

Honor as a Driving Force in Israeli Politics:
Israeli Political History Told through the Lens of Honor / Orit Kamir

First draft, not edited, do not circulate

Introduction

Israel's population is made up of two distinct fractions: the Jewish majority, whose members constitute almost 80% of the state's citizenry, and the Palestinian minority, which consists of almost 20%. Israel's Palestinian society, closely related to the Palestinians of The West Bank and Gaza, endorses traditional features of an Arabic, Middle Eastern honor culture. *Sharaf*, usually translated as "family honor", is a fundamental notion in that society. It is most deeply associated with women's sexual conduct and with ownership of ancestral land. The Jewish society, on the other hand, is not usually thought of as honor based. It is this majority group that the article focuses on.

I claim that the Jewish Israeli society is deeply entrenched in its own unique, multi-faceted honor-based culture. This idiosyncratic honor culture consists of a tense, ongoing interaction between three distinct notions of honor. The dominant component in this mix is the Zionist notion of honor, modeled on turn of the 20th century Central European national honor. In the face of their Diaspora existence, which they viewed as national humiliation, the founding fathers of Zionism envisioned bold, forceful, self-restrained, handsome, manly Jews working their land, fighting and conquering their enemies and determining the nation's fate in its liberated home land. This was the origin of Zionist honor. It was shared by three Zionist sectors, which became three fractions of Israeli society: the secular socialists, the secular right wingers and the religious Zionists. A far older notion of honor that plays a role in contemporary Israel is one that was prevalent in traditional Diaspora Jewish communities, who resided mostly in Europe. In these communities, honor was associated above all with Jewish men's complete devotion to the rabbinical study of sacred scriptures, and scholarly excellence at it. This pre-Zionist honor is cherished by contemporary ultra-orthodox Jewish communities in Israel. It is one cause of much political tension in Israel (for example, regarding the issue whether ultra-orthodox men should serve in the Israeli army, which was the central issue in the general elections of 2013). The third component of Jewish Israeli honor is the Mediterranean honor-and-shame sensibilities of members of Jewish communities that originated in the Arab world, mostly Morocco, Iraq and Syria.¹ Deeply rooted in Mediterranean environment, members of these Jewish communities adopted basic features of Mediterranean honor-and-shame culture. Members of these communities who immigrated to Israel in the 1950s felt that their cultural heritage was despised, denigrated and humiliated by European Zionist, founders of the Jewish state. Mediterranean Jews' experience of collective shame has been a significant feature of Israeli socio-political reality for decades.

In previous publications (in Hebrew) I focused on the diagnosis and analysis of Zionist honor culture. In this article I argue that the complex interactions among the three notions of honor constitute an internal Jewish Israeli dynamic that impacts both internal and external politics. Voting patterns and dominant public discourses reflect and refract the internal honor dynamic, and determine Israel's foreign relations, and most importantly: its management of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

¹ Using the term Mediterranean Jews I do NOT refer to Jews from Italy, Greece or France.

The first part of this paper offers a brief exposition of the three types of honor that prevail in Israel's Jewish society. The article's second part follows the political dynamic between five Jewish communities in Israel that endorse variations of these types of honor: 1. Secular, socialist Zionists (also referred to as "the Israeli center and left", and "The Old Elites"); 2. Secular right wing Zionists (initially called "revisionists" and later represented by the *Likud* party), 3. Religious Zionists (closely associated with the West Bank settlers); 4. Ultra-orthodox Jews; 5. Descendants of Jewish communities that lived in the Arab world ("Eastern Jews"). This part portrays the first two decades of Israel's history (1948-1967) as the era in which moderate Zionist honor was hegemonic. Jewish communities associated with traditional honor (the ultra-orthodox, religious Zionists and Eastern Jews) cultivated strong feelings of degradation and humiliation, as did the Zionist right wing, with its ultra nationalist honor sensibilities. The following decades (1968 to this day) constitute the "vengeance phase", in which these humiliated Jewish communities have been avenging themselves on the secular socialist founding Zionist community (now resentfully labeled "The Old Elites"). The most obvious and troubling external manifestation of this internal dynamic of vengeance is the blood-feud style with which Israel has been managing its conflict with the Arab world at large and the Palestinians in particular. The article concludes with the claim that Jewish Israeli awareness to and transcendence of internal honor dynamic are crucial to any resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It suggests that if human dignity replaces honor as Israel's fundamental moral code, there is hope for a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This article tells the story of Jewish Israeli society and politics through a single prism of honor. It deliberately leaves out many important factors, such as the economy, military history, national and international law, Arab world context, international relations and Israeli collective post-traumatic disorder, to focus attention on the honor dynamic within Israel's Jewish society. The story told here is not unknown, nor is it subversive. In fact, it is widely known and understood by most Israeli Jews. But it goes untold, unacknowledged, and thus unaddressed. Some would consider parts of this narrative politically-incorrect, insensitive and even damaging to the volatile relations between Jewish fractions of Israeli society. They seek "Jewish brotherhood" at the expense of painful – and dangerous – confrontation of the deep tensions among Israeli Jews. The collective choice of silence and repression, typical of honor societies, prevents deep, serious address of the problem. This article breaks this silence.

Part One: Three Notions of Honor in Jewish Israel

Honor and Honor Cultures

I refer to "honor," "honor cultures," and "honor societies" as they have been carefully studied and defined through decades of anthropological studies in the Mediterranean, Middle East, Western Europe, Southern USA, India, and South America.² Honor societies and cultures differ greatly in many features; nevertheless, a survey of studies that research particular honor societies and cultures around the world reveals that significant generic attributes are common to many. Whether a particular behavior is dishonorable/ shameful may be viewed differently by different honor cultures, but the use of honor as a fundamental criterion to determine worthiness and social rank is typical of them all. So is the use of shame and humiliation to denote dishonor. Members of historical and contemporary honor cultures derive their social

² For specific reference to Mediterranean honor cultures see foot note 14. For specific reference to turn-of-the-twentieth-century national honor see last paragraph of this section.

rank and sense of worthiness by measuring up to well-defined social norms of honorable behavior and avoiding or avenging behaviors and situations which are conceived as inflicting shame.

Honor cultures thus cultivate emotions such as shame (lack of honor) and envy (desire to have as much honor as one's peer) which tend to depend on relative standing in a community, rather than more internally-oriented and individualistic emotions such as guilt, remorse, angst, and ennui. According to Pitt-Rivers, a prominent scholar of honor cultures, "the sentiment of honor inspires conduct which is honorable, the conduct receives recognition and established reputation, and reputation is finally sanctified by the bestowal of honors. Honor felt becomes honor claimed and honor claimed becomes honor paid".³ In his exploration of humiliation and honor Miller notes, more simply, that: "[a]t root, honor means 'don't tread on me'. But to show someone you were not to be trod upon, often meant that you had to hold yourself out as one who was willing to tread on others".⁴ He further asserted that the logic of honor was that of a "zero-sum game": one must seize another man's honor in order to establish his own (Miller, 1993, p. 116).⁵ This is the source of the volatile and highly violent nature of honor-based cultures.

