



## Religiosity, National Identity and Legitimacy: Israel as an Extreme Case

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article investigates the relationship between religiosity and contemporary national identities by using Israel as a case study and comparing it to other countries. Survey data from the ISSP 2003 (ZA 3910) module and the Jewish Religious Behaviour in Israel study (2000)<sup>1</sup> are used to evaluate the level of national sentiments among people with different degrees of religiosity. It is found that secular Jewish Israelis are significantly less proud in almost every dimension of national pride than other Jewish Israeli groups. A similar pattern was noticed in other countries, but the gap in national pride between religious and less religious people in Israel is the highest among the 17 majoritarian ethnic groups examined. These findings point to the difficulty of stripping ethnic symbols from their religious origin, as well as to the special quest of Israeli Jews for legitimacy, which can be achieved more easily via religious justifications.

### **KEYWORDS**

Israel / legitimacy / national identity / pre-eminence / religion / religiosity

## Introduction

The Israeli journalist and peace activist Uri Avneri has said on more than one occasion that secular Israelis believe the Land of Israel was promised to them by God, in whom they do not believe. While certainly caricaturing Israeli

patriotic sentiments, this joke reveals some paradoxes of Israeli national identity which are present in other modern nation-states. These paradoxes are related to the elusive relationship between religion, secularism, and national identity – a controversial issue among different factions of national communities and a subject of scholarly debates. One major aspect of this controversy is the following: to what extent have modern national identities been constructed in opposition to religion, or, alternatively, inspired and supported by religious imagination and symbolism? Taking Israel as a case study, this article focuses on a more specific question: what is the role played by religiosity in articulating and maintaining contemporary national identities?

### National Feelings and Religiosity

The scholarly interpretation of the role and salience of religion in shaping national identities is inspired by two major analytical models. According to the first, nationalism is a ‘secular replacement’ of religion for the modern era. In terms of sociological genealogy, this perspective goes back to Durkheim’s secularist statement that ‘[...] God is only a figurative expression of society’ (1965[1915]), which sets the foundation for the notion of a Godless religion. Later, the idea that mundane institutions can become substitutes for religion was explicitly articulated in a series of studies adopting the ‘civil religion’ thesis (Bellah, 1967). The ‘modernist’ tradition in the study of nationalism is also supportive of the ‘secular replacement’ model (Anderson, 1991: 10–11; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990). Accordingly, nationalism is seen as ‘a secular form of consciousness, one that, indeed, sacralized the secular’ (Greenfeld, 1996: 169). Secularization is an essential part of the emergence of modern nationalism, and so, as a mechanism of social integration in the modern world, nationalism is a functional equivalent of religion in the pre-modern world (Greenfeld, 1996: 171; Taylor, 1998). This understanding of nationalism is also part of the self-image of many modern secular national movements, including mainstream Zionism.

According to the second model, the foundations of many modern national movements have religious roots. Because of the frequent overlap of religion and ethnicity, Anthony Smith’s theory of ethno-symbolism (1998) is largely compatible with this model. As Smith writes, modern national ideologies tend to use the pre-modern arsenal of ethnic symbols:

The reasons for the durability and strength of national identities can be understood only by exploring collective beliefs and sentiments about the ‘sacred foundation’ of the nation and by considering their relationship to the older beliefs, symbols, and traditional religions. (Smith, 2003: 4)

Consequently, ‘... it is in the sphere of “religion” that we must seek primarily the sources of national attachments. Behind and beyond ethnicity, language, and the state, albeit entwined, lie the fundamental sacred sources of national identity’ (Smith, 2003: 5). Indeed, the importance of religious elements and

symbols in the formation of modern national identities (Friedland, 2001; Gorski, 2003; Hastings, 1997; Marx, 2003), the evidence that institutionalized religion often played an important role in legitimizing and fostering nationalist values (Llobera, 1994), and the growing understanding of the loose nature of separation between church and state in western countries (Fox and Sandler, 2005; Morone, 2003) all challenge the view of modernization theories that secularization is an essential part in the creation of modern national identities.

Shenhav's conceptualization (2006) bridges the gap between these two models, although without distinguishing between them. Inspired by Latour's theory of modernity, Shenhav argues that modern 'secular' national movements simultaneously employ a discourse of purification, presenting themselves as distinct from 'pre-modern' religion (as well as from any modern substitute for religion), and a discourse of hybridization, mixing the secular with the religious. Following this logic, the 'secular replacement' approach to modern nationalism might represent the purification tendency of a national movement, while the approach of ethno-(religious) symbolism might represent tendencies of hybridization. Since national movements are never homogenous, the expectation is that different individuals and groups within the national community would emphasize different degrees of purification and hybridization.

