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*Power, Boundaries and Institutions: Marriage in Ultra-Orthodox Judaism**

Abstract

The growth in the numbers and influence of ultra-Orthodoxy – the haredim – since the Second World War has changed Judaism worldwide, even though it remains a minority culture. Growth has occurred through the maximization of family size and through the movement of *t'shuva* (''return''), and it has benefited from state and private subsidies to the institutions of Torah learning (*yeshivot* and schooling generally), which have become one of the twin pillars of ultra-Orthodoxy. The other pillar is the *shidduch*, the system of concerted marriage which ensures that more or less everyone gets married, and strengthens the educational institutions which inculcate among prospective brides a preference for a learned husband engaged in full-time study, and for a life devoted to sustaining him.

Keywords: Judaism; Kinship and marriage; Social capital.

THE RENAISSANCE OF ultra-Orthodox Judaism, most especially of its Eastern European variant, in the sixty years since the end of World War II defies the assumptions of the sociological theories dominant during most of that period. Against the trend of secularization, against the trend towards small families, against the trend towards a culture in which social status is determined overwhelmingly by economic means, against racial mixing, against the permissive society, against, against, against... This is a community, or, better, a culture, in which the watchword appears to be ''to any proposal for change say 'no'; to any inquiry about the application of a rule always choose the more stringent

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alternative''. Stringency indeed is the watchword. Of course, the ultra-Orthodox are a minority among Jews, but they have become a dominant influence in religious matters, setting the standard for observance among all groups and tendencies, edging out the influence of the German Jewish tradition, equally strict in observance but also strict in its respect of secular culture, and also drawing adherents away from the ''modern Orthodox'', whose claim to mainstream status among the observant is thus being eroded.

Haredi society as a case of resistance-cum-adaptation to a changing environment

So far, so trivial. But, quite apart from their intrinsic interest for people who have a political, ideological, religious or ethical stake in its interpretation, or for those who are simply curious to find out more, the ''case'' of the ultra-Orthodox Jews, or *haredim* (literally ''those who fear God'') – purposefully and instantly recognizable in certain clearly delimited neighbourhoods in many of the world's cities – is of interest because they provide a particularly stark set of responses to the time-honoured question of whether it is necessary to change in order to stand still, since their leaders' defence of values and practices which they describe as deeply traditional, is strikingly modern. In this, they add credence to Eisenstadt's concept of multiple modernities (Eisenstadt 2000), according to which many movements which proclaim themselves to be at war with modernity, or with the West (not of course the same thing) are themselves, on account of what he calls their Jacobin characteristics and their reflexivity, quintessentially modern. Ultra-Orthodox Judaism may not be as politically adventurous as some fundamentalists, but the agenda to ''reappropriate and redefine the discourse of modernity'', and to do so ''away from the traditional forum of the nation-state'' (*ibid.*, p. 24) is evident. The ultra-Orthodox leaderships' strategy is remarkable for its coherence and determination, and their modernity is evidenced not principally by the use of modern technologies, but by the self-consciousness of their case for the preservation and expansion of a way of life which, but for constant vigilance, would in their view be threatened by a host of internal and external forces. Their distrust of the nation-state seems to be incompatible with their reliance, in Israel, on the state for their material and indeed physical survival, but it has to be understood that they

have absolutely no sympathy for the secular creed of classic Zionism or for the contemporary Israeli state apparatus. Our own fieldwork and the evidence of numerous scholars and observers (Mintz 1992; Friedman 1993, 1995; Stolow 2006), offer abundant reasons for believing that this is not a case of a set of institutions and practices which have been left behind by modernity, or which have survived at the margin either of the institutions of modernity or the institutions of Jewish life. In pursuing their goals the leaders have followed both outward-looking and inward-looking strategies, and the latter include the nurturing of an elaborate set of practices related to marriage. None of this could take place without Judaism's remarkable heritage of social capital – a form of capital which is hard to build but also hard to destroy and increases with expenditure – and in the last part of the exposition we briefly explain its relationship to our theme.

Our focus here, analytically speaking, is on the management of group boundaries, and empirically on marriage, or more specifically matchmaking, for which the commonly used Hebrew and Yiddish word is *shidduch* (literally a "pairing" – pl. *shidduchim*), as one of the many institutions which draw and reinforce the boundaries: rules about who can marry whom, and who can have children by whom, draw a boundary. Our purpose is to lay out a model which describes the basic features of the marriage system as they are invoked by participants in describing how they go about getting married or arranging marriages for their children, their relatives and their friends, or even their students. It is a model of a system in which, as always, there are wide variations, and we indicate some of these. To fully describe the dynamics of marriage within this culture would require a much more elaborate comparison of structural and cultural variables across sects, sub-cultures, and geographical and political space. However, such an exercise still requires a grasp of the system, and the meetings (35 interviews plus numerous informal or unscheduled conversations) we have held in London, Manchester but mainly in Israel, have yielded a set of normative orientations and consistent patterns of practical action which point to the existence of a "system", and are recognized across a global culture despite heterogeneous features such as linguistic variation and varying customs of component sects, collectivities and traditions. Since the thesis is that marriage is a cornerstone of haredi society, the first sections lay out its broad features and some historical background; a description of the model is then prefaced with an explanation of various aspects of haredi society, and in the conclusion a case is made for the essential contribution of the marriage

system to the extraordinary revival in numbers and influence of ultra-Orthodox Judaism since the end of the Second World War.

The subject also has an intrinsic interest: no one who spends more than a few hours among *haredim* can fail to notice the prominent role played by marriage prospects, plans and opportunities in their lives and in their conversation. Yet the question of marriage is absent from the best known social science books and monographs on the subject: if occasional films and TV documentaries – such as *Volvo City*, a widely remarked 1991 documentary broadcast in the UK by Channel Four, the films *Uchpizin* (2004) and *Kadosh* (1999), and the Israeli mini-series *Krovim rechokim* (''Close and Distant'', 2008) – have focused on it, their treatment hovers between the voyeuristic and the sensationalist, and has not always been appreciated by their subjects.

An elaborate empirical study based on samples and the collection of exact data may not be a feasible proposition in the case of Ultra-Orthodox Judaism. The sight of interviewers roaming their neighbourhoods, talking to samples of people (''why him? why her? why not me?'' – or ''why me and not him or her?''), and asking about numerical facts (how many...?, how much...?) provokes suspicion and rejection. Because of the multiplicity and inconsistency of gatekeepers, the pervasive suspicion of hidden agendas (especially if the researcher is Jewish), the only way to undertake research on this subject is by creating and following contacts and networks and building personal trust: a time-consuming strategy, but one which can extend a long way across sectarian boundaries and geographical space.

Our interviews in London were quite limited, though informative, especially about the Lubavitch (or Chabad) sect of Chassidim. Attempts to develop relationships with other Chassidic groups were fruitless (''why is this of interest to you?''; ''what will you get out of it?''). And even the Lubavitch, who welcome outsiders because they are devoted to evangelization or outreach, draw tacit but clear lines around any subjects which they feel are simply not the business of others. Heads of schools and seminars, though, were very helpful, being accustomed to dealing with outside enquiries.

In Israel we had better contacts and perhaps also the balance of confidence and defensiveness among the ultra-Orthodox themselves was more in our favour. During a two-year period from 2004-2006, using family, quasi-family and institutional connections we undertook a wide variety of interviews with people who told us their marriage stories, with yeshiva tutors, with local rabbis, with individuals contacted through relatives in the secular world, among others university students.

A connection to the insurance business was particularly useful, leading to insurance brokers who were Gur Chassidim and had enough experience of the secular world to be relaxed in talking to us. Informants quoted range from a prominent Chassidic entrepreneur and Rabbi, people who, at least to a small extent, have a role outside the haredi neighbourhoods and institutions, who were prepared to speak to us and have some intuition about social research. For example a civil servant in the government cartography department and a local town planning officer, a secular Jewish social worker, and others who though well disposed were not entirely comfortable speaking to a pair of researchers of whom one was a strange male with whom they had no connection.

