Mixed Marriage: American Israeli Religious Zionists and their American Experience

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ABSTRACT

Mixed Marriage: American Israeli Religious Zionists and their American Experience

A thesis presented to the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies

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This paper presents qualitative research in the form of interviews with American immigrants to Israel who identify as Religious Zionists. The paper will attempt to elucidate their opinions about how they connect to both Israel and the United States. Broadly, this study will help to explain the ideas of “Jewishness in contemporary America and Americaness in contemporary Israel.” Through an examination of the interviewees’ religious, cultural, social, and psychological views towards America and American Jewry—the latter being a subject within the study of American immigrants to Israel that has been given scarce attention—it will be argued that their views are mixed, and interestingly, at times contradictory, a conclusion similar in manner to Charles Liebman’s renowned The Ambivalent American Jew, in which he argued that American Jewry did not develop in a linear fashion of merely attaching Judaism to their American environment, but rather that American Jewry developed in a complicated—and often contradictory—manner. The substantive findings in this paper argue that the interviewees view American society and culture favorably, while viewing American Jewry more negatively; however, this seemingly simplistic argument will be further scrutinized to show its complicated

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1 In this paper, these American immigrants will be referred to as American Israeli Religious Zionists.
nature and nuance. Furthermore, the paper will analyze the ambivalences found within the opinions of the interviewees, which help shed light on major issues within American Modern Orthodoxy, the American community that most closely aligns itself with Religious Zionism, and issues within Religious Zionism.
Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1

Data Sample .......................................................................................................... 11

Chapter I ............................................................................................................... 13

Chapter II ............................................................................................................. 31

Chapter III ........................................................................................................... 43

Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 48

Bibliography ......................................................................................................... 51
Introduction: A Brief Historical Review of the Components of American Aliyah

Since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, Jews have made Aliyah, Hebrew for “ascent,” which has since antiquity referred to immigration to Israel, from every continent save Antarctica. By and large, most of these new Olim (the classic Hebrew term for immigrants to Israel) came to Israel in search of a better life, either through economic betterment or a life free from anti-Semitism. American Aliyah is however a unique case. Those Americans who move to Israel generally do not do so because of economic or discriminatory factors. As sociologist Harry Jubas comments, if American olims’ motivations could be summed up in a single word it would be unquestionably “Jewishness.”4 These immigrants make Aliyah most pointedly because of their deep connection to Zionism and belonging with the Jewish State. They are not “pushed” to Israel due to economic or anti-Semitic concerns, but rather come because they are enticed, drawn, or “pulled” by the idea of living in Israel.5

From the period of 1948-1967, American Jewry had expressed reluctant support for Israel, but with the events leading up to the Six Day War, American Jewry was galvanized in support of Israel.6 In the weeks leading up to the Six Day War, with Egyptian leader Gamel Abdul Nasser, calling for Israel’s destruction, Israel was in a state of panic. Rhetoric of another Holocaust pervaded Israeli newspapers. For their part, American Jewish organizations made a

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massive effort to raise funds for Israel and to pressure the White House to help Israel. As historian Lawrence Grossman notes, “Many Americanized Jews who had never before affiliated with the community found themselves moved by Israel’s plight.” The threat of Israel’s destruction helped to strengthen American Jewry’s communal involvement in regards to Israeli affairs.

After a preemptive strike by Israel against the Arab armies massing on its borders, in just six days Israel had beaten back the Arab armies of Jordan, Syria, and Egypt, causing a euphoric reaction in the American Jewish community. American Jews had held their breath as Israel was faced with the prospect of annihilation. The war was a huge win for Israel, who conquered the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank including East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights, and was a humiliating defeat for the Arabs. A poll after the war found that 99% of American Jews supported Israel during the war. After the war, Israel became the dominant force in American Jewish life. As Historian Jonathan Woocher notes, “It has been that American Judaism recognizes only one heresy which subjects the perpetrator to immediate excommunication: denial of support to the State of Israel.”

With an outpouring of support after 1967, American Aliyah rose dramatically, with a concentration of the immigrants being from the Orthodox sector. After 1967, there was euphoria across the Jewish world. Political Science professor Daniel Elezar noted that the war had made worldwide Jewry, “deeply aware of the shared fate of all Jews, and of the way that fate is now

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8 Lawrence Grossman, “Transformation Through Crisis: the American Jewish Committee and the Six-Day War
bound up with the political entity that is the State of Israel.” With Israel taking an increasingly central role in the identity and in the fate of American Jewry, American Orthodox Jews began to make Aliyah in larger numbers after 1967. Their investment in Aliyah is evident when we consider that currently 10% of the Jewish demographic within the United States identifies as Orthodox, but 40% of American olim are Orthodox.

**Religious Landscapes of Israel and the United States**

To understand who these American Israeli Religious Zionists are, the Jewish religious landscape of Israel needs to be defined. The broad categories of Jewish identification in Israel are the *Chilonim* ("secular"), the *Mesortim* ("traditionalists"), Religious Zionists (National Religious or *Dati Leumi*, and the *Haredim* (to tremble in fear;” the ultra-Orthodox). The secular tend to not be religiously observant of *Halacha*, Jewish law, while the Mesortim observe Jewish law to some extent. Within Israeli society, *Mizrahim*, those that follow Jewish rite from the Middle East and North Africa, tend to be more traditional or religious in general than *Ashkenazim*, those following the Jewish customs of Europe, evidenced by 44% of Mizrahim identifying as Mesorti while only 18% of Ashkenazim identify as Mesorti.

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13 After 1967, the principle motivation became more of a “religious calling” than the pre-1967 desire to merely take part in the Zionist enterprise.
16 According to author’s conversation with Aliyah organization Nefesh B’Nefesh, it was estimated that 30% of American olim identified as Orthodox within the 2013 Aliyah year.
The Religious Zionists and Haredim identify as observant, meaning they strictly follow Jewish law, but more Haredim are meticulous in their observance of Jewish Law than Religious Zionists (96% as opposed to 60%).\(^{19}\) Differences in observance level aside, the key distinguishing factors between the Religious Zionists and Haredim on the whole is the nature of their involvement in Israeli society and their view of the State of Israel. Religious Zionists are more active participants in larger Israeli society; in particular, they are broadly supportive of secular studies and of cultural enjoyment in a similar manner to the rest of the non-Haredi Israeli population and, crucially, they send their children to the Israel Defense Forces. Above all, Religious Zionists see themselves as part of, and in some ways as the true leaders of, the Zionist project. Haredim on the other hand tend to deprecate secular education, as a rule do not participate in the larger public workforce, tend to live in insular Haredi communities, and obtain exemptions in order for their children to not serve in the Israel Defense Forces.\(^{20}\) Outside of these differences, the difference in Zionist outlook is a major factor separating Religious Zionists from Haredim. Religious Zionists believe that the State of Israel is imbued with religious significance, while Haredim for the most part do not confer religious significance to the secular state. The Religious Zionists are fervent Zionists, who increasingly partake in the functions of the state and in the army. The Haredim are non-Zionists or anti-Zionists, many whom merely participate with the state only to further their own objectives such as government support for yeshivas and controlling Jewish marriages.\(^{21}\) In the theological sphere, broadly speaking, Haredim believe in passivity in bringing the Redemption; they believe that God will usher in the messianic age on His own accord. Religious Zionists however believe that the Jewish People, secular Jews included, can help speed up the process of Redemption by being active participants

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 33.  
\(^{20}\) Sorek and Ceobanu, "Religiosity, National Identity and Legitimacy: Israel as an Extreme Case," 480-81.  
\(^{21}\) Ibid., 482.
in this messianic process. Religious Zionism can accordingly be seen as a group with a specific theology within Israeli society, a theology that will continue to be analyzed throughout this paper.

Turning to the United States, there are three main Jewish movements; those being Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox. Although there are numerous differences between the movements, one large difference is in the adherence to Halacha. The Reform movement sees Jewish law as far less binding, if at all, than do the other denominations. The Conservative movement adheres to a strong commitment to Halacha, but is more willing to modify it than the Orthodox. The Orthodox adhere to a strict interpretation of Halacha.

A major difference between the classifications of American Jews and Israeli Jews is that for the American denominations, each sees itself as being a legitimate form of authentic Judaism, whereas in Israel, the Orthodox population is considered even by many secular Jews to be the followers of authentic Judaism. It is telling that in Israeli society, Orthodox Jews are referred to as simply “religious Jews,” however, in America the non-Orthodox may also identify as being religious Jews. The groups that identify as Orthodox in both America and Israel see Orthodoxy as the group that is following authentic Judaism. For the interviewees in this study that identify as Orthodox, they feel that the Orthodox in both Israel and the United States are the most

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22 Sarna, American Judaism: A History, xix.
25 "The Orthodox Stream," 113; ibid.
26 For a general overview of American Jewish denominations see: Marc Lee Raphael, Profiles in American Judaism: The Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Reconstructionist Traditions in Historical Perspective (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 5-10.
28 Ibid.
connected to Jewish tradition and, since their connection is strongest to the Orthodox, their opinions about Jewry largely relate to Orthodoxy.

