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### Negotiating in Thirdspace

*An ethnographic study of Haredi (Jewish ultra-orthodox) teachers' perception of 'moving forward with the world without compromising on religion'*

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*Rachel Haller*

# **Negotiating in Thirdspace**

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## **NEGOTIATING IN THIRDSPLACE**

An ethnographic study of Haredi (Jewish ultra-orthodox)  
Teachers' Perception of 'Moving Forward with the World  
without Compromising on Religion'.



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# **Chapter 1**

## **General introduction**

### **Objective and research questions**

This dissertation addresses intercultural negotiations,<sup>1</sup> focusing specifically on Haredi (Jewish ultra-orthodox) teachers' negotiating Western<sup>2</sup> notions in an Enrichment Center for Haredi kindergarten children. The Enrichment Center was co-founded by a religious teachers' college for women and a European charity foundation, thus serving as an interface where Haredi and Western worldviews<sup>3</sup> were negotiated by the Haredi staff members and visiting kindergarten teachers.

The negotiations of distinct different worldviews are not unique to the Haredi community, but are common in other religious or otherwise traditional groups, both those that are ubiquitous throughout the contemporary Western world and are accustomed to its culture, and those in local distant communities foreign to Western culture (e.g., Hellemans, 2004; Knauff, 2002; Wagner, 1990). The teachers' negotiations are analyzed through the postmodern prisms of Hybridity and Thirdspace (Bhabha, 1994, 2015; Soja, 1996, 2009), and based on the theoretical prisms of 'multiple modernities', focusing on the continuous ambivalent interconnection between traditional communities, and the Western modern context in which they operate.

Studies on the Haredi community have described ambivalent attitudes of acceptance and rejection toward contemporary Western ideas and practices in various domains (see Caplan 2003; Caplan & Stadler, 2012; Finkelman 2002; Friedman 1991; Hakak 2011; Spiegel 2011). However, in most studies, either unique features of the Haredi community were explored or else the community was described as attempting to resist,

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<sup>1</sup> According to Creswell, 2007: subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. They are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction 'with others and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives.

<sup>2</sup> The terms 'Western' and 'contemporary' are used to refer to the current worldview characteristic of Europe and the Western hemisphere (see also Smith, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> The concept of 'worldview' is used in this dissertation based on Van der Kooij et al., 2013, p. 210, p. 217). It denotes an organized system of a 'group of believers; a view on life, the world and humanity that prescribes answers to existential questions and contains moral values, aiming to influence the thinking and acting of people and to provide meaning to their life'.

yet being passively influenced by external Western forces. Tendencies of deliberate adoption of Western notions were less frequently focused on. Moreover, less research attention was given to the nature of the described ambivalent attitude, to the processes involved in the negotiation of Western notions, and to the cultural strategies employed in such negotiations.

The purpose of this study is to further explore Haredi ambivalent attitudes toward contemporary Western notions by means of a focus on the strategies employed in the negotiation process, as perceived by research participants.

The study poses the following questions:

How did the Haredi teachers negotiate contemporary Western ideas and practices that may be in conflict with their religious perceptions?

1. How were Western educational notions negotiated by Haredi teachers in the planning and operating stages of the Enrichment Center?
2. How did the Haredi teachers negotiate the Western psychological concept of self-construal in light of their religious perceptions regarding individuality?
3. How did the Haredi teachers negotiate Western notions of sensorimotor development in light of their religious perceptions regarding the hierarchy between body and soul?

Teachers' negotiations are analyzed in reference to the following main domains: Western scientific notions, features of Western art (e.g., drama), current psychological understanding, and present day views of sensorimotor development. Moreover, teachers' negotiations are examined along four axes: the concrete-practical axis (What were the strategies employed?), the theological axis (What were the underpinning religious principles?), the cultural axis (What was the cultural context?), and the educational axis (What were the perceptions of Haredi teachers as educational agents?). Although presented here as distinct axes, in reality

the different axes were naturally intertwined through complex interdependent relationships.

In this dissertation, the male and female kindergarten teachers who participated in the present study are regarded as two distinct groups since the education system in which they teach and from which they graduated differ significantly from one another (Bilu, 2003; Caplan, 2003; Friedman, 1991; Mantzura, 2010; Spiegel, 2011; Yaffe, 2007). The underlying gender issues are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Before addressing the research questions, some background is needed to clarify key concepts and outline the theoretical approaches underlying the dissertation. First, the current anthropological view of modernity as a multiple variegated process (Knauff, 2002) will be introduced in order to provide a perspective of how modernity is negotiated by both local traditional communities, and religious institutions around the world. Next, the theoretical prisms of Thirdspace and Hybridity will be presented. Then the Haredi community and its segregated education systems will be described, focusing on the negotiation of Western notions in the community in general, and in the education systems in particular. Following that, the research methodology and fieldwork will be detailed, and finally the outline of the thesis will be presented.<sup>4</sup>

### **Negotiating modernity and tradition**

Modernity and its derivatives—extensively debated terms in anthropology (Knauff, 2002; Merrifield, Harms, Jobson, & Randle, 2013)—are used in the humanities and social sciences to designate both a historical period from about the seventeenth century onwards and a particular form of social and political organization (Dussel, 2000; Giddens, 2013). In this thesis, we mainly refer to the second designation focusing on

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<sup>4</sup> Two additional concepts: the psychological concept of self-construal and the developmental concept of sensorimotor development (which appear in Chapter 3 and four, respectively), will only be discussed in the relevant chapters and not in this introductory chapter, since they serve as an example of the central issue of cultural negotiations which the dissertation will address.

Western ideas and practices that developed on the basis of these modern underpinnings, interchanging the terms Western and modern notions.

The relationships between modernity and tradition are complex and differently manifested in diverse circumstances around the world, where modern ideas and practices are confronted with local long-standing cultural traditions (Knauft, 2002, 2019). On the one hand, modernity-based notions bear the promise of economic and social development; on the other, they are associated with a break from tradition whereby local values and social relations are 'relinquished, dislodged [and] disrupted' (Knauft 2002, p. 1). Thus, local traditional communities confronted with such conflicts often create their own 'inflections of modernity' (Knauft, 2002, p. 1), referred to either in the plural as 'multiple modernities' (Eisenstadt, 2000; Schmidt, 2006), or in relativized terms such as 'alternative modernity' or 'transmodernity' (Dussel et al., 2000; Knauft, 2002; Schmidt, 2006). Within these local inflections of modernity, tradition and modernity seem to be perceived not as dichotomous, mutually exclusive entities, but rather as entities that may coexist in an intricately intertwined manner which appears to involve processes of contestation, 'opposition' and 'selective appropriation' (Knauft, 2002, p. 25).

Encounters between religion and modernity-based Western notions seem to involve similar ambivalent relationships. However, these relationships have a significantly longer history. Differing from local cultures to which Western notions were introduced through external agents (Anderson Levitt, 2003; Wollons, 2000), religious settings are ubiquitous throughout the Western world. They evolved within the context of modernity, are accustomed to its culture, and have developed long-term relationships with the modern context in which they operate and through which they themselves are considered 'modernized' (Hellemans, 2004). Yet, rhetoric of contestation and rejection of Western modernity-based notions are common among religious groups. Many adherents of religion have pointed to inherent conflicts between the two as notions rejecting

religious principles are frequently central to modern theories. These were openly expressed in Darwin's theory of evolution which undermines the belief in God as creator of the universe (Calhoun, 2002), and in Freudian psychology which regards God as an illusion, based on the infantile need for a powerful father figure (Armstrong, 1993). Similar notions underpin the scientific method that transformed the concept of truth, previously based on religious sources, with the concept of certainty, whose only guarantor is man's judgment (Oden, 1995; Schmidt, 2006). However, despite such voices of criticism, the world's religions have been continuously responding to the challenges of modernity-based notions, constantly integrating Western social developments, and adopting current modern discourse, 'reinterpret(ing) ... [current modern challenges] within prevailing modern horizons' (Hellemans, 2004).

These ambivalent interrelationships between religion and the modern context in which it operates are noted in the literature on Islamic tradition (e.g., Asad 1986; Anjum, 2007), the Catholic church (Hellemans, 2004), Christian educational settings (e.g., Wagner, 1990), and in reference to the Haredi Jewish religious community (e.g., Friedman, 1991, 1995; Caplan & Stadler, 2012). Various types of relationships are highlighted, including 'amalgam of tradition and modernity' (Hellemans, 2004), selective instrumental adoption (Caplan & Stadler, 2012), and even 'exploitation' of the modern by religious groups employing modern means to anti-modern ends (Adely & Seale-Collazo, 2013; Hellemans, 2004). Some studies describe the processes involved in the integration of the religious and the modern as the 'braiding together' (Wagner, 1990, p. 6) and mixing of the two conceptual worlds through ambivalent processes of alteration, accommodation, compromise and adjustment (Wagner, 1990). The processes through which both local communities and religious institutions seem to negotiate the coexistence of seemingly opposing worldviews appear to be grounded theoretically in the notions of

Thirdspace (Soja, 1996, 2009) and Hybridity (Bhabha, 1994, 2015), exploring intercultural junctions.<sup>5</sup>

### **Thirdspace and Hybridity**

The postmodern notion of Thirdspace accentuates a deliberate conscious aspect of coexistence, proposing Thirdspace as a new way of thinking creatively about seemingly conflicting concepts—not as dichotomous entities, but rather as entities that may coexist. Thirdspace eliminates *either/or* options such as assimilation, imitation or rejection as the only option in intercultural encounters and suggests instead deliberately interjecting a Thirdspace as a different frame of mind that can encompass a 'multiplicity of perspectives' (ibid., p. 5). For Soja, such a deliberate combination of seemingly opposing concepts is not a general, vague concept, but rather a 'creative process of restructuring' that can be accomplished through 'draw[ing] selectively and strategically from the ... opposing categories to open new alternatives' (ibid., p. 5). In educational settings the notion of Thirdspace was employed in a variety of studies exploring 'in-between' (ibid., p. 143) domains: in-between home and school (e.g., Pahl & Kelly, 2005), in-between dominant and marginal academic discourses (e.g., Moje et al., 2004) and even in-between institutions (e.g., McAlpine & Hopwood, 2009).

Conversely, Bhabha (1994, 2015) focused on the more confrontational subconscious aspects of negotiating differences, referring to the 'profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2) processes taking place at intercultural junctions. Individuals being caught in the internal struggle between familiar fixed values, and new principles and priorities, may experience a sense of displacement, inferiority and what Bhabha recurrently referred to as a *split*

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<sup>5</sup>Notwithstanding the current use of Hybridity and Thirdspace interchangeably, in this article, the former is ascribed to Bhabha (1994) while the latter is ascribed to Soja (1996), as in their original quoted works.

of identity, where they may feel 'estranged unto themselves' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 4). However, Bhabha considers such struggles both painful and productive (cf. Ingram & Abrahams, 2015), since they challenge binary divisions, and call instead for dialectical reorganization, ultimately resulting in creative inventions of hybrids. These creations of cultural hybrids involve 'discursive conditions of enunciation' (p. 55): articulating, redefining and reading anew traditional cultural symbols, seeking to authorize the inventive cultural hybrids.

In this dissertation, the prisms of Thirdspace and Hybridity were employed in order to explore the ways in which Haredi kindergarten teachers negotiated the interface of Western education and their religious worldview. However, before turning to the ethnographic material, a description of the Haredi community is called for.

### **The Haredi community in Israel**

The Haredi community in Israel is a religious group comprising approximately 12.5 percent of the Jewish population in Israel (Cahaner, 2018). The term Haredi means 'fearful' in the sense of being meticulous, precise, and vigilant as concerns the strict observance of the religious way of life (Friedman, 1991). This term was adopted from the biblical verse, 'Hear the word of the Lord, you who are fearful at his word' (Isaiah 66:5), and its contemporary use to designate the community commenced during the 20th century (Baumel, 2004; Friedman, 1991).

Although the Haredi community is a diverse, dynamic, and changing community comprising several distinct groups (Caplan, 2003; Friedman, 1991; Mantzura, 2010), certain beliefs and ways of life are shared by all of its members. These relate to strict adherence to religious principles and include: (1) the belief in God and in the divine origin of the *Torah* (Bible). (2) the perception of *Talmud* study (the central text of religious law and Jewish principles) as of cardinal importance. (3) the compliance to observe God's commandments as they are interpreted in the *Talmud* and in latter rabbinical literature (Caplan, 2003; Friedman, 1991),



and (4) perceiving Jewish law as pertaining to all aspects of life (Mantzura, 2010). The Haredi community is additionally distinguished from the more secular oriented Israeli Jewish society surrounding it, by external characteristics that usually stem from its religious life style, such as modest cloths and a partially autonomous segregated educational system (Baumel, 2004; Caplan, 2003; Friedman, 1991; Mantzura, 2010; Yaffe, 2001).

The present dissertation focuses on a particular stream within the Haredi community, the Lithuanian stream, whose roots are found in Eastern and Central Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> century, and the affinity for past Jewish tradition is firmly anchored in its consciousness (Friedman, 1991). When tracing the influence of the 19th-century Jewish community in Europe on attitudes toward Western contemporary notions in the Haredi community today, two modes of influence, relevant to the current study, are particularly salient. (1) the influence of the relative openness toward modernity-based notions that has been observed in the Lithuanian Jewish Talmudic institutions (Stampfer 2010), and (2) the influence of the integrative approach to religion and modernity that characterized the neo-orthodoxy in Germany and is evident in the Israeli Haredi girls' education system Beth Yaakov to this day (Friedman, 1991;Nadler, 2010).

Studies on the Haredi community have often explored attitudes in the community towards Western ideas and practices, differentiating between two distinct periods. The first from the 19<sup>th</sup> century up until the 1970's labeled as 'the period of survival' and characterized by both focusing on internal strengthening and seclusion from the perceived threats of modern life. The second, 'the period of consolidation' from the 70's, characterized by increased confidence, greater involvement with the Israeli non-religious population, and observed tendencies of openness toward modern notions, which is not necessarily followed by a decline in traditional religious commitment (Caplan & Stadler, 2012). However, until the last decade, tendencies of openness and intentional adoption of Western notions were not usually focused on. Rather, some studies focused

on features unique to the community (e.g., Yaffe, 2007) or on tendencies of rejection (e.g., Bilu, 2003), others interpreted observed tendencies of openness as a process of diffusion, whereby Western concepts slowly seep into the Haredi community, gradually altering the Haredi worldview and weakening the religious way of life (Caplan, 2003).

As described above, only recently, intentional adaptation was noted in research, describing how new communication technologies are generally adopted (e.g., Neriya-Ben Shahar & Lev-On, 2011), how complicated innovative medical technologies are sought after (e.g., Ivry, 2010), and how Western psychological ideas and practices are accepted (Caplan, 2003; Hakak, 2011; Yaffe, 2009). However, although generally the selective instrumental nature of the process was underscored, the actual cultural strategies involved in adopting Western notions received only some research attention. Ivry (2010) described the involvement of rabbinical organizations in applying underpinning principles of Jewish law in order to resolve challenging situations engendered by the use of innovative medical fertility technology. Hakak (2011) described some of the screening practices employed in the process of adopting Western psychological ideas and practices (1) by choosing to adopt Western models that are in keeping with Haredi local values, and (2) by distinguishing between the 'core and the shell' ('wheat and chaff') within these models, accepting the core instrumental elements, i.e., 'wheat', that are compatible with the Haredi worldview and rejecting the 'chaff', namely, the elements that oppose Haredi values. Hakak (2011) additionally described a cultural strategy implemented in the process of adopting Western psychological ideas and practices noted in Haredi guidance books for parents and educators where the authors quote a religious source, which resonates with the adopted psychological ideas and practices.

### ***Haredi segregated education system***

In addressing attitudes to Western notions within the education system, a certain measure of distinction is drawn between the boys' and

girls' schools, which differ significantly from one another (Caplan, 2003; Friedman, 1991; Mantzura, 2010; Spiegel, 2011; Yaffe, 2007).

***Girls' education system***

The Haredi girls' education system Beth Yaakov, which consists today of kindergartens, elementary and secondary schools, and teachers' colleges, is fully accredited by the Israeli Ministry of Education, and its curriculum is similar to that of the general Israeli education system (Almog and Perry-Hazan 2011; Spiegel 2011). Scientific theories are routinely taught, as are Western pedagogy and psychology, which are the underpinning subjects of the curriculum in the Haredi teachers' colleges (Lupu 2003). However, research on the Haredi girls' education system has not often focused on this interface between Western educational content and the traditional religious way of life, or on the similarity between the Haredi curriculum and that of the general education system, but rather tended to explore the esoteric traditional religious aspects unique to the Haredi curriculum.

Two studies conducted in Haredi kindergartens described the nurturing of various aspects of the traditional religious way of life. Yaffe (2007) explored the socialization of girls into their cultural role, while Mantzura (2010) explored gender roles, as they are manifest in religious rituals in kindergarten. Both these studies focus on the centrality of the traditional religious way of life to the kindergarten. The tendencies of acceptance and openness toward contemporary Western content observed in girls' schools were usually not interpreted as an active intentional process of adoption but rather as a process of diffusion (Mantzura, 2010; Yaffe, 2009), in which the girls' education system is being passively influenced by external contemporary modern forces. Such perceptions may have reinforced the expectation that exposure to Western culture would bring about changes in the religious identity and traditional values of graduates of the Haredi education system, similar to changes reported in research on women in patriarchal societies who were exposed to academic

social discourse (see the elaborated discussion in Weiner-Levy, 2008). The fact that most educated Haredi women maintained their strictly religious identity (Almog & Perry-Hazan, 2011; Friedman 1991) was perceived by Almog and Perry-Hazan (2011) as a paradox, prompting them to explore the mechanisms within the system that appeared to block the anticipated changes in identity as a result of exposure to academic discourse. Embracing El Or's (1994) description of the Haredi girls' education as 'educating for ignorance', Almog and Perry-Hazan (2011) went further, arguing that the community and the gender obstacles, together with a lack of 'rights consciousness', accounted for Haredi professional women's inability to change their cultural role despite their broad general education. Adopting the prism of Thirdspace can provide an alternative perspective, 'eliminate[ing] *either/or* options such as assimilation, imitation or rejection as the only option in intercultural encounters ... suggest[ing] instead ... deliberately interjecting a... different frame of mind that can encompass a 'multiplicity of perspectives' (Soja, 1996, p. 5) where Haredi women can accept Western notions while maintaining their religious identity.

### ***Boys' education system***

In contrast to the girls' education system, the education of boys is considered to be more traditional (Spiegel, 2011). It comprises three levels: kindergarten to 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> grade, 'little' Yeshiva for ages 13–16, and 'big' Yeshiva for boys of 16 and up. Until age five, boys' kindergartens in the Lithuanian community are run mostly by female teachers, with a general curriculum similar to that of other kindergartens worldwide (Mantzura, 2010; Spiegel, 2011). A male kindergarten teacher enters the four-year-old boys' classroom for an hour a day and becomes their sole educator and caregiver from age five onwards (usually with a female remedial education teacher on the staff).

While curriculum in the elementary years comprises both general studies and religious studies (e.g., bible, Talmud and rabbinical literature), it gradually shifts toward a full time Talmud study starting at ninth grade

(For an overview of boys' education, see Spiegel, 2011). Alongside the study of Biblical and Talmudic content, the boys' education system focuses on developing advanced cognitive skills, such as in-depth comprehension (Spiegel, 2011), analytical logical processing, and critical discerning abilities (Cohen, 2005; Spiegel, 2011), which the boys will require for independent Talmud study in the future (Dembo et al., 1997; Spiegel, 2011). Through Talmud study the boys' education system furnishes its pupils with the knowledge on underpinning religious principles, and enhances the development of the skills necessary for applying these principles to daily life situations (Friedman, 1991). In addition, the boys' education system strives to develop inner motivation, satisfaction and love of learning (Nisan & Shalif, 2005; Shalif, 1995) as well as self-discipline, which are essential for religious life in general and for future independent Torah study in particular (Hakak, 2005).

Research on the boys' education system seems to focus on tendencies of seclusion. In his comprehensive study of the Haredi boys' education system in Jerusalem, Spiegel (2011) describes boys' schools as implementing strategies of isolation whereby their students are separated from Western notions by the construction of high barriers between the sacred realm within and the threats of the destructive, profane world outside. Spiegel interprets this phenomenon as a result of the fear that exposure to Western thinking may destabilize the religious way of life and threaten the school's educational messages - an interpretation that according to Caplan and Stadler (2012) had characterized the previous period of 'survival' and is not relevant to the present period of 'consolidation'. As in the girls' schools, observed tendencies toward openness and change in the boys' schools (e.g., Caplan, 2003; Golos et al., 2011; Mantzura, 2010; Spiegel, 2011) have often been interpreted as a passive process of diffusion (Caplan, 2003; Spiegel, 2011; Yaffe, 2001).

Many graduates of the boys' education system continue their Torah study for many years after marriage, others seek academic studies. This

tendency is observed among teachers in the early years, especially kindergarten teachers, who hold a teaching certificate from the Ministry of Education (Cohen, 2005; Gonen, 2000; Hakak, 2005; Lupu, 2003). Thus, most teachers in Haredi boys' kindergarten today are exposed to some degree both to Haredi religious education and to contemporary pedagogy and developmental theories. The present ethnographic study focuses on both female kindergarten teachers, graduates of the Haredi girls' education system and male kindergarten teachers, graduates of the boys' education system. It seeks to explore teachers' negotiations with contemporary Western educational perceptions, seeking first to investigate notions expressed by the teachers concerning their attitudes toward Western perceptions, second, to observe the strategies employed, and third to understand the embedded cultural context.

### **Research methodology**

#### **Fieldwork in the Enrichment Center**

This dissertation is based on ethnographic fieldwork in a Haredi Enrichment Center for kindergarten children. The Center was co-founded by a Haredi religious teachers' college for women (the Seminary) and a European charitable organization for children (the Foundation), seeking to improve opportunities for young children growing up in socially and economically difficult circumstances. In Israel, the Foundation worked on numerous projects in the Arab minority group and in the Haredi community, focusing both on enriching the children and on improving their teachers' skills, based on Western knowledge about child development (document # 13). Perceiving the aims of the Foundation as matching the Seminary's aims, and seeking financial aid for its educational programs, the Seminary approached the Foundation and was granted financial aid and the autonomy to build and operate the Enrichment Center under the supervision of the Foundation.

The Center, friendly inviting and professionally designed, was located on the lowest floor of a commercial building on the outskirts of a

Haredi neighborhood in a major Israeli city with a large Haredi population. It was open to visits from kindergarten classes (ages 5-6) from all over the city pending pre-registration and an entrance fee. Each kindergarten class visited the center once or twice a year. During their visit, each class of approximately 36 children was divided into six groups of six children each. Each group was assigned to the care of its own instructor for the full morning of activities, participating in (a half hour activity in) each room. The children's teachers did not have a clear program to follow - they were encouraged to walk into any one of the various rooms to observe the activity of the children, or even join in the activity themselves.

Notwithstanding the centrality of tradition and religion to the daily life of the community, the axis around which programs in the different rooms were organized reflected the acceptance of Western child-centered developmental theories (e.g., Ainsworth, Erikson, Piaget and Winnicott): focusing on cognitive development, sensorimotor proficiency and emotional well-being. Activities that focused on computers, literacy, and science emphasized cognitive development through explorative methods of inquiry, as well as the use of contemporary technologies to experience magnetism, electrical conductivity, and visual distortions. The contemporary psychological focus on individuality was observed at the Center via the individual attention provided by the personal instructor assigned to a group of six children throughout the day, and through their encouragement of the expression of thoughts and individual choices. Self-expression was further nurtured in the drama room which, along with the music room, introduced the children to the arts. During drama activities, the children experienced the art of performance and they were encouraged both to express themselves and to use their imagination to playfully assume someone else's role. During the music activities, the children experienced playing and sorting groups of instruments, identifying the instruments they heard whilst listening to classical music, and forming their own 'orchestra'.

***The rationale for choosing the research setting***

There were a number of reasons for choosing the Enrichment Center to explore the research questions. (1) The Center, representing the distinct different cultural perceptions of its founders, served as an interface where the negotiations of these different worldviews could be observed. (2) The unique position of the teachers in the Center offered a valuable perspective for observing teachers' behavior. As described below, in the Center the visiting teachers did not have a clearly assigned role; they did not have a familiar taken for granted routine or a dictated curriculum to follow. Thus, teachers' behavior could be considered to reflect spontaneous less mediated perceptions and practices<sup>6</sup>. (3) The novelty of the Center and the opportunity I was given to explore the planning stage as well as the early operation stage enabled me to observe the adopting and amending processes that took place at these early stages before they became routine. (4) Since the Enrichment Center was open to all Haredi kindergartens in the city, it offered the opportunity to observe and interact with a large number of kindergarten teachers from a wide variety of institutions, some of whom would otherwise have been inaccessible to me. Furthermore, all these teachers were observed under very similar conditions: in the same setting and engaged with the same staff members.

***Research participants***

Qualitative research, which aims for in-depth understandings of a particular setting and particular people (Merriam, 1995), does not use large random samples, but rather seeks purposive sampling, sometimes referred to as 'panels of experts' (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). In this approach, the researcher deliberately selects experienced individuals who have knowledge of the research topic and can best provide insight into the issues to be explored (Bowen, 2008). The criterion for choosing to focus on kindergarten teachers was their cultural representativeness based on the

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<sup>6</sup> In order to explore teachers' negotiations in other settings, observations in the Center were supplemented with visits to 5 boys' schools and 7 girls' kindergarten classes.



premise that after the family, kindergarten teachers are perceived as the second major social agents in young children's life (Korat, 2001). It is the kindergarten teacher who furnishes the children with culturally appropriate approaches, values, knowledge and skills, which will allow them to integrate effectively as members of their community (Wilcox 1982). Thus, studies focusing on teachers as social agents often serve to enhance the understandings of that specific culture (Riehl, 2001).

Within the broad category of Haredi kindergarten teachers, including both male and female kindergarten teachers who visited the Enrichment Center, I pursued additional criteria relevant to the focus of inquiry. Since the research aimed to explore the cultural strategies involved in the selective adoptions (and amendments) of contemporary educational ideas and practices, I sought to include teachers from two specific groups through whom this aim could be better understood, namely, groups noted for integrating to some degree contemporary ideas and practices, at the same time as strictly adhering to the religious way of life.

Hence, research participants included two groups of teachers. (1) Female kindergarten teachers included teachers who work in the Beit Yaakov education system that was described above as being strictly religious on the one hand and, on the other hand, as integrating religious and general studies as influenced by the Jewish neo-orthodoxy in Germany at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (2) Male kindergarten teachers who work in education systems affiliated with or influenced by the Lithuanian stream, which was noted (e.g., Friedman, 1991) as relatively open to contemporary ideas and practices while strictly adhering to the religious way of life through the study of Torah. Hence, the participants of the study can be considered suitable to provide insights into the phenomenon this dissertation aims to explore, namely the processes and cultural strategies involved in partial adoption of contemporary ideas and practices while maintaining the religious way of life.

In addition, seeking to include variations in research participants that may affect research findings, the following variables were considered: the main variable - differences in gender - was taken into account by including 105 female teachers and 88 male teachers. Teachers of both genders differed from each other in additional aspects: age, numbers of years of teaching, and academic background. During the two years of research, the Center was visited by almost all girls' Beit Yaakov kindergartens in the city and by most of the boys' kindergartens affiliated with or influenced by the Lithuanian education system. These kindergartens constituted the majority of Haredi kindergartens in the city. Hence, visiting teachers may be considered to represent kindergarten teachers in the two largest Haredi education system in a major Israeli city with a large Haredi population.