The distinction between these forces *within* the national unit sets the intellectual foundation for this article. In each national movement (or nation-state), there are voices ascribing different roles to religion in the definition of collective identities. By measuring the level of national identification and pride expressed by individuals who represent diverse forms of religiosity, we contribute to the debate about the importance of religious elements in the constitution of contemporary national identities. More specifically, if the 'secular replacement' thesis is correct, religious people of a country's dominant religion should express lower levels of national identification and national pride than non-religious people. On the other hand, if religious symbolism provides legitimacy and inspiration to a certain national identity, religious individuals should express higher levels of national identification and pride. This article does not explicitly test the validity of the theoretical models described above, since it assumes their co-existence; what it does test is the extent to which attempts to nationalize a religion through secularization have been successful in the long term, based on the current socio-political reality and taking Israel as a case study.

Previous quantitative studies on the determinants of national identification or pride have focused on the role played by religious denomination, while largely ignoring religiosity (Evans and Kelley, 2002; Phillips, 2002) or acknowledging it only marginally (Jones and Smith, 2001). For instance, Tilley and Heath (2007) found that, among religious respondents, being a Christian acted as a predictor of British national pride, whereas having a non-Christian faith did not. In showing that Christian Europeans are more likely to view Christianity as important for their national identity, especially for frequent religious attendees, the study by Kunovich (2006) departs from previous research. However, this study's contribution is shadowed by the lack of control

or reference for ethnicity – a demand required by the common appearance of national identification based on the ethnic model and the partial overlap of ethnicity and religion.

In this article, ‘religion’ refers only to monotheistic contexts, in which religious identities are mutually exclusive and have historically played an important political role. Empirically, the context is even narrower and countries with Muslim majorities are not included, due to lack of data.

## Israel as an Extreme Case

Israel stands as an example of a conscious attempt to use an arsenal of religious symbols and shared memories in order to build a Godless national identity. We use the term ‘extreme’ in order to emphasize that the tension between secular and religious interpretations of Israeli national identity is particularly salient, while simultaneously being only a radicalized representation of a wider global phenomenon.

The secularist modernist view of nationalism is well reflected in the writings of most of Zionism’s forerunners at the turn of the 20th century, some of whom may even be considered anti-religious (Avineri, 1981). From the very beginning of the Zionist project, however, this goal of secularizing Judaism stood in contradiction to the aspiration of concentrating a critical mass of Jews in a certain territory with the purpose of establishing an independent political entity (Kimmerling, 1999). The range of efficient symbols with the potential to mobilize groups of Jews for the Zionist project was embedded in the Jewish religion. Above all, when the founders wished to define the territory for creating the Jewish nation-state, they were compelled to choose the religiously sanctified Land of Israel (Palestine), despite many potential alternatives (Kimmerling, 1999: 343). Moreover, the national language which was chosen, Hebrew, has been used for centuries almost exclusively for religious purposes, which prompted a leading Zionist scholar to express scepticism about the feasibility of basing a secular national identity on Hebrew (Scholem, 1997: 28–9).

These tensions and paradoxes are not unique to Zionism, but due to the overlap of ethnicity and religion in Judaism, as well as to the lack of an initial territorial base for the national project, they were especially pronounced in this case. Consequently, the contemporary public debate about the way national identity and religion should relate is much more clearly articulated and explicit in Israel than in most other countries. This article uses the example of Israel to bring to the surface the apparent tensions between religion and national identity. It also builds on Shenhav’s argument (2006: 11) that, in the Zionist case, ‘the principles of hybridization and purification are pushed to the limit’ and, therefore, ‘[i]t is precisely because Zionism transcends these antinomies that it provides a more symmetrical approach (and a more general case) to examining how hybridization and purification can be at work simultaneously.’ Unlike Shenhav, however, we argue that, because of these tensions, the notions of

'religious' and 'secular' in Israel are not only epistemological categories but also significant socio-political identities. Religiosity is an important organizational principle of the Israeli political map and a major predictor of electoral voting (Shamir and Arian, 1999).