The majority of the interviewees who were raised Orthodox in the United States, as well as the ones that became Orthodox in the US, identified as Modern Orthodox while residing in America. Modern Orthodoxy or Centrist Orthodoxy in the United States is a movement best summed up by the motto of Yeshiva University, the premier institution for American Modern Orthodoxy, *Torah U’Maddah*, Torah and Science. Modern Orthodoxy stresses the importance of both Torah observance and of science/secular education. It is similar to Religious Zionism in this respect, but it differs from Religious Zionism due to its absence of inherent political ideology. Whereas Religious Zionism links Zionism to the Messianic Redemption, Modern Orthodoxy represents a traditional view of following Torah and Halacha while Religious Zionism, is expressivist, to use sociologist Charles Taylor’s term, for it strives to fuse the material and the spiritual in order to form a higher plane above both in order to bring forth the deepest truths of Jewish national identity. In other words, American Modern Orthodoxy does not infuse Zionism with the same cosmic weight; it does not view the State of Israel as an active component in the process of bringing about the Redemption. It is important to note that American Haredim, outside of a few anti-Zionist circles, are also strong supporters of the State of Israel on the political level even as they ascribe to it little or no religious meaning or significance. In identifying with the Israeli religious scene, a Modern Orthodox individual may

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consider themselves both religious and Zionist, but there is a dispute as we shall see further in this paper if such a person can be deemed a “Religious Zionist” by the American Israeli Religious Zionists respondents.

Zionism’s definition of the Diaspora is fundamental to the discussion of how the respondents view the American Diaspora. Since the beginning of the modern Zionist movement, there has been tension between Zion and the Diaspora. For Zionism, a central objective from the very beginning was Aliyah. The Yishuv (pre-state Jewish settlement) and the State of Israel needed more Jewish immigrants in order to flourish. In using Biblical terminology, Zionism, particularly after the State of Israel was declared in 1948, represented the “ingathering of the exiles.” 33 The Jewish People could now return to their ancestral homeland. Furthermore, not only could the Jewish People return, but they should return. For first Prime Minister David Ben Gurion, the leader who perhaps more than any individual brought about the state of Israel, Zionism was contingent on Aliyah. He stated, “Unlike most Zionists, I believe that the meaning of Zionism is life in the Land of Israel, not an affiliation with a Zionist organization.” 34 For Ben Gurion, supporting the Zionist project from afar is not enough; one must live out their Zionism by residing in and fully living out their Zionism. Although Ben Gurion stated that his opinion is different than the majority of Zionists, it represents the opinion of the founder of the Jewish State and it is an opinion that ran into conflict in regards to Israel-Diaspora relations.

The Zionist principle that fueled Ben Gurion’s desire for mass Aliyah was Shelilat HaGolah, “the negation of the Diaspora,” 35 that Jewish life is in the Diaspora was not feasible

34 Ibid., 167.
35 Although there are many versions of the negation of the Diaspora, for the use of this paper the negative narrative of the futility of the Diaspora will be used.
due to cultural alienation.\textsuperscript{36} Within the ideology of the negation of the Diaspora, the Jew in the Diaspora is seen as the wandering Jew, moving from one place to another without being accepted or treated equally by the host country. Thus, the story of the Jew in Diaspora is one of suffering and a continued struggle just to survive. David Ben Gurion stated that, “Whoever presupposes the survival of Jews in the dispersion, and wishes along with it the existence of the Jewish people wherever it might be wishes to maintain the impossible...this desire has no way to free itself from inner contradictions.”\textsuperscript{37} For Ben Gurion, the “inner contradictions” are that the Diaspora Jews do not belong in the Diaspora, but rather should return to Zion. Therefore, continuing to try and strengthen Diaspora Jewry was not the correct way to help worldwide Jewry.\textsuperscript{38}

Ben Gurion’s opinion directly upset the sensitivities of many American Jews, who rejected that Zionism was necessitated upon Aliyah and who did not feel as though they were broken exilic Jews. In 1950, Ben Gurion reached an agreement between himself and the leader of the non-Zionist American Jewish Committee, Jacob Blaustein, which helped to spell out how Israel would interact with the American Diaspora. This Ben Gurion-Blaustein agreement outlined that the AJC would recognize Israel as the Jewish State and would help press for its cause in Washington in return for Israel recognizing that she does not speak for American Jewry, and a promise that Israel would not interfere American Jewish affairs, namely not to sound the call for mass American Aliyah.\textsuperscript{39} This agreement has waned in importance since the time it was signed since Israel, not America, has increasingly became the center of world Jewry.

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., 167.
\textsuperscript{38} Although David Ben Gurion did believe in the negation of the Diaspora, this did not mean he did not care about the well-being of Diaspora Jewry. He tried with all his might to rescue Jews in the Holocaust and bring them to anywhere in the world in which they would be received.
Nevertheless, the Ben Gurion-Blaustein agreement is noteworthy as it shows that the concept of Aliyah was and still is a delicate subject for American Jews.

For the interviewees, it can be seen that Religious Zionism adds a religious expression to the idea of the negation of the Diaspora. The theology and philosophy of Religious Zionism is best exemplified by Religious Zionism’s leading thinker, Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook. Rav, meaning Rabbi, Kook, as he is commonly referred to as, declared, “The expectation of salvation is the force that preserves exilic Judaism, the Judaism of the Land of Israel is salvation itself.”40 In the Diaspora, a Jew hopes for redemption, but living in the Land of Israel is the bringing of salvation itself. In this manner, Rav Kook recast Zionism in messianic terms. The Land of Israel is the realization of the hopes of salvation that are preached in the Diaspora. Rav Kook’s son and the face of Religious Zionism in his generation, Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook, claimed in regards to the Holocaust that, “The total destruction of the Diaspora in the Holocaust […] adds real evidence to the fact that true observance of the Torah can only take place in our country [Israel].”41 Tzvi Yehuda radicalizes his father’s Religious Zionism by explicitly rejecting Diaspora life.42 Tzvi Yehuda’s view is central since, while the negative attitude associated with the negation of the Diaspora has declined in favor of promoting a shared Jewish identity within mainstream Israeli society, the strong condemnation of the Diaspora finds its largest support among Religious Zionists.43 In this paper this theology will shine through, along with a classical Zionist view, in how the American Israeli Religious Zionists view the American Diaspora.

40 Abraham Isaac Kook, Orot [Lights], Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook (1963), Chapter 1.
41 Tzvi Yehuda Kook, "Le-Netivot Yisrael [to the Paths of Israel],” (Jerusalem: Tzur- Ot, 1979), 112.
For many of the applicants who were raised in Modern Orthodoxy, it was not unfathomable that they would eventually make Aliyah. As sociologist Chaim Waxman points out, “The stronger the identity of the American Jew as a Jew, the greater the likelihood that Israel will play a central role in his or her life.” The fact that the Modern Orthodox are steeped in their Jewish identity makes them among the most formidable supporters of Israel and among the most likely candidates for Aliyah.

By identifying these ideological and historical factors that have influenced the perspectives of the American Israeli Religious Zionists, the relationship between these expatriates to their native country and their native Diasporic Jewish community can be better understood. As John Wennersten writes, “In attempting to understand the motivation of expatriates and their attendant experiences at home and abroad, one must rely on both individual recollections and case studies to flesh out the dimensions of the current expatriate process.” By understanding the historical and religious background of these American Israeli Religious Zionists, their opinions on American Jewry, society, and culture will be examined.

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**Data Sample**

The data in this research paper is comprised of qualitative research through twenty personal interviews conducted by the author during a period of two weeks from August 11-25, 2014. The Israeli war with Gaza in July-August 2014, Operation Protective Edge, was ongoing in mid-August and impacted the interviewees throughout the interview process. The interviewees are American Israeli Religious Zionists. All of those interviewed were born in the United States and immigrated to Israel after spending at minimum their teenage years in the United States. The data sample was wide; some of the interviewees were born in American Orthodox households and some were *Baalei Teshuvah* (literally “Masters of repentance,” those who were not born Orthodox, but decide to become Orthodox). 46 Many of the immigrants lived in settlements in the West Bank while some lived within mainland Israeli territory. There was a control group consisting of two American-Israelis who identified as Haredi and two American-Israelis that identified as secular, whose opinions are an important contrast when discussing the issue of the legitimacy of the American Jewish community.

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The breakdown of the key variables for the interviewees is listed in the table below.⁴⁷

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Male vs. Female</th>
<th>West Bank vs. Pre-1967</th>
<th>Raised Orthodox vs. Secular-Raised</th>
<th>Made Aliyah more than 20 years ago</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male, West Bank, Raised Orthodox, Made Aliyah 20 years ago</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, pre-1967, Secular-raised, Aliyah less than 20 years ago</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not all variables in this study are analyzed in depth; this paper is an analysis of the larger opinions of the interviewees. Future research on this study will expand upon the many variables involved in this study.

