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Self-exclusion as a strategy of inclusion: the case of Shas

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Among the many paradoxes of Israeli politics, there are the strategies of political inclusion used by organizations and parties representing groups that reject the universalism which Israeli democracy is heir to. This paper develops a model of 'political inclusion Israeli-style', illustrated by one party, Shas, which since 1984 proclaims itself the voice of the socially and culturally excluded Sephardi population of north African and Middle Eastern Jews, who represent over 40% of the Jewish population. Shas is also a movement of religious and ethnic revival which, by adopting a social strategy of self-exclusion grounded in strict religious observance, and of independence vis-à-vis established Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox politics, has gained 11 out of 120 Knesset seats, inclusion in government, and control over a share of educational and welfare expenditure. The paper raises the issue whether such less-than-perfectly universalistic practices are not a variety of corporatism and possibly, for the parties concerned, a more effective strategy of incorporation than the classic social democratic path.

Keywords: ethnicity; religious identity; religious revival; boundary-maintenance; political recognition; corporatism; multiculturalism; political inclusion; enclaves

Israeli politics and ethnicity

The case of Israel presents, as is well known, all manner of conundrums and puzzles for theories of citizenship. In the words of one prominent political scientist, referring to its party system: 'Israel is a most baffling case – and this quite apart from the fact that it is a microcosm of all the conceivable complexities' (Sartori 1976). The founding of the State itself was legitimate in international law by virtue of UN resolutions, but without the war which accompanied it, and which led to the forced exile of a large number of what would have been an Arab majority population, the Jewish character of the state, also validated by the UN, could hardly have been established. This did not, however, mean that the Jewish population would be homogeneous ethnically or even religiously: despite, but also because of, the shared Jewishness of its majority, Israel was destined to be multi-ethnic, multicultural and class-divided in a way no one at that time imagined and indeed few outside Israel imagine even today.

From its origins in the pre-State institutions before 1948 until well into the 1980s and even later, Israel's politics saw off any attempts to mobilize Jewish ethnic identity on large scale in the political arena: although there were numerous ethnic lists in successive elections

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going back as far as the pre-state *Yishuv* institutions in 1920, these were almost invariably the vehicles of particular politicians' transitory interests and the corresponding patronage of the largest parties (Herzog 1986) and never exceeded 5% of the vote, despite the multiplicity of national origins among the Jewish population. As far as religious controversy was concerned, the ultra-Orthodox parties – with some 5% of the vote – eschewed the holding of full Ministerial office, due to their principled objection to the idea of a secular Jewish state, confining themselves to vice-Ministerial positions, budgetary wrangling, and (shrill) conflicts over religious observance. In fact, early Zionist advocates barely acknowledged the existence of millions of North African and Middle Eastern Jews – while religious traditionalism was respected only as a relic of a world which most of them had abandoned when they left Poland and Russia in the early twentieth century, and which they probably regarded as destined to gradually disappear under the influence of modernity and secularization. But, by now, Israel has been touched by identity politics and reshaped by waves of immigration from different parts of the world: from the Yemen before 1950, the Middle East and North Africa in the 1950s and 1960s, the USSR in the 1970s, from Ethiopia in the 1980s, and again from the former USSR and from Ethiopia in the 1990s, and from North and South America throughout the period since 1960. This paper focuses on Shas, a social movement and political party that realigned the politics of religion and ethnicity and took its place firmly as the voice of the religious and ethnic revival of Middle Eastern and North African Jews (Sephardim)¹, thus enlarging the existing modes of representation, even though only a minority of the Sephardi electorate vote Shas.²

A society of enclaves: corporatism Israeli-style

Israel can be thought of as a society of enclaves – political legal, social and territorial. In the words, for example, of Horowitz and Lissak 'social enclaves tend to form around movements which act as secondary centers that mobilize and allocate resources and commitments, receiving continuity through socialization and indoctrination' (Horowitz and Lissak 1987, p. 28). We use the word enclave in part simply to draw attention to the degree of separation which keeps groups in Israeli society more sharply apart than in comparable high-income countries. It denotes visible or palpable boundaries backed by a degree of institutionalization, and also the superimposition of several different boundaries – for example, territory, race, marriage choices, language, dress codes. In contrast to the ghettos or *banlieues* of western Europe, which marginalize a certain category of group – notably immigrants and racial minorities – Israel's enclave pattern applies to a wide range of social groups and criss-crosses the entire social structure.

This enclave concept can be analytically formulated in terms of ideas about frontiers and about corporatism. The idea of a social boundary, border, or frontier was originally delineated by Barth (1969) in a model which still has not been surpassed. Barth insisted on the institutional character of boundaries, and argued against the notion that they are rooted either in tradition, or in colour or race, or in any of the differences which they claim to be built on, but rather that they are constructed and preserved through political processes, although not for that are they any the less real. Much frontier-related behaviour is sub-conscious, absorbed by the force of habit and repetition and not infrequently imbued by the classic mechanism of ritual.

Barth's analysis provides a neutral formula, which assumes neither exclusion nor inclusion, neither discrimination nor favouritism, obliging us rather to remember that the effect of these and other boundaries on individuals' lives can range from constraint to empowerment. It also enables us to take into account the knowledge that individuals

operate in many different spheres, in many of which their capabilities and entitlements are defined by a frontier – for example, a person's race (or races), professional status, place of residence, sexuality, religious affiliation(s) and those of their parents and ancestors. As the list shows, frontiers are, obviously, usually intangible and often symbolic – they may be expressed in clothes, accent, jargon, ritual and so on.