## Religious Categories in Israeli Society

Popular and scientific discourses tend to divide Israeli Jews into several distinct categories of religiosity, which have sociological meaning beyond religious faith and practice. They represent different ways of life and separate educational systems, they are major determinants of political behaviour, and they constitute important predictors of place of residence. These four categories are:

- 1 *Secular*: Israeli Jews defining themselves as secular are either non-observant of religious law, or observant of some Jewish traditions without ascribing to them religious meanings. The secular have enjoyed numerical advantage and political prominence. To date, all Israeli Prime Ministers and the vast majority of Cabinet ministers, members of parliament, judges, and generals have been secular Jews.  
About 44 percent of Israeli Jews define themselves as secular (ICBS, 2006). In 1999, 43 percent self-identified as non-religious and 5 percent viewed themselves as anti-religious (Katz et al., 2000: 5). As Mitchell (2006: 1137) argued, especially in contexts of ethnic conflict, 'religion often constitutes the fabric of ethnic identity. Even if identities do not appear to be primarily religious per se, they may have latent religious dimensions that can become reactivated.' Therefore, the self-definition 'secular' does not imply severance from the religious Jewish legacy. However, the similarity between the numbers in the two surveys mentioned above suggests that Israeli secular identity is constructed through its relative distance from religion.
- 2 *Traditional*: The traditional is a relatively recent invention, a category aimed at covering the large 'grey' area between religious and non-religious (Yadgar and Liebman, 2006). In 2006, about 39 percent of Israeli Jews defined themselves as 'traditional' (ICBS, 2006). This number might not reflect the full identification with the term since those who see themselves as traditional face pressures from both the religious (for abandoning religion) and the secular (for not being 'modern enough'); therefore, many avoid this self-classification – even though their lifestyle might justify the definition (Yadgar and Liebman, 2006). Unlike other groups, the 'traditional' is not institutionally recognized by the state through a separate educational system.
- 3 *Religious*: Sometimes referred to as national-religious or Zionist-religious, Israeli Jews who view themselves as 'religious' constitute between 10 and 12 percent of the Jewish population (ICBS, 2006; Katz et al., 2000). The origins of this group are found in those parts of the Jewish Orthodoxy reacting moderately to Enlightenment and later adopting Zionism – aspects

that distance them from the Haredim (see below). Compared to the Haredim, the religious have a much higher representation within the Israeli public sphere, including the mainstream media, academia, civic judicial system, and military.

- 4 *Haredim* (commonly translated as ultra-Orthodox): In 2006, about 7.5 percent of Israeli Jews defined themselves as Haredim (ICBS, 2006). These people are strictly observant of the Jewish religious law and are also highly segregated from the rest of society. The Haredi group has been shaped in reaction to secular Enlightenment, sharply separating themselves from both non-Jews and relatively assimilated Jews. Many ultra-Orthodox objected to secular Zionism, although the Haredim generally accept the idea of a Jewish state nowadays. This acceptance was facilitated by the involvement of the Haredim in the Israeli political system and by their re-definition of Zionism.

These four categories do not fully cover the diversity and nuances of the entire spectrum of religiosity in Israel. Nevertheless, most Israeli Jews can relatively easily self-identify as belonging to one or another of these four categories. When using this typology, Ben Rafael and Peres (2005: 77) documented a strong association between one's affiliation with a certain category of religiosity and her/his desired level of Jewishness of the state, a finding pointing to the sociological validity and heuristic usefulness of the four categories.

## Formal Expectations

Our excursus consists of two stages. First, we attempt to validate the argument that Israel is an extreme case in the continuum of possible tensions between the religious and the secular definition of the nation. We do so by comparing the Jewish population in Israel to majoritarian ethnic groups in other countries in order to highlight the particularly large gap in the levels of national pride expressed by religious and non-religious Israelis. Second, we test the hypothesis that secular Jews in Israel have lower levels of national attachments than the religious and traditional, but not necessarily lower than that of the Haredim. Since religiosity in Israel is associated with origin (Katz et al., 2000), class, education and other variables affecting national feelings, we employ a multivariate analysis to control for these factors' impacts.

## Data and Measures

Two datasets are used to test the formal hypotheses outlined above. For the cross-national comparison, based on the 2003 module 'Aspects of National Identity' (ZA 3910) administered by the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), we assembled a dataset consisting of individuals aged 18–75 from countries where a majoritarian ethnic group could be identified and where the question about frequency of

attendance in religious services was included in the questionnaire: Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, the former East Germany, the former West Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Latvia, Norway, Portugal, Russia, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, and Sweden. For the particular analysis in Israel, we used (1) the ISSP Israeli sample, from which we included Jewish respondents only ( $N = 1066$ ) and (2) the 2000 survey entitled 'Jewish Religious Behaviour in Israel' (JRBI). The JRBI dataset consists of a nationwide, randomly selected sample of Jews aged 20 and higher ( $N = 2466$ ).