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Chapter I: Data Findings

This section of the paper will deal with how the American Israeli Religious Zionists interviewed view the American Orthodox community and American Jewry more broadly. They will discuss their views on American culture and their overall American identity. For each interview, the author distinguished between the terms "pro-Israel" and "Zionist;" the former being an individual who perceives and accepts the cultural and religious autonomy of American Judaism and the latter being one who holds Aliyah as a goal and who feels that Israel is the spiritual and cultural center from which they derive their Judaism and Jewish identity. A lead question is posed for each separate topic. Many of the questions were umbrella questions that allowed for the interviewee to open up and express his/her thoughts.

Question 1: Why did you decide to make Aliyah? How do you view Israel?49

The decision to make was difficult, but all of the interviewees felt that the establishment of the State of Israel was a miracle, or at the very least a fundamentally unique development in Jewish history, and they wished to live their lives in the Holy Land. An interviewee explained that “the return of the Jewish People to Israel is a “miracle.” One referred to it as the “the most seminal event for the Jewish People” since the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. “After praying for 2000 years to return to Zion, it is now possible.”50 Interviewees repeatedly reported that in this day and age, all one has to do to come to Zion is board on a plane and immigrate to

49 These two questions are grouped together since respondents’ views of Israel were a significant factor in their decision to make Aliyah.
50 Respondent 1, interview with the author, 13 August 2014
Israel. As Orthodox Jews, they pray three times a day to return to Zion and they felt by making Aliyah, they were actualizing their prayers of returning to Zion. The ability of Israel to achieve victory in war throughout its history was seen as “nothing short of a miracle.” The revival of Hebrew as an everyday spoken language was another miracle. Since Israel was the land of miracles and the embodiment of their prayers, these American Religious Zionists decided to uproot their lives and move to Israel.

For most of the interviewees, a primary reason for Aliyah was that Jewish life in Israel was a more authentic experience than life in the Diaspora. It was seen as more authentic because, in harkening back to Rav Kook’s theology, the Land of Israel imbues those who live there with a higher level of holiness than those who do not. As one interviewee declared, “Just by living here (Israel), you are doing something significant.” One does not need to, for example, be in an important job position or be a community leader in order to do something significant; living in Israel is significant in and of itself. Another interviewee claimed, “You are not [just] living in a desert land. It is bigger than us.” The holiness of the Land of Israel was seen as a principal reason for making Aliyah. To be in the Land where, “The eyes of the Lord your God are on the Land from the beginning of the year until the end of the year.” For these American Israeli Religious Zionists, the Land of Israel is absolutely central; “Jewish faith and Zionism are not even two sides of the same coin, they are one in the same.” Living in the Land of Israel for a Religious Zionist can thus be seen as the upmost expression of their Judaism.

51 Respondent 4, Interview with the author, 21 August 2014.
52 Respondent 12, Interview with the author, 15 August 2014
53 Respondent 11, Interview with the author, 14 August 2014
54 Respondent 2, Interview with the author, 19 August 2014
55 Respondent 3, Interview with the author, 21 August 2014
56 Deut. 11:12.
If the Land of Israel is so central to Jewish religious thought, is it an obligatory Mitzvah to make Aliyah? If so, why was there no effort en masse to make Aliyah to the Land of Israel during the 2000 years between the exile of the Jews by the Romans and then the return of the Jewish state culminating in the creation of the State of Israel? The reason provided by an interviewee for those not making Aliyah was that it was not feasible back then. He added that now in an age where world travel is simple, “It would be very difficult for me to believe nowadays that any Ahronim [post-medieval rabbinic authorities] would say there is no Mitzvah to move to Eretz Yisrael [Land of Israel].”

Interestingly, for many of the Religious Zionist interviewees who agreed that living in Israel allows for greater fulfillment of the Halacha (many of the commandments in the Torah can only be performed in the Land of Israel), the Halacha, as such, was not the driving force in their decision to make Aliyah. One interviewee claimed that, “The Halacha helped confirm the decision to make Aliyah,” but was not the driving force. When participants were asked about making Aliyah, some did not mention the Halachic considerations at all or until the author mentioned it during the interview.

In explaining why they felt it was important to make Aliyah the interviewees explained why they felt they needed to leave the United States and the drawbacks of American Jewish life. Life in Israel as opposed to the Diaspora was seen as more authentic due to the universal element of Israel as a Jewish state. One interviewee alluded to the idea that “America is a melting pot, while Israel is a family plot.” Because Israel is predominately a Jewish society, everything a person does benefits the Jewish People. Since there is a Jewish majority in Israel, there is a

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57 Respondent 1, interview with the author, 13 August 2014
58 Respondent 3, Interview with the author, 21 August 2014
59 Ibid.
feeling of greater Jewish brotherhood within overall society than in the Diaspora. This feeling of a greater sense of the Jewish nation in Israel was seen as a more genuine Jewish life than Jewish life in America. An interviewee claimed that since American religious Jews live in America they miss out on the nationalistic aspects of their identity. He stated simply that, “there is more to Judaism than just religious observance.”

In explaining additional reasons of why they decided to leave America, interviewees repeatedly referenced a central issue pertaining to American Jewry, that of the threat of assimilation. For all Jews, but particularly for the Orthodox population, the idea that their future generations could intermarry and create non-Jewish families—a repudiation of their Jewish ideology and way of life—is very worrisome. Not only is the threat of assimilation through intermarriage a worry, but also the assimilation into mainstream secular American culture. An interviewee explained the situation by stating, “If a family stops being observant, the Jewish line will only last one or two generations. If you cut yourself off from the roots, you ain’t going to grow.” While referencing concern over the continuation and growth of the Jewish People wherever they may be, the interviewees voiced strong concern about whether an American Jew can safeguard his or her family from assimilation while continuing to live in the United States. An interviewee stated that while the Orthodox in America have a much stronger chance of producing Jewish families in the future, but the threat of assimilation is still an issue for all of American Jews. One participant stated that, “America is the great melting pot and the Jews are melting away.” With different cultures and ethnicities intermarrying, the Jews too have partaken in mixing with other groups, thus according to the viewpoint of this American Israeli

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60 Respondent 9, Interview with the author, 19 August 2014
61 Respondent 1, interview with the author, 13 August 2014
62 Respondent 12, Interview with the author, 15 August 2014
63 Respondent 9, Interview with the author, 19 August 2014
Religious Zionist, they have cut themselves off from their Jewish roots. Without explicitly stating that this was a reason for Aliyah, the interviewees at least implicitly appreciative that their children would be raised in a Jewish state where the threat of assimilation is lessened. In a word, for the interviewees, making Aliyah was the best way to secure the Jewish future.

Many participants acknowledged that many American Jews do not feel the need to make Aliyah because they safe and protected in the US; However, many interviewees further harkened back to Zionist ideals of the futility of the Diaspora by stating that they were not overly optimistic about the future treatment of American Jews who continue to dwell in the United States. Several interviewees spoke about how in history, countries had at a time treated Jews well, only to then later treat them extremely poorly. One interview said, “America is a good country to the Jews, but then again so was Germany before the rise of Hitler.”64 In particular, the threat of a Holocaust in America was a repeated claim. One individual mentioned that, “Jews don’t know when to leave.”65 Interviewees worried that the escalation of anti-Semitism in Europe, particularly in France, will eventually spill over into the United States. Most of the interviewees did not believe that a Holocaust in the United States was imminent; however, in the long term they believed the decision to pull themselves out of the Diaspora would be beneficial.

**Question 2: “Can an American Religious Jew be a Religious Zionist?”**

The American Israeli Religious Zionists felt there was a certain degree of shallowness in remaining on the sidelines, i.e. being a Diaspora Jew, particularly an Orthodox Diaspora Jew, in relation to the miracle that is the restoration of the Jewish People in their historic homeland. On the question of whether an Orthodox American Jew who is Zionist could be considered a

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64 Respondent 11, Interview with the author, 14 August 2014
65 Ibid.
Religious Zionist, there was a vast array of answers. Some of the interviewees did believe a religious American Jew could be a Religious Zionist, while some did not. For this interview question, it was not the religious part of the equation that troublesome to define, for all felt being Orthodox defined a person as religious; however, defining who is a Zionist did not provide a uniform answer. One interviewee claimed, “If you are not living in Israel, you are not a Zionist. I don’t care if you support Israel financially. You need to be here.” 66 Another interviewee claimed, “Yes, you can be a Zionist living in the United States.” 67 Another interviewee claimed, “I do not want to define terms and make labels.” 68 For him and others in the interview, this was a difficult question. This question, though, is vital in understanding how these American Israeli Religious Zionists view American Jews because if American Jews cannot be Religious Zionists, the interviewees’ ideal way of life, then these American Israeli Religious Zionists are far more likely to have harsh opinions of the American Jewish community.