Lifelong yeshiva *attendance for men and its implications*

Precisely because their codes of behaviour are designed to draw firm boundaries and to set them apart from the rest of society and also the rest of Judaism,[1] outsiders are drawn to the assumption that the systems which govern haredi life never change. This is precisely the impression that haredi leaders wish to give. Yet there has been much innovation since the Second World War, including (a) a demographic explosion driven by an apparently widely shared and deeply felt commitment to the maximisation of offspring, (b) the encouragement of young men to spend many years in full-time study, even after marriage, at the expense of advancing professional or business careers, (c) the acceptance, and sometimes the enthusiastic adoption, of campaigns of evangelization or outreach among secularized Jews to bring them back into the haredi fold, but specifically as haredim (Aviad 1983; Beit-Hallahmi 1991; Topel 2008), and (d) the increasing labour force participation of women, not to speak of (e) adaptation to a State of Israel originally built on secular principles which were, and remain, anathema to the ultra-Orthodox. Many of these innovations can be seen as examples of increasing stringency, modifying long-standing practices so as to mark out ever more firmly the dividing line

[1] Haredim do recognize the validity of modern Orthodox Judaism, but regard Reform, Liberal, Conservative Judaisms and other heterodoxies as not religious in a Jewish sense at all, much as their followers might be Jewish.

separating haredim from the rest, and exploiting changing circumstances in the name of maintaining core values and practices and their own power. These circumstances represent both a threat and an opportunity, this last thanks to the existence of the State of Israel and also to the unprecedented prosperity of Jews worldwide (Friedman 1986). At the same time, especially in the last two or three decades, and just as we observe the growing influence of ultra-Orthodoxy in Judaism worldwide, we are witnessing in Israel a growing ''haredization'' of the broader society: the frontiers are penetrating new neighbourhoods, new social groups, new spheres of social action and new ideological groups such as religious Zionism. In her recent book, Nurit Stadler describes all sorts of ways in which young haredim in particular are contemplating and bringing about changes that would help to reconcile them with Israeli society (Stadler 2009, chap. 7); but she also offers evidence that could be seen to some extent as a growth of haredi influence outsides the confines of their own culture strictly defined, notably through volunteer work in fields such as first aid and emergency care. One example is the ZAKA Brigade which has become prominent at the scene of terrorist attacks, but has also extended its activities into other areas (*ibid.*, p. 136).

With these institutional and material resources, practices which previously might have been restricted to those who had the time or the money, are now far more widely disseminated. In Eastern Europe from the mid 16th century onwards it was customary for men, especially the unmarried, to study Torah (Rabbinic learning) and for men of learning to head yeshivas (study centres for young men devoted to Talmudic learning and teaching) funded by communities (Katz 1961). Also, the institution of the *kest* enabled young married couples to live with in-laws during a limited period at the start of a marriage – specified in the marriage contract – while the husband devoted himself to study, or they laid the basis for economic independence (Katz 1961, p. 140; Freeze 2002, p. 30). It is hard to establish how common it was for these young husbands to devote themselves to study over a long period, but it is clear that although a life of study was an ideal, it was reserved for exceptional scholars with access to exceptional means. Today in contrast we find that in Israel it is a standard expectation among the ultra-Orthodox for married men to study full time until the age of 40, subsidized by the state. (The sum fluctuates: it was drastically cut by Benjamin Nethanyau as Finance Minister in 2005 to an average of c. $150 per month, but as of 2009 the same Nethanyahu agreed to raise it

substantially in order to coax ultra-Orthodox parties into a post-electoral coalition government.[2]) According to Eli Berman the percentage of haredi men in Israel choosing to study the Torah full-time rather than earn a living was 60 % in 1996 (Berman 2000; Rebibo 2001). More recent data for 2005 from the Bank of Israel show that ultra-Orthodox men have a very low labour force participation rate of 23.4 % as compared with a national male average of 65.8 % and, importantly, with ultra-Orthodox women's rate of 44.2 % (Bank of Israel 2006, p. 323), compared with a national average of 60.9 %. (These figures do not take unregistered income-earning into account.)

Outside Israel the pursuit of full-time study by married men is by no means uncommon, though the absence of a state subsidy makes it more costly. A factor which may well be important but difficult to quantify in understanding the apparently unsustainable economics of ultra-Orthodoxy is the extent to which it produces its own economy of piety, reminiscent of the informal sector in developing countries. This is opaque to inspection, taxation or quantification, and thus creates an economic environment in which ultra-Orthodox education policy is rational for the leadership and for their followers in Israel, in London, and elsewhere. Secular subjects have been downgraded, sometimes to the minimum acceptable to the educational authorities, and so contribute further to the idealization of fulltime careers in religious education and study and to the downgrading of secular professions. This varies, to be sure: a report by the British government's schools Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) in August 2008 showed poor or unsatisfactory standards of secular education (including science) in some Chassidic schools for boys in particular, but not in the girls' schools, where a broader curriculum is taught (*The Jewish Chronicle*, 22 August 2008). In Israel the government funds a large ultra-Orthodox schooling system which educated 23.6 % of the country's elementary school pupils in 2002 (*Haaretz*, 26 August 2004) – a figure predicted to rise above 50 % by about 2030. The system also includes a vast network of yeshivas for teenage boys devoted to fulltime Torah study. The state does not interfere with the curriculum of these institutions, which is more predominantly religious than that of their counterparts in the UK. Indeed, after the Supreme Court had ruled – in response to a case brought by the Teachers' Union – that the ultra-Orthodox education system should teach a core secular curriculum, the Knesset

[2] Informal sources tell us that the ultra-Orthodox were able to compensate for the 2005 cuts by raising private donations in the Americas and Europe – but in the crisis of 2008-2009 that surely must no longer be possible.

was eventually persuaded to modify the law so as to render its ruling without effect (*Haaretz*, 25 July 2007).[3]

The term ''haredi'' encompasses a large number of Chassidic sects as well as the ''Lithuanians''. Chassidic religiosity is more bodily, more expressive, and Chassidic sects (Satmar, Belz etc.) follow dynastic and sometimes also charismatic leaders. They hold full-time study in great esteem, and for them commerce continues to be a respectable activity – and one essential to the maintenance of Torah study institutions and their students. Nonetheless, in the face of competing versions of Jewish life, not least those enjoying the legitimacy conferred by having a Jewish state, they now support full-time study much more than they did before World War II, as exemplified by steps taken by the leaders of the Gur Chassidim (El-Or 1993, p. 587); in comparison, among ''Lithuanians'' – who follow rules of lifestyle very similar to the Chassidim, but do not owe allegiance to dynastic Rabbinic leaders – commercial or professional activity does not attract much status. The term ''Lithuanian'' refers to the Talmudic learning tradition of Vilna, which has become more or less universal throughout the haredi world. Lithuanian life revolves around the yeshiva and yeshiva heads have great authority, while Chassidim look more to their *Rebbes*, as their leaders are known. It is the Lithuanians who took the lead in the massification of full-time Torah learning, thereby contributing to the formation of an autonomously powerful elite of yeshiva heads, independent of a congregation or territorial community (Soloveitchik 1994). Despite these and other variations, the ideal has clearly shifted towards a massification of what were once elite callings of male full-time study, and towards an extension over decades of what was once, for all but the erudite elite, confined to the first two years of marriage, at most.

Another modern innovation is the maximization of fertility. In her remarkably researched and fascinating book, Freeze provides ample basis for the claim that marriage in the 19th century was depicted and accepted as a religious duty and a duty to the community, and describes the intense efforts and elaborate institutional mechanisms which existed to ensure that individuals were not left unmarried and also that marriages produced an offspring – one reason for the unusually high number of divorces (often on grounds of infertility) and

[3] This was passed with support from ultra-Orthodox and Arab members. Previously, government funding of ultra-Orthodox schools had been illegal because those schools do not teach the core curriculum. The new law creates the category of ''culturally unique'' schools which can be funded despite this omission.

remarriages (Freeze 2002, p. 62). It is, then, not surprising that the Jewish population in Russia grew much faster than the population as a whole (*ibid.*, p. 58). But today this duty to marry and reproduce has been converted into very strong pressure to *maximize* the number of children – which is quite new and not at all the same as a duty to procreate (Daube 1977). Freeze (2002, p. 50) quotes the Shulchan Aruch (the 15th century codification of Jewish law by Joseph Caro, which still remains an authoritative text) to the effect that once a man has begotten a son and a daughter ''he has fulfilled the precept of procreation''. This maximization has not been accompanied by a reduction of pressure on women to earn a living, since a far higher proportion of married men today are studying full time than in 18th or 19th century Eastern Europe. In that world it was not unusual for a woman to run a business on her own so that her husband could devote himself to religious pursuits or absent himself on his own business. Interestingly, at the time, ''modernizers'' of the Jewish Enlightenment viewed women's commercial burdens as demeaning and oppressive (Freeze 2002, p. 63).