When we shift from individuals to groups, the permutations and combinations become infinitely more complex, since the group is made up of heterogeneous individuals each operating behind a range of different frontiers, or in a range of different bounded spheres; thus the idea of cross-cutting frontiers brings ambiguity and multiplicity. Therefore we need to abide by a convention of naming while still reminding the reader and ourselves that to name a collectivity is not to confine all its component individuals to that single affiliation. In addition, we must note that a frontier, while separating, also creates a type of convergence (to avoid the word 'integrate'), and that a group operates in different spheres of social action and faces or draws different frontiers in different spheres. That is what might be called the benign side of the story and, because it is often forgotten, it deserves to be stressed; but no one can forget that frontiers can be exclusionary and violent and their control can often be asymmetrical, nor can one forget that a frontier can be thrown up or thickened with alarming speed and violence.

The dual separation-convergence role of a frontier can be illustrated by noting that if a frontier is well established then there are rules governing its operation which are respected by 'both sides' and by many other parties who are not directly implicated by or in the frontier. These rules do not usually forbid frontier crossing – rather they specify, implicitly or explicitly, the conditions under which borders can be crossed, and the corresponding costs and benefits: of intermarriage, of commercial arrangements, of political affiliation and so on. However, this is only one point on a very long axis: there are porous frontiers, contested frontiers, walled and barbed-wire frontiers and so on – and the porous ones are not necessarily subjects of conflict or controversy.

The idea that a group faces or builds different frontiers in different spheres is hardly a matter of controversy, but in the case of movements of religious revival it badly needs to be underlined, because they so often defy ready-made assumptions about introversion, about the rejection of modernity, about other-worldliness, about social cohesiveness. That is to say: the observation of tight internal control and uniform habits of dress and time allocation which purposively express rejection of consumerism, of the commodification of the body, of the permissive society, among many other things, may lead observers to assume that a group is therefore shutting itself behind high and thick walls, and is incapable of engaging with the institutions of modernity. Yet religious movements of renewal, return and re-evangelization do very frequently combine a strong emphasis on internal discipline and separation from the 'world of darkness', or just 'the world', with keen involvement in politics, with street-based and media-borne campaigns of evangelization. There are plenty of examples of movements and organizations which combine tight internal control, an ideology of world-renunciation and cultural isolation, with a determined intervention in politics, among other involvements in the secular world, and their leaders' ability to deliver reliable nuggets of electoral support, however small, is invaluable to politicians especially in systems of proportional representation (Ames 2001, Freston 2001). We shall see how this works out in the case of Shas, but the point to retain is the mutual affinity between competitive politics and social self-exclusion.

The next point to understand in linking the enclave system with the self-exclusion of religious revival and the political inclusion of the revivalist movements and their followers, is that, of course, leaders also have interests, and that brings us to a consideration of

corporatism, a concept which, in some of its acceptances, fits well certain aspects of Israeli politics. Philippe Schmitter (1974) describes corporatism as a set of arrangements in which the state recognizes or licences 'a limited number of singular, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories' and grants them 'representational monopoly ... in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports' (pp. 93–94), but can perform this recognition in ways which range from state corporatism to societal corporatism. If the former is an authoritarian imposition, the latter resembles more 'regulated self-regulation' in which associations, operating under the aegis of a benign state, take upon themselves the responsibilities of institutionalized self-regulation to compensate for 'important dysfunctions of community, market and state' in a spirit of impartiality and 'good government' (Streeck and Schmitter 1985).

Overall, this is a useful schema, but it is based on an over-simplified separation of state and society. One can turn it around and focus on corporatism as a potentially unstable system in which there is a constant struggle for prerogative on the part of agents within the state and within associations, in their attempts to steal a march on each other by gaining control of the rules of the game, that is, of regulating institutions. This is what is recognized by O'Donnell (1977) who, referring to Latin America and perhaps developing Schmitter's scheme, describes an 'estado bifronte' (the 'Janus-faced' state) which, in an authoritarian regime, is colonized by big business and similar elite interests but in its turn colonizes the organizations of workers and the popular sector. In other words, both state and societal corporatism co-exist in a single state and neither power nor class should be excluded.

In Israel, as in many of those countries, but for the most part unlike western Europe, it is possible for non-state entities, ranging from trade unions to political parties via religious institutions, business groups, state corporations, or state employee associations, to colonize institutions of the state even on a long-term basis, encroaching on the control exercised over them by central government. Examples are, of course, Shas, with its own educational network, and the other ultra-Orthodox bodies in Israel with theirs; aspects of the behaviour of political parties in Israel; the old Histadrut – trade union movement – before privatization of the industries it controlled (Grinberg 1991). To some extent, neo-liberalism has eroded these institutions, but they remain in evidence, especially in the eyes of business interests.

Where conditions exist for such fiefdoms within the state, the leaders of movements and corporations are also able to promote their own interests as gatekeepers and allocators of resources. It is important, therefore, to remind ourselves that movements, and the parties, unions, factions and even institutions which are their constituent parts, act under leaders who have strategies and interests of their own, by reason of their institutional position, and where the state plays a role in orchestrating or channelling the actions of movements and interest groups, those leaders can acquire parcels of state power, while still maintaining or even strengthening the frontiers separating their followers from other sectors of society. This is not necessarily the case, for often inclusion of a leadership in state decision-making may encourage the integration of their followers, but it is clearly a possibility, especially where multiple inequalities, a political culture of clientelism, and social exclusion weaken participatory inclinations at the grass roots.