The combination of the two surveys is important for investigating the Israeli case, as each provides information about various aspects of national feelings. We used the ISSP dataset in order to measure the correlation between religiosity and national pride. In this first analysis, the dependent variables are represented by two indices (pre-eminence<sup>2</sup> and pride in state institutions<sup>3</sup>) and seven single-item statements, each capturing a specific dimension of national pride: a country's political influence in the world, its scientific achievements, its sport achievements, its achievements in literature and the arts, its armed forces, its history, and being (country's) national. Each of the single-item constructs had the order of responses reversed, with a high score (measured on a 1–4 Likert scale) reflective of increased pride. The first index, pre-eminence, is a composite measure consisting of three items ranging in values from 1 to 5, whereas the second index, pride in state institutions, is the mean score of four items that are measured on a 1–4 scale. We recoded each item in these aggregate measures, with higher values signifying stronger agreement and pride, respectively. A series of tests exploring the factor structures in each national sample (Israel included) was conducted for the two indices and, based on the item loadings' robust scores, the respective composite measures were assembled. Taking religiosity as the discriminator, the same type of analysis was replicated in the case of Israel's sub-samples. Reliability checks in each national sample and in the Israeli sub-sample revealed Cronbach's alpha scores in the 0.6 range and higher, which is within the standards reported in comparative studies. The one-dimensional structure of the two indices is further indicated by the model fitting tests for the single- and two-factor solutions for the seven individual items tapping pre-eminence and pride in state institutions for each national sample. The statistics from these confirmatory factor analyses<sup>4</sup> indicate that the single-factor model fits poorly.<sup>5</sup> By comparison, the two-factor model yields very robust statistics, suggesting a superior fitting for the two proposed measures.

Apart from the indicators for national pride, the ISSP dataset does not include a question referring to the sense of belonging. Since people might feel highly connected to a certain national community without being proud of it, we are using the JRBI dataset to fill this lacuna. The JRBI dataset enables us to measure the association between religiosity<sup>6</sup> and two dimensions of national identity probed by the following questions: 'Do you feel Israeli?' and 'Would you want to be reborn Israeli?'

We used the independent variable, religiosity, in a different way in each dataset. The JRBI suggested to the respondents the four conventional categories

of religiosity in Israel. In comparing Israel to other countries, we could not use the pre-defined categories of religiosity (those were available only with Israeli data). Instead, a dummy independent variable was created, which distinguished between respondents who are high frequency attendants of religious services (more than once a year) and those who are low frequency attendants of religious service (once a year or less). The rationale for choosing this cut-off point was that 84 percent of Israeli respondents who attend religious services once a year or less define themselves as secular.

## Results and Analysis

Table 1 presents standardized regression coefficients (betas) for the high frequency attendants of religious services from the models predicting various national feelings in 17 countries. Each coefficient represents the specific contribution of being relatively religious to national pride, controlling for age, sex, university education, and top-bottom self-placement.

Statistically significant negative scores (where national pride is inversely associated with religiosity) were found only in two countries, in both of them in no more than one dimension. Statistically significant positive scores, on the other hand, are observed in 14 countries, 13 of them in two or more dimensions. The gaps are most common in the general national pride and the pre-eminence index – which is compatible with the argument about the prevalence of the ‘chosen people’ theme in modern national identities (Smith, 2003).

The reported findings suggest that the tension between the religious and secular views on national feelings in Israel is, indeed, extreme. Israel is the only country where significant positive correlations were found for every dimension of national pride. Furthermore, in the case of five such dimensions, the correlation coefficients’ magnitude is the highest among 17 countries. Together, the findings imply that the Israeli case represents a wider phenomenon but in an extreme form.

Before discussing the implications of this conclusion, two alternative explanations deserve consideration. First, it could be that Israel’s extreme position reflects the relative confidence of secular Jews in Israel because of their numerical and political strength, which allows them to be more critical of Israel’s national symbols. Despite its merits, this explanation should not be overestimated. Politically, Israel is not unique in its secular elite’s prominence. Numerically, the percentage of low frequency attendants of religious services (48%) ranks Israel only 6th among the 17 countries examined. Furthermore, we found no significant correlation between the relative number of low frequency attendants in a certain country and the gap in national pride between religious and non-religious people.

Second, these results might reflect the operational definition of religiosity based on practising. Relatively speaking, Judaism is more of a practice-oriented religion than a belief-centred one, which means that this definition of religiosity possibly fits Judaism better than Christianity. Therefore, while this operational



**Table 1** Mean gaps of various national feelings between high and low frequency attendants of religious services in 17 countries, ISSP 2003