In honor cultures, honor serves as an effective disciplinary tool, and the honor-code is, therefore, a structure of social power. In order to achieve and maintain honor, an honor culture offers its members specific behavior codes demanding complete obedience. Failure to detect an insult which taints one's honor, or failure to respond to an offense to one's honor at the right time, in the right fashion, in the right degree results in costly consequences, i.e., in loss of honor. Honor cultures are local and particularistic in the sense that they apply exclusively to their own members, demanding thorough mastery of the most nuanced specific norms and expectations. Such cultures are ritualistic in the sense that they demand very specific responses to offensive behaviors. Honor cultures are individualistic in that each member is responsible for his or her honor, and will suffer the consequences of a wrong social move. They are collectivist in the sense that each person's honor also affects the honor of his or her clan, and sometimes that of a larger group, such as nation. They are also class-oriented, in the sense that a person's honor and the means of maintaining it vary greatly according to social class.

The most obvious class difference in many honor cultures (but not in all) is gender based. Since honor codes developed mostly in patriarchal societies, men are often the only players in honor games, including duels and feuds. Women are constructed as facilitators and "objects" in some such games. So, for example, in most honor societies a man's honor depends on his ability to control access to his wife's sexuality. A common "honor game" is for men to "seduce" other men's wives, thus "stealing" their honor and appropriating it through the sexual "use" of their women. In many societies such an offence to a man's honor is so severe that he must retaliate by taking the life of his offender. The woman in such a game is the vehicle through which one man loses honor and the other gains it. Honor societies vary greatly in their emphasis of women's sexual "purity" and "modesty", but the loss of control over a woman is

³ Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honor and Social Status", in *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, 1966, ed. J. G. Peristiany, Chicago University Press, Chicago, p. 22.

⁴ William Ian Miller, 1993, *Humiliation And Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort and Violence*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 84.

⁵ "The mathematics of honor usually meant that you could never be just like someone else without taking what he had, appropriating his status to yourself. For the most part, people acted as if the mechanics of honor had the structure of a zero-sum or less-than-zero-sum game." Ibid, p. 116.

almost universally considered shameful for a man. It is commonly held that Mediterranean honor cultures were – and perhaps still are – far more focused on sexuality, masculine virility and feminine chastity than other European honor cultures.

Turn of the 20th century Central European honor focused on a new version of national masculinity.⁶ Honor was associated with manhood, which was defined as powerful, brave, self-reliant, self-determining, honest, silent, clean, healthy, modest, handsome, and above all – self-restraining. Purity of spirit and thorough integrity were crucial to a man's honor. Sexuality was not at all central to it; in fact, sexual restraint was far more honorable than sexual conquest and achievements. This vision of manliness was the foundation of nationalism. Only true men of honor had the national spirit that could sustain honorable nations.

Zionist Honor

In previous publications⁷ I suggested that Political Zionism⁸ is, predominantly, an honor discourse. Around the turn of the 20th century Political Zionism reconceptualized European Jews' *pain* caused by continuous assault on their dignity, wellbeing and human rights, into a condition of *shame* and feelings of *anger*, framed in terms of national honor. This new perspective was adopted by the founding fathers of Political Zionism from Central European – especially German – culture. Almost immediately, it was portrayed as authentically Jewish. According to this Zionist formulation, biblical Jews and their Second-Temple era descendants were proud men of honor, the forerunners of contemporary European men. These ancient Jews owned their ancestral land, fought bravely, conquered their enemies and determined their fate, manifesting the honor code prevalent in contemporary Central Europe. Uprooted from their home land, Jews abandoned this honorable heritage, which Political Zionism at long last set out to restore. This heroic narrative made it plausible for the Zionist discourse to present the harsh reality of Jewish life in Europe as degrading and humiliating to the collective honor. The vision of a national state (in Palestine, the ancestral home land) was offered as an honorable solution to the dishonorable exile.

The first to envision a new Jewish Honor Culture was Theodor Herzl, an assimilated, German speaking Hungarian Jew, founder and leader of the Political Zionist movement. Herzl “had internalized the Jewish stereotypes of the European enlightenment. He saw Jews as inferior: cowardly, unmanly, shamefully preoccupied with money, bereft of idealism. But he also identified with their history of victimization”⁹ and was deeply disturbed by the unbearable conditions of Eastern Europe’s Jews. Ever since his alliance with the national student fraternity *Albia* in the early 1880s in Vienna, Herzl was fascinated with German Honor and the honorable

⁶ George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe*, 1985; *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*, 1996.

⁷ See “Honor and Dignity Cultures: the Case of *kavod* (honor) and *kvod ha-adam* (dignity) in Israeli Society and Law”, 2002, in *The Concept of Human Dignity in Human Rights Law*, eds. David Kretzmer and Eckart Klein, Kluwer Press, Amsterdam, 231-262, and *Israeli Honor and Dignity*, 2004, Carmel, Jerusalem, in Hebrew.

⁸ Political Zionism is the movement that predicated the establishment of an autonomous Jewish state. Settlement Zionism believed in settling Palestine and creating a living Zionist reality. Political Zionism worked from top to bottom, convincing world leaders and Jewry that Jews deserved a state of their own. Settlement Zionism, on the other hand, implemented grassroot activism in Palestine, and was mostly socialist. At first, Political Zionism did not prefer Palestine to other possible locations. Once it decided to focus on Palestine, the two branches of Zionism merged. For an entirely different Zionist perspective, Ahad Ha-Am's Siritual Zionism, see below.

⁹ Jacques Kornberg, *Theodor Herzl: From Assimilation to Zionism*, 1993, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, p. 2.

practice of dueling. Consequently, he believed that the Jews' redemption would come through their transformation into men of honor.

Herzl's first solution for the problem of Europe's Jews was a public duel between a leading anti-Semite and a Jewish leader such as himself. According to the honor logic, which he whole-heartedly embraced, this was a "win-win" solution. The Jew's victory, he wrote, would restore Jewish honor and clear the nation of its disgrace. The Jew's death would achieve the same result, proving to the world that Jewish men were as brave, manly and honorable as others. This fantasy is the backbone of his 1897 play, *The New Ghetto*, in which the Jewish protagonist, Jacob, is fatally wounded in a duel he initiated. Jacob's honorable conduct reestablishes his honor, which was tarnished when, on a previous occasion, he had failed to challenge an offender. Dying in the arms of his family, he begs them to leave the "ghetto" and start a new, honorable Jewish life.¹⁰

Political Zionism was another honor solution that Herzl formed. It was motivated primarily by compassion for the undignified conditions endured by most Jews. At the same time it aimed to remedy these indignities by restoring and constructing Jewish national honor. Herzl's Jewish State was to be a public display of Jewish honor. Every element of his political plan was carefully designed to serve and enhance the honorable effect.

Arguing that Herzl's honor code was a far cry from Jewish religion and morality, Ahad Ha-Am (pen name for Asher Ginzberg) fiercely rejected the honor discourse together with the whole concept of political Zionism. His Zionist vision was of an elitist, scholarly settlement in Zion that would serve as spiritual leadership to the Jewish masses in Europe. This Spiritual Zionism did not consist of a Jewish army or proud, manly Jewish heroes, but of Jewish scholars and philosophers. But despite Ahad Ha-Am's harsh criticism, the leaders of Political Zionism (like Max Nordau and later Ze'ev Jabotinski on the right and David Ben Gurion on the left) embraced Herzl's honor-based vision and expanded it. Five decades after Herzl first introduced it, Political Zionism succeeded in bringing about the establishment of Israel as the Zionist state. Herzl's vision of honor was faithfully realized in the state of Israel, although in a more Oriental and less European version.

