] A small number of Israeli Arabs (Arabs with Israeli citizenship) has voted for Shas.

Representatives from All Groups

In addition to this close and ever-present relationship and interest in their constituency, a practical result of Shas' awareness of its constituency and possible future supporters, is the way they have Knesset members representing different segments of the Jewish population. When Itzhak Avidani gave me a quick briefing on the Knesset members of Shas, what seemed to him a natural part of the descriptions was which geographical area and which group of their constituency, and also of the Israeli society, the individual Knesset member represents. Some represent the returnees to observance, another Knesset member represented people living in *moshavim.*[117] Knesset member Amnon Cohen from Bukhara entered the Knesset in 1999 and represents the Bukharian Jews, Itzhak Avidani explains. Cohen has studied under the guidance of Ovadia Yosef and is supposed to bridge the gap between the new Russian immigrants to Israel and Shas (Ha'aretz, 30/3/2002).

There are tensions between the Sephardim and the Russian parties and movements who are in competition for money distribution from the state and also concerning the shaping of the Israeli society. Answering why Shas is reaching out to the Russians, Cohen explained that the old secular elites are setting the Russians up against the Sephardim and Shas to prevent the religious [Shas] from influencing the Israeli society (Ha'aretz, 30/3/2001). The motivation of Shas' expansion towards the Russians, except from the obvious wish of winning more supporters, might be to decrease the party's sectarian image, in terms of Jewish ethnic focus group, and to increase their legitimacy overall. Or maybe their motivation is a result of their proclaimed outreaching policy and the fact that many Jews from the Asiatic republics from the former Soviet Union are Sephardim religiously speaking, i.e. they follow the Sephardic Halacha. This is the case of Knesset Member Itzhak Gagula who himself was born in Georgia. According to Itzhak Avidani, Georgian Jews are Sephardim and therefore it is natural that they have a representative amongst the Shas Knesset members.

7.3   Educational Network

Itzhik Sudri says that Shas' organisations are more important than the practical politics. According to him, all the Shas institutions and organisations are means to assist people and not political organisations. Itzhik Sudri claims that there are 20 000 pupils in the educational network of Shas. Nobody has been able to confirm (or invalidate) the

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[117] A moshav is a cooperative agricultural settlement.

number of pupils and all of my informants operate with different numbers. Avirama Golan thought there might be 13 000 students in the Shas school network,[118] whereas an article in Ha'aretz Magazine (15/8/00) says there are 30 000 students and in addition 3000 children in Shas' kindergartens.

Illustration 5. A page in a pamphlet from Shas marketing their educational network and stating that the education of our youth has the highest priority.

Spreading the Torah

"The goal of all the organisations is to spread the Torah and to return the people to Judaism, make people more religious", Itzhik Sudri says. He characterises Shas' educational network and other courses as saying to people: "Come to study Torah with us". This is contrasted with the education network of the government, where they according to Itzhik Sudri "teach the children to be seculars, to be Israelis". When I asked Itzhak Avidani if Shas has got any far-reaching goals he immediately answered: "The centre is the education of our children, this is the centre of the Torah of rabbi Ovadia Yosef – education for our children in our way. That's why we left the coalition[119] because of the problem that was between [Minister of Education] Yossi Sarid[120] and his Deputy Minister Shulam Nahari [of Shas]. The serious problem – the education is the centre." When I asked about 'the ideal Israel' for Shas, Itzhak Avidani emphasised: "…the educational life, we see the

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[118] Interview with Avirama Golan 18/9/00. She warned me that Shas would say about 20 000.

[119] Shas left the Barak coalition in summer 2000 allegedly because it was not satisfied with the state funding for its educational system.

[120] In the government lead by Barak from 1999-2001.

education of our children as the first thing. It means: if we will manage to give our children a good education, in our way, everything will be …it will be the base, a good base".

Subjects Taught in Shas' Schools

In chapter 5.1, I looked into what Shas wants to give each individual through its education concerning identity and religious and moral standards. Now I would like to look into the material results of the education, the way my informants see it and the way it is perceived from outside of Shas.

According to Itzhak Avidani the Shas schools teach everything. He admits that a good portion of the day is dedicated to Torah, Mishna, prayer and Talmud, but he insists that the pupils also learn English, economics, physics, mathematics and computers – "They learn everything!" he says. Itzhak Avidani boasts about his own children that they know everything, they use the Internet and they know everything that secular people know: "We do not want them to teach them only Torah. We absolutely want them to know everything", Itzhak Avidani says. As to whether this is correct, I am not in a position to argue.

According to an article in Ha'aretz Magazine (15/9/00), comparing a school in Shas' *Maayan Hahinuch Hatorahni* (The Wellspring of the Torahni Education) network with a state public school, the pupils in this Shas school did not know who Theodor Herzl was, nor did they know the national anthem. However, when asked about Ovadia Yosef, the Shas pupils' unison answer was: "The greatest man of the generation". Critics of Shas' education system are harsh and usually say that the children do not learn "anything" in their schools. I spoke to the educational director of the national educational project Ometz,[121] who said that Shas schools provide food, clothes and activities, but their level of studies is "terrible", even in religious subjects, and as a result most of the children educated there do not pass the exam to continue their studies in high school or university. He claimed that girls graduated from seventh grade in a Shas school do not know basic mathematical symbols or how to read and write properly.

Gender and Observance Segregation

There are two types of segregation in Shas' schools: gender separation and separation between children of yeshiva and Haredi families, and children from traditional or secular homes. The reason for the segregation according to parents' religious affiliation

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[121] For details see chapter 4.4.

is that children of religious or Haredi parents have attained a higher level in religious studies. Furthermore, these children probably will continue their studies at yeshivas and therefore they should receive a higher standard of religious education (Ha'aretz magazine, 15/9/00). The educational director of Ometz, told me that Shas in reality operates with two types of schools; one for their own Haredi or religious children, which is the better of the two and from which the children go onto yeshiva, and another for the poor Sephardi public. The pupils from the latter have no chance of getting through high school because of their low level of knowledge, as he pointed out about the girls graduated from the seventh grade.

In an interview in Ha'aretz Magazine (1/9/00) Haim Avidan, who works as a teacher in Hebrew and Jewish philosophy in one of Shas Maayan Hahinuch Hatorahni schools, describes these schools as: "A heterogeneous school system intended to provide in Israeli children education, the Torah and knowledge in accordance with traditional Jewish values". From the article Haim Avidan demonstrates little knowledge of, and interest in, issues such as piercing, Pokemon, TV programmes, supermodels, Madonna [the pop singer], Spinoza, Harry Potter, Dalai Lama or kibbutz. Whereas on democracy, Jewish traditions and rituals, law and order, different politicians, Zionism, religious authorities and ethnic issues he had clear opinions and thoughts. Haim Avidan received his education from the Agudat Yisrael teacher's seminary, like many other teachers in Shas' schools. Other teachers are educated in yeshivas or *kollel*.[122] According to Natan Elnatan (Ha'aretz Magazine, 15/9/00), Tel Aviv mayor and Shas affiliated city council member, teaching in the Haredi world is considered a mission built on love and devotion. This he contrasts with the low status of this occupation amongst secular Israelis (Ha'aretz Magazine, 15/9/00).

Poor Material Situation in Shas' schools

Another important issue to Itzhak Avidani is the material situation of their schools. He tells me how it makes him want to cry to see Shas children taught in caravan houses because they cannot afford building new schools. Many Shas schools are overcrowded and the entire school network is deficit. Some of their schools have not been able to obtain an operating licence from the government because of security problems, health hazards and low enrolment rates. The result is that the teachers will not receive their salary (Ha'aretz, 25/8/00).

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[122] A seminar for men who have finished yeshiva studies.

A lot of Shas politicians' energy and time is devoted to ensure the government's economical support for their educational and social institutions. This is why they are primarily interested in positions in the Educational Ministry and Ministry of Religious Affairs. They use their power in the Knesset and in the coalitions to ensure further funding for their institutions. More than once has Shas threatened to leave the coalition or opposed the government's policies on the grounds that the government is not satisfying their need for economic support. As an example: in June 2000 Shas' Council of Torah Wise Men instructed its politicians to resign from the coalition with Barak due to the government's lack of support of their educational network. They labelled the treatment from the government "persecution of Torah institutions" and said that the government had not fulfilled its promises of support from the coalition agreement (Ha'aretz, 14/6/00).

International Contacts

Shas receives funding from abroad, mainly from Sephardi contributors in England, France and the United States. In my interview with Nissim Zeev, he related how he went to the United States to collect funds from the Sephardi Jews in the United States, to finance the establishment of Shas. Ovadia Yosef and other leaders travel abroad to voice their needs and establish fund raisings. On one of these trips party leader Elie Yishai said that they are thinking of internationalising their educational system and establish Shas schools in other countries with a Sephardi population (The Jerusalem Post, 10/12/99). This was supported by the leader of United Kingdom Friends of Shas, who gave Ovadia Yosef's visits to England the credit for the organisation of four new Sephardi synagogues and two new schools and kollels in London (The Jerusalem Post, 10/12/99).

The Attractiveness of Shas' School

According to Ha'aretz (18/8/00), in the Galilean city Tiberia 70 percent of the population is secular, an yet 33 of 28 kindergartens in the city are run by Shas, Agudat Yisrael or the Hassidic movement Habad. People send their children to the Orthodox kindergartens because they offer free lunch, free transport, free summer camps, no strikes and a long school day. Itzhik Sudri told me that there are a lot of problems today in the secular schools. He emphasises problems with drugs and violence, due to which all the schools in the country today have got security personnel. "Everyone says this, not only us, seculars says this; the secular education has failed and is corrupt. Everyone except us; in our schools we do not have those problems. We offer an alternative education network that offers both education and religion", Itzhik Sudri says. Shas is successfully answering to the

socio-economic needs of their constituency. As presented in chapter 6.4, Shas is aware of the problems of the everyday life of their supporters and offer practical, minimum cost solutions that have a real and practical impact on people's lives. This is one of the main reasons why so many Sephardim choose to support Shas, instead of Likud or any other party.

Friedman[123] supports this, saying that Shas is the only option for parents of the lower strata of Israeli society when it comes to securing the future of their children. The children and concern for their children is at the centre, and in the development towns or "in the city slums" children face the threats of crime, prostitution, drugs and insufficient education or security at the schools, according to Friedman. These parents turn to Shas and its institutions because they want their children to be educated without these threats – parents who want a dignified education with focus on discipline for their children. The state is not able to give them this, so the only option is Shas, because Shas' schools, as opposed to governmental schools, do something about the problems. Friedman explained how Shas institutions could expel pupils because of their voluntary structure. This threat of expulsion does not exist in state schools and the difference is that parents with children in Shas schools can feel certain that the schools react to trouble-makers. The state schools cannot show any such immediate results in dealing with difficult pupils.

Another issue is that for traditional Jews the state schools do not give them the opportunity to keep their Sephardi norms, and therefore the Shas schools with focus on discipline and tradition appeal to them. According to Etta Bick (Bick, 2001:58), there was a change in Shas in 1999 from a "Sephardi fundamentalist religious party to a social protest movement". Shas actively uses the social and economical situation of the Sephardim in Israel in its election campaigns and, as mentioned before, continue working in between elections, something that adds to the credibility and sincere concern. In the 1999 elections Shas got 30-40 percent in most development towns (Bick, 2001:57).

7.4 Welfare and Social Organisation

In addition to the educational network, Shas operate a variety of social and religious organisations and institutions under the umbrella of El Ha'Maayan.[124] According to Itzhik Sudri, Shas takes care of grown-ups through El Ha'Maayan and its female division Margalit Em Israel, presented in the following chapter. Itzhik Sudri explains how the youth

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[123] Interview with Menachem Friedman 17/10/00.
[124] "To/Towards the Well Spring".

organisation in El Ha'Maayan takes care of youth in the afternoon so that also children who do not attend Shas' educational network can study Judaism in after school courses. Everyday, all over the country, El Ha'Maayan organises classes in Torah, Halacha and in the tradition, and Itzhik Sudri emphasises that these activities are not political. El Ha'Maayan provides help to people, he continues. Carmela Naor, manager of Em Margalit Israel, confirms this and is proud to tell me that they have got 150 classes in all the country; there are classes in Judaism and classes for consciousness [of mind].

Returnees to Observance

The ambition of has to spread Torah and return people to a religious way of life is furthered in its organised El Ha'Maayan and Margalit Em Israel, in special courses for people who are considering or in a process of becoming returnees to observance. Shas estimates that there are no Sephardi families today who do not have close relatives who are returnees to observance (Bick, 2001:59). Whether this is correct or not is difficult to find out. These returnees to the religious fold are very responsive to political activism for Shas or Shas-related people, and they are involved in the organisation of the social work of Shas, such as the youth organisation and election campaign work (Bick, 2001:59).

Social and Welfare Institutions

Besides the activities aimed at the returnees to observance, El Ha'Maayan is the mother organisation for all of Shas' welfare institutions. These institutions offer health care, soup kitchens for poor people, economic support for large families and organisation of community areas. For example it contributes by building playgrounds and cleaning up in slummy neighbourhoods, as well as taking care of prostitutes and drug addicts. In the Adva report from 1998,[125] Shas' El Ha'Maayan is characterised as an "…additional, parallel welfare system to the one established by law" that give effective short-term answers to social problems and therefore also ease the feeling of distress among a segment of the Israeli public (News From Within, 1998:35). From the report is it obvious that these are tasks the state has not been able to fulfil. This welfare system of Shas is aimed at "a sector of Mizrahim in the underprivileged neighborhoods and 'development towns' " (News From Within, 1998:34).

The Adva report compares El Ha'Maayan to the educational and charitable institutions of Islamic movement of Israel as do an Arab Israeli interviewed in Ha'aretz

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[125] Adva is the "Center for Information on Equality and Social Justice in Israel".

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(3/10/2000): "It [the Islamic Movement] can raise money, help the poor, set up a school system. There is a parallel between the Islamic Movement and Shas: Does everyone who votes Shas believe in every religious principle? The same is true for us." Both Shas and the Islamic Movement are willing to help and set up special institutions to improve the lives of people who do not necessarily become more religious or follow their path of religious behavior.

Yaakov, my informant from Kiryat Malakhi, told me:[126] "Shas is good for the Sephardim, in its institutions it cares for the children. Shas gets money for the Sephardim and builds new kindergartens etc. Its institutions are sometimes better than those of the state, like the medical service centre in Kiryat Malakhi." This comes from a person who does not consider himself traditional, who does not believe in the rulings of Ovadia Yosef, who works for a state funded national pedagogical project and votes Shas only because it is Sephardi, and not for ideological reasons.