	ISR	AUT	BUL	CZE	DEN	FRA	E GER	W GER	HUN	IRE	LAT	NOR	POR	RUS	SVK	SLV	SWE
Pre-eminence	0.48**	0.34**	0.05	-0.05	-0.04	0.18*	-0.11	0.20**	0.14*	0.37**	0.10	0.02	0.14**	0.00	0.21**	0.19**	-0.02
Pride in state's institutions	0.10**	0.10*	0.11**	0.11*	0.01	0.14**	0.10	0.13**	0.01	0.27**	0.04	0.06	0.03	0.00	-0.04	0.01	-0.04
Proud of (R's country) political influence in the world	0.23**	0.09	0.09	0.10	0.05	0.18**	-0.03	0.09	-0.01	0.27**	0.06	0.15**	0.11*	0.08	-0.01	0.17**	0.04
Proud of (R's country) scientific achievements	0.16**	0.08	0.08	0.11	-0.02	0.11*	-0.05	0.05	0.03	0.16	-0.13	0.13*	0.04	0.08	0.03	0.12*	0.04
Proud of (R's country) achievements in sports	0.13*	0.15**	-0.02	0.08	0.07	0.01	-0.11	0.09	-0.06	0.18*	0.04	0.05	0.02	0.03	0.02	-0.02	0.01
Proud of (R's country) achievements in the arts and literature	0.13*	0.21**	0.17*	0.10	0.15**	0.13*	0.11	0.13*	-0.04	0.05	0.05	0.12*	0.00	0.05	0.09	0.05	0.11
Proud of (R's country) armed forces	0.34**	0.29**	0.05	0.00	0.17**	0.13	-0.06	0.26**	0.06	0.31**	-0.03	0.19**	0.08	-0.12*	0.07	0.27**	0.02

(Continued)

**Table 1** (Continued)

	ISR	AUT	BUL	CZE	DEN	FRA	E GER	W GER	HUN	IRE	LAT	NOR	POR	RUS	SVK	SVL	SWE
Proud of (R's country) history	0.27**	0.12	-0.01	0.11	0.05	0.08	-0.42*	0.13	0.11	0.14	0.11	0.04	0.09*	0.04	0.12	0.03	-0.11
Proud of being (R's country) nationality	0.35**	0.29**	-0.07	0.21**	0.05	0.15**	-0.32	0.26**	0.12**	0.20**	0.16*	0.03	0.16**	0.02	0.08	0.14**	-0.01
High frequency attendants of religious services (%)	50.8	54.7	50.0	18.9	30.0	22.4	10.2	44.9	33.1	88.3	36.0	17.3	54.4	31.3	53.9	63.9	20.9

Note:

\* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.01$

definition enables an accurate distinction between religious and secular individuals among Jews, it is also responsible for a loss of variance in the Christian countries. This argument sounds even more plausible when we examine the internal Christian division: the gaps tend to be especially prevalent in countries with a Catholic majority among believers (Austria, Ireland, Slovenia, France, and Portugal). Given that Catholicism is a more practice-oriented religion than Protestantism, it might be that Protestants with strong religious convictions have been classified as relatively less religious.

The JRBI dataset, however, enables us to measure religiosity in Israel not only through practising but also through self-classification. These data show that, even based on this criterion, the Jewish Israeli seculars are significantly less proud in their national identity than any of the other Jewish Israeli groups in every dimension of national pride, except for arts and literature (see Table 2). The difference between Catholic and Protestant countries might be related to the individualistic orientation of Protestantism, which makes Protestants more likely to limit the religious meanings they ascribe to different elements in the public sphere.

Another interesting comparison can be made between Israel and the former communist countries of Europe, since both Zionism and communism were revolutionary secularizing ideologies, but which nevertheless differed in their view of national identity and religion. Unlike Zionist leaders, communist regimes tended to avoid using the legitimizing power of religion, which enabled their secular orientation to be more consistent. Interestingly, the average percentage of 'high frequency attendants' in the eight former communist countries is not significantly lower than in the other nine countries (37.2 vs. 42.6,  $p > 0.5$ ). However, positive coefficients in more than two dimensions of the relation between religiosity and national pride were found only in one former communist country (Slovenia). More than undermining religion, and contrary to Zionism, it appears that communist regimes were successful in undermining the linkage between religion and nation-states.

It is noteworthy that the differences between the two groups in Israel are most acute in terms of general national pride, country's pre-eminence, pride in the armed forces, history, and political influence in the world. The country which displays the closest pattern to Israel in these dimensions is the Republic of Ireland, where religious symbolism also played a critical role in mobilizing national identification (Boyce, 2003: 308–10). Indeed, scholars of Ireland have indicated that secularization has weakened commitment to the role of Catholicism as a component of ethnic national identity (Poole, 1997) – an observation emphasizing the linkage between religiosity and national identity.

Another case deserving attention is the former West Germany, a society which is neither predominantly Catholic nor a prominent example of integrating religious and national symbols. Nevertheless, in the former West Germany, statistically significant positive coefficients were found in five dimensions, a pattern similar to that of Israel (high coefficients in pre-eminence, general national pride and armed forces). The puzzle is even greater since the former West Germany demonstrates that religious homogeneity among the majoritarian

ethnic group is not a necessary pre-condition for high coefficients. Among ethnic Germans, Catholics and Protestants constitute equal shares (41%) of the population, and no significant difference between their levels of national pride exists.

