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American Jewry in Israel
Challenge, Image and Influence

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ABSTRACTS

American Jewry and its Representation in Educational Texts, 1955-2003

Orit Oved, Tali Tadmor-Shimony

This article discusses the representation of American Jewry in the history curricula and textbooks for middle and high school students over three generations between 1955 and 2003. We argue that educational text functions as a litmus test to determine the importance of a subject in the national narrative. The article discusses two issues that reflect dilemmas in public, academic, and educational discourse: the representation of American Jews and their characteristics; and the representation of American religious movements and their principles. Two conclusions might be drawn from these: Firstly, those study topics have not been altered in the course of three generations, although the presentation of subject matter has been modified over the years; and secondly, there has been a significant change in the curricula and textbooks with regard to the Reform Movement. While the authors of the first-generation texts deny the legitimacy of the Reform Movement, those of the second-generation refer to it in neutral terms, thus conveying the impression that it is a legitimate phenomenon.

Keywords: American Jewry, educational texts, Israel – history curricula, Reform Movement

Pluralism in Zion: Between the Israeli and American Reform Movements

David Barak-Gorodetsky

This article deals with the attempts of the American Reform Movement to negotiate the constant tensions between the desire to mold a pluralistic Jewish identity in Israel in its own image, and its reservations about the possible ramifications of Jewish nationalism and the establishment of the State of Israel vis-à-vis American Jewry as an autonomous religious community. The Israeli Reform Movement, in contrast, has tried to balance the American sources that inspired its evolution by investing them with Zionist values with the creation of a Reform Hebrew culture. The dialectics between the American and Israeli Reform Movements explored here address the patrilineal descent decision of the American movement in 1983 and the response of the Israeli Movement. The ongoing tensions between the American and Israeli Movements hinge on the aspiration of both to seek legitimacy through the existence of the other while continuing to develop in accordance with their respective circumstances. Their relations have also been subjected to political and economic power dynamics, in which each side attempts to leverage actual or symbolic capital in order to promote its particular view of collective Jewish existence.

Keywords: Israel-Diaspora Relations, Patrilineal Descent, Pluralism, Reform Judaism, Religion and State

The Adaptation of North American Jewish Spirituality in Israel

Rachel Werczberger

This paper focuses on the cultural translation and adaptation of North American Jewish spirituality (JS) in Israel. JS emerged in North America in the late sixties and early seventies and absorbed the universalistic, open and inclusive approach typical of the counterculture and of the subsequent New Age forms of spirituality. When JS entered the Jewish Israeli scene in the late nineties it was adapted by two different socio-religious groups: secular New Age Israelis and the National-Religious public.

As adopted by secular Jews who belong to the New Age spiritual milieu it retains (most) of the universal values that characterize the North American JS. At the same time, it reconstructs Jewish rituals in accordance with Israeli New Age aesthetics. When it is absorbed by Religious-Zionist Jews, its Jewish particularistic affinities are accentuated and the universal-cosmopolitan aspects are blurred, or even, in cases like that of R. Yitzchak Ginsburg, obliterated, creating a nationalistic version of JS.

Keywords: Jewish renewal, neo-Hassidism, R. Yitzchak Ginsburg, R. Shlomo Carlebach, Jewish spirituality

Alive and Flourishing: JDC Assistance to Yeshivas in Israel

Ori Kraushar

From the very first years of the JDC's establishment, the organization supported Torah institutions. In 1920, it founded a designated cultural committee to coordinate activity which until the Holocaust, was religion-centric and devoted to Eastern Europe. However, from the 1950s onwards, most resources were directed to Israel. With the establishment of the State of Israel, the JDC believed that the responsibility for handling the yeshivas should be transferred to the Jewish Agency and the government. However, due to economic straits and the neglect of the state, the JDC continued to provide help to yeshivas and their students. The infrastructure and sanitary conditions of the post-Holocaust yeshivas in Eretz Israel were abysmal and visitors from the JDC became concerned about the nutrition and living conditions of students. The economic plan for Israeli yeshivas had been non-viable from the start, and as the number of yeshiva students increased, the institutions found it more and more difficult to provide them with the necessary resources. The situation necessitated renewed planning on the part of the JDC, and in 1954, the Cultural Committee decided to establish a special department to handle the yeshivas in Israel. The JDC did not see yeshivas merely as educational institutions but as communal organizations with social needs and as early as the 1940s, had supported their nutritional needs, constructed and renovated kitchens, purchased modern kitchen equipment, and provided them with guidelines regarding hygiene and food quality as well raw materials. The JDC likewise supported the introduction of occupational training

