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Yohai Hakak. *Young Men in Israeli Haredi Yeshiva Education: The Scholars Enclave in Unrest.* Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2012. VIII, 190 S. $133.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-23469-7.

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Y. Hakak: Young Men in Israeli Haredi Yeshiva Education

Yohai Hakak has written an important book with the relatively unspectacular title "Young Men in Israeli Haredi Yeshiva Education". But already the subtitle hints towards the actual topic of the book, namely "'The Scholars' Enclave in Unrest". This refers to recent developments within Haredi (or ultra-Orthodox) milieu, which has been described 'the society of scholars' as it is dominated by the ideal of lifelong Torah learning for all its male members. In recent years the Haredim have become probably the most debated social segment of Israeli society, especially against the background of their enormous birth rates and the implicit fear of a 'Haredization' of Israeli society. Public discourse in Israel revolves around the question, how the relation of this rather different group to the rest of the society will evolve. The need for posing this question is amplified by the fact, that it is a society which undergoes major changes.

While there is quite some literature on the Haredim in the context of fundamentalism debates, these recent developments still need more in-depth research. There is certainly pioneering work done, e.g. the book by Nurit Stadler. Nurit Stadler, Yeshiva Fundamentalism. Piety, Gender, and Resistance in the Ultra-Orthodox World, New York 2009. Yet research on the question how the latest developments change and challenge the self understanding of the Haredi society itself was hard to find. And this is where Hakak's book fits in.

The author attempts to answer some of the most frequent questions in regard to the changes of the Haredi society. "How influential, if at all, is the outside world and Israeli society on this scholars' enclave, the ideological heart of Haredi society? [...] The successful socialization of young men is crucial for the survival of the enclave, but what do the religious authorities consider to be success? Do these definitions change? Do they allow for those who don't completely fit in to stay? How do the religious authorities, rabbis and educators deal with those who don't fit perfectly?" (p. 6f.) In order to answer these questions, Hakak analysed Haredi text books, but he also - and this is rather unique - managed to get access to a yeshiva and was allowed to participate in class and interview students.

The book is structured thematically. Hakak starts with a discussion of a tension which is maybe the crucial feature of the Haredi society, namely "the place of the body and the earthly, and its relationship with the spiritual world in this spiritual oriented community" (p. 6). Throughout the book Hakak highlights the importance of this discourse for the Haredi lifeworld, especially in two fields: First, between the actual corporeality of the Haredim and their attempt to escape this state of being in favour of a more pure spiritual existence; and second, between their community and the outside world (Jews, Gentiles).

He connects this tension with several changes and developments within the Haredi world. For example, Hakak explains how in their ever growing society, the ideal of becoming an outstanding Torah scholar is less and less within reach for most of the students. That in turn produces the paradoxical phenomenon of school dropouts in a world of scholars. The author does not only show how this endangers the social fabric, but also explains how it raises questions in regard to the lack of secular studies in the Haredi world: What, if not Torah scholars, can the yeshiva graduates become, if they are not excelling in their studies? In connection to this stands Hakak's discussion of those weaker students, who are not able to live up to the "standards of discipline and control of the body" (p. 109). These youths are a growing problem to the Haredi world, as they challenge the ethical ideal of the 'society of scholars'. Hakak illustrates on the one hand different strategies the rabbis employ to deal with that problem, for example through instituting "light yeshivot". On the other hand he pinpoints the changing self conception of these Haredi youngsters: Open deviance in certain areas, new approaches to indi-

viduality, e.g. in clothing and also new approaches towards their very physicality. Other points he discusses are shifting perceptions of Torah sages, away from super human saints to more "regular mortals" (p. 101), or the rise of notions the individual in a holistic world, which leads somewhat to a democratization of the Haredi society.

Even though research has been done on some of the issues of change within the Haredi society, Hakak manages to deepen and enrich our understanding of the recent developments within the Haredi society. But the strongest feature of the book is certainly, that he describes not only these changes, but embeds them in the Haredi discourse of worldliness versus spirituality, good and evil, inside and outside the community. And he also indicates how this discourse starts to shift in light of the above mentioned changes. This is tantamount, as Hakak rightly notes quite often, with a readjustment of the social structure of the Haredi society. He highlights this by a rather bold, but not unfounded statement towards the end of the book. The author observes a "major transition in world-view", when he claims that "previously the Haredi world was unconscious of its being based on man-made theory, [...n]ow we see a move towards a world-view that conceives itself as man-made as leaving room for doubt" (p. 170).

Hakak's theoretical approach could be further elaborated. He rightly notes, that the "theoretical perspective used [...in the academic discourse on Haredim] is limited" (p. 3). To overcome this problem, Hakak combines a theory of enclave cultures (which has been used before) and religious orders. While this is certainly useful, a more meta-structural view on things would contextualize the insights of the book much better. The tensions Hakak describes are essentially constellations of the axial age (i.e. the relation between transcendence, world and revelation or also the holistic views on society and cosmos) which are confronted with modernity. Marcel Gauchet, The Disenchantment of the World. A Political History of Religion, Princeton 1999; Johann P. Arnason / Smuel N. Eisenstadt / Björn Wittrock, Axial Civilizations and World History, Leiden 2005. In highlighting these changes, it would become clearer that the turn to the body and to the world is a necessary precondition for a turn towards the Israeli society. This turn is fairly relevant in political terms: The change of attitude to the world at cost of a sole spiritual path is a prerequisite for attributing politics and the state with more relevance in the theological discourse.

But that is just a minor critique. In sum, the book manages to elaborate on important developments and changes in the Haredi world: The emergence of cautious deviance, questioning of old ideals, or the rise of individuality. At the same time Hakak explains how these changes inflict strains upon the social structure of the Haredi world. The book can be therefore recommended particularly to scholars dealing with the development within the Haredi society.

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