Far fetched and even ludicrous as it may have sounded to most of Herzl's European contemporaries, his honor based vision was received with much enthusiasm by three Zionist sectors: the secular socialist left wing, the right wing and the religious wing. It was adopted wholeheartedly by many Jewish settlers in Palestine, and soon became a dominant facet of their Zionist ideology. In the early 1900s, members of the *HaShomer* organization in Palestine served as role models for aspiring Zionists. Taking upon themselves to guard Jewish settlements from Bedouin and Palestinian gangs, members of *HaShomer* became professional gun fighters. They sat tall in their saddles, excelled as warriors, and manifested boldness and courageous manliness. They blatantly adopted Bedouin mannerisms, such as dress, speech, riding, dining and feasting manners; this Orientalism was designed to paint them as authentic decedents of native men of honor.

¹⁰ Herzl's second, and slightly more realistic, idea regarding the solution of the Jews' problem was that all Jews be baptized as Christians. Nevertheless, he was very conscious of the effect this act might have on Jewish honor. In his vision, therefore, not only would the baptism ceremony be performed with great splendor and grandeur, but, most importantly, the leaders of the Jewish community would remain Jewish, explicitly proclaiming and vindicating Jewish honor.

In the 1940s this iconic image of the native, Jewish warrior, was reincarnated in the persona of the *Palmachnik*: member of the elite unit of the *Hagana* underground movement. During the British Mandate in Palestine, the *Hagana*, populated and supported by the center-left secular socialist Zionists, was the largest and most popular Jewish underground movement. It smuggled Jewish immigrants into Palestine, established Jewish settlements, stored weapons and trained men and women to use them for self defense and in the struggle for Jewish independence. In 1948, when the British administration and army forces left Palestine, the Zionists declared the foundation of their independent state, Israel, and war between Jews and Arabs ensued. The *Hagana* functioned as the Zionist army, and the *Palmach* - as its elite unit. *Palmach* soldiers were greatly outnumbered by their opponents, but displayed legendary heroism and self sacrifice, offering themselves as the "silver platter" on which the independent Zionist state was awarded the Jewish people. They became the ultimate embodiment of Jewish national honor. Depicted as forceful, unrelenting, modest and handsome, the youthful *Palmachnik* became the ultimate idol of the first generations of Jewish Israelis. This iconic image remained pivotal in Jewish Israeli ethos until 1973, when the October (*Yom Kippur*) war unleashed deep disillusionment and disenchantment with Zionist mythology. Despite many challenges (such as the right wing's appropriation of national symbols), the icon of the epic, self-sacrificing defender of national Jewish existence and honor is still very central to Jewish Israeli identity to this day.

Traditional European Jewish, "Ultra-Orthodox" honor

Subsequent to complete loss of political autonomy in the first and second centuries A.D., most Jews lived outside their ancestral homeland. Jewish communities were established mostly in Europe, and despite repeated attacks and destruction, these communities survived – and at times even flourished – until the 20th century. Following common European perception, Herzl and other Zionists viewed members of these communities as unmanly and dishonorable. In fact, Jews were commonly viewed by their "hosting" Christian neighbors as subsisting outside the honor-based cultural spheres of European societies. And indeed, Jewish men lacked any attribute widely considered honorable: they did not carry weapons or own land, and at times and places they were not allowed to ride certain animals such as horses. Their means of survival were money lending and trade: occupations abhorred by other Europeans. They were often despised, mocked and humiliated without avenging their honor. Furthermore, particularly in modern times, their women were very visible and active. They ran businesses and supported families. Many Jewish men did not seem to their neighbors to control their women or to provide for them.

While factually true, this was a partial, external depiction of traditional Jewish communities. It was based on outsiders' perspectives, blind to these Jews' own narrative and point of view. As a racial, cultural, religious minority, Jews were indeed often forbidden – and undoubtedly also refrained from – any conduct that could be viewed by their "hosting" Christian neighbors as honorable. But in their internal cultural sphere they nurtured their distinct Jewish honor code. It was based, above all, on men's rabbinical, scholarly devotion to scripture.

This cultural tradition was fostered by Jewish sages in Babylon and Palestine, who, in the first five centuries after the demolition of Jewish Political autonomy, instituted rabbinical Judaism. These sages (called *tanaim* and *amoraim*) created the *halachic*¹¹ texts, first and foremost the

¹¹ Legal-religious.

*Talmud*¹², and established the *Yeshiva* way of life. In the *Yeshiva* men studied *Talmud* in a polemic, argumentative fashion, under the supervision of their rabbis. Study sessions, mostly conducted in pairs, resembled intellectual matches, or sword fights, i.e., duels. The mutual goal was to penetrate, decipher and own the depth of the textual, spiritual truth; this was the way to profess Jewish devotion to God, as well as to deduce practical *halachic* solutions to questions raised in everyday Jewish life. An additional goal was the training of future rabbis and Jewish leaders. The basic means to all these ends was critical, argumentative scholarly excellence, i.e., rabbinical "intellectual dueling". Such sacred intellectual pursuit bestowed honor.¹³

In the course of penetrating the holy scriptures, the sacred truth and the divine law, rabbinical scholars took on divine sanctity, which I label "glory". Let me elaborate briefly. Rabbinical, *Yeshiva* "penetrating study sessions" were conducted with full body movement, alluding to sexual penetration. The holy scriptures were referred to both as God's divine daughter and men's beloved, pretty "gazelle", whose womb is small and tight. In the context of this imagery, the "penetration" of God's holy daughter (the scriptures), endowed *Yeshiva* scholars with divine glory. More accurately, glory, this hint of holiness, is the absolute, inalienable value of human life in Jewish culture. It was said by the sages to have been awarded to all human beings, as they all bear the divine image of God. It is the ancient, religious forerunner of what would later be molded by European enlightenment, liberalism and humanism as "human dignity": the absolute value and worth of humanity. In rabbinical culture, glory derived not from humanity, but from God's divinity, and Jewish men who penetrate the tight womb of the divine deer "took on" more of it than other humans. This additional divine glory is the quintessence of their manly Jewish honor.

The *Talmud* and the *Yeshiva* way of life, as developed by sages in Babylon and Palestine, together with their inherent notions of honor and glory, became the foundations of traditional Jewish cultural autonomy and self-rule in Europe.

It is, of course, presumptuous and impossible to encompass centuries of Jewish life in a few brief paragraphs. Nevertheless, I believe that it is safe to say that despite many variations among them on the particulars, many Jewish communities in Europe conceptualized Jewish honor in reference to men's scholarly, rabbinical study of *Talmud* in the *Yeshiva* tradition. All Jewish boys were sent, often at the age of three, to elementary schools, where they were taught basic reading and writing skills. The texts they studied were sacred scriptures. Students who manifested outstanding intellectual rigor, devotion and critical, argumentative skills, were encouraged to continue their studies and progress to *Yeshiva* level. The more they excelled, devoted their lives to rabbinical scholarship and progressed in the *Yeshiva* hierarchy – the more honorable they became. Their intellectual exercise, pursuit and "dueling" were constructed as heroic, valorous, laborious and taxing – just as physical warring and dueling were constructed in other European communities. Honor as symbolic capital was allocated by traditional Jewish communities to men who immersed themselves in rabbinical scholarly life, continuing and developing Jewish culture, maintaining and leading Jewish autonomy.