The vast majority of the interviewees believed that even if one could be considered a Religious Zionist in the United States, this Zionism was to at least some degree hypocritical. “There is a distance between Zionism and their real life,” 69 one interviewee stated. This interviewee’s opinion was very closely related to the current events in Israel; the war with Gaza in the summer of 2014 (Operation Protective Edge) at the time of these interviews. This interviewee further explained that for American Religious Zionists the distancing between their Zionism and their real life was felt most acutely because of literal distance, being thousands of miles from Israel. The participant explained that it was one thing to watch the news and be worried about Israel from the safety of the United States, and it was “another to run for the bomb

66 Respondent 12 Interview with the author, 15 August 2014
67 Respondent 10, Interview with the author, 17 August 2014
68 Respondent 3, Interview with the author, 21 August 2014
69 Respondent 2, Interview with the author, 19 August 2014
shelters” when rockets were shot from the Gaza Strip.\textsuperscript{70} By living outside of Israel, those Jews in America or elsewhere in the world do not live out their Zionism because they are not in Israel. As we will see, for a few of the interviewees not only was it hypocritical for an American Religious Zionist to make Aliyah, but American Jewry as a collective was seen as illegitimate for its decision to remain in the United States.

**Question 3: What do you have to say to Jews who do not make Aliyah?” “How do you view the American Diaspora?**

In general, most of the interviewees did not give any legitimacy to American religious Jewry refusing to make Aliyah and continuing to reside in the United States; they believed that the overarching reason American religious Jews do not make Aliyah is because of “entrenchment in the Galut (Exile).”\textsuperscript{71} Other than circumstances such as taking care of one’s parents, many interviewees felt that American Religious Jews remain in America for false and selfish reasons, due to materialistic concerns and a “false” sense of rootedness in the United States. One interviewee explained The Jews in Galut feel at home there and, as a people in Exile for 2000 years, this interviewee felt it was hard for Diaspora Jews to change their mindset and pack their things to make Aliyah. This entrenchment, another interviewee explained was merely “real life.”\textsuperscript{72} It is difficult to uproot oneself from one’s family, native culture, and native language.

The question regarding why religious Americans do not make Aliyah regularly evolved into a harsh attack on the American Jewish community’s decision not to emigrate. A primary reason given for American religious Jewry’s desire to remain “entrenched in Galut” was that their priorities were primarily materialistic and superficial. One interviewee claimed that

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{71} Respondent 1, Interview with the author, 13 August 2014
\textsuperscript{72} Respondent 3, Interview with the author, 21 August 2014
religious American Jewry was concerned only with having a high-paying job and raising their children. The goal of life was, “To be successful with a Kippah on top.” The real goal was to be monetarily successful, but also to do it as an observant Jew. This interviewee felt that the pursuit of spiritual goals was secondary to the pursuit of making more income. Another interviewee explained that an American religious Jew’s status, based on their occupation and income, in their community was a central goal of America’s observant Jewish community. An interviewee who deals with fundraising among non-Jews claimed that the observant Jews she meets today in the United States are “far more materialistic” than their non-Jewish counterparts. A respondent commented about the Jewish community, “A family of five will live in a house for twenty. I just don’t get it. It is not one of my values.” The adage of Israel being a country where it is hard to earn money, no longer was considered a worthy reason to stay in the United States. “Israel is not what it was in the 1950’s,” an interviewee commented. Israel is now a first-world nation and , granted that its economy is not as strong as the US economy, the interviewees felt that Americans could live a relatively well-off life in Israel. When compared to Israeli society, the interviewees felt that the American Jewish community was far more concerned with material than the Israeli community. These interviewees felt that because America’s economy is superior to that of Israel’s, American Jews wish to stay in America in order to continue what they see as materialistic lifestyles.

There was a patronizing attitude of some of the interviewees towards American religious Jews who choose not to make Aliyah. More than one interviewee claimed simply that American

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73 Respondent 14, Interview with the author, 20 August 2014
74 Respondent 14, Interview with the author, 20 August 2014
75 Respondent 12, Interview with the author, 15 August 2014
76 Respondent 2, Interview with the author, 19 August 2014
religious Jews “should know better.” Another interviewee claimed, “American Religious Jews know they are wrong.” They should know the Torah and Zionism mandate them to make Aliyah.

By contrast, and interestingly, the interviewees were to a large extent more ideologically understanding of secular American Jew’s not making Aliyah. Since a secular American Jew “lacks the connection to Judaism”, he does not have the religious commitment to Zion like the observant Jew. His Jewish connection is seen as less because he is less observant of Jewish Law and therefore, his connection to Israel is expected to be less. He is seen by the interviewees as an American of the Jewish faith and does not seem himself nationally as a member of the Jewish nation. Although the interviewees were more understanding on a personal level of why secular Jews would not wish to make Aliyah, they in a sense brushed them aside ideologically, categorically rejecting their non-Orthodox lifestyle. This was clearly evident when speaking of why religious Jews should make Aliyah. One interview said, “If he is not religious that is something else.” In this way, secular Jews are “excused” for not making Aliyah because they are seen as far from Judaism and understanding why Aliyah would be important. The secular Jew lacks the “pull factors” of economic issues or anti-Semitism that would drive him to make Aliyah, while at the same time he also lacks the “push factors” of wanting to move to the Jewish state. Hence, on one hand the American Israeli Religious Zionists were more tolerant of secular Jewry for not making Aliyah, as they were not as attached to Judaism as Orthodox American Jews, but on the other hand they disapproved of their secular way and non-Orthodox way of life.

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77 Respondent 12, Interview with the author, 15 August 2014
78 Respondent 13, Interview with the author, 14 August 2014
79 Respondent 4, Interview with the author, 21 August 2014.
80 Respondent 11, Interview with the author, 14 August 2014
Question 4: “To what extent is the American Diaspora community important to the future of the Jewish People?”

In taking the idea of American Aliyah further, many of the interviews agreed with the position that there was no importance in having a Diaspora community, although it will be discussed that not all felt this way. A general concept emerged from the respondents whereby if the Diaspora emptied into Israel, this would be the most beneficial situation for the Jewish People. As one interviewee said, “There is strength in numbers.”81 What will make Israel strongest is Aliyah. Twelve of the eighteen interviews felt that it would be ideal for all of American Jewry to make Aliyah.

One interviewee categorically delegitimized the American Diaspora. Another claimed that since the return of the Jews to their homeland, the story of the Jewish People is now in Israel. For American Jews, he believed that, “They are not part of the collective role in history.”82 American religious Jews can thus be seen as those who actively and purposefully do not make Aliyah even though they should. Furthermore, according to the latter interviewee, American Jews are not seen as part of moving the Jewish People forward.

There was also a more venomous view articulated towards American Jewry and the Diaspora. One interviewee expressed that not only was the Diaspora not an integral element to the Jewish People, but that it was a hindrance to the Jewish People. This interviewee declared that, “Standing [living] outside of Israel at this moment of time is a Hillul HaShem [“desecration of God's Name”].”83 He explained that the miracle of Israel was a gift to the Jewish People. For Jews to not accept this gift (those living in the Diaspora), is in his eyes, a desecration of God’s

81 Respondent 2, Interview with the author, 19 August 2014
82 Respondent 14, Interview with the author, 20 August 2014
83 Respondent 13, Interview with the author, 14 August 2014
name. For Jews to remain outside of Israel now that there is a Jewish State is to not accept this gift of God. He also felt that since Jews, particularly in America, continue to not make Aliyah, it makes Israel also look poor in the eyes of the world; as if it is not a good enough destination for the Jews and it is not their homeland.

It is important to note that 8 of the 18 participants did not view the American Diaspora as illegitimate. These interviewees disagreed with the hardline idea that all Jews must make Aliyah. One interviewee commented that “It is not incumbent on religious Jews to come and live in Israel.”84 This interviewee explained that it was neither realistic nor essential for American Jews to make Aliyah. Some of the interviewees took little issue with American Jews deciding to stay in America, but added that American Jews must do their utmost to support Israel. Another interviewee said, “I feel that there is a place in the United States of America for strong Jewish supporters of Israel.”85 A different interviewee echoed this sentiment by claiming that it was important for Jews to remain in the U.S. and in the Diaspora in order to help support the state of Israel from afar.86 This echoes the sentiment that a strong American Jewish community and a strong Jewish lobby like the American-Israel Public Action Committee (AIPAC) helps the United States continue to be Israel’s strongest ally. The more moderate interviewees expressed the sentiment that although the American Modern Orthodox community as a whole does not make Aliyah, the camp expresses their support of Israel in other ways. However, another interviewee who did not believe all Jews needed to make Aliyah nevertheless said, “It is great if American Jews want to help Israel, but the best thing for Israel is to get over here.”87 The best way to support Israel was not through lobbying the US government about Israel or by sending

84 Respondent 9, Interview with the author, 19 August 2014
85 Respondent 5, Interview with the author, 18 August 2014
86 Respondent 10, Interview with the author, 17 August 2014
87 Respondent 6, Interview with the author, 15 August 2014.
money, but rather by moving and on a day-to-day basis being part of Israel. These ideas help to illustrate that these American Israeli Religious Zionists did not all agree on their perceptions of American Jewry. This issue in particular was one in which there was no broad consensus of opinion.

