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Nurit Stadler. *A Well-Worn Tallis for a New Ceremony: Trends in Israeli Haredi Culture.* Brighton: Academic Studies Press, 2012. 174 pp. $70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-936235-82-7.

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The Israelization of Contemporary Haredi Culture?

According to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, more than a quarter of Jewish elementary school students in the State of Israel are studying in the Haredi sector, suggesting that Haredim will only become more important as time goes on.[1] For this reason alone, we should celebrate the growth in the past decade of careful quantitative and qualitative studies of Israeli Haredim. Nurit Stadler's *A Well-Worn Tallis for a New Ceremony: Trends in Israeli Haredi Culture* makes an important contribution, bringing to an English-speaking audience more of this growing Israeli academic conversation. Building on her closely related (and somewhat more polished) 2009 book, *Yeshiva Fundamentalism: Piety, Gender, and Resistance in the Ultra-Orthodox World*, Stadler offers a rich understanding of Haredi experience based on close observation, interviews, written sources, and multimedia materials. Stadler is part of a growing group of Israeli students of Haredi culture–including Tamar El-Or, Gideon Aran, Yoram Bilu, and others–who offer rich analysis of contemporary Haredi culture from an anthropological perspective, in addition to a growing number of scholars working on economics, geography, quantitative sociology, history, Jewish thought, and Jewish law.

Opening in the first two chapters with a survey of various sociological theories of the relation of religion to modernity as well as a thorough literature review of anthropological studies of Israeli Haredim, the book continues with a series of case studies of changing Haredi attitudes toward aspects of contemporary non-Haredi culture and society. Chapter 3 uses the example of ZAKA and Yad Sara, two Haredi-founded nonprofit organizations that make important contributions to non-Haredi Israelis, arguing that a new spirit of citizenship and civic duty has appeared among a significant number of young Haredi men. Despite the fact that minority fundamentalist groups often find themselves in opposition to civil society and government, many Haredim "are actively seeking wider public recognition and legitimacy by adapting themselves to popular liberal models of citizenship, which place an emphasis on, say, 'giving back' to society at large" (p. 64).

In chapter 4, Stadler suggests significant changes in Haredi gender images. A gradual diminishment of focus on male emotional self-control and asceticism has put a new focus on masculine domesticity, in which men are increasingly encouraged to value emotional interpersonal relations with their wives and children. Borrowing from John Bartkowski's work on evangelical Promise Keepers in North America, she explains that strong family life is necessary to maintain the religious enclave, which in turn requires men to contribute their share of the emotional work in marriage and child-rearing. In a particularly sharp and insightful section, she points to ways in which Haredi men feel emasculated and helpless–even angry at their rabbinic leaders–because of rabbinic edicts that insist that men not earn a living but study Torah full-time. As one student put it, "Our rabbis do not understand this conundrum.... They recommend that women should be sent to work in order to support their husbands economically ... or [they espouse] the elevation of yeshiva isolation as an ideal model of piety.... This is wrong; we cannot feel comfortable with this.... This is not what is stated in the Torah" (p. 84).

Next, Stadler traces the increased resonance of military language and metaphor in Haredi men's discussion.

Haredi men speak openly about a desire to serve in the army, even if that is not a desire they can actualize, and they often use military imagery to talk about their own yeshiva experience, battling the evil impulse, conquering temptation, and protecting the people of Israel through the sanctity of Torah. This suggests an influence of Israeli military culture on Haredim. Chapter 6 returns to ZAKA, arguing that the spirit of volunteerism that inspires Haredi volunteers who care for the often mutilated bodies of murdered terror victims reflects a profound concern for the well-being of non-Haredi Israel. Israeli Haredi men care profoundly about the well-being of the larger nation and have taken on a spirit of voluntarism in order to help contribute their share. The book closes with a chapter on "post-fundamentalism" (p. 123), suggesting an increased openness to Israel and Israeli culture on the part of Israel's Haredim. Israeli Haredim may be moving away from the enclave model of fundamentalism to something more integrated and fluid.