Probably more relevant to explaining this gap is that Germany experienced serious dilemmas regarding the legitimacy of national identity. Interestingly, in the former East Germany, where the historical connection to Nazi Germany was officially denied, religious people do not score significantly higher than the non-religious in any dimension. An explanation for this is found in the attempts of German churches to fill the 'spiritual and moral vacuum' after the Third Reich's collapse (Maier, 1974). Similarly, Margalit (2005) outlined theological reactions to the Holocaust in West Germany, some of which had the potential to reduce sentiments of collective guilt.

The similarities of Ireland and Germany with Israel suggest two mutually dependent explanations of Israel's extreme status. First, it is possible that, in places where ethno-national identities have been historically inspired mostly by religious symbolism, secular individuals might be less attached to these symbols. Second, it is possible that, when a certain collective identity is challenged by major moral dilemmas, religious justifications are more easily mobilized to legitimize this identity. Nonetheless, closer examinations of both the Irish and German cases must be made before developing further our arguments about these countries.

Arguably, the most interesting country for comparison with Israel in this aspect is Turkey, a republic which was founded on strict secularist principles and in which political Islam has gained significant political power during recent decades (Keyman, 2007) by promoting its interpretation of Turkish national identity. Unfortunately, we do not have relevant data for further elaborating on this comparison.

## **A Closer Look at Israel**

An important finding from the JRBI dataset is the prevalence of the feeling of 'Israeliness' among the Jewish citizens of Israel, with more than 95 percent of respondents providing positive answers ('yes, definitely' or 'yes'). The traditional (among them 81.7% answered 'yes, definitely' and 16.8 answered 'yes') and the religious (78.7 and 19.7%, respectively) lead this tendency. The non-religious (70.1 and 24.5%) and the anti-religious (65.8 and 25.0%) are only slightly behind them. Of the five categories, the Haredim are the least likely to feel Israeli, although a firm majority of them answered affirmatively (53.1 and 30.8%). In light of these findings, Baruch Kimmerling's (2001) thesis about the 'decline of Israeliness' appears premature.

More complexity is added when people are asked about their feelings towards being part of Israel. In answering whether one would want to be reborn as Israeli, anti-religious (among them 41.2% answered 'yes, I would very much' and 16.0% answered 'yes') and non-religious (43.9 and 26.8%, respectively) are

**Table 2** Standardized regression coefficients (betas) for the ultra-Orthodox, religious, traditional, and secular categories from the models predicting various national feelings in Israel, ISSP 2003

	<i>Ultra-Orthodox</i>	<i>Religious</i>	<i>Traditional</i>	<i>Secular</i>
Pre-eminence	0.107***	0.149***	0.123***	-0.307***
Pride in state's institutions	-0.105***	0.099**	0.102**	-0.100**
Proud of Israel's political influence in the world	-0.083*	0.023	0.138***	-0.095**
Proud of Israel's scientific achievements	-0.034	0.073*	0.067*	-0.097*
Proud of Israel's achievements in sports	-0.112***	0.009	0.164***	-0.094**
Proud of Israel's achievements in the arts and literature	-0.083**	-0.057	0.138***	-0.035
Proud of Israel's armed forces	-0.027	0.089**	0.124***	-0.169***
Proud of Israel's history	0.062	0.110***	0.030	-0.156***
Proud of being Israeli national	-0.064*	0.132***	0.134***	-0.186***

Note: Reported coefficients are from the individual OLS regressions predicting each dimension of national feelings. Not reported here are the coefficients for the following variables: age, sex, university education, and group of immigrant origin.

\*  $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.001$ .

ranked much below the categories of religious (71.7 and 17.4%), traditional (67.9 and 21.5%), and even the ultra-Orthodox (51.9 and 18.6%). The differences in the relative ranking of the non-religious categories implies that there is a gap in these groups between their sense of belonging to the Israeli national community and the extent to which they feel comfortable with this belonging.

The results reported in Table 2 provide additional evidence for this claim. This table contains extractions of standardized regression coefficients (betas) from a series of OLS regressions for each dependent variable and for each of the four categories of religiosity in Israel, while controlling for attributes such as: age, sex, education, class (top-bottom self-placement), and continent of origin.