We can now return to Israel and see how the enclaves fit into a corporatist model. These enclaves are variously religious, political and economic: the ultra-Orthodox *Haredim*³ were, on the founding of the state of Israel, granted state-funded educational autonomy and legal prerogatives over personal status law for all Jews (Zameret 1997).

The trade union movement, organized by the powerful Histadrut, operated cooperatives and industries as well as representing workers and wielding much political influence, until crisis and liberalization started a long process of subsidy withdrawals and privatization after the early 1980s. The kibbutz movement was also something of a law unto itself: kibbutzim regulated and limited entry, and had their own economic practices outside the market economy, and their own educational arrangements – all funded by the state until the same crisis of the 1980s. Educational enclaves provide a separate education system for Arabs and four main educational systems for Jews of different religious affiliation – including, as we shall see, the ‘Shas’ network known as ‘The wellspring of Torah education’ (*HaMa’ayan Hachinuch Hatorani*). Territorial enclaves are embodied, among others, in the *de facto* segregation of Arabs in municipalities where hardly any Jews live (although legally it is not prohibited), by homogeneous Jewish ultra-Orthodox neighbourhoods and by West Bank settlements ranging from fully fledged towns such as Ariel or Betar Eilit, to a string of legal, quasi-legal and illegal unplanned outposts. Driven by a particularly extreme brand of proportional representation, which encourages party fragmentation and makes the leaders of even minor parties into kingmakers, Ministers run their Ministries like private fiefdoms, or party fiefdoms, to the extent that we have in recent years twice seen Foreign Ministers who are in open disagreement with the foreign policy of the government hold on to their posts successfully⁴ and hundreds of thousands of settlers who have obtained state funding over long periods through whatever Ministry their political patrons have occupied – notably through Sharon and especially when he was at Agriculture (1978–1981). These enclaves can operate because they enjoy approval and direct or indirect economic support from the state, combined with mobilization from ‘below’. The original development of the settlers’ movement (Sprinzak 1991) and our case, the Shas movement, illustrate well this very Israeli phenomenon.

It should be noted that among these examples there are some where the leaders of the enclave wield substantial power and others, like the Arab educational and territorial enclaves, where they clearly do not, at least not *vis-à-vis* the state (Louër 2007). We could elaborate much further on different types of enclave but that would go beyond the scope of this paper, and the argument is developed at greater length by us elsewhere (Lehmann and Siebzhner 2006). Here we want to emphasize, first, the very particular use of corporatism and the enclave pattern whereby Israel solves problems of inclusion of excluded groups or of those whose leaders claim a history of exclusion: corporatism offers precedents for special treatment, special access and the institutionalization and state funding of self-governing quasi-autonomous entities, while enclaves have become so normal in Israeli society that leaders can establish social and symbolic barriers around their group without provoking much surprise.

These precedents favour a strategy whereby self-exclusion can be of particular use as a path to political recognition and inclusion. Self-exclusion here means setting up and thickening social and symbolic barriers between the group and the rest of society, through a process of mobilization and under a determined leadership, as distinct from exclusion in the sense of powerlessness and material deprivation.

Although leaders gain from their role as intermediaries, gatekeepers and political fixers, it is not intended here to give the impression that people in pivotal positions in these corporatist arrangements are all self-serving, venal or out of control: the settler leaders are often subject to fierce grassroots pressure to take uncompromising positions; the Ashkenazi haredi leaders are heirs to a long tradition of working in rule-bound committees with careful attention to procedural norms, and also have to maintain a degree of transparency in order to retain the confidence of their diaspora-based donors, for example, so their power is not arbitrary; but

Shas, coming from a different background in the political cultures of the Middle East and North Africa, has tended to concentrate power in a more personalistic way, leading to scandals about appointments and contracts, for example over their school transport arrangements during the Barak government (1999–2001). In all these cases, though, the leaders are very firmly entrenched and rarely subject to removal from their positions.

Shas: a conversion-led movement

We bring evangelical and fundamentalist movements together under the combined category of conversion-led movements, because proselytizing, conversion and quantitative expansion are their *raison d'être*, and this more analytical term enables us to include movements of reconversion, which exhibit very similar social and psychological features. Usually, conversion is thought of as a person's move from one religious affiliation, or none, to a new creed, but the phenomenon of reconversion, observed notably among Jews and Muslims, in which an individual returns to a stringent or intensely observant version of his or her own religious heritage, is not significantly different: it too involves the espousal by individuals of a new way of life in which they sever ties with their old friends and sometimes also their workplaces and even their families. The Pentecostal variant is now amply described in an abundant literature (Martin 1990, Lehmann 1996; Corten 1999, Martin 2001); the Muslim variant is covered in a general sort of way in Cesari, Kepel and Roy (Cesari 1981, 2004, Roy 1994, Kepel 2002) but still cries out for more ethnography; the Jewish variant is well described in Friedman's writings on the Lubavitch sect (Friedman 1994). To be sure, there are variations in the thickness of the boundaries and the thoroughness of the break with the past vary, but the points of convergence are too striking to ignore, and the variations are as much within traditions as between them.