Leftist Social Ideology

Journalist Avirama Golan (Ha'aretz, 22/3/01) characterises Shas' social politics and the behavior of Shas ministers at the starting point of the new Sharon government in the summer of 2001 as more "leftist ideology", than what comes from the leftist parties themselves. Golan uses the examples of policies from Shas Member of Knesset Shlomo Benizri and Elie Yishai in their dealing with the gap in health services throughout Israel and workers' rights. She asks rhetorically why these politicians are engaging in what she calls "Shas socialism" instead of concentrating on empowering their own institutions.

According to Kamil (2001:50), the social success of Shas is a result of the educational and social service institutions that Shas offers the Sephardim as a means to integrate them into the Israeli society, a process in which the state of Israel has failed to assist them. As an active fighter for Mizrahi politics and equality Chetrit,[127] on the other hand, is critical to the way Shas makes this pubic dependent on Shas for everything their community needs, instead of bringing its Sephardi public to political and economic

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[126] See chapter 4.4 for details on Yaakov. Kiryat Malakhi is a poor development town with almost only Sephardi and Ethiopian residents. It has got high unemployment figures and great poverty problems (Ha'aretz, Internet, 04/12/2001).

[127] In this context the term Mizrahi has a particular political connotation referring to the immigration history of the Middle Eastern Jews and the following experiences they have had in Israel.

competitive equality. In his words "Shas has exchanged one type of dependency for another" (Chetrit, 2000:29).[128]

7.5 Charismatic Rabbis and Public Gatherings

On my first day in Jerusalem in the autumn 2000, former Shas Chairman Aryeh Deri was entering prison to begin to serve his sentence of three years for bribery and fraud. I attended a huge demonstration organised in support of Aryeh Deri in Jerusalem, similar to the demonstrations outside the courthouse when he was on trial.[129] All around the country demonstrations were organised and all departed to follow Aryeh Deri to jail in convoys that disrupted traffic in central Israel. The convoy buses were organised, separate for men and women, and many hundred thousand supporters were reported to have gathered outside the prison. Some never went home after that first demonstration, instead, they impulsively decided to stay and "serve time with Aryeh", according to one of the organisers of Shaagat Aryeh. They set up a tent and organised a supporters' camp with a yeshiva and informal study groups during the days and public meetings in the evenings. This was the start of the Shas phenomenon of autumn 2000 – Shaagat Aryeh as described in the Introduction.

"The Lions Roar"

I asked Itzhak Avidani what Shaagat Aryeh is and he answered that most of the people in Shaagat Aryeh "love Aryeh Deri highly". The participants at Shaagat Aryeh are close to Aryeh Deri. He explained further: "We in Shas are involved; we pay for some of the things at Shaagat Aryeh. I think it is very good; it is very good to strengthen Aryeh Deri, not to leave him or forget him. They want to be with him and that is why there is Shaagat Aryeh. The public in Israel does not like it, but this is our power: even if somebody [in this case Aryeh Deri] has problems, we will be with him." Yehuda Azrad was one of the organisers of Shaagat Aryeh. I interviewed him when the son of Ovadia Yosef, rabbi David Yosef was on stage speaking emotionally about the unfair treatment of Aryeh Deri during the trial, and the male part of the audience loudly declared their support for Aryeh Deri. When I asked Yehuda Azrad what Shaagat Aryeh is, he spoke about Aryeh Deri's part in the building of Shas and his fight and encouragement to reverse the unfairly

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[128] In his article on Shas in *News From Within*.
[129] See illustration 1.

treatment of Sephardim in Israel. Then he told me to talk to Yossi, a man in his early twenties who is in charge of the media and promotion of Shaagat Aryeh.

Yossi elaborated on the activities conducted there, ranging from confessions and commitment declarations on stage by returnees to observance, different rabbis who came to talk to the people and celebration of regular Jewish festivities and holydays. Yossi was very proud that even people from the left side of Israeli politics, such as historian Amnon Krakotsky, of *Ha'Keshet Ha'Demokratit Ha'Mizrahit* (The Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow Coalition)[130] came to talk in favour of Aryeh Deri. Secular Israelis are generally critical of the activities at Shaagat Aryeh. In an article in Ha'aretz (3/10/00) Shaagat Aryeh was presented as a "group-ecstasy" aimed at confirming individual belonging, and compared with the Israeli annual New Age Genesis festival.[131] Benny Elbaz is the famous Shas singer who sings popular songs about Aryeh Deri. The most famous song is called '*Hu zakay*' (He is innocent), and is the theme song in the video produced for the 1999 election campaign. The 90 minutes long video concentrates entirely on the unfair and discriminating treatment of Aryeh Deri, by what the Shasniks look upon as the Ashkenazi, corrupt, racist court and police investigation that sentenced him. Another song on the Benny Elbaz tape from Shaagat Aryeh is dedicated to Amnon Danker, a secular journalist who went from being very critical towards Shas, to supporting the release of Aryeh Deri. Amnon Danker was another one of the seculars to speak in favour of Aryeh Deri at Shaagat Aryeh.[132]

Public Meetings

Shas organises many rallies around the country, both as part of their election campaigns and as part of religious awakening and missionary plans among Jews. In addition, the rallies are responses to contemporary issues, be it political or religious. For these rallies the spiritual leadership of Shas and charismatic rabbis are flown around the country in helicopters. Also Sephardi singers participate and perform, as in Shaagat Aryeh. According to Bekerman and Yair Neuman (unpublished article:10), the speeches of the

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[130] The Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow Coalition is a leftist political expression fighting for the rights of Middle Eastern Jews (and Palestinians) in Israel. See Chetrit 1999 "The New Mizrahim: Radiacal Alternative & Criticism" for further reading.

[131] This festival is descibed as including ingredients such as mediation, yoga, focus on ecology and various religious commitments.

[132] The text of the song: "There is a precious man. His name is Amnon Danker. There is a precious man. He is a brave man and a hero, a lion [aryeh], who is not timid. Amnon, you're a doll, you're an angel from heaven Amnon, Amnon, Amnon, Lapid is crying. Amnon, Amnon, Amnon, a hero like Areyh. There is a precious man, a real journalist who isn't timid." (Ha'aretz: 11/10/00)

charismatic rabbis are aimed to recruit secular Jews to the Orthodox fold and to reinforce the observance of the already Orthodox by making the audience take part in their "newly constructed symbolic realignment". According to Bekerman and Neuman, all the charismatic rabbis they have studied recognise modernity, understood here as science and progress, though they criticise the fact that in the modern world Jews are tempted to stray away from Judaism and a life in accordance with the Halacha. The answer of the charismatic rabbis to these circumstances is centred on tradition, which gives identity and direction (Bekerman and Neuman, unpublished article:13).

A Charismatic Rabbi

Amnon Itzhak is one such charismatic rabbi. I asked Itzhak Avidani about Amnon Izthak and his relations to Shas, and Itzhak Avidani said that Amnon Itzhak is a popular rabbi. He comes from the Haredi city Bnei Brak.[133] Amnon Izthak has got his own Internet homepage (http://www.shofar.net/) called *Shofar* (Ram's Horn), and he produces his own cassettes from his speeches. Until now he has produced three million copies. To record and distribute speeches is very common and the cassettes are sold at a low price.[134] "Amon Itzhak is a returnee to observance and a rabbi and he used to be an officer in the military", Itzhak Avidani continues.

A lot of the activities of charismatic rabbis are aimed at the returnees to observance who constitute a large segment of supporters of Shas and possible future supporters. Further, Itzhak Avidani tells me that in his lectures Amnon Izthak gives answers. "He is not a member of Shas, but he wants to have a relationship with Shas, so that Shas can take care of his returnees to observance ", Itzhak Avidani states. Apparently Ovadia Yosef did not favour this connection with the charismatic rabbi in the past, because it created problems; "Amnon said things in fundamentalist and extremist ways. This scared people. Academics never listen to him like they do to Shlomo Benizri, who holds lectures at different universities around the world "Itzhak Avidani explains.

This last remark is interesting as an example of Shas' quest for legitimacy in the Israeli society as a serious and modern party-movement. It can also serve as an illustration of the complex relations between individual people, the Shas officials and the Shas movement. As mentioned in chapter 2.1, and discussed further in chapter 3.4, I find it

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[133] See chapter 4.1.3 about Haredim in Israel.

[134] Usually Orthodox and Haredi rabbis and singers do not produce CDs because most of their audience cannot afford CD players.

complicated to comprehend the structure of the Shas party-movement, and the boundaries that defines what or who is Shas, and what or who is not. The charismatic rabbis are examples of individuals who are related to, but not described as part of, Shas. They are acknowledged for their ability to return people to an Orthodox way of life and for the recruitment job they do for Shas. Yet, these charismatic rabbis are not presented as coming from within Shas, and the reasons for this are many; Shas wants to be regarded as a serious political party and therefore cannot be in official relations with (in Itzhak Avidani's words) "extreme and fundamentalist" charismatic rabbis, secondly Shas is also looking for legitimacy and acceptance from the Ashkenazi religious parties and movements, and to be associated closely with charismatic rabbis might damage the reputation of rabbi Ovadia Yosef and the Council of Torah Wise Men. The reason for this is that many Ashkenazi Haredim do not consider the charismatic rabbis as equal and look down on them for their populist methods.

Belonging to Shas

Similarly defining who are in Shas and what is their responsibility is difficult when it comes to the standing of other rabbis than Ovadia Yosef and the Council of Torah Wise Men. For example the position of Cabbalist Itzhak Kedouri is disputable. His photo is often showed besides that of Ovadia Yosef and former Party Chairman Aryeh Deri, on various posters and stickers, and in Shas supporters' shops and homes. Itzhak Kedouri's status is uncertain because he does not have any official position in Shas. He acts on his own account, but is often present in rallies or ceremonies, where he contributes to the degree of spirituality. Some accuse Shas of intentionally using mystical faith to attract followers and give the party a notion of sacredness.[135] According to Leon[136], Itzhak Kedouri is an instrument of Shas – an icon and a symbol without any power. The sticker in the synagogue is an example; the religious people who do not listen to or understand the Halachic language of Ovadia Yosef, understand the blessing from Itzhak Kedouri. Together Ovadia Yosef and Itzhak Kedouri complement each other – Itzhak Kedouri represents the mystical dimension of Shas.

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[135] For example an article in TIME, September 25, 2000, with the title "Miracle Makers, Israel's Shas Party Tapping into Mysticism to Give its Policies more Potency".
[136] Interview with Nissim Leon 27/4/01.

7.6 Use of Modern Communication Tools

Shas uses media and communication tools to be in contact with their supporters. The aim is to link the centre of the party-movement, the leadership, with the local synagogues and communities around them. In addition Shas uses communication tools to be a part of the political and cultural debates in the Israeli society. All Shas officials have a least one mobile phone and one personal pager making them available and in touch with each other at all times. In the beginning of this chapter I presented the satellite transmission of Ovadia Yosef's after-Shabbat sermon from the Yassdin synagogue in Jerusalem. In addition to the satellite transmission of religious lectures to local synagogues around Israel, Shas has got a party newspaper, operates radio stations, uses TV commercials in its election campaigns and Shas officials are frequently participating in debate programmes and news broadcasts on national TV.

The video used in the 1999 election campaign depicts the trial and sentence of Aryeh Deri as a trial conducted by the Ashkenazi establishment against the Sephardi innocent underdog. According to a review of the video in Ha'aretz (7/5/99), it displays professional use of cutting between close-up pictures of an emotional and serious Aryeh Deri and a supportive and fatherly Ovadia Yosef and shots of excited and despairing crowds of Shas supporters in contrast to cold and distanced images of the Ashkenazi judges and policemen. All accompanied by background music by Shas singer Benny Elbaz singing the theme song "He is innocent". The video was distributed to individuals, shown in community houses, at religious celebrations and gatherings, at Shas conventions and parts of it were used in the election campaign on national TV.

Party Newspaper

Shas' weekly newspaper Yom Leyom is sold in newsstands close to religious or Sephardi neighbourhoods. In fact it took me some time to find out where to get this newspaper in West Jerusalem. I had to move away from the middle and upper middle class neighbourhoods to the kiosks in the lower middle class neighbourhoods around the Yehuda Market and into the religious neighbourhoods where Shas supporters are more likely to live. Shas Member of Knesset Nissim Zeev told me that it is the party's newspaper: "[…] Yom Leyom represents the religion and culture of Shas, and so on. It is the newspaper of

Shas like Ha'aretz is the newspaper of Meretz", Nissim Zeev explained.[137] Yom Leyom consists of the main newspaper with national news, especially after the outbreak of the Al Aqsa Intifada, and focus on Shas politicians and rabbis and generally the situation of the Sephardim in Israel. Each issue includes a weekend supplement with more background and editorial articles and a magazine for children with stories and crosswords games.

According to Leon,[138] only the leadership or "elite" in Shas reads Yom Leyom. The majority of Shas supporters read the weekly leaflet Maayan Shavoa, because the leaflet is distributed in the synagogues. To Leon this makes the leaflet more important than the newspaper. The reason for this division between people who read the newspaper and the people who read the leaflet, is first of all that anything distributed in the synagogue is considered obligatory to respect and therefore people feel obliged to read it. Moreover, people cannot throw away the leaflet due to its respectful status. Furthermore, the leaflet is free of charge, and lastly, it is a four-page leaflet that is quickly and easily read. Horowitz[139] estimates that 200 000 leaflets are distributed every week.

Radio Stations

Shas operates several radio stations alone or in cooperation with other religious movements. Some of the stations are pirate, i.e. they do not have state permission and this has caused a lot of controversy between Shas and other political parties. The radio stations are described as combining music, call-in talk shows, charity drives and lectures (Bick, 2001:61). Ovadia Yosef himself is frequently giving lectures and answering questions in these programmes. In an article in Ha'aretz (16/8/00), the radio broadcasts by Shas are described as using "informal, very blunt idiom" answering to the ethnic and social protest needs and to its religious content. Another article (Ha'aretz, 7/2/01), describes Shas' radio stations "[…] as one of the principal keys to its success." The reasons for this is that even poor people have got a radio, many people can listen to one radio together, and the programmes thereby reach many people at on time with information about Halachic rulings on conduct, happenings and political development. Besides funding for its educational network, legalising of its pirate radio stations was one of the main demands of Shas for entering the coalition with Barak in 1999. According to Eytan Gilboa and Yaron Katz

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[137] This says more about how Nissim Zeev looks upon Ha'aretz than about Ha'aretz itself. In this perspective it is important to remember that Meretz and Shas in a way have mutually singled out each other as opposites in terms of Israeli internal politics and in their position on religion and state respectively.

[138] Interview with Nissim Leon 5/5/01.

[139] Interview with Neri Horowitz 22/10/00.