Yet today the modernizers are inside, and pursue the aim of preservation in surprising ways. The Jewish women of 19th century Russia had hardly benefited from a systematic or formal education, and certainly not from a formal education in Jewish matters, which they would have learnt in the home. But with the founding in 1917 of the Beit Ya'akov girls' schooling system by the revolutionary Sarah Scheneier in Warsaw the seeds were sown for the development of a culture in which today ultra-Orthodox girls are educated both to place the highest value on male full-time Torah study and also to take up a profession, preferably as a teacher and preferably in a Beit Ya'akov school. This stands in contrast to the practice in Eastern Europe and Russia where learning was a valued attribute of a husband but not the supreme consideration in considering a match (Katz 1973, p. 141; Freeze 2002, p. 62). In Israel this dual commitment has found support from the government subsidies to full-time study and unconditional funding of the entire ultra-Orthodox school and yeshiva system, thus laying the material foundations for a renewed model of ultra-Orthodox marriage, which in its turn sustains the learning society (Friedman 1986, 1988). This striking illustration of adaptation to modernity is thus added to the adaptation represented by birth-maximization. It also marks an ideological shift which, again, reflects the modernity of haredi culture and is well represented by the sceptical Tamar El-Or: women can no longer be subordinated by

financial dependence or by ignorance, but now their subordination rests on their contribution to the "collective effort to maintain the society of male scholars", while at the same time integrating their perception of the family with the non-Orthodox discourse of marriage involving love and sharing by equal partners (El-Or 1993, p. 596).

Strategies of recovery and expansion

Like other evangelical and fundamentalist cultures, ultra-Orthodoxy seems to go from strength to strength: just as the liberal religious cultures of mainstream Protestantism are ceding influence to evangelical Christianity, and the priestly culture of Catholicism is under pressure from the Charismatic Renewal, and from devotional sects and orders like the Legionnaires of Christ, the neo-Catechumenes and Opus Dei, so ultra-Orthodox Judaism has become the yardstick against which other models of a Jewish way of life and of Jewish ritual are measured – even by those who regard ultra-Orthodoxy as unacceptably fundamentalist. This influence has been achieved, as in Christianity, by revivalist conversion-led movements, which in Judaism are devoted to bringing secularized Jews "back" to true strict observance. There have been bitter debates in the London *Jewish Chronicle* about the influence of haredi emissaries – who provide supplementary instruction on religious subjects at no cost to the school – on children in Jewish schools, and it is no longer surprising to find ultra-Orthodox individuals being appointed as Rabbis or teachers in less observant synagogues (*cf.* Madrid) because of the shortage of Rabbis of their own, or perhaps because those communities or their leaders prefer it that way. Even in São Paulo, where strict Jewish observance has been confined to a tiny minority, the sponsors of a non-haredi Jewish school, in a sign of "haredization", recently insisted, as a condition for funding a new building, that "converted Jews should not be accepted as students" (Topel 2008, p. 103). A similar issue has erupted recently in London because the Court of Appeal has ruled that the policy of the state-supported Jewish Free School, which has tightened up to exclude the children of mothers who have not been converted according to strict Orthodox procedures, contravenes the Race Relations Law (1965). The controversy in the pages of the *Jewish Chronicle* for June and July 2009 shows support for the Court's ruling as well as opposition and many positions in between, often revolving around the shift of this

prominent institution towards a much stricter, more Orthodox interpretation of its role and of Jewish identity. Until the Second World War, ultra-Orthodox leaders focused on protecting their institutions and traditions from the contaminations of modernity and of contact with less observant Jews whose values were dangerous and over whose parentage there always lingers a certain suspicion. The trauma and dislocation of the Shoah made such a disposition costly in terms of numbers, and the responses are instructive, since they come from different quarters and seem to respond to contrasting ''logics'', yet converge on the same broad outcome of adaptation-with-increased-stringency. The confusion or even chaos, not least the tragic destruction of families, created uncertainty about identity and lineage which must have hindered strict enforcement of marriage rules and sect endogamy – as some of our informants explained to us. A second factor which would have tended to weaken the enforcement of marriage norms was the adoption of outreach campaigns, pioneered as a modern version of the ancient virtue of *t'shuva* (meaning return, repentance or an answer) by the Lubavitch under their revered leader who brought them back from near-extinction to numerical and symbolic prominence after World War II. Today t'shuva campaigns bring secularized Jews back to strict observance and what some call ''yiddischkeit'', and provision for the religious and social needs of ''returnees'' are a standard feature of ultra-Orthodox organization. We have mentioned Stadler's ethnography (Stadler 2009) in which external influences make themelves felt and generate a positive, even creative, response side-by-side with the leadership's standard ''refusenik'' position, but even her interviewees do not for a moment contemplate a relaxation of marriage norms.

If these conjunctures and strategies have tended to have an ''opening up'' effect on ultra-Orthodox life and institutions, others have been of a much more introspective and closed kind, affecting education, real estate development – quasi-enclaves in Brooklyn, in upstate New York (New Square, Monsey) and in Israel – and marriage and reproduction. This inner-directed element draws and thickens boundaries between different haredi sects or communities, between the haredi world and other sections of Judaism, and between haredim in general and the rest of society. To speak of boundaries is another way of speaking of identity markers, but without the vagueness of identity's psychological, emotional and imaginary connotations: boundaries denote simply ''devices which separate'', in the institutional sphere, in ritual gestures and performances, across time (the rhythms of daily life from getting up in

the morning until going to sleep at night – ''when you lie down and when you rise up''), and space – ''on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates'' (*cf.* Deuteronomy 6:viii-ix), in dietary restrictions, and in the rules of kinship and marriage, to name but a few.

The strengthening or thickening of boundaries, however, does not occur in consistent or pyramidal patterns. The image of a cat's cradle is more appropriate than that of concentric circles or watertight containers. Boundaries are often of course decreed by authorities of various kinds, but they also proliferate through informal and unarticulated mechanisms. It is possible that some environments favour cascading boundary formation, as if it was out of control. In the haredi case we observe how boundaries have spread and thickened over recent generations. Yet thickening has not prevented cross-cutting. Thus highly successful t'shuva campaigns among Israel's Sephardim – and among Sephardim elsewhere, as in Mexico and Panama – have brought them into the fold in learning, in dress codes for men, in the adoption of a birth-maximization culture – yet the Ashkenazi haredim still hardly ever accept them as marriage partners, nor has the *numerus clausus* been lifted which restricts Sephardi access to their schools and yeshivas – two related fields as we shall see.

So although marriage has a fundamental role in defining boundaries, those boundaries may be further elaborated by sub-divisions and cross-cutting divisions traced by other institutions: political affiliations may divide Chassidim from one another or from Lithuanians, schooling and housing arrangements may variously bring different sects together or draw them apart. On the other hand we shall see that marriage is of fundamental importance when related to the institutions of haredi life and the maintenance of their power and prestige.

Marriage and demographic growth

A mystery surrounds the explanation of the very high fertility rates of haredi couples. According to Berman (2000) the total fertility rate of haredim in Israel in 1980-1982 was 6.5 compared with 3.0 for the population as a whole; by 1995-1996 it had risen to 7.6 compared to a decline in the population as a whole to 2.7. Later statistics continue the same trend. Like marriage, with which it is obviously closely linked, this subject figures very prominently in haredi conversation, yet it is overlooked so egregiously in the academic literature that one might

conclude that anthropologists and sociologists are simply embarrassed by it. It is a subject on which there is little in the way of open public pronouncements or specific disquisitions by Rabbinic leaders aside from generalized statements in praise of large families. It is a pattern which would be hard to explain convincingly solely by reference to official rules, to Rabbinic texts, but women and men constantly consult Rabbis about it in private, and we did hear of women consulting rabbis and asking for ''permission'' to stop conceiving for a time on grounds of health or even exhaustion, but the cases we heard of speak of only a few months' respite. Human reproduction is just too personal, too intimate and for that matter too hard to police, and so calls for explanation from ''below'' in terms of everyday social dynamics as well as in terms of instructions from community leaders. The well known divine injunction on the sixth day of the Creation – ''be fruitful and multiply'' (Genesis 1:28) – is too vague to explain anything.

Infertility constitutes grounds for divorce in rabbinic courts, and it is evident from our interviews that if a woman marries and does not conceive soon after then tongues start wagging. An Italian-born woman who had married into a family from Aleppo, but who has lived for 50 years among the haredim and led a haredi life, said very firmly that ''no contraception is allowed except for medical reasons'', but we have also been told that there are cases in which women have continued to conceive despite medical advice to the contrary. Abortion likewise is allowed but only for medical reasons and is prohibited after 40 days of pregnancy. From these statements we can see that the issue is not a principled opposition to interfering with the production of life, as in *Humanae Vitae*, but a strategic policy of maximizing births. We can also see that some authority has to rule on the health reasons, even though there is the possibility of obtaining a ''second opinion'': an academic with knowledge of the subject simply said that better off haredi women who wish to limit their fertility find a subterfuge, obtain a favourable doctor's letter, or even make a particularly generous donation. (Rabbinic corruption was a matter of controversy in the 18th and 19th century (Katz 1961, p. 228).) At first of course it is an issue of simply having a child, but the pressure continues until a respectably high number of children is achieved. We interviewed several grandparents in their sixties all of whose children were already married with children of their own – in one case a couple in their sixties who had had 14 children, now all married, aged 22-44, and 100 grandchildren.