Such movements find ample opportunities in the Israeli system because, having burned their bridges, converts become dependent on the new group and its leadership, and because the demands placed on them by the organization or movement (Iannacone 1997) facilitate the construction of social and enclave-style symbolic frontiers which operate as mechanisms of social self-exclusion. On the one hand, the leadership is empowered by its control over converts to negotiate with politicians hungry for votes, and can gain benefits for followers, as we shall see. On the other hand, the followers are heavily dependent on their enclave, especially if they adopt the sort of lifestyle that is not compatible with living in a secularized milieu. This is what might be called the sharp end of the conversion phenomenon. The rapidity and depth of withdrawal from previous social networks varies: our case, Shas, claims to take a gradualist approach whereas the Lubavitch sect, more prominent outside Israel, seems more radical – and nowadays conversion mobilizes a myriad of modes of communication, operating, for example, through self-improvement or confidence-building courses. An organization called Arachim (values), which runs weekend seminars and short courses in Israel, aims at drawing people back to strict observance. The worldwide campaign for bringing Jews back (*t'shuva* – repentance) extends to variants of popular music such as the Matisyahu phenomenon which mixes reggae, hip-hop and Chassidic genres, or Chassidic versions of rap.

Shas started out in the early 1980s as a party fighting local elections within the ultra-Orthodox community. Its leaders were rebelling against the patronizing treatment and discrimination they faced in the religious study centres (*yeshivas*), which are the dominant status-defining institutions of that world. Whereas high-achieving students could expect to gain teaching positions, to marry a girl from a prestigious family, and eventually even to be

head of a *yeshiva*, Sephardi students were excluded from these prizes. In addition, distinguished institutions imposed, as they still do, a *numerus clausus* on Sephardi admissions, and the ones, which ‘specialized’ in taking Sephardi students, were starved of funds and attention. These grievances lay behind the formation of Shas, but its activists discovered that they had success among secularized Sephardim as well, a receptiveness to a classic revivalist message of strict religion heralding a world free from drugs, sexual license and disrespect for parents, with the added element of ethnic revival, under the motto ‘Restoring the crown to its ancient glory’, written around a drawing of a palm tree and an oasis reminiscent of the world of Jews in Arab lands. For example, Rabbi Reuven Elbaz, who in the 1990s became a prominent figure associated with Shas, had begun like an evangelical preacher, trawling the billiard halls of Jerusalem, persuading young men to take up a religious lifestyle, and founding the first of the *Or HaChayyim* (Light of Life) network of *yeshivas* for returnee men, in 1968. Today, it seems to have 200 branches dotted around the country.⁵ These *yeshivas* are all funded by the state in accordance with student numbers, and the full-time students receive an allowance from the state of about \$300 per month in accordance with the agreements reached with Agudat Yisrael – the representatives of the *Haredi* world – in 1947. At that time, the politicians believed that they were preserving ultra-Orthodoxy and full-time rabbinic study as relics of a lost world, not as seedbeds of what would become the fastest-growing segment of Judaism.

After surprisingly gaining seats in the 1983 Jerusalem municipal elections, Shas moved onto the national stage in 1984 and won four Knesset seats at its first appearance. After 1990, under the dynamic leadership of a very young leader, Ariele Deri, it negotiated the establishment of its school network funded by the state on a similar basis as the existing Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox network, but with more favourable conditions in recognition of the low incomes of its clientele: these include extended school hours and hot lunches. Shas continued in government with two interruptions throughout the period until the present day, and in the 2003 and 2005 elections seems to have reached its stability level of 11 out of 120 Knesset members.

As a social movement, Shas has developed its own trademark style of grassroots activism to bring secularized Jews ‘back’ to strict religious observance – carrying the banner of *t’shuva*. This key term, which means ‘return’ or ‘answer’ or ‘repentance’, has become familiar in Jewish circles worldwide, thanks to outreach activities of the Lubavitch sect, among others. Shas’s grassroots campaigning method – used also by other Israeli organizations, notably the West Bank settlers but also the founders of the state itself – creates quasi-institutional ‘facts on the ground’ which become jumping-off points for political pressure. Unpaid activists may go into a neighbourhood and start free kindergarten sessions or some other type of religious-educational venture in a building site caravan or an air-raid shelter (both pervasive features of the country’s urban landscape) and later press local government for financial support. This fits also with the view we frequently heard in interviews with Shas sympathizers, that it is the one party which maintains a continuous and active local presence, with activists propagating the message of religious revival, echoing the resentment of potential supporters against the sophisticated, globalized irreligious elites who rule over the country’s politics. The ethnic message is articulated subtly, almost unspokenly: when the activists look like Sephardim and the inhabitants of the neighbourhoods they operate in are predominantly Sephardi, there is no need to evoke openly or frequently their ethnic belonging. The Sephardi liturgy is little different from that of the Ashkenazim, but the Sephardim have plenty of scope to mark out their difference in the music of the liturgy, and in specific customs (*minhagim*) which mark a difference vis-à-vis the Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox: women are enjoined to wear hairnets, not wigs or headscarves, and skirts reaching

their feet rather than their calves. Men trim their beards, wear a slightly different (Borsalino) design of black hat and even seem to carry themselves differently from the hurried, nervous gait of Ashkenazi *yeshiva* students who have, for example, never done military service – unlike Shas followers who are so often returnees (*ba'alei t'shuva*) from a secular lifestyle. They have taken the *haredi* religious archetype and 'tweaked' it in a manner that is instantly recognizable as different yet, in the kinship sense, related. This phenomenon of 'rubbing off', of gaining recognition by allusion as much as by direct strident invocation, is repeated with Shas' aura of ethnic belonging which has attracted some 250,000 votes from an overwhelmingly Sephardi electorate who are not for the most part highly observant.