(1999), Shas frequently used the radio stations in the 1999 election campaign transmitting political programmes and information about Shas' activities. Another reason for the importance of the radio is that it is easy for the leadership to control the radio stations and thereby keep the radio programmes kosher,[140] something that is difficult with other medias, such as the Internet.

Use of the Internet

Ovadia Yosef did not sign a statement written by "prominent Haredi rabbis" prohibiting use of the Internet, except from in relation to work (Jerusalem Post, 21/1/00), however, according to Shas officials close to Ovadia Yosef, he backed the ruling and said that Shas did not plan to launch a website. This is in contrast to the information given to me by Itzhak Avidani who, in the end of October the same year, told me that: "We are now starting to get on the Internet, we want to build something on the Internet. Beginning, we hope that in something like months from today we will be able to get something in the Internet, something big […] so when you go back to Oslo I hope that you should able to find our site, what we are going to publish there." In April 2002 they still do not have any site operating.

The reasons behind the prohibition against the Internet is the availability of sex and violence sites, besides the general delivery of the secular world into the Haredi living rooms (Jerusalem Report, 09/04/2000). It is hard to tell whether the divergence on the issue between Ovadia Yosef's aides and Itzhak Avidani is due to a development in Shas on the issue or another example of differences of opinions within Shas. It could be a tactic where the rabbi is expressing his concern, yet not supporting the prohibition, and his politicians are following the development of society to keep up with their supporters and competitors. Another possibility is that Ovadia Yosef does not know of the plans to launch Shas Internet site. Yet another possible reason for the deviation could be that Itzhak Avidani wanted to impress me by Shas' development and relationship with modern tools.

Other Means of Communication

Wall posters are an effective internal means of communication and they are used excessively by Shas. The use of wall posters is common to Haredim and signifies a rather poor society where few people have TV, telephone or other means of communication. At

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[140] In this context kosher is used in a transferred manner and means 'acceptable', 'moral' and 'right' (Groth, 2000: 223). Something 'not kosher' is not 'fit' or 'suitable' in accordance with Jewish law and traditions, for example an upright Jew is considered a kosher Jew (Jacobs, 1999: 128).

the same time it indicates a literate society as well as a community where people actively use the community facilities (Friedman, 1994).[141] For example during Aryeh Deri's trial and around his imprisonment, posters with different photos of Aryeh Deri claiming his innocence could be found all over Jerusalem and Sephardi neighbourhoods around the country.

Illustration 6. A car decorated with posters advocating the release of Aryeh Deri. One of the posters depicts Aryeh Deri behind bars opposite the former president of Israel, the Ashkenazi Ezer Weitzman, with the text: "Look what colours can do". Both were charged for corruption and fraud, but only Aryeh Deri was convicted (photo: Tilde Rosmer).

Relationship with the National Secular Press

Aryeh Deri was the favourite of the secular national press for many years and he appeared in TV discussions and gave a large interview in Ha'aretz newspaper a few months before he went to prison. His wife Yaffa and Ovadia Yosef's daughter Adina Bar Shalom have also given interviews on national TV channels and in national newspapers. These are examples that can illustrate Shas' relationship with the secular press. They use

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[141] The wall posters inform about various religious events, announcing the death of important people or giving religious warnings and advice.

this press and thereby see themselves as part of the political and social discourse of secular Israel, which is important to the party-movement, as presented above.

However, this is an ambivalent relationship and Shas officials have often criticised the secular and national press for being prejudice against them as Sephardim and religious, and for not giving them the coverage they deserve. This feeling of alienation from the mainstream national media has lead Shas towards their alternative media, represented by their satellite transmissions, their pirate radio channels, their newspaper and news leaflets and the videos cassettes (Gilboa and Katz, 1999:6). A well-known episode that illustrates the negative and distrustful feelings from Shas towards the secular press is the press conference after Aryeh Deri was convicted. Ovadia Yosef reacted quickly to what he must have felt as a threatening and accusing question from a TV reporter, whereupon he ordered the reporter to leave calling him "hostile", and then he told Aryeh Deri not to answer the question. All this happened on live TV and, according to Gilboa and Katz (1999), the question asked by the TV reporter was not illegitimate.

7.7 Shas: Party and Movement

The interesting questions for this chapter is which motivation lies behind Shas' mobilisation of its supporters. Moreover, what are the similarities or the differences, between these driving forces and those of the Ashkenazi Haredim? The different ways of mobilisation are links between the leadership, and their ideology, and the Shas supporters. These links are mostly initiated from the leadership and therefore give an idea of the leadership's understanding of their supporters and the background for how and where they are leading their supporters. Member of Knesset Nissim Zeev said to me that Shas started as a general movement and emphasised that this was the intention.

Defining Shas

Many scholars have tried to define what Shas is: a Haredi movement, an ethnic movement or a social protest movement? Is it a political party? Fischer and Bekerman (draft:2) characterises Shas as a church building on Weber's definitions of church and sect, wherein sect is an organisation of "spiritual aristocracy" and a church is a "religious body which addresses all people". Their argument for defining Shas as a church is Shas' extensive social movement with its informal relations and practices, referring to and resulting in its broad public support (Fischer and Bekerman, draft:3). Fischer and Bekerman define Ashkenazi Haredi organisations as sects. They explain the differences between the church organisation of Shas and the sect organisation of Ashkenazi Haredim

as firstly Shas' acceptance and welcome of "sinners" (Fischer and Bekerman, draft:4). Shas do not demand perfection from its followers, as opposed to the Ashkenazi Haredim. Secondly Shas is involved in both the spiritual and the material welfare of its supporters. Thirdly, Shas is not elitist, unlike the Ashkenazi Haredi sect composed of "spiritually superior" Jews (Fischer and Bekerman, draft:2).

I agree with the interpretation of differences between Shas and Agudat Yisrael, however, I have said that I am not trying to put Shas into a pattern or model because it can lead to misunderstandings and presumptions about the phenomenon in description. Therefore I would not describe Shas by the terms church and sect. Usually a church is associated with the dominant class in a society (McGuire, 1987:116) and in the case of Israel this would mean the Ashkenazi, secular, Zionist establishment. This is contrary to the case of Shas, which sees itself as representing the underprivileged in the Israeli society.

Ricky Tessler (2000:3) describes Shas as developed from a "hybrid party", explaining the relationship between a party and its satellite organisations, to a "party-movement", defined as a party of the masses. The motive behind the hybrid party is rooted in power; through its satellite organisations the party is able to raise and receive funds it is otherwise not eligible for as a party. The motive for the party-movement, however, is ideological. It uses the 'radical behaviour' of the organisations, if they indeed behave radically, to change the public policy and uses the organisations to make its policies more effective. This means that both the hybrid party and the party-movement use extra-parliamentary means to exist and to develop its power. According to Tessler, the change in Shas from a hybrid party to a party-movement took place in 1992 when Shas went from focusing on discrimination against Sephardi religious institutions by the Ashkenazi Haredi establishment, to a focusing on its goal, namely religious revolution. This development describes a move away from the influences and domination of the Ashkenazi Haredi parties; in practical terms relating to Shas' start as a party, and in ideological terms wherein Shas wants to change the Israeli society. This is different from the Ashkenazi Haredim who want to lead their secluded lives within the state of Israel.

It is hard to differentiate between the party and the movement, especially since Ovadia Yosef is seen as the religious authority for both. But, there is a certain distinction; for example when I ask people whether they are "in Shas", they often answered that they are not members of Shas, presumably referring to the party. But, these people told me they voted for Shas and use the Shas-affiliated social institutions. Shas does not have any member list or any other functional way to identify the supporters. Moreover, this makes it

difficult to discern the impact of associations around Shas and their precise relationship with the party-movement. This is why Friedman[142] characterised Shas as a 'communitas',[143] i.e. a spontaneous, informal and fluid movement that fades away or become institutionalised, thereby disappearing in its original form (Burke, 1992:89). As such Shas is built on informal and deep mutual involvement organised round Shas affiliated synagogues.

Local and National Level

There seems to be two levels of contact in Shas: the first is the local level aimed at individuals through the local synagogues, the neighborhood rabbi and the local school. This level of mobilisation is reflected in Itzhak Avidani's comments on Shas' connection with the public in which he claims that Shas demonstrates an outreaching and accepting character because it is willing to help everyone. The other level is the national and group oriented level addressed through the media of Shas, and also by the Shas officilas' participation in the national press and thus the Israeli society. According to Leon the radio and the newspaper voice the macro community of Shas.[144]

Why does Shas operate in these two ways? It seems obvious that they are interested in increasing the number of votes for Shas. This is not a trait they share with Ashkenazi Haredi political parties who concentrate on their given constituency. This vote collecting behavior is legitimate political conduct in democratic states and it gives us an idea that Shas wants to increase its influence and wants it to include the state and society of Israel, as opposed to only its own constituency. Angelika Timm (2001:60) describes the relationship between the political party Shas and the welfare organisation El Ha'Maayan as a one of patronage initiated by the political party. In this relationship Shas uses El Ha'Maayan as a tool in the two "cultural wars" it is fighting: between the seculars and the Ultra Orthodox and between the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim.

The variable reflections of Shas officials on what Shas is, focused on either religious traditions, ethnic group in Israel or the Jewish state as presented in chapter 6, are visible in the many diverse ways Shas relates to its supporters as presented above. Through the established welfare and educational institutions and the loosely related organisation, such as the girls' school, the public gatherings and the charismatic rabbis, Shas is reaching out

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[142] Interview with Menachem Friedman 17/10/00.

[143] *Communitas* is a term from Emile Durkheim's theory.

[144] Interview with Nissim Leon 4/11/00.

to and is in touch with a range of supporters with various religious commitments and closeness to Shas. With the radio stations, leaflets distributed in the synagogues, use of the secular media and election campaigns, Shas is addressing the diversity of its constituency and also looking out for possible future supporters.

Shas relates to the various identities of its supporters in accordance with the diverse constituency of a modern society. This corresponds with Itzhik Sudri's definition of Shas' New Jewish Israeli – being religious in modern Israel implies to be part of the society for example to give interviews in the secular press, and to follow the Halacha and fulfil the mitzvoth. Shas is composed of Israelis talking to Israelis; Shas officials do not seem to perceive themselves as a secluded group of Jews living in a state that is not kosher. [145]

Compared to Ashkenazi Haredi Parties and Movements

Ashkenazi Haredi schools also give the Haredi and non-Haredi children the opportunity of transport to and from school, free lunch and long school days, like the educational network of Shas. But this seems to be practices picked up from Shas and its institutions. According to Ha'aretz (7/11/2001), it took four years for United Torah Judaism to establish "a rival" to the educational network of Shas, though according to the newspaper, United Torah Judaism has always aimed to provide all Jews with an Ultra Orthodox education. It may seem that the success and organisation of Shas' educational network gave the Ashkenazi Haredim a push to realize their goal. However, it is not a point to prove for me that any conduct or practice is unique to Shas, but to try to understand the ideology and identity behind them, and thereby the institutions they result in and the way these institutions are organised.

Though Ashkenazi Haredi parties and movements may have the same tools of communication, they use them in a different manner. Where Shas uses these tools to address all circles of its constituency and to attract supporters, Ashkenazi Haredim focus more closely on their defined group of supporters in accordance with their agenda of separating themselves from the secular Israeli society. In contrast, the institutions of Shas act naturally as part of this society, though its agenda is to change the society in accordance with its understanding of being 'Jewish'. The Shas officials I spoke with seemed to be proud of the fact that Shas is a part of the Israeli society.

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[145] For details see footnote chapter 7.6.

The arguments of Fischer and Bekerman on the differences between Ashkenazi Haredi movements and Shas support my investigation assumption of Shas as something different from Ashkenazi Haredi parties and movements.

7.8   Summing Up

In this chapter the relevant 'measures' to investigate Shas' relationship with modernisation are: the party-movement's strategies of recruitment, its relationship with technology and its appreciation of the social and economic situation of its individual supporter. I have found that Shas is recruiting supporters through local synagogues, school network, welfare institutions and courses for returnees to observance. All of these strategies for mobilisation of supporters point to an awareness of the socio-economic situation of the individual supporter. Moreover, Shas demonstrates interest in, and willingness to do something about, the individual situation. In addition, Shas uses the most modern technology as a strategy of recruitment and as communication tools within its party-movement. However, because Shas is familiar with its supporters' life situation, it makes an effort to be accessible to the supporters at no or minimal cost. This is exemplified with use of radio, cassettes, wall posters, the newsletter without charge and its organised transmissions of religious lectures to local synagogues and community houses. Shas also displays advanced skills in populist use of media, as illustrated with the video about Aryeh Deri used in one of its election campaigns.

Ashkenazi Haredi parties and movements also use many of the strategies of recruitment used by Shas, such as education for non-Haredi children and use of technology and populism. The major difference is that Shas is mobilising people from all segments of the Israeli society, whereas the Haredim are focusing on their own segment of this society. The increased mobilisation of Sephardim by Shas promotes modernisation. This is a fact both in relation to the lower political participation of traditional lower-middle class Sephardim before Shas entered the political scene, and in relation to the increased mobilisation of Sephardim to welfare and social institutions.

The focus on education is similarly strong in Shas and the Ashkenazi Haredi movements. Also in its educational network Shas is reaching out to and fashioning its services to suit the needs of the various users. Whereas in Haredi schools the focus is on Haredi studies and do not often incorporate non-Haredi students, the school network of Shas is developed to incorporate children from different religious backgrounds and with different educational aspirations.

8   Women in Shas

Naavot Israel is a girls' school run by Shas Knesset Member rabbi Nissim Zeev and his wife Shifra. I enter the school on Shmuel HaNavi Street in Jerusalem on the border to East Jerusalem. There is a guard by the door of the rather new and very attractive looking thee floor building. I go to the office to meet Shifra Zeev, who is the daily manager of the school. She is wearing an elegant costume in delicate colours and a wig, like most of the other women working in the school. "I prefer the wig although rabbi Ovadia Yosef disagrees", she says, "it is prettier. I got married at the age of eighteen", she tells me as we are sitting in the library with a cup of coffee. Shifra studied architecture before she had her children. "My husband let me do it with pleasure". She has got eleven children from the age of twenty to one-an-a-half. After five years at home with her children she went to a computer course twice a week "for therapy" - she explains: "I needed some time away from the house and all the children. Some time for myself. Eleven children are too much." Now the Zeev family lives in an Ashkenazi neighbourhood in Jerusalem with only two more Sephardi families nearby. Shifra only works half days because she has to take care of her baby. "Its too much!" she bursts out smiling. Her husband, Nsiim Zeev, is seven years older than her, an age difference she appreciates "..he knew how the world worked before we got married. I do not think it is good when the boy and the girl are the same age when they get married. Girls mature before boys, and if they marry too soon she becomes like a mother to him".