Although they do have power, in their control of admissions to yeshivas and other study centres, in their access to charitable funds,

and also moral influence through their personal prestige, Rabbis do not appear to have many levers to enforce these particular norms of fertility maximization, especially in the light of the ''second opinion'' option: we did not for example hear of scholarships for children from large families. As is well known the Israeli state does provide child allowances which increase in value after the fifth child, and secular Israel frequently resounds with harsh words about the resulting encouragement of large families by the state, but in the absence of a study to demonstrate the cause and effect relationship it is hard to believe that the allowances are proportionate to the burdens of bringing up children – which would be a condition for the incentive argument to hold up. The standard of living of haredi families, at least on conventional criteria, is not high, as evidenced by a study of Jews in Britain based on the 2001 Census (Graham *et al*. 2007), according to which, compared with the Jewish population as a whole, the areas in which they are heavily concentrated exhibit very low levels of educational qualification and of labour force participation. In Hackney and Salford (centres of ultra-Orthodoxy) respectively 43.5 % and 26.5 % of Jews aged 16-24 had ''no qualifications'' and the rate of non-participation in the labour force was extremely high – 47.0 % and 37.7 %. In Israel the Bank of Israel reports for 2005 and 2006 that 57% of the ultra-Orthodox lived below the poverty line in 2004 and 63 % in 2005; shockingly, while these figures deteriorated for the haredim, the national percentage improved substantially, declining from 42 % to 25 %. The employment rate brought further extremes, as we have seen (Bank of Israel 2005, p. 309; 2006, p. 323).

However generous the welfare state, it could not prevent such indicators from overflowing into severe social disintegration unless there were other sources of institutional support for large families; this support is so substantial that one must ask whether conventional measures of income do not exaggerate the level of deprivation among haredim. Our work in Israel revealed, for example, the importance of rotating credit societies – known as *gemachim* (an acronym for the Hebrew *gemilut chasadim* – acts of kindness). These seem to exist in large numbers and operate in a vast range of specialized areas. Many lend money interest-free to people who have deposited with them, especially for house purchases, but also receive deposits as acts of charity from people who do not need to borrow; others operate consumer cooperatives selling goods at very advantageous prices. In addition they may provide essentials like children's toys, cutlery and crockery for rites of passage, household tools, wedding dresses etc. The list is

very long. They are present throughout Israeli society, but among haredim, as we heard regularly in our interviews, they form part of a wide range of institutions whose purpose is specifically to support marriage.

The degree of social conformity which reigns in the haredi world is the result of a combination of institutional factors, the exercise of power, and also an intense social interaction among individuals which seems to reinforce and multiply restrictive norms. In order to focus more carefully on this phenomenon, the remainder of this paper is devoted to a model of Jewish marriage which assembles a dense set of rules and practices which have developed, in our view, from ''below'', with Rabbinic approval but with relatively little rabbinic initiative.

Marriage and matchmaking

A story told us by a manager of an aged persons home belonging to the Belz Chassidim recounts how the first Belzer Admor[4] was a man of great learning who earned his living as a bathhouse attendant and did not want to accept a position of leadership, until his wife took him to a sage who told him that if he stayed in the bathhouse he would not be able to find matches of a ''suitable spiritual standard'' for his children. Apart from the allusion to the primacy of a good match for one's children, the use of the word ''spiritual standard'' is important: repeatedly our interlocutors refer not to financial ambitions or questions of social status but to the personal qualities of prospective marriage partners. In a handbook entitled *Binyan adei ad* (''Building for ever'') published in Jerusalem and written for yeshiva students and their prospective spouses, two concepts are emphasized: *midot* and *a'tama*. *Midot* are characteristics and *a'tama* refers to the fit or match between two people. The author also distinguishes between the compatibility which comes from two people's common backgrounds and that which comes from their *midot*. This attention to one's personality is not just a matter of advice in a manual: the anxiety surrounding marriage places young people under something like constant surveillance, not from a single panopticon but from everyone in their social circle and beyond. Where families consist of an average of more than 6 children

[4] Admor is a term of respect and title used with reference to the leader of a Chassidic community. It is an abbreviation of *adonenu, morenu ve-rabenu* – ''Our lord, our teacher and our rabbi''.

and where these are expected to be married by the age of 22 at the latest for girls and 24 for boys, the issue is a matter of urgency, for marriage should take place in order of age of siblings. There is therefore permanent pressure to move people on so that they can make way for the next one. Among Chassidim the target age of marriage is even lower and the corresponding pressure more severe. Schoolfriends, brothers and sisters, cousins, aunts, mothers, fathers and grandparents are constantly on the lookout for a match not only on their own account but on account of others who need to be moved on, though among Chassidim parents are more directive than among the Lithuanians. Large families thus impose several, straightforwardly material, conditions on a person's choices and strategies. But several material factors which have just been mentioned do make a major difference: the pressure to marry by a certain age, the pressure to marry in order of age, the number of people in a family and in the immediate environment on the lookout for a marriage partner for themselves or for others, the implications of other people's actions on a person's own marriage prospects – for example if an older sister breaks off an engagement or gets divorced, or if a brother or sister has left the ultra-Orthodox way of life.

A person's character, their way of carrying themselves, of dressing, even their physical stature, are all under surveillance from myriad directions. The standing of a young man in his yeshiva is regarded as a particularly weighty consideration, and not only for moral reasons: demands from parents that the counterparts contribute a very large sum to establishing the young couple, may be justified not by economic necessity, but rather by the high academic esteem of the young man as a Torah student. The head of an English seminar for girls aged 16-18 assured us[5] that whereas ''before'' – not so long ago – material considerations were very important in the choice of marriage partner, his pupils' ideal husband was now ''a good Torah student or scholar – and this counts more than his material situation''. Or, one might add, than the potential economic costs to parents or the burdens the wife herself will have to bear as breadwinner while the husband devotes himself to study. So strong is this preference that ''if boys leave the yeshiva before getting married and go to work they will find very few girls who will consider them even if they are very religious . . . because they are out of the world of the Yeshivah''. This places power in the hands of

[5] Interview, December 2003.

Yeshiva heads if they are consulted about which of their pupils are the high-flyers, and it also has repercussions for parents and siblings for there are no exam marks like in secular schools. If during marriage negotiations, parents of talented young men appear greedy when they demand of the other party a disproportionate contribution to the new couple's housing, they will probably be looking to save on this match because they have other children, not all so exceptional, so they are under pressure too. It must also be remembered that although these requirements may sound severe, this is a system in which more or less everyone ends up marrying – or leaving.

In case family and peer pressure was not enough, the girls at the Manchester seminar also receive detailed instruction in the making of a match, and in the elements to watch out for in making a successful marriage. According to the same source, they also have lessons on preparation for marriage and are encouraged to discuss issues like "how do you decide to get married to a person or not?", to what extent do you have to do what other people decide for you, to what extent do you say "it's my life and therefore the guidance of my parents is only guidance, but I have to live with this person". "It's the boy himself that really matters, not the parents"; but on the other hand, the Rabbi also recalled, "the background often says a lot about how compatible the young people might be".

The involvement of yeshiva heads can go further. In Jerusalem in December 2004 we had a long conversation in a very large yeshiva (Yekiri Yerushalayim) with the person responsible for student welfare (*mashgiach* – the British equivalent might be a Senior Tutor), and he gave us an extended account of his involvement in finding matches for his students. The yeshiva occupied a new and lavishly appointed building with an almost exclusively Sephardi intake, but it did not teach the Sephardi heritage. Instead, it kept faithfully to the Lithuanian tradition of Torah study, while retaining the Sephardi style for religious services.[6] The head of a prestigious Tunisian yeshiva in B'nai Brak also told us that he had regular contacts with a girls' seminar on the subject of marriage. We have found signs of similar practices in study centres which attract exclusively Sephardi returnees, people who because they come from a non-haredi background do not have the social networks to find a suitable spouse, and who have told us how they found one through their yeshiva. Nevertheless, the yeshiva tutor's role has its limits: our informant told us that while he

[6] For an explanation of these intricacies, see LEHMANN and SIEBZEHNER 2006.

excluded parents from the process until the young people, after a series of carefully orchestrated meetings, are prepared to take a step towards firm commitment, at that stage parents might veto an arrangement or impose conditions – not least because they will be expected to fund the wedding and the marriage.