Ethnicity

Sephardim in Israel are the Jews originating in the Middle East and North Africa, and the largest single contingent among them originates in Morocco. *The Statistical Yearbook 1999* (Table 12.15) shows consistent under-representation of persons whose father was born in Asia and Africa (the nearest approximation in census categories) among academics, professionals and managers, and over-representation among unskilled workers. Among students and applicants to universities they were also under-represented (although once admitted they performed as well as other groups). Seventy-five percent of Israel's development town population, a classic example of modern urban development becoming a concentration of poverty, was Sephardi in the 1980s, accounting for one-quarter to one-third of the country's Sephardi Jews. They accounted for 40% of the country's unemployed in 1987, and in 1989 their rate of unemployment was double the national average (Shafir and Peled 2002, p. 81).

Unlike the Ashkenazim, the Sephardi immigrants they were not able to re-establish their institutions in Israel. This was probably because those institutions in the 'home countries' had been under the personal authority of Jewish notables and had not supported a robust civic culture, and also because the North African Jewish elite tended to emigrate to France and the Americas (Adler and Inbar 1977, Shokeid 1995), while most of those who went to Israel were from the poorer and less educated strata who, for example, spoke no French and had little familiarity with the Zionist idea of a Jewish state. Once in Israel they were confronted by an immigrant absorption apparatus which paid little respect to their way of life (Hasson 1993) and by a fiercely competitive society ruled by a determinedly modernist and democratic bureaucracy.

It is therefore not surprising that Israeli academics and commentators agree that the migrants from Arab countries experienced feelings of alienation, aggravated by a scarcely concealed attitude of arrogance or even contempt on the part of the bearers of Israel's dominant culture for the Middle Eastern and especially for the North African population. They are often called Mizrachim (Easterners), but the term Sephardim which, though strictly speaking it should only apply to the descendants of those expelled from Spain in 1492 and moved across the northern shores of the Mediterranean, has now come to designate all the Jews originating in the world outside Europe – except for Yemenis, Indians and Ethiopians. The word Sephardi does not have the connotation of inferiority that tends to be attached to 'Mizrachi' among the mass of the population.⁶ Stated baldly and simplistically, the Jews of North African descent in particular, having avoided or been spared the opening up to a modernity in which religion and non-religion (the secular) could occupy separate spheres – having been spared in other words the fierce tensions between traditionalists and modernists which the Enlightenment brought to the Jewish populations and institutions of Poland and Russia – retained a respect and an affection at least for the rituals of religion and

so were open to persuasion by Shas activists that it was time to take more seriously the fulfilment of the Torah's commandments and the authority of the Rabbis who interpret them.

The paradox, of course, is that Shas, whose founders and leaders are trained in the rigorous disciplines of the Lithuanian⁷ *yeshivas*, was to bring precisely this division into the Sephardi world, since *t'shuva* means the adoption of a way of life marked by a separation of the observant from the rest. Furthermore, although the Shas dress code, as we have said, tweaked the *haredi* archetype, the result was nothing like the traditional dress of the countries of origin. But that does not matter: the principle of drawing boundaries is to be distinguished from their content (Barth 1969). In this example, side by side with these markers that by their content denote Sephardi heritage, Shas has adopted many Ashkenazi practices that mark its adherents out as ultra-Orthodox, and yet, on account of crucial details, also marks them out from the Ashkenazim.

Boundaries, gatekeepers and self-exclusion

Shas is drawing people into its orbit by self-exclusion, bringing them back to religion, opting out of the secularized lifestyle shared by most Israelis. They are also distancing themselves from the soft, undemanding, 'traditional' style of religiosity prevalent among Sephardim, and marking themselves out from the Ashkenazi sects and institutions which dominate ultra-Orthodoxy and in which the party's leaders were originally educated and socialized. This is a triple self-exclusion, but by the same token it is also a demand for recognition and inclusion. The vote-gathering capacity which comes with the self-exclusion and the *t'shuva* campaigning helps the demand for recognition, but there has also been resistance: Shas endures bitter, sometimes almost poisonous, comment from some quarters of Israeli society, who, referring to scandals which in one very high profile example, ended in prosecution and a prison sentence for Ariele Deri in 2001, brand its leaders corrupt and their methods cynical (Tessler 2003, Lehmann and Siebzehner 2006, pp. 155–159). As a member of governing coalitions, Shas seems to have drawn the conclusion that it would do better not to press too hard for policies of exclusive benefit to the ultra-Orthodox or which might further constrain the lives of the non-observant majority of Israelis, and instead kept to the less controversial theme of social welfare and poverty, but without bothering to attend with any frequency the Knesset debates on welfare legislation. And, in any case, beyond the political arena, Shas has not responded to its critics by toning down, moderating or softening the edges: the public face of being different and determinedly so, the campaigning for people to return to religion, continue.