Stadler puts forward, clearly and with much evidence, what amounts to the current reigning narrative in Israeli anthropological studies of contemporary Haredi culture, namely that Haredi Judaism is undergoing a process of Israelization in which Haredi Jews have greater contact with non-Haredi culture than they did in the past. "The ultra-Orthodox … display greater openness to mainstream society.… The mounting exposure to the 'outside world' has been facilitated by modern technologies, particularly computers, mobile phones, the Internet, and DVDs. As a result, many Haredis now have access to 'forbidden' sources of information that were hitherto safely out of reach" (p. 12). This has led to increased influence on Haredim of outside forces and greater openness to those forces.[2] The argument is clear, well presented, based on systematically gathered evidence, and is, no doubt, at least partially true.

Still, I want to try to push Stadler's argument a bit further, in two ways. First, I want to challenge some of the unstated historical assumptions in the book. Second, I would like to point to some evidence that pushes in the opposite direction of Stadler's conclusions, not because her conclusions are incorrect, but because the Haredi community is experiencing paradoxical, contradictory, and seemingly mutually exclusive trends simultaneously.

A Well-Worn Tallis identifies contemporary trends in Haredi culture and argues that they represent a move toward opening up the boundaries between Haredi and non-Haredi culture. Yet, the book does not articulate in a precise way the point of historical comparison. When was Haredi culture more insulated and closed off? When and how were things less open? Stadler does not make this explicit, but the unstated assumption seems to be that the 1970s and 1980s represent a kind of golden age of Haredism, when the community was more isolated, when there were fewer points of encounter between Haredi and non-Haredi culture, and when lived experience more closely matched isolationist communal ideology. In contrast to that period, today's Haredim appear more open and influenced by outside cultural trends. Still, to the best of my knowledge, we lack an anthropological study or a thick description of Haredi life in the 70s and 80s.

But there is reason to suspect that if we looked as closely at that time as we do at contemporary Haredi life we would find signs of openness and cultural interaction, albeit somewhat different ones. We might not find Haredi gyms, as much subtly subversive women's fiction, or ZAKA. Instead, we would find Haredim listening to non-Haredi radio stations, since the phenomenon of Haredi radio had not developed. We would find Bnei Brak not as an exclusively Haredi city, but with religious-Zionist residents as well, which would have helped create day-to-day encounters between Haredim and others. We would not find gender-separated health clinics, for Haredim only, but day-to-day meetings outside the pediatrician's office.

A corollary of this speculation is the suggestion that Haredi culture has not moved in one direction, toward greater openness and interaction, but might be moving in several contradictory directions simultaneously. Take the example of separation between the sexes. A generation ago, nobody had heard of separate-gender public buses or municipal sidewalks. Needless to say, gender separation is a complex phenomenon that needs to be analyzed from multiple methodological perspectives, but one social function of increased gender separation is to set up boundaries between Haredim and non-Haredim. A gender-separated public bus declares the bus to be Haredi territory, in which non-Haredim will feel uncomfortable and part of the outgroup. Gender-separated sidewalks keep non-Haredim out. Take also the example of geographic isolationism. A generation or two ago, many neighborhoods, particularly in Jerusalem, could include both Haredim and non-Haredim. Today, neighborhoods and entire cities are Haredi only, and often neighborhoods segregate by subgroups of Haredi Jews.

What to make of these contradictory trends is a matter of interpretation and further research. Perhaps signs

of greater openness have pushed more conservative elements toward further isolation. Perhaps additional isolation leads to a sense of confinement that pushes Haredim to search beyond the community's boundaries. Perhaps growing Haredi size and self-confidence is simply creating more diversity.

Thus, Stadler does a fine and careful job of telling half of the story, the half of the story in which Haredim, non-Haredim, and their respective cultures are having more interactions. She downplays the other half of the story, in which they are interacting less. Only time will tell how these contradictory trends play out in the ongoing interactions between an increasingly influential Haredi community and the rest of Israel.

Notes

[1]. See `http://www.cbs.gov.il/reader/shnaton/templ_shnaton.html?~num_tab=st08_09&CYear=2011`, accessed July 2012.

[2]. See, for example, Kimmy Caplan and Nurit Stadler, eds., *Leadership and Authority in Israeli Haredi Society* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Van Leer Institute and Hakkibbutz Hameuchad, 2009); and Emmanuel Sivan and Kimmy Caplan, eds., *Israeli Haredim: Integration without Assimilation?* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Van Leer Institute and Hakkibutz Hameuchad, 2003).

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