

Abstracts

The Debate in Israel over the Status of non-Orthodox Jewish Denominations at the Western Wall in the Aftermath of the Six-Day War

Shmuel Bahat

Shortly after the Six-Day War, Israel's Religious Affairs Ministry erected a gender partition at the Western Wall. This move de facto established the Western Wall plaza as an Orthodox synagogue and provoked an acrimonious debate in Israel. Further controversy ensued in 1968 after authorities rejected the Reform Movement's petition to hold a prayer service without gender segregation at the location. This article examines both controversies and their ultimate outcomes, focusing primarily on the question of the status of Diaspora Jewry—and in particular American Jews—in view of the decisions made regarding the Western Wall's religious character.

The article also examines the current state of affairs at the Western Wall where after a long struggle a prayer area to the south of the plaza was allocated to the 'Women of the Wall' and non-Orthodox denominations. It is concluded that one of the main factors underlying this development is the growing influence of American Jewry on Jewish society in Israel, which is in line with the conclusions reached previously in the work of Allon Gal.

The Synagogue, the Western Wall and Gender-Oriented Struggle: The *Ladies Guild Collection* by Jacqueline Nicholls within the Entanglement of Nationalism and Secularism

Roni Tzoreff

In this study, I focus on the *Ladies Guild Collection*, an artwork by the British Jewish Orthodox artist Jacqueline Nicholls. Created in 2009-2012, the collection underscores the marginal place of women in the synagogue and in the canonical Jewish literature and its link to other forms of women's marginalization in contemporary culture. In particular, it attributes a major role to the present-day struggle of 'Women of the Wall' (WoW), a Jewish feminist organization whose goal is to ensure the equal rights of women to pray in the Western Wall plaza. Nicholls' collection highlights the way in which the organization and its goals became popular within Jewish feminist circles and suggests a connection between this specific community's struggle and the political issue of gender segregation at the Western Wall. I trace the historic transition of the Western Wall from a holy site under the Ottoman Empire, without any particular customs or rites and without gender separation, to its status since 1967 as an Israeli 'national synagogue,' which features both Orthodox synagogue rites and national ceremonies and thus has come to be a provocation to the adjacent Islamic holy places. I argue that WoW's goal of establishing the Western Wall as an egalitarian synagogue would strengthen Zionist sovereignty over the site and would dampen the oppressive power relations that unfold at the plaza. Therefore, I suggest to seek for a new path for the Jewish feminism political horizon, a path which will lead to solidarity and cooperation among women from different political groups.

‘Your Fate is in Your Hands’: The Beginning of the Feminist Struggle for Equality on the Basketball Court in Israel

Roi Irani

This article describes the struggle for equality by women basketball players in Israel during the eighties and early nineties based on newspaper accounts and the writings of the strugglers leaders. It emphasizes the clash between the feminist discourse of the basketball players, which was similar to but more radical than the spirit of some recently passed laws, and between the conservative views of the basketball officials. The gap between the two views, in addition to the radical activities adopted by the feminists, played a key role in achieving a number of significant changes in basketball regulations. The description of these events also challenges the conventional wisdom in historical feminist research in Israel. Whereas this research emphasizes the restrained character of the feminist struggle during the eighties, the episode of the women basketball players suggests that at least in some domains a radical struggle for equality was in fact taking place.

The Movement for the Dispersion of Torah: The ultra-Orthodox in the Development Towns

Idit Hazut

There are a number of Haredi, Hasidic and Lithuanian communities located in the towns of Israel's periphery. How did these communities come to be and under what circumstances? What were the motives for their establishment?

There was indeed a guiding hand behind the settlement of Lithuanian ultra-Orthodox Jews in the periphery. The article describes the little-known work of the Movement for the Dispersion of Torah (TLT, abbreviation of Tenua Lehafatzat Tora), and shines a light on its leadership and the movement's partners. This is a story of communities that kept themselves apart while at the same time striving to gain influence.

The TLT movement was founded in the 1950s by a Jerusalemite 'avrech' (yeshiva student) named Rabbi Eliezer Kugel, and began with Torah lessons given from time to time by yeshiva students in the 'Prozdor' (corridor) towns. From this humble start, a network of 'kollels' was developed that led to hundreds of students settling in those towns. The Torani 'Metivta' middle schools made it possible for the towns' youth to integrate within Haredi yeshivas, while other youths were offered activities in the 'Ahdut' club network.

In this endeavor, the ideological motive became intertwined with the economic motive: subsidized housing and accessible employment opportunities, alongside cultivation of a vision of 'seeding the spiritual wilderness'. The 'kollels' of the TLT were among the first groups to settle in the development towns by choice, and they enjoyed broad local and government support. Settling in the periphery also had a significant impact on expanding the map of ultra-Orthodox settlement.