¹² Two *Talmud* books were compiled, one in Babylon and the other in Palestine, in the centuries following the canonization of the *Mishnah*. Each of them consists of scholarly discussion and debate of the *Mishnah* and additional texts of mishnaic period.

¹³ For a full analysis of the classic *Yeshiva* world as an honor world see... (an article written by Yakir Englander and myself).

Since rabbinical scholarship was encouraged in all Jewish boys, most scholars did not have the financial means to support themselves in *Yeshiva* life. The rabbinical honor-based mechanisms of self-maintenance and survival dictated that "adopting" rabbinical scholars and providing for them would be a way to earn honor; and the way to "adopt" a scholar was to become his father-in-law. The honor-based system that Jewish communities set up to preserve, nourish and nurture their scholars was to honor their sponsors; marriage was the type of contract signed between the sponsor and his protégé. Simply put, men who were not, themselves, excellent "intellectual warriors", but were financially established, were offered the opportunity to gain honor by marrying their daughters to *Yeshiva* students, taking these men into their homes, and supporting them for life. Wealth could buy honor if it were shared with rabbinical scholarly excellence. Women were the means of establishing the bond (*halachic* contract) between their fathers' wealth and their husbands' scholarly honor. In their own right, these women were completely excluded from the major sphere of honor (and glory); *Yeshiva* life and scholarship were off limits for Jewish girls and women.

Jewish men in traditional communities could gain honor through additional venues of ensuring the survival of their communities: building synagogues, helping the poor, redeeming Jewish captives and using their connections and influence to negotiate better living conditions for Jews. Men and women alike could also gain honor by professing ultimate devotion to Judaism: refusing to disown it even at the cost of their lives. Glorifying Judaism through self sacrifice was greatly honored. But no honor was as great – or as glorified – as that directly associated with Jewish culture: rabbinical scholarship.

Traditional Jewish communities' honor code was not categorically different from other European honor codes. The pivotal difference was the definition of manliness. In many European societies a wealthy man would be pleased to marry his daughter to a great warrior, knowing that such an alliance would permit him to bathe in his son-in-law's honor. In a traditional Jewish society a wealthy man simply coveted a great rabbinical intellectual rather than a great warrior.

Visionaries of Political Zionism, who spoke the language of European enlightenment, were estranged to traditional Jewish communities and insensitive to their internal codes. Searching in vain for military splendor and valor European style, such Zionists denounced traditional European Jews as dishonorable, unmanly and a disgrace to the proud heritage of their ancient biblical ancestors. Their Zionist honor discourse was based on self-distinction from traditional Jews. In contrast to traditional Jews, Zionists viewed themselves as enlightened, honorable, manly and national. When Jewish communities, especially under Russian rule, were attacked by gangs and destroyed (*pogroms*), many Jews did not carry arms or organize to fight their assailants. Zionists typically viewed this as testimony to the enormous dimensions of Jewish disgrace. Similarly, after the Holocaust, surviving Jews were accused by many Israeli Zionists of "going like sheep to the slaughterhouse". They were blamed that their unmanly, dishonorable conduct brought shame and humiliation on the entire Jewish nation. Israeli Zionism was completely blind – and explicitly disgusted with – the traditional Jewish narrative according to which not physical resistance, but spiritual devotion to Judaism under all circumstances, constituted Jewish honor and glory. This was deemed apologetic, cowardly, despicable excuse.

The state of Israel was founded by Zionist Jews and defined by them as the Zionist homeland of the Jewish people. Members of traditional Jewish European communities that immigrated to Israel, mostly after the Holocaust, were viewed by Israeli Zionists as remnants of shameful

Jewish exilic existence. Most of them chose to merge with the majority, Zionist Israeli group. But a small minority of them withdrew into enclosed, traditional communities, which became increasingly ultra-orthodox, increasingly distinct from the larger Jewish Israeli group. They revived their *Yeshiva*-focused life style and traditional, rabbinical honor code, adapting it to the new circumstances of life in the Zionist state.

Mediterranean Jewish, "Eastern" Honor

Jewish communities in the Arab world were far fewer and smaller than in Europe. As in traditional European Jewish communities, rabbinical scholarly excellence, significant contribution to Jewish survival, religious devotion and self sacrifice rather than denunciation of Judaism were sure to bestow honor. But more significantly, Jewish communities in the Arab world assumed the distinct features of Mediterranean honor cultures.

Mediterranean honor has been the focus of much research and as much controversy. This article cannot address the weighty learned debate regarding the characteristics of Mediterranean honor cultures. I will refer to a prevalent definition of the distinct nature of this type of honor.¹⁴

¹⁴ I am referring to the volume of articles edited by David D. Gilmore, *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean*, 1987, a special publication of the American Anthropological Association, no. 22. In his introduction (pp. 3-21), Gilmore says the following: It appears [...] that sexual access in the Mediterranean area often involves an indirect threat to the masculine integrity of another man. This amounts to a symbolic 'penetration' in rape or seduction, or a public display of potency (in marriage or other legitimate access) in which men are stratified through invidious comparison of phallic performance. Thus the stress on virility seems to belie a defensive or prophylactic strategy. This strategy is institutionalized in the particularly aggressive Mediterranean ethnomasculinities with their relentless, almost obsessive manliness – a feature found from the *machismo* of Spain and *maschio* of Sicily to the *rajula* of North Africa to cognate forms in the Balkans. [...] (ibid., 11). Here we see the corollary affective significance of the Mediterranean concept of shame for men. Sexual shame is not only the arbiter of chaste femininity, but also, when lost, the negation of masculine identity. When a man is shamed through an erotic defeat of an equivalent social submission he is symbolically emasculated: his physical integrity is dissolved and he succumbs to the ever-present danger of sexual reversal, of feminization. In a sense, he surrenders his own masculine identity and *becomes* a woman who is victimized and penetrated. [...] So male dishonor implies more than loss of social prestige; it also implies loss of male social identity, of masculinity. Mediterranean honor, then, is a 'libidinized' social reputation; and it is this eroticized aspect of honor – albeit unconscious or implicit – that seems to make the Mediterranean variant distinctive. A rigid spatial and behavioral segregation of the sexes and the consequent domestic division of labor is probably the most striking physical characteristic of Mediterranean community life. (ibid., 14). In the Mediterranean area we see gender polarities as a kind of 'genetic code' for behavior and self-identity [...]. This genetic code produces a strictly dichotomous universe in which all things, even inanimate objects, are divided linguistically into male and female categories (ibid., 17)."

Carol Delaney, who studied honor in a Turkish context, suggests that "honor and shame are functions of specific construction of procreation which, in turn, is correlative with the religious concept of monotheism". Carol Delaney, 1987, "Seeds of Honor, Fields of Shame", in *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean*, edited by David D. Gilmore, a special publication of the American Anthropological Association, no. 22, pp. 35-48, 36. More specifically: "Within this construction of procreation, it is men who give the life, women merely give birth. [...] Seed is a kind of living torch that is passed from father to son, *ad infinitum*. [...] The penis is thus the generative organ, and it is an object of much attention. One ritual that concentrates and reinforces this is circumcision. [...] The female genitals [...] are the seat of shame precisely because they do not have the ability to perpetuate the self in time. In contrast, the penis, as source of the male's ability to do so, is the source of pride (ibid., 39).