Because his is a prestigious institution, especially in Sephardi circles, the tutor at Yekiri Yerushalayim receives a large number of approaches on behalf of prospective brides and has extensive experience in overseeing the matchmaking. The account made little mention of the issue of the academic credentials which were so important to the English seminar students and which are mentioned by so many others in Israel. He explained that he makes extensive enquiries about the young women in question – their families, their friends, their teachers, their neighbourhood. He said he does not believe what parents or even teachers say since they are liable to exaggerate. (A marriage guide for yeshiva students published in Jerusalem also advises against trusting school teachers – but does favour consulting yeshiva Tutors.) Once he has sufficient information, obtained in ways which remained unclear, he makes a connection with a student and the preliminary steps are taken. These may or may not lead to an engagement, but if they do the Tutor then prepares young men for marriage by inducting them into the practicalities, which range from sex to psychology to household management. He tells them that "the world of women is full of feelings", which is quite different from the "rational text-centred world" to which the boys are accustomed. He used a phrase which we heard often – the conflict between the "cognitive" and the "affective": in choosing a bride or husband it is important not to allow the emotional side to dominate: the "rational" is also very important. Indeed, he put it the other way round: "if everything fits rationally, it is because God wished it so, so an extra effort is needed". And yet he did not disdain the irrational, introducing it in a way which may sound surprising, quoting a well-known phrase from Israel's longtime and extremely powerful Lithuanian leader Rav Schach: "it is prohibited to complete a *shidduch* unless the couple has walked together". This may be a figurative rendering of the classic Talmudic prohibition on marriage between people who have never met each other,[7] but the mashgiach went further, emphasizing "how their bodies work together – walking frees up and is more

[7] "A man is forbidden to betroth a woman until he sees her, lest later he find in her a blemish." (*Kidushin*, 41A). Alternativly, some say the rule exists to ensure that neither of the parties will complain afterwards that their spouse was not the person who had been promised: remember the travails of Jacob (Genesis, xxviii).

fluid, and ... the walk makes for chemistry''. Among Chassidim (of whom Schach was definitely not one), where parents play a more proactive, if not dominant role, such a statement would probably provoke severe disapproval. Nonetheless, it is clear that in the past the Talmudic injunction may often have been ignored. Freeze (2002, p. 14) states quite categorically that in 19th century Russia sometimes couples did not meet before marriage, while the Rabbinic Commission of Russia responded to a governmental inquiry saying that while a father could not coerce his son into marriage ''he could betroth his under-age daughter to whoever he pleased'' (*ibid.*, p. 15). Nonetheless, the author says that boys too could in fact be coerced, and might even take refuge as students in a yeshiva to escape an undesired match!

This vignette on the role of yeshivas and tutors illustrates the convergence of pressures and interests from above and from below in adapting marriage processes to reshape the frontiers of ethnicity. Young Sephardi men and women and their families who lead a Haredi life yet are excluded from Ashkenazi social networks, and from marrying into Ashkenazi families, look to yeshiva tutors for guidance, and so eventually the role of the tutors will be institutionalized, ensuring the continued future demand for yeshiva education and also the persistence of the Ashkenazi-Sephardi divide.

The Ashkenazi Torah education system also benefits from the marriage system because of the importance attached by young women (more it seems than by their parents) to marrying high-achieving Torah students. But our interviews did not suggest that in Ashkenazi yeshivas the tutors got involved in the marriage process itself: ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazi society has an embedded marriage system, which has become a bulwark for the yeshivas.

Balancing advantages and the premium on information

The *shiddouch* is said popularly to be a business deal. As if to confirm that, the section on the family in the Shulchan Aruch cross-refers to the section on Business, or Commercial, Law when it comes to marriage.[8] We would probably say that this is not the whole story, but we would agree that, as in a business deal, the parties are hungry for information. Here we shall focus to a significant extent on a matter

[8] We are grateful to Jonathan Garb for drawing this to our attention. See חושן משפט, 87,53; and 185, 10.

of information. A local government planning official in Zichron Yacov in Northern Israel, who is connected with various haredi communities, described to us in May 2005 how ''many issues arise – appearance, smell, dress ... the little things''. ''Enquiries'', he said, ''are worse than the FBI! ... They start with the family diseases, then the family history, then the characteristics of the prospective party, and then the economic situation''. The Italian-born woman mentioned above used the same simile: the searches[9] are ''like a police inquiry''. The Chassidim were particularly inquisitive – which fits in with the high priority they attach to sect endogamy. Other people speak of the phobia of mental health problems, and of what to do with ''problem girls'': apparently Israeli families send them to a seminar in England (if they can afford it). An insurance agent in Jerusalem, told us that one of her daughters married a young man who had an unmarried older sister aged 26. Such was the burden of this ''old maid'' (the interviewee's ironic expression, in English) that when she said she did not want to spend a large amount on a wedding celebration (the bride's parents' responsibility, normally) her counterpart – the prospective husband's father – preferred to pay for it himself, but discretely: his conjecture was that if he allowed the boy to ''skip'' his much older sister in the marriage sequence without a respectable celebration, people would start to gossip, saying he had kept the wedding quiet so as not to embarrass the older daughter. At the same time, he did not want to embarrass the bride's mother by letting it be known that he was paying for the occasion.[10] (The older girl eventually married five years later. In our interviewee's words ''she would not compromise'' – that is, she would not marry just for the sake of it.) But we know of other cases where ''choosy'' or indecisive women were eventually left unmarried even, in one case, after ''desperate'' parents allowed her to go to university. She also explained how such things affect the margin of manoeuvre of siblings or even other relatives, using expressions such as ''wasting the name'' of a prospective spouse. Other ''negatives'' include even the slightest mention that one might think of marrying one's offspring to a Sephardi! Mixed marriages of this kind are very rare in the Ashkenazi haredi world, and give rise to occasional tasteless jokes.

The list of positives and negatives is endless: an overweight man may be a negative, but not if he is a good student. A person who has previously broken off an engagement may inspire less confidence than

[9] Her word was ''indagini''.

[10] The expenditure involved was ''US$100-150'' for the hall plus home-made food.

otherwise, and so on. It is important to remember that the purpose of the system is to marry young people, not to prevent them marrying, so these considerations are all relative to each other and to a prospective partner's preferences and capabilities. Even so, the Sephardi-Ashkenazi divide remains very deep: we heard enough convincing stories to be persuaded that a mixed couple encounters difficulties if they want to live in an Ashkenazi haredi neighbourhood, go to Ashkenazi schools and eventually marry their children to Ashkenazim. Among secularized Israelis, by contrast, such marriages are by no means exceptional.

The broker (*shadchan*, pl. *shadchanim*) enables information and its evaluation to circulate without offending personal sensitivities – though sensitivities seem to receive little smoothing treatment when linked to the Sephardi-Ashkenazi divide. Likewise sensitivities are protected by the convention that when a proposal is refused reasons are neither requested nor offered. The broker, having built up a network of informants without which she – or sometimes he – could not operate at all, can also presumably obtain information faster than the principals themselves, thus saving time in situations where people are often in a hurry to reach an agreement. The broker is the subject of innumerable jokes and fables in Jewish lore, but the institution enables families and prospective spouses to gather valuable information without committing themselves, and is supposed to be the soul of discretion. Brokers we have met in London and Israel keep notebooks with addresses stretched across the globe. There are people who seem to do this full time almost as a profession, and others who do it occasionally, and many who seem to have just had a good idea for a friend or relation. It may be a necessary role, but it is not necessarily the most admired: *shadchan* jokes abound.[11] In all cases someone has to be paid: if one of our interviewees calls this "the most kosher money", it is probably regarded – like many ritual-related donations – more as a custom than a payment for a service. We could not find any rule about the sums involved, but if a marriage goes wrong the first question is "did you pay the *shadchan*?" The accounts we heard confer a crucial but not exclusive role on the broker: most bring in a number of people apart from the couple themselves. Brothers and sisters, in-laws, cousins, uncles and aunts, schoolfriends and their relatives, may

[11] A shadchan is trying to marry off a woman with a hunchback. He sings her praises – her dowry, her intelligence, her thriftiness, her good family – and then someone inquires, delicately, about the hunchback, and he replies "Ah – a veritable Everest!". Freeze also describes the shadchan as a ubiquitous but much caricatured figure (Freeze 2002, p. 62).

all have ideas and proposals, so that the term ‘‘arranged marriage’’ is too specific, especially among Lithuanians. Among Chassidim, with a more directive parental role, it fits better. Although the model provides that the parents have to come to an agreement about financial issues – the point at which the independent broker becomes particularly useful – the process should be described as ‘‘concerted’’ rather than ‘‘arranged’’ in order to convey the multiplicity of pressures which are brought to bear, and the negotiations that may take place.