They are active in Israel activities in their synagogues and their Jewish communities. The Orthodox community gives philanthropically to Israel. The community helps to organize rallies in support of Israel. A growing phenomenon in the American Modern Orthodox world is to send their children to Israel on one-year “gap year” programs after they graduate high school and before they attend university.

An interview with an American-Israeli migrant who identified as Haredi was particularly enlightening on the issue of making Aliyah. The participant commented that the most important thing was not living in Israel, but living where one has enough of a financial livelihood (parnassah, the traditional term in Hebrew), to raise their children in a Jewish environment with a strong Jewish education.\(^88\) This aligns with the Haredi perspective that does not see living in Israel as a religious imperative. This view is more representative of the overall feelings of American Orthodoxy, where the Haredi sector makes up 2/3 of American Orthodoxy while the Modern Orthodox make up one-third.\(^89\)

The interviews with those identifying as secular also did not put the same emphasis on Aliyah. One of the interviewees explained that it is not imperative Jews live in Israel; they can be Jews to the fullest anywhere in the world.\(^90\) Another explained in a similar way to some of the

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\(^88\) Respondent 17, Interview with the author, 22 August 2014
\(^90\) Respondent 8, Interview with the author, 18 August 2014
American Israeli Religious Zionists that Aliyah is personal and individual decision.\(^{91}\) For these olim, they felt a personal connection to Israel and hence made Aliyah.

**Question 5: “How did you view the American religious Jewish community before you made Aliyah?”**

We now know how the interviewees felt about the American Jewish community after they made Aliyah, but how did they feel when they were still a part of it? Some of the interviewees, particularly those who became more religious while still living in the United States, had a trying time fitting into the observant American Jewish community before they made Aliyah. Another interviewee explained his dismay that the American Orthodox community was not dealing with debates over Aliyah and Zionism. He said this community would allow those who wanted Aliyah to move away so that they could continue living their lives in America without the interference of a pro-Aliyah camp.\(^{92}\) A woman who was raised Orthodox complained that the Jewish community she had moved into before making Aliyah was extremely rude and impolite; no one would say “Shabbat Shalom” to her and her family on the Sabbath.\(^{93}\) These interviewees expressed a feeling of discontent with how the American Jewish community was operating.

While they continued to reside in the US, some of the interviewees did not view the American Jewish community negatively nor did they feel the American religious community was wrong for not making Aliyah. An interviewee claimed that, “Only after about ten years of living in Israel did I feel that American Jews need to make Aliyah.”\(^{94}\) It can be deduced then once these

\(^{91}\) Respondent 16, Interview with the author, 14 August 2014  
\(^{92}\) Respondent 1, Interview with the author, 13 August 2014  
\(^{93}\) Respondent 12, Interview with the author, 15 August 2014  
\(^{94}\) Respondent 7, Interview with the author, 15 August 2014
immigrants were outside of the American Jewish community and in the Israeli Religious Zionist community, they became more critical of their native community.

Views on American Culture and Society

Question 6: “What are the some uniquely positive American values you brought with you to Israel?”

When asked about positive American values that interviewees brought with them, many interviewees claimed that pluralism, tolerance, and liberalism were great American values that did not exist to the same strong degree in Israel as contrasted to the United States. One interviewee claimed that they learned in America that, “A Jew is a Jew.”95 This person viewed American Jews as being accepting of all Jews; it did not matter if you were religious or secular, Sephardic or Ashkenazi, all Jews are held in the same regard; however, this person viewed Israeli Jews as being more segregated and less accepting of Jews that are different. Related to their feelings of discontent with what they perceived as rigid Israeli group identification, a few of the interviewees expressed their displeasure in group identification, by stating that although they identify with the Religious Zionist camp, they prefer to not use labels. One respondent reported further added to the idea of American Jewish tolerance to Jews by stating that a strength of American society in comparison to Israeli society is that Americans tend to be more accepting. She explained that Israelis have a hard time understanding that “Accepting people doesn’t mean you have to agree with them.”96 The interviewees felt that Israel could learn more from America’s emphasis on being a liberal, tolerant society.

95 Ibid.
96 Respondent 2, Interview with the author, 19 August 2014
Interviewees praised America’s democratic system and said that Israel could learn from America’s example. A respondent claimed, “Israel has a long way to go to understanding freedom of speech and democracy.”97 This person commented that Israel does not have as strong values in relation to freedom of speech as America. On the same token, another interviewee believed that the “politicization of Judaism is anti-democratic.”98 He believed that the separation of church and state should be a model for Israel.

Although liberalism and pluralism were seen as positive American attributes, these attributes had their limits. A few interviewees felt that America was becoming too pluralistic and too liberal. One interviewee who praised America’s liberalism felt that America has begun taking the idea of liberalism too far by claimed that, “America is too involved with the idea of political correctness.”99 He claimed that political correctness was preventing free-speech on American college campuses and was particularly damaging to Israel’s image on American college campuses.

Without being directly asked, the interviewees, almost universally, eagerly conveyed that they had admiration and appreciation for the United States. One interviewee said simply that, “America is a great country, Americans are a great people.”100 Another interviewee commented that, “America is an extraordinary society. America tries to help the world.”101 Others expressed affinity towards America because of its special relationship with Israel. An interviewee claimed that, “America is Israel’s best friend.”102 No interviewee expressed hatred towards the United

97 Respondent 10, Interview with the author, 17 August 2014
98 Ibid.
99 Respondent 11, Interview with the author, 14 August 2014
100 Respondent 10, Interview with the author, 17 August 2014
101 Respondent 2, Interview with the author, 19 August 2014
102 Respondent 10, Interview with the author, 17 August 2014
States. These American Israeli Religious Zionists felt genuine admiration for American society and America as a political entity.

The United States was praised just as strongly for its treatment of its Jewish citizens as it was praised for its society and democracy. An interviewee stated that, “I am eternally grateful for what the United States has done for the Jewish People in general and his family in particular.”103 This interviewee respected the United States for what he felt was its fair treatment of Jews and for taking in his parents after they had survived the horrors of the Holocaust.

**Question 7: “Do you still identify as American? If yes, how so?”**

Almost all of the interviewees feel that they are still American today, and that to a large extent, they more identify with American culture than with Israeli culture. One interviewee said that, “The music I listen to will always be the American music of the 60’s and 70’s.”104 Another interview commented that, “I still love American football and follow it religiously.”105 A participant felt that, “an American is always an American.” Most of the interviewees felt proud to be an American. One interviewee brought up the story of American-Israeli Member of Knesset Dov Lipman, who was forced to surrender his U.S. citizenship before becoming an MK. Dov Lipman emotionally gave up his U.S. passport and said, “I thank the United States of America for my 41 years of citizenship and for all it has done for my family.”106 The interviewee brought up this story to illustrate how, in a similar manner to Lipman, he is both proud of his American heritage and his now Israeli identity.

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103 Respondent 13, Interview with the author, 14 August 2014
104 Respondent 12, Interview with the author, 15 August 2014.
105 Respondent 13, Interview with the author, 14 August 2014
For many of the interviewees, their American background made them acutely aware of feeling that they had not integrated fully into Israeli “sabra” culture. For some, this feeling was due to having low competency in Hebrew, but for most it was merely the fact that they were born and raised in a culture very different than Israel’s. Even in relation to the culture around food, a participant commented, “I don’t eat falafel. I don’t like hummus.” Sara Hirschhorn explains that, “Rather than striving for full acculturation within Israeli society, this clash often led to a further retrenchment of the Jewish-American immigrant’s values.”\(^{107}\) As immigrants, the acculturation process was difficult for many of the respondents. Instead then of fighting to become more Israeli, these American Israeli Religious Zionists became more identified with their American social and cultural values, in part because Israelis would see them in that light.

Within their praise of America and Americans, respondents spoke about how American Jews have certain qualities that make them extremely desirable olim. Sociologist Kevin Avruch notes that Americans in Israel see themselves in a sense as “American ambassadors,” who can use their progressive ideals to help Israel.\(^{108}\) One interviewee who worked with an agency that helps facilitate American Aliyah explained how Americans help Israel by bringing uniquely American traits to Israel. This new American immigrant wanted to bring all those in the neighborhood, secular, religious, American, Israeli, all together. This immigrant took it upon himself to start a potluck Shabbat afternoon meal. Now every week everyone comes together in the park for this meal. The interviewee explained that the pluralistic attitude and the innovative go-getting attitude of Americans help Israeli society. Another interviewee commented that,


“Americans brought running as a sport to Israel.” According to a majority of those that were interviewed, not only then it is important for American Jews to make Aliyah for their religious identity and authenticity, but also because they can contribute to Israel society in ways that are unique, an ideal that all walks of American olim could agree with.