The books in the library are mostly religious, but they have got a section of books in English and reference books such as the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Shifra explains that the librarian goes through the books and crosses out everything the management considers not proper, like intimate relations between men and women or talk about Darwinism and evolution they do not believe in. She shows me some pages censored with white correcting tape. Then classes finish and a lot of girls dressed in blue and white uniforms with long skirts and blouses come into the library, some to study and some to pass time (or perhaps to see who I am?). I ask for permission to take a photo of some girls studying. With all the young girls around Shifra wants us to speak in English so that the pupils will not understand. She takes me for a tour of the school. The school has got a very new and well-equipped science lab. They have got two computer rooms with new computers, about twenty in each room, and some have got an Internet connection that the girls can use under supervision so that they will no see anything un-kosher. On the roof they have got a

*large plateau where they do sports, for example football and spend time between classes.
"We are currently building a sports hall next to the school that will include a swimming
pool", Shifra explains. The hallways are decorated with school projects and in the first
hallway there is place reserved for photos of important visitors to the school: a photo
shows rabbi Ovadia Yosef when he was here recently delivering a sermon.*

I have chosen to write a separate chapter dedicated to the situation of women in Shas,
instead of integrating these women and the female issues throughout the dissertation. The
reason for this is the fact that Shas' organisation is patriarchal and male dominated, and the
reality of segregation between the genders is one of the most important organisers of Shas'
institutions, as I learned and experienced during my fieldwork.

8.1 The Jewish Woman

What can be described as the identity of Shas' 'New Sephardi woman', related to the
new opportunities many Sephardi women connected to Shas are given in Shas' educational
and welfare organisations, has to be understood in relation to general Orthodox Jewish
gender relations and traditions. It is also important to examine this new identity in
connection with the situation of the Sephardi women before Shas appeared. Therefore I
will present briefly women's position in Orthodox Judaism and in the Halacha and
afterwards a study of Middle Eastern Jewish women in Jerusalem. In addition I will
compare this new identity with the identity of the Ashkenazi Haredi women.

Women in Orthodox Judaism

In Orthodox Judaism women have got a very small place in official ritual life, for
example in the synagogue. Women are responsible for the home, the upbringing of
children, the cooking according to the kosher dietary laws[146] and the preparations for the
festivals celebrated at home. According to the Halacha, women are bound by the same
rules of life and religious obligation as men, but they are exempted from the time bound
obligations and rituals, such as the daily prayers. A Jewish wife's Halachic obligations can
be summarized in the abbreviation *ChaNaH*: *Challa* (to break the Shabbat bread) *Niddah* –
(to keep the rules of purity and correct behaviour) and *Hadlik nir* (to light the Shabbat
candles). In most of the Talmud literature women are mentioned in relation to men.

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[146] All food has got to be prepared according to the Kashrut dietary laws to be eatable for an Orthodox Jew.
The strictness of these regulations differ amongst the different segments and groups of Jews.

In Orthodox Judaism segregation between the genders is an essential part of the organisation of religious rituals. According to one interpretation women and men have got to be separated in the synagogue sermon because women might disturb men in prayer and distract them towards sexual fantasies. The degree of segregation differs amongst the groups and types of Orthodoxy and is the strictest in Haredi communities. For Haredim it is one of the most decisive and important organisers of all sides of life, whereas for other directions of Orthodoxy it is not integrated into life outside of the synagogues. A Haredi man or woman would for example never sit next to someone of the opposite gender on the bus. Since many Haredi men study all day, Haredi women have to work to support their large families. Because men and women live in strictly segregated patterns, women work in positions where they do not have male colleagues or cliental. Besides, they make sure their place of work is within the community to avoid (unnecessary) contact with the secular society.

Middle Eastern Traditions

Susan Sered characterises the rituals and religious practices of Oriental Jewish women as "domesticated religion", meaning that these women personalise Judaism and their traditions to safeguard the lives of people they care about (Sered, 1995:285). From her study of poor, illiterate older women living in Jerusalem, but originally from Kurdistan, Iraq, Iran, Yemen and North Africa, rituals such as blessings, donations to charity, kissing sacred objects, Judaica lessons, Shabbat and festival preparations, visiting holy tombs and prayer in the synagogues constitute their everyday life and their female religious world (Sered, 1995:285).

Some of these traditions Shas have taken up and thereby renewed their validity. An example is the use of blessed amulets in Shas' election campaign in 1996. By using the traditions and folk religion of these women actively, Shas is talking to them in their own cultural and religious language and thereby also giving it legitimacy. Some would argue that Shas is using these traditions and women to win votes. This is probably true, but it does not negate the positive effect this legitimising has got for these traditions and the women upholding them. According to Fischer and Bekerman (draft:3), magical practice such as amulets, charms and Cabbalah, the mystical school in Judaism, functions as a bridge between the pious (read Haredi) and the traditional Shas followers, because both groups relate to these religious expressions.

8.2 Role and Position

I asked Izhak Avidani about the relationship between men and women and the official view of Shas on gender relations. He answered: "Usually the Ultra Orthodox women do not work, they are at home where they have got a lot of work to do". He gives the example of his boss, rabbi and Knesset Member Shlomo Benizri, who, when he was 37, had eight children. "Somebody had to take care of them", Itzhak Avidani says implying Shlomo Benizri's wife. According to Itzhak Avidani the wife does most of the housework. However, he tells me that his wife works in a secular school and they only have got three children, whereas most other Shas officials have from four to twelve children. Besides his wife only wears a hat or covers her hair when she is meeting the rabbi [Ovadia Yosef]. Itzhak Avidani told me this to illustrate that he is a "liberal" and he seemed proud of his wife.

Wives of Shas Officials

Then Itzhak Avidani tells me about the wives of Shas officials. From his descriptions there emerges a picture of housewives spending a lot of time and effort on charity work. For example Shlomo Benizri's wife, who according to Itzhak Avidani feeds and takes care of hundreds of people every week. Furthermore Elie Yishai's wife has got an organisation that helps girls who want to get married. Her organisation will do everything that needs to be done to secure the wedding: find a husband, help finance the dresses and organise the wedding. Yaffa Deri, the wife of Aryeh Deri, has got an organisation that helps thousands of children materially for school. To Itzhak Avidani these women prove that it is not true that Shas women just stay at home. Indeed it seems like a new role for Sephardi women is developing through the activities and exposure in the media of 'Shas' leading ladies', i.e. the wives of Shas front figures. Yaffa Deri was the first woman from a religious party to take on a representative role both within the Shas community and outside in the secular media. Especially after her husband started to serve his sentence in prison, she has participated alone in several interviews on different TV and radio stations.

It would be very interesting to go in-depth into this new role taken on by her, the wife of the present Shas Party Chairman, Tsipi Yishai, and also of other Shas officials like the wife of Shlomo Benizri. Sadly, this has to be postponed due to limitations of space in this dissertation. Another woman wielding power within Shas is Yehudit Yosef, the wife of Moshe Yosef, Ovadia Yosef's son. She operates behind the official scene and through traditional family lines of power structure, but nevertheless she is a woman everybody in

and around Shas knows to be in a position of authority. I will return to this while discussing the power relations and structure of the leadership of Shas in chapter 9.3.

Female Representatives

When I asked Itzhak Avidani whether men and women could work together, he rejects this and says: "You will not see a female Knesset Member for Shas, I cannot see women working in Shas in the near future". With "working" he means working in an official position. Knesset Member Nissim Zeev explained in my interview with him "It depends on rabbi Ovadia Yosef and the Council of Torah Wise Men and it is not even an issue yet. Are they ready for it? They do not even think about it. Women are active in other spheres; education, social activities, culture. Maybe there are some women in Shas that want to be in the Knesset? But, a woman should not have a public position – it is not modest. They should not be heard in public".

An example to illustrate this attitude in a practical situation involves Ovadia Yosef when he gave compliments to Education Minister Livant Limor at a dinner he hosted. Because Limor is a woman Ovadia Yosef addressed her spouse and applauded his actions, whereas in reality he was complimenting Limor's actions (Ha'aretz, 3/8/2001). According to Ha'aretz, Limor, who is aiming to be the first female Prime Minister of Israel since Golda Meir, she says she believes the obstacles to a female Prime Minister lies within the Ashkenazi Haredi camp, not within the Sephardi Haredi public (Ha'aretz, 3/8/2001).

Itzhak Avidani says that personally he is sorry that Shas does not have any female Knesset members. He says he does not think it is good and he continues "but if I will decide some day, it will not be like that, but right now the rabbi decides." When it comes to education Itzhak Avidani can see possibilities. He says that right now one of the daughters of Ovadia Yosef is building a university for women, a group of women that will study academically. She herself studied in a textile university in Tel Aviv. This development is new in Shas and Itzhak Avidani thinks it is very important.

There is an apparent divergence between the attitude expressed by Nissim Zeev, Ovadia Yosef and Itzhak Avidani towards female representatives. As discussed in chapter 6.5, I interpret this divergence in answers amongst my informants to mean that within Shas there is a certain room for personal preference and interpretation. However, as I pointed out in chapter 6.5, my informants would withdraw their own personal opinion if confronted with a contradicting opinion by someone in a more prestigious position in Shas.

8.3 Education and Future Prospects

According to Shifra Zeev, Shas was established to be able to build Naavot Israel, which according to her is the first Sephardi girls' school in Israel. Shifra Zeev explained that the Jerusalem Municipality would not let them build the school without connection to a political party, and therefore her husband "created Shas". When I confronted Nissim Zeev with his wife's story, he confirmed this. This does not correspond exactly with the explanation for the establishment of Shas in chapter 4.4. However, one could view the establishment of the girls' school as an example of what the Sephardim experienced as unfair distribution of funds, within the Haredi institutions, was the main concrete reason for the establishment of Shas, the political party.

The emphasis on Sephardi education is not surprising, but that Shas apparently started with a school for girls is worth noticing. Nissim Zeev told me that the Ashkenazi Haredi school for girls, Beit Yaakov, would not accept Sephardi students on equal terms. They chose only the good Sephardi students and many Sephardi girls did not have the opportunity to be educated. This is the reason why he came up with the idea for establishing Shas. Naavot israel has got 800 pupils from the age of three to 20 including a kindergarten, elementary school, high school and a seminar for teachers, kindergarten teachers and computer education. They teach all subjects required by the Ministry of Education, and in order to qualify for municipal funding the pupils take final exams from the Ministry and they thus obtain a matriculation certificate, like any Israeli student who has finished high school.

Educational Focus and Future Prospects

Carmela Naor is the manager of Margalit Em Israel, a Shas-related organisation for women under the umbrella of El Ha'Maayan. She tells me that Margalit Em Israel offer classes centred on the advancement in knowledge of women including classes in inner [spiritual] development, family Bible reading, and their corner stone subject – domestic bliss. When I asked what women associated with the organisation generally do, she answered: "Part of them work, part of them stay at home, it depends – if the woman has got small children she is more at home. Women work in social services, in kindergartens and some are students too!"

According to Shifra Zeev: "When the students graduate [from Naavot Israel] they may work in Haredi offices as secretaries or in Haredi schools as teachers. It is very reasonable for the girls to be teachers, whereas nursing for example is an occupation that is

difficult for Haredi girls because of the modesty requirements". It is important to remember the critic of the educational network of Shas presented by the manger of the national educational programme Ometz.[147] Then again, it is unclear whether this critic is relevant to all schools associated with Shas, and thus Naavot Israel, or just the schools my informant has experience with.

I asked what these girls want for their future. "They want to study, to have a family and husband 'like girls do' ", Shifra Zeev answered. "There is one artist graduated from the school, another went to study architecture and computers, but the problem is that one cannot do this in a religious place. The girl can do this if her husband (or father) lets her. The parents will let them if they love their children". However she insists that: "We do not lock them [the girls] up in the house, but we do not let them go to Ben Yehuda[148] for nothing. They do not go to cafes: they do not like it. They stay in the house; to go to cafes is not normal here. The children are busy in-between school, family and friends. For special occasions, like birthdays, they make nice parties for each other, surprise parties with cakes".

8.4   Improved Situation for Sephardi Women?

According to journalist Aryeh Dayan[149] the position of women is better in Shas than in Ashkenazi Haredi movements. The reason he gives is that even though they are not active politically, the Shas women generally are more active, for example in education, than the women in Agudat Yisrael. Shas has got frameworks of activities for women. In her article *Ultra Orthodox Jewish Women* El-Or (1995) writes that the goal of the education of Ashkenazi Haredi women is to become images of their Polish mothers and the way they organised their homes. They go to schools to learn how to keep a kosher household. They are taught the Halacha, Biblical sources and some philosophy and they have study groups organised at each others houses. The focus is on issues related to faith, justice and moral questions in the women's everyday life.

According to El-Or (1995), these study groups and the education in general seems to be organised in relation to the different Ashkenazi Haredi groups. She writes "This is a community that separates itself from others similar to it [such as other religious group]…"

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[147] See chapter 7.3.

[148] Shopping and café street in West Jerusalem.

[149] Interview with Dayan 19/9/00. Dayan wrote the first book about Shas based on newspaper articles from the Haredi press. He told me that his motivation to write his book about Shas was that he considers Shas "the most important political and social phenomenon in Israeli history after Ben Gurion".

(1995:169). To compare this to the organisation Margalit Em Israel, the first difference seems to be the focus groups. Whereas the Ashkenazim have got a more separatist and inwardly focus, the Margalit Em Israel works towards groups of returnees to observance and traditional Jews. According to Horowitz[150], if a girl comes from a family of returnees to observance she is not accepted into Ashkenazi schools. These girls have to go to a national religious or even a secular school. The women's organisation of Shas now tries to build a school system around Margalit Em Israel. Admittedly, the Shas-related organisations are focused on Sephardim, but they do not demand a certain degree of observance nor adherence to a certain rabbi or traditions, according to Carmela Naor (2000). This is evident in the goal of Margalit Em Israel which, at this point, does not seem to recreate a special kind of ideal mother, like the Ashkenazi Haredi education for women, but to increase knowledge about Judaism as well as traditions and inner development.

Margalit Em Israel works on the local level in the neighborhoods. They travel all around the country and contact people where they live. This means that they are not confined to the ghetto like neighborhoods of the Ashkenazi Haredim. Naavot Israel school for girls is more focused on a stricter religious segment of Sephardim aimed at an Orthodox way of life, than Margalit Em Israel. However, all the new educational opportunities for Sephardi girls today are an improvement of the situation compared to the illiterate grandmothers studied by Sered.