Women's shame, I suggest, is related to the theory of procreation in which she does not have the seeds of honor within her. That is, she lacks the power to create and project herself, she lacks the core of identity and autonomy, the possession of which is, according to Pitt-Rivers, the essence of honor. A woman is not self-contained, her personal boundaries are diffuse and permeable, and these physical attributes take on moral qualities. The belief that female intelligence is thought to be less sharp than the male's suggests that she lacks the proper equipment

Beside reflecting and bestowing status, prestige and social rank, Mediterranean honor reflects and refracts a man's autonomy and identity, the ultimate, fundamental essence of human value and worth. It is very closely associated with manhood. Women are construed as less than full human subjects, and are above all else potential shame, which must be closely supervised and contained by the responsible adult male. Any shaming of a man that is socially considered to reflect on his manhood – reduces him to a less-than-fully-human status of a woman. Such shaming robs him not merely of social status and prestige, but of manhood itself, i.e., subjecthood and full human agency. In other words, Mediterranean honor, which is at the core of Mediterranean manhood, includes not merely honor in the common European sense (social worth and rank), but also what modern European schools of thought (namely enlightenment, liberalism and humanism) label "human dignity": the most fundamental extract of human value and worth. In other words, Mediterranean honor cultures are unique in that they do not – and cannot – distinguish manhood and honor from human dignity, as their notion of manly honor encapsulates what Northern European cultures can – and in modernity do - distinguish as the core worth of humanity, i.e., human dignity.

Unlike their European Jewish brothers and much like their non-Jewish neighbors, many male members of Jewish communities in the Arab world kept their women secluded and concealed (to various degrees), to restrain the potential shame that they may inflict on the men. Some of them exhibited excessive sensitivity to their masculine virility and reputation, vigorously cherishing their Mediterranean manly honor, i.e., their human worth. Unlike the pale, timid looking, frail European Jewish *Yeshiva* scholars, Mediterranean Jewish men manifested *macho* style manly bravado, which to them signaled their manly honor as well as what we would call human dignity.

When they arrived in Israel, mostly in the 1950s, Jews of the Arab world were received as primitive, chauvinistic, uneducated immigrants from third world countries. Unable to find employment, many immigrants lived on welfare; their large families were considered a heavy burden on the struggling new Israeli society. Uprooted and disoriented in the new environment, stripped of their patriarchal status and rights, many men felt helpless and lost. There was little they could do to maintain their patriarchal reign other than use physical violence, and when that failed – resort to alcohol abuse. They experienced ultimate degradation.

To conclude, immigration to Israel destroyed the traditional structure of Mediterranean Jewish families. Men felt utterly humiliated, thus stripped not merely of their honor, but of their manliness, identity, worth, and what we would call human dignity. This overwhelming sense of shame and the deep resentment it set off have played a central role in Israeli politics.

In the traditional Jewish world, most European Jews were called "Ashkenazi", and most Jews of the Arab world were referred to as "Sephardi" (Spanish). This distinction took on religious connotation, as these two Jewish groups developed distinct religious customs. But in the political Israeli context, Israelis descending from communities that lived in the Arab world prefer to call themselves "Mizrachim", i.e., "Eastern", to emphasize not their religious customs but socio-economic identity. I thus refer to them as Eastern Jews.

to discern the boundaries between right and wrong. Women's shamefulness is basically a kind of indiscriminate fecundity which can only be redeemed by constraining and putting limits around it (ibid., 41)."

Much like ultra-orthodox honor, Eastern honor derives from traditional, communal lifestyle, whereas Zionist honor, socialist, right wing or religious, derives mostly from ideology. This is, of course, not to say that ultra-orthodox or Eastern Jews did or do not have political, ideological preferences. It is merely to say that the type of honor that is commonly associated with their communities is lifestyle rather than ideology based.

Part Two: Politics of Honor in Jewish Israel

Zionist Honor in the Formative "Melting Pot" Era: 1948-1967

The Zionist pilgrims who settled Palestine since the turn of the 20th century and later founded the state of Israel (1948) were mostly young, energetic, East European Jews. Many of their families were somewhat traditional. They spoke *Yiddish*, were members of Jewish communities and were acculturated into Jewish customs and lifestyles. The pilgrims were usually exposed to modern, secular, liberal European as well as Jewish education. They were often well versed in both socialism and nationalism. Most were young, secular, socialist, nationalist European Jews. The new society they established in Zion, Palestine, was a highly ideological, self-conscious one. It aspired to be utopic. Much of the intellectual and ideological creation took place in collectivist agricultural communities, such as the *kibbutz*.

These young idealists adopted the central European notion of national honor, as framed by Herzl, Nordau and their followers. They were men of honor in the sense of standing tall on their ancestral land, defending themselves fearlessly, and devoting their lives to the redemption of the Jewish nation, revival of the ancient home land and foundation of a just society. Their social rank, status and prestige were gained through extraordinarily hard labor (often agricultural), contribution to the collective, active participation in the exciting project of nation building, and complete devotion, body and soul, to the Zionist endeavor. They were committed to self Jewish governance, self sustenance, modesty in lifestyle, complete equality for all members, deep integrity and utmost dedication. Universal socialism was, in their minds, inherent to their Zionism. Their youth and poverty contributed to their ideological zeal.

A small but vocal minority among the pilgrims opposed socialism. This fraction, known as the revisionists, was led by Ze'ev Jabotinski, and tended to be significantly more committed to a distinctly more nationalistic Jewish honor than the socialist majority. Another minority was made up of religious Zionists, who subscribed to Zionist ideology, and often also to socialism, but rejected secularism. Instead, they created a modernized, moderate version of Jewish religiosity, and invested much energy in seeking their distinct middle ground between orthodoxy and secular Zionism. Mainstream secular, socialist Zionism, busy establishing itself in Palestine, was not particularly tolerant of these dissidents. The right wing revisionists were largely hated as local fascists, while the religious Zionists were looked down upon as clinging to dated, disgraceful remnants of exilic Judaism.

After the Second World War, Holocaust survivors arriving in Palestine, and later in Israel, met with blame and accusation. Why did they not leave in time, as the Zionists did? Why didn't they listen when told that Europe was burning? Why did they survive, while others, dear ones perished? And above all: why did they not fight back? Why did they go like sheep to the slaughter? Why did they not behave honorably? Why did they allow the foes to humiliate the Jewish nation and denigrate it in an unprecedented manner? Most survivors were fiercely determined to merge in the receiving, Zionist community. They studied Hebrew, took on new Israeli names, fought in the 1948 war of independence, served in the Israeli army, worked

hard, started new families and struggled to prove themselves useful citizens. They stowed away their pain and concentrated on making the most of the present. Most adopted the prevailing secular, national, socialistic Zionist ideology and took on the necessary new identities. They soon became a significant part of the young state's backbone. The children they raised were Israeli born *Sabras*. In 1961, when Israel conducted Adolf Eichmann's trial, many Israelis began to understand the dimensions of the horror experienced by holocaust casualties and survivors. Survivors' testimonies slowly began to be sought and welcome.

A minority of the European immigrants to Israel chose to maintain traditional, religious lifestyles. They established secluded communities, spoke *Yiddish*, maintained their distinct medieval East European dress code, and above all – adhered to their rabbis and founded new *Yeshivas* to take the pace of those destroyed in Europe. They were determined to recreate in Israel the traditional Jewish *Yeshiva*-focused world. They are often referred to as Israel's ultra-orthodox communities.