Other institutional devices have arisen to respond to changing circumstances, such as the international register of blood types which enables people to find out if a proposed match might run a risk of producing children with the appalling degenerative Tay-Sachs disease – a disease almost exclusive to Jews of European origin. For a fee of $200 young people obtain a code number and can thus check on their compatibility. (Incompatibility carries a very high risk.) Another innovation is the availability of persons who can ‘‘coach’’ young people before their marriage, teaching them about sex and personal relations in marriage – needed because of young people’s extreme sexual segregation and their insulation from knowledge of sex. Informants in the UK and in Israel mention this and there is also a possibility that the service should be paid for – but either way the important point once again is the neutralization of potential embarrassment. Interviewees also mentioned the problems which have been caused by the sexual innocence of young couples – though others have said that the repressive atmosphere of yeshivas accentuates prurience and the market for pornographic videos etc. (Haredi authorities prohibit access to the Internet or, seeing the impracticality of total prohibition and its obvious advantages for the promotion of many of their aims, take energetic steps to manage its introduction.)

A market model?

The metaphor of the market does find much to support it in our study, as some of the quotations above indicate, but it is just a metaphor, not an analysis. Let us therefore look at the financial aspects of the Ashkenazi haredi shidduch.

Several very distinctive features frame the economics of a match. Firstly, the newly married couple is expected to set up a household of its own: in contrast to the 19th century *kest* arrangement in Russia, it is

unusual for them to live under the same roof as either of the parents, and in Israel, where rented accommodation is in short supply, it is said to be almost compulsory for them to move into a house or more usually apartment of their own. Again the institutions do come to the rescue: Israel has many modern neighbourhoods, not infrequently in occupied territories, purpose-built for haredim, where local Rabbinic leaders decide who can buy. The parents must somehow enable this to happen, by providing down payments on a mortgage, for example, which may in turn involve them in long-term debt to a bank, to a *gemach* or to an individual.

There is no longer a convention that the bride's parents provide a dowry: the respective contributions of the parties depend on negotiations. Weddings are expected to be quite elaborate occasions, and guests all bring presents, often in cash. Even poor people contribute. Already in the 19th century and doubtless earlier Eastern European Jewish communities ran funds specially to enable poor people to get married and this is carried on today. Katz (1961, p. 151) mentions the ''obligation to help poorer relatives get married'', while Freeze (2002, p. 31) refers to charitable institutions to help with dowries for poor families in 19th century Russia. But she also notes that these institutions required much written certification – a manifestation of the deeply rooted Jewish tradition of formal administration and protection against trickery which we shall return to at the end of this paper.

Markets are a device for dealing with uncertainty and agents require information. Bargaining enables many issues to be brought out into the open. The institution of the broker permits a negotiation to take place which will, at least to a certain extent, reduce uncertainty and make risk more transparent than otherwise, and will facilitate information. Reports from a yeshiva head will give an idea of a young man's earning potential as a teacher or Rabbi; enquiries among the social circle will tell of hereditary diseases or mental health problems. Parents in particular will gather information, sometimes very intensively, through social networks, even to the extent of arranging for an individual's movements and social contacts to be monitored. But in the end there are great uncertainties and there is much risk of misinformation. Indeed, the discovery that someone had made false statements in or surrounding the marriage contract is clear grounds for a divorce. Theoretically, in those circumstances the divorce will not count as a negative factor in future marriage negotiations.

Because of the numbers of people looking for marriage and other issues mentioned earlier linked to family size, these negotiations cannot

be too leisurely. Parents are under pressure if they have many more children of marriageable age or less; the young people themselves are under pressure from parents (if they approve of a proposal), of their Tutors (arguing for a particular proposal on grounds of its ''rational'' appeal), of the younger brothers and sisters behind them in the queue. Everyone, in short, is at a point in a domestic cycle and their interactions are controlled by that fact. So neither courtships nor negotiations can carry on too long, and young people are caught between two constraints: if they reject too many proposals they risk not receiving any more from worthwhile prospects, but they cannot prolong any single courtship too long even in order to get to know someone better, for reasons of decorum and also because while they are meeting a party that person is ''off the market''. It is of course prohibited to conduct more than one courtship at a time. So the pressure of time may well account for the unashamed pursuit of information – information which in other contemporary contexts might emerge over the course of a long premarital relationship.

High fertility itself underlies the pressure to marry and ''marry off'' and underlies other features of the society which may be of more recent origin than might be thought. However many children one may be able to handle in childhood, large numbers become hard to manage as teenagers, let alone in maturity. Haredim are not usually wealthy so a household full of young people of both sexes in their late teens, must in itself constitute a pressure. It would be mayhem. So boys are sent off to boarding yeshiva, if affordable – always an issue – already at 14. In England girls are sent to seminars and then for a year in Israel (only unusually to stay as immigrants) after 16, but Israeli girls are rarely sent away to board. So the pressure is on to shift boys and girls to the next stage in the cycle.

Behind many of these balancing factors is a concern for purity of lineage. Ashkenazi haredi society places a very high premium indeed on knowing who a person is, which in this language means their ancestry. One informant, a Gur chassid with extensive business interests, even explained endogamy as more a matter of knowing the people one is dealing with than of having similar customs. Hence the severe restrictions, indeed prohibitions, on unsupervised socializing between the sexes, which can lead to more and more intimacy and the birth of children of unknown paternity. Hence also the reluctance to allow returnees to marry into families of recognized ancient lineage or high status: apart from doubts about the strictness of their habits, about whether they have ''really'' given up all their secular and modernistic

ways, there is the familiar phrase, ''you never know where they come from...'' Lineage is a very important consideration indeed. And returnees have none at all to speak of, though exceptions seem to be made for celebrities. In fact these are not exceptions, but rather further exemplifications of how factors are balanced out, celebrity status being sometimes like a trump card. In another illustration we met a Bnei Brak family who were known to a wide circle for their highly talented daughter. This woman was in her late twenties when we visited; she did drama productions in primary schools and, in her own words, had ''gone out'' with ''hundreds'' of boys – by which she only meant she had meetings with them. Eventually she married a newly religious man from New York – but he apparently had the balancing quality of being quite wealthy.

When factors are balanced, religiosity also counts. It is apparently accepted nowadays that the religious observance of the couple and the type of dress code they will follow are also discussed in advance. In previous generations a person's background would perhaps be sufficient indicator of the customs they would follow, but today lineage is still considered a quality which, in different degrees, pertains to everyone, namely *yichous*. In our interviews it was never very clear whether this referred to the wealth and social status of a person's lineage, or to the number of learned scholars whom he or she could count among them. But Dynner (2006) shows that among Chassidim even in the 18th century it could be either or both, and that there was a shared understanding that it can be turned in either sense, depending on circumstances. Freeze (2002, p. 25) quotes the Talmud (*Kiddushin*, 41A) as follows: ''A man should sell all his possessions so that he might marry the daughter of a scholar'', but her documentary research leads her to conclude that ''the ideal of a learned groom only occasionally outweighed social status'' (*ibid.*, p. 62). Lineage too can be subject to a generous interpretation. In the interests of institutional continuity. Chassidic *tzaddikim* or venerated saintly figures in the 18th century could manage their succession by regarding their star pupils as sufficiently close to warrant the standing of quasi-kin and thus to inherit their position (Dynner 2006). Thus they could circumvent the hazards of genetic variation by, for example, marrying a daughter to a potential successor.

Even where issues of dynastic or institutional succession do not arise, the need to find out about *yichous* and – on the other ''side'' – to publicize it, is palpable. Wedding invitations carry elaborate lists of the distinguished lineage of bride and groom, Rabbinical or otherwise.

Thus information feeds reputation, influencing the marriage prospects of brothers and sisters.

In the end, then, everyone, with very few exceptions, does get married, and if at all possible at a fairly young age (21-22 for women, 24 for men, as a rule of thumb). If people bargained too hard, that outcome would never be achieved. Negotiations are helped to a conclusion by the multiplicity of factors to be taken into account and thus by the need to balance the costs and benefits of any proposal. So the long list of apparently restrictive factors which go into a decision are at the same time a way of producing flexibility.

Courtship

The courtship code has made some concessions to the pressures or seductions of the permissive society, which can be interpreted as a far-sighted adaptation inspired by leadership decisions or a controlled incremental accommodation to the inevitable. Among Lithuanians, who, although they tend to marry within their very large constituency, are not in an endogamous sect and have no single, let alone dynastic, leader, young people can meet and discuss their future under certain conditions: it must be in a public place – a hotel lobby or a park are usually mentioned[12] – and the meetings are limited in number. To violate these rules is to risk not receiving future offers, or at least not receiving them from desirable parties. These "concessions" to what some interviewees describe as the inevitable influence of modern ways of life, are selective, but should be mentioned so as to show that the impetus to stringency, however powerful, does have limits. Although lip-service is paid to some sort of courtship by the Gur Chassidim who constitute most of our Chassidic informants, in practice it is only minimally recognized: among the Gur, parents retain more control of the matchmaking process than among Lithuanians, and young people have less margin for manoeuvre in the face of pressure from parents to choose a particular husband or wife. According to one informant the shidduch is negotiated before the couple meet. After "perhaps 20 minutes" the couple emerge and are immediately asked "do you

[12] An early evening visit to Jerusalem's new Inbal Hotel among others will find numerous young couples in the lounge engaged in earnest conversation over two small bottles of mineral water.

agree?''. The pressure to assent is obviously overwhelming, but the rule that people must see each other (not quite the same as ''meet'') before getting married is formally upheld. A role for yeshiva tutors is not mentioned.