The interviewees went on to explain that although they are happy to live in Israel, it is not always all smiles. One interviewee commented that he “Is part of a transitional generation.” He still feels American, but also Israeli. He has one foot in American and another in Israel, but the hope is that his children will be “full-blooded Israelis”. One interviewee said, “I will always have an American accent in Hebrew.” In other words, his American identity will always be known whenever he speaks in Israel. Another interviewee offered a different perspective, “You do not need to be a Sabra to fit in here [Israel.]” She went on to say that Israel is a country of immigrants and that being an immigrant does not exclude you from feeling Israeli.

Although these American immigrants identify as Israelis, most socialize within a more insular American social group in Israel. Almost all of the interviewees live within American areas of Jerusalem or in American communities within West Bank settlements. Some who live in more Israeli areas still said that most of their friends are English speakers. The reasoning for this was that they feel they have more of a connection with those that speak English and those that come from a similar American culture.

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109 Respondent 8, Interview with the author, 18 August 2014
110 Avruch, American Immigrants in Israel: Social Identities and Change, 173.
111 Respondent 1, interview with the author, 13 August 2014
112 Respondent 11, Interview with the author, 14 August 2014
113 Respondent 15, Interview with the author, 19 August 2014
114 Avram Hein, "Ideological Immigration: A Detailed Study on North American Jewish Immigration to Israel" (2007), 32.
The American Israeli Religious Zionists that were interviewed still had deep ties to the United States, all with family (some had immediate family back in the US) in the US and many of the interviewees travelled to America frequently. One respondent declared, “My family is there. I have an intimate blood connection to the American Jewish community.”

Many of the interviewees travel to see their families in the US on an annual basis. One person commented that, “I feel like a spy when I go back to the United States. I do not feel like an American, but I do not feel like a tourist either.” Although they may not identify America as their home, the respondents still have a strong bond to the United States.

115 Respondent 1, interview with the author, 13 August 2014
Chapter II: Analysis

Of particular interest in the data findings is that the American Israeli Religious Zionist community views American religious Jewry negatively while viewing the greater American people and culture as positive. Why do these American olim view American Jewry with such disdain? The argument will then be made that the American Israeli Religious Zionists have very mixed opinions about American Jews and American society.

First, the interviewees are hostile towards American Jews for the simple fact that American Jews are not making Aliyah in substantial numbers. The rate of Aliyah hovers around 2,000 people per year\textsuperscript{116} with an American Jewish population estimated to be 6.7 million.\textsuperscript{117} The interviewees understood that the process of Aliyah can be extremely difficult. Many of the interviewees switched their careers, in most cases, from highly professional careers to more menial jobs in Israel. They reported that it was difficult adjusting to Israeli bureaucracy, language differences (Hebrew as opposed to English). Perhaps most of all, they reported it was very challenging to leave their families behind. Nevertheless, the olim in this case study stuck it out and carved for themselves an existence in Israel as recent immigrants. On one hand, they want other American Jews to make Aliyah, but on the other, each of these immigrants struggled to make it in Israel. Showcasing the difficulty of Aliyah from the United States is the fact that upwards of 40\% of American immigrants to Israel return to the US after a short period of a few

\textsuperscript{117} Lugo, Cooperman, and Smith, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans," 25.
years. It pains them that the American religious community they left behind did not take action like they did and make Aliyah.

It is of the upmost importance to address the deeper factors that delve into why there is hostility towards American Jews on the part of many of the participants. Rabbi Aharon Lichenstein, a central leader in both American Modern Orthodox and Religious Zionist thought, comments that,

“Many Israelis are wont to assume that the primary restraint upon Aliya among religious Zionists derives from cleavage to the fleshpots of Egypt. This is a convenient assumption, especially in as much as it enables its advocate to flatter himself by basking in the reflected glory of his own comparative idealism.”

This critique by Rabbi Lichenstein, who is himself made Aliyah and is a highly distinguished leader of American Israeli Religious Zionism, exposes that not only do some Religious Zionists feel that the community should be tolerant towards those who do not make Aliyah, but there are strong voices within this camp that are particularly troubled by the condemnation towards those who do not make Aliyah. Although many of the interviewees feel strongly about Aliyah, there denigration of American Jewry can be seen as ideological superiority and a means of validating their own decision to make Aliyah. Similarly to how Rabbi Lichenstein argues it is not so simple to dismiss American religious Jews for not making Aliyah, the reasons that the American Israeli Religious Zionists made Aliyah is likewise not so simple.

The story that the American Israeli Religious Zionists pass on highlights the most positive outlook on why they made Aliyah, the religious ideological call to come to Israel; however, this ignores the fact that in all likelihood their Aliyah decision was not purely

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ideological, but arose from a mixture of factors. As Chaim Waxman notes, “It seems reasonable to assume that the reasons given by those who have already immigrated cannot be accepted at face value. They, after all, have a vested interest in putting their Aliya in the most noble light.” 120

Indeed after explaining that American Jews need to make Aliyah for religious reasons, one respondent admitted later in the interview that he did not know if he would have come with his family if he had not had, in his words, had a “job lined up”. 121 This goes to show that although the interviewees claim that their Zionist zeal was the chief reason they made Aliyah, it can be seen that their decision to emigrate was in part rooted in social and economic factors.

A reason for the bitterness towards American Jewry could be partially explained for some of the respondents by a lack of social belonging within the American Orthodox community. The eminent sociologist Eisenstadt argued that, “Every migratory movement is motivated by the migrants feeling of some kind of insecurity and inadequacy.” 122 Within the data findings, there can be detected a feeling of insecurity and conflict within the interviewees and their relationship with the American Jewish community. For those that became Baalai Teshuvah it reasonable assume that it was difficult adjusting from their secular lifestyles in America to an Orthodox lifestyle. One interviewee cited that she did not fit in with the Orthodox community since they were not courteous and kind. For others, their accusations of American Orthodox superficiality could represent a degree of resentment of not having a sense of belonging within the American Orthodox community. For the interviewees who were increasingly considering Aliyah (and for

120 Waxman, “In the End Is It Ideology?: Religio-Cultural and Structural Factors in American Aliya,” 50.
121 Ibid., 50-51.
some who were also becoming Orthodox) while residing in America, they were distraught by the fact that for the Orthodox community in America, “Aliyah was not on the agenda.”

That being said, a further reason for the American Israeli Religious Zionists disgruntled view towards American religious Jews is because many in the religious community simply don’t contemplate Aliyah at all; an important reason that American Modern Orthodox remain in the United States is because more important than having an Israeli identity is their own American identity. Many modern Orthodox Americans do not struggle over Aliyah because they feel completely at home in the United States. They do not feel alienated from mainstream American society. They do not experience the suffering that is associated with exile. They are engrained in American society culturally, linguistically, and socially. For some Modern Orthodox Americans, Aliyah is not even contemplated because they see themselves so firmly as Americans. In sum, they do not feel a strong conflict between their Jewish and American identities.

As a result of the tension of an American religious Jew living in a non-Jewish society, these American-Israeli olim saw their “Americaness” and their “Jewishness” not as compatible—like those who continue to be observant Jewish Americans—but rather as two identities that are in conflict, a major point in light of the often compatible equation given to Jewishness and Americaness. A participant mentioned his own transformation, saying “I began to see myself as an American Jew and not as a Jewish American.” For him, to see himself as a Jew meant that he began to prioritize his Jewishness over his Americaness; which

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123 Respondent 14, Interview with the author, 20 August 2014
125 American Jews who do not desire to make Aliyah may have tension between their American and Jewish identities, but they are able to coexist within American society with this tension.
126 Respondent 9, Interview with the author, 19 August 2014
then led him to making Aliyah because he felt, as a Jew, he should live in the Jewish State. As stated, most American Jews are not overly concerned that they live in a non-Jewish American environment, but there was a strong feeling among the American Israeli Religious Zionists that they made Aliyah in order to become “justPLAIN Jews”, free of the tension of living as a minority in a non-Jewish nation.

The tension between one’s “American” identity and one’s “Jewish” identity can be seen in the issue of the interviewees feeling that there was a compartmentalization of their Jewish identity. The idea that an American religious Jew’s mission is “to be successful with a Kippah on top” illuminates on the concept that an American Orthodox Jew has to compartmentalize their Jewishness in the United States and in the Diaspora in general. The interviewee explained that in the US an observant Jew goes about their daily work, but separates their public business life from their private religious life. In the United States, he goes about his work just like any other secular American. “You may make Kiddush on Friday night, but you care about your children and your bank account like other Americans.” Thus, when the interviewees were living in America, for some of them, they felt a deep tension between their Jewish and secular identities in a greater Christian society where they were a minority.