Shas has an institutional enclave of its own where its cadres can operate almost out of sight of secular Israel. It allows the party to guard its boundaries with numerous gatekeepers and to compete for resources by fielding something like a stable faithful electorate. It also provides a space in which to continue the campaign for *t'shuva*, for example among the parents of children who are sent to its schools. Its network of schools, already mentioned, educated between 20,000 and 30,000 children in 2002, and now also has established a college for women. In addition it has a separate network of associations, discussion groups, adult and religious education activities under the confusingly similar name of *El Ha Ma'ayan* (towards 'the source'), which are nominally apolitical so that they can be subsidized by the state, although their style, content, and clientele leave no doubt as to their political complexion.

During our fieldwork, social workers and political activists in modern ultra-Orthodox neighbourhoods explained to us that local rabbis (all of whom are salaried state employees)

appointed directly or indirectly by the Shas spiritual and charismatic leader Rav Ovadia Yosef, are active organizers in their neighbourhoods. Their role involves anything from obtaining a mortgage to marshalling an audience for the satellite transmission of Rabbi Yosef's weekly Saturday night homilies.⁸ Shas municipal councillors, who have maintained their representation even after the party declined from their high score of 17 Knesset seats in 1999, have influence in allocating housing for groups with differing religious affiliations, and thus different rules concerning access to electronic media, male–female interactions and the like. The party is able to raise scholarships for its cadres or future cadres to follow university-level, or at least university-style, courses which bring them certificates, diplomas and thus the qualifications to occupy senior civil service positions, and now one of Yosef's daughters has founded what is known as a 'Shas College' to enable Shas cadres and especially women to follow a university-style course without involvement in the normally secular world of Israeli higher education.

If we add together the forces of separation and corporatist encapsulation we can see that they converge and reinforce one another. The endogenous forces include the exhortations of the Shas leadership, which encourages the pursuit of an ultra-Orthodox lifestyle and the separate schooling of its followers' and sympathizers' children, the material mechanisms of dependence on the organizational core of the movement, and other factors which we have elaborated on in *Rethinking Israeli Judaism*, such as the epidemiological pattern of spread of religiously observant behaviour (Sperber 1996) and the attractions of Shas-supporting radio stations. But there are also exogenous factors to be taken into account, notably of course the aggressive tone and patronizing content of anti-Shas chatter among the non-religious middle classes and sometimes among liberal sectors of opinion, and the discrimination faced in the Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox world typified by the *numerus clausus*.

It should be noted, however, that, apart from assembling a religious and political following, Shas has very lofty ambitions, notably to bring the Israeli system, especially the legal system, more closely in line with its leaders' conception of Jewish Religious Law (the *halacha*) and also to influence the country's social life in a similar direction. Thus, Ovadia Yosef calls for a synagogue and a *mikva* (ritual bath) in every neighbourhood, and Shas leaders often raise issues such as the doubtful Jewish background of Russian immigrants, the validity of conversions which are not in strict conformity with Orthodox procedures, the strict enforcement of laws prohibiting Sabbath work and so on.

One salient contrast between Shas and earlier ethnicity-based political movements is without doubt the party's joining of the themes of ethnic renewal – even ethnic pride – and religious renewal – the *t'shuva* campaign. This has provided a legitimacy within the Israeli system (Peled 1998) beyond short-term political maneuverings, and has enabled the leadership to develop a triple appeal to ethnic renewal, religious renewal and class resentment. Activists also frequently expressed to us their belief that the *t'shuva* movement caught the atmosphere in a country which had succumbed to a bout of almost millennial self-confidence after the 1967 victory and then suffered a crisis of confidence when caught off guard by the Egyptian invasion of 1973, and so became much more receptive than before to religious interpellations.

A new dimension to Israeli-Jewish citizenship

With the rise of Shas, Israel has extended arrangements which previously operated in the Jewish religious sphere to the ethnic sphere, at least *de facto*. The party has persuaded the state to create what is in effect a special, strictly Orthodox educational network for children of North African and Middle Eastern parentage. Hitherto, the only ethnically based special

provision – of education, and implicitly of municipal services in areas with predominantly Arab population – was of a discriminatory kind, a truncated citizenship for the remaining Arab population (Louër 2007).⁹ The political class did not actively seek to suppress diversity, but neither did it ever seriously consider the notion of a politics of identity as a device to achieve inclusion. In fact, affirmative action (not the same thing, of course) has existed, but for the Arab population, to help them gain access to universities. Among the Jewish population poverty and exclusion – the issues which often underlie claims for ethnic recognition – were treated as matters for social policy. Even when, as in the 1970s, differences of origin were recognized as causes of differential educational achievement, and catch-up programmes were devised for the disadvantaged, this was in no way intended to be an identity-specific education or a basis for any kind of identity politics.

Note, however, that ethnic identity is no more a matter of straightforward labelling here than anywhere else. Thus, in this case, despite the universal assumption in daily parlance that schools, clubs, associations and the like gathered under the aegis of Shas political leaders (*Ha-Ma'ayan* and *El Ha-Ma'ayan*) are for the benefit of Sephardim, there is no official mention of ethnic difference in the provisions for these activities and associations: the ethnic belonging is entirely implicit and non-codified, although sustained by elaborate, tacit and informal codes. Shas educational institutions are open to all, but in practice the pupils are overwhelmingly Sephardi, although Shas teachers and politicians have spoken to us with pride of their openness, and welcome non-Sephardi pupils as a recognition of the quality of the service they offer. Their interest is in not having a *numerus clausus*, especially since they are a long way from attracting a majority of Sephardi children. Likewise, although the Shas inclination of these institutions is universally recognized, it cannot be officially admitted because that would confirm the political adherence of educational and civic bodies, which is not admissible. The Sephardi character of the schools is manifested in the symbolic markers we have already mentioned – dress, physical appearance, music, the liturgical use of Sephardi Hebrew pronunciation, ubiquitous pictures of Ovadia Yosef¹⁰ – but hardly in the substance of the curriculum, which is heavily religious and ultra-Orthodox, but has little distinctively Sephardi in its content. For example, we found nothing on the 2,000 years or more of history of Jews in Arabic-speaking societies.