programs for yeshiva students, thereby responding to their needs well-beyond the provision of financial support.

Keywords: Israel, JDC, Philanthropy, Social Assistance, Support, Ultra-Orthodox, Yeshivas

Modern *Haredi* Identity in Israel through Perceptions of American-Jewish Philanthropy

Ofir Abu, Lee Cahaner

In this paper, we explore modern *Haredi* identity by focusing on the views of the new *Haredi* civic leadership in Israel (the homeland) on Jewish-American philanthropy (the diaspora). Drawing on ethnographic data, collected through interviews with 10 *Haredi* civic leaders and participant observation in a workshop that joined representatives of the two groups, we uncover the tensions which seem to constitute the symbolic boundaries of modern *Haredi* identity. One boundary relates to the dialectics of preservation and transformation: maintaining *Haredi* culture while pursuing a change in *Haredi* society in order to set it back on the right path. Another boundary refers to the dialectics of integration and distinction: the new *Haredi* civic leadership believes that *Haredim* can contribute to Israeli society as a whole but they should be able to do so while maintaining their *Haredi* values and *Haredi* way of life. The third boundary consists of the dialectics of differentiation and cooperation: The rejection of liberal Judaism (which Israeli Jews associate with American Jewry) alongside the willingness to cooperate with Jewish-American philanthropy. This study sheds new light on the issue of modern *Haredi* identity as it looks at how *Haredi* views of the diaspora serve identity construction processes in the *Haredi* society.

Keywords: *Haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) society, Israel, Jewish-American philanthropy, liberal Judaism, symbolic boundaries

The Origins of the Anglo-American Journalistic Tradition in Mandatory Palestine

Gilad Halpern

Throughout the 19th century, a distinctive journalistic tradition emerged simultaneously in Britain and the United States, emphasizing norms and practices such as fact-based reporting, a clear separation between news and opinion, and objectivity. The Anglo-American tradition gradually spread to other locations including Continental Europe and Israel, becoming paradigmatic in the 1970s. However, the earliest manifestations of this were already noticeable in British-ruled Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s, mainly in the two Jerusalem-based media outlets reviewed in this article: the Palestine Telegraphic Agency (PTA), a local subsidiary of the international Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA), headquartered in New York; and the *Palestine Post* newspaper. These two English-language news organizations catered to Palestine's English readers (predominantly members of the Mandatory administration) and adhered perforce to the Anglo-American journalistic tradition to which their readers had been accustomed. Jacob Landau and Gershon Agronsky, the American founders of the two companies championed Anglo-American journalism on a variety of financial, political, and professional grounds.

Keywords: Anglo-American, Jewish Telegraphic Agency, Journalism, Mandatory Palestine, Objectivity Principle, Palestine Post

American Librarians and their Influence on Librarianship in Israel

Jacqueline Laznow

From the early 20th century on, American experts in librarianship helped establish the libraries of Israel. One such expert was Sophie Udin, an American Zionist activist who, like other experts, considered herself an agent of American modernization. Her activity in the Yishuv and the State of Israel is central to the history of American influence on Israeli Librarianship and spanned the decades of the 1920s and 1950s. She and her professional colleagues from North America brought with them concepts

and methodologies that differed greatly from the traditional German system they encountered upon their arrival. Thus, they challenged the traditions that were in place in the emerging National Library and opened a gradual if obstacle-ridden path to change. The library organizations and collaborations they initiated eventually led to the recognition of librarianship as a profession requiring dedicated training, and of the library as a public rather than a purely academic educational resource. Moreover, since American librarianship is education-oriented, this played a significant role in the feminization of librarianship in Israel.