The drive to stringency: institution-building and social capital

The impetus towards stringency, erecting ever thicker barriers between haredi life and the secular world, setting it apart from neighbourhoods and institutions identified with ever-more-embattled mainstream – or ''modern'' – Orthodoxy, and also driving the multiplication of intra-haredi differentiation, has been much in evidence for several decades, especially as regards sex and marriage. Separate schooling now begins at primary school and occasionally earlier; higher education at university is almost prohibited because of the student lifestyle, both in Israel and in London; it seems customary now for men and women, even teenagers, to sit separately (on opposite sides of a table) at family meals. One lady from the Gur Chassidim told us that her own son-in-law had difficulty addressing her directly, that none of her sons-in-law addressed their sisters-in-law directly, and that in one of her daughters' households men and women do not even sit at the same table. She herself however teaches in a state religious school, which is not ultra-Orthodox and requires interaction with men, but despite this relative openness to the secular world, her children seem to have opted for an even stricter way of life, and the husband spends many evenings at the Torah study centre, or *kollel*.[13]

The question at hand is how it comes about that in the absence of a central authority, and despite the availability of myriad Rabbis with potentially varying opinions, certain tendencies take root while others do not? One example is obviously the extraordinarily high birth rate, which we have discussed. Others include the uniform dress of haredi men, who always wear a white shirt and a very dark grey or black suit, never a tie, or the head coverings of haredi women – from wigs covered by hats to hats to headscarves over visibly shaven heads, depending on their sect or milieu. Doctrine does not explain these patterns because even if a biblical or Rabbinic phrase can be found in

[13] A centre for married men to study, distinct from the yeshiva, which is for unmarried men, but which also stands as a metonym for places of Torah study in general.

support of them the relevant object of enquiry our is the motivation for finding the phrase and interpreting it in a certain way.[14] To our knowledge there is no written haredi dress code though there are many books and pamphlets offering guidance and always endorsed by a Rabbi of note. In any case, a recognized source could easily be found to justify the opposite if one was needed. Rabbinic authority may play a role, but to achieve such remarkable conformity requires more than powerful positions and command over resources. Although "atmosphere" is not a hard-and-fast sociological category and has little explanatory force, we would venture to say that in haredi neighbourhoods there is an atmosphere in which no Rabbi would dare to question certain customs and rules. Senior Chassidic Rabbis have tried to restrain the scale of present-exchanges at weddings because of the pressures these represent for hard-pressed family budgets. For example, we have observed at Gur weddings that close family are invited to the formal wedding supper, while friends and neighbours arrive later for light refreshments bringing token gifts. Conversely, the strength of grassroots, interstitial consensus was recently illustrated when the leading Lithuanian Rabbi Eliashiv suddenly handed down a ruling banning all wigs on the grounds that they are becoming too attractive. The ruling was ignored and evaporated.

In the period following the Second World War ultra-Orthodoxy was forced to co-exist with other Jewish and non-Jewish populations to a greater extent than before: previously its heartland was in relatively self-contained villages and urban neighbourhoods of Eastern Europe. (German strict observance and its co-existence with a secular society was another matter: with emigration to other European countries, to the US and to Israel its bearers would converge with Eastern European styles of ultra-Orthodoxy almost to the point of subordination, something which would have shocked earlier generations.) So, in order to preserve their way of life the leadership had to pursue strategies which were to some extent in tension with one another: the recruitment of new people to replenish their ranks, but also the codification of rules which in earlier times could be taken for granted, handed down from one generation to the next in the routine rhythms of everyday life.

[14] This is exemplified by a fascinating discussion of Talmudic and Rabbinic debates about women's hair-covering in Bronner 1993.

Here it emerges that opinions have varied over the centuries, especially since the Middle Ages, and above all that the wig was first seen as a device for embellishment as Jewish women in the 18th century adopted it in accordance with secular fashion, for which they were criticized. Thereafter, it became rebranded as a device for modesty, because it covered the hair.

Recruiting new people involved temporary relaxation of some customs, especially those governing marriage (so as to encourage demographic growth): marriage between sects and across Lithuanian-Chassidic lines; the recruitment of young Moroccans into the yeshivas (but without allowing them to marry Ashkenazi women). We see here early premonitions of what became the *t'shuva* movement, though later, under all sorts of other influences, it became more illuminist. At the same time, if they were to preserve their way of life, they had to ensure the new recruits would not dilute their ethos, and they had to protect them from an environment dominated more than ever by a secular ethos, and within Judaism by Conservative, Liberal, Reform, modern Orthodox and of course Zionist streams, who were unsupportive or even hostile. This required that codification be uncompromising on religious matters and questions of sexuality and lifestyle. Codification favoured clarity of limits and boundaries, stringency – a good example being the clarification of boundaries vis-à-vis those young Moroccan recruits. It also involved the empowerment of educational institutions and their leaders. The figures who rejected any compromise – ''if in doubt say 'no''' – may have been isolated at first, but they gained or kept enough adherents to reach a critical mass. It would be mistaken to regard this evolution as a necessary outcome of the tragedies of the Shoah: it was one of many possible outcomes at a time when the institutions and philosophies of Judaism would continue to diversify in response to massive changes in culture, economics, politics and philosophy. It probably owed much to the political and organizational talents of leaders such as those who negotiated the famous ''status quo'' arrangement with Ben-Gurion in 1947-1948, to salvage their culture and guarantee themselves a niche on the eve of the birth of the new state, and also of the man who renewed the Lubavitch sect after World War II, Menachem Mendel Schneersohn (d. 1994), renowned for his fund-raising abilities and revered as a charismatic, even messianic, leader (Friedman 1994). If the leaders of the haredim in Israel took a hard line on religious issues, they also demonstrated political flexibility when the very birth and survival of the state was at issue, by negotiating with a Zionist leadership whose ethos they detested (Friedman 1995), they innovated by encouraging girls' formal education in both secular and religious subjects and, more surprisingly, their entry en masse into the labour market, as well as their assumption, once married, of the role of breadwinner while their husbands devoted themselves to Torah learning. Furthermore, by its open-ended commitment to the funding of haredi education, the new

state created the employment, as teachers, which those women – and the Rabbis – needed (Friedman 1988). Since the same women were also under enormous pressure to maximize their fertility, this has brought about an extraordinary increase in their double burden. On the face of it, the haredi women have adopted this ethos as their own, and in another piece of research one could also document how they have gradually built up public roles, albeit carefully separated from the religious sphere in which men have the monopoly.

However, even if the beginnings of ultra-Orthodoxy's rebirth and renewal – which merit much further investigation – were a matter of leadership and resource mobilization (McAdam *et al.* 1996), the subsequent process of consolidation cannot be explained by these factors alone. Prevalent theories both of social movements and in the sociology of religion would tend to predict a later phase of institutionalization or an opposed trend of sect introversion, in which stringency and authoritarianism are accentuated while membership declines and becomes increasingly subservient, ending in collapse (Stark and Bainbridge 1987, chap. 8). Our hypothesis is, rather, that in this case, as the boundaries thicken so the investment in them on the part of those who remain within becomes more and more precious – that is to say, the cost of violating them or stepping outside them rises, and so the possibility of a viable social life on the edge of boundaries declines, and the expenditure of effort in policing boundaries becomes more worthwhile. Boundaries are extended and framed to cover more and more spheres of social life and vested interests (including employment) in boundary maintenance also multiply: where once prominent figures might themselves deal with secular or non-Jewish authorities, now they appoint emissaries in their place so as to avoid contact – as in Israel where top religious leaders would never dream of sullying themselves with direct political involvement; special schools are required, creating jobs for teachers. In this ultra-Orthodox rebirth, institutions and roles crop up to police boundaries – teachers of secular and religious subjects, kosher food inspection bodies and their staff, marriage brokers, burial societies, administrators and attendants at ritual baths (*mikvah*). The theories which predict a fork in the road (between moderation and institutionalization on one hand and self-destructive sectarianism on the other), are basing themselves on Christian revival movements in a particular period, which burst out in a break with institutional traditions and made a point of starting from scratch (Comaroff 1985; Martin 2006). The haredim, in contrast, are heirs to a Jewish tradition in which institution-building

(without a protective state or in enclaves conformed by an encompassing, distant state) is an abiding theme. There surely are also collective material incentives or facilitators at work: German postwar restitution, paid to institutions as well as individuals, was vast and is only now running out; Jewish philanthropy and the Israeli state have also supported the institutions which frame the system. And institutions do matter: if the resources had not been channelled to viable institutions, the tendency could have been decay and disintegration. In some interpretations, especially that of Eli Berman, the availability of external funds encourages tighter discipline and control, so as to discourage fakes and opportunists, or alternatively because if an organization controls and distributes valuable goods in a deprived environment it is in a position to make heavy, predatory, non-monetary demands on beneficiaries (Berman 2000). The pattern we describe is consistent with that interpretation, save that we would emphasize the importance of solid institutions with a deep heritage (social capital) in sustaining it in the long run. Otherwise, as Berman's examples (notably the Taliban) show, the predator can implode. (We shall see whether the revival of the Taliban will lead to a similar ending this time.)