Visiting teachers comprised the first circle of participants. The two additional circles included: (a) the planners and designers of the Center - four teachers from the co-founding Seminary: Shira and Tamar were energetic women in their fifties; Shira in her capacity as Head of the Early Childhood Department in the Seminary represented the Seminary and was in charge of the project. Tamar was responsible for students' training. Avigail headed the Graphics Department and Michal was a senior science teacher. (b) the staff of the Enrichment Center - Hedva, the educational director, an energetic retiree from kindergarten supervision in her early 60s who created a pleasant atmosphere in the Center, and six young instructors: Chana, Riki, Esti, Batsheva, Michali, and Yonit, all in their early 20s and graduates of the Early Childhood program at the Seminary co-founder of the Enrichment Center.

***Gaining access, building trust and my position as participating researcher***

Generally, it was easy for me to gain access to the actual field as originally, in my capacity as a professional Haredi woman teaching psychology and special education at the Seminary, I was asked by the head

master of the Seminary to conduct an ethnographic study at the Enrichment Center. Participating from the early stages of planning and designing of the Center made my professional presence quite natural. This professional presence was facilitated by the fact that I was somewhat familiar by name or face in the Haredi education systems yet not personally known to most participants: I was known as a former teacher in the Seminary who designed and operated the Center, an evaluator of children with learning difficulties in the community, and as a former supervisor to special education teachers in the girls' kindergartens. All these roles helped in building trust and establishing me as an insider, but also allowed for some distance, since I was not part of the staff and not directly involved in the activities. Officially, I fulfilled two roles in the field: I was introduced to the visiting teachers as a learning specialist with whom they could consult regarding children's educational-emotional needs. I was also introduced as a researcher, conducting research for the founders of the Center. Aside from these official roles, I helped the staff when needed, substituting for an instructor or answering phone calls.

Staff members were aware of the research objectives through their direct interactions with the founders or their representatives. During interviews I told the teachers that the co-founder of the Center was interested to learn more about the Haredi community and its needs. This information was shared with other visiting teachers who were curious about the research I was conducting. I believe that the awareness of research objectives did not have a strong effect on teachers' conduct in the Center. The teachers seemed preoccupied with the Center and its activities and concerned about the children's participation. My role as a researcher was referred to only occasionally when teachers were asked to complete questionnaires or at the beginning of interviews; otherwise, my informal conversations with teachers usually evolved around issues of child development or concerned the activities of the Center.

Although building rapport with female teachers was not usually difficult, finding a time and place for interviewing visiting female teachers proved to be somewhat problematic. The teachers were usually busy with home duties, and I had to adjust to their schedules and accept their preferences: some interviews were conducted in the kindergarten, either at 8 o'clock when the kindergarten was still empty and the teacher's helper could welcome the coming girls; or at 1:30 p.m., after the children went home. Two interviews were conducted late in the evening, one in the lobby of a hotel, the other on a park bench near the teacher's homes and one female teacher preferred coming to the center on her day off. Building rapport with the male kindergarten teachers was more difficult. I had to carefully judge each situation and act according to the accepted cultural codes such as respectful, professional (not personal) interaction. Interviews with male kindergarten teachers were conducted either in the center or over the phone.

I participated in the Center's activities three mornings a week for almost two years (2008-2010), returning later for supplementary data (in 2011 -2012). During the prolonged engagement in the field, I observed and informally conversed with teachers in the course of a full five-hour morning. Observations in the field were recorded as field notes and in numerous pictures, and short video clips as well as more than ten videos of full sessions, each approximately 30 minutes long. Each video was fully transcribed verbatim close to the time it was taken. A few informal conversations were audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim, while others were summarized as field notes, along with additional information, both descriptive and reflective [including my own impressions, insights, criticisms, questions, and concerns (Labaree, 2009)].

The observations and informal conversations provided spontaneous, and hence, more genuine, less mediated information. However, in order to gain more direct insight into teachers' perceptions, these were supplemented by in-depth interviews. Candidates for interviews were

reached through feedback questionnaires that were given to all visiting teachers. In addition to giving their feedback, teachers were asked whether they agreed to be interviewed. Many teachers completed the questionnaire and some of them agreed to be interviewed and specified the time and place of their convenience. Finally, 15 women were interviewed including Shira, in charge of the planning and designing of the Center, its seven staff members and seven visiting teachers as well as 15 visiting male kindergarten teachers.

All interviewees fit the criteria set for research participants. They were teaching either in the Beit Yaakov girls' education system or in Lithuanian affiliated or Lithuanian influenced boys' kindergartens. All visiting teachers interviewed were married and had children. They all had a teaching degree from the Israeli Ministry of Education but differed in their academic degree (some held a B.A. only one had a M.A.), in the length of their teaching experiences (7 - 30 years) and in their age (ranging from 30 to over 60 years old).

In addition to the interviews with teachers, some informal conversations and a full formal interview (for close to 2 hours) were conducted with the representative of the Foundation both in Israel and abroad. Questions during the interviews were open ended, designed to reveal what was important to participants. The interviews with the teachers opened with a general question (how was it for you to visit the center?), and developed using probes (detail-oriented probes, elaboration probes and clarification probes), with the intent to lead participants to talk about opinions, values and feelings. Most interviews were one hour long; they were recorded, and were transcribed and reflected upon immediately after their completion.

Recognizing the multiplicity of cultural frames of reference by means of which social orders are structured (Atkinson & Delamont, 2005), I additionally collected many documents both in the Center and in the community including correspondence between founders, communication

papers, thank-you letters, the guest book, and relevant articles or advertisements published in the daily Haredi newspaper, *Yated Neeman*, which has broad readership among the Haredi community. Being aware of the importance of the cultural historical context and of the relevance of the ancient religious texts (Bible, Talmud and related rabbinical literature) for guiding daily life in the community, I consulted these religious sources for underpinning Haredi ontology and epistemology. This triangulation of research methods, which is advocated in qualitative research, enabled the exploration of research questions from many different perspectives, each shedding light on a different aspect of the phenomenon under study, leading toward the point of 'completeness' (Stenius, Mäkelä, Miovsky & Gabrhelik, 2008. p. 86), and of data saturation.

Data saturation marks the point of terminating data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and is described in the literature as the point of diminishing returns from data collecting efforts when data has become redundant (Bowen, 2008), no new themes are identified and no insights are obtained. Considering the recursive process where the collecting of data and its analysis are intertwined, saturation of data can often be accomplished only at the late stages of data analysis. Indeed, in the present study, data from ancient religious sources at the late stages of analysis provided the underpinning principles through which an understanding of interrelations within and across categories emerged, marking the point of 'completeness' (Stenius et al., 2008. p. 86), where no new data provided additional new insights.

### **Thematic analysis**

The inductive analytic process of culling for meaning from the data continued throughout the research's different stages as is common in qualitative studies (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Stenius et al., 2008). It involved ongoing dialogues with the participants, constant reflective examinations of self, and a recursive process of emergent meaning and sharpening of understanding. However, the major

rigorous process of systematic analysis was conducted after most data were collected and resembled the assembling and organizing of numerous puzzle pieces in order to construct a portrait of an unknown scene and gain an understanding of the meanings embedded within (LeCompte, 2000). It followed the steps detailed below described by LeCompte (2000) and Maykut and Morehouse (1994) which are often advocated for the analysis of qualitative data.

### ***Finding units of meaning***

After each whole piece of data (e.g., an interview) was thoroughly read, small units of meaning were identified and marked. The guidelines for identifying and marking these units (a scene, a statement etc., usually a few lines or a short paragraph in length) were either their relevance to the focus of inquiry or other factors such as frequency of occurrence or conspicuousness (see LeCompte, 2000).

### ***Creating and refining provisional categories***

All marked units were cut out, coded and classified into initial categories using the constant comparative method, comparing each unit of meanings obtained to all other units and grouping all similar units into a category. Items within each category were organized, and each category was labeled by summarizing the properties of units it encompassed, thus defining its rule of inclusion. For example, items pertaining to teachers' academic studies or in-service training were grouped together under the label "teachers' studies. This included teachers' attitudes to their studies, places of study, duration of study, intensity of study, field and content of study, and the degree earned. Through constant comparison (to other units and to other categories), these provisional categories were constantly refined - divided into subcategories, merged, broadened or narrowed, some altogether omitted, others newly generated in order to include items which did not fit rules of inclusion of existing categories.

***Exploring relationships and patterns across categories***

After categories and subcategories were established, they were reviewed in order to identify meaningful relationships between them. For example: An interrelation (of inclusion) was found between the category labeled 'teachers' studies' and the category labeled 'teachers' concerns for children's' sensorimotor development'; the latter was found to include the former; teachers' studies was one of the ways that illustrated teachers' concerns for children 's sensorimotor development'. A relation of contradiction was identified within the category labeled 'teachers' attitudes towards enhancing sensorimotor development'. On the one hand, teachers attributed significance to physical development both implicitly and explicitly, but on the other, they established sensorimotor development as inferior to Haredi religious values. Identifying this contradiction was significant, and led to a more comprehensive understanding of Haredi views regarding the interdependency of body and soul. This process of finding relationships and patterns across categories was found to be significant and marked the beginning of the recursive process of emergent meaning and sharpening of understanding.

***Assembling structures***

The next step involved the construction of what LeCompte (2000) described as a meaningful 'portrait' of the explored scene. This was the final stage of analysis in which an overall understanding of important Haredi underpinning principles was gained (including via perusal of Haredi ancient religious sources). The conceptual understandings which emerged at this final step constitute the titles and subtitles of chapters 2-4 of this dissertation, resulting from the combined implementation of both etic and emic approaches – as emic (native) empirical data was read through etic (theoretical) concepts. All these steps involved repeated reading of the original data as contextually situated, striving to understand the meaning both in participants' views and in the wider cultural context. Every reading raised many thoughts and questions which guided the



subsequent readings, sharpening the understanding and meaning of the phenomenon under study<sup>i</sup>.

### **Validity and reliability in qualitative research**

In qualitative research reliability and validity are conceptualized using a variety of terms, such as credibility, neutrality, consistency, dependability, applicability, transferability, trustworthiness, rigor and quality (Golafshani, 2003). Notwithstanding the use of different terminology, qualitative researchers share similar concerns as quantitative researchers, namely, the wish to establish confidence in research findings and to persuade its readers that the interpretations or conclusions that are drawn from the data accurately represent the participants' realities (Creswell, 2018; Golafshani, 2003). In the present study, the following most commonly advocated procedures, were implemented:

**Member check** (Creswell, 2018; Levitt et al., 2018): in addition to presenting and discussing research findings and conclusions with staff members as participants in the study, I strove to construct meanings within the broader cultural contexts. Hence, I discussed research findings and conclusions with other members of the community including teachers of older children and leading rabbis. These discussions often raised new questions, pointing to religious sources some of which contrasted with my initial conclusions, others supporting them, gradually leading to a refining and crystalizing of initial understandings.

**Triangulation** (Creswell, 2018): seeking to secure an in-depth understanding and add rigor, breadth and richness to the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), I employed multiple methods for data collection, including participant observation, interviews and the collection of documents in the field and in the community.

**Peer debriefing** (Creswell, 2018): as discussed earlier, this procedure was implemented throughout the research's different stages as an essential supplement to the insider position. The external critical eye enhanced the translation from the emic, experience near perspective to the etic,

experience distant perspective, required in research, pointing to possible biases and to be taken for granted assumptions that emanated from the insider position.

**Reflexivity** (Creswell, 2018; Levitt et al., 2018): While describing the methodology and fieldwork, I openly disclosed my identity as a Haredi professional woman, an insider of the community under study, who continuously negotiates contemporary worldviews and my religious traditional views. This positionality may be considered both a possible asset and a possible hindrance. On the whole, researching one's own community is currently recognized theoretically and practically as justified (Choi, 2006). It has gained merit as promoting collaboration with participants (Johnson-Bailey, 1999), and as enhancing the researcher's ability to understand culture-bound phrases and silent understandings (Choi, 2006). However, in order to minimize possible bias in data collecting and in its interpretation (Baker, 2006), it was vital to establish a point of view that would be sufficiently detached yet sufficiently involved for conducting the study (Gothoni, 2015). It required my constant awareness of differences between myself and research participants in educational background and in exposure to the Western modern world, constantly engaging in self-reflection. In addition, I sought an external critical eye (Creswell, 2018) of other qualitative researchers, my colleagues in an ongoing qualitative forum. I asked them to highlight any possible bias, to critically assess whether the arguments and conclusions presented were convincingly derived from the data, to provide etic analytical concepts to contrast or illuminate cultural differences (Lie, 2013), and to enhance the translation of the findings from the emic, experience-near perspective to the etic, experience-distant perspective, required in research (Gothoni, 2015).

Hence, I wanted to focus on the potential usefulness of this position and utilize it to highlight the multifaceted challenges of nurturing the Haredi religious way of life while simultaneously adapting contemporary

notions, illuminating Haredi ontology and epistemology as guiding the cultural strategies employed in order to reduce the conflicts between the different worldviews that comprise this complex reality.

**Outline of the dissertation**

The central goal of this dissertation is to explore the ways in which Haredi kindergarten teachers negotiated contemporary educational ideas and practices. **Chapter 2** describes the cultural strategies employed by Haredi female teachers both in the designing of the Center and its operation, in amending contemporary ideas and practices to conform to Haredi values. **Chapters 3 and 4** describe male teachers' negotiations of contemporary notions in two important domains. **Chapter 3** describes Haredi teachers' negotiating features of the contemporary psychological concepts of independent self-construal, illuminating a specific cultural strategy of leaning on ancient religious texts. **Chapter 4** describes the ways in which Haredi teachers adopted contemporary developmental techniques for enhancing their pupils' sensorimotor proficiency, additionally illuminating important tenets of Haredi ontology and epistemology as guiding the adoption process. **Chapter 5** provides an organized summary of the findings in the preceding chapters, discusses in depth the cultural meanings of these strategies, points to research limitations, and suggests directions for further research.

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## Chapter 2

### **Negotiating Tradition and Contemporary Education: An Enrichment Center for Jewish Ultra-Orthodox Children in Israel**

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<sup>7</sup> Please note that indentation style and references cited both in the text and in the references list are presented in a format required by *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* that differs from APA style.

### **Abstract**

This paper addresses the negotiations of Haredi (Jewish Ultra-Orthodox) kindergarten teachers with contemporary educational understandings as these emerged in a Haredi Enrichment Center for kindergarten children. Using the prism of Thirdspace, a close look at the themes around which the Enrichment Center and its activities were organized reveals the cultural strategies involved in the amendments that contemporary ideas and practices must undergo in order to be conceptually accepted and practically implemented by Haredi educators.

*Keywords:* early education, ultra-orthodox Jewish kindergarten teachers, girls' religious education, Thirdspace, Israel.

### **Introduction**

The Haredi (Jewish Ultra-Orthodox) community in Israel shares with other traditional religious communities the wish to preserve and nurture its religious ways of life while partially adapting to the contemporary Western world. This aspiration has posed a conceptual as well as a practical challenge for this community in the past and present, since modernity, perceived as a breakaway from tradition and religion (Oden 1995; Schmidt 2006), is apparently in inherent conflict with the traditional religious way of life. This study is an interpretive ethnography based on fieldwork conducted at a Haredi Enrichment Center for kindergarten children by the first author of this paper. The purpose of the study was to address the complex attitude of the Haredi community toward Western educational notions, specifically exploring cultural strategies involved in the partial adoption of the latter as these emerged at the Enrichment Center. The Center was co-founded by a religious teachers' college for women and a European charity foundation, and designed and run by graduates of the Haredi girls' education system. As such, the Center served as a setting for observing the interface where Western educational perceptions coexisted with a religious way of life. This study joins the

current anthropological quest to understand local "inflections of modernity" (e.g. Knauft 2002,1) whereby traditional communities negotiate modern notions.

### **The interface between modernity and tradition**

Modernity and its derivatives—extensively debated terms in current anthropology (Knauft 2002)—are used in this paper in two ways: (1) to denote the historical modern period following the European Enlightenment, and (2) to refer to contemporary Western perceptions that developed on the basis of these modern underpinnings. The relationships between modernity and tradition are complex and differently manifested in diverse circumstances around the world, where modern ideas and practices are confronted with local long-standing cultural traditions (Knauft 2002). On the one hand, modernity bears the promise of economic and social development; on the other, it is associated with a break from tradition whereby local values and social relations are "relinquished, dislodged [and] disrupted" (Knauft 2002,1). Thus, local traditional communities confronted with such conflicts often create their own "inflections of modernity" (Knauft 2002,1), which reflect their aspiration to nurture local tradition while partially adapt to the contemporary Western world.

The diversity of local inflections of modernity around the world has led anthropologists to question the attempt to view modernity as a singular coherent development, suggesting instead that modernity can be seen as a series of political projects (Asad 2003). These projects are referred to either in the plural as "multiple modernities" (Eisenstadt 2000; Schmidt 2006), or in relativized terms such as "alternative modernity" or "transmodernity" (Dussel 2000; Knauft 2002; Schmidt 2006). These local inflections of modernity suggest that tradition and modernity need not necessarily be perceived as dichotomous, mutually exclusive entities, but rather as entities that may coexist in an intertwined manner, involving complex processes of contestation, "opposition" and "selective appropriation" (Knauft 2002,25).

Encounters between religion and modernity, which constitute the heart of the current study, seem to give rise to conflict and involve similar processes of contestation and selective appropriation. Historically, modern thought has been perceived as seeking to emancipate men and women from the constraints of religion; it is characterized by fundamental principles that undermine God as the source of authority and emphasize personal autonomy (Oden 1995). Secularism, albeit perceived as a multi-layered concept (Asad 2003), is still considered one of the marks of modernity (Oden 1995; Schmidt 2006), and notions rejecting religious principles were frequently central to modern scientific theories. These include Darwin's theory of evolution, which undermines the belief in God as the creator of the universe (Calhoun 2002), as well as Freudian psychology, which regards religion and God as illusions based on the infantile need for a powerful father figure (Armstrong 1993). Similar views underpin the scientific method that transformed the concept of truth, previously based on religious sources, into the concept of certainty, whose final guarantee is man's judgment (Oden 1995; Schmidt 2006).

Contemporary Western theories in education, based on these perceptions, may be in conflict with the religious values that religious educational settings seek to nurture. Although such settings are ubiquitous throughout the contemporary modern world and are accustomed to its culture, they share with local traditional communities an ambivalent attitude towards modernity. Studies of various religious educational institutions—Christian, Islamic or Jewish—have described the complex attitudes whereby these groups negotiate the challenges of modernity (Adely and Seale-Collazo 2013). Thus, Wagner's (1990) study of a variety of Christian schools reveals that despite a rhetoric of polarization and separation from material worldliness, in reality the tensions between the two worldviews may often be productive and result in some sort of coexistence, referred to as "gray amalgam" (Wagner 1990,6). Similar to the intertwined complex processes that characterize local inflections of

modernity, the coexistence of religion and modernity often involves the "braiding together" (Wagner 1990,6) and intermingling of the two worldviews through processes of alteration, accommodation, compromises and adjustments.

Thus described, the coexistence of these conflicting worldviews seems to resonate with the theoretical perspective of Thirdspace suggested by Soja (1996). Rather than focusing on the confrontational processes involved in negotiating conflicting concepts (e.g. Bhabha 1994), the notion of Thirdspace (Soja 1996) accentuates a more deliberate aspect of negotiation. Thirdspace proposes a new way of thinking creatively about seemingly conflicting concepts—not as dichotomous entities, but rather as entities that may coexist. It eliminates either/or options such as assimilation, imitation or rejection as the only option in intercultural encounters and suggests instead deliberately interjecting a Thirdspace as a different frame of mind that can encompass a "multiplicity of perspectives" (p. 5). For Soja, such a deliberate combination of seemingly opposing concepts is not a general, vague process, but rather a "creative process of restructuring" that can be accomplished through "draw[ing] selectively and strategically from the ... opposing categories to open new alternatives" (p. 5). In this paper, we employ the theoretical prism of Thirdspace in order to explore the ways in which Haredi kindergarten teachers negotiated Western educational ideas and practices in light of their traditional religious worldview. Before addressing the ethnographic material, a description of the Haredi community is called for.

### **The Haredi community in Israel**

The Haredi community in Israel is a religious group comprising approximately ten percent of the country's population (Almog and Perry-Hazan 2011; Mantzura 2010). The term *Haredi* was adopted from the biblical verse, "Hear the word of the Lord, you who are fearful at his word" (Isaiah 66,5), and refers to being meticulous, precise, and vigilant as concerns the strict observance of the religious way of life (Friedman 1991).

Although the Haredi community in Israel is a diverse, dynamic, and changing community comprising several streams (Caplan 2003; Friedman 1991; Mantzura 2010), certain ideological and lifestyle-associated characteristics are shared by all of its members, thereby distinguishing this community from the non-religiously oriented Israeli Jewish society surrounding it. These characteristics include: (1) the belief in God and in the divine origin of the Torah (Bible), (2) the perception of Talmud study (the central text of religious law and Jewish principles) as being of cardinal importance, (3) compliance with God's commandments as they are interpreted in the Talmud and in later rabbinical literature (Caplan 2003; Friedman 1991), and (4) the perception of Jewish law as relevant to all aspects of life (Mantzura 2010).

Studies of the Haredi community have addressed complex processes of acceptance and rejection of contemporary Western ideas and practices (see Caplan 2003; Finkelman 2002; Friedman 1991; Hakak 2011; Spiegel 2011). These processes have been explored in ideological and demographic contexts (e.g. Friedman 1991), and in attitudes towards technology and communication (e.g. Neriya-Ben Shahar & Lev-On 2011), towards physical health and medicine (e.g. Ivry 2010) and towards psychology and mental health (e.g. Hakak 2011; Yaffe 2009; also, see Caplan 2003 and Spiegel 2011 for overviews). While some studies focus on features unique to the community or on tendencies of rejection (e.g. Bilu 2003), others interpret tendencies of openness as a process of diffusion whereby Western concepts slowly seep into the Haredi community gradually altering the Haredi worldview and way of life (e.g. Caplan 2003). Only a few studies interpret the observed tendencies of openness as an active more deliberate process (e.g. Hakak 2011; Ivry 2010).

These processes have also been explored in historical context. When tracing the influence of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Jewish community in Europe on attitudes towards Western modern notions in the Haredi

community today, two modes of influence, relevant to the current study, are particularly salient: (1) the influence of the relative openness towards modernity that has been observed in the Lithuanian Jewish Talmudic institutions (Stampfer 2010), and (2) the influence of the integrative approach to religion and modernity that characterized the neo-orthodoxy in Germany and is evident in the Israeli Haredi girls' education system to this day (Friedman 1991; Nadler 2010).

***Haredi girls' education system***

The Enrichment Center, which is the focus of this study, was founded and operated by graduates of the Haredi girls' education system. When addressing attitudes toward Western perceptions within the education system, there is a measure of distinction between boys' and girls' schools, which differ significantly from one another (Caplan 2003; Friedman 1991; Mantzura 2010; Spiegel 2011; Yaffe 2007). The boys' education system, which is considered to be more traditional, has often been described as displaying higher tendencies toward seclusion and rejection (Spiegel 2011), while the girls' education system seems to display an attitude of greater acceptance of Western educational ideas and practices<sup>ii</sup>. The girls' education system, which consists today of kindergartens, elementary and secondary schools, and colleges of education, is fully accredited by the Israeli Ministry of Education, and its curriculum is similar to that of the general Israeli education system (Almog and Perry-Hazan 2011; Spiegel 2011). In addition to a broad in-depth study of religious subjects (Friedman 1991), scientific theories are routinely taught, as are contemporary Western pedagogy and psychology, which are core subjects of the curriculum in Haredi colleges of education (Lupu 2003). Notwithstanding the above, most studies of the Haredi girls' education system do not often focus on this interface between Western educational content and the traditional religious way of life, or on similarities between the Haredi curriculum and that of the general education system. Rather, they tend to explore the esoteric, traditional,



religious aspects unique to the Haredi curriculum. Thus, two recent studies conducted in Haredi kindergartens describe the nurturing of various aspects of the traditional religious way of life. In her comprehensive study, Yaffe (2007) explores the socialization of girls into their cultural role; Mantzura (2010) focuses on gender roles as they are manifested in religious rituals in kindergarten. Both studies emphasize the centrality of the traditional religious way of life to the kindergarten and interpret openness toward Western educational ideas and practices not as an active process of adoption but rather as a trickling-down process in which Western perceptions seep into the Haredi education system (Mantzura 2010; Yaffe 2009). Thus, the Haredi girl's education system is depicted as being passively influenced by external forces. Such depictions reinforce the expectation that exposure to Western culture will bring about changes in the religious worldview and traditional role of graduates of the girls' education system—changes that were reported in research on women in patriarchal societies who were exposed to academic social discourse (see expanded discussion in Weiner-Levy 2008). Almog and Perry-Hazan (2011) interpret the fact that most educated Haredi women maintain their traditional role as a paradox, prompting the researchers to explore the mechanisms within the system that appeared to block the anticipated changes in traditional role as a result of exposure to academic discourse. Adopting El Or's (1994) description of the Haredi girls' education as "educating for ignorance", Almog and Perry-Hazan (2011) go further, arguing that the community and the gender obstacles, together with a lack of "rights consciousness", account for Haredi professional women's inability to change their traditional role despite their broad general education.

Against this background, in this study, our aim was to explore the coexistence of the traditional religious worldview and Western educational perceptions. Focusing on the Enrichment Center, in which such coexistence was evident, we were interested, first, in notions expressed by

Haredi teachers concerning coexistence of both worldviews. Second, we wanted to observe the strategies employed in amending Western educational ideas and practices so as to conform to the Haredi worldview. Third, we sought to understand the cultural meaning of such strategies from the Haredi perspective.

### **The Enrichment Center**

The Center was co-founded by a Haredi religious teachers' college for women (the Seminary) and a European charitable organization for children (the Foundation). The Foundation considered its mission to be the provision of improved opportunities for young children growing up in difficult social and economic circumstances by supporting programs implemented by local partner organizations in selected countries. In Israel, the Foundation worked on numerous projects in the Arab minority group and in the Haredi community alike, focusing on enrichment for children and on improving teachers' skills, based on contemporary Western knowledge of child development (document # 13).

Perceiving the aims of the Foundation as matching the Seminary's aims, and seeking financial aid for its educational programs, the Seminary approached the Foundation and presented plans for establishing an Enrichment Center for kindergarten children. Upon gaining the approval of the Foundation, the Seminary was granted financial aid and the autonomy to set up and operate the Enrichment Center under the supervision of the Foundation. The Center was located on the lowest floor of a commercial building on the outskirts of a Haredi neighborhood in a major Israeli city with a large Haredi population. Its staff included Hedva, the educational director, an energetic retiree from kindergarten supervision in her early 60s who created a pleasant atmosphere, and six young instructors: Chana, Riki, Esti, Batsheva, Michali, and Yonit, all in their early 20s and graduates of the early childhood program at the Seminary with which the Enrichment Center was affiliated. The Enrichment Center was open to visits from kindergarten classes (age five to six) of boys and girls (separately) from all

over the city pending pre-registration and an entrance fee. Although it was the first of its kind in the Haredi community, the Enrichment Center quickly gained popularity, and during the two years of research (2008-2010), over 100 female teachers and close to 100 male teachers visited with their classes.