Two further points need clarification to highlight the pre-state origins of arrangements which institutionalize enclaves and corporatism. First, the state inherited from the Ottoman Empire and via the British Mandate separate judicial arrangements regarding personal status law for Jews, Christians and Muslims, which for practical purposes has meant that in Israel a Chief Rabbinate – divided between Sephardi and Askenazi –, with its court and its bureaucracy, decides on who can marry whom, and who qualifies as a Jew,¹¹ and certifies the ritual acceptability (*kashrut*) of food on behalf of the state. Muslim and Christian courts likewise deal with marriage, divorce and similar 'personal status' issues. In addition, the division of the education system according to religious criteria (secular, national religious,¹² ultra-Orthodox) was inherited from the pre-state period (the *Yishuv*) when non-state Jewish institutions ran their own schools. These separate arrangements have been preserved in parallel to the patronage power of political parties in the state, also inherited from the pre-state period when the various Zionist parties – left, right, centre, religious and secular and various permutations of these – had, in accordance with the enclave principle, their own kibbutz settlements, cooperatives, medical services, football teams and much else besides.

Enclaves like these may not fit some contemporary definitions of the notoriously fluid concept of multiculturalism, but it is clear that, by establishing a set of institutional arrangements in response to the needs or traditions of different groups – defined in these cases religiously and to some extent even ideologically – the state set a precedent for something like the group-differentiated rights which are the defining feature of multicultural citizenship (Kymlicka 1995). At the same time, it has to be recognized that much in the application of the term to particular circumstances depends on fine judgements impossible to determine in advance in an abstract way, independent of context.¹³ Some would say that the separate arrangements for the *haredi* community laid down in 1947–1948 were in effect multicultural, even though they were designed for a religious constituency; others would say that the arrangements for the Arab population, discriminatory though they may be, are also a variant, just as some rather notorious systems across the world are called thus by critics of multiculturalism and of the racial-type classifications that it may entail. And, in addition, it bears repeating that however much the effect of Shas institutional arrangements may be described as ethnicity-specific, this is a matter of social convention, for they are not formally described as such. If the Israeli political elite were using ethnic particularism to attack socio-economic exclusion, then they might also pay attention to the Ethiopian population, who now number about 90,000, are a visible presence, and clearly suffer serious social marginalization as well as repression of their culture (Herzog 1995, Weil 1997), yet have not benefited from any special (in the ethnic sense) institutional provision. It is also worth mentioning the vast Russian and ex-Soviet population, numbering more than a million, who have made a distinctive voice heard, but not in order to promote their own heritage or even their own identity as Israeli-Russians (Horowitz 2006).

So Shas is apparently a distinct, perhaps unique, case in Israel. The state does not have a general multicultural citizenship architecture, even though we have seen that it has some *de facto* multicultural practice. One test for multiculturalism comes in the courts, and on the one occasion when Shas did use explicit multicultural arguments in a judicial context, it lost. This was when the party had to defend itself against accusations of improper practices during the 1999 election campaign. Another party had complained about the distribution of amulets by Shas campaigners, and the response from Shas's leader Ariele Deri was, as Barzilai (2003) has explained, classically multicultural: he defended the practice in terms of the cultural practices peculiar to his constituency, thus acknowledging that Shas voters were different from others, and deserved different consideration, because they were almost all Sephardim. A distinguished anthropologist was called to testify on the basis of his knowledge of the political mores of North African society and the Electoral Court took the view that such practices did indeed amount to vote buying. By then of course the election was long over.

Multiculturalism as a variant of corporatism

Shas reminds us of a core ambiguity, even hypocrisy, in the concept of multiculturalism because in practice multicultural arrangements are designed as remedies for the excluded assuming the continued existence of a hegemonic set of practices, symbols and affiliations usually associated with a dominant elite or class. These are not – despite the implicit equality of consideration implied by the term – on an equal footing with the traditions favoured or promoted by multiculturalism, but rather are set outside, beyond and over and above a multicultural arrangement. Indeed, is not the sponsorship of a separate Shas school network by the state a way of avoiding the massive expense and upheaval which

would be required to bring the entire Sephardi population into the mainstream with better education and employment opportunities (Peled 2001)? Is it not a classic tactic of co-option by conferring the power of patronage on a minority elite and leaving them to manage their followers? The Israeli state, especially the Labour Party (Mapai) did the same with the Arab population until any pretense of common interests became untenable, driving even the conservatively inclined leadership towards Palestinization (Louër 2007).

Although, of course, they are not indifferent to 'pure' socio-economic deprivation, multicultural theorists do not take it as their primary concern. For example, Kymlicka (1995) bases his arguments for group-differentiated rights on the idea of compensating or rescuing marginalized and oppressed groups, especially those who have been displaced territorially by colonial conquest, the priority being to enable them to live in accordance with their own customs and values rather than pursuing socio-economic parity with the rest of the population, even though social exclusion is invariably a feature of such groups. In addition, special entitlements or rights are of their very nature not an egalitarian affair, since the recognition at the heart of a multicultural arrangement is regard for the distinctive features of groups, not for the principles which can be universally applied to their members as citizens.