Most Israelis were hardly welcoming of the ultra-orthodox immigrants. They viewed them as contemporary incarnation of the disgraceful, shameful Diaspora Jewry, and had little compassion for them. But since the ultra-orthodox were construed as rare living remnants of the annihilated, traditional Jewish world – guilt ridden Israeli Zionists begrudgingly allowed them to maintain their anachronistic lifestyles. They treated ultra-orthodox as relics of a vanished world, and allowed them self rule in their secluded communities. To facilitate their rebuilding of their *Yeshiva*-centered world, the state exempted young ultra-orthodox men from army service. This exemption perpetuated their honorless status in Israeli society; a society that honored its soldiers above all else.

As the new state was struggling to accommodate Europe's Jewish refugees, in 1950 it faced an additional wave of new comers: Jews from the Arab world, who later labeled themselves Eastern Jews. The cultural difference between the receiving society and these immigrants was overwhelming. Israelis were greatly taken aback by what they considered barbaric, primitive backwardness. They felt intimidated and threatened by the possibility that the new comers' customs would prevail in the young society, still struggling to define its identity. They were also unsure how to train and educate the new comers to become useful citizens of a modern state. As a result of such (mis)conceptions, the authorities settled many Eastern Jews in remote, desert towns, away from urban opportunities, education and employment. As mentioned above, their Mediterranean patriarchal family structure was undermined: girls and women were encouraged to seek education and employment, while men who attempted to enforce their traditional rights were penalized. Many men found themselves unemployed, helpless and irrelevant, and felt that their honor was shattered. They bore deep grudge and resentment towards Israeli hegemony, i.e., the Labor Party, and silently awaited the opportunity to avenge themselves on it.

To summarize, in the two decades following the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, socialist, secular European Zionism (represented and led by the Labor Party) was in power, and its moderate perception of national Zionist honor was an integral part of Israel's ruling ideology. Although Holocaust survivors were initially accused of having tainted national honor through their shameful victimization, they gradually integrated with the receiving Zionist society. The religious Zionists faithfully supported the Labor Part, but their (religious) connection with the "old world" (Diaspora Judaism) marked them as distinctly less honorable. The right wingers were resented and disliked by the socialist majority. Their political leader, Menachem Begin, was forever in parliamentary opposition. Despite his fierce adherence to

Zionist honor, his European manners and dress deemed him a "Diaspora Jew", a label that, to most Israelis, compromised his honor. Eastern Jews were busy getting settled in their new environment, their shame and humiliation brewing. The ultra-orthodox kept to themselves, investing their energy in the rebuilding of their secluded communities.

Vengeance and Feud within Jewish Israel

- 1967: The Rise to Power of Religious Zionism

In the spring of 1967 tension around the Suez Canal led many Jewish Israelis to believe that Egypt was planning a war meant to annihilate Israel. The apprehension in Israel was tremendous. Many believed that this war would resemble Second World War. Then, in June of that year, in the course of six days, the Israeli army defeated those of Israel's neighboring Arab countries: Egypt, Jordan and Syria. Israel conquered the Sinai desert and Gaza, the Golan Heights and above all, the West Bank: the land in which the biblical patriarchs are believed to have founded both Judaism and the Jewish tribe. Hebron, Bethlehem, Jerusalem were now under Jewish rule. Israeli Jews' sense of euphoria was overwhelming. For many, this victory was a cosmic correction of the Second World War: not merely were Jews not exterminated, but they "avenged themselves" and even regained control over the ancient territory of their biblical ancestors. It was as though the cosmos, history, fate or God has finally decided to smile upon the Jewish people and redeem it. For many Zionists, national honor was finally cleansed and now shone bright for the world to admire. Uncontrollable sensations of national honor and Messianic euphoria were fused into new Messianic honor euphoria.

Most deeply touched by the collective Messianic honor euphoria were the religious Zionist Israelis. The Zionist redemption of the "holy land" seemed to have brought together Zionism and Jewish religion, just as they had always done. They felt that their time has come: this was their opportunity to move to the front seat and lead the way for the whole Jewish nation. Eager to out-honor the condescending secular Zionists, religious Zionists took it upon themselves to settle the new, "holy" territories and ensure that they remain forever under Jewish rule. Slowly but surely, they became the Jewish settlers of the West Bank, proclaiming and demonstrating utmost devotion to the expanded home land; devotion once exhibited by the secular Zionist pilgrims. They constructed themselves as the new and true Zionist pilgrims. Not all religious Zionists partook in the actual settlement, but the community at large redefined itself around the enthusiastic support of the settlement project.

The more committed they became to the settlement project, the more religious Zionists withdrew from their historical alliance with the socialist Labor Party, forming a new alliance with the right wing (who took political power in 1977). National Jewish honor was a significant component in this alliance between secular right wing and religious Zionism. Concurrently, empowered by the leading national role that they took upon themselves, the religious Zionists felt the time has come to take on the other community that had previously looked down on them: the ultra-orthodox.

Although completely barred out of Israel's Zionist honor sphere, the ultra-orthodox communities in Israel maintained their own, traditional, *Yeshiva*-focused, divine glory-centered honor system. Since their settlement in Israel, they channeled all their efforts to the monumental project of re-establishing their *Yeshiva* world. The leading rabbis encouraged young men and women to raise big families of eight and ten offspring, and send all boys to the *Yeshivas*. Exempt from army service, these young men were channeled to devote themselves

to life-long *Talmudic* studies, while their wives were required to raise the families and support them. *Yeshiva* students engaged in the traditional, rabbinical, intellectual "dueling", gaining honor by excelling in the holy penetration of the scriptures; just as they had in the old world. As the ultra-orthodox communities grew, they felt more secure, and did not conceal their contempt to the religious Zionists, who, in their minds, waved all rights to "real", scholarly Jewish honor.

In response to the honor challenge posed by the ultra-orthodox, the religious Zionists established their own *Yeshiva* world, with their own rabbis, scholars and intellectual "dueling". In so doing, the religious Zionists were competing for traditional Jewish honor, playing by the rules dictated to them by the ultra-orthodox. But having started the settlement project, the religious Zionists redefined the rules of the Jewish honor game. From now on, they did not merely excel at penetrating the holy scriptures in the rabbinical tradition; they did so while redeeming the holy land, and pronouncing God's glory and honor in his chosen territory. They were modern day Jewish crusaders; reincarnations not merely of the rabbis, but of King David and the *Makabim*¹⁵.

From an additional perspective it may be argued that the religious Zionists, mostly of European origin, adopted a version of the Palestinian notion of *sharaf*, fundamental honor that is attached to the proud ownership of ancestral land. Besides invoking Messianic honor euphoria, the 1967 war also created the reality of Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, including the large Palestinian population that up to that time had lived under Jordanian and Egyptian rule. The occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, followed by the growing settlement project in those areas, brought about a direct, escalating, land-based conflict between the local Palestinian population and the Israeli settlers, many of whom were religious Zionists. For decades now, the Palestinians have been attempting to maintain ownership and control over what they view as their land, while the settlers endeavor to "redeem" the same lands, which they view as historically and religiously Jewish. The Palestinian struggle is marked by the deeply felt *sharaf*. The Jewish settlers have been using both the Zionist rhetoric of "redeeming Zion" as the Jewish national home land, and the religious rhetoric of professing utmost devotion to God's glory and his commands. Yet their underlying zeal reveals absolute, overwhelming commitment to the land, which is found neither in mainstream Zionism nor in mainstream traditional Judaism; it is found in *sharaf* rhetoric of the Palestinian call to arms against the invaders of their ancestral land. The settlers' land-based zeal seems to reveal engagement in a *sharaf* blood feud, disguised in Zionist and ultra-orthodox terminology.