Notwithstanding the centrality of tradition and religion to the daily life of the teachers, the axis around which the programs in the different rooms were organized seemed to reflect the acceptance of Western child-centered developmental theories (e.g. those of Ainsworth, Erickson, Piaget, and Winnicott) that are routinely taught at the Seminary, focusing on cognitive development, sensorimotor proficiency, and emotional well-being. Activities focused on computers, literacy, and science emphasized cognitive development through explorative methods of inquiry, including the use of modern technologies for experimenting with magnetism, electrical conductivity, and visual distortions. The contemporary Western psychological focus on individuality at the Center manifested itself in the individual attention provided by the personal instructor assigned to a group of six children throughout the day as well as in the encouragement of the expression of thoughts and individual choices. Self-expression was further nurtured in the drama room, which, along with the music room, introduced the children to the arts. During drama activities, the children experienced the art of performance and were encouraged both to express themselves and to use their imaginations to playfully assume someone else's role. During the music activities, the children experienced playing and sorting groups of instruments, identifying the instruments they heard whilst listening to classical music, and forming their own "orchestra".

The Enrichment Center was found to be a suitable site for exploring the interface between the Haredi and the contemporary Western perceptions for two reasons: First, the fact that its co-founders represented two different worldviews foregrounded such negotiations and facilitated conversations regarding their coexistence. Second, since the Enrichment

Center was open to all Haredi kindergartens in the city, it afforded an opportunity to observe and interact with a large number of kindergarten teachers from a wide variety of institutions.

### **Mode of the study**

As a professional Haredi woman who teaches psychology and special education at the Seminary, the first author was asked<sup>8</sup> by the head master of the Seminary to conduct an ethnographic study at the Enrichment Center that the Seminary was co-founding with the Foundation. She participated in the Center's activities three mornings a week for almost two years (2008-2010), returning later on for supplementary data. As a participant, she observed the many visiting teachers, wrote field notes, took numerous pictures, and filmed video clips as well as more than ten videos of full sessions, each approximately thirty minutes long, which were later transcribed. In the field, she conducted numerous informal conversations with the teachers and thirteen in-depth interviews, mostly one hour long, with the founders - Shira from the Seminary and Metta from the Foundation, with all staff members (educational director and six instructors), and with some of the visiting teachers who volunteered to be interviewed, namely, Ora, Esti, Shavi, and Tami, who were experienced female kindergarten teachers in their late thirties. All Haredi participants were graduates of the Haredi girls' education system. The interviews were conducted in locations that were convenient for the teachers: their kindergarten, the Enrichment Center, or a park near their homes. Striving to construct meanings within the broader cultural contexts, research findings were discussed with other members of the community including leading Haredi rabbis.

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<sup>8</sup> The Foundation had requested an ethnographic study to be conducted in the Center, and although the Seminary was granted the liberty to suggest possible candidates from within the community, the final decision was in the hands of the Foundation that periodically supervised the study.

Cognizant of the significance of the religious texts (Bible, Talmud, and related rabbinical literature) and their relevance for guiding daily life in the community, these religious sources were consulted for underpinning Haredi ontology and epistemology. Furthermore, recognizing the multiplicity of cultural frames of references by means of which social orders are structured (Atkinson and Delamont 2005), other data collected in the field and in the community included correspondence between founders, communication papers, thank-you letters, the guest book, and relevant articles or commercials published in the daily Haredi newspaper, *Yated Neeman*, which enjoys a broad readership in the Haredi community.

As for the positionality of first author as a Haredi woman, an insider of the community under study, on the whole researching one's own community is currently recognized theoretically and practically as justified (Choi 2006). It has gained merit as promoting collaboration with participants (Johnson-Bailey 1999), and as enhancing the researcher's ability to understand culture-bound phrases and silent understandings (Choi 2006). However, in order to minimize possible bias in data collecting and in its interpretation (Baker 2006) it was vital to establish a point of view which would be sufficiently detached yet sufficiently involved for conducting the study (Gothóni 2015). It required awareness of differences between researcher and participants in educational background and in exposure to the Western modern world, constantly engaging in self-reflection, and seeking an external critical eye (Creswell and Miller 2000) of other qualitative researchers—her colleagues in an ongoing qualitative forum—to point to possible bias in the different stages of research, to critically assess whether the arguments and conclusions presented were convincingly derived from the data, to provide etic analytical concepts to contrast or illuminate cultural differences (Lie 2013), and to enhance the translation of the findings from the emic, experience-near perspective to the etic, experience-distant perspective, required in research (Gothóni 2015).

These procedures adhered to the inductive analysis of data that continued throughout the various stages of the research. The thematic analysis involved a recursive process of emergent meaning and sharpening of understanding until finally conceptual structures of meaning were assembled (LeCompte 2000).

Critically reflecting on the research process, we wish to discuss some subtle factors that may have influenced this work: The awareness of the possible audience both outside and inside the Haredi community, the concerns to accurately present one's own complex reality, and the apprehensions about "treading on thin ice," of causing harm to one's own community, of portraying it in a negative way—particularly given the present climate in Israel in which the Haredi community senses itself "under fire" by the anti-Haredi media. Rather than attempt to eliminate this subjectivity of an insider researcher, the study sought to utilize this potentially useful positioning. It aimed to highlight the multifaceted challenges of nurturing one's religious way of life while partially adopting contemporary Western perceptions and to focus on Haredi ontology and epistemology as guiding these processes.

### **"The world is moving forward"**

As noted above, the Haredi worldview leans on divine originated religious scripture, while the contemporary Western worldview is based on the secular orientation of the Enlightenment. However, contrary to the anticipated sense of contestation between the competing worldviews presented at the Center, the coexistence of both worldviews seemed to be commonly accepted by the various participants there: founders, staff members, and visiting teachers. The representatives of the Foundation shared a common language with the Haredi professionals, who appeared comfortable with the prevalent discourse concerning Western developmental theories. In her interview, Metta, the Foundation's representative, said:

*We were reluctant at first to work with this religious group... so foreign to us. We didn't think we could understand them, we didn't think they would understand us; we didn't think it would work. But when we met them, our attitude changed... we saw that they were professional... they spoke English... they spoke our language... they shared similar educational goals... we felt we could work together (interview 25.11.11).*

A similar attitude of acceptance was exhibited by the staff of the Enrichment Center and many visiting teachers. Hedva, the educational director, invited scientific instructors from leading companies in Israel to present innovative scientific activities to the children. She encouraged experimental learning and demonstrated to the young instructors how to enhance scientific inquiry: sitting informally on the floor with the children, posing questions to stimulate their curiosity, devising experiments to test their hypotheses, and documenting every step of the experiment in a series of drawings. In one of our informal conversations, she said, "*I always tell my husband you can't go backward..., the world is moving forward*" (field notes 10.12.09).

Most visiting teachers also seemed to perceive Western educational concepts as familiar and routinely practiced. As noted above, as graduates of the Haredi education system, they were acquainted with contemporary Western theories in psychology and education both throughout their schooling and in their professional practice (see Lupu 2003). The teachers described the implementation of contemporary Western teaching methods and experiential learning in their kindergartens: Tami the kindergarten teacher described how she taught the letter B by blowing bubbles with the children, and Ora elaborated on the experience of preparing grape juice with the children. Esti, an experienced kindergarten teacher, explained that adopting Western perceptions does not contradict adherence to religious values. However, she also described the conditions required for such coexistence. In her interview, she said:

*The world is moving forward ... you can't remain behind. Today there are Haredi books... even science, a Haredi encyclopedia... we have Haredi music... Haredi performances on the stage... we use it for the good in a supervised way, we don't... compromise on religion (interview 6.8.08).*

Esti described a twofold attitude toward the changing world, both accepting but also setting limits; on the one hand, she referred to "moving forward" with the world, adopting Western notions in science and arts; on the other, describing a Haredi version of these, noting a Haredi encyclopedia, Haredi music, and Haredi stage performances<sup>9</sup>, suggesting that the adopted Western notions regarding science and art were amended in order to produce a version in which religion would not be compromised.

Esti proffered two explanations for why religion was not compromised by the notion of "moving forward with the world": first, because Western ideas and practices are "used for the good", and second, because "moving forward with the world" is accomplished in a "supervised way". These two concepts—"using it for the good" (*shimush letova*) and a "supervised way" (*betzura mevukeret*)—seem to be key concepts by means of which this twofold attitude is accomplished, and the sense of conflict minimized.

"Using it for the good" seems to refer to Haredi ontology in which the world is perceived as created and continuously supervised by God. According to Haredi religious tradition new innovations in God's world are not perceived as opposing religious principles, but rather as a challenge, since the religious way of life has to find ways to harness them and "use them for the good". For Esti, using new, Western innovations "for the

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<sup>9</sup> The teacher is referring here to the many Haredi publications and forms of art, which are prevalent in the Haredi community, including Haredi children's books (see Yaffe 2001) Haredi encyclopedia (e.g. "encyclopedia levet Israel" by Rav Halpern's), Haredi movies and performances on stage usually by women and for women, and Haredi musical albums.



good", in accordance with religious principles, can ensure that the religious way of life and Haredi values are not compromised in the process.

The second key concept described by Esti is the "supervised way" by means of which Western content is adopted. This "supervised way" is necessary for amending the adopted content to conform to the Haredi worldview, thus creating a "Thirdspace" - a new Haredi version of these Western ideas and practices that does not pose a threat to religious values and can therefore be accepted by the Haredi teachers without apparent conflict.

At the Enrichment Center, two main strategies seemed to be involved in the construction of Thirdspace in which both the Haredi worldview and Western ideas and practices could coexist without apparent conflict: the removal of unsuitable elements opposing religious values that may have been interwoven into Western theories, and the repackaging of the amended content in Haredi wrappings.

### **Removal of unsuitable elements: "Eating the fruit and disposing of its peel"**

The removal of interwoven elements that oppose religious belief is a strategy that can be traced back to Talmudic days where it was figuratively referred to as follows: "When he found a pomegranate, he ate its fruit and disposed of its peel" (Babylonian Talmud, Chagiga 15,b). This Talmudic statement refers to a strategy that enables an individual to differentiate among the various components within a body of knowledge and select (or "consume") only those elements he considers to be nourishing for him. Such a process was commonly implemented in the past and is still used today in many aspects of daily life in the Haredi community (see Hakak 2011). It is also commonly used in educational settings where prior to their use, Western theories are "cleansed" of unsuitable elements that are conceived as contradicting religious values.

At the Enrichment Center, this practice of screening Western notions and removing culturally non-suitable components took place

mainly during the planning stage, when the Haredi planners of the Center screened the different programs adopted from non-religiously oriented enrichment centers around the country. For example, when designing the activities in the science room, the scientific experimental method was espoused but presented not as replacing the religious sources of knowledge, but rather as a tool to enhance cognitive development. Even more obvious were the amendments made in reference to the theory of evolution. The Haredi planners and designers "cleansed" any reference to a spontaneously evolving world that opposes the Haredi religious belief in the Biblical description of the Creation by God. This "cleansing" included the removal of the names and pictures of prehistoric creatures or references to millions of years of evolution.

During the day-to-day operation of the Enrichment Center, only the amended product, in which any connotation of evolution was replaced by the religious concept of creation, was evident: the program in the computer room where children were watching and listening to sounds and voices in nature was called "Voices and Sounds in the Creation"; in the science room, scientific advances were introduced as "all kinds of interesting things that God has created in the world" (field notes 22.2.09). In addition, the name of the science room which constituted a subject of discussion for some of the teachers was changed so as to emphasize God as the Creator of the universe. Although most teachers saw no problem with "Science" as the name of the room, Hedva, the educational director of the Enrichment Center who wanted all the teachers to feel at home, later changed the name of the room to "The Creator's Wonders". When she saw that the staff was surprised at the change of name, she explained, "In the ... schools, science studies **are** called "the wonders of the Creator" (field notes 27.11.08).

Emphasizing God as the Creator of the universe in the names of the programs and the room were just traces of the "cleansing" process in which Western scientific concepts were amended in order to conform to the community's religious beliefs. Thus, while accepting the Western content

and adopting scientific concepts and explorative methods of inquiry, the connotation of evolution, which is a major theme in science, was removed and replaced by a central religious belief, namely, Creation.

This practice of screening a contemporary Western concept and removing culturally non-suitable components was routinely executed in other domains as well. For example, during the examination of modern art, certain elements such as aesthetics were readily accepted while the cultural content, in which themes opposing religious values were openly exhibited, was removed.

As noted above, this strategy of removing unsuitable elements was implemented mainly in the planning stage, and only its traces were evident during the day-to-day operation of the Enrichment Center. More evident during the operation stage were the Haredi "wrappings" in which the amended Western ideas and practices were presented in the various activities. These "wrappings" served to further reduce a possible sense of conflict, accentuating instead the suitability of the adopted content to the Haredi way of life. This implicit notion was also explicitly articulated by some teachers. When I asked Shavi what she liked about the Center, she said, "This is a clean and kosher place, a 100 percent ours" (interview, 6.8.08). Using the term "kosher" which refers to food prepared according to Jewish law, Shavi seems to say that the programs/ activities in the Center were similarly prepared according to Haredi values and can be safely "consumed". Shavi seems to specifically refer to the two strategies employed in the Center in amending the programs to suit Haredi values: "clean" may refer to the cleansing of adopted content from unsuitable elements; "ours" may refer to the Haredi "wrappings" in which the "cleansed" content was repackaged when presented to the children. Some of these "wrappings" were preplanned and their presence was prominent; others were employed only occasionally, depending on the choice of a particular instructor in a particular situation.

### **Three layers of Haredi "wrappings"**

At the Enrichment Center, these "implicit pedagogical processes" (Vicini 2013,382) seemed to be at work through three layers of familiar "wrappings" for the activities in which the children engaged: the first layer was reflected in the external surroundings, the second was expressed in practicing the children's religious way of life, and the third related to the children's cultural roots of the past that were brought into the Enrichment Center and served as a background for some of the activities.

***Familiarity of the external environment***

The first layer of familiarity consisted of the external surroundings, which, constituting as they did the milieu of an educational setting, were not considered trivial. According to Haredi epistemology, the transmission of knowledge is considered to be an educational act that is multifaceted and includes both the physical aspects of the milieu (Yaffe 2007) and the personality of the "messenger", both of which are perceived as influencing the "message". Although the architecture, design and decoration of the Center did not indicate the Haredi presence in any obvious way, the Haredi presence was prominent in the fact that all staff members at the Enrichment Center were Haredi: Hedva, the educational director, was a former teacher at the Seminary, and the instructors were all Seminary graduates who had been recruited by Shira, the main planner and designer of the Enrichment Center. Not only were the teaching staff of the Enrichment Center Haredi and personally acquainted with the teachers' college—almost all of the planning and design stages were also executed by professional Haredi teachers.

*Shira, the educational coordinator of the early childhood program in the Seminary, described to me how she and Tamar, the pedagogical expert, had contacted existing non-religiously oriented enrichment centers in Israel and spent many days traveling across the country, learning about the operation of these centers, adopting many ideas and practices, and sharing these ideas with professionals within the*

*community who were asked to adapt the programs in accordance with Haredi values* (field notes 21.5.08).

Indeed, most programs at the Enrichment Center were designed by experts from the school or the community: the computer room was designed by the educational director of graphics studies and the science room by the biology teacher. Only the program in the gymboree room, for which a Haredi professional could not be found, was designed by a professional from outside the community.

Thus, through the first layer of "wrappings", the children were surrounded by familiar Haredi staff members who dressed like the adults in their lives, engaged in the cultural discourse familiar to them, and provided them with the second layer of familiarity, namely, the milieu in which the children's religious way of life could be practiced when necessary. In this regard, the "implicit pedagogical" processes were "embodied by educators themselves" (Vicini 2013,82).

#### ***Familiarity of the children's religious way of life***

The second layer of familiarity consisted of the children's religious life experiences, which were practiced naturally at the Enrichment Center. Time was allotted in the daily schedule for ritual hand-washing and for reciting the blessing after the food consumed by the children during snack time. Children's religious ways of life, such as having many siblings, were used as examples in the science room when the children, who were experimenting with the use of double mirrors, were asked to make "*enough (pieces of pizza) for their whole family*" (field notes 1.12.08). They baked cookies that resembled the traditional festival foods; the dough for the cookies was prepared according to Jewish law—the way to which the children were accustomed.

*In the kitchenette, which was equipped with state-of-the-art appliances, the six girls who were sitting around the table were preparing dough for cookies according to a written and illustrated recipe posted on the wall. Each girl was responsible for one step of*

*the process that was written on an extra strip of paper she received. As Riki the instructor went through the sequence of steps for preparing the dough, she naturally discussed with the children the sifting of the flour with a special sieve in order to eliminate bugs. She asked the children, "And what do we do now? ... [pointing to the illustrated recipe posted on the wall] ... That's right. Flour..., can I pour [the flour] straight into the bowl? What do I need to do to it first? ... I sift it. This pink dish is called a sieve and I sift the flour so all the good flour goes down and if there is any dirt or bugs ..., it remains in the sieve, on top" (video 3.1.10).*

Sifting flour is a ritual to which the children are accustomed; it is based on the Jewish dietary laws forbidding the consumption of insects. This ritual was practiced at the Enrichment Center when flour was required for baking; however, if a salad or jelly was to be prepared, no sifting was necessary. This and other religious rituals were practiced only when they were necessary as part of an activity but not for the educational purpose of teaching Jewish laws. They were not a part of the program, nor did they constitute the focus or educational aim of the activity. However, these implicit pedagogical processes had a significant role in the socialization of the children into the religious ways of their community. In the science room, the educational aim was experimenting with visual distortion, while in the kitchenette the focus of the activity was developing literacy and organizational skills. Nevertheless, these practices, which served as the second layer of "wrappings", enhanced the familiarity of the Enrichment Center and enabled the children to experience it as their own.

#### ***Familiarity of cultural roots***

The third layer of familiarity consisted of cultural stories of the past with which the children were familiar. The Haredi worldview attributes importance to reliving underpinning cultural events of the past (Yaffe 2007). In kindergarten, past events are relived both through the stories of the weekly Bible portion and through the stories of the Jewish holidays,

which are recounted according to the Jewish calendar. Some of the familiar stories of the holidays were brought into the Enrichment Center and frequently served as the script for the plays the children performed on stage in the drama room. This practice of familiarity was not preplanned, nor was it a part of the original design of the drama room program. The original program included listening to a recorded unfamiliar story and then acting that story on stage. However, in order to save the time required for listening to a new story, Hedva, the educational director, decided to replace the new, unfamiliar story with the familiar stories of the holidays. Thus, as the children learned to assume imaginary roles, holiday stories served as background scripts. Here again an implicit pedagogy seems to be at work, as religious heroes of the past serve as exemplary models for the children to imitate; Around Hanukkah, the holiday commemorating the Maccabean revolt against the Seleucid Empire, the children play-acted the Maccabees fighting the pagan Greeks for the right to observe their religious traditions. After Passover, the children staged scenes from the story of Rabbi Akiva, the shepherd who became a famous scholar, describing the devotion of his wife Rachel to Torah study. Around Purim, the holiday that commemorates the deliverance from annihilation in the ancient Persian Empire, the children acted various scenes of the ancient story, chosen randomly by the instructors:

*Riki the instructor sat on the edge of the low stage that took up almost half of the small drama room. Six children were sitting on the floor near her. The drama room resembled a mini theater, equipped with a stage, dressing rooms, audio center, colorful lights, and beautiful backdrops. Riki explained the function of the room and of its different features, emphasizing the names of some concepts that were new to the children: drama, mini theater, stage, dressing rooms, audience, and backdrops. By means of questions and answers, she introduced the children to the art of performance and demonstrated to them how to assume someone else's role. She told the children, "In the play, we want*

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*to be someone else... to dress like him... to talk like him... to walk like him." After practicing acting like a policeman, Riki suggested a topic for a play to be performed by the children. She asked them, "What holiday is coming up? ... That's right, Purim... What play can we put on stage for Purim? ... Who was the king? ... Who were his guards?" The children preferred to dress up as soldiers and play at war, and Riki went along with them. She let them play for a while and then tried to persuade them to dress up as the characters in the Scroll of Esther. She said, "You know? The king's guards were actually soldiers. Now who wants to be the king? ... Who wants to be Haman? ... Who wants to be Mordechai? ... You know, I think Mordechai also had a gun" (video 10.2.10).*

In this play, as in the other plays performed at the Enrichment Center, only fragments of the story were staged and no moral lessons were discussed. This was very different from the way the children learned about these traditional stories in kindergarten, where the entire story was taught and its moral lessons were highlighted. Thus, while in kindergarten, an explicit pedagogy aiming to socialize the children into the ways of their religious community is at work, at the Enrichment Center, parallel implicit pedagogical processes were evident. These were not necessarily implemented consciously by the staff, but nevertheless were very powerful in the socialization of the children into both, the religious ways of their community, in general, and the specific selective ways of partially adapting to the Western world, in particular. Although the children were probably unaware of the cultural strategies employed by the staff, through their experiencing Western ideas and practices in a religious milieu, a socialization process was at work. The children learned both the possibility of coexistence of Western perceptions and religion, and the culturally appropriate ways of doing so without posing a threat to religion: in a Haredi environment, with Haredi staff, while practicing their religious way of life, and in the context of the cultural roots of their past.



### **Conclusion**

This paper describes the Enrichment Center in which Western educational ideas and practices and the Haredi way of life coexisted without an apparent sense of conflict. On the one hand it describes the teachers' self-perception as "moving forward with the world", while on the other, it focuses on the cultural strategies employed in order to ensure that religious principles would not be compromised in the process. These strategies of "Haredization" included processes of explicit pedagogy as elements which were perceived as negating Haredi principles were removed from the adopted Western content, as well as processes of implicit pedagogy through three layers of "wrappings" in which the adopted content was presented. These strategies of "Haredization" resulted in new local versions of Western perceptions in which, for example, modern science could coexist with the religious belief in God's creation of the world.

These active processes of adopting and amending contemporary Western ideas and practices are not unique to this specific site. As described earlier in this paper, they are anchored in a Haredi worldview, and implemented in the Haredi girls' education system to this day. As such they do not seem to entail tendencies of rejection, as suggested by Bilu (2003), or a notion of being passively influenced by a seeping process, as described by Yaffe (2007) or Mantzura (2010). Rather, they seem to express the more active process that characterizes local communities or religious institutions in their effort to simultaneously nurture traditional values and adapt in their own way to the contemporary Western world. This stance is further emphasized both by the teachers' self-perception as "moving forward with the world" and by the Talmudic analogy between these processes and the tedious work required for separating the nourishing kernels of a pomegranate from its many layers of outer membranes. The analogy suggests that Western ideas and practices that were adopted were perceived to be valuable and worthy of the great amount of effort expended

on their adoption, while underscoring the fact that greater importance was attributed to the Haredi worldview. The latter was explicitly declared by the teachers' statement that religion is not compromised in the process.

The concept of Thirdspace may be useful for examining the twofold attitude exhibited by the teachers embracing two conflicting notions at the same time. The possibility inherent in Thirdspace for combining a "multiplicity of perspectives" (Soja 1996,5) obviates the need to choose between competing notions. By considering different forms of interconnections other than the previous binary options of assimilation versus rejection, the teachers were not forced to renounce one way of life for another, since adopting elements associated with one was not seen as at the expense of forfeiting the other. Further research is needed for exploring whether and in what ways the processes discerned here differ from similar processes in other cultural educational contexts. Although the notion of Thirdspace, in which features of Western perceptions are negotiated with a religious worldview, seems to be a common structural feature in other settings grappling with similar challenges, the anthropological emphasis on local distinctiveness would suggest that their extent and form will vary from one context to another. In contrast to explicit and implicit statements of the Haredi teachers that religion is not compromised in the process of adopting Western theories in education, in other religious settings compromise and modernization of religion seem to be accepted as an inevitable part of such adaptation processes. Thus, Hellemans (2004) describes the modernization of the Catholic church, Wagner (1990) refers specifically to the compromises that Christian schools must make as they negotiate Western educational perceptions, and Asad (1986) argues that Islamic tradition is not a fixed unchangeable social system, but rather a discursive relationship of thinking subjects with foundational religious texts, allowing diversity, change and the mixing of tradition and modernity (Anjum 2007).

The concept of Thirdspace may be particularly helpful for examining the ways in which religious groups act to reduce conflicts when negotiating Western notions. By referring to processes of "drawing selectively... from the ... opposing categories to open new alternatives" (Soja 1996:5), Thirdspace may illuminate the actual active selective processes involved in combining a "multiplicity of perspectives" (ibid.). The notion of "drawing selectively" has shed light on the selective processes of adoption taking place at the Enrichment Center, especially those involved in the removal of elements which did not conform to Haredi values. Although Thirdspace provided the general rudimentary framework, a specific modality of "drawing selectively" seemed to be at work at the Center: first, a reverse process was evident, focused on selective removal rather than selective adopting. Second, the process of selective removal seemed to be based on a cultural tradition of doing the same rather than on an individual choice as described by Soja, and as such the process seemed to be more systematic. Third, while Soja's model emphasizes no hierarchy between the "multiplicity of perspectives" combined in Thirdspace, for the teachers in the Center, a clear hierarchy was evident between Haredi religious principles and the adopted Western perceptions. This was evident in the amendment of the latter to suit the principles of the former as well as in the teachers' statement that religion not be compromised in the process of adoption.

How can the Haredi teachers' perception of "no compromise" on religion be understood, especially in light of the obvious changes in the traditional ways of life which are simultaneously accepted? Did the teachers perceive Haredi religious tradition as remaining unchanged in a fixed location in the past as the statement of "no compromise" appears to imply or did they perceive it as changing and developing over time as the obvious changes in the traditional ways of life (e.g. historical changes in girls' education) impart? For this purpose, it may be useful to reexamine the Talmudic analogy of separating the nourishing kernels of a

pomegranate from their outer membranes which is commonly referred to in the Haredi education system. The "pomegranate analogy" may impart a perception of worldview as composed of distinct elements, some of which are regarded as beneficial and essential, analogous to the nourishing kernels of a pomegranate, while others are regarded as an external membrane which can be removed without affecting the essence. Furthermore, notwithstanding the tedious work required in the separation of the kernels from their outer membranes which was alluded to above, the "pomegranate analogy" may additionally impart that discerning between these distinct elements is clear, explicit and unequivocal. We want to cautiously<sup>10</sup> suggest that this analogy, which explains how unsuitable elements are discerned and removed from adopted Western notions prior to their acceptance by Haredi teachers, can be borrowed here to suggest that Haredi religious tradition is also perceived as composed of distinct elements. Some of these elements are perceived as divinely originated core religious principles which remain unchanged and fixed in the past, while others are perceived as external traditional ways of life that may undergo change which is not considered to be a compromise on religion. The Haredi teachers' confidence that religion is not compromised in the process of adopting Western educational notions described in this paper may additionally imply that they perceived the guidelines by which these different elements are to be distinguished as clear and explicit.

It may be surprising that despite the effort invested in not compromising on religion, the teachers perceived themselves as moving forward with the world, as adapting to the modern world as long as their religious principles are observed and while simultaneously nurturing religious tradition. The teachers' description of themselves as being modern in their own way, may serve to illustrate how modernity is

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<sup>10</sup> We allude to the discerning processes with caution, aware of the complexity and extreme sensitivity in which these are perceived in the Haredi community.

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differently understood and manifested in diverse circumstances around the world, where modern ideas and practices are confronted with local long-standing cultural traditions, as currently encapsulated in the term "multiple modernities".