In all dimensions of national pride, being religious and/or traditional has a significant positive effect on national pride. The pride of those who are traditional ranks first in general national pride and in fields encompassing Israeli institutions and culture: state institutions, political influence in the world, scientific achievements, sports, arts and literature, and armed forces. The fields where being religious predicts the highest scores in national feelings are less mundane: the country's pre-eminence and Israeli history. Quite plausibly, the high score of the religious group in the dimension of country's pre-eminence stems from the religious value attached to the Land of Israel and the divine status of the Jews as a chosen people – and not necessarily from attachment to contemporary Israeli society. Similarly, the high score in the dimension of pride in Israel's history

might be explained by seeing the Bible as the most important part of the country's history.

These findings are in line with those reported by Liebman and Don-Yehiyeh (1983: 146), namely that the understanding of the *raison d'être* of the State of Israel by the traditional group is closer to that of the secular than to the religious worldview. While the dominant justification for the existence of the state among religious Jews was the promise of God, the traditional and secular segments emphasized a utilitarian justification (the suffering of the Jews in Diaspora) or an ethnic justification that is not necessarily religious (the yearning of Jews to return to the Land of Israel). This argument corroborates the idea suggested by Yadgar and Liebman (2006: 366), according to which the traditional option provides the most suitable tool for dealing with the permanent and inherent tensions of the Israeli national identity. This comes as no surprise considering that the traditional is the only category which emerged and was shaped exclusively within the context of the state of Israel.

Being ultra-Orthodox has a significant negative effect on general national pride, pride in state institutions, in Israel's political influence in the world, in achievements in sports, and in achievements in arts and literature. On the other hand, being ultra-Orthodox has positive effects on pride in the same dimensions where the religious lead: pride in Israeli history, which serves as a further confirmation that respondents identified Israel's history with the Biblical people of Israel, and sentiments concerning the country's pre-eminence, which are related to the sacred religious value of the country. This finding parallels that reported by Ben Rafael and Peres (2005: 68–9), that the ultra-Orthodox feel themselves the least to be part of the Israeli society and yet are ranked second in willingness to live in the country and willingness for their children to live in the country. Indisputably, there is a discrepancy between the socio-political marginality of the ultra-Orthodox in the Israeli society and their religiously inspired attachment to the country.

The ultra-Orthodox category shares with the secular the high frequency of negative coefficients. Historically, this can be explained by the common denominator of the Haredim and secular Zionists – the acceptance of the purification discourse (the separation of religion and nationalism). Secular Zionism did this by rejecting religion, while the Haredim did so by rejecting nationalism. Being secular, however, has an even stronger negative effect on national pride than being Haredi. Moreover, being secular correlates negatively with all dimensions of national pride, and, with the exception of pride in the arts and literature, all effects are statistically significant. Compared with the ultra-Orthodox, the secular respondents yielded more extreme coefficients in most dimensions of national pride.

The relatively reserved attitude of the secular Israeli Jews toward national identity does not mean that they do not see themselves as Israelis, or that they are not attached to the country and the Jewish secular elements of its culture. It does imply, however, that attempts to engineer a cohesive and stable Israeli secular national identity face obstacles. The gap between 'feeling Israeli' and 'feeling pride in being Israeli' suggests that secular Israelis experience a dissonance

and that they tend to feel less comfortable with the contemporary conventional public meanings of Israeliness.

## Crisis of Legitimacy

Our explanation for this phenomenon (which has already been implied by the comparison to Germany) follows those of Liebman and Don-Yehiye (1983) and Kimmerling (1999), who saw a direct link between the crisis of legitimacy experienced by Zionists and the need for Jewish religious symbols to cope with this crisis. Solid legitimacy for the Israeli national project is essential for two reasons. First, there exists a native population who has paid the price for the Zionist project. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict, therefore, is frequently managed in the moral field, whereby each side aspires to accumulate moral capital. Second, legitimacy is needed because Israelis are constantly facing demands for significant sacrifices (individual and collective) to maintain the national project.

Kimmerling believed that this crisis dictated the choice of symbols from the very first steps of the Zionist movement. Since Zionism faced violent opposition from the Palestinians, it repeatedly had to explain to Jews and the international community why it chose Palestine as its target territory for settlement. Since materialist reasoning could not be used to justify this choice, Zionism has been:

[...] unable to disconnect itself from its original identity as a quasi-messianic movement. The essence of this society and state's right and reasons to exist is embedded in symbols, ideas, and religious scriptures – even if there has been an attempt to give them a secular reinterpretation and context. (Kimmerling, 1999: 341)

Liebman and Don-Yehiye (1983) identified the 1967 war as the turning point in this scheme. After occupying (among other territories) the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Israel became the direct ruler of a large Palestinian population, whom Israel left in limbo (with no defined status or civil rights). Liebman and Don-Yehiye (1983) argue that the old Israeli 'civil religion' based on statism, secularized Jewish symbolism, and invented tradition was not enough to provide legitimacy to the new circumstances. Consequently, 'Israelis were increasingly thrown back onto utilizing religious or, at least seemingly, religious arguments' (1983: 129), the end result being the emergence of a 'new civil religion', one which 'seeks to integrate and mobilize the Israeli Jewish society and legitimate the primary values of the political system by grounding them in a transcendent order ...' (1983: 131).