Opportunities

According to El-Or, Shas' educational network is an area where Sephardi women can improve their position in society.[151] Earlier they were not able to be teachers in the Haredi Ashkenazi schools. Sephardi women were rejected because of the Haredi character of these schools, and because these schools did not want Sephardi teachers in their Ashkenazi schools. Therefore Sephardi women were only offered jobs with the small children, as opposed to today when Sephardi women can get positions as teachers in the Sephardi schools, like in Naavot Israel. Thus, in the new Shas education institution Sephardi women can have positions unattainable for them before and they feel at home in these positions; they are within a Sephardi context, surrounded by their own tradition and group of Jews. Moreover, in these Sephardi schools they are considered important, they are acknowledged and they receive respect from the pupils and parents.

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[150] Interview with Neri Horowitz 19/10/00.
[151] Interview with Tamar El-Or 23/10/00.

In addition to this El-Or points out that Shas is a 'revolutionary organisation', its existence is 'revolutionary', and this existence has got effects on the lives of women and other groups in the organisation. There are more chances for women to hold new positions and more significant positions in revolutionary times (El-Or). An example of such innovation is that female teachers can teach boys in the Shas education system as long as the boys are young and not Haredim or too Orthodox. This is because women are considered better trained to teach these pupils. They become caretakers for less Orthodox boys because they are considered more able to be handling the insecurity of the parents and pupils who are returnees to observance (El-Or).

Status

As discussed in chapter 5.4, Shas' Sephardi identity gives positive connotations in comparison with the 'Mizrahi' identity that relates to the immigrant history of this group and therefore gives negative connotations. In the same manner the Sephardi women are improving their status with focus on Sephardi studies, by moving away from the negatively associated immigrant identity. To many of the returnees to observance who are being educated in Judaism and practical housekeeping in Shas' Margalit Em Israel, their new identity as Sephardi religious women is attractive both personally and in relation to the Israeli society as a whole. Golan explained to me that generally Jewish Israeli women live a hard life in a hard reality, referring to the Palestinian-Israeli political situation in which mothers are troubled about the safety of their children growing up and serving in the military, and to the harsh economic fight for existence in Israel.[152] This can be a reason why Sephardi women are attracted to the position and place they receive in the model of the Sephardi family. This position is an active one; they are better positioned than the Ashkenazi woman because the Sephardi family is more tolerant.

Lower Middle Class Struggle

Most of the followers of Shas are middle class or lower middle class and the options of identity that they have, what they can be, which dreams they can realise, and their future, is either to be nothing (or worse: criminal, involving prostitution and drugs), or they can save themselves (El-Or).[153] These women are struggling to survive, their choice is a choice of dignity. To these women being religious is not so much a moral thing, but a

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[152] Interview with Avirama Golan 18/9/00
[153] Interview with Tamar El-Or 23/10/00.

social issue according to El-Or. With their new Sephardi status their marital life becomes better, the husband respects them and they gain respect from society. According to El-Or, when they return to observance it is not purely a spiritual answer like it is for most upper middle class, these women believed in God before, whereas now they cover their bodies and gain dignity.

Applying the theories of Rasmussen (forthcoming)[154] on these female returnees to observance, they are autonomously fashioning their own identity through their active self-education and reform for themselves and the future generations. By this education and reform they are resisting Ashkenazi socio-economic dominance and guaranteeing certain moral standards. An example is a returnee to observance I met at Shaagat Aryeh called Hana. Hana is 22 years old, she has been married for two years and she has a son. She went to a national religious school, but considered herself to be more traditional, and then she met her more Orthodox husband and slowly she returned to observation. She explained that she went to a school run by a *rabbanit* (a wife of a rabbi and / or pious female authority in a community), two to three evenings a week to learn about religion. Further she told me how the teachers there were not pushy, but let the students develop at their own speed without pressure to dress in a certain way or to undertake other expressions of observance.

Limitations

Shas offers Sephardi women a new and simultaneously indigenous identity, as discussed in chapter 5.4, this indigenous identity is built on the local and dignified tradition able to deal with modernisation. Shas has also given these women educational and occupational opportunities within their religious school system. However, there are limitations connected to this new identity for the Sephardi woman and her possibilities compared to other women in Israel today. El-Or is worried that the women employed in the Shas-related schools are only receiving a very small salary or even working voluntarily. She is also concerned about the amount of nepotism within these systems.[155]

Another issue is whether these Sephardi women are equipped to take part and compete in the modern Israeli society after being educated in Shas' schools and organisations. According to El-Or they are not. The reason being that these Sephardi women are only able to work in positions for which they have been educated in Shas'

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[154] Rasmussen studied the female Islamists of Cairo to whom dressing with *hijab* (veil), is a visible part of their self-education and self-reform by which they resist imperialism and guaranteeing certain moral standards.

[155] Interview with Tamar El-Or 23/10/00.

schools. The pupils in Naavot Israel are all educated to become teachers in Shas schools or secretaries, even though they passed the matriculation test, in most cases they do not have the level needed for university studies. And, if they could go to university, they are educated to accept their positions in the institutions of Shas. These positions as presented above are to be found mainly within Haredi offices, in Haredi schools or within other Shas-related institution. This way Shas may take opportunities available to secular Israeli women away from these Sephardi women.

Official Positions in the Israeli Democracy

In this perspective it is vital to remember that many of these women would probably not wish to, nor aspire to, participate more in the general Israeli society. These women have got important roles as mothers and power through their responsibility for the Jewish household, including the upbringing of children, and by financing their husbands' yeshiva studies. However, they are not free to participate as other women in the Israeli democracy. On the other hand, Leon told me that more women than men vote for Shas, and this is a sign that Shas is getting through to these women who are using their most important democratic asset by voting for them.[156] Still it is important to remember that all my informants answered when I asked: a woman may not have an official role in Shas that requires that she speak in public. [157] Besides the internal pressure to have many children is hard both physically and psychologically on the parents and again especially on the women.

8.5   Summing up

In chapter 2 I said I was going to investigate the model and position of women in Shas as one of the 'measures' to interpret Shas' relationship with modernisation. This chapter has shown that Shas has created new opportunities for Sephardi women in Israel, through its educational network and other courses.

I have shown that compared to the focus in the Ashkenazi Haredi education of women, that operate with one model for all women, Shas gives the individual woman room for personal preferences and decisions on her own conduct of life. In the same institutions Shas are giving Sephardi women new opportunities in terms of job positions. Moreover,

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[156] Interview with Nissim Leon 17/10/00.

[157] For perspective it is worth mentioning that there has been few female Sephardi Knesset Members. Thus, Shas cannot be said to have taken away any position from the Sephardi women in this respect, but a founded criticism would be that Shas is not contributing to any progress in increasing the female representation in the Knesset.

because Shas as a party-movement and its institutions are in an early stage of institutionalisation, women are given opportunities usually beyond their realm, that increases their level of responsibility and demands made to their accomplishments, as explained by El-Or.[158] The educational and employment opportunities Shas offer also show an acknowledgment and insight into the individual social and economic situation, similar to that pointed out in the previous chapter on mobilisation of supporters. All these improvements of the Sephardi women's social, economic situation and future prospects are promoting modernisation amongst women involved or affected by Shas' institutions. Similar to the effect pointed to in the summing up of the previous chapter on mobilisation, is Shas increasing the mobilisation of Sephardi women both politically and socially.

The values expressed in the education and courses for women in Shas introduce and reflect the party-movement's Sephardi identity that was discussed in chapter 5. This identity bestows on the Sephardi women closeness to their family and religious roots. Moreover, they feel pride in their identity and position as Sephardi mothers, something most did not feel in relation to the former Mizrahi immigrant identity. For the individual woman this is also reflected in the respect people around them show for their Sephardi lifestyle.

In addition to these impacts on the lives of Sephardi women, Shas has opened up for new positions of authority and political power for wives and daughters of important Shas officials and its spiritual leaders. These positions, and the way these women are interacting in the Israeli society through the media, are modernising innovations compared to the position of spouses of Ashkenazi Haredi leaders.

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[158] Interview with Tamar El-Or 23/10/00.

9   Structure of Leadership and Practical Politics

I am going to the Yassdin synagogue in the Bucharian neighbourhood of Jerusalem to listen to rabbi Ovadia Yosef's weekly sermon after Shabbat. The Bucharian neighbourhood is one of the oldest neighbourhoods in the New City of Jerusalem centred around the Bucharian market. Today mostly traditional and religious Sephardim inhabit it. It is considered a Shas stronghold. This is very obvious by all the wall posters in the neighbourhood advocating Shas-related rabbis' sermons and gatherings, and all the photos of rabbi Ovadia Yosef, Aryeh Deri and the Cabbalist Itzhak Kedouri in the cafes and shops. The Yassdin synagogue is a quite big and tall building that looks rather new with a lot of ornamental scripture at the entrance and a tall fence around. It clearly sticks out in its neighbourhood.

Ovadia Yosef's weekly sermon is transmitted on radio and by satellite to 200 synagogues and localities in Israel, according to Itzhik Sudri. He says about 150 000 watch the transmission every week. "It is the largest shiur *(religious lecture) in Judaism since the Temple. In the history of Israel there has not been any other shiur about the Torah where there were 150 000 people",[159] Itzhik Sudri told me proudly. This particular Saturday is the day of* Slichot, *the day before* Rosh haShana (*the Jewish New Year) when Jews ask for forgiveness for their sins from God and people before the end of the old year, and therefore Ovadia Yosef is speaking as late as 23.00. There are a lot of men outside the synagogue and small market stalls sell tapes, videos and books from earlier lectures by Ovadia Yosef.*

I go to the women's entrance by the side of the building and upstairs to the women's gallery overlooking the men's floor and rabbi Ovadia Yosef's throne-like chair on a podium. The light is bright and the women are sitting behind a wooden grating that goes half way up to the ceiling. They are fighting to get the seats in the front row to get a better view and at one point a man calls out "Sheket lamalah!*" or "Quiet upstairs!". The men's floor is full and a rabbi is talking. There is, as usual, another rabbi lecturing and warming up the audience before rabbi Ovadia Yosef arrives. When Ovadia Yosef comes into the synagogue everybody stands up and claps, and the women make the loud ululating noises characteristic of women in the Middle East and North Africa. The other rabbi kisses*

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[159] It is disputable whether *shiurim* (plural of shiur) were actually given in the Temple, however this is what Itzik Sudri said, probably to link Ovadia Yosef's shiurim to the Jewish tradition and to show his greatness by saying that he is doing something greater than what has been done in the past.

Ovadia Yosef's hand and a lot of men rush to help him get seated. An obviously proud young man brings Ovadia Yosef his cup of tea. Bringing Ovadia Yosef his tea is equal to a personal blessing from him, a lady explains to me. There is great competition to get this honourable assignment.

Then Ovadia Yosef starts to talk as always without a manuscript. They say his mind is like a computer and that he remembers thousands of Halachic sources by heart. I do not understand a word he is saying due to his strong Sephardi accentuated Hebrew and his religious language. Despite this I can understand from what I see that he is very communicative and relaxed; he gestures vividly and frequently makes his audience laugh. There is a very casual atmosphere; people walk in and out. Some of the women are leaning their heads on the bench in front and closing their eyes during the sermon.

In this chapter I will present and discuss the internal structure of leadership of Shas and its strategies of recruitment to the leadership, as well as Shas' practical politics, including its relationship with Arabs, and finally the secular perception of Shas as a threat to democracy. I will compare this with Ashkenazi Haredi political parties and point out similarities and differences.

9.1   Rabbi Ovadia Yosef and The Council of Torah Wise Men

During my visit to Shas' offices in the Knesset on the day of the opening session after summer 2000, the most pressing issue for Shas in those days, shortly after the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, was whether or not to support the Barak government coalition from the outside. Shas Members of Knesset and their advisors were gathered in a room to listen to the decision of Ovadia Yosef as he spoke on the phone through loudspeakers. When they appeared from the meeting they announced that Ovadia Yosef decided they should support the Barak coalition with 'a safety net' from outside the government until the security situation improved.[160]

After the meeting I asked Shas official Itzhak Avidani about the connection between these Knesset meetings and Ovadia Yosef. He told me that: "In today's meeting before the Knesset assembled for the first time this autumn, the rabbi decided [on the issue above] before the Members of Knesset signed the agreement. Of course, we as politicians in Shas want to be in the government: to have the cars, offices and parliament salary, but rabbi

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[160] These lines of policy meant that Shas would support the Barak government on security matters and not engage in any controversy with the government.

Ovadia Yosef knows what to do, what is good, and this is why we listen to him". In the Knesset and politics in general, Shas politicians always act as a group, that is, all the Shas representatives vote similarly and support the same lines of policies.

According to Itzhak Avidani: "Rabbi Ovadia Yosef is the leader of all the community, so in the end of the business he will say what to do, and that is what will happen". This can be illustrated by many examples from political decisions in Shas, for example when Ovadia Yosef "instructed" (Jerusalem Post, 5/6/01) the Party Chairman to visit families of victims after a terrorist attack or when he "announces" the party's policies or decisions on internal issues in Shas. Sometimes the Knesset members are free to vote as they please in the Knesset, as was the case in the last presidential election.

The Politicians and the Council

When I asked Member of Knesset Nissim Zeev how Shas functioned, he answered that the base of the pyramid of Shas, is the Sephardi religion, Ovadia Yosef and the Council of Torah Wise Men. According to Itzhik Sudri, the Council decides in all cases, but they are not involved in day-to-day politics. The Council points out the road – the ideology of Shas for the politicians to follow. Itzhak Avidani further explains that the Council does not tell the politicians what to do in every case. If the Members of Knesset need to get and give advice, they meet with the Party Chairman who decides if certain cases should be presented to the rabbi for his advice. If it is a very important issue it needs to be presented in the Council and they will find the answer according to the Torah. This implies that the Party Chairman possesses power in deciding what is relevant to the religious leaders, and what is not.

Itzhak Avidani assures me that the rabbi discusses with the Party Chairman and other politicians everyday, they tell him what has happened, what will happen and what is of special interest. This everyday contact with Ovadia Yosef starts in the morning when the important politicians and others gather at Ovadia Yosef's house for Morning Prayer. It seemed to be a prestigious event to the ones included in this close circle around the rabbi and if my informants were indeed included, they would be sure to mention this and also for how many years they have been praying with the rabbi.[161] The home of Ovadia Yosef is like a second office of Shas and is often the location for press conferences as it was after Aryeh Deri received the verdict for bribery and fraud. Aryeh Deri and Party Chairman Elie

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[161] For example Ephraim Avidani could boast to have prayed with Ovadia Yosef for 40 years.

Yishai came to Ovadia Yosef's home to speak to the press and announce the road ahead for Shas. In this particular case the location of Ovadia Yosef's home was a symbol of unity within Shas, through Ovadia Yosef's position as a religious leader and final decision maker, answering to the factionalism within the party as discussed below in chapter 9.2.