Keywords: American Experts in Israel, Feminization of Librarianship, Israel State Archives, Libraries in Israel, Sophie Udin

Israeli Journalism in the Face of Moral-Political Criticism in the Works of Saul Bellow and Philip Roth

Omri Asscher

This article examines a representative case of Israeli publicist responses to the moral-political critique by American Jewish authors, focusing on the reception of Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* and Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet*. These novels were first published in Hebrew translation in the early 1970s, against the backdrop of a heightened mythologization of Israel in the American Jewish mainstream and concurrently with Israel's early occupation of the West Bank. Roth's and Bellow's works include some highly unflattering images of Israeli militancy and chauvinistic nationalism. Israeli literary critics tended to respond to the authors' moral-political critique by framing it as inauthentically Jewish or as incorporating non-Jewish influences. In this way, Israeli responses sought to undermine the validity of the authors' critique by implying a framework of Jewish identity in which Israeli culture was symbolically preeminent. Ultimately, this tendency demonstrates how the subterranean struggle between homeland and Diaspora has informed and infused the conversation among the two Jewish communities with respect to contemporary Jewish ethics and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Keywords: Israeli-American Jewish relations, American Jewish moral critique of Israel, Philip Roth, Saul Bellow

The Catcher in the Killing Field:
The Birth of Spoken Hebrew and Its Appropriation
in the Literature of the Anti-Psychiatry Movement

Chen Edelsburg

J. D. Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) was twice published in Hebrew translation: first in the limited edition of 1954, and second in 1975, when it became a best-seller that ran to seventeen editions. This article considers the acceptance of Salinger's novel in Israel and argues that the second publication coincided with an ideological change that not only paved the way for the acceptance of the language and content of the American text but immediately thereafter, appropriated both the syntax and rhetoric of the early translation in the literature of the anti-psychiatry movement. This circular acceptance was expedited by the publication in 1973 of *I Don't Give a Damn* by Dan Ben Amotz, a novel that marks a turning point in the literary use of spoken Hebrew. Through Salinger's mediation, Ben Amotz was able to shake off the ornate Hebrew style typical of the 1970s, and create a new literary language, which became more prevalent in the 1990s. Ben Amotz who had been exposed to the anti-psychiatry movement during his stay in the United States, and even participated in a film on the subject, was drawn to Salinger's book and ended up writing a local version that launched the Israeli genre of anti-psychiatry literature.

Keywords: *The Catcher in the Rye*, Dan Ben Amotz, influence, Israeli-American relationship, J. D. Salinger, translation

Rachel Pomerantz as an Agent of Change in Israeli
Ultra-Orthodox Literature

Hodaya Bonen-Alek

The ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) writer Prof. Malka Schaps, who writes under the pseudonym Rachel Pomerantz, has a unique biography that positions her as an agent of social change in Israel's ultra-Orthodox society.

ABSTRACTS

This article offers a reading of three of Schaps' novels: *A Time to Rend, A Time to Sew* (1997), *Cactus Blossoms* (1999), and *Wildflower* (2004), in light of Alicia Ostriker's term 'stealing the language,' which describes ways in which women have 're-appropriated' the language of the patriarchy and invaded the sanctuaries of male discourse. Uncovered here are the novels' violations of accepted ideological norms in Israel's ultra-Orthodox society, though they are not identified as critical texts, but rather as the stories of young Jewish-American women who 'return' to traditional Jewish practice by becoming *baalot teshuva*. My argument here is that even though Schaps' texts are conservatively grounded in the writing conventions of ultra-Orthodox literature, they undermine the accepted ethos with a discourse that is simultaneously conservative and subversive.

Keywords: Malka Schaps, Rachel Pomerantz, Stealing the Language, Ultra-Orthodox, Ultra-Orthodox Literature, Women's Writing