To conclude, in their Zionist zeal to redeem the West Bank, the religious Zionist settlers convinced themselves (as well as some other Israelis) that they outdid the majority secular Zionists at their own national honor game. At the same time, in their combatant, self sacrificing religious zeal, they reassured themselves that they challenged the ultra-orthodox at their Jewish honor game. Facing the Palestinians, the settlers may be said to have taken on a land-based *sharaf* blood feud. Their political alliance with the right wing, who took political power, guaranteed them a sense that they were invincible on all these fronts. They felt that they were honored by both Zionist and ultra-orthodox Israeli communities, embodying Jewish national honor to perfection.

The 2005 withdrawal from Gaza, led by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, greatly disturbed the religious Zionists' long Messianic honor euphoria. In the coming years they mourned their loss

¹⁵ Jewish rebels who fought the Hellenistic occupation of Judea and succeeded in reestablishing the sacred Jewish religious devotion to God in the Jerusalem Temple.

and regrouped to wage their battles more wisely. Determined, goal-oriented planning enabled them in the elections of 2013 to infiltrate the ruling secular right wing *Likud* party while also securing their own party (Naftali Bennet's *The Jewish Home*) over ten percent of the seats in the Israeli parliament. For the first time in Israeli history, the religious Zionists are thought to be cultivating their own contestant to Israel's "throne", i.e., Prime Minister office.

- *1973: Wake Up Call*

Six years after the Euphoria of 1967, October 1973 brought a war that was experienced by many Israeli Zionists as a deep blow not merely to their national honor but also to unquestioned faith in the Zionist state. Many were disillusioned with the Israeli leadership that failed to prevent the 1973 war and refused to take responsibility for it, as well as with the army and its generals.¹⁶ This disturbing moment gradually evolved into a moment of truth that sent different fractions of the Israeli Zionist society in diverse directions. Some Israelis, mostly from the secular socialist group, experienced disillusionment with their nationalist sentiment. Having overcome the initial shock and grief, they slowly grew ready to reconsider their commitment to nationalism - or any collectivism, to Israel's honor mentality and to the occupation of the Palestinian land and population. Many more Israelis, from a range of Israeli fractions, experienced the socio-political "earthquake" as an opportunity to overturn the prevailing socio-political hierarchy and seize power. They did not necessarily want to rethink collectivism, but rather to redefine it according to their agendas. For these Israelis, who had felt silenced and patronized by the perpetual rule of secular socialists, 1973 was a wake up call to fierce political action. The 1973 war thus greatly accelerated the process of polarization that has become the socio-political reality in Israel ever since. This polarization is marked by the deep split between two camps: on the one hand, the secular center and left, now mockingly labeled "The Old Elites"; on the other hand - the coalition of Jewish Israeli groups that had felt humiliated by "The Old Elites": secular right wingers, Eastern Jews, religious Zionists and ultra-orthodox Jews. This powerful coalition took power four years after the 1973 war, in 1977 and has maintained it (with few exceptions) to date.

- *1977: The Rise to Power of the Right Wing Zionists and Eastern Jews*

The most dramatic turnabout in the history of Israeli politics was the right wing party's victory in the elections of 1977. Right wing Zionism was a present, vocal opposition to hegemonic socialist Zionism ever since the 1920s. In 1948 it became Israel's right wing party, first called *Heirut*, and later *Likud*. For thirty years, it played the role of fierce opposition to Israel's socialist governments. Members of the right wing party were largely of European descent, just as the Labor Party's. But many Eastern Jews, who felt alienated, rejected and humiliated by the Israeli establishment and its ruling elite, considered the right wing opposition a natural ally. This alliance was not merely a random pact among the disparaged; honor was an underlying sentiment that drew the two sectors together. The right wing's militant, European notion of national honor was very different from Eastern Jews' traditional sense of patriarchal honor. But they were close enough to seal the bond between these two marginalized groups.

In 1977, disillusionment with the Israeli leadership brought many Labor voters to refrain from voting for it. At the same time, Eastern Jews, who now accounted for half of Israel's Jewish

¹⁶ The dramatic shift from exaggerated euphoria, that many took part in since 1967, and the exaggerated sense of failure and lack of leadership in 1973, opened up fundamental issues that had previously been mostly suppressed.

majority, stood firm with the right wing party. Their massive vote for *Herut/Likud* party facilitated the historic turnabout, bringing to an end the long reign of socialist, secular Zionism. The loyalty felt by many Eastern Jews to the *Likud* party goes beyond the political; it can be likened to a tribal sentiment, or to the devotion of a community of fans to their sports team. No matter what *Likud* leaders say or do - their victory over the left and proud reign are still experienced by many Eastern Jews as cleansing their collective honor. This strong, clanish bond between the right wing and Eastern Jews accounts for the strongest force in Israeli politics to date.

Secular socialists were not the only ones who treated Eastern Jews with condescension. The ultra-orthodox did not acknowledge the legal or scholarly force of Eastern rabbis nor did they honor their Sephardic traditions. This humiliation was avenged through the foundation, in the mid 1980s, of a Sephardic ultra-orthodox party, *Shas*. In 1999 *Shas* won fifteen percent of the votes to the Israeli parliament, greatly outshining the European ultra-orthodox parties. Representing the same community of Eastern Jews, the *Likud* party and *Shas* are natural allies.

Much like the religious Zionists "avenged themselves" on secular socialist Zionists on the one hand and ultra-orthodox Jews on the other hand, so Eastern Jews "avenged themselves" on the same two groups. Much like the religious Zionists "infiltrated" the ruling right wing party, while also establishing their own party (The Jewish Home), so Eastern Jews have great power over the ruling right wing party, while also supporting their own party (*Shas*).

Shas is not ideologically invested in national Jewish honor; but Eastern Jews' long alliance with the *Likud* has left its marks on them, and through them - on *Shas*. European ultra-orthodox were similarly never committed to national honor; but their close competition (for prestige, sources and voters) with *Shas* on the one hand and with the religious Zionists on the other, brought the ultra-orthodox to take a harder line regarding the Israeli-Palestinian feud.

- 1991: *Secular Left Wing Zionism Turns Away From National Honor to Human Dignity*

In 1992 Israel's parliament, prompted by the left wing party *Merez*, enacted Israel's Bill of Rights, *Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty*. That same year, after fifteen years of *Likud* rule, the Labor Party was voted to power, and Izhak Rabin was elected prime minister. Two years later Rabin signed the peace agreement with Jordan. In 1995 he signed the second Oslo Accord, which was to become a peace treaty with the Palestinians and to end of the bloody Israeli-Arab feud. These events signal the transformation of Israel's socialist secular Zionist fraction into its current less collectivist and less honor driven identity.