Ovadia Yosef's home is also the scene for visits by leaders of other political parties, seeking Shas' support in coalition building or presidential elections. The politicians put on skullcaps and come to receive the rabbi's blessing. There has been a rumour that one of the reasons why Ehud Barak was not able to keep Shas in his coalition was that he did not court Ovadia Yosef.

The way the leadership of Shas is organised became obvious to me through the way I got in touch with Shas, and the way Shas officials seem to be in contact with each other. This contact is characterised by personal, loose connections between people and the party-movement. Except from Members of the Knesset and other people in governmental or party positions, there seems to be few official Shas positions. However, there are many people in the close circles around the people in offices whose exact position or office is unclear. For example, when I asked Itzhak Avidani about Shaagat Aryeh, he said that it was organised by "people who love Aryeh", but he specified that Yehuda Azrad, one of the organisers of Shaagat Aryeh, "is with Shas". However, Yehuda Azrad does not have any official position Shas.

9.2   The Party Chairman and The Spiritual Leader

Former Party Chairman Aryeh Deri has received a lot of the honour for Shas' expansive success in elections and as a party representing the Sephardim in Israel. Shas owes much of its success to his political skills, his charismatic personality and his ability to cooperate with Ovadia Yosef and with the different Prime Ministers. Aryeh Deri was the youngest Minister ever in Israel and the mastermind behind Shas' successful election campaigns.

Journalist Aryeh Dayan characterised the relationship between the former Party Chairman and the spiritual leader as a perfect leadership combination.[162] The argument was that Ovadia Yosef feels towards Aryeh Deri like a father does to his son, and Aryeh Deri is a very clever, politically motivated man and a good manipulator. According to Dayan, Aryeh Deri knows how to manipulate the leadership of Ovadia Yosef. In reality

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[162] Interview Aryeh Dayan 19/9/00.

this means that during all those years of shared leadership, from the beginning of Shas until the end of the trial against Aryeh Deri, Ovadia Yosef was assured that Aryeh Deri would carry out his instructions. Aryeh Deri on his side knew how to manipulate these instructions to do what he wanted to do and at the same time be in good relations with Ovadia Yosef.

It was Aryeh Deri who formed Shas as a political party. Itzhak Avidani says that the sealed discussions in Shas, similar to the one I observed in the Knesset, are an example of a result of the leadership and fashion of Aryeh Deri. They have internal and secret discussions with only Members of Knesset and a few assistants, for example the party meeting they had to decide on support for Barak's coalition. Aryeh Deri is also described as the leftist maker of Shas, introducing and convincing Ovadia Yosef to support compromises with the Arabs and for example refusing to support attacks on Iraq during the Gulf War. Aryeh Deri is given the credit for the creation of the two-headed leadership of Shas with himself in charge of the political leadership and Ovadia Yosef as spiritual leader. This has changed after Elie Yishai became Party Chairman. Elie Yishai is described as more subordinated to Ovadia Yosef, seeking his advice and letting him run the party more than Aryeh Deri did.

After the trial and imprisonment of Aryeh Deri there have been rumours and focus on the supposed power struggle between Aryeh Deri and the new Party Chairman of Shas Elie Yishai. I asked Itzhak Avidani about this and he answered that there is talk of groups of supporters, one group that is closer to Aryeh Aryeh Deri and one to Elie Yishai. However, Itzhak Avidani dismisses this as unimportant and told me Aryeh Deri and Elie Yishai will be leaders together when Aryeh Deri comes out of prison. During the trail and shortly after the conviction, Ovadia Yosef supported Aryeh Deri and numerous times claimed; "Aryeh Deri is innocent, completely innocent, and he will continue to lead the Shas movement" (Ha'aretz, 18/03/1999). This supporting attitude towards Aryeh Deri weakened after his conviction and it has been assumed that the Shas leadership felt a need to distance itself from the image of corruption and crime.

Fight for Attention

After the cult like status and worship of Aryeh Deri in the rallies accompanying him to prison and in Shaagat Aryeh, Ovadia Yosef has tried to turn the attention away from the personality of Aryeh Deri towards himself and Judaism. An example of this was the

celebration of *Simhat Torah*[163] last autumn when the followers of Aryeh Deri wanted the main holiday rally of Shas to be held at Shaagat Aryeh, whereas people close to Ovadia Yosef wanted it to be in Jerusalem. The argument for organising the celebration in Jerusalem was that Jerusalem is the city of pilgrimage and the rally should be in the honour of Ovadia Yosef.

According to Ha'aretz (20/10/00), the managing director of Shas' newspaper Yom le'Yom was dismissed because he insisted on organising the rally at Shaagat Aryeh. In the end the festival was celebrated at Shaagat Aryeh, much due to the security situation in Jerusalem. This practice of setting the supporters of Aryeh Deri aside from important positions in Shas and in its associated institutions, have been reported in Israeli newspapers as a method Elie Yishai is using to gain control. He is reported to have appointed "his people" to most key positions in Shas' educational network and in Yom le'Yom (Ha'aretz, 07/12/2000).

After he was forced to retreat from politics and later during his imprisonment, Aryeh Deri has portrayed himself a "not political" (Ha'aretz 14/07/2000), and he is increasingly acquiring a martyr status focusing on Judaism and 'The Jewish revolution' as opposed to earlier 'Sephardi revolution'. There are many speculations as to what will happen when he is released from prison: will he start his own Jewish party or will he become the next charismatic leader of Shas, a sort of mixture of his earlier political position and the spiritual leadership of the aging Ovadia Yosef?[164]

9.3 Recruitment and Power Structure

The home of Ovadia Yosef is rumoured to be a power base for his family members without official positions in Shas. According to a source close to Shas, Ovadia Yosef's daughter in law is the sister of the Party Chairman Elie Yishai. My source said Ovadia Yosef's daughter in law and his son, Moshe, use their positions to acquire power for themselves.

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[163] Simhat Torah (Rejoicing of the Law) is the festival culminating the holidays of *Sukkot*, Tabernacles, wherein the men dance and sing holding the Torah scrolls and pass them around so as the scrolls are carried around the synagogue seven times. On this day, the Jews complete their annual cycle of reading the Torah and start over again.

[164] One Shas official described the future meeting between Elie Yishai and Aryeh Deri like this: "Eli Yishai will go onto the biggest stage in the country and say: 'Rebbe Aryeh [Deri], here are the keys, I only had them in deposit'. The audience will cheer and the two of them will go off into a room alone and Elie [Yishai] will ask: 'Aryeh, who's the driver?' If Aryeh says 'you are', his future will be ensured. He can be president of Shas or any such thing and the rabbi will be delighted. We have to trust in Aryeh's [Deri] good sense. As long as the rabbi is alone he cannot come out against him" (Haaretz, 23/2/01).

Also Ovadia Yosef's daughter, Adina Bar Shalom, has got a strong position in this unofficial and family based power structure within Shas. According to Ha'aretz (23/3/00), she and her brother Moshe Yosef have been in dispute, the reason for the dispute is not given, and Adina Bar Shalom told one of the leading national newspapers how Moshe Yosef was a "weak individual" incapable of administering the court of Ovadia Yosef. This attitude towards personalised power and linkages between the power bases in the party-movement was shown when I spoke with manager of Margalit Em Israel, Carmella Naor. When I asked her about her connections with Members of the Knesset she answered: "Yaffa Deri works with us and Aryeh Deri's father. Everybody works together". Neither Yaffa Deri nor Aryeh Deri's father have any official positions in Shas or related organisations.

Undemocratic Internal Structure

As Izthak Avidani and Member of Knesset Nissim Zeev said in chapter 6.3, there is no democracy in Shas where the rabbis make the decision. It is the same with election of representatives: Shas does not elect its primaries. The people who are in official positions are chosen by Ovadia Yosef who also tells the supporters for whom to vote, according to journalist Etiel Benhain.[165] According to Benhain, a committee of rabbis decides who gets the different ministries and other positions. A good illustration of this is when Ovadia Yosef chose Elie Yishai as Party Chairman after Areyh Deri and told his supporters to vote for Elie Yishai. I asked Itzhik Sudri how he got his position as the spokesman of Shas, an impressive position for someone around the age of 23, and he answered that he got his position because of his many years in Shas. He has been in Shas from childhood; he was in the youth organisation, after that in the El Ha'Maayan, then he studied in the yeshiva, but he dropped out to do the military service. I also asked Itzhak Avidani how Itzhik Sudri got his job, and he answered: "Itzhik Sudri comes from a famous family. His family is involved in business. Inside jobs in Shas and the general management of Shas are based on family connections". Itzhak Avidani emphasises that these people are professionals; "they do not come from the street", meaning that they are smart and know what they are doing.

This is not the case, according to Uzi Benziman (Ha'aretz, 27/8/00), who writes that Shas heads are recruited via the "bring a friend" method, resulting in unsuitable and not sufficiently educated representatives in the Knesset.[166] Further, he writes that this is the

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[165] Interview with Benhain 25/9/00.

[166] Also El-Or is worried about the degree of nepotism in Shas, as presented in chapter 8.4.

background for all the corrupt and criminal Shas leaders. Dayan explained to me that when Aryeh Deri was Party Chairman he and Ovadia Yosef decided who got a leading position in Shas and the criterion was merit, but in a very strict sense.[167] For example the majority of Shas Members of the Knesset are people who started their political career in Shas from the grassroots. These people started at the most local level of activity in the neighbourhood, in the moshavim,[168] and in the towns, and worked their way up to the municipal level. Many Shas Members of Knesset today were members of Municipal or local religious councils in the 1980s.

Dayan told me that another criterion to get a central position in Shas was to be loyal to Aryeh Deri. According to Ha'aretz (12/02/2001), Shas has a custom of making all its officials declare their loyalty to the leadership and the party discipline. This was especially important in the transition of Party Chairman when officials were expected to affirm their recognition of Elie Yishai and to promise to follow the instructions of Ovadia Yosef.

9.4 Practical Politics

I asked Shas' spokesman Itzhik Sudri what practical politics means to Shas. He answered that in order to implement the Torah they need an organisation, and to have an organisation they need money and therefore they need to be involved in politics. Itzhik Sudri emphasised that the organisations are more important than politics; the politics only assists the organisations. Here I will present the major issues that have influence on Shas' participation in political coalitions and its main areas of interest.

According to Dayan, Shas is the only political party in Israel with a clear agenda for the future. The enforcement of their 'revolution' is a religious matter – it is in the hands of God. Shas, understood as a party, is only concerned with day-to-day politics, Dayan concludes. This attitude to the value of politics was expressed in Leon's observation that the traditional voters for Shas and Ovadia Yosef are divided by politics; to Ovadia Yosef, politics is an instrument and to the traditional voter it is the point of departure.[169]

Areas of Political Interests

From following Shas' political affairs in national Israeli newspapers, there seems to be two major issues that are important to the party's decisions on participation in coalitions

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[167] Interview Aryeh Dayan 19/9/00

[168] For detail see footnote chapter 7.2.

[169] Interview with Nissim Leon 5/5/01.

or other political alliances: when other Members of Knesset behave in conflict with the Halacha according to Shas, or when Shas receives fewer subsidies to its organisations than wanted. These two issues may also serve to understand Shas' view on politics. An example is, as presented in chapter 7.3, when Shas left the Bark coalition in the summer of 1999 because of the Minister of Education would not grant Shas' educational network the subsidies it asked for.

Dissatisfaction with subsidies, state or other support for their organisations is the regular reason for Shas to go in and out of government coalitions and other political alliances. This is the similarity between Ashkenazi haredi parties and Shas in terms of position in politics[170]: both move between other parties to get what they want. The Council of Torah Wise Men has more than once characterised the government's policies as "the undermining and persecution of Torah institutions" and instructed the politicians to resign from the coalition (Ha'aretz, 14/6/00). Knesset Member Nissim Zeev told me: "The targets of Shas are the same as in the start, the same concepts; social issues, education, culture and religion are the most important".

Other cases when Shas has threatened to leave the coalition, is when Shas considers actions of the government or its representatives to be in conflict with the Halacha. For example in the summer of 1999 a state-owned electricity company wanted to transport equipment on Sabbath, and would thereby violate the commandments for Sabbath, according to Shas. As a compromise the company hired non Jewish people to carry out the transport.

Other issues of interest that have impact on to Shas' policies are the law of return and definition of who is a Jew, subsidies for yeshiva students, modesty, especially in cases concerning health care, and the release of Aryeh Deri. According to Ira Sharansky[171] (1996), the areas of interest in politics of religious parties are reflected in their choice of Ministries when they are part of a government. He depicts the Ministry of Religion as "the honey pot of Israeli government patronage" (Sharansky, 1996:88). Further, he describes Ministry of Education as "another prize sought by religious parties" (Sharansky, 1996:89). Lastly Sharansky mentions Ministry of Housing and Construction and Ministry of Welfare as of special interest for the religious parties, looking after their constituencies and the Jewish identity of the state.

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[170] See Chapter 2.4.
[171] Ira Sharansky is professor of political science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

In the current coalition under Prime Minister Ariel Sharon,[172] Shas' Party Chairman Elie Yishai is Minister of Interior and Shas is in control of the Religious Affairs Ministry, the Ministry of Health, the Labor and Social Affairs Ministry, the Ministry for Jerusalem and has got the Deputy Minister of Education.

Peace Process and Relationship with Arabs

In contrast to the overwhelming interest in interior politics, Shas is not so involved in foreign affairs, including Israeli-Palestinian relations. This could be a reason for my informants' show little interest in the fact that I am from Oslo, as presented in chapter 3.3. On the issue of peace, Ovadia Yosef ruled that if it can save Jewish lives, it is favourable to give away territory constituting the land of Israel to achieve peace with Israel's neighbours. It was first ruled in relation to the evacuation of Sinai after the peace agreement with Egypt in 1978. This is remarkable because few rabbis in a similar position have made rulings that so clearly support the peace process. Because of this, Shas has been able to participate in coalitions with Labour supporting the Oslo Accords and has therefore been called 'the dovish Haredi party'.[173] Without the support of then Party Chairman Aryeh Deri, Itzhak Rabin would not have been able to start the peace process. However, later Binyamin Netanyahu would not have been able to halt the same process without Aryeh Deri's and Shas' support. There seems to be discrepancy between Ovadia Yosef's ruling and Shas' practical politics.

When I asked about the peace process, Shas officials answered that of course they wanted peace, but they did not want to give away anything of Jerusalem to achieve peace. Shas never advocated a 'Greater Israel' ideology and is not presenting itself as a party that promotes Jewish settlements in occupied territories. Shas supports the peace talks and agreements, but with the shift of leadership and the political developments since the outbreak of the Al Aqsa Intifada, Shas seems to have moved to the right. This is visible in Elie Yishai's (Ha'aretz, 22/6/01) comments on the Palestinian President Yassir Arafat, saying he does not believe in him [Arafat], that Arafat does not want peace and that he is incapable of making decisions. Also Ovadia Yosef's harsh utterances during a synagogue sermon in August in the year of 2000, where he described Arabs as snakes saying that God

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[172] March 2002.