This is why we should remind ourselves briefly that the life of Jews in Eastern Europe had for centuries been regulated by Councils which separated religious and secular affairs, which ran educational institutions, collected taxes and operated impartial, expert-led judicial procedures (Katz 1961; Freeze 2002; Hundert 2004). Of course, not everything was always in order, but the idea of institution-building was known and accepted. Katz, for example (Katz 1961, p. 154), states that there were elaborate measures to prevent family members sitting together on judicial or community bodies, to the extent that sometimes a Rabbi could not be appointed if he had relatives living locally because that might jeopardize his independence when he sat on such bodies. The illuminist Chassidic upsurge in the 18th century may have started as a challenge to institutional life but did not take long to build its own institutional life and networks and also to find a *modus vivendi* with the established order (Dynner 2006), unlike the Sabbateans whose spectacular collapse had foreshadowed the Chassidic revival (Sholem 1961, pp. 287-324). In Germany communal voluntary institutions had managed Jewish life since the 16th century: burial societies operated as high-status charitable institutions into which entry was expensive and elitist; Rabbis were, as in Poland-Lithuania, recruited from outside a locality "to prevent formation of factions among locals" and their tenure was always limited to three years (Breuer

1996, pp. 168-169, 173); in Furth an association of circumcisers was formed to maintain standards and introduce ''protective measures for the safety of infants'' (*ibid.*, p. 174). By the 20th century charitable institutions became more professionalized, and one estimate put the number of Jewish welfare and educational organizations at 5,000 in 1906 and reckoned that 20,000 Jews in Berlin alone belonged to at least one Jewish charity – not counting non-Jewish ones (Lowenstein 1997, pp. 131-133).

The mechanics of the continuity of this tradition in the aftermath of the Shoah remain to be properly understood, but they are an important element in the story, especially when contrasted with the trajectory of religious revival in Pentecostal and Evangelical Christianity, where stringency only lasts a generation or so before succumbing to the comforts of the middle ground (Martin 2001), or the temptations of political co-optation (Maxwell 2006) take their toll – or sometimes movements simply implode.[15]

Conclusion

We started out on this research because it seemed to us that amidst the mass of sociological and anthropological writing on ultra-Orthodox Judaism this theme of marriage was unmentioned even though it was surely a cornerstone of the haredi ''system''. The evidence and analysis presented here has perhaps taken that intuition even further than expected, for it begins to emerge that the marriage system in its contemporary form, especially among Lithuanians, is in many ways a product of other institutions and initiatives and has been shaped less by the dynamics of kinship itself than by the dynamics of revival and institutional renewal in a culture where the rhythms of the day, the week, the month and the year, and the multiple rites of passage through which a person passes, are governed to a remarkable extent by institutions. The causality issue here is not as important as the understanding of the mutual reinforcement between the marriage system and the institutional structures of ultra-Orthodoxy. The interpretation is applied principally to Israel if only because the state subsidies do seem to be an essential feature of the system and we do not know the scale of similar injections which may occur elsewhere from government or charities.

[15] The relationship between social capital and religion is explored in Lehmann 2008.

The mutually reinforcing practices and institutions which converge on marriage can be listed as (a) the yeshiva system; (b) the maximization of fertility; (c) the socialization role of educational institutions; (d) women's entry into the labour market; and (e) the strengthening of communal institutions such as rotating credit societies and ceremonial or banqueting halls.

The yeshiva system and its sister the seminar have come, through processes which remain unknown, to inculcate into their students, with some success, an ethos of marriage which is devoted to the maintenance of a Torah learner. This is not, obviously, the only purpose, but we have heard repeatedly that young women are less interested in the material side of prospective marriages than in this ideal, and that it goes together with a degree of independence vis-à-vis parents who, having other children to bring up and marry, may have financial issues and know that their daughters' ideal could be very expensive. We have also heard accounts of deep disappointment on the part of young women who find they cannot realise their ideal. In this way the attractiveness of the yeshiva is enhanced for parents who hope their sons will study hard, do well, and attract good offers of marriage. After marriage, furthermore, according to the ideal, the wife will, apart from bearing several children in rapid succession, go out to work and send her children to a nursery and later a kindergarten and a school all within the ultra-Orthodox system. To be sure this is an ideal, because it is costly, and one wonders how people, who are on average way below the poverty line both in Israel and in London, can afford this. The answer partly lies in the numerous charitable institutions which operate in haredi society, but there is surely more to it than that.

Proper explanation of the high fertility of haredi couples continues to be a mystery, but one of its many effects is, again, to strengthen ultra-Orthodox institutions: they run the nurseries etc. which take in these children and the mothers often find employment working in those self-same nurseries and schools. Although government doubtless subsidizes these it probably does not pay the full cost. Also, the jobs available within the haredi world no longer suffice, and indeed haredi women are now being hired in Israel – and in the occupied territories – in other jobs, notably in the hi-tech industry where suitable working conditions can be found and, reportedly, they are more submissive and content with lower pay than other workers (Algazi 2006).

The high birth rate also creates pressure from within the household for early marriage, due to overcrowding and the danger of teenage indiscipline. Early marriage in turn will perpetuate dependence on

haredi institutions because couples are embarking on a life of child-rearing and income-gathering before they have had a chance to acquire the skills needed to survive in the outside world and its economy, as employees in the private or public sector. It also creates competition for entry into prestige yeshivas and ensures their continuing prestige. In 2005 it was reported that top Israeli yeshivas were coming under pressure to create more vacancies from parents in the US anxious about their sons' marriage prospects (*Haaretz*, 28 January 2005).

The social capital represented by this complex of relationships is by no means negligible. Social capital is hard to build up, but once built up it lasts over many generations and increases with expenditure. The deep history of European Jewish institutional life, which is merely hinted at by our minuscule examples, helps to explain why this culture was able to revitalize itself in the last fifty years. The subsidies from the Israeli state and from charitable donations worldwide have helped, but on their own they would not have been able to build the institutionalized trust which is a central feature of social capital (Putnam 2000; Lehmann 2008).

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Résumé

La croissance en nombre et en influence des groupes ultra-orthodoxes *(haredim)* depuis la Seconde Guerre mondiale, pour minoritaires qu'ils soient, a changé la face du judaïsme de par le monde. Leur accroissement vient d'un taux sans précédent de natalité, du mouvement de *t'shuva* (retour ou repentir) et des subventions publiques et privées accordées à l'enseignement de la Torah dans les *yeshivot* et autres écoles. On a là le premier des deux piliers de l'ultra-orthodoxie. Le second pilier est le *shidduch*, système de mariages concertés, qui garantit que tous les membres ou presque puissent se marier ; il est renforcé par les institutions éducatives qui inculquent aux jeunes filles une préférence pour un mari érudit qui consacre sa vie à l'étude, avec pour corollaire l'obligation pour elles de le maintenir économiquement.

Mots clés : Judaïsme ; Parenté ; Mariage ; Capital social.

Zusammenfassung

Der Anstieg und Einfluss ultraorthodoxer Gruppen (haredim), selbst wenn sie in der Minderheit sind, hat seit dem zweiten Weltkrieg das Judentum weltweit verändert. Der Anstieg erklärt sich aus der Kinderzahl, einer t'shuva (retum) Bewegung und den öffentlichen, wie privaten Subventionen, die dem Torahstudium in den yeshivot und anderen Schulen zugute gekommen sind. Es handelt sich um den ersten der beiden Hauptpfeiler des Ultraorthodoxismus. Der zweite ist der shidduch, Heiratsverträge, die es allen oder fast allen ihrer Mitglieder erlauben zu heiraten; er stärkt die Bildungsinstanzen, die die jungen Mädchen glauben machen, daß sie einen gebildeteten Mann, der sich ganz dem Studium widmet, vorziehen sollen, mit der Folge, daß sie ihn unterhalten müssen.

Schlagwörter: Judentum; Verwandtschaft und Heirat; Sozialkapital.