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## Chapter 3

### **'Educate the Child According to His Own Way' Negotiating a Jewish Ultra-Orthodox Version of Independent Self-Construal**

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Jewish ultra-Orthodox version of independent self-construal

### **Abstract**

The article employs the prism of Thirdspace to address the ways in which male Haredi (Jewish ultra-Orthodox) kindergarten teachers negotiated contemporary psychological concepts as these emerged in a Haredi Enrichment Center for kindergarten children in Israel. An ethnographic study was conducted for the duration of two years, including observations with 90 kindergarten teachers. The findings reveal a local notion of self-construal that included several features of the contemporary Western view of self-construal along with the Haredi religious perceptions. Together, these encouraged the development of an autonomous individual capable of making choices and independently conducting his life as an adult. Children were perceived as distinct individuals with unique personal attributes whose expression would engender personal success, increase self-esteem, and encourage self-expression—all this in a religious framework that sought to enhance the joy engendered by experiencing the religious way of life. The paper additionally discusses the negotiation strategies involved in this process.

*Key words:* Haredi, male kindergarten teachers, Thirdspace, Hybridity independent/interdependent self-construal.

### **Introduction**

This article addresses the negotiations of contemporary notions in a traditional religious setting, focusing on the ways in which male Haredi (Jewish ultra-orthodox) kindergarten teachers negotiated the contemporary psychological notion of self-construal in a non-formal Haredi educational setting in Israel. The negotiations of distinct different notions are common in diverse communities worldwide, both those that are ubiquitous throughout the Western world and are accustomed to its culture, and those in traditional distant communities foreign to Western culture (Hellemans, 2004; Knauff, 2002, 2019; Wagner, 1990). The Haredi community in Israel is a religious community that is accustomed to Western culture, selectively

adopting modernity-based notions, while seeking to nurture its religious tradition (Haller et al., 2018).

Studies on the Haredi community delineated a twofold attitude toward contemporary Western notions, partially accepting practical ideas and practices while rejecting their ideological underpinnings (Hakak, 2011; Ivry, 2010; Neriya-Ben Shahar & Lev-on, 2011; Spiegel, 2011). However, less research attention was given to the actual processes through which such partial adoption is accomplished. The present study aims to address this gap in scholarly knowledge by exploring the strategies employed by male Haredi kindergarten teachers in their negotiations of seemingly conflicting notions; their theocentric traditional religion principles on the one hand, and individual centered psychological concepts on the other. The teachers' negotiations are analyzed based on the theoretical prisms of Hybridity (Bhabha, 1994, 2015) and Thirdspace (Soja, 1996, 2009) that focus on negotiating intercultural conflicts<sup>11</sup>.

### **Hybridity and Thirdspace**

Bhabha (1994, 2015) described the complexity of processes that take place in intercultural junctions, where 'the exchange of values, meaning and priority [...] may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2). This often results in 'displacement disorientation, dislocation (Bhabha, 1994, p. 149) and a 'split of the ego' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 164). However, the struggles taking place in these 'liminal<sup>12</sup> spaces' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 5), in between cultures and identities, are both painful and productive (cf. Ingram & Abrahams, 2015), as they force the creative inventions of cultural hybrids. These involve re-articulation of concepts 'that are neither the One [...] nor the Other [...] but something else besides, [...] contest[ing] the terms and territories of both'

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<sup>11</sup>Notwithstanding the current use of Hybridity and Thirdspace interchangeably, in this article, the former is ascribed to Bhabha (1994) while the latter is ascribed to Soja (1996), as in their original quoted works.

<sup>12</sup>Limen (meaning *threshold* in Latin), is used to in denote 'transition between' (Turner, 1974).

(Bhabha, 1994, p. 41). For Bhabha, cultural hybrids may be 'contingent to modernity, discontinuous or in contention with it, [but in any case these hybrids are] resistant to its oppressive assimilationist technologies'

(Bhabha, 1994, p. 9).

Rather than focusing on the confrontational processes involved in negotiating conflicting concepts, the notion of Thirdspace (Soja, 1996, 2009) accentuates a more deliberate aspect of negotiation. Thirdspace proposes a creative new way of thinking about seemingly conflicting concepts—not as dichotomous entities, but rather as entities that may coexist. It eliminates either/or options such as assimilation, imitation or rejection as the only option in intercultural encounters, and suggests instead deliberately interjecting a Thirdspace as a different frame of mind that can encompass a 'multiplicity of perspectives' (Soja 1996, p. 5). For Soja such a deliberate combination of seemingly opposing concepts is not a general, vague process, but rather a process of creative restructuring, which can be accomplished through 'draw[ing] selectively and strategically from the [...] opposing categories to open new alternatives' (Soja 1996, p. 5). Hybridity and Thirdspace find expression and continuity in the negotiations of the Haredi teachers with the seemingly conflicting contemporary psychological notion of independent self-construal.

### **Independent and interdependent self-construal**

Based on a model originally proposed by Markus and Kitayama (1991), self-construal refers to the extent to which the self is defined interdependently with others or independently of them (Cross, Hardin, & Gercek-Swing, 2011). The cultural environment in which the independent self-construal is prominent tends to perceive the individual as separate, distinct, and independent from others (Greenfield et al., 2003; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1996). Every person is considered unique and autonomous (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1996), i.e., defined by his/her individual, personal attributes, abilities, traits, desires, and motives (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), and individual's personal goals are given

priority over the goals of collectives (Triandis, 1996). Furthermore, the individualistic cultural environment promotes the development and expression of individual attributes as well as their use as referents for personal actions. Self-expression and personal choices are encouraged (Greenfield et al., 2003), and individual achievements are considered to be a source of happiness, pride, and high self-esteem since they reflect internal personal attributes (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Alternatively, a collectivistic environment emphasizes an interdependent self-construal wherein the self is perceived as being connected to others and as part of an encompassing social entity. Relationships with others, rather than personal attributes, constitute the defining features of the self, while others serve as referents for one's own behaviors. Self-esteem is derived from the ability to restrain one's self and to fulfill role obligations rather than from one's personal achievements (Greenfield et al., 2003; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1996).

Markus and Kitayama's original model was later replaced with the more dynamic 'cycle of mutual constitution' (Markus & Kitayama, 2010, p. 423) in which cultural and psychological processes were described as exerting a mutual influence. Other influences, such as immigration, were perceived as influencing self-construal (Huijbregts et al., 2008). Moreover, the distinction between the two types of self-construal, which was originally attributed to Western individualistic societies versus non-Western collectivistic societies (e.g., Singelis, 1994; Triandis, 1996), was later understood to represent different dimensions that may coexist within one individual as well as within one community (Greenfield, 2009; Kagitcibasi, 2005; Oyserman & Lee, 2008; Suizzo, 2007; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008).

In light of current understandings of self-construal, the present study does not seek to characterize the Haredi community as either individualistic or collectivistic; neither does it aim to present a holistic description of the Haredi perception of the self or to negate the existence of

Haredi collectivistic features. Rather, it explores the cultural strategies employed by Haredi teachers in negotiating the adoption of features of the Western individualistic self-construal as a particular interface for observing Thirdspace as a frame of mind for encompassing a 'multiplicity of perspectives'; religious traditional perceptions on the one hand, and contemporary psychological notions on the other. Before addressing the ethnographic material, a description of the Haredi community is called for.

### **The Haredi community in Israel**

The Haredi community in Israel is a religious group comprising approximately 12.5 percent of the country's population (Cahaner & Malach, 2019). Although it is a diverse, dynamic, and changing community consisting of several sub-groups (Caplan, 2003; Friedman, 1991; Mantzura, 2010), certain ideological and lifestyle-associated characteristics are common to all of its members, thereby distinguishing this community from the more Western-oriented Israeli Jewish society surrounding it. These characteristics include: (1) the belief in God and in the divine origin of the Torah (Bible). (2) the perception of Talmud study (the central text of religious law and Jewish principles) as being of cardinal importance (3) compliance with God's commandments as they are interpreted in the Talmud and in latter rabbinical literature (Caplan, 2003; Friedman, 1991), and (4) the perception of Jewish law as pertaining to all aspects of life (Mantzura, 2010).

The attitudes of the Haredi community today to current challenges of the secular Western culture have been explored in various domains, recounting ambivalent selective adoption of practical contemporary ideas and practices, while simultaneously rejecting the underpinning Western ideology (e.g., Caplan, 2003; Finkelman, 2002; Friedman, 1991, Hakak, 2011; Spiegel, 2011). Studies described such twofold processes in the adoption of new communication technologies (e.g., Neriya-Ben Shahar & Lev-On, 2011), in seeking complicated innovative medical technologies (e.g., Ivry, 2010), and in the partial acceptance of contemporary

psychological and educational ideas and practices (Caplan & Stadler, 2012; Hakak, 2011; Yaffe, 2009). Some studies described some cultural strategies involved in this process: Ivry (2010) described the involvement of rabbinical organizations in applying underpinning principles of Jewish law in order to resolve challenging situations engendered by the use of innovative medical fertility technology. Hakak (2011) described some of the screening practices employed in the process of adopting contemporary psychological ideas and practices (1) by choosing to adopt contemporary models that are in keeping with Haredi local values, and (2) by distinguishing between the 'core and the shell' ('wheat and chaff') within these models, accepting the core instrumental elements, i.e., 'wheat', that are compatible with the Haredi principals, and rejecting the 'chaff', namely, the elements that oppose Haredi values. Additionally, Hakak (2011) described a cultural strategy implemented in the process of adopting contemporary psychological ideas and practices noted in Haredi guidance books for parents and educators where the authors quote a religious source, which resonates with the adopted psychological ideas and practices.

### ***Haredi boys' education system***

The current study focuses on negotiation of the contemporary notion of self-construal by male kindergarten teachers in the Haredi boys' education system. When addressing attitudes towards the contemporary world within the education system, there is a measure of distinction between boys' and girls' schools. The curriculum in the girls' schools is recognized as resembling that of the general Israeli education system (Lupu, 2003; Spiegel, 2011) and affording its graduates accessibility to a wide variety of professional occupations, while the boys' education system is considered to be more traditional, focusing mainly on religious studies (Spiegel, 2011) and sheltering its pupils from the contemporary world.

The boys' education system comprises three levels: kindergarten to 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> grade, 'little' Yeshiva for ages 13–16, and 'big' Yeshiva for boys of 16 and up (Spiegel, 2011). Until age five, boys' kindergartens are run



mostly by female teachers, with a general curriculum similar to that of other kindergartens worldwide (Mantzura, 2010; Spiegel, 2011). A male kindergarten teacher enters the four-year-old boys' classroom for an hour a day, and becomes their sole educator and caregiver from age five onwards (usually with a female remedial education teacher on the staff).

While curriculum in the elementary years comprises both general and religious studies (e.g., bible, Talmud and rabbinical literature), it gradually shifts toward a full time Talmud study starting at ninth grade (For an overview of boys' education, see Spiegel, 2011). Alongside the biblical and Talmudic content studied, the boys' education system focuses on developing advanced cognitive skills such as in-depth comprehension (Spiegel, 2011), analytical logical processing, and critical discerning abilities. These are pivotal to understanding the underpinning religious principles that are interwoven in the Talmudic text (Cohen, 2005; Spiegel, 2011) and that the boys will require for independent Talmud study in the future (Dembo, Levin, & Siegler, 1997; Spiegel, 2011).

The specific mode of Talmud study is reputed to develop discerning abilities and sensitivity to subtleties (Dembo et al., 1997; Spiegel, 2011)—qualities that facilitate the analysis of new ideas in accordance with the aforementioned religious principles (Friedman, 1991). Thus, through Talmud study, the boys' education system furnishes its pupils with the knowledge on underpinning religious principles, and enhances the development of the skills necessary for applying these principles to daily life situations (Friedman, 1991). In addition, the boys' education system strives to develop inner motivation, satisfaction with and love of learning (Nisan & Shalif, 2005; Shalif, 1995) as well as self-discipline, which is essential for religious life and future independent Torah study (Hakak, 2005).

Studies often describe tendencies of isolation in boys' schools, whereby the pupils are separated from the Western world by the construction of high barriers between the sacred realm within and the

threats of the destructive, profane world outside (Spiegel, 2011). Spiegel (2011) interprets this phenomenon as resulting from the fear that exposure to the world outside may destabilize the religious way of life and threaten the school's educational messages—an interpretation that appears in other studies of the education system (e.g., Caplan, 2003; Mantzura, 2010). The perception of the community in general and the boys' schools in particular as constructing barriers in order to avoid exposure to the influence of their surroundings seems to emphasize a collectivistic attitude, whereby community leaders serve as gatekeepers in order to control and direct the actions and perceptions of its members and undermine independent decision making or autonomous individuality.

Views of the Haredi community as collectivistic were expressed in two studies focusing on self-construal in this community. Yaffe (2001) characterized the Haredi community as a collectivistic community in which the individual is not recognized as unique and significant in his/her own right, but rather is perceived as part of an encompassing social relationship, becoming meaningful only by dint of belonging to the historical collective. Rosenthal et al. (2009) shared similar views, focusing on the notion of emotional restraint in social settings and interpreting this to indicate that the community's needs to preserve social harmony take precedence over individual needs for self-expression.

As noted earlier, the aims of the present study were not to characterize the Haredi community as either individualistic or collectivistic, but rather to explore the strategies in the particular intercultural junction. Focusing on the ways in which visiting male kindergarten teachers related to their pupils, we were interested, first, in notions expressed by the former concerning their perceptions of self-construal; second, we strove to understand the cultural meaning of such perceptions; third, in light of the underpinning Haredi principles, we sought to observe the cultural strategies involved in negotiating this particular contemporary concept.

### **The study**

The ethnographic study described in this paper was part of a larger research project conducted by the first author at an Enrichment Center for preschool Haredi children located in a large city in Israel with a large Haredi population. The Enrichment Center offered the children extracurricular activities that promoted cognitive development, emotional well-being, sensorimotor proficiency, and the arts, with the emphasis on multi-sensory enrichment, experiential learning, free choice and joy (*Yated Neeman*, daily Haredi newspaper 28.3.2008). The Center was open to visits for kindergarten classes from all over the city pending preregistration and an entrance fee.

The first author participated in the Enrichment Center's activities three mornings a week for almost two years (2008–2010), observing and informally conversing with close to 90 visiting male kindergarten teachers. These were recorded as field notes in numerous photographs and video clips as well as more than ten videos of full sessions, each approximately 30 minutes long; 15 in-depth interviews with participating male kindergarten teachers were conducted, each approximately one hour long. For the saturation of data, documents were collected in the following two years (2011–2012), both in the field and in the community including ancient religious sources.

All participants were married and had children. Most of them were native Israeli and Haredi from birth; only Rav Perl (all names are pseudonyms) was born outside the country (Russia) and became religious at age 13. Most of the teachers had grown up in the city; only Rav Wagner was raised in a farming community. The teachers' ages varied: most of them (Rav Goldberg, Rav Liener, Rav Levi, Rav Malca, Rav Perl, Rav Sason, Rav Silver, Rav Wagner, and Rav Winer) were in their 30s and had been teaching for 7–11 years, Rav Frank, Rav Kaplan, and Rav Steiner were older (late 40s–late 50s) and had been teaching for close to 20 years, and Rav Cohen was in his late 60s and had served as a teacher and as a

school supervisor for close to 30 years. The teachers differed slightly in their academic training. They all had teaching certificates from the Ministry of Education as well as some background in special education. Only Rav Sason held a Master's degree in counseling with a specialization in special education and child development. The title Rav which precedes the teachers' name, an abbreviation of the title Rabbi, is a title of respect, but does not necessarily designate rabbinical ordination.

Building a rapport with the teachers was facilitated by their acquaintance with the researcher as a member of the community, and also by her natural acceptance on the part of the staff. Out of deference to the Haredi cultural codes of gender separation, non-formal conversations with the teachers were respectfully distant, as is customary in the Haredi community, and most interviews were conducted by phone.

Striving to construct meanings within the broader cultural contexts, the procedure of 'member check' (Creswell, 2018; Levitt et al., 2018) was employed, i.e., research findings were discussed with other members of the community including leading Haredi rabbis. These discussions often raised new questions, pointing to religious sources some of which contrasted with the first authors' initial conclusions, others supporting them, gradually leading to a refining and crystalizing of initial understandings. Cognizant of the significance of the ancient religious texts (Bible, Talmud and related rabbinical literature) and their relevance for guiding everyday life in the community, references were sought to those religious sources in contemporary Haredi guidance books for educators and parents in which contemporary psychological ideas and terminology were integrated. The published lessons of Rav Hoffman (a respected scholar and consultant in the community) were found to be particularly helpful; since he systematically traces a religious source for every contemporary psychological term that he uses (Stein, 2016). Furthermore, recognizing the multiplicity of cultural frames of reference by means of which social orders are structured (Atkinson & Delamont, 2005) other important data

were collected in the field and in the community. These included correspondence between founders, communication papers, thank-you letters, the guest book, and relevant articles or commercials published in the daily Haredi newspaper, *Yated Neeman*, which enjoys a broad readership in the Haredi community.

The positionality of first author, a Haredi woman, as an insider of the community under study, added intricacy to the concerns regarding the ethnographer's authority to represent other people's life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Although researching one's own community is currently recognized theoretically and practically as justified (Choi, 2006), and as promoting collaboration with participants based on shared bonds of solidarity (Johnson-Bailey, 1999), the insider position has its pitfalls and requires constant self-reflection. In so far as researching foreign groups requires familiarization with the strange setting, researching one's own community requires defamiliarization and caution from assuming similarities where these do not exist or from taken for granted understanding (Choi, 2006).

Realizing that the insider position of first author as a Haredi woman was an asset and a hindrance, the following validating procedures were employed: (1) peer debriefing (Creswell, 2018), adding an external critical eye, (2) the above described procedure of 'member check', returning research findings to participants and other members of the community for further discussion and clarification, and (3) constant self-reflection (Creswell, 2018). These procedures adhered to the inductive analysis of data that continued throughout the various stages of the research. The analysis involved ongoing dialogues with the participants, constant reflective examinations of self, and a recursive process of emergent meaning and sharpening of understanding. Finally, through thematic analysis, conceptual structures of meaning were assembled (LeCompte, 2000).

### **Findings**

The findings revealed a local version of self-construal that included several features of the contemporary Western view of self-construal along with the Haredi religious perceptions. This section presents first notions expressed by the teachers of their perceptions of self-construal, then the cultural meaning of such perceptions is analyzed, and finally the cultural strategies involved in negotiation are discussed.

#### **'Educate the child according to his way' (Book of Proverbs, 22:6)**

The Haredi teachers' perceptions of the self seemed to include many features of the Western self-construal. However, the adoption of these Western features appeared to be selective and instrumental, pointing to a twofold attitude of acceptance on the one hand, while channeling the adoption for the service of the religious way of life, on the other hand.

#### ***'It is extremely important... to get to know the children'- teachers perception of each child as a unique individual***

Getting to know the children and learning about each child's distinct capabilities seemed to be significant for many of the teachers visiting the Enrichment Center, reflecting teachers' perception of each child as a discrete individual with unique attributes and talents. This was expressed in their willingness to invest time and effort in order to learn about their pupils' distinct attributes, particularly those of the withdrawn children who did not occupy center stage in kindergarten.

There were teachers who used their visit to the Center, where the children engaged in extracurricular activities, as an opportunity to observe them 'in a different way' (Rav Levi, 3.8.08), thereby enabling the teachers to discover new talents that were not apparent in the routine kindergarten setting. In his interview, Rav Winer said, '*In the Center, it was as if we pressed on a button that we hadn't previously pressed. We discovered abilities that ... [the child] didn't [seem to] have*' (15.6.09). Thus, instead of relaxing during their visit to the Center or taking the time to learn about its programs, many of the visiting teachers opted to take advantage of this

unique opportunity, when they were exempt from carrying out their routine duties, to observe their pupils and learn about their individual attributes.

At the Center, it was very common to see teachers observing children and writing down notes and comments. Rav Goldberg described how he prepared for the observation by coming to the Center with a list of pupils he wished to observe (7.12.09). Rav Sason described how he systematically observed many children and wrote 'a whole *megila* [lengthy scroll]' about each child (8.12.09). Rav Levi felt that it was necessary to make the effort and observe the children several times a year. In his interview, he said: '*For me it wasn't a day off, but a working day... It is extremely important... to get to know the children ... you have to come [to the Center to observe them] four times [a year]*' (3.8.08). Devoting time and effort to observe each child, the teachers wanted to learn about their pupils' individual attributes so that these unique abilities could be further developed and expressed.

***'If he can play the drums, it will increase his self-esteem' - teachers' perception of individual attributes as a source of self-esteem.***

While observing the children engaging in extracurricular activities, many teachers discerned talents not previously evident in school. Rav Malca expressed his surprise and delight to see an introverted child performing skillfully in the music room (12.11.08), and both Rav Baum and Rav Frank were impressed with a boy's motor proficiency (27.10.08, 12.1.09, respectively). The teachers stressed how important it was for each child to find strengths within himself that would allow him to experience success and a sense of self-worth. They were adamant that it was particularly crucial for children who did not possess the high cognitive skills to discover other latent talents that would enable them, too, to enjoy the experience of success. During his interview, Rav Steiner said: *There are children who are not strong enough in other areas; they can express themselves... here. A weak child who can play the drums and the trumpet, as opposed to a more dominant child who doesn't manage it so well—that*

*increases the self-esteem of the weak child* (9.11.09). Rav Steiner stressed not only the need of each child to discover his inner attributes and find a place where he, too, could excel, but also the child's need to feel unique and blessed with special attributes that others lacked.

Uncovering unknown attributes and discerning personal preferences was a starting-point for many teachers. The teachers further sought to develop these personal attributes for two reasons: (1) to enable the children to experience self-efficacy (2) to acquire tools that would enable the teachers to help their pupils succeed in kindergarten based on each child's specific learning abilities. Some teachers scrutinized the new environmental conditions offered by the Center in which a child's personal attributes and preferences could be expressed, seeking ways to replicate some of these conditions in their kindergartens in order to allow each child to learn 'in his own way'. For instance, when Rav Frank saw a child with language deficiencies succeed in following the instructions on an illustrated recipe at the Center, he decided to add more visual aids to the kindergarten as well (12.1.09). When Rav Goldberg saw a child with reading difficulties—a child who usually refused to cooperate in reading sessions—choose on his own initiative to prepare cookies in the shape of the alphabet, he exclaimed: '*Look, we can teach him through something he enjoys!*' (13.1.09). Rav Sason described in detail how he learned about a child's interest and looked for creative ways to harness this interest so as to engage the child in kindergarten:

*I had a very mischievous and naughty boy and [at the Center] I saw that... the dough... attracted him. When I sat and talked to him, I saw that at home he loves to help his mother with the challot [special bread that is baked for the Sabbath], so I started to think 'how could I use that to help a child who can't sit still in class'... [Previously] I used to send him to go round the building twice... every once in a while I gave him*



*errands... [but now, I have an additional tool], during recess I let him help our cook prepare lunch... then he feels at home (8.12.09).*

Rav Sason went on to provide a detailed description of all the work he had invested in making the child experience self-worth by observing the child's preferences, by talking to the child about it, by sitting down, contemplating and devising ways of engaging the child in kindergarten by way of the child's own interests. He had long realized that it was difficult for this child to sit still in class. As a teacher, he had accepted this child's difficulties and had tried to make allowances by sending the child to circle the building, thereby enabling him to release energy in a positive way. Now, however, after observing the child's interest in cooking, Rav Sason was able to relate to him not only as a child with a unique concentration problem, but also as a child with unique interests that rendered him a person with self-worth, appreciated by his teacher for his positive attributes. The fact that the teacher made every effort to notice the child's preferences and harness his distinct abilities in order to achieve useful performance highlights the teacher's desire to enhance the child's self-esteem and help him feel successful, confident, and proud of his attributes.

***'He really opened up... really blossomed' –teachers' vision of self-expression as significant for children's development.***

Many teachers expressed satisfaction at seeing the children experience success and feel comfortable with themselves. The teachers were concerned about introverted children who did not open their mouths in class, and were pleased to discover that when children experienced success, they often felt more comfortable and less restrained, they usually 'opened up' and 'blossomed' (Rav Sason, 8.12.09). On the personal level, the teachers were impressed with children who 'opened up' and expressed themselves confidently on the stage in the Center's theater. Rav Winer was happy to see how introverted children who were confused and 'don't find themselves' in the day to day activities experienced a sense of self-worth at the Center, accepted themselves, and felt more confident to express 'who

they are' (15.6.09). Rav Levi was impressed with children who dared 'to really reveal themselves' to others (7.12.09), and Rav Sason described children who gained confidence and expressed themselves unrestrainedly, '*children simply let out [expressed] everything they had. They felt secure*' (8.12.09). On the interpersonal level, some teachers were impressed with children who 'opened up' and displayed confidence in their social relationships. Rav Levi described a child with a reading difficulty who generally shied away from social contact, '*but after drama he opened up and plucked up the courage to talk to his friends*' (3.8.08). Rav Liener spoke about a child who had experienced a trauma in the past and was socially withdrawn, '*but here he opened up [and talked freely with his friends]. I heard him talk here in a way I hadn't heard since the beginning of the year*' (9.2.09). Rav Silver described a quiet child who was free and unrestrained with his friends: '*He completely opened up (and talked)... about the family and about everything*' (9.2.09).

Other teachers stressed the significance of the expression of self-contentment in the form of a physical release of energy and bodily relaxation. Rav Sason described children who were previously '*closed*' and had '*all kinds of stress and... fears*', [but at the Center], '*they were peaceful and relaxed*'. He felt that '*once a week, a child should come to the Center and unwind... in the trampolines, one can go wild*' (8.12.09). Rav Goldberg was impressed with the gymboree that allowed the children to unwind and release energy (7.12.09). Rav Levi described physical expressions of comfort and delight as the child, free of bodily constraints, jumped with joy: '*He started to talk, to rejoice, to be happy, to jump, and to recount home experiences... in short, he opened up*' (7.12.09).

Thus, it seemed that the teachers sought to allow each child to experience self-fulfillment. They recognized each child's unique attributes and sought ways in which these attributes could be expressed, they sought to enhance self-esteem and did allow each child to 'open up', that is, to express himself, to be socially confident, to unwind, and to experience joy

and pride. However, in addition to the feeling of joy in one's self, the teachers seemed to be concerned that the child experiences joy in the religious way of life.

***'That he should enjoy learning...'* - teachers' vision on the significance of joy in religious teaching.**

A concern for the children's joy was stressed by most teachers when asked about their visit to the Enrichment Center. Rav Cohen felt *'that without any other benefit, for me it was enough that the children enjoyed [their visit to the Center]'* (11.6.09). He emphasized his concern that the children should experience joy in the religious way of life: *'Our approach is to let the kids enjoy themselves, the more the better... [they should learn to experience joy] in order for them to enjoy learning Torah'*. Other teachers were content to see the children motivated to learn and feel enthusiastic about it. Rav Malca indicated experiential learning in science as a factor for increasing motivation and for making learning an exciting experience, *'helping even a quiet child to be full of enthusiasm and full of life'* (12.11.08). Rav Wagner spoke enthusiastically about his happiness to see the children *'immersed in learning, engaged by it, and fulfilled'*. Rav Sason articulated his concern that learning in kindergarten—particularly religious learning—be an enjoyable experience, *'that the child should enjoy to learn. Torah should be loved by them ... [it should be] sweet'* (8.12.09). Rav Perl elaborated on his efforts to make the study of the Jewish holidays a living experience by bringing all sorts of dolls that *'revived the children' [perked them up]* (13.7.09). Rav Frank described how he helped the children enjoy learning by adding drama to his Bible lesson:

*After [the visit to the Center], the whole 'parasha' [weekly portion of the Bible], we acted it out in a play... the children enjoyed it 'up to the roof' [immensely] [satisfaction in his voice], and this week I read the notes [from the parents], I simply enjoyed reading that everyone had internalized it through the play. A play is tangible... they lived it.*  
(7.12.09)

The wish to see the kids engaged, fulfilled, and 'perked up' by learning seems to emphasize the teachers' concern that the children should experience life in general and religious learning in particular as enjoyable and fulfilling. The concern for joy and self-fulfillment of each child as a unique individual is similarly expressed in Haredi guidance books for educators, underscoring the importance of learning about each child's distinct attributes in order to provide him with optimal conditions for personal development (e.g., Stein, 2016; Wolbe, 1999).