The Lithuanian ultra-Orthodox activity in the periphery, which included initiatives of the TLT, brought in its wake the establishment

of *Mizrachi* ultra-Orthodox communities in the periphery. The Lithuanian influence decreased with the creation of the Shas movement which implemented the far reaching vision of the TLT: 'By establishing a yeshiva in one location and a kollel (adult full time learning framework) in another, we will slowly change the face of the country'.

The Loss of a Visionary: Press Coverage of the Death of Binyamin Ze'ev Herzl

Barak Bar-Zohar

The article investigates the press coverage of Binyamin Ze'ev Herzl's death (on July 3rd, 1904) in three widely circulated Hebrew newspapers: *Ha'Tsfira*, *Hashkafa* and *Habatzelet*. It is shown how journalistic practices were used in order to praise Herzl and to mark his death as a meaningful, spectacular and resonant media event. To this end, Herzl was described as divine and subliminal and as having a striking physical appearance. He was presented as the greatest leader that the Jewish people has ever known, with emphasis on his vision for the establishment of the Jewish state. However, Herzl's death exposed deep-seated tensions within the Jewish community. Specifically, while *Hashkafa* accused Herzl's opponents of being responsible for his death, *Habatzelet* refrained from even mentioning Herzl's death for a number of weeks and then strongly criticized Herzl's funeral and burial as a betrayal of Jewish tradition, religious values and God.

The Position of the Army with regard to the West Bank and Jerusalem Prior to the Six-Day War – Between Accepting Reality and Sentiment

Elona Horenstein and Yossi Goldstein

In this article, we examine the influence of senior army officers on the shaping of Israeli foreign policy. The case study discussed here is the attitude of high-ranking military personnel towards the territories of Judea, Samaria and the Old City of Jerusalem during the interim years between the War of Independence and the Six-Day War. Did the military authorities believe that Israeli control over the West Bank was vital to maintaining the security of the Israeli population? And if so, was security the only consideration or was it accompanied by personal longing for a greater Land of Israel?

The main argument set forth is that at the highest levels of the IDF, the majority supported the designation of the Jordan River as Israel's eastern border, both for security reasons and based on a historical-nostalgic longing. It becomes clear that in Israel of the fifties and sixties there was no clear dichotomy between the defense establishment and the political echelons. It has been shown repeatedly how the IDF exerted its influence—and even imposed its position—on the government, although it generally carried out the government's instructions. It can be concluded, though with a degree of caution, that although the final decision was not in their hands, senior IDF officials exerted a great deal of influence on policymaking. This is most clear in the management of the Six-Day War, which deviated significantly from the original plan, and not only because Jordan decided to enter the war.

Israelis are from Mars, American Jews are from Venus? Cultural Differences and Rivalry in American Jewish Attitudes toward Israel

Gil Ribak

The article examines the rarely explored feelings of cultural estrangement – and sometimes outright rivalry – among American Jews towards the State of Israel and Israelis, attitudes that have little to do with political or religious convictions. The ways in which American Jewish leaders, intellectuals, filmmakers, commentators, and even immigrants to Israel have portrayed Israelis and their behavior reflect those profound cultural gaps. In addition to describing episodes of rivalry between American Jewry and Israel, the article examines the representations of Israelis as pushy, noisy, aggressive, and menacing by American Jewish writers and creators of popular culture. Such portrayals indicate that many American Jews view Israelis as a Jewish ethnic ‘other’. In addition to the image of their obnoxious masculinity, Israelis are described as being the somewhat darker-skinned, Arab-like, Middle Eastern cousins, who, in turn, underline not only the liberal/progressive character of American Jews, but also their Ashkenazi, and hence European, origins. The gap between the image of Israel as an abstract entity and that of actual Israelis and the conflation of the political and the cultural in the perceptions of American Jews and in the representation of Israel and Israelis still constitute a prevalent phenomenon in American Jewish culture. Moreover, this gap leads to the broader question of whether the focus on Israel has enabled American Jews – both Israel’s staunchest supporters and its harshest critics – to sidestep other, more substantial questions that are at the center of Jewish life in America, such as the challenges of building viable communities, intermarriage, and dwindling numbers.

List of Participants

Dr. Shmuel Bahat, University of Haifa

Dr. Barak Bar-Zohar, Mofet Institute

Prof. Yossi Goldstein, Ariel University

Dr. Idit Hazut, Hemdat Hadarom Academic
College of Education

Dr. Elona Horenstein, Ariel University

Roi Irani, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Dr. Tamir Karakson, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Prof. Gil Ribak, University of Arizona

Roni Tzoreff, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev