



The Zionist Regime and the Identity Crisis in the Jewish State: The Conflict Between Modern Liberal-Secular Zionism and Ultra Orthodox Jews

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Abstract

Although Zionism was essentially a secular movement and a product of the Haskalah or Jewish Enlightenment (Schweid, 2008: 70–131; Bensoussan, 2011: 5), it nevertheless required the participation of all Jewish communities—including religious groups collectively referred to as Haredim—for its growth, consolidation, and, most importantly, the creation of symbolic foundations for nation-state building. At the same time, it was also necessary to persuade religious leaders to endorse the Zionist project of establishing a national homeland, so that the mission of Jews worldwide to migrate to the “Promised Land” would be framed as a religious and obligatory duty, thereby accelerating demographic transformation in Palestine in favor of the Jewish population. Consequently, the entry of religious groups into the occupied territories, along with the granting of special privileges to them for the purposes of promoting this mission, appeared both necessary and strategic. A review of the historical trajectory of the first religious groups settling in these territories, and their early privileges—especially exemptions from military service, later followed by independent educational systems and influence within key areas of judiciary and policymaking—clearly demonstrates that the religious community has been steadily gaining power. In assessing this process, however, one must also account for the high demographic growth rate of this social group, which has significantly contributed to the expansion of its influence. While the Zionist regime has essentially defined itself through a liberal-democratic identity—presenting itself, on the one hand, as the only “true democracy” in West Asia, and, on the other, adopting the title of a “Start-Up Nation” in order to position itself as a global hub for high-tech industries and to attract elites and companies engaged in free-market activities, research, and development—the reality is more complex. The identity it claims for itself stands in stark contrast to the rapidly growing religious community, a group that is openly resistant even to the most basic symbols of modernity. This juxtaposition reveals a profound tension and signals a deep-rooted identity duality within this constructed society. The earliest manifestation of this conflict may be seen in the assassination of the secular leader Yitzhak Rabin by a religious extremist, and its most recent expression in the efforts of the religious community to push for judicial reforms that would undermine the principle of separation of powers.

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Methodology

The present study is a qualitative research employing an explanatory-descriptive method, conducted through the use of both quantitative and qualitative data as well as document-based data collection and qualitative inference.

Result and discussion

The article seeks to examine the process through which the identity crisis in the Israeli regime has emerged and to assess whether this crisis can be regarded as the most significant internal threat shaping its future trajectories? According to Result and discussion, The Haredim have established themselves as one of the most powerful forces within Zionist society and in the occupied territories Through the 1947 Status Quo Agreement and secured a significant power base vis-à-vis the Zionist regime. This agreement enabled the Haredim to reorganize into political and social groups and to exert control over the regime's political and legal systems. Alongside guaranteeing their own educational autonomy, the Haredim, supported by state subsidies for yeshivot and their families, succeeded in creating a secure financial network. These conditions allowed them to educate their youth with the same anti-modernist ideology and by methods that both provoke secular Zionists and hinder the state's efforts to curb Haredi influence. In addition, the Haredim continue to dominate Issues of Personal Status within society. This domain constitutes not only their most crucial source of power but also the primary cause of frustration among Israel's secular population. The secular community's main demand is that marriage registration and the determination of Jewish identity be governed by state law under a secular legal framework, rather than by halakhic regulations. As long as no resolution to this issue is found, Israeli society will remain governed by two parallel and contradictory legal systems.

Conclusion

The findings of this study based on Social Identity Theory, introduced in the late 1970s by prominent social psychologists such as Henri Tajfel and John Turner, provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics of how individuals perceive their identities and interact with others based on group membership. According to Tajfel and Turner's fundamental insights, social identity refers to the characteristics and attributes associated with individuals' membership in social groups. This process gives rise to what is termed "social categorization," whereby individuals classify themselves and others into clusters based on perceived similarities and shared features. Such categorization simplifies the complexities of the social world and enables individuals to navigate their environments more efficiently. However, it can also foster intergroup discrimination and promote a "we versus them" mentality. Despite the active and semi-active social fault lines within this constructed society, the most persistent and intensifying threat is the identity crisis, which has set the religious community against the secular community. The evidence suggests that this problem is unlikely to be resolved except through the elimination of one of the two competing groups.

Keywords: Identity, Zionist Regime, Security Threat, Religious Community, Secular Society

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