### ***Consulting ancient Haredi sources***

In exploring Haredi guidance books for parents and educators, another issue of interest surfaced, further illuminating teachers' twofold Haredi attitude toward the adoption of contemporary ideas and practices. In line with Hakak's (2011) finding, the present study found that when using contemporary psychological terminology, authors of Haredi guidance books often declare the suitability of the adopted psychological notions to the Haredi principles. This was openly and repeatedly declared in the teachings of Rav Hoffman (Stein, 2016), which was extensively examined in the present study. In his teachings, Rav Hoffman quotes and elaborates on the source of every contemporary psychological concept adopted by him. This practice of consulting, exploring, and depending on ancient religious sources (e.g., Talmud) in the process of adopting contemporary notions is prevalent in numerous Halachic (i.e., pertaining to Jewish law) volumes in which Haredi scholars apply underpinning religious principles to new innovative situations (ranging from the use of microwave energy to *in-vitro* fertilization procedures (e.g., Ivry, 2010). In this Halachic literature, the underpinning principles are frequently traced to their Talmudic sources, and diverse opinions pertaining to current events are discussed. The consultation of the ancient sources is carried out by means of hermeneutic rules of halachic interpretation, which considers the written law and the oral inseparable (e.g., Grunfeld, 1973).

***Tools for independent adult life***

This strategy of consulting Haredi ancient sources for guiding the adoption of new concepts seems to be an important tool that enables members of the Haredi community to conduct their religious life independently of others. Acquiring this tool necessitates formal knowledge and training. In order to consult religious sources, one must have extensive familiarity with ancient religious sources, in-depth understanding of underpinning Haredi principles, and training in applying these principles to the relevant situations, all of which are learned and developed in the boys' education system.

***The role of the boys' education system***

The boys' education system focuses on developing abilities for independent Torah study. As discussed previously in this article, in addition to the intrinsic value of Torah study (Cohen, 2005; Friedman, 1991; Gonen, 2000), the boys' education system furnishes its students with the knowledge and skills that are pivotal to understanding the underpinning religious principles interwoven in the Talmudic text (Cohen, 2005; Spiegel, 2011). Furthermore, the specific mode of Talmud study aspires to develop discerning abilities and sensitivity to subtleties (Dembo et al., 1997; Spiegel, 2011) — qualities that facilitate the analysis of new ideas in accordance with the aforementioned religious principles (Friedman, 1991). Thus, the knowledge and skills required to employ the strategy of consulting ancient sources for guidance in adapting to the contemporary world are developed in the boys' education system by means of Talmud study. Thus, although it may appear to be a paradox, the boys' education system, which has been described as seeking to shield its students from the threats of the outside world (Caplan, 2003; Mantzura, 2010; Spiegel, 2011), may actually serve to furnish them with the requisite knowledge and skills for negotiating the novel situations they will encounter there. This strategy of consulting Haredi ancient sources for guiding the adoption of contemporary ideas and practices points again to a twofold attitude of a

religious community to the Western context in which it operates, on the one hand adopting contemporary ideas and practices, while on the other hand doing so selectively and often instrumentally.

### **Discussion**

This article addressed the negotiations of seemingly opposing notions of the God centered religious perceptions of male Haredi kindergarten teachers on the one hand, and the individual centered psychological notion of independent self-construal on the other hand. It focused on notions expressed by the teachers concerning their perceptions of self-construal, striving to understand the cultural meaning of such perceptions, and seeking to observe the cultural strategies involved.

The paper described a cultural hybrid (Bhabha, 1994, 2015) encompassing conflicting notions (Soja, 1996, 2009), a Haredi version in which several features of the contemporary independent Western perception of self-construal coexisted with the Haredi religious perceptions, with no apparent sense of conflict. Teachers perceived children as distinct individuals with unique personal attributes whose expression would engender personal success, increase self-esteem, and encourage self-expression, capable of making choices and independently conducting their life as an adult—all this in a religious framework that sought to enhance the joy engendered by experiencing the religious way of life. Additionally, the article unfolded the cultural strategy of consulting religious sources in order to determine the suitability of an adopted notion and its application.

The active process of adopting and redirecting the application of contemporary Western ideas and practices is not unique to this specific educational setting. As described above it is a common practice in the Haredi community, and the boys' school furnishes their students with the necessary training. As such, they do not seem to entail tendencies of isolation from the threats of the destructive, profane world outside as posited in previous studies (e.g., Caplan, 2003; Mantzura, 2010; Spiegel,

2011). Rather, they seem to imply a comprehensive understanding of both, the contemporary notions to be adopted, and the religious ancient sources guiding the adoption, in their effort to encompass 'multiplicity of perspectives' (Soja 1996, p. 5).

The Haredi teachers seemed to endorse the possibility inherent in the concepts of hybridity and Thirdspace (Bhabha, 1994, 2015; Soja, 1996, 2009) for embracing two conflicting notions at the same time, simultaneously nurturing traditional values while adopting contemporary useful notions. By considering different forms of interconnections, other than the previous binary options of assimilation versus rejection, the teachers were not forced to renounce one way of life for another, since adopting elements associated with one was not seen as at the expense of forfeiting the other.

Although the notion of Thirdspace, in which contemporary perceptions are negotiated with traditional views, seems to be a common structural feature in other settings grappling with similar challenges, the anthropological emphasis on local distinctiveness would suggest that their extent and form would vary from one context to another. Indeed, studies reveal diverse intercultural combinations. In religious settings, Hellemans (2004) elaborated on the modernization of the Catholic Church, Larson (2004) and Numbers (2006) presented Creation Science as a way in which a fundamentalist Christian group negotiated the secular concept of evolution by seeking scientific evidence for God's creation of the world. Wagner's (1990) study of a variety of Christian schools reveals that despite a rhetoric of polarization and separation from secular worldliness, in reality some sort of coexistence exists, referred to as 'gray amalgam' (Wagner 1990, p. 6), through processes of alteration, accommodation, compromises and adjustments. Similarly, Asad (1986) argues that Islamic tradition is not a fixed unchangeable social system, but rather a discursive relationship of thinking subjects with foundational religious texts, allowing diversity, change and the mixing of tradition and modernity (Anjum, 2007).

The concept of Thirdspace may be additionally helpful for examining the nature of the actual strategies involved in intercultural negotiations. Soja (1996) illuminated a particular process of *selective drawing* from conflicting categories, providing a general rudimentary framework. However, scrutinizing the strategies described in this paper, a specific modality of “drawing selectively” seemed to be at work by the teachers: first, while Soja’s model emphasizes no hierarchy between the “multiplicity of perspectives” combined in Thirdspace, for the Haredi teachers a clear hierarchy was evident between Haredi religious principles and the adopted Western perceptions. This was apparent in the employment of the strategy of giving priority to religious sources, accepting only those contemporary notions that suited religious principles. Second, due to the established hierarchy, the process in which the teachers engage may be described as selective *acceptance* rather than selective *drawing*, as the teachers seemed to draw selectively from one category only. It was only the contemporary notions that were selectively adopted, while religious principles were meant to remain untouched. Third, the process of selective acceptance seemed to be based on a cultural tradition of doing the same rather than on an individual choice as described by Soja, and as such the process seemed to be more systematic.

It is important to consider some limitations of this study. It explored educators in preschools where the focus is on contemporary developmental issues; it is recommended to further explore whether teachers of older children, where the focus is on Torah studies, share similar or different perceptions. Similarly, the researcher's positioning as a Haredi woman investigating a group of Haredi men may have influenced participants' free expression. Further research conducted by male researchers may provide additional insights in the phenomenon under study. Finally, the non-routine setting in which the research was conducted may be considered both a strength of the study and a limitation, providing a perspective not previously used in exploring the particular issue of intercultural



## Negotiating in Thirdspace

negotiations. Further research is needed to examine these processes in routine school settings.

Despite these limitations, the present study offers valuable insights into the issue of intercultural negotiations. Notwithstanding the specific group of research participants, the findings of the present study may have significance to other populations coping with similar challenges. A comprehensive understanding of such negotiations by one particular traditional religious group of educators might assist educators at other intercultural educational junctions (beyond traditional/ religious groups) in understanding the ambivalent attitude toward Western culture of parents and children from different cultural backgrounds. This is an important and urgent topic in the global world, where mass immigration brings issues of intercultural negotiations close to home.

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## **Chapter 4**

### **'Body and Soul Go Together' Jewish Ultra-Orthodox Kindergarten Teachers Negotiate Contemporary Developmental Techniques**

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Haller, R., Tavecchio, L.W.C. Stams, G. J. & Van Dam, L. (2020). 'Body and Soul Go Together': Jewish ultra-Orthodox Kindergarten Teachers Negotiate Contemporary Developmental Techniques

### **Abstract**

The paper explored the ways in which Haredi (Jewish ultra-Orthodox) kindergarten teachers negotiated contemporary developmental perception aiming to enhance children's sensorimotor proficiency, as these emerged in a Haredi enrichment center for kindergarten children. An ethnographic study was conducted for the duration of two years, including observations with 90 kindergarten teachers and 15 in-depth interviews. A close look at the practices employed by the teachers revealed a twofold attitude in which, on the one hand, the contemporary developmental perceptions were granted a status of significance, while on the other hand a hierarchy was established rendering this significance conditional. The findings are analyzed through the prisms of hybridity and Thirdspace, illuminating a specific modality involved in the negotiations of seemingly conflicting notions.

*Key words:* Haredi, male kindergarten teachers, sensorimotor proficiency, Hybridity, Thirdspace

### **Introduction**

This article addresses intercultural negotiations, exploring the ways in which male Haredi (Jewish ultra-orthodox) kindergarten teachers negotiate contemporary developmental perceptions of sensorimotor proficiency in a non-formal educational setting. The negotiation of divergent worldviews is not unique to the Haredi community, but is common in other traditional groups, both local distant communities foreign to modern culture (Eisenstadt, 2000; Knauff, 2002; Schmidt, 2006), and religious conservative groups that are ubiquitous throughout the modern Western<sup>13</sup> world and are accustomed to its culture (Hellems, 2004; Kalagy, 2016; Wagner, 1990).

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<sup>13</sup>The term 'Western' refers to a current worldview characteristic of Europe and the Western hemisphere (Smith, 1999). Western and contemporary are used interchangeably.



The Haredi community in Israel is a religious community that seeks to nurture its religious tradition while selectively adopting modernity-based notions (Haller et al., 2018). This aspiration has posed a conceptual as well as a practical challenge for this community in the past and present, since modernity, perceived as a breakaway from tradition and religion (Oden, 1995; Schmidt, 2006), is apparently in inherent conflict with the traditional religious way of life.

Studies on the Haredi community described a complex attitude toward contemporary notions, selectively accepting instrumental ideas and practices while rejecting their ideological foundations (Hakak, 2011; Ivry, 2010; Neriya-Ben Shahar & Lev-On, 2011; Spiegel, 2011). However, further research attention is needed for exploring the actual processes of negotiation and selective adoption. The purpose of the present study was to investigate Haredi teachers' attitude toward contemporary techniques aiming at enhancing children's sensorimotor proficiency, focusing specifically on the cultural strategies employed in negotiating religious traditional perception versus modernity-based attitudes toward corporal needs.

### **Negotiating tradition and modernity<sup>14</sup>**

In anthropology both tradition and modernity are regarded not as distinct opposing concepts that remain unchanged and fixed in the past, but rather as constantly evolving, interacting with each other and mutually influencing one another (Anjum, 2007; Asad, 2003; Hellemans, 2004; Knauft, 2002, 2019; Merrifield et al., 2013). These interactions are differently manifested in diverse circumstances around the world, where contemporary ideas and practices are continuously negotiated with local long-standing cultural traditions (Knauft, 2002, 2019). The responses of local traditional communities to the challenges of modern life often result

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<sup>14</sup>Similarly, modernity and its derivatives are used in this paper to denote contemporary Western worldviews that developed based on modern underpinnings emerging during the historical modern period following the European Enlightenment.

in local 'inflections of modernity' (Knauft, 2002, p. 1), which reflect the ambivalent aspiration involved - to nurture local tradition on the one hand while simultaneously adopting contemporary notions, on the other. These local 'inflections of modernity' are referred to as 'multiple modernities' (Eisenstadt, 2000; Schmidt, 2006), 'alternative modernity' or 'transmodernity' (Dussel, 2000; Knauft, 2002; Schmidt, 2006), pointing to the numerous possible ways, shapes and forms in which constantly evolving components of tradition and modernity are interacting and become reconstructed, often involving processes of contestation, 'opposition' and 'selective appropriation' (Knauft, 2002, p. 25).

Studies of various religious educational institutions—Christian, Islamic, or Jewish—have similarly described the complex attitudes whereby these groups negotiate the challenges of modernity (Adely & Seale-Collazo, 2013). Wagner (1990) in her study of a variety of Christian schools related that despite a rhetoric of separation from modernity based worldliness, in reality some sort of coexistence, which she refers to as 'gray amalgam', is evident (Wagner 1990, p. 6). Such coexistence often involves the 'braiding together' (ibid) and intermingling of the different worldviews through processes of alteration, accommodation, compromises, and adjustments, resonating with the intertwined complex processes that characterize local inflections of modernity. The teachers' negotiations are analyzed based on the theoretical prisms of Hybridity (Bhabha, 1994, 2015) and Thirdspace (Soja, 1996, 2008) that are implemented in studies exploring negotiations in various intercultural junctions (c.f., Moje et al., 2004; Shannahan, 2011).

### **Hybridity and Thirdspace**

Both Bhabha (1994, 2015) and Soja (1996, 2008) scrutinized the processes occurring at intercultural junctions, each illuminating a different aspect. The postmodern notion of Thirdspace introduced by Soja (1996) highlights a deliberate consciousness aspect of coexistence between seemingly conflicting concepts. Soja suggested a creative frame of mind

that can encompass a 'multiplicity of perspectives' (Soja, 1996, p. 5), eliminating either/or options as the only option in intercultural encounters. Soja described Thirdspace as a 'creative process of restructuring' that can be accomplished through 'draw[ing] selectively and strategically from the . . . opposing categories to open new alternatives' (p. 5).

Conversely, Bhabha (1994, 2015) focused on the more confrontational subconscious aspects of negotiating differences, referring to the 'profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable' (Bhabha, 1994, p.2) processes taking place at intercultural junctions. Individuals being caught in the internal struggle between familiar fixed values and new principles and priorities may experience a sense of displacement, inferiority, and what Bhabha recurrently referred to as a *split* of identity, where they may feel 'estranged unto themselves' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 4). However, Bhabha considers such struggles both painful and productive (cf. Ingram & Abrahams, 2015), since they challenge binary divisions, and call instead for dialectical reorganization, ultimately resulting in creative inventions of hybrids. These creations of cultural hybrids involve 'discursive conditions of enunciation' (p. 55): articulating, redefining and reading anew the ancient traditional symbols, in order to authorize the inventive cultural hybrids. Thirdspace and hybridity appear to find expression in the negotiations of Haredi teachers explored in the present paper between the religious versus the contemporary Western attitude toward physical needs.

### **The Haredi community in Israel - Attitudes toward the body**

The religious Haredi community in Israel constitutes approximately 12.5 percent of the country's population (Cahaner & Malach, 2019). Although it is a diverse community comprising several subgroups (Genut & Kolikant, 2017; Mantzura, 2010), certain ideological and lifestyle-associated characteristics are shared by all its members, thereby

distinguishing this community from the more *traditionist*<sup>15</sup> Israeli Jewish society surrounding it. These include (1) the belief in God and in the divine origin of the Torah (Bible and Talmud). (2) the perception of Talmud study (the central text of religious law and Jewish principles) as being of cardinal importance. (3) compliance with God's commandments as they are interpreted in the Talmud and in latter rabbinical literature (Friedman, 1991), and (4) the perception of Jewish law as pertaining to all aspects of life (Mantzura, 2010).

Studies of the Haredi community today often explored attitudes in the community toward contemporary ideas and practices in various domains, including communication technologies (e.g., Neriya-Ben Shahar & Lev-On, 2011) and contemporary psychological - educational notions (Caplan & Stadler, 2012; Hakak, 2011; Yaffe, 2009). Attitudes in the community toward the body and its needs, which are at the heart of the present article, were explored historically (e.g., Jacob, 1997), empirically and culturally. Some studies focused on socialization of the Haredi kindergarten girls into the appropriate cultural ways of body gestures and dress (e.g. Yaffe, 2007), others on attitudes of adolescent Talmud students toward the body including sports and modern dress (Hakak, 2009a, 2009b, 2016). Hakak's (2009a) study revealed that the dominant perception of these adolescent Talmud students was that man was created in God's image, and therefore should emulate the Lord's spirituality via the sublimation of earthliness. Furthermore, according to Hakak, these adolescent Talmud students perceived restraint of bodily needs, urges, desires and wishes as a condition for the flourishing of spiritual life.

However, despite the declared hierarchical dichotomous relation between the bodily earthliness, and the elevated spirituality (Hakak,

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<sup>15</sup>According to Nissim & Hizky (2018) *traditionists* are individuals who belong to a religious tradition but are quite selective in their observances, not committed to religious authorities and not affiliated with a recognized denomination.

2009b), the attitudes toward corporal restraint seemed to be directed against the pursuit of hedonism for its own sake on the expense of spiritual pursuit, while attending to corporal needs and physical health appeared to receive a very positive attitude. Hakak's findings revealed a use of medical discourse when involvement in sports was described. Ivry et al. (2011) have argued that a positive attitude toward the body as a source of health is an inherent Haredi value based on the biblical commandment 'So take ye good heed unto' (Deuteronomy, 4:15), interpreted by the Sages to refer to health and well-being (Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 30a). Indeed issues relating to health seem to receive significant rabbinic attentions. Based on on-going meetings of leading rabbis and medical professionals, large volumes of rabbinic medical literature were composed (e.g., seven volume *Encyclopedia Hilchatit Refuit*), a quarterly journal *Assia*, devoted to issues of Jewish medical ethics, was regularly published, and an institute for medico-halakhic research was established in Israel (Schlesinger institute, 2018). Rabbis are often consulted before making medical decisions (Bressler et al., 2020), and some collaboration between doctors and rabbis was evident concerning advance treatment of infertility (Ivry, 2013). In general, members of the Haredi community were described as avid users of medical services and technology (Mittman, 2005), additionally referred to as a skilled knowledgeable consumer, selectively adopting useful medical advances (Remennick, 2006; Teman et al., 2011; Zlotogora et al., 2007). The attitudes of male Haredi kindergarten teachers has not received comprehensive research attention (For an overview of boys' education, see Spiegel, 2011). The present paper aimed to fill this gap, by exploring the ways in which these teachers negotiated contemporary techniques from the field of occupational therapy, aimed to enhance children's sensorimotor proficiency

Sensorimotor integration is significant for children's development, considered as one of the stages in Piaget's comprehensive theory of cognitive development (Arnett et al., 2020). During the sensorimotor stage

of cognitive development (from birth to the acquisition of language around age two) infants progressively construct knowledge and understanding of the world by coordinating sensorimotor experiences such as vision, hearing, and physical interactions with objects (Bernstein et al., 2013 ). Notwithstanding the natural development of sensorimotor integration, professional interventions by occupational therapists are frequently required in order to enhance sensorimotor integration for children with learning disabilities or developmental delays, as well as for children with slight difficulties in related schools activities. According to ecological models, such interventions are most effective when applied in the educational setting in collaboration with classroom teachers in what is known as *school based occupational therapy* (Reynolds et al., 2003). Under the guidance of the occupational therapist, classroom teachers are trained to screen and detect developmental delays as well as to facilitate the transfer of newly learned skills to the daily routine (Golos et al., 2011). Coincidentally, a few years before the opening of the Enrichment Center, many of the visiting teachers had participated in school based occupational therapy programs. Viewing their participation in the described program as an opportunity for investigating their perceptions regarding enhancing physical proficiency, we sought first to explore their attitude toward sensorimotor techniques; second, to observe the strategies involved in their negotiations; third, to understand their underpinning cultural meaning.

### **The study**

The study described in this paper was part of a larger ethnographic research project conducted by the first author at an Enrichment Center for preschool Haredi children. The Enrichment Center offered extracurricular activities that aimed to promote cognitive and emotional development, sensorimotor proficiency, and the arts (*Yated Neeman*, newspaper 28.3.2008). Kindergarten classes from all over the city visited the center pending preregistration and an entrance fee.

## Negotiating in Thirdspace

Participation in the Enrichment Center's activities took place three mornings a week for almost two years (2008–2010), and included observations and informal conversations with close to 90 visiting male kindergarten teachers. These were recorded in numerous photographs, in researcher's field notes, and in video clips as well as more than ten videos of full sessions, each approximately 30 minutes long. A total of 15 in-depth interviews with participating male kindergarten teachers were conducted, each approximately one hour long. During the following two years (2011–2012), documents were collected both in the field and in the community including ancient religious sources.

All participants were married and had children. Most of them were native Israeli and Haredi from birth; only Rav Perl (all names are pseudonyms) was born outside of the country (Russia), and became religious at age 13. Most of the teachers had grown up in the city; only Rav Wagner was raised in a farming community. The teachers' ages varied: most of them (Rav Eizen, Rav Goldberg, Rav Levi, Rav Perl, Rav Sason, Rav Segal, Rav Wagner, and Rav Winer) were in their 30s and had been teaching for 7–11 years. Rav Frank, Rav Kaplan, and Rav Steiner were older (late 40s–late 50s) and had been teaching for close to 20 years, and Rav Brown, Rav Cohen, Rav Gold, and Rav Samet were in their late 60s, and had served as teachers and as school supervisors for close to 30 years. The teachers differed somewhat in their academic training: they all had teaching certification from the Ministry of Education. Some held Bachelor's degrees in special education, but only Rav Sason had earned a Master's degree in counseling with a specialization in special education and child development. The title Rav, which precedes the teachers' name, is an abbreviation of the title Rabbi, and is a title of respect that does not necessarily designate rabbinical ordination.

Building a rapport with the teachers was facilitated by their acquaintance with the researcher as a member of the community, and by her natural acceptance on the part of the staff. Out of deference to the

Haredi cultural codes of gender separation, non-formal conversations with the teachers were respectfully distant, as is customary in the Haredi community, and most interviews were conducted by phone. Striving to construct meanings within the broader cultural contexts, research findings were later discussed with other members of the community including leading Haredi rabbis. These discussions often raised new questions, pointing to religious sources some of which contrasted with my initial conclusions, others supporting them, gradually leading to a refining and crystalizing of initial understandings.

Cognizant of the significance of the ancient religious texts (Bible, Talmud and related rabbinical literature) and their relevance to guiding everyday life in the community, religious sources were consulted—both ancient and contemporary—including contemporary Haredi manuals for Torah scholars and educators that were relevant to the present study. These sources were frequently consulted in order to ensure the accuracy of a familiar religious expression that was quoted by a teacher or resonated with the data, thereby reflecting underpinning Haredi ontology and epistemology. The consultation of the ancient sources is carried out by means of hermeneutic rules of halachic interpretation (e.g., Grunfeld, 1973). Furthermore, recognizing the multiplicity of cultural frames of reference by means of which social orders are structured (Atkinson & Delamont, 2005), other important data were collected in the field and in the community. These included correspondence between founders, communication papers, thank-you letters, the guest book, and relevant articles or commercials published in the daily Haredi newspaper, *Yated Neeman*, which enjoys a broad readership in the Haredi community.

The positionality of first author, a Haredi woman, as an insider of the community under study, added intricacy to the concerns regarding the ethnographer's authority to represent other people's' life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Creswell, 2018). Although researching one's own community is long recognized theoretically and practically as justified



(Choi, 2006), and as promoting collaboration with participants based on shared bonds of solidarity (Johnson-Bailey, 1999), the insider position has its pitfalls and requires constant self-reflection. As far as researching foreign groups requires familiarization with the strange setting, researching one's own community requires defamiliarization and caution from assuming similarities where these do not exist or from taken for granted understanding (Choi, 2006).

Realizing that the insider position was both an asset and a hindrance, an external critical eye was sought, asking other qualitative researchers—colleagues in an ongoing qualitative forum—to critically assess whether the interpretations presented were convincingly derived from the data. This procedure of peer debriefing (Creswell, 2018), adhered to the inductive analysis of data that continued throughout the various stages of the research. The analysis involved ongoing dialogues with the participants, constant reflective examinations of self, and a recursive process of emergent meaning and sharpening of understanding. Finally, through thematic analysis, conceptual structures of meaning were assembled (LeCompte, 2000).

### **Findings**

This section presents first teachers' attitudes toward sensorimotor techniques, then the strategies involved in the negotiations are analyzed, and finally the underpinning cultural meaning is discussed.

#### **Twofold attitude toward children's physical development**

At the Center, the visiting male kindergarten teachers seemed to be well acquainted with contemporary developmental techniques, which aim to enhance children's sensorimotor proficiency. However, a twofold attitude toward these techniques was expressed by the teachers, thus revealing the intricacy in which a religious group negotiates the modern contemporary context in which it operates.

### **Granting contemporary developmental techniques a status of significance**

The male kindergarten teachers visiting the Center appeared to value contemporary developmental ideas and practices. They routinely used contemporary developmental terminology, held occupational therapy in high regard, and seemed to internalize the importance of sensorimotor proficiency. This perceived importance was expressed both explicitly and implicitly. When referring to sensorimotor integration, many teachers elaborated on the effectiveness of occupational therapy for enhancing both the children's cognitive abilities and their physical well-being. Some teachers referred to the 'power' of occupational therapy to enhance cognitive abilities and even to directly improve such skills as reading and writing (Rav Segal, 6.09; Rav Goldberg, 22.2.09). Rav Kaplan highlighted the connection between occupational therapy and the learning process: *'In the Gymboree... children are sliding into a pool of balls... shooting at a target... [they] develop learning skills... Gymboree is not just a game; occupational therapy improves learning skills'* (Rav Kaplan, 8.7.09).

The teachers seemed to value the contribution of sensorimotor proficiency to the development of cognitive abilities. Although cognitive development is highly regarded in every education system, it has special significance in the Haredi boys' schools where high cognitive skills are required for Torah study. However, the teachers perceived the contribution of sensorimotor proficiency as surpassing the cognitive domain. Rav Kaplan explained that occupational therapy can 'repair' physical disabilities (8.7.09), and Rav Steiner emphasized the high success rate of this therapy, which can change the life of some children: *'In the past [before occupational therapy techniques were implemented], an unfortunate child who, God forbid had some motor or physical difficulty... was finished... Today these kids... blossom'* (Rav Steiner, 7.12.09).

This reference to the 'power' of occupational therapy to 'repair', heal, and restore physical health resonates with medical terminology thus

being associated with the biblical commandment, 'Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves' (Deuteronomy 4:15). Perceiving sensorimotor integration as significant, the teachers recognized the need for professional intervention even for children with high cognitive abilities. In his interview, Rav Perl said:

*I had a kid last year... When he came to kindergarten, he read with all the vowels... [he] was three and a half [years old]. ...with all his genius ... he came, no gross motor [skills], no fine motor [skills], nothing! No ability to jump... [I told the mother] Take him... to occupational therapy... reading he knows, [but] not coloring, not cutting, not holding a pencil, nothing! ... His genius is one thing and his childhood is another thing (13.7.09).*

Rav Perl realized that cognitive abilities, significant as they may be, were not sufficient and could not compensate for deficiencies in sensorimotor integration. Sensorimotor development was important and had to be attended to professionally and promptly. This high regard with which sensorimotor integration was perceived was evident in the time and effort that the teachers invested, seeking to learn about these ideas and practices and in the ways in which they implemented the developmental techniques in their daily routine.

### ***Seeking specific in-depth scholarly information***

Almost all teachers described participating in specific study programs that focused on early childhood developmental theories. The teachers' motivation for participation in these programs seemed to be practical instead of academic. They sought specific practical knowledge in order to acquire professional tools for conducting observations and 'working with children' (Rav Winer, 15.6.09), and they acquired the tools 'to see what is the difficulty with the reading, what is the difficulty with writing' (Rav Sason, 8.12.09). However, although they were primarily interested in practical training, most teachers described participating in intensive, in-depth programs in which both the developmental theoretical

background and the practical implementation were elaborated upon. In his interview, Rav Sason said:

*'We have the tools... in a year we will finish...it's already three years. ... no playing around... you study and take tests ...a test is a test: child development, sensorimotor, early childhood, learning disabilities, remedial teaching. As a teacher, that really develops [you]. (8.12.09).*

Rav Sason underscores the importance he attributes to contemporary notions, describing participation in lengthy in-depth study programs. He elaborates on the contribution of these studies as providing him with a wide theoretical background as well as practical professional tools for detecting difficulties. He also stresses that the studies developed his teaching skills - he acquired and internalized professional knowledge which developed him as a teacher. Similar perceived importance was also evident in the particular ways in which the teachers implemented developmental techniques in their daily routine, seeking to enhance children's sensorimotor proficiency. They did so with conviction, intensively, continuously, within and beyond formal settings.

***Implementation with conviction: systematically, intensively and continuously***

When interviewing the teachers, they described different ways in which developmental techniques had been implemented in their daily routine. The teachers described conducting systematic screening observations, referring children for professional intervention, and devoting time in their daily routine to practices aimed at enhancing their students' sensorimotor development. Rav Goldberg described how for the past nine years he had been systematically observing children's sensorimotor progress, and recording his observations in special organized files (7.12.09). Rav Winer elaborated on conducting evaluations for many years. He elaborated on the training he received for 'observing children in natural settings', systematically evaluating children's sensorimotor proficiency while they play during recess (24.5.09). Rav Sason explained that he

routinely conducts comprehensive evaluations in kindergarten every year *'right away, from the beginning of the year'*, so that he could work correctly with each child throughout the school year (8.12.09), and Rav Cohen described how in his school a special program was devised for observing children both in the classroom and during playtime: *'We had staff meetings with all the teachers; we built a whole program... work sheets and other things. We designated times for teachers to observe the children... not only during recess [but also] during [learning] activities'* (11.6.09).

The teachers were willing to devote time and effort in order to systematically observe the children. They appeared to perceive such developmental information as valuable, conducting these observations consistently and intensively at the beginning of the school year and repeatedly throughout the year, doing so with conviction for many years after they had completed their studies. The significance with which the developmental techniques were perceived was apparent not only in the formal implementation of developmental techniques, but even more so in their implementation beyond formal instruction.

***Implementation with conviction: beyond formal settings***

The teachers implemented the adopted techniques in a variety of settings, seizing opportunities in and out of school to conduct informal observations. Even the visit to the Center was perceived by some teachers as *'a golden opportunity to observe children'* (Rav Gold, 4.5.09), claiming that it was *'a pity to waste the day resting'* when one could learn so much about children's motor functions (Rav Brown, 22.11.08). At the Center, it was common to see teachers engaged in observing children, some completing detailed questionnaires, others holding preplanned lists of children whom they wanted to observe, and yet others systematically recording lengthy observations in each room. Some teachers were not content with passive observation, and actively engaged some children in order to observe them in action: *'Children who didn't climb, I asked them*

*to climb. I wanted to see if they could climb... gross motor, fine motor... everything'* (Rav Frank, 12.1.09).

The visit to the Center was perceived by some teachers not only as a golden opportunity to observe the children. Some of them actually used the professional equipment available there to work with certain children on enhancing specific motor skills. One day (17.11.08), Rav Eizen was observed working with one of the children on planning the series of steps necessary in order to climb onto a moving swing and then safely jump off. Another time, a teacher was observed instructing a child how to jump on the trampoline with straight legs and urging him to pluck up the courage to jump with both legs in the air.

Seizing different opportunities at the Center—a recreational facility meant for fun—for implementing developmental techniques was indeed surprising. However, what was even more impressive were the teachers' descriptions of seeking a variety of situations in the daily routine at school for enhancing children's sensorimotor integration, sometimes as a school initiative and at other times as a personal initiative on the part of either one teacher or a group of teachers.

Rav Samet (27.7.08) described the sizeable financial investment made by his school in order to convert their huge, neglected bomb shelter into a developmental activity room that contained a ball-pool, a trampoline and other equipment. The school devised a specific time for each class to participate. Rav Perl elaborated on his own initiative for adding visual kinesthetic aids to the Bible stories he taught the children: he prepared colorful laminated drawings to illustrate the stories as well as miniature three-dimensional scenes from them.

When visiting his classroom, Rav Perl proudly exhibited his hand-made collection of Biblical scenes: a huge whale representing the one that swallowed the prophet Jonah (Jonah 2:1), big enough to accommodate two children comfortably, miniature figures—one representing Esau hunting in the fields, the other his brother Jacob studying in the tent (Genesis 25:27).

Indicating the scene where Rebecca, the biblical matriarch, was filling up pails of water from the well for the thirsty camels to drink (Genesis 24:17-20), Rav Perl explained: *'When I started to recount the weekly portion, I started to bring them all sorts of dolls... You can touch it... They see the camel... almost their height. The children need it to be tangible'* (29.10.09).

While Rav Perl employed visual and kinesthetic aids on his initiative at a different kindergarten, a group of teachers 'sat together' and devised a special program for incorporating sensorimotor activities into their Bible classes:

*'So every week we have the sense of touch and all sorts of games related to the 'Parasha' [weekly portion of the Bible read in the synagogue]... A week ago [when we learned] about the blessings [that Isaac gave his sons, Jacob and Esau] ... it was the sense of touch. The whole week we played with the sense of touch that [was related to] Jacob and Esau'* (Rav Frank, 12.09).

Rav Frank described using the content of his bible lessons for enhancing sensorimotor integration. This was not a single incident, but an initiative of a group of teachers in his school who devoted the time to construct a specific program of using the content of bible lessons for enhancing sensorimotor integration. The voluntary initiatives—whereby schools, individual teachers, and groups of teachers implemented adopted techniques for enhancing sensorimotor integration—emphasize their conviction, implying that the motivating force of implementing these techniques went beyond obligation and obedience, and reflected the significance they attributed to these techniques. However, at the same time, despite the many ways in which the significance attributed to the adopted model was expressed, a clear hierarchy was established between the adopted content and the Haredi value of Torah study. This hierarchy rendered this significance conditional, defining the role of the adopted content as a means to an end, but not as the end itself.

### **Conditional significance**

A clear hierarchy between the contemporary ideas and practices and the Haredi values was established by the teachers both implicitly and explicitly. Implicitly, the teachers' emphasis on the contribution of sensorimotor proficiency to Torah study implied the subservient status of contemporary notions in relation to Haredi values. This was also explicitly declared by some teachers, as stated by Rav Winer: *'Of course this [Torah study] is the ultimate goal. The other things [sensorimotor integration] serve only to support this ultimate goal'* (Rav Winer, 15.6.09).

At first glance, this clearly-established hierarchy seems to accentuate the superiority of Torah as the sacred entity versus the inferiority of the contemporary notions as the mundane entities, thus possibly undermining the significance attributed to the contemporary developmental notions, which was described earlier in this paper. However, a closer look elucidates a more intricate relationship between the two. During his interview, Rav Winer recounted the speech he gave upon completing the three-year study program devoted to developmental issues. Addressing the appropriateness of occupational therapy to the Haredi values, he said:

*All those who know the books (all learned people) know that the body and the soul go together... that the spiritual parts are bound by an unbreakable bond to the physical, mechanical part of the body... that you have to take care of the body so that it can sit and study diligently.*

In his address, Rav Winer seems to argue against the preconceived notion that spiritual entities, such as the soul and mundane entities such as the body are binaries, stressing instead their interconnection. He defines this connection at two levels: the first at a superficial level relating to the body as an external vessel containing the soul, seeing the function of a healthy body as enabling the soul to engage in the study of Torah: the second describing the body as directly influencing the higher function of cognition:



*'But we understand that... [ the jumping and skipping of the child] are interrelated... that at the moment that he doesn't run so well, so he has parts in his brain that are not working well ... like crossing his body's middle line, and transmission of data from the brain to the hands ...'*

While describing the interconnection between body and soul, Rav Winer uses certain terms interchangeably. He interchanges the soul with Torah study as well as with cognition. This interchange of terminology seems to serve some function in further defining the interconnection that Rav Winer describes. This exchange of terms appears to define that connection more specifically, thereby highlighting the interdependence between the two. Notwithstanding the definition of Torah study as the goal and the sensorimotor integration as the means to achieve this goal, the implied analogy of their relationship to the interdependence between body and soul accentuates their mutual dependence. Not only is the body dependent on the soul for its survival, the soul too is dependent on the body.

### **Discussion**

This article described the ways in which Haredi kindergarten teachers negotiated contemporary developmental techniques. It focused on teachers' attitude toward techniques aimed to enhance sensorimotor integration, seeking to observe the strategies involved in the process, and to understand their underpinning cultural meaning. The findings revealed a twofold attitude towards these specific techniques: On the one hand, the teachers expressed both explicitly and implicitly the significance they attributed to these contemporary notions. On the other, they rendered this significance conditional. However, despite the greater significance granted to Haredi values, interdependence between religious values and sensorimotor techniques was accentuated, perceiving the latter as essential to achieve religious goals. The findings thus shed light on the ways in which a group of religious teachers negotiated the modern context in which they operate, illustrating the possibilities inherent in the concept of Thirdspace to

encompass *multiplicity of perspectives* (Soja 1996, 5), simultaneously nurturing traditional values while adopting contemporary useful notions. By considering various forms of intercultural combinations, the teachers were not forced to renounce one way of life for another, since adopting elements associated with one was not seen as at the expense of forfeiting the other.

Endorsement of Hybridity and Thirdspace as a frame of mind is not unique to the Haredi teachers; it seems to be a common feature in other intercultural educational settings coping with similar challenges. Anderson-Levitt (2003) described how 'local wisdom' in Thailand was incorporated into the adopted global model of Western schooling (p. 24), and Prochner (2002) elaborates on the ways in which preschools in India encompass both the Western notions of play-based education and the principles of Tarang (joyful learning), a form of indigenous non-formal education. These examples highlight that cultural differences may not necessarily be perceived as dichotomous and mutually exclusive, but rather may braided together and coexist in various formations.

The findings additionally illuminate the actual processes occurring at intercultural junctions, and the strategies employed to negotiate the competing cultural claims for superiority. The first strategy was explicit and openly stated by the teacher--the second seemed more subtle. The teachers established a clear hierarchy between the religious value of learning Tora and the contemporary sensorimotor techniques. They declared the religious value as the 'ultimate goal' while rationalizing the adoption of the contemporary notion, not for its inherent value, but rather for its usefulness both for children's general health and for serving the religious value. In so doing, they seemed to renounce any possible sense of competing cultural claims, clearly signifying the superiority of their religious tradition. However, analyzing the findings through the prism of Hybridity appears to reveal another more latent strategy, which may point to a confrontational – competing aspect of the explored intercultural

junction.

Bhabha recurrently highlighted the involvement of the strategy of enunciation in negotiating differences for redefining, rehistoricizing and reading anew past cultural symbols. A similar discursive strategy of rehistoricizing and reading anew old traditional resources seemed to be the second strategy evident in the teachers' negotiations. In using the phrase 'all those who know the books, know (that body and soul go together)' the teacher seems to imply that the significance attributed to body- physical proficiency, is neither foreign to religious ideology nor negating it. Rather, it is found in the old books and is well known to scholars. The specific adopted techniques may be novel, but not the underpinning principles. Bhabha further posits that this discursive strategy of 'renewing the past' serves to authorize the coexistence of differences. In the teacher's case, the strategy may serve an analogous function of validating the adoption of the contemporary techniques.

It is important to consider some limitations of this study. It explored educators in preschools where contemporary developmental issues are focused on; it is important to further explore whether teachers of older children, where Torah studies and the associated cognitive skills are focused on, share similar or different perceptions. Similarly, the researcher's positioning as a Haredi woman investigating a population of Haredi men may have influenced participants' free expression. Further research conducted by male researchers may provide additional insights into the phenomenon under study. Finally, the non-routine setting in which the research was conducted may be considered both a strength of the study and a limitation, providing a perspective not previously used in exploring the particular issue of intercultural negotiations. Further research is needed to examine these processes in routine school settings.

Despite these limitations, the present study offers valuable insights into the issue of intercultural negotiations. Notwithstanding the specific group of research participants, the findings of the present study may have

## Negotiating in Thirdspace

significance to other populations grappling with similar challenges. A comprehensive understanding of such negotiations by one particular traditional religious group of educators might assist educators at other intercultural educational junctions (beyond traditional/ religious groups) in understanding the ambivalent attitude toward Western culture of parents and children of different cultural backgrounds. By illuminating some of the ways in which a religious group of teachers negotiated contemporary notions, this study joins the central interest of anthropology (Knauff, 2002, 2019) to understand the intricate fluid processes involved in the negotiations of different cultural worlds.

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## **Chapter 5**

### **General discussion**

### **General discussion**

This dissertation addressed negotiations at intercultural junctions, focusing specifically on Haredi (Jewish ultra-orthodox) teachers' negotiating contemporary educational notions in an Enrichment Center for Haredi kindergarten children. The general goals were first, to explore Haredi teachers' attitudes toward contemporary educational perceptions, second to examine the strategies involved in the negotiation process and third, to understand the cultural meanings of these strategies. The research – which was an ethnographic study - was conducted in and around an Enrichment Center (the Center) for Haredi kindergarten children in a major city in Israel. The Center was co-founded by a Haredi religious teachers' college for women (the Seminary) and a European charitable organization (the Foundation), thus serving as an interface for observing the teachers' negotiations of contemporary Western educational perceptions.

Conducting the research at the early stages of the Center's planning and operation, when routines were not yet fully established, enabled the researcher to capture short-lived processes which are unique to these early stages and are difficult to trace back at later stages. The study employed the traditional triangulation of qualitative research methods, both for validation and for gaining a comprehensive view via multiple perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005): selection of a research population that best enhances the understanding of the issues under study, prolonged participant observation, in-depth interviews, and the collection of documents in the Center and community.

The focus on kindergarten teachers was based on the premise that as social agents teachers can provide valuable understandings of their culture (Korat, 2000).

Research participants included three circles (a) Planners of the Center - who visited numerous contemporary enrichment centers in Israel, adopted their programs and amended them to suit the Haredi worldview - provided important insights into these initial processes. (b) Staff of the Center,

including the experienced 60-year-old educational director and the six young novice instructors (in their 20s), provided the opportunity to observe the ongoing processes of daily negotiations in the Center. (c) visiting kindergarten teachers who provided a unique chance to observe the spontaneous negotiations of a large and varied group of teachers, not in their secure domain of a familiar routine but rather in a novel setting in which they did not have a clearly assigned role.

Observations and the informal conversations conducted during 2008-2010 were supplemented by in-depth interviews that provided insight into teachers' declared perceptions. For the saturation of data, documents were collected in the following two years (2011-2012), both in the field and in the community, including ancient religious sources that provided both the historical context and a comprehensive understanding of Haredi ontology. The researcher's positionality as an insider of the community added a unique perspective, facilitated collaboration with participants and contributed insider knowledge of the community and its education systems.

The teachers' negotiations were explored through the postmodern-postcolonial prisms of Hybridity (Bhabha, 1994, 2015) and Thirdspace (Soja, 1996, 2008), which accentuates the processes involved in encompassing seemingly conflicting elements - processes that were at the heart of the present study.

Previous studies on the Haredi community in Israel have addressed attitudes toward contemporary notions in various domains, delineating a twofold attitude, partially adopting practical ideas and practices while rejecting their ideological underpinnings (Hakak, 2011; Ivry, 2010; Neriya-Ben Shahar & Lev-on, 2011; Spiegel, 2011). These studies explored tendencies of rejection (e.g., Bilu, 2003) or features unique to the Haredi community (e.g., Mantzura, 2010, Yaffe, 2007). Tendencies of acceptance were often interpreted as being passively influenced by diffusion of contemporary perceptions (e.g., Caplan 2003; Mantzura, 2010; Spiegel, 2011; Yaffe, 2009), which gradually weaken its religious commitment.

Intentional deliberate adoption of contemporary notions received less research attention, and only a few studies focused on the cultural strategies employed in such processes. Hakak (2011) described a cultural strategy of consulting religious sources in accepting certain contemporary psychological ideas and practices, and Ivry (2010) described the involvement of rabbinic organizations in adopting innovative medical fertility technology. Similar negotiations strategies of teachers in the Haredi boys' education system were not extensively addressed. The central goal of this dissertation was to fill in this gap and to focus on these less explored aspects of negotiations.

### **Main findings**

The findings of this dissertation describe the teachers' twofold aspiration to preserve and nurture their traditional religious ways of life while simultaneously adapting to the contemporary world, an aspiration which was referred to by the teachers as 'moving forward with the world without compromising on religion'. The different chapters of this dissertation describe teachers' negotiations at this liminal, in between, Thirdspace resulting in reconstructing of inventive hybrids to encompass both perspectives, 'moving forward with the world' by adopting contemporary notions, while simultaneously employing local cultural strategies in order to ensure that religion would not be 'compromised' in the process.

### **'Moving forward with the world' in Thirdspace**

#### ***Haredi versions encompassing seemingly conflicting notions.***

Contrary to the description of the Haredi community as rejecting contemporary perceptions (e.g., Bilu, 2003), the teachers openly expressed conceptual acceptance and practical implementation of contemporary educational and developmental perceptions. These were further evident in the Haredi versions of contemporary concepts wherein features of both Haredi and contemporary perceptions coexisted. In **Chapter 2**, the Enrichment Center itself is described as exhibiting the characteristics of Thirdspace by encompassing the different worldviews of its founders: the

traditional religious perceptions of the Haredi Seminary and the contemporary Western perceptions of the Foundation. Specific local versions of contemporary concepts were evident during the various stages of the Center's planning and operation including: the Haredi version of contemporary science where evolution was replaced by the wonders of God, and the Haredi version of art where cultural religious stories served as scripts for performance in the contemporary mini theater in the drama room.

In **Chapter 3**, the Haredi version of independent self-construal was described as including several features of the contemporary psychological perceptions of the self, framed by the Haredi religious perceptions. Children were perceived as autonomous individuals capable of making choices, and of being able to independently conduct their life as adults in due course. Each child was perceived as a distinct individual with unique personal attributes whose expression would promote personal success, increase self-esteem, and encourage self-expression—all this in a religious framework that sought to enhance the joy engendered by experiencing the religious way of life.

In **Chapter 4**, the ways in which Haredi teachers adopted sensorimotor techniques were described, revealing a twofold attitude. On the one hand, the teachers expressed both explicitly and implicitly the significance they attributed to these contemporary notions: seeking specific in-depth scholarly information, implementation with conviction, systematically, intensively and continuously, in and beyond formal settings. On the other hand, they established a clear hierarchy emphasizing the subservient status of the contemporary notions. However, despite the greater significance granted to Haredi values, the interdependence between religious values and sensorimotor techniques was accentuated, resulting in an inventive hybrid where seemingly conflicting elements may be encompassed.

The described acceptance of contemporary concepts while simultaneously nurturing local values are in line with previous ethnographic studies on local communities (e.g., Knauff, 2002, 2019) or on religious institutions (e.g., Adely & Seale-Collazo, 2013) which describe the local versions created by traditional/ religious communities in their efforts to simultaneously nurture traditional values while adapting to the contemporary world.

***A deliberate, intentional process of adopting contemporary concepts***

The different chapters of this dissertation described the adoption of contemporary concepts as a deliberate intentional process, a creative frame of mind that can encompass a 'multiplicity of perspectives'. **Chapter 2** focused on the cultural strategies involved in negotiating contemporary educational perceptions and described how these processes are elaborated upon in the Haredi community in a careful, deliberate, and intentional manner, involving teachers, administrators, and other professionals from within the community. Similar intentional processes of the deliberate adoption are further elaborated upon in **Chapter 4**, as the Haredi teachers describe investing time and effort in intensive study of current developmental theories aiming to enhance children's sensorimotor proficiency. This deliberate process of adopting contemporary perceptions is further evident in the continuous implementation of the adopted developmental techniques in the teachers' daily routine, doing so with conviction, within and beyond formal settings. Such deliberate processes were described in **Chapter 2** (and in the Introduction) as a way of life in the Haredi girls' education system based on a long tradition.

These findings seem to defy the description of the Haredi education systems as being passively influenced by the diffusion of contemporary notions (e.g., Caplan 2003; Mantzura, 2010; Spiegel, 2011; Yaffe, 2009), accentuating instead the deliberate consciousness reconstruction of a conceptual Thirdspace suggested by Soja (1996).

**'Without compromising on religion'**

The findings of the present dissertation describe major cultural strategies employed in order to ensure that the religious way of life would not be compromised in the process of adopting contemporary perceptions. These strategies foreground Haredi values as guiding the process of adoption and determining the suitability of adopted concepts.

***Relying on Haredi ancient sources***

The first strategy involved consulting religious ancient sources (e.g., the Talmud) in search of underpinning principles relevant to a specific contemporary concept. This strategy is elaborated upon in **Chapter 3** in describing Haredi guidance books for educators and parents in which contemporary psychological terminology is utilized. These books often quote the ancient religious sources which resonate with the adopted concepts, and their authors openly declare that only those psychological concepts which conform to Haredi worldview were adopted in their books. As previously described, the strategy of consulting ancient religious sources has been the main strategy employed by the Haredi community in the process of adopting contemporary ideas and practices. This strategy is prevalent in numerous Halachic (i.e., pertaining to Jewish law) volumes throughout the ages in which Haredi scholars apply underpinning religious principles to new innovative situations (ranging from the use of microwave energy to advanced fertility procedures (e.g., Ivry, 2010). In this Halachic literature, the underpinning principles are frequently traced to their Talmudic sources, and diverse opinions pertaining to the current case are discussed.

In **Chapter 4**, Haredi ancient sources were not directly consulted, nor were they explicitly relied upon. The teachers seemed to employ a strategy of enunciation recurrently highlighted by Bhabha in which traditional ancient resources are *rehistoricized* (Bhabha, 1994 p.55) and read anew in order to authorize new hybridity.



*Separating the core from its shell*

The second cultural strategy which was described in this dissertation involves the 'cleansing' of adopted concepts by removing interwoven unsuitable elements which were considered to conflict with religious values. This strategy is based on the premise that contemporary perceptions can be separated into their components, thus allowing the removal of unsuitable elements without affecting their usefulness. This premise can be traced to Talmudic days wherein the removal of unsuitable elements was figuratively described as separating the nourishing core of the pomegranate from its useless shell (Babylonian Talmud, Chagiga 15: b), resonating with the more familiar expression of separating the 'wheat from the chaff'.

The implementation of this strategy was described in **Chapter 2** as the planners and designers of the Enrichment Center removed any mention of evolution from the adopted contemporary scientific notions. This strategy was described as commonly implemented both in the past and the present in educational settings where prior to their use, contemporary theories are 'cleansed' of elements perceived as negating religious principles.

The above described two major strategies stem from an underpinning strategy of establishing a clear hierarchy between the religious values and the adopted contemporary notions thus renouncing any possible sense of competing cultural claims, clearly signifying the superiority of their religious tradition versus the subservient status of the adopted contemporary notions. **Chapter 4** illustrates the use of this underpinning strategy. It described how the teachers declared explicitly and implicitly the religious value of learning Tora as the 'ultimate goal', while rationalizing the adoption of the contemporary notion of sensorimotor integration, not for its inherent value, but rather for its usefulness both for children's general health and for serving the religious value of learning Tora.

The description of these strategies seems to challenge the interpretation posited in previous research (e.g., Caplan, 2003; Mantzura, 2010; Spiegel, 2011; Yaffe, 2009), according to which the diffusion of contemporary perceptions gradually weakens the community. The described strategy of consulting ancient religious sources in the process of adoption suggests instead that the Haredi worldview is even strengthened through the adoption of contemporary notions, not only because of its role in guiding the process, but mainly because the negotiation process necessitates the acquisition of profound knowledge on both religious principles and their conceptual underpinnings. The fact that the knowledge and skills required for adapting to the contemporary world are developed in the boys' education system by means of Talmud study seems to challenge the description of boys' education system as seeking to protect its students from having to cope with the outside world as interpreted by Caplan (2003), Mantzura (2010) and Spiegel (2011). It suggests instead that, what has been interpreted as isolating walls shielding Haredi boys' from exposure to the contemporary world, may actually be enclaves within which the foundations for coping with modernity are laid, training graduates in negotiating the modern world more effectively.

### ***Haredi modality of Thirdspace***

Soja (1996) illuminated a particular process of *selective drawing* from conflicting categories, providing a general rudimentary framework. However, scrutinizing the strategies described in this dissertation, a specific modality of *drawing selectively* seemed to be at work by the teachers: first, while Soja's model emphasizes no hierarchy between the *multiplicity of perspectives* combined in Thirdspace, for the Haredi teachers a clear hierarchy was evident between Haredi religious principles and the adopted contemporary perceptions. This was apparent in the employment of the strategy of giving priority to religious sources, accepting only those contemporary notions that suited religious principles. Second, due to the established hierarchy, the process in which the teachers

engage may be described as selective *acceptance* rather than selective *drawing*, as the teachers seemed to draw selectively from one category only. It was only the contemporary notions that were selectively adopted, while religious principles were meant to remain untouched. Third, the process of selective acceptance seemed to be based on a cultural tradition of doing the same rather than on an individual choice as described by Soja, and as such the process seemed to be more systematic.

Can the Haredi modality of Thirdspace be regarded as a particular case of multiple modernity, describing the Haredi community as 'modern' in its own fashion? From the teachers' efforts to ensure 'no compromise on religion', there seems to be an emphasis not on the adoption of 'modern' practices, but rather on nurturing their religious tradition. Introducing an indigenous (research) perspective may highlight the phenomenon from an additional point of view.

Indigenous researchers place local indigenous tradition at the center of their attention, arguing for research in indigenous communities to be respectful to indigenous ways of knowing and being, by employing methods appropriate to indigenous ontology, epistemology, and axiology (Datta, 2018; Fredrick, 2007; Smith, 2008, 2012). Haredi modality of Thirdspace may resonate with the indigenous perspective of cherishing and nurturing their local tradition, as was evident throughout the current dissertation in the teachers' efforts to ensure that religious traditions would not be compromised in the process of adopting Western ideas and practices.

Understanding the significance of cherishing local tradition may be endorsed by educators in multicultural settings. Respect for the diversity of children's various traditional backgrounds would enhance children's confidence and facilitate bridging between home and school (e.g., Moje, 2004). Respect for cultural/ religious diversity is in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Therefore, it is argued that states should support educators' training in understanding and implementing

Thirdspace as a frame of mind for encompassing and respecting multitudes of cultural traditions.

**Strengths, limitations and suggestions for future research**

To the best of my knowledge, employing the prism of Thirdspace in order to scrutinize the deliberate aspects of intercultural negotiations and leaning on local ontology and epistemology were not evident in previous research on the Haredi community. This makes this research unique and may be considered one of its strengths. A second unique feature of the study can be seen in its specific population. Focusing on teachers of specific educational systems within one particular Haredi stream, based on their relevance to the issues explored, does not seem to be a common practice in studies on the community. This focus has enhanced the understanding of the ways in which the centrality of Talmud study in the Lithuanian stream has influenced its openness to the contemporary world without threatening religious commitment. Thus, this study may pave the way for future studies that will better differentiate between the various Haredi streams and focus on a specific stream relevant to the specific issue explored. Further research is needed to explore whether and in what ways the trends found in this research differ from similar processes in other Haredi streams. Third, the non-routine setting in which the research was conducted may be considered to be an additional strength, providing a perspective not previously used in exploring the particular issue of intercultural negotiations. Further research is needed to examine these processes in routine school settings. However, it should be taken into consideration that the findings of this dissertation are not based solely on research participants, but rather are well grounded in Haredi ancient sources, as well as in current Haredi literature, and in discussion of the findings with other members of the community.

This particular research has some limitations: It explored educators in preschools where contemporary developmental issues are focused on; it is important to further explore whether teachers of older children where

## Negotiating in Thirdspace

Torah studies are focused on share similar or different perceptions. Similarly, the views expressed in this study pertain to Haredi educators; future research should also include other members of the community, not necessarily educators, who may provide additional perspectives for understanding Haredi attitudes toward the contemporary notions. Finally, the researcher's insider positioning which can be considered a strength of the study, may also be regarded as a limitation. Possible effects of the researcher's positioning such as assuming similarities where these do not exist, reading her own views into participants' words should be considered, notwithstanding the methodological procedures employed for overcoming the inherent bias in this position.

Despite these limitations, the present dissertation offers valuable insights into the issue of intercultural negotiations by shedding light on less explored aspects of these specific complex intercultural junctions. This is an important and urgent topic in the global world, where mass immigration brings issues of intercultural negotiations close to home.

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## **Summaries**



**English summary:**

**Negotiating in Thirdspace: An ethnographic study of Haredi teachers' perception of 'Moving forward with the world without compromising on religion'**

This dissertation explored the negotiation of cultural worldviews. It focused on the ways in which Haredi (Jewish ultra-orthodox) teachers negotiate contemporary educational notions as these emerged in an Enrichment Center for Haredi kindergarten children in Israel.

This study joins the interest of both anthropology and religious studies in exploring the negotiations of modernity in diverse traditional/religious communities worldwide. Teachers' negotiations were analyzed through the postmodern/ postcolonial prisms of Hybridity (Bhabha, 1994, 2015) and Thirdspace (Soja, 1996, 2008) which accentuate the processes of selectively drawing from opposing conflicting concepts in order to construct creative conceptual combinations.

Studies on the Haredi community in Israel delineated an ambivalent attitude toward contemporary Western notions, partially accepting practical ideas and practices while rejecting their ideological underpinnings (Hakak, 2011; Ivry, 2010; Neriya-Ben Shahar & Lev-on, 2011; Spiegel, 2011). However, in most studies, either unique features of the Haredi community were explored or else the community was described as attempting to resist, yet being passively influenced by external contemporary forces (e.g., Bilu, 2003). Tendencies of deliberate adaptation of contemporary notions were less frequently focused on. Moreover, less research attention was given to the nature of the described ambivalent attitude, to the processes involved in the negotiation of contemporary notions, and to the cultural strategies employed in such negotiations. The goals of the current study were first, to explore tendencies of acceptance toward contemporary educational perceptions, second to examine the strategies involved in the negotiation process and third, to understand the cultural meanings of these strategies.

This dissertation is based on ethnographic fieldwork at an

Enrichment Center for Haredi kindergarten children. The center was co-founded by a Haredi and a contemporary Western organization and provided a unique perspective for exploring Haredi teachers' negotiations with contemporary ideas and practices.

Data was collected via the traditional triangulation of qualitative research methods: prolonged participant observation, in-depth interviews, and the collection of documents in the Center and in the community. During the two years (2008-2010) of participation in the Center's activities (three mornings a week for 5 hours each day), field notes were written, numerous photographs were taken including video clips and more than ten videos of full sessions, each approximately 30 minutes long. In addition, in-depth interviews, each approximately one hour long were conducted with 15 female and 15 male kindergarten teachers. In the following two years (2011-2012), observations and in-depth interviews were supplemented with the collection of documents in the Center and in the community, including daily newspapers and religious sources, both ancient (e.g., Bible and Talmud) and contemporary, to be examined for underpinning Haredi ontology.

Research participants comprised three circles (a) the planners of the Center (b) staff members at the Center (the educational director and 6 instructors), and (c) 193 visiting kindergarten teachers (105 female teachers and 88 male teachers). All teachers were affiliated either with the Lithuanian stream or else with the Beth Yaakov education system, two major Haredi education systems both of which are described in previous research (e.g., Friedman, 1991) to be relatively open to the contemporary world.

The inductive data analysis and validation procedures continued throughout the various stages of the research. These involved collaboration and ongoing dialogues with the participants, member check (respondent validation), peer debriefing, reflexivity (Levit et al., 2018), and a recursive process of emergent meaning and honing of understanding. Finally, based

on steps detailed by LeCompte (2000), thematic analysis was conducted, coding units of meaning, assembling and refining categories through constant comparison, and searching for patterns within and across categories, until the conceptual structures comprising the chapters of this dissertation were constructed.

The findings are described in three chapters of the dissertation: **Chapter 2** focuses on the cultural strategies employed by female kindergarten teachers in the planning of the Center and in its operation. **Chapter 3** describes male teachers negotiating contemporary psychological perceptions of the self, while **Chapter 4** focuses on the adoption of contemporary sensorimotor techniques.

The findings describe the teachers' twofold aspiration to preserve and nurture their religious tradition while simultaneously adapt to the contemporary world, an aspiration which was referred to by the teachers as 'moving forward with the world without compromising on religion'. The different chapters of the dissertation describe teachers' negotiations in Thirdspace resulting in the reconstruction of inventive hybrids to encompass both aspirations.

#### **'Moving forward with the world'**

##### ***Haredi versions encompassing seemingly conflicting notions.***

Contrary to the description of the Haredi community as rejecting Western notions (e.g., Bilu, 2003), the teachers openly expressed conceptual acceptance and practical implementation of contemporary Western educational perceptions. These were further evident in the Haredi versions of contemporary concepts wherein features of both Haredi and contemporary perceptions coexisted. In **Chapter 2**, the Enrichment Center itself is described as exhibiting the characteristics of Thirdspace by encompassing the different worldviews of its founders. Specific local versions of contemporary concepts were evident during the various stages of the Center's planning and operation including: the Haredi version of contemporary science where evolution was replaced by the wonders of

God, and the Haredi version of art where cultural religious stories served as scripts for performance in the contemporary mini theater in the drama room. In **Chapter 3**, the Haredi version of independent self-construal was described as including several features of the contemporary psychological perceptions of the self, framed by the Haredi religious perceptions. In **Chapter 4**, the ways in which Haredi teachers adopted sensorimotor techniques were described, revealing an ambivalent attitude. On the one hand, the teachers expressed both explicitly and implicitly the significance they attributed to the adopted contemporary techniques, on the other hand, they underscored the subservient status of sensorimotor techniques to Haredi values. However, the interdependence between religious values and sensorimotor techniques was accentuated, resulting in an inventive hybrid where seemingly conflicting elements may be encompassed. The described acceptance of contemporary concepts while simultaneously nurturing local values are in line with previous anthropological and ethnographic studies on local communities (e.g., Knauff, 2002, 2019) or on religious institutions (e.g., Adely & Seale-Collazo, 2013) which describe the local versions created by traditional/ religious communities in their efforts to simultaneously nurture traditional values while adapting to the contemporary world.

***A deliberate, intentional process***

A deliberate, intentional process of adopting contemporary concepts was evident throughout the chapters of the dissertation, describing a creative frame of mind that can encompass a 'multiplicity of perspectives'. **Chapter 2** focused on the cultural strategies involved in negotiating contemporary educational perceptions and described how these processes are elaborated upon in the Haredi community in a careful, deliberate, and intentional manner, involving teachers, administrators, and other professionals from within the community. Similar intentional processes of the deliberate adoption are further elaborated upon in **Chapter 4**, as the Haredi teachers describe investing time and effort in intensive study of

current developmental theories aiming to enhance children's sensorimotor proficiency. This deliberate process of adopting contemporary perceptions is further evident in the continuous implementation of the adopted developmental techniques in the teachers' daily routine, doing so with conviction, within and beyond formal settings. Such deliberate processes were described in **Chapter 2** (and in the Introduction) as a way of life in the Haredi girls' education system based on a long tradition. These findings seem to defy the description of the Haredi education systems as being passively influenced by the diffusion of contemporary notions (e.g., Caplan 2003; Mantzura, 2010; Spiegel, 2011; Yaffe, 2009), accentuating instead the deliberate consciousness reconstruction of a conceptual Thirdspace suggested by Soja (1996).

### **'Without compromising on religion'**

The findings of the present study describe major cultural strategies employed in order to ensure that the religious way of life would not be compromised in the process of adopting Western notions. These strategies foreground Haredi values as guiding the process of adoption and determining the suitability of adopted concepts.

### ***Relying on Haredi ancient sources***

The first strategy involved consulting religious ancient sources (e.g., the Talmud) in search of underpinning principles relevant to a specific contemporary concept. This strategy is elaborated upon in **Chapter 3** in describing Haredi guidance books for educators and parents in which contemporary psychological terminology is utilized. These books often quote ancient religious sources which resonate with the adopted concepts, and their authors openly declare that only those psychological concepts which conform to Haredi worldview were adopted in their books. In **Chapter 4**, Haredi ancient sources were not directly consulted, nor were they explicitly relied upon. However, the teachers seemed to employ a strategy of enunciation recurrently highlighted by Bhabha in which

traditional ancient resources are *rehistoricized* (Bhabha, 1994 p.55) and read anew in order to authorize new forms of Hybridity.

***Separating the 'core' from its 'shell'***

The second cultural strategy which was described in this dissertation involves the 'cleansing' of adopted concepts by removing interwoven elements which were considered to conflict with religious values. The implementation of this strategy was described in **Chapter 2** as the planners and designers of the Enrichment Center removed any mention of evolution from the adopted contemporary scientific notions. This strategy was described as commonly implemented in both the past and the present in educational settings where prior to their use, contemporary theories are 'cleansed' of elements perceived as negating religious principles.

The above described two major strategies stem from an underpinning strategy of establishing a clear hierarchy between the religious values and the adopted Western notions thus renouncing any possible sense of competing cultural claims, clearly signifying the superiority of their religious tradition versus the subservient status of the adopted contemporary notions. **Chapter 4** illustrates the use of this underpinning strategy.

**Haredi modality of Thirdspace**

Soja (1996) illuminated a particular process of *selective drawing* from conflicting categories, providing a general rudimentary framework. However, scrutinizing the strategies described in this paper, a specific modality of *drawing selectively* seemed to be at work by the Haredi teachers: first, while Soja's model emphasizes no hierarchy between the *multiplicity of perspectives* combined in Thirdspace, for the Haredi teachers a clear hierarchy was evident between Haredi religious principles and the adopted Western notions. This was apparent in the employment of the strategy of giving priority to religious sources, accepting only those contemporary notions that suited religious principles. Second, due to the

established hierarchy, the process in which the teachers engage may be described as selective *acceptance* rather than selective *drawing*, as the teachers seemed to draw selectively from one category only. It was only the Western notions that were selectively adopted, while religious principles were meant to remain untouched. Third, the process of selective acceptance seemed to be based on a cultural tradition of doing the same rather than on an individual choice as described by Soja, and as such the process seemed to be more systematic.

The emphasis of the teachers on the centrality of their religious traditions appears to resonate with the indigenous perspective of cherishing and nurturing local traditions (e.g., Datta, 2018). Understanding the centrality of local traditions in the eyes of their beholders, may have implications for educators in multicultural settings. The findings of this research underscore the importance of respecting the diversity of children's various traditional backgrounds in order to facilitate bridging between home and school, and enhance children's self-confidence.

### **Strengths, limitations and suggestions for future research**

To the best of my knowledge, employing the prism of Thirdspace in order to scrutinize the deliberate aspects of intercultural negotiations and leaning on local ontology and epistemology were not evident in previous research on the Haredi community. A second unique feature of the study can be seen in its specific population. Focusing on teachers of specific educational systems within one particular Haredi stream, based on their relevance to the issues explored, does not seem to be a common practice in studies on the community. This focus has enhanced the understanding of the ways in which the centrality of Talmud study in the Lithuanian stream has influenced its openness to the contemporary world without threatening religious commitment. Third, the non-routine setting in which the research was conducted may be considered to be an additional strength, providing a perspective not previously used in exploring the particular issue of intercultural negotiations. Further research is needed to examine these

processes in routine school settings. However, it should be taken into consideration that the findings of this dissertation are not based solely on research participants, but rather are well grounded in Haredi ancient sources, as well as in current Haredi literature and in discussion of the findings with other members of the community.

This particular study has some limitations: It explored educators in preschools where contemporary developmental issues are focused on; it is important to further explore whether teachers of older children where Torah studies are focused on share similar or different perceptions. Similarly, the views expressed in this study pertain to Haredi educators; future research should also include other members of the community, not necessarily educators, who may provide additional perspectives for understanding Haredi attitudes toward the contemporary notions. Finally, the researcher's insider positioning which can be considered a strength of the study, may also be regarded as a limitation. Possible effects of the researcher's positioning such as assuming similarities where these do not exist, reading her own views into participants' words should be considered, notwithstanding the methodological procedures employed for overcoming the inherent bias in this position.

Despite these limitations, the present study offers valuable insights into the issue of intercultural negotiations by shedding light on less explored aspects of these specific complex intercultural junctions. This is an important and urgent topic in the global world, where mass immigration brings issues of intercultural negotiations close to home.



### **Samenvatting (Dutch summary):**

#### **Onderhandelen in Thirdspace: een etnografisch onderzoek naar de perceptie van onderwijs van Haredi-leerkrachten in de moderne wereld zonder compromissen te sluiten over religie**

In dit proefschrift is het ‘onderhandelen’ over culturele wereldbeelden verkend. Het richt zich op de manier waarop Haredi (joodse, ultra-orthodoxe) leerkrachten omgaan met hedendaagse onderwijsbegrippen zoals deze naar voren kwamen in een Verrijkingencentrum voor Haredi peuter- en kleuterschoolkinderen in Israël. Het onderzoek past binnen het interessegebied van zowel de antropologie als theologie, met name waar het gaat om het verkennen van de discussie over moderniteit in diverse (traditionele) religieuze gemeenschappen over de hele wereld. De ‘onderhandelingen’ van de leerkrachten zijn geanalyseerd met behulp van postmoderne theorieën over *Hybriditeit* (Bhabha, 1994, 2015) en *Thirdspace* (Soja, 1996, 2008), waarin verschillende, soms ook (schijnbaar) onverenigbare, paradigma’s op elkaar betrokken kunnen worden vanuit een overkoepelend perspectief van onderhandelen in een denkbeeldige ‘derde ruimte’.

Studies over de Haredi-gemeenschap in Israël laten dikwijls een ambivalente houding van deze gemeenschap zien ten opzichte van hedendaagse Westerse opvattingen over onderwijs, waarbij moderne ideeën en praktijken gedeeltelijk worden geaccepteerd, maar de ideologische onderbouwing hiervan tegelijkertijd wordt verworpen (Hakakak, 2011; Ivry, 2010; Neriya-Ben Shahr & Lev-on, 2011; Spiegel, 2011). In de meeste studies zijn ofwel unieke kenmerken van de Haredi-gemeenschap verkend, ofwel is de gemeenschap beschreven als een gemeenschap die probeert weerstand te bieden tegen moderniteit, maar die toch (passief) beïnvloed wordt door externe hedendaagse krachten (zie Bilu, 2003). Tendensen die wijzen op bewuste aanpassing aan hedendaagse ideeën en praktijken zijn minder vaak onderzocht. Bovendien is minder

vaak aandacht besteed aan de aard van de beschreven ambivalente houding. De doelstelling van dit proefschrift was daarom het onderzoeken van de houding ten opzichte van en het omgaan met hedendaagse opvattingen over onderwijs van een onderdeel van de Haredi-gemeenschap en het begrijpen van de culturele betekenis van strategieën die hierbij een rol spelen in termen van ‘onderhandelen’ in een fictieve ruimte.

Dit proefschrift is gebaseerd op etnografisch veldwerk in een Verrijkingcentrum voor Haredi peuter- en kleuterschoolkinderen. Het centrum werd mede opgericht door de Haredi-gemeenschap en een Westerse organisatie en bood een unieke mogelijkheid voor het verkennen van de onderhandelingen van Haredi-leerkrachten over hedendaagse ideeën en praktijken. Gegevens werden verzameld via triangulatie van kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden, dat wil zeggen: langdurige participerende observatie, diepte-interviews en het verzamelen van documenten in het Centrum en in de Haredi-gemeenschap. Tijdens de twee jaar (2008-2010) van deelname aan de activiteiten van het Centrum (drie ochtenden per week gedurende 5 uur per dag) werden ‘veldaantekeningen’ gemaakt en beeldmateriaal verzameld, waaronder talrijke foto's, videoclips en meer dan tien video's van volledige sessies, die elk ongeveer 30 minuten duurden. Daarnaast zijn diepte-interviews van elk ongeveer een uur gehouden met 15 vrouwelijke en 15 mannelijke kleuterleid(st)ers. In de daaropvolgende twee jaar (2011-2012) zijn observaties en diepte-interviews aangevuld met documenten uit het Centrum en de Haredi-gemeenschap, waaronder dagbladen en religieuze bronnen, zowel klassieke (bijv. Bijbel en Talmoed) als hedendaagse.

Drie groepen namen deel aan het onderzoek: (a) de oprichters van het Centrum, (b) stafmedewerkers van het Centrum (de onderwijsdirecteur en 6 instructeurs), en (c) 193 peuter/kleuterleerkrachten die gebruik maakten van het Centrum (105 vrouwelijke en 88 mannelijke leerkrachten). Alle docenten waren aangesloten bij de Litouwse stroming of bij het Beth Yaakov onderwijssysteem, twee belangrijke Haredi-

onderwijssystemen die beide in eerder onderzoek (bijvoorbeeld Friedman, 1991) zijn beschreven als relatief ontvankelijk voor moderne ideeën.

De inductieve data-analyse en validatieprocedures zijn gedurende de verschillende fasen van het onderzoek uitgevoerd. Deze omvatten samenwerking en voortdurend in dialoog zijn met de deelnemers, member checking (responsvalidatie), peer debriefing, reflectie (Levit et al., 2018), en een proces van zich ontwikkelende betekenisverlening en het aanscherpen van het begrip ‘onderhandeling’. Tot slot is op basis van stappen die door LeCompte (2000) zijn uitgewerkt, een thematische analyse uitgevoerd; het coderen van betekenisvolle eenheden (‘units’) door het samenstellen en verfijnen van categorieën door middel van constante vergelijking en het zoeken naar patronen binnen en over categorieën heen, totdat de conceptuele structuren die de hoofdstukken van dit proefschrift bevatten, werden geconstrueerd.

De bevindingen zijn beschreven in drie hoofdstukken: **Hoofdstuk 2** richt zich op de culturele strategieën die vrouwelijke kleuterleidsters hanteren in de ontwikkeling van het programma van het Centrum en de (uit)werking in de praktijk. **Hoofdstuk 3** beschrijft hoe mannelijke leerkrachten ‘onderhandelen’ over hedendaagse psychologische percepties van het zelf, terwijl **hoofdstuk 4** zich richt op de overname en het gebruik van hedendaagse sensomotorische technieken.

De bevindingen hebben betrekking op het tweeledige streven van de leraren om hun religieuze traditie te behouden en te koesteren en zich hierbij tegelijkertijd aan te passen aan de hedendaagse wereld, een streven dat door hen werd aangeduid als ‘voortgaan met de wereld zonder compromissen te sluiten op het gebied van religie’. De verschillende hoofdstukken van het proefschrift beschrijven de ‘onderhandelingen’ van de leraren in *Thirdspace* die resulteerden in de reconstructie van vindingrijke hybride concepten om beide aspiraties te kunnen omvatten.

### 'Voortgaan met de wereld'

#### *Haredi-interpretaties die schijnbaar tegenstrijdige begrippen bevatten*

In tegenstelling tot de typering van de Haredi-gemeenschap als een gemeenschap die Westerse begrippen afwijst (bijv. Bilu, 2003), hebben de leerkrachten openlijk conceptuele acceptatie geuit en hedendaagse Westerse onderwijsconcepten geïmplementeerd. Deze niet-afwijzende houding kwam verder tot uiting in de Haredi-versies van hedendaagse concepten waarin kenmerken van zowel Haredi- als hedendaagse opvattingen naast elkaar bestonden. In **hoofdstuk 2** is het Verrijksingscentrum zelf beschreven als een centrum dat de kenmerken van Thirdspace vertoont door de verschillende wereldbeelden van de oprichters te omvatten. Specifieke lokale versies van hedendaagse concepten werden duidelijk tijdens de verschillende stadia van de ontwikkeling en het functioneren van het Centrum, waaronder: de Haredi-versie van de hedendaagse wetenschap, waarin de evolutie werd vervangen door de wonderen van God, en de Haredi-versie van de kunst, waarin culturele religieuze verhalen dienden als scripts voor voorstellingen in het hedendaagse minitheater in de toneelruimte. In **hoofdstuk 3** is de Haredi-versie van een onafhankelijk (autonoom) zelfbeeld ('self-construal') beschreven. Het zelfbeeld omvatte een aantal kenmerken van de hedendaagse psychologische perceptie van het zelf, aangepast en geherformuleerd in termen van religieuze Haredi concepten. In **hoofdstuk 4** zijn de manieren beschreven waarop Haredi-leraren sensomotorische technieken toepasten, wat een ambivalente houding aan het licht bracht, want aan de ene kant gaven de docenten expliciet en impliciet uiting aan het belang dat zij toekenden aan de overgenomen moderne technieken, maar aan de andere kant onderstreepten zij de ondergeschikte status van sensomotorische methoden ten opzichte van de Haredi-waarden. De onderlinge afhankelijkheid van religieuze waarden en sensomotorische technieken werd echter geaccentueerd, wat resulteerde in een inventieve hybride mengvorm, waarin (schijnbaar) tegenstrijdige elementen kunnen

worden opgenomen. De acceptatie van hedendaagse concepten en het tegelijkertijd koesteren van lokale waarden zijn in lijn met eerder antropologisch en etnografisch onderzoek naar lokale gemeenschappen (bijv. Knauff, 2002, 2019) of religieuze instellingen (bijv. Adely & Seale-Collazo, 2013). Dat onderzoek beschrijft lokale versies die door traditionele/religieuze gemeenschappen worden gecreëerd in hun streven om tegelijkertijd traditionele waarden te koesteren én zich aan te passen aan de hedendaagse wereld.

***Een weloverwogen, doelbewust proces***

In alle hoofdstukken van dit proefschrift is een weloverwogen, bewust proces van het overnemen van hedendaagse concepten zichtbaar, een creatief conceptueel kader dat een 'veelvoud aan perspectieven' kan omvatten. **Hoofdstuk 2** richtte zich op de culturele strategieën die een rol spelen bij het onderhandelen over hedendaagse onderwijsvisies en beschreef hoe deze processen in de Haredi-gemeenschap op een zorgvuldige, weloverwogen en bewuste manier worden uitgewerkt, waarbij leerkrachten, bestuurders en andere professionals uit de gemeenschap zijn betrokken. Vergelijkbare bewuste processen bij de weloverwogen overname van moderne ideeën zijn verder uitgewerkt in **hoofdstuk 4**, waar Haredi-docenten beschrijven dat ze tijd en moeite investeren in intensieve studie van moderne ontwikkelingstheorieën die verbetering van de sensomotorische vaardigheden van kinderen beogen. Dit weloverwogen proces van het overnemen van moderne opvattingen is verder zichtbaar in de continue implementatie van de overgenomen ontwikkelingstechnieken in de dagelijkse routine van de leerkrachten, waarbij ze dit met overtuiging doen, binnen en buiten de formele setting. Dergelijke bewuste processen zijn in **hoofdstuk 2** (en in de Inleiding) beschreven als een manier van leven, een gewoonte, in het Haredi-meisjesonderwijs, gebaseerd op een lange traditie. Deze bevindingen lijken de typering dat Haredi-onderwijssystemen passief beïnvloed zouden zijn door de verbreiding van eigentijdse begrippen (bijvoorbeeld Caplan 2003; Mantzura, 2010; Spiegel,

2011; Yaffe, 2009) te weerleggen, en accentueren in plaats daarvan de weloverwogen bewustzijnsreconstructie van een conceptuele Thirdspace, zoals die door Soja (1996) werd gesuggereerd.

### **Zonder afbreuk te doen aan de godsdienst**

In dit proefschrift zijn belangrijke culturele strategieën beschreven die worden toegepast om ervoor te zorgen dat de religieuze manier van leven niet in het gedrang komt tijdens het proces van het overnemen van Westerse ideeën en praktijken. Deze strategieën plaatsen Haredi-waarden op de voorgrond als leidraad voor het overname-proces en het bepalen van de geschiktheid van de overgenomen moderne concepten.

### ***Vertrouwen op klassieke Haredi-bronnen***

De eerste strategie bestaat uit het raadplegen van klassieke religieuze bronnen, (bijvoorbeeld de Talmoed) op zoek naar basisprincipes die relevant zijn voor een specifiek hedendaags concept. Deze strategie is uitgewerkt **in hoofdstuk 3** bij het beschrijven van Haredi instructieboeken voor opvoeders en ouders waarin hedendaagse psychologische terminologie wordt gebruikt. In deze boeken worden vaak oude religieuze bronnen geciteerd die met de overgenomen concepten resoneren, en de auteurs verklaren openlijk dat alleen psychologische concepten die in overeenstemming zijn met het Haredi-wereldbeeld in hun boeken zijn overgenomen. In **hoofdstuk 4** zijn de klassieke Haredi-bronnen niet direct geraadpleegd, en er werd ook niet expliciet op vertrouwd. De leraren leken echter een strategie van ‘enunciatie’ toe te passen die herhaaldelijk door Bhabha werd benadrukt en waarin traditionele, oude bronnen opnieuw worden ‘gehistoriseerd’ (Bhabha, 1994 p. 55) en opnieuw worden gelezen om nieuwe vormen van Hybriditeit te autoriseren .