It is evident then that not only were there ideological factors that led them to make Aliyah, but also sociological factors that led the interviewees to Israel; however, while many of them came to Israel, in a sense affirming their Jewishness over their Americaness, their lives in Israel would be characterized by a strengthening of their American identity. Sara Hirschorn writes that, “A complex identification with an American background once in Israel, which often

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128 Respondent 14, Interview with the author, 20 August 2014
saw a return to the elevation of Americaness over Jewishness, would come to characterize the experience of American-Jewish settlers. Once they came to Israel, the immigrants, many who are themselves settlers, stood out as Americans within the larger Israeli society and this in turn, led to a strengthening of their American identity. They left America because they did not want to be identified as Jews, but when they come to Israel, they were identified as Americans. Not only did the greater Israeli society identify them as Americans, but they themselves embraced their American identity more fully; “In Israel…the oleh’s identity as an American is no longer a danger to his identity as a Jew […] he is using his identity as an American in the service of his identity as a Jew.” By removing themselves from the internal conflict between their American and Jewish identities in the United States, many American Israelis allow their American identities to flourish in Israel.

Thus, it is evident that for the interviewees there is much more that guided their decision of Aliyah than meets the eye. Their opinions shed light on American Jewish identity; the conflict between American, public, integrationist attitudes vs. Jewish, private, and non-assimilationist attitudes.

**Ambivalence in Regards to Religious Ideology and Aliyah**

To understand the mixed ideologies that the respondents have in regards to American society and American Jewry, an analysis and comparison will be made to the actions and beliefs of the American Modern Orthodox sector, the group that almost all of the participants attached to while residing in the United States. By examining this relationship, the complicated identities pulling at the American-Israeli Religious Zionists will be better understood.

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There is a large degree of ambivalence in the attitudes of the American Israeli Religious Zionists and their views of religious American Jewry. On one hand, the American Israeli Religious Zionists have a strong *Ahavat Yisrael*; they love and care for all Jews wherever they live in the world. They too, voiced appreciation for all the support that religious American Jews provide for Israel. Furthermore, they felt a particular close connection to those Jews who identified as religious, due to the shared value of living a Torah observant life. On the other hand, they categorically reject American religious Jewry’s Diasporic existence in the United States.

Yoel Finkelman’s essay on Haredi ambivalence can be applied to the Religious Zionist community in order to further understand the ambivalence of these American Israeli Religious Zionists towards the American religious community.\(^{131}\) Structural ambivalence is built into social statues and into the principles of a society.\(^{132}\) It is acceptable to admire and support America according to an Israeli Religious Zionist perspective, but to legitimize American religious Jewry is to legitimize the Diaspora, which in turn is a form of repudiating the primacy of life in the Land of Israel.

A cardinal belief in the foundation of Religious Zionism as espoused by the Rabbis Kook is the bestowing of redemptive importance to the state of Israel, but interestingly this was hardly mentioned during the interviews. It was to a small extent implicitly mentioned in a small number of comments such as “It is more than just a desert it is bigger than us”, but never explicitly. The more radical wing within Religious Zionism may view the settlements and the conquering of

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Greater Eretz Yisrael as part of the path to bring the Messiah, but evidence has shown that American settlers do not generally view the settlements in this messianic manner.\textsuperscript{133}

In the interviews not only was messianism not mentioned, but there was hardly a mention of the cosmic dimension of Israel. There was no expansive case made for why Aliyah is Halachically imperative. There were no comments by the interviewees mirroring Rabbi Shlomo Goren (1917-1994), the third Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel and a prominent leader of Religious Zionism, who stated that Aliyah, […] is the apotheosis of their aim [the commandments.]\textsuperscript{134} Aliyah was seen as imperative for purely practical reasons and not as part of a penultimate Torah obligation. As we shall see, although they scorn American Modern Orthodoxy, much of their opinions express an American Modern Orthodoxy viewpoint.

Several of the interviewees subscribed to the “Yeshiva University” version of Modern Orthodoxy; in this case when they referenced “The Rav” they did not mean Rav Kook, which would be expected in Religious Zionist circles, but rather had in mind American Modern Orthodox leader Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, father-in-law of the aforementioned Rav Lichenstein. Rav Soloveitchik was supportive of the State of Israel, but he was unequivocal in stating that it did not have Messianic importance.\textsuperscript{135} He himself never made Aliyah and dedicated his life to strengthening Modern Orthodoxy in America. He, very much like many of the interviewees, identified with Israel in both a positive and religious light, but did not go as far as giving Israel messianic importance. He viewed Israel as important primarily because: there is a mitzvah to settle the land, by virtue of being a Jewish state, more Torah can be added to the


government and the society, and lastly because a Jewish state provides a better chance in fighting assimilation. As has been shown, the concepts that Israel protects from assimilation and is a Jewish society with a Jewish government, are the same general reasons given for Aliyah both by Rav Soloveitchik and the interviewees.

It is apparent then that the hostility towards American religious Jews for not making Aliyah is not coming from the religious ideology in the Religious Zionist camp from which many of the interviewees readily identify with, but rather is coming from an American Modern Orthodox view on the importance of the State of Israel. Thus, the interviewees more identify with what Gadi Taub termed “State Zionism,” the importance of Israel as a Jewish State adhered to by American Modern Orthodoxy rather than “Redemptive Zionism,” which is adhered to by many within the Religious Zionist camp.  

Ambivalence in Regards to American Society and Culture

The ways in which the American Israeli Religious Zionists view American society and their own American values illustrate their own contradictions. It will be shown that their Jewish identity and American identity are not mutually exclusive in this regard, but rather that they both help to mold the interviewees opinions’ on America.

Although they hold very favorable views of American society, the American Israeli Religious Zionists still had doubts that American society would continue to treat Jews fairly. These American Israeli Religious Zionists believed that America has treated its Jews well, but there is an underlying fear that this will change. Even with the admiration of American society, it

is a diaspora community and the fear that it will become poisonous for Jews like overarching
diasporic Jewish history.

There is a strong link between the interviewees’ views on American society and their fear
of American society becoming more anti-Semitic; if the United States stops treating its Jews
well, the opinion of these American Israelis towards America will become progressively less
positive.\textsuperscript{137} It is palpable then that their love for American society is conditioned based upon
America’s treatment of its Jews. Therefore, their love for America is directly correlated to the
situation of anti-Semitism within the United States, which further helps to convey the strong
influence the participants’ Jewish identity has on their American values.

Another example of the dichotomy in the interviewees’ views can be seen in the field of
liberalism and pluralism. Many felt that Israel needs to be more inclusive and pluralistic.
However, one interviewee claimed that the “secular are lost” and another railed against Israeli
Arabs.\textsuperscript{138} Also, their liberal values did not prevent some of the interviewees from rejecting
American Jewry. A minority of the interviewees who subscribed to this more radical notion still
felt Israel needed to follow America’s liberal and tolerant approach, but were themselves
intolerant. Author and journalist Yossi Klein HaLevi notes about the infamous American Israeli
Religious Zionist radical Meir Kahane, “He hated entire categories of Jews: Orthodox Jews who
refused to follow him, weren’t religious at all, […] secular Israelis were ‘Hebrew-speaking
Gentiles.’ And Israeli leftists were ‘worse than anti-Semites.’\textsuperscript{139} Although there were only a few
interviewees who Kahane’s statement held true for, it shows that for them their identification
with liberalism and pluralism has its limits.

\textsuperscript{137} Avruch, "On the “Traditionalization” of Social Identity," 97.
\textsuperscript{138} Respondent 4, Interview with the author, 21 August 2014.
\textsuperscript{139} Yossi Klein Halevi, \textit{Memoirs of a Jewish Extremist: An American Story} (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), 167-68.
With all of this, it is evident that the interviewees have contradictory views on how they view the United States and American Jews. The point to be made is that an internal piece of many of these interviewees’ hearts is American. To be sure, they have internalized American values in a way that furthers their own particular religious Zionist agenda. Their views on America and their views on American Jews bleed into one another; for example, American society is seen as tolerant and inclusive, but there is the fear that it will turn intolerant to Jews. On the other side of the equation, they may see American Jews as shallow and materialistic, but also as American citizens with unique talents that other Israelis do not have. The general view then that American society is good and that American Jewry is bad is not so simple; the good and the bad from American society and American Jewry mix with one another and affect how these interviewees perceive both categories.
Chapter III: Issues in Contemporary American Modern Orthodoxy and Religious Zionism

The ambivalences within the ideology of the American Israel Religious Zionists help to shed light on the significant dilemmas facing Modern Orthodoxy and Religious Zionism as collective ideologies.

.” A potential reason for the interviews’ harsh views of American religious Jews is for not only the reason that for many Aliyah is not on the agenda, but because it is a subject that is in a way the “elephant in the room.” Historian Seth Farber explains:

“Aliyah is a reality but modern Orthodoxy doesn’t know what to do with it. In one sense, Aliyah is the quintessential expression of the religious Zionism espoused by the American modern Orthodox community. And yet, the overwhelming majority of avowed Zionists continue to live rich and meaningful Jewish lives in the diaspora, not serious contemplating Aliyah.”