Pursuing the disillusionment prompted by the 1973 and then the 1982 wars, many of Israel's "Old Elites" lost much of their fascination with collectivistic ideologies, national honor and blood feuding. Instead, many turned to individual wellbeing and civil rights, following in the footsteps of contemporary Western Europeans. Israel's Bill of Rights was modeled on the German Basic Law, and was meant to place human dignity at the heart of Israeli discourse, education, world view and lifestyle. It posed a fundamental challenge to honor-based Israeli cultures of every variety, and led the way to a significant liberal legal revolution.¹⁷ At the same time, The Parliamentary support of the Oslo Peace Accord signaled that The West Bank was not "Holy

¹⁷ For an analysis of the *Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty* as a challenge to Zionist honor culture see Kamir, footnote 7 above.

Land", but a territory that could be negotiated and declared Palestinian; that Israel was not "God's army", but a modern state, in which the citizens are the sovereign, and any decision they adopt democratically could become foreign policy. Additionally, parliamentary support of the Oslo agreements relied on Israel's Arab parties, thus signaling that Palestinian citizens of Israel are finally to be treated as full citizens, and not as "an enemy within".

But as members of Israel's "Old Elites" abandoned national honor, other Jewish Israeli groups responded by joining forces to reinforce it.

- 1995: *The Assassination of the Secular, Socialist Zionist Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, By a Religious, Right Wing, Eastern Jew*

Rabin's term in office was short, and the peace treaty he promoted was forsaken. On November 4th, 1995, he was assassinated by a young, Jewish Israeli citizen. Yigal Amir, the assassin, was an Eastern Jew and a right wing, religious Zionist.

Tamar Elor labeled the assassination an honor killing. She claimed that Rabin's government was experienced by some Jewish Israelis (religious, right wingers and Eastern) as simultaneously alienating them while forging intimacy with Palestinians. The assassination was not so much political as it was an honor killing of a member of the Jewish family (Rabin) who dishonored the family by mixing with members of a rival tribe and rejecting his own people.¹⁸

To Elor's analysis I would add that the peace accord was viewed by many Israelis as professing the "Old Elites'" refusal to fight and sacrifice for the Jewish nation, the homeland and God. Rabin's peace was portrayed and despised as a cowardly, individualistic betrayal of the heroic collective commitment to the Jewish tribe and its ancestral land. This betrayal defiled Jewish honor, shaming the group and all its members. It had to be stopped, and Jewish honor had to be cleansed and restored to its valor and glory.

Rabin's assassination caused tremendous turmoil in Israel. But the greatest fear it aroused was of civil war between the Jewish fractions. More than anything, Israeli Jews feared that right and left wing, European and Eastern Jews, secular, religious and ultra-orthodox Jews would fight each other. For the sake of family peace among the Jewish tribes, the assassination was suppressed. In the better part of the seventeen years since the assassination, the right wing, supported by Eastern Jews, has ruled the land together with the religious Zionists and the ultra-orthodox. Jewish honor of every creed has been restored and hegemonic. Individualism and human dignity have been on the attack. Peace negotiations have come to a halt.

Unique Multi-Faceted Jewish Israeli Honor

The long lasting coalition of right wing, Eastern Jewry, religious Zionism and ultra-orthodoxy may account for the rise of a unique multi-faceted Jewish Israeli honor. Initially, each of these ideologies and social groups fostered a unique notion of honor. The right wing's honor was deeply nationalistic, associated with modern statehood and contemporary politics. Eastern

¹⁸ Tamar Elor, 2009, *In the Next Passover: Women and Learning in Religious Zionism*, Tel Aviv, pp. 81083. In Hebrew.

Jew's Mediterranean honor was traditional, patriarchal and familial; it was highly localized and private, associated with powerful feelings of personal identity. The ultra-orthodox cultivated honor based on divine glory, intellectual excellence and special Jewish closeness to God; this honor was sacred and elitist. The religious settlers developed a zealous holy-land-based honor, which resembles the deeply felt Middle Eastern *sharaf*. Long years of co-dependence fused characteristics of these distinct notions of honor into a new type of Jewish Israeli honor. It is both nationalistic in its scope – and yet very tribal, clannish, in sentiment. It is both modern and state-focused, cherishing flags and army uniform – and yet traditionally focused on manly bravado. It contains a mystically divine, metaphysical component, together with zealous commitment to blood and ancestral land. This type of honor combines absolute loyalties to nation, tribe, homeland and God with flagrant machoistic audacity. It is essentialistic in an almost biological, deterministic manner. It is not tempered by egalitarianism, socialism or universalism. It does not co-exist easily with ideologies founded on human dignity, human rights or peace. Versions of this type of honor are prevalent in Jewish Israel. Their popularity lies in their ability to bridge internal Jewish differences, offering a longed-for sense of internal unity and peace.

Concluding Remarks

In the narrative offered by this article, the history of Jewish Israeli society is deeply influenced by three distinct notions of honor: Zionist, rabbinical, and Mediterranean. After twenty years (1948-1967) in which Zionist honor played a dominant hegemonic role and alternative honor discourses were largely scorned, internal feuding began. Socialist secular Zionists of European descent, once the ruling class ("Old Elites") and champions of prevailing, moderate Zionist honor, gradually lost their appetite for it and turned to a more individualistic, human dignity based discourse. At the same time, right wing Zionists, who seized political power in 1977 and have maintained their reign since, have greatly enhanced the nationalist elements of Zionist honor. The survival of their hegemony relies on a strong alliance with Eastern Jews, who cherish, in varying degrees, variations of Mediterranean honor, and with religious Zionists, settlers of the West Bank, who developed their own nationalistic-religious-land-centered honor code. This honor coalition maintains a complex relationship with Israel's ultra-orthodox and it has been avenging itself on the "Old Elites". It takes a hard militant stand in its dealings with Palestinians and the world at large. More simply put: it treats Israeli occupation of Palestinians and their lands as an ongoing, irresolvable blood-feud. Attempts made by the Israeli center and left wing to resolve the conflict through negotiation and compromise are constructed as traitorous and dishonorable. Internal honor conflicts, thus, greatly determine Israel's ability and desire to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the occupation. As long as Jewish honor conflicts go unresolved, they will continue to overwhelm Israel's aptitude to end the occupation and resolve the conflict.

General elections over the last decade have indicated once and again that Jewish Israelis are nearly evenly split: a little over half of them support the honor coalition, and almost a half would prefer to explore new options. In this given reality, this article's honor perspective cannot offer an accurate prediction. It can, however, offer a direction.

In 1992 the Israeli parliament enacted a Bill of Rights, determining human dignity and liberty as the fundamental values of Israeli society. Human dignity can replace honor as a moral core and a basis for relationships among individuals and groups. Such a move may bring to a halt all feuds. Many European societies have chosen to undergo this transformation, and have

been working at it for decades. This has enabled Europe to transcend centuries of conflict and two devastating, honor driven World Wars.

In Israel, human dignity was already established as a fundamental moral core in the context of gender relations. In 1998 the Israeli parliament enacted legislation to prevent sexual harassment, proclaiming that such harassment offends human dignity, and is thus prohibited. Despite initial fierce opposition, this legislation has triggered significant social change. Perhaps there is room for cautious optimism that the growing awareness and understanding of human dignity among Jewish Israelis generated by gender-focused legislation may induce change in the honor dynamic that has held the Israeli Palestinian conflict in deadlock. As new generations of Jewish Israelis slowly experience human dignity, and not honor, as the foundation of Israeli culture, perhaps there is hope that they feel less committed to honor based dueling among themselves and with the Palestinians.

Monday, February 25th, 2013