### ***‘Kern’ en ‘schil’ van elkaar scheiden***

De tweede culturele strategie die in dit proefschrift is beschreven, is het 'zuiveren' van overgenomen concepten door bepaalde elementen te verwijderen die als strijdig met religieuze waarden werden beschouwd. De implementatie van deze strategie is beschreven in **hoofdstuk 2**; de

oprichters van het Verrijkingencentrum verwijderden elke verwijzing naar de evolutie uit de overgenomen moderne wetenschappelijke noties. Deze strategie werd in verleden en heden algemeen toegepast in educatieve omgevingen waar hedendaagse theorieën, voorafgaand aan hun gebruik, worden 'gezuiverd' van elementen die worden gezien als ontkrachting van religieuze principes. .

Beide hierboven beschreven belangrijke strategieën komen voort uit een fundamentele strategie die een duidelijke hiërarchie aanbrengt tussen religieuze waarden en de overgenomen Westerse begrippen, waardoor elk gevoel van concurrerende culturele claims wordt verloochend en de superioriteit van hun religieuze traditie ten opzichte van de ondergeschikte status van de overgenomen eigentijdse begrippen wordt benadrukt.

**Hoofdstuk 4** illustreert het gebruik van deze fundamentele strategie.

### **Haredi-modaliteit van de Thirdspace**

Soja (1996) verhelderde een bijzonder proces van selectief gebruik van tegenstrijdige categorieën, waardoor een algemeen rudimentair kader ontstond. Als we echter de strategieën die in dit onderzoek worden beschreven nader onder de loep nemen, lijken de Haredi-leerkrachten een specifieke selectiemethode te hanteren: ten eerste was er voor Haredi-leraren een duidelijke hiërarchie zichtbaar tussen religieuze Haredi-principes en Westerse begrippen, terwijl Soja's model de hiërarchie tussen de veelheid aan perspectieven die in de Thirdspace worden gecombineerd *niet* benadrukt. Dit was duidelijk te zien in de toepassing van de strategie om voorrang te geven aan religieuze bronnen, waarbij alleen eigentijdse begrippen worden geaccepteerd die passen bij religieuze principes. Ten tweede kan het proces waarin de leerkrachten betrokken zijn vanwege de gevestigde hiërarchie worden omschreven als selectieve *acceptatie* in plaats van selectieve *keuze*, aangezien de leraren uit slechts één categorie leken te putten. Alleen de Westerse begrippen werden selectief overgenomen, terwijl religieuze principes onaangetast moesten blijven. Ten derde leek het proces van selectieve acceptatie gebaseerd te zijn op

een culturele traditie om allemaal gelijk te handelen in plaats van op een individuele keuze, zoals beschreven door Soja, en als zodanig leek het te gaan om een meer systematisch proces.

De nadruk van de leraren op de centrale positie van hun religieuze tradities lijkt overeen te komen met het endemische perspectief van het zorgvuldig koesteren van lokale tradities (zie bijvoorbeeld Datta, 2018). Inzicht in de centrale positie van lokale tradities kan implicaties hebben voor opvoeders in een multiculturele omgeving. De bevindingen van het onderhavige onderzoek ondersteunen het belang van het respecteren van de diversiteit van verschillende traditionele achtergronden van kinderen om zo een brug te kunnen slaan tussen huis en school, en het zelfvertrouwen van kinderen te vergroten.

### **Sterke punten, beperkingen en suggesties voor toekomstig onderzoek**

Voor zover bekend was het gebruik van het Thirdspace perspectief om de weloverwogen aspecten van interculturele onderhandelingen te onderzoeken en te leunen op lokale ontologie en epistemologie niet evident aanwezig in eerder onderzoek naar de Haredi-gemeenschap. Een tweede uniek kenmerk van het onderzoek is de bijzondere populatie. De focus op docenten van specifieke onderwijssystemen binnen één bepaalde Haredi-stroming, gebaseerd op hun relevantie voor de onderzochte onderwerpen, lijkt geen gangbare praktijk in studies over de gemeenschap. Deze focus heeft geleid tot beter begrip voor de manier waarop de centrale positie van het bestuderen van de Talmoed in de Litouwse stroming het open staan voor de hedendaagse wereld heeft beïnvloed, zonder dat dit een bedreiging vormt voor religieus engagement. Ten derde kan de niet-routineuze omgeving waarin het onderzoek is uitgevoerd, worden beschouwd als een extra sterk punt, dat een perspectief biedt dat niet eerder is toegepast bij het verkennen van het specifieke probleem van interculturele onderhandelingen. Verder onderzoek is nodig om deze processen in standaard schoolomgevingen te onderzoeken. Er moet echter rekening worden gehouden met het feit dat de bevindingen van dit proefschrift niet



alleen afkomstig zijn van de deelnemers aan het onderzoek, maar ook duidelijk gegrondvest zijn in klassieke Haredi-bronnen, evenals in hedendaagse Haredi-literatuur en in de discussie over de bevindingen van andere leden van de gemeenschap. .

Het onderhavige onderzoek kent enkele beperkingen: de focus lag op opvoeders in peuter- en kleuterklassen waar hedendaagse ontwikkelingsvraagstukken aan bod komen; het is belangrijk om nader te onderzoeken of leerkrachten van oudere kinderen, waar de focus ligt op de Torastudie, dezelfde of verschillende opvattingen hebben. Evenzo geldt dat de zienswijzen die in deze studie worden geuit betrekking hebben op Haredi-leerkrachten; toekomstig onderzoek zou ook andere leden van de gemeenschap moeten omvatten - niet noodzakelijkerwijs leerkrachten - die extra perspectief kunnen bieden voor het begrijpen van Haredi-attituden ten aanzien van hedendaagse opvattingen. Ten slotte kan de insider-positionering van de onderzoeker, die als een sterk punt van het onderzoek kan worden beschouwd, ook als een beperking worden gezien. Mogelijke effecten van de positionering van de onderzoeker, zoals het veronderstellen van overeenkomsten waar deze niet bestaan of het 'lezen' van haar eigen opvattingen in de woorden van de deelnemers, kunnen niet worden uitgesloten, ondanks de methodologische procedures die werden gebruikt om mogelijke inherente vooringenomenheid in deze positie te corrigeren .

Ondanks deze beperkingen verschaft het onderhavige onderzoek waardevolle inzichten in het vraagstuk van interculturele onderhandelingen, door licht te werpen op minder verkende aspecten van deze specifieke, complexe interculturele knooppunten. Dit is een belangrijk en urgent vraagstuk in de wereld, waar massa-immigratie problemen op het gebied van interculturele onderhandelingen dicht bij huis brengt.

תקציר בעברית (Hebrew summary):

משא ומתן במרחב השלישי

מחקר אתנוגרפי הבוחן כיצד תופסים מורים חרדים את עצמם כ'נעים קדימה עם העולם

בלי להתפשר על הדת'

דיסרטציה זו בחנה תהליכי משא ומתן בין השקפות עולם תרבותיות. היא התמקדה בדרכים בהן מנהלים גנות ו'מלמדים'<sup>16</sup> חרדים תהליכי משא ומתן עם תפיסות חינוכיות מערביות עדכניות, כפי שהם עלו במרכז העשרה לילדי גן חרדים בישראל. בכך מצטרפים המחקרים האמפיריים המרכיבים דיסרטציה זו להתמקדות האנתרופולוגית באופן שבו מתמודדות תרבויות מקומיות ומוסדות דתיים עם השפעות התרבות המערבית. תהליכי המשא ומתן שניהלו המורים החרדיים נותחו באמצעות הפריזמות הפוסט-מודרניות / פוסט-קולוניאליות של היברידיזציה [Hybridity (Bhabha, 1994, 2015)] ו-מרחב שלישי [Thirdspace (Soja, 1996, 2008)] המדגישות תהליכי משא ומתן תוך אימוץ בררני (Selective drawing) של מושגים מנוגדים במטרה לבנות שילובים רעיוניים יצירתיים.

מחקרים על החברה החרדית בישראל תארו יחס אמביוולנטי כלפי תפיסות מערביות עדכניות הכולל קבלה חלקית של מושגים וטכניקות פרקטיים תוך שלילת האידיאולוגיות שבבסיסם (חקק, 2011; נריה-בן שחר ולב און, 2011; עברי, 2010; שפיגל, 2011). אולם מרבית המחקרים לא חקרו את מהות היחס האמביוולנטי שתארו. הם התמקדו או בתופעות חינוכיות ייחודיות הקשורות לאורח החיים הדתי (כגון, יפה, 2007; מנצורה, 2010), או בתאור החברה כמושפעת בהדרגה מתהליך דיפוזי, שבו מושגים עדכניים מחלחים באופן פסיבי לתוך החברה, למרות התנגדותה (כגון יפה, 2009; מנצורה, 2010; קפלן, 2003; שפיגל, 2011). מגמות של פתיחות מרצון כלפי תפיסות מערביות, לא זכו לתשומת לב מחקרית מספקת. כמוכן לא נצפתה התמקדות מחקרית באסטרטגיות המעורבות במגמות אלו ובמשמעותן התרבותית. מטרות דיסרטציה זו הן: ראשית לחקור מגמות אלו של פתיחות, שנית לבחון את האסטרטגיות המעורבות בהן, שלישית לנסות להבין את המשמעות התרבותית של אסטרטגיות אלו.

<sup>16</sup> במקביל לגנות בגני הבנות, מורים לבנים חרדים בגיל הרך נקראים מלמדים.

מתודולוגיה

הדיסרטציה מבוססת על עבודת שדה אתנוגראפית שנערכה במשך כשנתיים (2008 – 2010) במרכז העשרה לילדי גן חרדים בגילאי 5-6. המרכז הוקם במשותף על ידי סמינר חרדי לבנות וקרן צדקה ארופאית. שיתוף זה הפך את מרכז העשרה למקום בו ניתן היה לצפות בתהליכי המשא ומתן שהתקיימו בין התרבויות השונות שייצגו מקימיו. הנתונים נאספו באמצעות המשולש המסורתי של שיטות מחקר איכותניות: תצפית משתתפת ממושכת, ראיונות עומק ואיסוף מסמכים במרכז ובקהילה. תצפית משתתפת בוצעה במשך שלושה ימים בשבוע, חמש שעות בכל יום. במהלכה נכתב יומן שדה, צולמו מספר רב של תמונות וקטעי וידיאו, נערכו תצפיות ושיחות בלתי פורמאליות עם משתתפי המחקר, ובוצעו ראיונות עומק. בשנים אלו ובשנתיים שלאחר מכן (2011-2012) נאספו ונותחו מסמכים כתובים במרכז ובתוך הקהילה, כולל עתונות יומית, ספרי קודש עדכניים, ומקורות דתיים עתיקים (כגון תנ"ך, תלמוד וספרות הלכתית), במטרה להעמיק בהבנת האונטולוגיה החרדית.

משתתפי המחקר כללו:

- א. מקימות המרכז: 2 מורות ומפקחות בגנים בגילאי 50-60. הצוות המפעיל את המרכז: מנהלת מפקחת לשעבר בגנים בשנות ה-60 ושש מדריכות צעירות בשנות ה-20 המוקדמות
- ב. 193 אנשי צוות חינוכי שליוו את הילדים המבקרים (105 גננות ו-88 מלמדים). כל אנשי הצוות החינוכי היו קשורים לאחת מתוך שתי מערכות החינוך החרדיות הגדולות, שתוארו במחקרים קודמים כפתוחות יחסית לתפיסות עולם עדכניות (למשל, פרידמן, 1991): למערכת החינוך לבנות 'בית יעקב' או לתלמודי תורה לבנים המזוהים עם הזרם הליטאי.

הליכי ניתוח אינדוקטיביים נמשכו לאורך שלבי המחקר השונים. הממצאים נותחו בתהליך רקורסיבי (recursive) של ניתוח נושאי (thematic analysis) על פי המודל של לה-קומפטה (LeCompte, 2000) עד שהורכב המבנה המושגי (conceptual structures) המהווה את פרקי הדיסרטציה הנוכחית. ביסוס אמינות המחקר (trustworthiness) ננקטו הצעדים הבאים המומלצים במחקר איכותני (Levitt et al., 2018): טריאנגולציה (triangulation) הצלבת נתונים מכלי מחקר וממקורות שונים, שיתוף משתתפי המחקר (collaboration), הערכה של חברים נוספים בקהילה (member check), שיפוט חיצוני (external critical eye) ורפלקציה אישית (reflexivity).

ממצאים

ממצאי המחקר מתוארים בשלושה מפרקי הדיסרטציה: **פרק 2** מתאר את האסטרטגיות התרבותיות שננקטו על ידי מקימות המרכז והצוות המפעיל בשלבי התכנון וההפעלה של מרכז העשרה. **פרקים 3 ו-4** מתמקדים במלמדי הבנים: **פרק 3** מציג את האסטרטגיות שננקטו במהלך אימוץ תפיסות פסיכולוגיות עדכניות, ו**פרק 4** מתאר את דרך האימוץ של מושגים התפתחותיים עדכניים.

ממצאים מרכזיים

הממצאים מתארים את שאיפתם הכפולה של המורים 'לנוע קדימה עם העולם בלי להתפשר על הדת', ביטוי המשקף את היחס האמביוולנטי המורכב של המורים כלפי תפיסות העולם המערבי שבתוכו הם פועלים. פרקי הדיסרטציה מתארים מרחב שלישי של תהליכי משא ומתן שניהלו המורים ליצירת הכלאות יצירתיות שבהם יוכלו תפיסת העולם המנוגדות לכאורה - החרדית והמערבית - להתקיים זו לצד זו.

**א. 'לנוע קדימה עם העולם'**

**1. גרסאות חרדיות להכללת תפיסות קונפליקטואליות**

בניגוד לתיאור החברה החרדית כמי שמתנגדת ודוחה תפיסות עולם מערביות (למשל, בילו, 2003), המורים הביעו בגלוי, קבלה מושגית ויישום מעשי, של תפיסות חינוך מערביות עדכניות. קבלה זו באה לידי ביטוי בין השאר בגרסאות החרדיות של מושגים עדכניים, שכללו מאפיינים של תפיסה עולם חרדית לצד תפיסת עולם מערבית עדכנית.

**בפרק 2**, מתואר מרכז ההעשרה עצמו כמבטא את המאפיינים של מרחב שלישי (Thirdspace), בכך שהוא מאפשר קיום בו זמני של השקפות העולם, המנוגדות לכאורה, של מייסדיו. גרסאות מקומיות ספציפיות למושגים עדכניים ניכרו גם בשלבים השונים של התכנון וההפעלה של מרכז העשרה. הללו כללו: גרסה חרדית של מדע עדכני, שבה הוחלף מושג אבולוציה במושג 'נפלאות הבורא', והגרסה החרדית לאמנות, שבה סיפורי דת תרבותיים שימשו כתסריטים להצגות, במיני תיאטרון העדכני בחדר הדרמה. **בפרק 3** תוארה הגרסה החרדית של 'האני העצמאי' שכללה תפיסות פסיכולוגיות עדכניות של 'האני העצמאי' בתוך מסגרת של תפיסות עולם חרדיות. **בפרק 4** תוארו הדרכים בהן מורים חרדים אימצו טכניקות סנסורי-מוטוריות. מצד אחד, המורים הביעו, הן באופן מפורש והן באופן מרומז, את החשיבות שהם ייחסו לטכניקות עדכניות אלו המפתחות מיומנויות גופניות. מצד שני, הדגישו המורים את נחיתותם וכפיפותם של הטכניקות העדכניות לערכי יסוד חרדיים רוחניים, אותם אמורות טכניקות אלו לשרת. עם זאת, הדגישו המורים את התלות ההדדית שבין הגוף הגשמי לנפש הרוחנית, כאשר בכך הם יוצרים הכלאה יצירתית המסוגלת להכיל

בתוכה אלמנטים סותרים לכאורה, את התפיסה הדתית המציבה את הנפש והרוחניות בעמדת עליונות, לצד התפיסה המערבית העדכנית המייחסת חשיבות לגוף ולצרכיו הגשמיים. ממצאים אלו, המתארים אימוץ מושגים מערביים עדכניים, תוך טיפוח בו זמני של ערכים מקומיים מסורתיים, תואמים ממצאי מחקרים אנתרופולוגיים קודמים על קהילות מקומיות (כגון, Knauft, 2002, 2019) או מוסדות דתיים (כגון, Adely & Seale, 2013), שבהם תואר האופן בו יוצרות קהילות מסורתיות/דתיות, גרסאות מקומיות של מודלים מערביים עדכניים, מתוך רצון לאפשר קיום בו זמני של ערכים מסורתיים לצד תפיסות מערביות עדכניות.

## 2. תהליך רצוני ומכוון

תהליך רצוני ומכוון של אימוץ מושגים עדכניים ניכר לאורך פרקי הדיסרטציה השונים, בהם תוארה מסגרת מחשבתית יצירתית בבניית הכלאות המסוגלות להכיל 'מגוון נקודות מבט' (Soja, 1996). **בפרק 2** תוארו הזמן והמאמצים המרובים שהושקעו בהתאמת מושגים מערביים עדכניים לתפיסות העולם החרדיות. **בפרק 4** פורטו תהליכים רצוניים דומים של אימוץ מכוון של טכניקות התפתחותיות, כאשר המורים החרדים מביעים, הן בגלוי והן באופן מרומז, יחס של חשיבות כלפי טכניקות אלו. בפרק מתארים המורים השקעת זמן ומאמץ בלמידה אינטנסיבית של תיאוריות התפתחותיות עדכניות שמטרתן לשפר מיומנות סנסו- מוטוריות. תהליך רצוני דומה של אימוץ תפיסות עדכניות באופן מכוון ומתוך מחויבות עמוקה, ניצפה גם באופן בו יישמו המורים טכניקות ההתפתחותיות אלו בשגרת יומם, בתוך ומעבר למסגרות הלימוד הפורמליות. **בפרק 2 (ובמבוא)** תוארו תהליכים רצוניים דומים כדרך חיים המבוססת על מסורת חרדית ארוכת שנים במערכת החינוך החרדית לבנות.

נראה כי ממצאים אלה אינם עולים בקנה אחד עם ממצאי מחקרים בהן תוארו מערכות החינוך החרדיות כפסיביות וכנתונות להשפעת תפיסות מערביות עדכניות המחלחלות לתוכן למרות התנגדותן (למשל, קפלן 2003; מנצורה, 2010; שפיגל, 2011; יפה, 2009). ממצאי המחקר הנוכחי מדגישים את המאמץ המודע והרצוני ליצירת מרחב שלישי קונסטרוואלי, בדגם דומה לדגם אותו הציע סוגה (1996), מרחב המציע אפשרויות יצירתיות של הכלאה וחיבור במפגשים בין תרבותיים, במקום האפשרויות הבינאריות של התנגדות או כניעה.

## ב. 'בלי להתפשר על הדת'

ממצאי המחקר הנוכחי מתארים אסטרטגיות תרבותיות מרכזיות שנקטו בידי המורים במטרה להבטיח כי אורח החיים הדתי לא יפגע במהלך תהליך האימוץ של תפיסות

מערביות עדכניות. אסטרטגיות אלה מציבות את הערכים החרדיים בעמדת עליונות כמנחים את תהליך האימוץ וכקובעים את הקריטריונים להתאמת מושגים מאומצים להשקפת העולם החרדית.

### **1. השענות על מקורות חרדיים עתיקים**

אסטרטגיה אחת שננקטה ע"י המורים כללה השענות על מקורות דתיים עתיקים (למשל התלמוד) לבדיקת התאמתו של מושג מערבי מועמד לאימוץ, לעקרונות דתיים בסיסיים. אסטרטגיה זו הוצגה בפרק 3 בתיאור ספרי הדרכה חרדיים למחנכים ולהורים, בהם משתמשים רק במושגים פסיכולוגיים התואמים את תפיסת העולם החרדית. בפרק 4, לא הסתמכו המורים באופן מפורש על מקורות חרדיים עתיקים, אך נראה כי המורים נוקטים אסטרטגיית דיסקורסיבית שאותה תאר בהבה (Bhabha, 1994), בה נעשה שחזור מחדש של מקורות מסורתיים עתיקים, על מנת לתת תוקף וסמכות ליצירות היברידיות חדשניות.

### **2. הפרדת הליבה מקליפתה**

אסטרטגיה תרבותית נוספת שתוארה בעבודה זו, כוללת ניקוי ו'טיהור' מושגים מערביים מאומצים על ידי הסרת אלמנטים הנחשבים כמנוגדים לערכי הדת השזורים בתוכם. יישום אסטרטגיה זו תואר לדגמא בפרק 2, כאשר המתכננות והמעצבות של מרכזו ההעשרה הסירו כל אזכור של מושג האבולוציה מהתוכניות המדעיות שאומצו לשימוש במרכזו. שתי האסטרטגיות העיקריות שתוארו לעיל נובעות מאסטרטגיה ראשונית של ביסוס היררכיה ברורה בין הערכים הדתיים לבין התפיסות המערביות המאומצות. היררכיה ברורה זו מבטלת מראש כל אפשרות למאבק תרבותי, ומסמנת בבירור את עליונותה של המסורת הדתית לעומת מעמדם הנחות של תפיסות מערביות עדכניות המאומצות על מנת לשרת את הערכים המסורתיים. פרק 4 ממחיש את השימוש באסטרטגיה ראשונית זו.

### **מודליות חרדית של מרחב שלישי**

בתארו את המרחב השלישי כמסגרת מושגית יצירתית המאפשרת הכלאה וחיבור בו זמניים של מושגים מנוגדים, סיפק סוגה (Soja, 1996) מסגרת ראשונית כללית המתארת תהליך ברירה סלקטיבי מקטגוריות סותרות. אולם, מניתוח האסטרטגיות המתוארות בדיסרטיציה זו, נראה כי אצל המורים החרדים פעלה מודליות ספיציפית של ברירה סלקטיבית: ראשית, בעוד המודל של סוגה מדגיש העדר היררכיה בין הפרספקטיבות המרובות המתקיימות זו לצד זו במרחב השלישי, אצל המורים החרדיים הודגשה היררכיה ברורה בין העקרונות הדתיים החרדיים לבין המושגים והפרקטיקות המערביים שאומצו. שנית, היררכיה ברורה זו, יצרה תהליך של קבלה סלקטיבית, במקום התהליך של ברירה סלקטיבית, שכן המורים בררו באופן סלקטיבי מקטגוריה אחת בלבד. רק מתוך הקטגוריה

של תפיסות העולם המערביות אומצו באופן סלקטיבי פרקטיקות ומושגים מסוימים, בעוד שקטגורית העקרונות הדתיים נועדה להישאר בשלמותה. שלישית, נראה כי תהליך החרדי של קבלה סלקטיבית מבוסס על מסורת תרבותית רבת שנים, ולכן הוא גם שיטתי יותר מאשר תהליך הברירה הסלקטיבית האינדיבידואלי, שתואר במודל של סוג'ה.

הדגש של המורים על מרכזיות המסורת התרבותית (דתית) שלהם, מזכירה את נקודת המבט הילידית (indigenous) המדגישה אף היא את מרכזיותן וטיפוחן של ערכי תרבויות מקומיות (כגון, Datta, 2018). להבנת מרכזיותן של המסורות המקומיות בחייהם של מהגרים, עשויה להיות השלכה על אנשי חינוך במסגרות רב-תרבותיות הכוללות ילדי מהגרים. ממצאי מחקר זה מדגישים את החשיבות של כיבוד המגוון הרחב של רקעים תרבותיים שונים, אותו מביאים ילדי מהגרים למערכת החינוך המערבית שבה הם מתחנכים. התיחסות מכבדת לרקע התרבותי היחודי של כל ילד, עשויה להקל על הגישור בין ביתו של הילד לבין בית הספר, ולהגביר את הביטחון העצמי של הילדים.

### תרומת המחקר, מגבלותיו, והצעות למחקרי המשך

למיטב ידיעתי, מחקרים קודמים לא חקרו את יחסה של החברה החרדית למושגים ופרקטיקות מערביות עדכניות, מתוך הפריזמה של מרחב שלישי והברידיות, ומתוך הישענות על אונטולוגיה ואפיסטמולוגיה חרדית. התבוננות מתוך פריזמה זו תוך חקר אונטולוגיה ואפיסטמולוגיה מקומית, מהווים תרומה יחודית של מחקר זה, העשויה לסלול את הדרך למחקרי המשך שיאמצו נקודות מבט יחודיות אלו.

מאפיין ייחודי שני במחקר זה, ניתן לראות באוכלוסייה הספציפית שלו. נראה כי התמקדות במורים במערכות חינוך ספציפיות בזרם חרדי מסוים, על סמך הרלוונטיות שלהם לנושאי המחקר, אינה נוהג מקובל במחקרים על החברה החרדית. התמקדות זו במחקר הנוכחי, העמיקה את הבנת האופן שבו דווקא מרכזיות לימוד התלמוד בזרם הליטאי היא זו שהשפיעה על פתיחותו לעולם המערבי, מבלי להוות איום על המחויבות הדתית.

שלישית, המסגרת הבלתי פורמלית של מרכז העשרה בה נערך מחקר זה, אינה שגרתית בחקר החברה החרדית, ועשויה להיחשב כחוזק נוסף המספק פרספקטיבה שלא נעשה בה שימוש בעבר בחקר הנושא הספציפי של משא ומתן בין-תרבותי. יש צורך במחקרי המשך כדי לבחון תהליכים אלו במקביל גם במסגרות בית ספר שגרתיות.

למחקר ספציפי זה גם מגבלות מסוימות: במסגרתו נחקרו אנשי חינוך בגיל הרך שעבודתם מתמקדת בנושאי ההתפתחות עדכניים; חשוב יהיה לבדוק האם האסטרטגיות התרבותיות שעלו במחקר זה משמשות גם אנשי חינוך בגילאים גבוהים יותר שבהם מושם דגש על פיתוח קוגניטיבי בלימוד התורה. באופן דומה, התפיסות שתוארו במחקר זה הובעו

ע"י מחנכים חרדים; מחקר עתידי שיכלול גם חברים אחרים בקהילה, ולא דווקא אנשי חינוך, עשוי לספק נקודות מבט נוספות להבנת עמדות חרדיות כלפי התפיסות מערביות עדכניות. עם זאת, יש לקחת בחשבון שממצאי עבודת דוקטורט זו אינם מבוססים אך ורק על משתתפי המחקר, הם מעוגנים היטב במקורות חרדיים עתיקים, כמו גם בספרות רבנית עכשווית. כמו"כ נדונו ממצאי המחקר עם חברים אחרים בקהילה החרדית כולל רבנים ומנהיגים רוחניים/דתיים אחרים.

לבסוף, מיקומה הפנימי של החוקרת, היכול להיחשב כנקודת חוזק של המחקר, יכול להחשב גם כמגבלה שלו. חשוב לשקול השפעות אפשריות של מיקום החוקרת, (כגון הנחת דמיון במקומות שאינם קיימים, קריאת דעותיה שלה בדברי המשתתפים), זאת על אף הנהלים המתודולוגיים הקפדניים שננקטו על מנת להתגבר על הטיה אפשרית הגלומה בעמדה זו.

למרות מגבלות אלו, המחקר הנוכחי מציע תובנות בעלות ערך בנושא משא ומתן בין-תרבותי ומאיר היבטים פחות נחקרים לגבי צמתים בין-תרבותיים מורכבים. לנושאים אלו חשיבות חיוניות בעולם הגלובלי, המתמודד עם תופעות של הגירה המונית המלוות בתהליכי משא ומתן בין-תרבותי.



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<sup>1</sup> For an example of thematic analysis, see the file *An Illustration of the emergence of categories grounded in research data* on <http://hdl.handle.net/11245.1/3619e187-dd5f-4ff1-b5d9-2196af966e8e>

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