This quest for legitimacy has never subsided and even tended to intensify with the escalation of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the ISSP survey was administered in December 2003 (the end of the second Palestinian Intifada), when sporadic attacks were taking place and memories of the large scale terrorist acts against Israeli civilians were still fresh.

The crisis of legitimacy is another way to interpret the thesis of Shafir and Peled (2002), who identified three discourses of citizenship prevalent in Israeli

society: an ethno-national discourse (which legitimizes the privileges of Jews), a liberal discourse (which emphasizes individual universal rights), and a republican discourse (which privileges those who contribute to the declared aims of Zionism). Two of the three discourses are collectivist-nationalist: the republican one, which has declined in intensity over the years; and the ethno-national one, which has gained strength. The republican discourse took inspiration from the secular ideological fervour of the pioneering ethos, which legitimized the privileged status of the Zionist socialist youth (mostly originating in Europe), who fervently carried out the sacred secular missions of Zionism – settling the periphery, leading the military, and dominating the creation and consumption of the emerging secularized Hebraic culture.

The ‘old Israeli civil religion’ conceptualized by Liebman and Don-Yehiye was closely connected to this republican secular discourse of citizenship. Our findings suggest that, under the circumstances of a growing crisis of legitimacy, this discourse was not satisfactory in terms of providing moral support. Therefore, Israelis either withdrew from collective goals by adopting a liberal discourse (and, implicitly, avoiding collective responsibility) or adopted the ethno-national discourse (which is immersed in religious symbolism). The first option is typical of secular people, whereas the second is popular among the traditional.

## Broader Implications

Methodologically, this study illustrates the importance of a priori knowledge of the relevant categories for a case study. In Israel, religiosity does contribute to national pride, but it was only due to our a priori knowledge of the Israeli society that we were able to identify the kind of religiosity which makes the most salient contribution (the traditional category). This refinement points to the caution required in international comparisons. Furthermore, it illustrates the advantages of an analysis that combines international comparison with a narrower examination of a particular society.

Theoretically, our findings suggest that the ‘secular replacement’ model is less common than the ethno-religious symbolism one (in other words, that the discourse of purification is relatively unimportant). Nonetheless, religiosity cannot be seen simply as a ‘reason’ for national pride. Although religiosity is the independent variable in our equation, equally plausible is that religious attachment might be inspired by individual national and/or ethnic identifications.

Furthermore, this analysis highlights the difference between the sense of belonging and the sense of pride. While the sense of belonging is only marginally associated with religiosity in Israel, national pride is strongly and negatively associated with being secular. Therefore, our findings do not suggest that attempts to transform religion into a secular national identity are doomed to fail. Religious symbols might be transformed into signifiers of a secular nation, even when stripped of their divine meaning. If a divine meaning is preserved, however, these symbols also have a strong legitimizing power, with a potential to reduce



or inhibit hesitations or moral dilemmas about the politics, culture, and image of the nation-state. Thus, the stronger the quest for legitimacy, the tougher it is to 'purify' national identities of sacred elements, which leads to the widening of the gap in national pride between believers and non-believers. This insight calls for further examination of cases in societies where contemporary sentiments of national identification are threatened by crises of legitimacy.

## Notes

- 1 Administered by Shlomit Levi, Hanna Levinsohn, and Elihu Katz from the Institute for Applied Social Research and provided by the Israeli Social Sciences Data Center at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
- 2 The pre-eminence index was constructed from responses to the question 'How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?' (1) I would rather be a citizen of [R's country] than of any other country in the world; (2) the world would be a better place if people from other countries were more like [R's country] people; (3) generally, [R's country] is a better country than most other countries.
- 3 The index of pride in state's institutions index was assembled from responses to the question 'How proud are you of [R's country] in each of the following?' (1) the way democracy works; (2) [R's country] economic achievements; (3) social security system; and (4) fair and equal treatment of groups in society.
- 4 Not reported here but available from the authors upon demand.
- 5 The RMSEA (Root Mean Square Approximation of Error) values were higher than the cut-off of 0.05 and the scores for the Comparative Fit Index (a goodness of fit measure designed for small samples) were lower than 0.90 (see Bentler, 1990).
- 6 For the JRBI survey, the five categories of religiosity are: 'Haredi', 'religious', 'traditional', 'not religious but not anti-religious', and 'anti-religious'.

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