Control of the enclave has earned the Shas leadership significant bargaining power in Cabinet, as exemplified by the recent establishment of a Ministry of Religious Services, with some of the functions of the old Ministry of Religious Affairs which Ariel Sharon had disbanded in 2004, after removing them from his coalition. The party has also taken steps to align itself more consistently than before both with the smaller, Ashkenazi, ultra-Orthodox parties and with the secular right, by pressing for the reinstatement of fully proportional child benefits for large families on the one hand, and the renewal of construction activity in disputed areas of Jerusalem on the other. The need for an enclave might seem ironic given that Sephardi Jews and their children and grandchildren are a very large minority indeed, perhaps a majority if intermarriage is fully taken into account, but it is convenient for the leadership, who by maintaining a strict religious position, retain access to power and control over institutions within their enclave.

Corporatism, self-exclusion and democracy

This paper has explored the mechanics whereby, in Israel, a movement and its leaders enhance their claims and achieve social inclusion through a corporatist path tinged with ethnic particularism. Many arguments can be produced to show that in principle a universalist social-democratic welfare policy might provide a more just and more effective solution for all those covered by the claim. But the principle of universal entitlement does not always find enough favour in a democracy. Although the Shas leaders are not neglectful of the interests of the Mizrahi population as a whole, their prime commitment is to their followers and to potential recruits to the life of ultra-Orthodox Judaism, who are prepared to make the sacrifice of self-exclusion. The political system, notably perhaps Israel's extreme form of proportional representation, also seems to favour the corporatist approach.

The pattern of corporatist inclusion is then enhanced by Israel's version of the religiously motivated social closure, which characterizes so many contemporary religious movements. This self-exclusion, as we have called it, has multiple causes, but it turns out to have very interesting political potential, and by no means only in the Israeli context. It is hard and perhaps unnecessary for us to decide whether the claim for recognition expressed in self-exclusion is a motive, an outcome, or a pretext, but we have tried to show that it can help the leadership to achieve their purposes, namely access to office, to resources and to recognition.

Notes

1. This word means, strictly, Spanish, in reference to the Jews who were expelled from Spain and spread across the northern Mediterranean where they lived for centuries as far as Istanbul and Salonika. In Israel the Jews of the Middle East and North Africa are often called 'Mizrachim' (Easterners) but the followers of the ethnic-religious renewal embodied by Shas prefer to be called Sephardim, thus distancing themselves from the connotations of an inferior social status which 'Mizrachim' still carries.
2. This paper is based on extensive fieldwork carried out between 1999 and 2006 during which we visited *yeshivas* and synagogues, interviewed Shas activists, took part in women's discussion groups and courses for returnees to religious observance (*ba'alei t'shuva*), spoke to neighborhood Rabbis – in short we undertook a classic multi-levelled exercise in participant observation following up from one contact to another in a lengthy networking exercise which took us near to the summit of the Shas hierarchy and down to the poorer districts of Jerusalem and Petach Tikva.
3. Literally, those who live in fear of God. *Haredim*, here, are almost all Ashkenazi Jews, heirs to the Russian-Polish tradition; later that changes, as we shall see.
4. Shalom was against Sharon's disengagement from Gaza and Tzipi Livni was apparently against the 2006 Lebanon War and later, in April 2007, called on Prime Minister Olmert to resign, but without doing so herself. In September 2007 she remained in place and indeed seemed back on good terms with her Prime Minister!
5. It is not possible to gain access to documentary evidence of such claims.
6. In contrast, secular intellectuals pointedly use the term Mizrachim.
7. So called because they follow the study methods of the *yeshivas* in what was once the large state of Lithuania, and in the tradition of the Vilna Gaon, the sage who so fiercely opposed the Chassidim in the late eighteenth century (Hundert 2004, p. 175).
8. After Deri was forced out of politics, Yosef shifted from a role of spiritual leader and inspiration to more direct day-to-day involvement in Shas decision-making. Although his terms as Sephardi Chief Rabbi had finished in 1983, he continues to wield much influence over rabbinical appointments.
9. The existence of parallel Ashkenazi and Sephardi Chief Rabbinate can be understood as based on different traditions of worship and religious observance, in which ethnic identity acted as an appendage.
10. As a Rabbinic sage, of course – not as a political leader . . .
11. In this it is selectively flexible – notably in the case of hundreds of thousands of Russian immigrants whose status as Jews, if it were subjected to the rigorous scrutiny applied, for example, to people converted outside Israel by non-Orthodox rabbis, would cause serious difficulties.
12. National Religious schools were at first established in recognition of the existence of a religious wing to Zionism at the founding of the state and before. Their curriculum is more religious than that of state secular schools, and it is a reality that their pupils tend to achieve less and to come from poorer backgrounds. They are run by the Ministry of Education, unlike the schools of the ultra-Orthodox and Shas, which are funded by the Ministry but managed independently.
13. As is the case for Kymlicka's (1995) own book. The architecture of multicultural rights is perfectly harmonious in the early chapters of his book, but when he then goes into specific issues he repeatedly falls back on the need to take local context into account. This is fine, but undermines – unsurprisingly – the universalistic aspirations of the model.

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