[173] In this terminology a "dove" is someone who advocates measures in international affairs designed to avoid or reduce open hostilities, in contrast to a "hawk" that is someone who advocates war or measures in international affairs designed to provoke or escalate open hostilities.

regrets having created "the Islamites",[174] leads to the conclusion that Shas has become more hawkish (Dagsavisen, 07/08/2000). Furthermore, Shas has been described as one of the most hawkish parties in their reactions to the Al Aqsa Intifada and single events, accused of going beyond Likud in favour of military actions (Ha'aretz, 22/6/01).

Hawkish Sephardim

Generally the Sephardi population of Israel is said to be more hawkish than Ashkenazi population. Ami Pedahzur (2000:5) describes Shas' attitudes towards Arabs as xenophobic, pointing to Shas' outspoken policies of "rescuing" Jewish women from mixed marriages with Arab men. Horowitz and Lissak (1989:187) explain this hostility towards the Arabs as a means to rid themselves of 'the Arab image' the Sephardi immigrants had when they came to Israel. In addition to coming from Arab countries, this image was increased by these immigrants' Arabic mother tongue and culture, such as dress codes and cuisine. In this respect the hawkish attitude is a way to secure integration into the Israeli culture. Another reason given is the economic threat. If Israel returns the territories occupied in 1967, the Palestinians from these areas would not be able to continue working in the low-status jobs earlier held by Sephardim (Horowitz and Lissak, 1989:187). Sephardim are afraid they will have to return to these jobs and thus experience a decline in their socio-economic situation and status. Other factors commonly thought to be the grounds for Sephardi hawkish attitudes, are the treatment these Jews received as citizens of Arab countries, including persecution and discrimination, and the loss of property and positions, without any compensation, when they emigrated to Israel.

According to Ephraim Yuchtman-Yaar and Tamar Hermann (2000:32), Shas' two-sided or undefined relationship with peace is created on purpose in order to increase Shas' ability to manoeuvre from left to right in Israeli politics. From Yuchtman-Yaar and Hermann's (2000:38) article "The Haredi-Dovish Image in a Changing Reality", Shas seems to move right in terms of the peace process when it is in coalition with Labour, whereas it moves left when it is in a coalition with Likud. This changing stance can partially be explained by Shas' need to answer to its constituency, who are considered to be more hawkish than the party. The other, more obvious, explanation is that Shas is pressing the coalition partners in order to achieve what it wants in budget negotiations and internal Israeli politics.

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[174] A term used to describe Muslims.

9.5 Shas – A Threat to the Israeli Secular Democracy?

In their book *Jewish fundamentalism in Israel* (1999) Israel Shahak and Notron Mezvinsky, categorise all fundamentalists as past-oriented and claim that they can only be understood through understanding the historical past that the fundamentalists, according to Shahak and Mezvinsky, identify themselves with. Furthermore, they interpret the movements to have risen as a reaction to the effects of modernity (Shahak and Mezvinsky, 1991). Shahak and Mezvinsky look upon these groups of religious Jews as an obstacle to peace in the region, as hostile to democracy, building on Barcuh Kimmerling who says that the Jewish religious values and democracy are not unifiable.

Shahak and Mezvinsky can be said to represent the secular outcry of fear of the so-called 'fundamentalist movements', or in this context, 'Shasofobia' as Horowitz and Leon call this way of relating to Shas.[175] These seculars claim that Shas wants to create a state run by the Halacha in Israel, further that the party-movement receives too much subsidies for its institutions, that these institutions create factionalism within the society, and lastly that Shas is an obstacle to the position of religion as a private matter.

In their article "Religion that strengthens democracy; An analysis of religious political strategies in Israel", Kopelowitz and Diamond (1998) discuss how a religious political party can enter and function in a liberal democracy and even strengthen this democracy. Kopelowitz and Diamond analyse religious political groups by interpreting their use of common public symbols in political discourse. This approach opens up for an interpretation of religious political groups as politically flexible and as participating in the political interaction that is necessary in a democracy.[176]

This is in a line of thought similar to that of Ann Swidler's (1986) sociological theory of analysing culture through symbols and strategies. This theory is built on the assumption that culture provides the continuities in the way of life of a particular group. According to Swidler, culture is a "tool-kit" (Swidler, 1986:273) of symbols, rituals, worldviews, skills, habits, moods, sensibilities and styles and its causal effect is that it provides humans with "strategies of action", that is ways of ordering action through time. Culture does not define the ends of actions, rather it helps to construct and organise behaviour and ways of thinking. Cultural phenomenon explains group behaviour because it analyses the tool-kit used by the group, whereas the end-goals or values cannot explain

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[175] Interview with Neri Horowitz and Nissim Leon 22/10/00.
[176] See Kopelowitz 1999 for further reading.

why a group chooses one way of action instead of the other. Following the approach of Kopelowitz and Diamond, and Swidler, it is in my opinion more interesting and realistic to investigate the political participations and actions of Shas, than investigating what are presumed to be its goals.

According to Leon, Shas officials read what academics and the newspapers write about them and use this in counter attacks when necessary, or as legitimating when this is the purpose. These counter attacks usually take place at rallies and demonstrations, on radio programmes and in the party newspaper.[177] Shas officials are aware of the fears of the seculars concerning the amount of power Shas possesses, and what Shas might want to do with it. An interesting example is the answer I got when I asked about the future and my informants' visions of a 'perfect society'.

Both Itzhik Sudri and Itzhak Avidani repeatedly stressed the fact that: "We do not want Iran where women dress like they do, women can do what they want," in the words of Itzhak Avidani. Itzhik Sudri put it this way:

> "The example of Iran, the Muslims; there everybody live according to the religious law, that means that the law demands that those women who do not want to dress and cover up according to the religious laws have to do it [….]. They say that Shas wants a Halacha state,[178] but it is wrong. It is forbidden for me according to the Halacha to say to someone 'I want you to dress only like this, to celebrate Shabbat' and so on. Halacha says that what he [the person who violates the Halacha] does is forbidden, but you cannot tell him [the person who violates the Halacha] what to do or not to do."

My informants use an illustration of a theocracy with a covered and restrained woman, to say what they do not want for the future. They are, then, in what seems to me, a direct dialogue with the secular Israeli society and academia. In this dialogue Shas officials are fighting for legitimacy and the right to paint their own picture of their visions for the future.[179] Shas officials' basic claim towards the secular media is that this media takes the statements of Ovadia Yosef, and of Shas officials, out of their proper religious and rhetoric context and use these statements in populist media exploitation.

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[177] Interview with Nissim Leon 27/4/01.

[178] State ruled by religious law, for details see chapter 4.1.

[179] An example of this attitude and discourse amongst secular Israelis is the title of an OP-Ed in Ha'aretz (18/08/2000): "When we want Iran, we'll call Shas".

Political Participation

Though most scholars and the Shas officials themselves would agree with Kimmerling that Shas is not democratic, they would take into consideration that Shas has participated like other political parties in coalitions, with both left and right, and made political compromises. Kopelowitz and Diamond (1998) look into the relationship of different Jewish Israeli religious parties and their position and role in the Israeli democracy, and by analysing their day-to-day activities and discourse, as opposed to analysing them on the basis of presumed end-goals, Shas turns out to be more radical in some political cases and more liberal in others. Shas has participated in every coalition since they became a party in 1983, as opposed to Agudat Yisrael, who refrains from participation in coalitions with the leftist, non-religious Labour party. Shas compromises over political decisions and has followed the democratic political pattern of behaviour, according to Kopelowitz and Diamond (1998). Also Chetrit (2000:26)[180] notes this and he writes that the political involvement of Shas is one of the major differences between it and Agudat Yisrael.

Kopelowitz and Diamond (1998) also remind us that the Israeli democracy is based on porportional representation, and the fact that Shas has become the third largest party in the Knesset is the way of democracy – the Knesset only reflects the Israeli political and ideological fragmentations. Whether these ideologies themselves are democratic or not, is not the issue. In this context Ehud Barak's 'civil revolution', with its slogan 'Only Not Shas' from the last election, openly saying that any other coalition partner but Shas is acceptable can be said to be un-democratic.

Other Israeli religious movements, such as *Gush Emunim*,[181] have been characterised as anti-systemic movements (Beyer, 1997), whereas Shas is involved in the political system of Israel. Both Shas and Gush Emunim have succeeded in changing the political agenda and putting their ideological concerns into the consciousness and practical politics of Israel. In this perspective Shas too has been moulded into a legitimate partner in Israeli politics, though not everybody who disagrees with Shas, would agree to this.

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[180] In his article on Shas in *News From Within*.

[181] Gush Emunim (The Faithful Block) is a religious Zionist movement created in the mid 1970s with the goal to establish permanent settlements throughout the territories, whose spiritual leader was rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook. See Ravitsky 1990 "Religious Radicalism and Political Messiansim in Israel" for further reading.

Claiming Democracy

Shas Member of Knesset Shlomo Benizri said in his speech at Shaagat Areyh that the democracy in Israel discriminates against the Haredim and therefore to him it is not "a real democracy". [182] However, he continues to say that he intends to speak up for these rights and will no be mistreated anymore. Member of Knesset Nissim Zeev is reported to have said: "What, are you the owner here? Is this your democracy?" (Ha'aretz, 12/7/01) in a coalition fight with the secular, left wing party Meretz. The point is, that Shas is, as opposed to the Ashkenazi Haredi political parties and movements, claiming co-ownership of the Israeli democracy. They are participating and following, though admittedly bending to their benefits, the rules of this democracy. By and large, their participation is similar to that of secular participants and Shas demands to be respected and given the same responsibilities and support as the other political actors. Is Shas then compromising on its beliefs and policies and is it less extremist than for example the Ashkenazi Haredi party Agudat Yisrael, who refuses to go into a coalition with pronounced secular parties? In this perspective it does not matter if the fear and allegations of secular Israeli, portraying Shas as un-democratic and as wanting to impose a state built on the Halacha, are true or not. The actual participation of Shas in this democracy is the focal point, not its presumed long-term goal(s).

9.6 Summing Up

The last issue used 'to measure' Shas' relationship with modernisation is its practical politics. Clearly the organisation of leadership in Shas, with its Council of Torah Wise Men, is adopted from Ashkenazi Haredi parties. This includes the decision-making position of rabbi Ovadia Yosef, which is similar to that of the late rabbi Eliezer Schach, as leaders of their respective Torah Councils. Dayan characterises Shas as a Haredi party-movement because they receive their legitimacy from Ovadia Yosef, who in addition to being a source of legitimacy, is Shas' symbol and spiritual leader.[183] Furthermore, he argues that Shas functions internally in an undemocratic way known to Haredi parties, precisely because the rabbis make the decisions. This corresponds with the presentation in this chapter. In my interview the Shas officials never claimed to be democratic, neither within in the inner structure of their party-movement, nor in terms of ideology. However, they emphasises that they accept the state system of Israel, something Shas proves by their

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[182] See the Introduction.
[183] Interview Aryeh Dayan 19/9/00.

political participation as pointed. As pointed out by Kopelowitz and Diamond, and Swidler, Shas' actual performance is more interesting than its ideological stance in this issue. This clearly shows that Shas, in comparison with the Ashkenazi Haredim, is promoting modernisation.

A point of difference between the Sephardi rabbis and the Ashkenazi Haredi leaders is the willingness of the Sephardim to take positions in the rabbinate and other national rabbinical institutions in Israel. These governmental institutions represent the Zionist establishment that the Ashkenazi Haredim segregate themselves from and look down on, because of their non-Haredi religious level of observance. Shas affiliated rabbis, on the other hand, do not distance themselves in this way from the establishment, but join it and try to influence it. By acting in this pragmatic and co-operative manner with its surroundings Shas is promoting modernisation, in comparison to the segregation performed by the Ashkenazi Haredim.

Shas officials repeatedly told me that they do not want to impose their religion or way of life on anybody, neither individually nor through their institutions or the state. The scholars and other people, who have followed Shas' development and say that Shas does not want to rule Israel, confirm this. Rather, Shas wants to be part of the executive institutions to ensure funding for its institutions and ensure the Jewish character of the state. About this Jewish state, Shas officials say they do not want a state run by the Halacha, but a state whose identity is unquestionably Jewish. Shas thus plays by the democratic rules in is in this manner not a hindrance to modernisation, but promoting on the same level as all other Israeli political parties..

In participation in the Israeli democracy Shas focus on the place of Judaism in the state, the relationship between the secular and the religious segments of society and the socio-economic situation of the Sephardim. Overall, the Shas politicians and officials are more visible in the Israeli society than the Ashkenazi Haredim. In addition to the exposure in the media, they are active in governmental debates and on the municipality level all over Israel. Shas is a part of the Israeli democracy that is claiming its share and accepting the positions necessary for this partaking. Moreover, it is representing a large part of the Israeli population, a representation earned by elections, and Shas is thereby promoting modernisation.

10 Conclusion

This study set out to show that the party-movement Shas has a different relationship with modernisation than that of the Haredi Ashkenazim, as described and defined by academics. This is interesting because most academics and others, who studied Shas, seem to accept the categorisation of Shas as Haredi without reservations to the different historical and sociological contexts of the two expressions of Judaism.

As Jewish expressions Shas and Haredism are complex and involve different religious legal traditions and customs developed in different historical circumstances. These circumstances are respectively, the Middle Easter and North African geographical framework of the Sephardi expression of Shas, in which most Sephardim lived under Arab and Muslim rulers, in contrast to the European Christian dominated framework of the Ashkenazim. Moreover, the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim have different relationships and pattern of immigration to the modern state of Israel. The Ashkenazi Haredim have never fully acknowledged the establishment of the secular state and have refused to be an integral part of this state. Whereas the Sephardim that constitute Shas, both its leadership and followers, have accepted and partaken in the state and in its, both secular and religious, institutions.

Another important aspect as to why the categorisation of Shas as Haredi is so complex is the fact that Shas rose from within the Ashkenazi Haredi institutions and political party Agudat Yisrael. The establishment of Shas was, as portrayed in chapter 4, a reaction to the discrimination felt by Sephardim within the Ashkenazi Haredi establishment and institutions. However, this fact in itself is not enough to defend the categorisation of Shas as Haredi. As shown in chapter 5, Ovadia Yosef and his contemporaries were developing their thoughts on the Sephardi identity, and its expression in Israel, from the time before the establishment of the state. In addition to the historical and religious legal reasons mentioned above, Shas did not develop as a blue print to the Ashkenazi Haredi institutions it grew from, but is a new expression of Jewish identity and organisation. It is this expression I studied during my fieldwork and that constitutes the empiric starting point of my interpretation of Shas, presented and explained to me by Shas officials and in addition by the actions of Shas as a party-movement. On the basis of the information collected during my fieldwork I have investigated Shas' identity and relationships with modernisation.

