

Yoav Peled, Horit Herman Peled. *The Religionization of Israeli Society*. Oxon: Routledge, 2018. 250 pp. \$150.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-138-95479-3.

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Secular Israeli journalists, publicists, and academics have recently expressed their concerns with the increasing influence of religion on Israeli society and politics. In *The Religionization of Israeli Society*, Yoav Peled and Horit Herman Peled aim to explain the sociopolitical origins of this process and describe how religion influences various spheres of Israeli society. The authors identify religionization as replacing secular civil religion in Israel with traditional religion, a process which has been taking place since the decline of the Labor Zionist Party, starting with its fall from power in 1977. The religionization of Israel entails the increasing representation of Religious Zionists in state institutions, as well as cultural fields, such as fine arts and cinema. This process is analyzed by the authors through the Gramscian concept of cultural hegemony. They describe how the Labor Zionist hegemony has gradually been replaced by a new historic bloc consolidated around the Religious Zionist (or National Religious) movement. The authors argue that the Religious Zionist nationalist worldview is now supported by broader parts of the Israeli society, which can eventually lead to the theocratization of the Israel state.

The main contribution of the book lies in the first three chapters, which discuss secular-religious relations within the Zionist movement and the state of Israel. In the first chapter, the authors

give an overview of some of the scholarly work on the tensions among religion, modernity, and nationalism, and how these tensions were dealt with in the Zionist context. The authors show how the Zionist movement's reliance on Jewish religious symbols later served as an ideological foundation for the Religious Zionist hegemony, enabling other secular groups to support the Religious Zionist worldview. The second chapter explains the economic factors that led to the rise and fall of the hegemony of Labor Zionism. The third chapter briefly describes the ideology and history of the Religious Zionist movement and how its political alliance with the existing Labor Zionist hegemony shifted to a direct challenge of that hegemony during the 1960s and 1970s.

The fourth chapter is intended to present groups that are not part of the Religious Zionist movement, but still can be considered as falling under its "sphere of influence" the movement of "return" to religion (*teshuvah*) and the movement for "Jewish renewal." The rest of the book is dedicated to various domains of Israeli society, in which the authors identify growing religious influence, mainly due to the increasing presence of Religious Zionists. The book focuses specifically on the influence of religion in the education system, Israeli military, and visual fine arts. One more short chapter discusses the rise of Orthodox

feminism, although it does not account for many of the recent developments in the movement. The last chapter analyzes television and film productions created by Religious Zionists and *haredim*, or the ultra-Orthodox.

How do the authors define “religionization”? It is not understood in terms of increasing adherence to religious law; indeed, religious observance has not grown in Israeli society. Religionization for them, rather, is the increasing influence of the Religious Zionist ethnopolitical worldview on the Israeli public. This influence, in turn, appears to be measured primarily by the growing numbers of people associated with religious groups present in various domains of Israeli society: their mere presence is defined as “religionization.”

It is of course important not to overlook these processes, since religion consists of a social dimension and cannot be reduced to piety and adherence to religious obligations. However, this emphasis on social representation and cultural influence raises some analytical problems. Since the authors argue that the mere fact that Religious Zionist individuals fill certain influential roles in society constitutes religionization, how do we understand, for example, the increasing enlistment of Religious Zionist women in the Israeli army? It certainly increases the representation of Religious Zionists in the army. At the same time, as the authors note, these women are explicitly disobeying rulings by prominent Religious Zionists rabbis prohibiting women’s army service. As a result, a phenomenon that clearly indicates a decline in religious authority is paradoxically considered to constitute an example of religionization.

While the authors note some political diversity in the Religious Zionist movement, they also consider it as “very strongly correlated with right-wing nationalist political positions” (p. 216). They emphasize that since the 1960s and 1970s a group formed around Rabbi Zvi Yehudah HaCohen Kook became the dominant ideological force within the

Religious Zionist movement. This group’s explicit political agenda challenged the Labor Zionist hegemony and argued that political considerations must be subject to religious considerations. The main consequence of this idea was the formation of Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful), a social movement that began settling Jews in the territories occupied by Israel in the 1967 war. The authors successfully show how this ideology and system of symbols became increasingly dominant in Israeli society, replacing Israeli civil religion. However, research has also shown that the influence of this group within Religious Zionist circles has been declining, opening space for alternative Religious Zionist interpretations.[1] Therefore, merely pointing to the increasing participation of Religious Zionist individuals in the Israeli public sphere misses the internal diversity of the movement and the growth of alternative ideological strands.

The authors describe the religionization of Israeli society through an analysis of Religious Zionist values, focusing on their influence on the broader Israeli society and its dominant social symbols. This influence, they argue, comes about through the increasing participation of Religious Zionists individuals in various public domains. However, the authors’ normative standpoint against what they consider to be Religious Zionist values, together with the choice to avoid a positive description of “religionization” is problematic. The book does not provide us with analytical tools to interpret more ambiguous cases, such as the non-Orthodox movements for Jewish renewal, in which the increasing influence of religion does not necessarily promote an ethnonationalist worldview. Therefore, the use of the concept is sometime almost tautological (actions of religious people equal religionization).

To sum up, this book is an important contribution to the field of Israel studies, offering a comprehensive and detailed description of the changing role of religion within the Israeli society. How-

ever, scholars of religion in Israel, and specifically scholars of Religious Zionism might be disappointed by the lack of a more nuanced and updated description of the contemporary Religious Zionist community as well as other forms of Judaism in Israel.

Note

[1]. Chanan Moses, "From Religious Zionism to Postmodern Religion" (Hebrew) (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2009).

Hayim Katsman is doctoral candidate at the University of Washington. His dissertation project is entitled "Religious Nationalism in Israel/Palestine: The Case of Religious Zionism and Hamas."

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