Aliyah is seen in the Modern Orthodox community as a legitimate decision worthy of praise. It is the realization of the Zionist ideology within Modern Orthodoxy. The fact that there is not a strong Halachic basis for not making Aliyah within Modern Orthodoxy could be seen as frustrating for the participants in this study. Yet, many still do not make Aliyah, even though they may see it as a beneficial religious decision. In this Modern Orthodox world that is pulled between feeling at home in America, while realizing Israel is the homeland, the interviewees

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who see Aliyah as the tenet of Zionism were distraught by the message that Modern Orthodoxy conveys—an unclear and somewhat tabooed subject.

It is then this identity that the American Israeli Religious Zionists attack; the attitude of being so rooted in the American Diaspora. It is an attitude of ambivalence towards Aliyah—believing it is beneficial and the most “Zionist” activity one can do, but as a group, something that Modern Orthodoxy does not advocate—that the American Israeli Religious Zionists deplore. This ambivalence can be clearly seen even in American Modern Orthodoxy’s own Rav Soloveitchik, who saw Aliyah as a Mitzvah, but who also never visited the country.

Within the American Modern Orthodox community, there is a certain undercurrent of being a Zionist, but not being so adamantly a Zionist that the movement pushes for Aliyah. A question that arises for the Modern Orthodox community is do they wish to inculcate their children to be such fervent Zionists that they leave their families behind and make Aliyah? The gap year yeshiva programs have put this statement to the test with approximately upwards of 20% of those who attend gap year programs in Israel, make Aliyah.\(^\text{141}\) Although, the numbers are still small of those that make Aliyah, some of the greatest American Modern Orthodox rabbis such as Rabbis Riskin and Lichenstein have moved to Israel. Historian Dana Kaplan notes that this “brain drain” creates skepticism about whether American Modern Orthodoxy can endure in the United States.\(^\text{142}\)

As a movement, Modern Orthodoxy’s ambiguous stand on Aliyah is in one way beneficial and in another way harmful to its principles. It is beneficial because Aliyah represents American Modern Orthodox values and allows for American Modern Orthodox Jews to take

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their values that they feel are unique and transplant them to Israel to help enact positive change there. Furthermore, the ambiguity of pushing for Aliyah allows for those in America and for those who make Aliyah to both feel that they are representing Modern Orthodoxy. The negative of its ambiguity is that it is not clear what American Modern Orthodoxy is prioritizing for its future, to preserve Diasporic life in America or to make Aliyah in order to contribute to the Jewish State and a Jewish society; judging by the numbers of American Orthodox olim, it seems that the former is true.

In part because of the decline of messianism and ideological fervor as well as the ever-changing Israeli political situation, Religious Zionism has become almost singularly preoccupied with the issue of settlements. There has been a decline in ideology within Religious Zionism because Rav Kook’s nationalist redemptionist ideology, fostered by Tzvi Yehuda Kook forming his father’s idea into a political objective, has formed into a concrete reality in the form of the settlements. Thus, the settlements represent the ideology of Religious Zionism. To be fair, many within the Religious Zionist community are not settlement-centric, but as Neuman Kalman notes, this constitutes the “silent majority.” This singular concern with settlements has led to a deterioration of liberalism within the Religious Zionist camp. The American principles that the American Israeli Religious Zionists espouse, values like tolerance and pluralism, may fall by the wayside in the face of the issue of settlements. For example, they are likely to be intolerant to those that disagree with them; one interviewee related that, “American Jews need to come to Israel, but the lefties can stay home.” Moreover, as the sociologist Shlomo Fischer argues, the settlement enterprise has in and of itself led to a breakdown in democratic values by establishing

144 Respondent 15, Interview with the author, 19 August 2014
domination over the lives of West Bank Palestinians. As settlers and the settler enterprise continue to expand in the West Bank, Israel’s democratic character will be increasingly questioned due to an increased Israeli presence in Palestinian areas. For the American Israeli Religious Zionists and Religious Zionism as a whole, the issue of settlements puts their commitments to a Jewish and democratic state in danger.

Both Modern Orthodoxy and Religious Zionism lack direction on these critical issues in part because no central leader has been able to fill the shoes of either Rav Soloveitchik or Rav Abraham Isaac Kook and Tzvi Yehuda Kook. Without central leadership, no theological framework has been able to unite those who subscribe to these two groups. Without leadership, the issues of Aliyah for American Modern Orthodoxy and the preoccupation with settlements due to a lack of messianism within Religious Zionism have continued to boil under the surface.

These issues within the American Modern Orthodoxy and Religious Zionism play out within the worldview of the interviewees. As this study has shown, the respondents clearly see American Modern Orthodoxy’s lukewarm commitment to Aliyah. As one interviewee stated, “One of the advantages of being an expatriate is being able to look back at your home country with a certain degree of clarity.” Their life in Israel, then can allow for some the opportunity to look back at American Modern Orthodoxy from the outside, which allows for a greater scrutiny of its commitment to Aliyah. Now that they presently reside in Israel, they exemplify the decline in Messianic attitude and the prioritizing the issue of settlements, which can lead to a breakdown and repudiation of their American values of liberalism, tolerance, and pluralism. This attitude was personified by an interview who exclaimed upon meeting the author, “Welcome to Karnei

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145 Fischer, ”Two Orthodox Cultures: "Centrist" Orthodoxy and Religious Zionism,” 156-57.
Shomron, where we are an impediment to peace!" This statement showed the cynicism this interviewee and many settlers feel towards the thought that the settlements in which they live deteriorate Israel’s democratic values. Thus, the American Israeli Religious Zionists’ viewpoints expressed in this paper reflect both central issues facing both American Modern Orthodoxy and Religious Zionism.

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146 Respondent 6, Interview with the author, 15 August 2014.
Conclusion

As products of both American and Israeli ideals, culture, and values, the American Israeli Religious Zionists have complicated, at times contradictory, feelings towards American society and American Jewry. They have many layers of identity, but it can be seen that they are strongly influenced both by American Modern Orthodoxy and Religious Zionism. They hail American society and America’s treatment of its Jewish population, much in the same manner as American Modern Orthodoxy. Many of them expressed frustration with American Modern Orthodoxy’s attempt to maneuver an Orthodox lifestyle in a non-Jewish society by stating the reasons why American Jews should move to Israel. Within the realm of Religious Zionist thought, some of the interviewees rejected Diasporic Jewish life, a characteristic more identified nowadays with Religious Zionism. The lack of messianism and importance of settlements was also characteristic of these Religious Zionists.

It is vital to mention that the interviewees’ views are shaped not only by the American society that they come from, but also the Israeli society they live in. The Israeli public tends to view America positively and believes that Israeli democratic values align with American democratic values. Israelis are also appreciative of America’s support of Israel, making a pro-American viewpoint in Israel not an uncommon sight. As said previously, Religious Zionism has a pejorative view of the Diaspora. All of these factors can be seen as playing a role in influencing the American Israeli Religious Zionists.

A question that has no clear-cut answer is whether there can be Religious Zionists in the Diaspora, parallel to the debate of whether there can be Zionists in the Diaspora within the
general ideological framework of Zionism. Perhaps the ambiguity of the term Religious Zionism allows for a larger group of people to identify with it. In a general sense, if at the heart of Religious Zionism, is a commitment to both Orthodox Judaism and support of the State of Israel, this allows for the dissemination and identification of these values to all Jews, wherever they may live.

It is evident that these American Israeli Religious Zionists are deeply concerned with the problems and issues facing American Jewry. Part of their critique of American Jewry comes from a loving concern for the future of American Jews. It is clear from the depth of their answers on questions regarding their American experience that they have thought long and hard about issues facing American Jewry. It is also clear that for most of the participants they are proud of their American Jewish identity and this continues to be a large part of their identity. Although this study focused on the interviewees’ relationship with the United States, it seems that their American Jewish identity is a more central part of their identity than perhaps their Israeli identity.

We can see that there is no simple identity that these American Israeli Religious Zionists adhere to. They do not fit into neat black-and-white categories. The interviewees have much ambivalence, but they are no means alone in having an ambivalent nature; this paper has shown that there exist ambivalences within American Modern Orthodoxy, American Jewry, and within Religious Zionism.

American Israeli Religious Zionists are an important group because they are a part of both American Modern Orthodoxy and Religious Zionism and can help bridge the gaps that exist between them. Shlomo Fischer argues that Religious Zionism, particularly its radical side, “is
largely incomprehensible to Americans."¹⁴⁷ To return to an earlier idea, Religious Zionism’s expressivist face is much different than American Modern Orthodoxy’s traditional attitudes. Some American Israeli Religious Zionists have already begun to try to bridge the gap between these two communities, for example, Rabbi Lichenstein’s Yeshivat Har-Etzion. With both an American Modern Orthodox and Religious Zionist mindset, American Israeli Religious Zionists stand the best chance to help establish mutual respect and understanding between these two groups.

¹⁴⁷ Fischer, “Two Orthodox Cultures: "Centrist" Orthodoxy and Religious Zionism,” 165.
Bibliography