As emphasised in chapter 2, when questioning the Haredi identity of Shas, I am not questioning the Haredi pious identity expressed by some of my informants. This identity refers to the other connotation of Haredi, that is a classification of a certain level of religious observance and piety. As explained in chapter 2, it is impotent to be aware of these levels of abstraction when discussing the Haredi identity, so that no-one will think I am trying to understand my informants better than they understand themselves.

I have not spoken to everybody in Shas' leadership, as pointed out in chapter 3. I have not interviewed the spiritual leadership or religious authorities in Shas, such as Ovadia Yosef or other members of the Council of Torah Wise Men. My informants from Shas are mainly Shas officials, defined in chapter 2 as persons with an official position in Shas and who thereby can speak on behalf of the party-movement. This fact may have affected my understanding of Shas and possibly limiting its perspective or the value of its significance. However, even if I had been able to interview a religious leader, it is impossible to know anything about the value of that information. Moreover, I have spoken to people representing most sides of the party-movement of Shas and consider my fieldwork as a good base for this study.

The procedure followed in this study of Shas' relationship with modernisation has been to investigated several issues 'to measure' the modernising effects of Shas. These issues formed the outline of the discussion in chapters 5 to 9. In relation to most of the issues discussed, I have interpreted Shas as a promoter of modernisation. In chapter 5 I looked into the relationship with individualisation and found that the Sephardi and Torahni identity of Shas is open to all Jews and Jews with different levels of observance of the Halacha. In addition the Sephardi identity bestows upon Sephardi Jews pride in their roots and religious traditions. This is something the Sephardim did not find or feel as part of the Ashkenazi Haredi institutions, where the Sephardim were considered to have a lower status than the Ashkenazim. Shas' attitude towards individuals demonstrates an understanding of the individual social situation and an acceptance that everybody cannot live according to the Halacha the way Shas officials wish they could. This is different from the fixed level of observance that the Haredim operate with and that exclude many possible followers from the Haredi institutions.

In chapter 6 I interpreted the different meanings of Shas' slogan To Restore the Crown to Its Ancient Glory and investigated Shas' understanding and use of past and future. I found that Shas does not refer to a specific historical past, such as the Ashkenazi haredim do, rather Shas uses Sephardi values and ideals in its shaping of a political, social

and economic response to its surroundings. In terms of relationship with the traditional religious power institutions, Shas has an established and respectful relationship with the national religious institutions, compared to the withdrawing and superior attitude the Ashkenazi Haredim exhibit towards these institutions. Shas' relationship with the Haredi power institutions is complex, as described above, because Shas grew from within these institutions. The establishment and party-movement of Shas is a clear sign that Shas is distancing itself from the Haredim; yet, in most cases Shas is closer to them than other political or religious affiliations in Israel. This was because the Sephardim were welcomed to the Ashkenazi Haredi institutions and not to the national religious institutions and, moreover, because Ovadia Yosef and the Sephardim like the Ashkenazi Haredim were in opposition to the national religious establishment, albeit for different reasons.

The other central issue in chapter 6 was Shas' view of the central state. Shas sees itself as a legitimate part of this state and advocates its right to shape it and challenge its ideology. Shas is not anti-Zionist such as the Haredim, but Shas would like to alter the secular outlook of the state and make it more Jewish. My informants said that the Jewish character of the state is more important to them than the democratic state system, even though they accept and even like the democratic state system and claim their right to influence it.

Shas' strategies for recruitment, its relationship with technology and with individual social and economic situation, were issues discussed in chapter 7. The different strategies of mobilisation, including use of advanced technology, reveals a party-movement that is aware and willing to do something about the socio-economic as well as the religious state of its supporters. Again, Shas shows interest and care for people with a variety of different levels of observance and an ability to talk to and meet each one in his or her everyday. Shas is available and reaching out and by many described as the only practical socialist party-movements in Israel. As pointed out in chapter 7, these strategies of recruitment are in line with the open identity of Shas, and like this identity is different from the Haredi one, so are the strategies.

Shas has created new opportunities, in terms of education, work and a dignified identity for Sephardi women, as opposed to their limited opportunities in Ashkenazi Haredi institutions. This new model and position of women was the 'measuring' issue discussed in chapter 8. The new identity of Shas offers these women the same sense of belonging to a dignified tradition, as the Sephardi identity does. And again, Shas exhibits openness and

tolerance for the situation of the individual woman and does not enforce one specific ideal, such as the Ashkenazi Haredi courses for women do.

In chapter 9 I discussed the structure of leadership and the practical politics of Shas, as the last issues to investigate its relationship to modernisation. As shown in this chapter, because the establishment of Shas developed from within the Haredi parties; Shas' structure of leadership is its most similar aspect with the Haredim. However, it is important to keep in mind the lesser isolationalistic and more accommodation attitude of the Sephardi rabbis that constitute the top of the hierarchy of the party-movement, when noting this similarity. In terms of practical politics, Shas are more involved in all sides of Israeli politics and take on more offices than the Ashkenazi parties. Moreover, Shas does not act in accordance with the Haredi political tradition in terms of the peace process and coalition participation.

Shas thus promotes modernisation by its focus on the individual, its educational institutions for Sephardim, its assistance to the Sephardim in a difficult socio-economic situation, its future focus and acceptance of its Zionist surroundings, its mobilisation of the Sephardi population of Israel both politically and socially, the new opportunities it has created for Sephardi women and, finally, its representation of the Sephardi population in the Israeli democracy and its partaking in this democracy.

As I said in chapter 2, I wanted to find the motive powers of Shas, i.e. the inspiration that can explain the identity the party-movement offers its supporters – the ideals that formed the ideology and future outlook of Shas and the manner in which Shas mobilises its supporters and interacts in the Israeli society. The motive powers are not understood as the final goals of Shas, but as the motivation behind its political agenda and practical appearance. From this study there are two ideas or attitudes that are detectable in most of Shas' organisations, in its actions and in its identity; first of all an inclusive and embracing attitude towards followers, and possible future followers, emulating from the Sephardi identity as shown in chapter 5 while presenting the Sephardi identity. Secondly, Shas does not operate with a fixed level of observance for everyone in order to be accepted as a part of the party-movement or to utilise its institutions.

In this dissertation I have argued that Shas has another relationship with modernisation than that described as Haredi, and further that this particular relationship of Shas is better described by using Shas officials own terms: Sephardi and Torahni. These two concepts refer to a worldview that is using the past, in terms of local tradition and religious identity, to construct a New Jewish Israeli Identity. In this 'modus vivendi', Shas

is inclusive towards individuals on two levels: all Jews can be Sephardim by following the Sephardi Halacha and Jews of all levels of religious observance are welcome. Therefore to describe Shas as Haredi is wrong and leads to a misunderstanding of Shas and its role and position in the Israeli society.

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- Bet Shas, Shas' main office in Jerusalem
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Appendix I: Theme Guide for Interviews

Personal data: (Name, gender, age, country of origin, language, occupation)

1. What is Shas?
2. Do you have a party programme?
3. Explain the structure of Shas.
4. The slogan – what does it mean? What/which past does it refer to?
5. The politicians of Shas: how did they get their positions, what is their background: education/training?
6. What are the differences between Shas and the Ashkenazi Haredim?
7. Why do not Shas have any female representatives and what about in the future?
8. What is Shas' relationship with secular Israelis and secularism: political parties and individuals.
9. What is the largest/most important political opposition of Shas?
10. In an ideal world, how is Israel governed?
11. What are positive sides with the democracy in Israel today?
12. What is the relationship between the rabbis and the politicians in Shas?
13. Are the politicians a "by-product" of today's political situation? Will they exist in the ideal world?
14. What is the position of Ovadia Yosef?
15. What will happen when there is there equality between Sephardim and Ashkenazim in Israel? Has Shas then reached its goal?
16. What is more important – religion or ethnic issues?
17. How is the relationship between Shas and the Sephardim in Europe? Historically and now.
18. What is Nationalism? What is Zionism? (What does it mean to you? To Shas?)
19. What is Shas' relationship with Palestinian Israelis and Arabs in general?
20. Why do non-religious Israelis vote for Shas?
21. What is Shaagat Aryeh?
22. What is the position of Amnon Izthak and what is his relationship with Shas?

Appendix II: Hebrew Words

This is list of Hebrew word is intended as an assistance to the reader and explains my utilization and understanding of the Hebrew words used in this study. All Hebrew worsa are tranliterated followig the tradition of The Encyclopedia of Judaism.

Agudat Yisrael: "The Band/Association of Israel", name of Ashkenazi Haredi party.

Am Israel: The nation/people of Israel, biblical term.

Ashkenazi: refers to traditions and culture belonging to European Jews and to an edition of the Halacha. The term is derived from *Ashkan* which means German(y) in Old Hebrew.

Ashkenazim: (plural form of Ashkenazi) Jews that originate, or descendant of Jews, from Central and Eastern Europe.

Avraham Aveinu: Abraham Our Father

daat Torah: knowledge of the Torah and Halacha, usually refers to rabbis.

datii: religious, in Israel used to describe Jews with an Orthodox affiliation and observance of the Halacha.

Degel ha'Torah: "The Torah Flag", name of Ashkenazi political party formed after a spilt in Agudat Yisrael

El ha'Maayan: "Towards the Wellspring", the umbrella organisation for Shas' social and religious institutions

Eretz Israel: the Biblical term for the Land of Israel

Gadolei Torah: The Great Men of the Torah

ge'onim: the heads of the Jewish academies in Babylonia, means 'excellency' or 'pride'.

ha'aretz: the country, land

Ha'Keshet Ha'Demokratit Ha'Mizrahit: The Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow Coalition, a leftist political expression fighting for the rights of Middle Eastern Jews (and Palestinians) in Israel.

Halacha: the Jewish religious law, the term is deduced from the Hebrew word *halach* that means "to walk", and includes all the aspects of Judaism that is concerned with the Jewish that rules and regulates how a Jew should "walk" through life.

Haredi: Ultra Orthodox, Haredi comes from the Bible: "Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble (Haredim) at His words" Isaiah 66:5 and denotes a certain way of life and a strict observance of the Halacha.

Haredim: (plural form of Haredi) Ultra Orthodox Jews

Hashem: God, literally it means "The Name" in Hebrew and is a Jewish term for God.

Hiloni: secular

hozrim b'teshuva: returnees to observance, means Literally "Returned to *teshuva*", which is "the process of repentance for transgression and return to the correct observance

of Jewish ethical and ritual law". The term is used on Jews who convert for a secular life to a religious life.

kollel: religious seminar for after-yeshiva studies

Lag B'Omer: A festival day in a period of mourning and according to the Halacha it is the only day in the Jewish month of *Omer* Jews are allowed to cut their hair, shave and get married. Since the 17th century is has been celebrated with a pilgrimage to the grave of rabbi Simon Bar Yochai at Mount Merom. At the gravesite and all over Israel people gather around bonfires.

Lehazair Atara le'Yoshna: "To Restore the Crown to its Ancient Glory", Shas' slogan

Maayan Hahinoch Hatorahni: The Wellspring of the Torahni Education, the name of Shas' educational network.

Mapa: the Ashkenazi edition of Shulhan Aruch (The Arranged/Set Table), the term means "Tablecloth" and refers to the need for covering of the Ashkenazi traditions to complete the Sephardi written Shulhan Aruch.

masoret beit abba: the tradition (followed) in my father's house

masorti: traditional, term used to describe Jews who observe many of the religious commandments and rules, but not all, and often in a pragmatic manner.

minhag: custom/tradition

Mishna: The Oral Law, part of the Jewish religious law, compiled around second and third century CE

mitzvoth: religious commandments or good deeds (plural of *mitzvah*)

Mizrahi: Easterly, refers to the tradition and culture of Jews from North Africa, the Arabic peninsula, Iran, Iraq and the Levant.

Mizrahim: (plural of Mizrahi) Jews who immigrated to Israel in the 1950s and 1960s from the above-mentioned countries and their offspring.

Moetzet G'adolei ha'Tora: The Council Of the Great Men of the Torah, the religious council that occupies the top of the hierarchical structure in Agudat Yisrael.

Moetzet haHamim ha'Torah: The Council of Torah Wise Men, similar council in Shas.

Naavot Israel: girls' school in Jerusalem.

Nemanei Torah: The Torah Loyalties, group of Ovadia Yosef and his contemporaries in the 1960s.

posek: Halachic arbitrator

rabbanit: a wife of a rabbi and/or pious female authority in a community,

rabbi: a teacher of Judaism qualified to make decisions based on Jewish law and a spiritual guide that tells his followers how to act according to his interpretations of the Halacha.

Sephardi: refers to the religious tradition and culture of the Jews from Spain and of their followers and to an edition of Halacha. The term is derived from the Hebrew word for Spain, *Sepharad*.

Sephardim: (plural form of Sephardi) the descendants of the Jews who fled from Spain as a result of the Spanish Inquisition in the 15th and 16th centuries and all Jews who follow the Sephardi edition of the Halacha, the Sephardi customs and traditions.

Shaagat Aryeh: The Lions Roar, the tent yeshiva and social happening outside the prison where the former Party Chairman Aryeh Deri serves a sentence for corruption and fraud.

Shas: name of the party-movement, short for *Sephardim Shomrei Torah*: Sephardim Observing the Torah, the term Shas is originally an abbreviation of *Shisha Sedarim* that defines the six chapters of the Mishna and Talmud.

Shasnik: a person who is actively engaged in, and considered to be a member, of Shas, but who does not necessarily have a defined position. *..nik* is slang for a person belonging to the a group, political party or similar.

Shma Israel: the Jewish declaration of faith and most important prayer, it means "Hear Israel".

Shulhan Aruch: The Arranged/Set Table, codification of Halacha written by Yosef Caro in the 16th century.

Talmud: the commentary to the Mishnah. There exist two Talmuds; the Jerusalem Talmud from Palestine and the Babylonian Talmud.

Torah: here understood as all written and oral Jewish teachings, literally the term means 'The Teaching'.

Yabia Omer: Expressing the Word, nine volumes on Halacha written by Ovadia Yosef.

Yalkut Yosef: The Anthology of Yosef, a guide for the Sephardi family based on the rulings of Ovadia Yosef, written by his son, Itzhak Yosef.

yehadut: Judaism

yeshiva: religions seminar for men